

CONTENTS:

Editor's Page	2	More Archacology	9
Programme 2003-04	3	Will Crooks' Election Centenary	10
London Fireman's Dog	4	On Growing up in the East End	11
Tunnel Trouble	5	Open Air Sitting Rooms for the Poor	13
Correspondence	6	New Book from the ELHS	15
Book Reviews	7	Autumn Coach Trip	16
Memorial Research & Archaeological Gleanings	8	Membership Renewal Form	Enclosed

Editorial Note:

The Newsletter is edited, typeset and produced by Rosemary Taylor with the assistance of an editorial team comprising Philip Mernick, Doreen Kendall, David Behr, and Doreen Osborne.

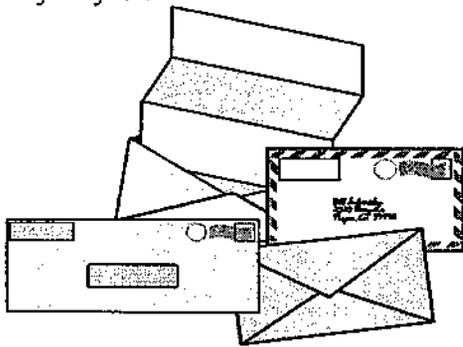
Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are always welcome and we make every effort to publish suitable material. Whilst hand-written articles are acceptable, items of interest that are typewritten or even better still, on disk will get priority!!

Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF, Tel: 0208 981 7680, or Philip Mernick, email: phil@mernicks.com

All queries regarding membership should be addressed to Harold Mernick, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London E3 4DT

Check out the History Society's website at www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk.

The present committee are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, Bob Dunn, and Rosemary Taylor.



Subscriptions for 2003/4

If you don't have a subscription renewal form with this Newsletter then you have already paid!

Editor's Note:

"History happens every day in Tower Hamlets. Ask for last week's local papers at the Bancroft Road Library to see what I mean!" - Ray Jefferd, great grandson of Will Crooks.

The ELHS were very pleased to share in the celebrations organised by the descendants of Will Crooks. Doreen Kendall, Philip Mernick and Doreen Osborne met the large group who came to Tower Hamlets to see for themselves the birthplace and the final resting place of their illustrious ancestor. Doreen gave the group a guided tour of the cemetery and showed them the restored headstone on the grave. Later Philip and Doreen showed them around various areas of special significance in relation to Will Crooks and his work amongst the people of the East End. Ray Jefferd, who organised this family excursion, was very grateful for the time and trouble taken by members of the ELHS to make their outing such a memorable one. His report on the trip is included in this edition of the newsletter.

Another event of great significance is the long-anticipated opening of the Museum in Docklands. Housed in the old sugar warehouses, all that remains of what were once the world's largest buildings, the Museum opened its doors to the public at the end of May. The story of the docks and surrounding area over the last 2,000 years unfolds across 12 galleries, a story which begins in AD43 with a Roman settlement and explains the history of the area with models, pictures and archaeological finds, with records of major events in the history of the docks, from their beginnings in 1802 to the London Docklands Development Corporation and the News International strike at Wapping. The Museum is at No. 1 Warehouse, West India Quay, and is open 10am-6pm. Definitely worth a visit!

Cover Picture

Tiled panel from The Horns public house, now on the entrance wall of Whitechapel Library.

**EAST LONDON
HISTORY SOCIETY
PROGRAMME 2003-04**

Thursday 11th September 2003

Call the Midwife

Speaker: Jennifer Worth

Saturday 13th September 2003

Coach Trip to Woburn Abbey

See back cover of newsletter for details and booking form

Organiser: Ann Sansom (Tel 020 8524 4506)

Thursday 23rd October 2003

Title to be confirmed

Speaker: Tom Ridge

Thursday 13th November 2003

The Villages of East London

Speaker: Peter Lawrence

Thursday 4th December 2003

Power Writers- Five African Writers In London's East End in the Eighteenth Century

Five individual speakers

Thursday 29th January 2004

The Tentergrounds of East London

Speaker: David Sames

Thursday 19th February 2004

Builders of Repute: the Story of Renders Brothers

Speaker: Josephine Boyle

Thursday 15th April 2004

Brunel and The Great Eastern

Speaker: Clive Chambers

Thursday 13th May 2004

Open Evening – How we entertained ourselves: children's games to street parties

Note:

The lectures are held on Thursday evenings at 7.30 pm in the Latimer Congregational Church Hall, Ernest Street, E1. Ernest Street is between Harford Street and Whitehorse Lane, off Mile End Road (Opposite Queen Mary and Westfield College). The nearest Underground Stations are Mile End and Stepney Green.
Bus No. 25.

The Programme

Suggestions and ideas for future topics and/or speakers for our Lecture Programme are always welcomed. If you can suggest someone or indeed if you would like to give a talk yourself, please do come along to the Open Evening in May, and meet David Behr, our Programme co-ordinator.

Alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick at phil@mernicks.com with your comments and suggestions.

The London Fireman's Dog

Despite a variety of earlier fire-fighting methods and organisations in London there was increasing concern about the large number of fires and resulting casualties,

In 1826 a group of philanthropists made plans for the establishment of the 'Society for Preventing the Loss of Life from Fire' which included the building of stations (or depots) in the centre of districts to contain fire-fighting apparatus "under the care of persons properly instructed and in constant attendance". But the appeal launched for subscriptions was not well supported and the Society soon collapsed.

However, the idea was revived and augmented in 1836 when the 'Royal Society for the Protection of Life from Fire' was established. By the mid 1800s it had become a popular cause and its income had risen to £10,000 a year - all from voluntary contributions - and in addition to the district stations, a force of 100 men manned 85 'fire escapes' (ladders). These escapes were stationed around central London, often close to the larger churches and squares.

"In winter they were manned by a conductor from 8pm - 7am and, in summer, from 9pm until 8am, and the 'escape man' sitting by his ladder - often with a dog for company - became one of the regular sights of London. When the alarm was raised the Fire Brigade was called from the nearest station by one runner, while another ran to the escape post. The conductor would whirl his wooden rattle to summon help and as soon as he had a minimum of 2 volunteers to help trundle the heavy escape they would set off, frequently led by the dog with a lantern in its mouth".

(Information from "Courage High! A History of Firefighting in London" by Sally Holloway)

Several of these dogs became well known. One of these, named 'Chance', had attended many fires and wore a collar engraved 'Stop me not but onward let me jog, for I am the London

Fireman's dog'.

Another dog was named 'Bill'; he belonged to Conductor Wood, of Whitechapel. An article, dated 1857, is reproduced below.

"BILL," THE FIRE-ESCAPE-MANS DOG.

CANINE sagacity has rarely been marked by such a reward as that lately conferred upon the dog belonging to the conductor of a fire-escape in Whitechapel. The biped is, doubtless, a worthy public servant: we commend him to the prize distribution of some public society; meanwhile the quadruped has been rewarded by the parishioners of the locality in which he has evinced his instinct allied to reason. We often record and illustrate the presentation of testimonials to individuals, but rarely, if ever, one better deserved than in the present instance.

A few evenings since a considerable number of the parishioners assembled at the house of Mr. Upson, in High-street, Whitechapel, for the purpose of presenting the dog "Bill" with a memento of their appreciation of the services he renders at all fires in the east end of London. The testimonial consisted of a chased collar, on which is engraven :

*I am the fire-escape man's dog, my name is Bill
When "Fire!" Is called I am never still
I bark for my master, all dangers to brave,
To bring the escape—human life to save.*

Several of the leading parishioners were present, and testified not merely to the great good Wood, the fire-escape conductor and owner of the dog, had done in saving life at fires, but also to the services rendered by the dog in calling assistance, and running in front of the escape with a lantern in his mouth.

We add a few particulars of this recipient of human gratitude. "Bill" is of the terrier breed, and about six years old. Whenever there is an alarm of fire he is one of the first to discover it: he barks for assistance, and never ceases his clamour till, with his master and the fire-escape, he arrives at the conflagration. No sooner is the

escape fixed than a race commences between the dog and his owner—the former up the ladder, the quadruped working his way up inside the canvas, and not always last in the ascent. A window is no sooner opened than in dashes Bill, He examines the beds and searches every corner for the inmates, and, should he find any, soon attracts his master to the spot by loudly barking. He has in this way helped Wood to rescue seventy-two persons from a fearful death, and on many occasions the dog himself narrowly escaped destruction. At his first essay—a fire in Fashion Street, Spitalfields—the flooring gave way under him, and he fell through the flames into the cellar, where he was discovered in a butt of water, which, although saving him from fire was hot enough to scald off his coat. For saving an old lady and a gentleman at this fire Wood received the Royal Society's medal. At another fire, in Fieldgate-street, Wood saved five lives—one person being lost. Bill, on this occasion, *again vanished through the floor* and had to remain till all danger was over, when he was found with the body. Wood was rewarded with a very flattering testimonial and a sovereign.

As the vigilance of the fireman has been greatly aided by the sagacity and watchfulness of the dog, the rewards which Wood has received will convey some notion of the services of the dog.

Wood has also received testimonials for saving four lives in Somerset-street; a testimonial for preserving seven women and two children in Ticehurst-street; and for rescuing three persons at Walker's, in Whitechapel-road. At No. 1, Colchester-street, there were two fires: on the first occasion he saved no less than ten persons; and, on the second, five: for his exertions at these fires he received a testimonial, half a sovereign, a Bible, a handsome silver watch, and twenty pounds.

He has also received testimonials for saving four lives at 41, Back-church-lane; for saving four at Yates's, in the Whitechapel-road; for rescuing three persons at Moses', Whitechapel-road; for saving two persons (one a police officer) at 62, Backchurch-lane; for saving, at another fire in the same street, the proprietor, his wife, and four

children; for saving four persons at Mr. Bradley's, in the Commercial-road; a testimonial, and a sovereign, for preserving two persons in Little Haley-street. He has also received the society's testimonial for the great number of fires attended; and is to receive another for saving five persons at another fire in the Whitechapel-road.

It is worthy of remark that "Bill" has never been taught his business; as his master says, "it is a gift." Wood is unassuming as brave, and will gladly show his interesting collection of testimonials at his residence, 6, Silk-street, Burton-street, Cripplegate. The inhabitants of Whitechapel are justly proud of him.



THE FIRE-ESCAPEMAN'S DOG

Doreen Osborne

Tunnel Trouble

Tunnels, tunnelling and their related problems are nothing new to the East End of London. Within the last two years an enormous amount of work has taken place on the construction of the new Channel Tunnel rail link to St Pancras, via Stratford and Barking, involving the removal of some 2.5 million cubic metres of earth. Nevertheless, it came as a huge shock to the residents of Lavender Street in Stratford, when they woke to find a huge hole in their back gardens. Apparently, the boring machine had disturbed several old wells that were not marked on any plans! The tunnel will pass under 2,000 buildings, 60 bridges and 600 utilities.

CORRESPONDENCE

Alan and Annie Willis, Portsoy, Banffshire, write:

The Spring Issue of the ELHS newsletter arrived a few days ago and I have thoroughly enjoyed reading the articles and catching up on news of the Society's activities. The 'Martha' article by Teresa Stephens was particularly fascinating. What a woman! It was interesting to see that one of Martha's sisters worked as a 'French polisher'. My paternal grandmother – Mary Willis (née Craig) was contemporary (born 1883) in the Old Nichol and she is described on my father's birth certificate as also being a 'French polisher'. I know that the furniture trade in Bethnal Green was very prevalent and Arthur Harding in his book of memoirs about the Old Nichol mentions about work being carried out in small factories, but also in people's homes. So it was interesting to see from the 'Martha' article that this also applied to French polishing.

I was very sorry to hear of the death of John Harris. I would certainly echo Mrs L Foster's comments in the newsletter. John was of considerable help to me in following up various leads relating to my family history and he came up with some really useful information. I am obviously not alone in regretting the future appearance of an envelope with John's 'distinctive handwriting'. It was always an exciting item of post to receive.

I must say how distressing it was to hear of the recent tragic murder in Victoria Park. I have happy memories of going there with my father and later, of running in races on the athletic track. I know that the Park holds a particular affection for you and I only hope that local people will be able to regain the Park for themselves as a happy place of recreation.

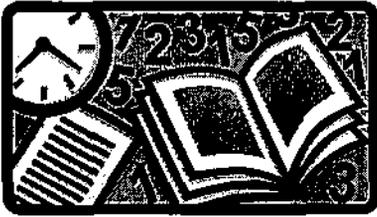
George Renshaw, of Bethnal Green, in reference to the piece on the Children's Hospital, sent in a picture of Hackney Road, and his reminiscences. George, born in 1922, recalls the scene:

The Children's Hospital is on the left, on the corner of Goldsmith's Row. On the corner was a grocer's shop, Conners. Next door, I think, was a coffee shop then the Pub, The Three Crowns. The tram track in this section of Hackney Road was single track, the road at this point was narrow. On the right was the Nag's Head pub, on the corner next door was a barber shop, then Ion Square, then Williams, the Post Office and Corn Chandlers and grocers discount shop – every purchase you would get a tin disk with one penny or up to sixpence. These you could use to purchase goods with, when funds were low, as they often were. Next to Williams was I think a toy shop. Next door was the bakers, Wasems, terrific bread, not like today's bread, you could enjoy just bread and margarine and jam or marmalade. Next to the bakers was Scotts the Butchers, which in later years became a pie and mash shop, Mercers. Then a sweet and tobacco shop, then I think Singers Sewing Machines was on the corner of Warner Place. The other shops that laid back from the road right opposite the Children's Hospital, an oil shop, an Ironmongers, a book shop, a newsagents, a couple of other shops, then Peters Street, and then the cinema picture palace, the Central. I could go on, but I bet many of your members will well remember the Hospital, it was well known all over London, kids from far and wide came here.

Home Movies/Videos of Docklands

If you have any, then London Weekend Television would love to hear from you. They are looking for films, and people willing to talk about them, illustrating how the area has changed over the last decade or so. Contact Mr Stuart Cooper, Series Producer, London's Home Movies on 020 7633 2573.

BOOK REVIEW



Call the Midwife, by Jennifer Worth SRN. SCM. Published by Merton Books. 17 black and white photographs of the area in the 1950s. ISBN 1-872560-10-5. Price £14.99.

Stepney housing in the late 1950s did not reflect the wealth of the City of London or the docks which bordered its boundaries. The docks were fully operational and employed most of the men. The bug-infested tenement slums housed tens of thousands of people and overcrowding was chronic. A whole house occupied by as many as twenty people would share one outside tap for water, and one outside toilet.

The conditions in which many women gave birth just half a century ago were horrifying, not only because of their grimly impoverished surroundings but because of what they were expected to endure. This is how it was when Queen Elizabeth II began her reign.

Jennifer Lee was a district midwife working with an order of nuns, going around Poplar on a bicycle in the 1950s, when the East End of London was still ravaged by wartime bombs. Family life was close and families were large. Women clung to the traditions of their mothers and at least 50% of Poplar babies were born at home - by gaslight. Water often had to be carried in and boiled up in the copper for the midwife's use.

The local dialect was hard to understand and Jennifer took many months to master the cockney slang, at the same time learning to cope with the eccentricities of the nuns she worked with. Parts of Cable Street were the haunts of

prostitutes and pimps, making the area difficult for decent families to live in. The friendship of Father Joe Williamson, who came to St Paul's, Dock Street in 1958, and worked hard to resolve the social problems in an area many feared to venture into, proved invaluable in her work.

Our first lecture in September will be given by the author of this real life drama whose midwifery skills are all too graphically described in this book based on her experiences in the 1950s. Her writing skills were developed as a result of an article she read: Impressions of a Midwife in Literature, by Terri Coates, who concluded that whilst doctors of every branch were a popular subject for TV dramas and literature, midwives were shadowy figures and virtually non-existent. Coates ended her article with the words : 'Maybe there is a midwife somewhere who can do for midwifery what James Herriot did for the veterinary practice'. Jennifer decided to take up this challenge.

CALL THE MIDWIFE describes, with humour and with poignancy, the author's experiences. She saw brutality and tragedy at first hand. She met with amazing kindness and understanding and she learnt to love the Cockney character. These many different and moving stories reveal that here is an author who may truly be called the James Herriot of the nursing profession.

A word of warning, though, to the unwary who might treat this as another book on local history – it is definitely not for the squeamish! Graphic descriptions of the birth process abound, as well as earthy humour, some courtesy of the nuns themselves!

Jennifer Worth will be publishing her new book titled 'Shadow of the Workhouse' in October, and is hoping to find some pictures of people in a workhouse. If any one has anything of interest, please contact Jennifer. Her address is: The White House, St John's Road, Boxmoor, Hertfordshire HP1 1QG.



MEMORIAL RESEARCH AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL GLEANINGS



Doreen and Diane Kendall, with Doreen Osborne and a dedicated group of

volunteers are in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park on second Sunday of every month at 2 pm, researching graves and recording memorial inscriptions. They have been doing this work with great perseverance and enthusiasm, for several years now, and have assisted scores of people with their family records, whilst adding to our knowledge of local history. At the same time, their work has aroused interest in several quarters.

Doreen Osborne reports:

Last August, when out with the group recording memorial inscriptions in Tower Hamlets Cemetery, I happened to notice an oddly shaped block of what appeared to be stone — about 8 inches in diameter — in a pile of rubble near a dip in the ground. Having always been interested in stones, I picked it up and, on close examination, found that it was actually made up of old clay-pipe stems which seemed to be embedded in a block of hardened clay, and arranged in a criss-cross pattern. This intrigued me as, obviously, it was man-made and not a natural formation.

I took it home and cleaned it up and then decided to take it to the Museum of London, as they always welcome examining any old or unusual objects found and will try to identify them. The expert I saw seemed quite excited at the sight of the block and took it away for examination, promising to let me know something about it within a few weeks. However, just a few days later, I received a letter and a phone call in which the block was described as an “interesting and rare find”!!

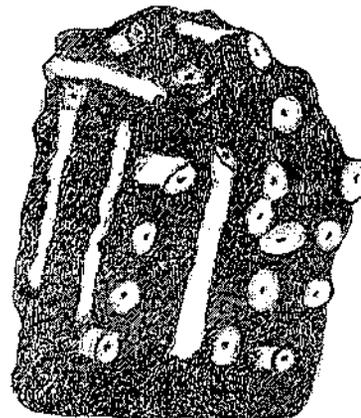
The block appears to be a piece of the “crucible” from a clay-pipe kiln, of a type once quite numerous in London from the 17th - 19th centuries when clay-pipe smoking was quite common. The kilns had an outer chamber for the fire and an inner chamber (known as the “crucible” or “muffle”), which protected the pipes and ensured that they retained

their whiteness. The crucible itself was usually circular in shape and was constructed from pipe-clay into which broken bowls and stems from old pipes were inserted to act as a kind of flue an early form of recycling! When the crucible was completed, newly-made pipes would be packed into it ready to be fired.

The Museum told me that although so many of these kilns once existed and had been found at various archaeological sites, it had not been realised until fairly recently that any blocks of criss-crossed pipes that were found were actually part of the kiln's construction and were not just examples of a failed consignment of pipes that had been discarded: many of such finds had once been discarded as industrial waste, with only a few retained as samples. This would explain the excitement about the find from Tower Hamlets Cemetery, which is now considered “important evidence of the process and a contribution to knowledge of the 17th — 19th century techniques”.

What has not yet been ascertained is why the block should have been found in the cemetery. Despite several subsequent visits to the exact spot where the block was found, no other pieces have been discovered: could the block have been dumped there in a load of stone used for construction of paths etc, or could it have been unearthed from the remains of a previous kiln on the site prior to the creation of the Cemetery in 1841?

(NB: The Museum sent me a lot of information on the clay-pipe-making process and also a long list of the names of various pipe-makers in London, some of whom worked in Mile End, Bow, Limehouse, Poplar and Stepney.)



... AND MORE ARCHAEOLOGY

The newly-opened "London Before London Gallery" at the Museum of London contains examples of ancient archaeological finds — including some from East London. Also several collectors of these items lived in the East End. They include: -

Sir Antonio Brady, of Stratford, 1811-1881. He owned Uphall Pit (Uphall Brick Pit, Ilford) which, in the 19th century, was a known location of ancient animal remains.

Most of his collection was purchased by the Natural History Museum in 1873, but a mammoth's tusk and lower jaw — originally donated to the then London Museum in 1913 — are now on display in the new Gallery.

Dr Frank Corner, a collector of London antiquities, lived in Poplar. At his death in 1948, his collection was auctioned and two lots were purchased by the London Museum. Some items and the auction catalogue are now on display.

Worthington George Smith. Although he did not live in London, his collections included flint hand-axes found in Abney Park Cemetery and in Lower Clapton and flint scrapers from Stoke Newington Common and Finsbury Park. He made regular visits to building sites, road excavations etc., in North and East London and Essex to collect specimens, making precise records of his finds and their locations.

In addition to visiting sites to obtain ancient finds, many collectors bought them from agents and "curiosity dealers", who sometimes acquired specimens recovered during dredging operations in the Thames during the 19th century (An example on display is a bronze sword, from Limehouse, found in 1835.) One such collector / dealer was G. F. Lawrence ("Stony Jack") — 1861-1939. He encouraged various navvies to look out for items found in the course of their work: "I taught them that every scrap of metal, pottery, glass or leather that had been lying under London may have a story to tell the archaeologist, and is worth saving". Lawrence supplied objects to various museums, including much of the Roman Collection now at the Museum of London. According to the writer, H. V. Morton, Lawrence did "more solid work for the

preservation of London's antiquities than any living man".

However, there are examples of unscrupulous dealers, and practices which fooled many keen collectors. Well known in the East End is the fiasco of the sale of "Billies & Charlies" (counterfeit 'pilgrim medallions' of lead produced in a back street near the Tower of London by shore-rakers, William Smith and Charles Eaton.) They flourished for a while because of the high demand in the 19th century for antiquities as "fashion items" for display in the home.

Another example of fraud was exposed at Stoke Newington Common. During the 1870s a genuine 'working floor' for the making of primitive flint tools had been excavated there and many ancient objects removed by collectors, including the "Sturge Collection" now in the British Museum. But the popularity of the excavation had its sequel, as outlined in C.E. Vulliamy's "Archaeology of Middlesex and London", 1930.

"Palaeolithic implements ... came into fashion. Credulous collectors and persuasive dealers flocked to Stoke Newington. The workmen were pleased and astonished to find that chipped flints were saleable. Forgeries were turned out by the hundred; genuine implements were taken from one place to be sold at another; landladies took flints in lieu of rent and publicans exchanged them for beer; lustrous and beautiful surfaces were made by the violet application of hard brushes and the forged implements were stained in iron saucepans full of rusty nails and boiling water"!!
(I acknowledge with thanks much information provided by Jon Cotton of the Museum of London).

Another excellent place to see finds from all ages, including from East London, is Mortimer Wheeler House, 49 Eagle Wharf Road (off New North Road) London N1.

This is the Archaeological Archive and Research Centre for the Museum of London and holds regular open days for the public and visits by appointment.

Doreen Osborne

Will Crooks' Election Centenary

History happens every day in Tower Hamlets. Ask for last week's local papers at the Bancroft Road Library to see what I mean! We descendants of Will and Matilda Crooks were involved in a minor historical event on the 11th and 12th March 2003. This was the celebration of Will Crooks' first election to Parliament. In 1910, Will briefly lost his seat. At the time, he and his wife Elizabeth (they called each other Bill and Bess), were in Australia. They only reached Woolwich the night before the poll. Will retired from politics four months before his death in Poplar Hospital on 5th June 1921 aged 69. Almost blind and deaf towards the end, he had to be helped about The House but he kept up a barrage of written questions in the interests of his constituents and the poor. Supported by the Poplar Labour League, he was the first Labour MP to win a contested election in a single member seat. Earlier Labour MPs had either been unopposed, or come second in two member constituencies.

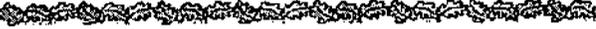
From Cromarty to Cromer and Cornwall, several cousins were met by Doreen Kendall at Mile End Underground Station. At the nearby Soanes Centre, she introduced us to Philip Mernick, Doreen Osborne, Margaret, Evelyn and Sylvia, of the East London History Society, and Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. As we were shown the more prominent memorials, I marvelled at the tremendous amount of clearing and tidying done since I visited the Cemetery five years ago. We heard how Rosemary Taylor had burrowed fearlessly among tree roots and under brambles to locate Will and Elizabeth Crooks' grave. Trees had broken up their monument. Rosemary and Doreen then raised funds from Unions and the Labour Party to create a close replica of the original tombstone. Doreen and her daughter Diane have also generously given their time to locate records of the numerous Crooks' graves in the Cemetery. Doreen read the tablet's inscription in such a moving way that I quietly suggested that Don Austen, Mayor of LB Greenwich, repeat the performance the next day when a coachful of descendants visited the grave with Malcolm Barr Hamilton, archivist from Tower Hamlets Local History Library, whom we met in the Mayor's Parlour. Salim Ullah, Mayor of Tower Hamlets kindly allowed us to see the Poplar chain which Will Crooks had worn. (By an odd coincidence, a nearby Cornish neighbour descends

from John Bussey, the second person to wear the chain in 1902-3.

Will Crooks would be dumb-founded to see the present affluence of the Isle of Dogs. More people must work there now than then London was a major port. What will Tower Hamlets be like when Salim Ullah's great grandchildren gather to marvel at the chain he had worn? Malcolm took us to see what remains of Will Crooks' Poplar. From the kink in Upper North Street, you can see virtually all of the sites of the many homes of Will Crooks throughout his lifetime, save for the Liverpool sojourn. On an earlier visit, my cousins and I located the site of 35 Arcadia Street where our grandmothers were born. Some local children politely looked at our ancient maps while we explained. One child asked, "Was this a hospital then?"

On the Tuesday Doreen and Philip walked with us to the Bow Docklands Station. Doreen saw us safely away from the amazing Canary Wharf Underground hall. On our walk, Philip told us fascinating anecdotes of local historical sites. My wife, Miriam was recently interviewed by students as part of a project. "Do you bother to vote?" they asked. "If you do vote, why bother?" She said everyone should vote, especially women, as a tribute to those who had devoted their lives to the struggle to obtain the Right to Vote, and sometimes even died for their cause. The teenagers were surprised. They confessed that no one had ever told them that the right to vote had not always been a universal privilege. Miriam's father often said, "A vote is not worth much but it would be terrible NOT to have it." That's what I was recalling when Philip showed us the side road, Tomlin's Grove, where marching Suffragettes suffered horrendous injuries as they were crushed by a charge of mounted police. At Bow Station I turned to thank Philip for his guidance. He had already modestly vanished. Thank you to Philip, to Doreen and the ladies who gave their afternoon to come and meet us. Thank you too to the many volunteers who have begun the almost incompatible tasks of trying to reverently clear the Cemetery while creating a Public Open Space and preserving the varied wild life.

Ray Jefferd


On Growing Up in the East End
 by Leah Lachman
 1913 - 2000


Until I was asked to have this little talk with you I hadn't given much thought - or at least not very much thought to the life we led all those years ago in the East End. I could start by telling you about all the things we didn't have - washing machines, central heating etc. etc. I won't mention vacuum cleaners because nobody I knew had carpet on their floors - linoleum was the only thing we knew. Anyway we had none of the things most people take for granted today. But to start at the beginning - my grandfather came from Krakow. My mother as a baby came from Vilna with the rest of her family. My father was born in England. I myself was born in a little backstreet off the Mile End Road. I lost my mother at a very early age (In the 1918 flu epidemic) and lived with my father and my mother's sister and husband. They had 6 children and there were three of us, in all 3 adults & 9 children. Our home was shared between 2 families - 12 of us in one part of the house & the other family (consisting of 2 adults and 2 children) in the other part. There was no sharp division in the house - we more or less split up the rooms as best we could. We had 3 bedrooms (1 of which was a little room over a stable) for the 12 of us. Sounds gruesome doesn't it? There was never any privacy - not to mention running hot water or a bathroom. We had a yard that contained the lavatory which of course had to be shared between the 2 families. My uncle also kept chickens in the yard (sounds quite rural doesn't it?) - and they supplied us with the occasional egg and also our dinner from time to time. And now comes the horrible part - we took it in turns to take ageing chickens to the shochet. My uncle would tie the wretched birds' legs together and then force the struggling bird into a very large shopping bag. This was made of a kind of plaited straw. When I had the job of taking the chicken to be killed all I could think of was the return journey. I remember walking back holding the bag at arm's length. Even now I can relive the terror and disgust I felt knowing what was inside that bag (dead chicken). I was 10 or 11 at the time.

The street consisted of both Jewish and non-Jewish families - all more or less living under the same conditions. I recall my aunt doing the washing - we

had a scullery leading off from the kitchen and there was a copper where the water was heated. My aunt would stand for hours at the washboard and then the wet things would be wrung through the mangle. There was a clothes line in the yard and I can remember there was always something hanging on it to dry. I might add we all had baths once a week in a zinc bath with water taken from the copper. Sometimes we would go off to the local slipper baths and I can still hear the shrill cries of customers calling out from the various cubicles, "More hot water for number 10 please!"

However all was not gloom. There was too much hustle and bustle going on, as you can imagine, with so many people around. Besides we knew no other life and took all this for granted. We knew all our neighbours in the street (Skidmore Street) and in fine weather people would sit outside their front doors. I used to love listening to the women gossiping, and the tittle tattle which went on was great. Often somebody would walk in to borrow a cup of sugar or half a loaf of bread and would be thought none the worse for doing it. Mind you there'd be the odd one or two coming along and we'd mutter - here's Mrs so & so on the cadge again.

Money was very scarce. Most of the Jewish people we knew were in the tailoring business working long hours for little money - but glad to have a job. When the breadwinner was out of work the family went on what we called 'relief' (Poor Relief). They were given stamps to a certain value and could then buy groceries etc. up to certain limits. Mention of the East End today invokes for many people a picture of colour and glamour, but what I have told you was how it really was. Strangely enough, although there was a shortage of money, we always had new clothes for the Jewish holidays.

I went to an elementary school - each class consisted of between 50 or 60 pupils. At the age of 10 my class was divided into divisions so the teacher was teaching at 2 or 3 different levels. Once a year we were taken on an outing to the country - Epsom Downs was a favourite. This reminds me of a story my aunt told of how when she was at school (she came to England from Russia as a small child) she was asked to write about a day in the country. She'd never been outside London and described a lovely day at Shepherd's Bush (a built up area in the West of London). This she thought must be the countryside with green fields etc. and was the only

place she could think of with a name that sounded rural.

To get back to school days - I sat for the Junior County exam as it was called and by good luck managed to get a scholarship to a very good school in Spital Square (Central Foundation Girls School). I stayed at this school until I was 17. This caused a bit of friction amongst the other children in my family because they had all left school at 14. After a means test I was given a small yearly grant - I can't remember how much. This was to help with buying the school uniform and various other bits and pieces. I remember the school hatband round the compulsory school hat (Felt in Winter and a Panama in Summer) was embroidered with a real coat of arms - truly regal! I had about a 3 mile journey to school by bus or tram. Often I would walk all the way home to save a 1d to spend on a bar of chocolate. Some of the girls were fee paying and the rest were what we called scholarship girls (I was a scholarship girl). The latter were mostly Jewish.

Every Monday morning the whole school had a general assembly with prayers in the hall. The rest of the week the Jewish girls had separate morning prayers in the large dining room. Hot lunches were provided at a small cost, but many of us took sandwiches and sat in chairs around the hall. I think going to that school was a turning point in my life. I made new friends and was taught by excellent teachers. My friends were mostly Jewish - this was not deliberate - we just drifted towards each other.

There was a stretch of land between Stepney Green and the London Hospital which was known as 'The Waste'. I don't know why it was called this. Very often on a Saturday night we would stroll along here and enjoy looking at all the various stalls selling everything under the sun. In winter they would all be lit up with huge jets of gas flaring away. Our money would be spent on bags of hot chestnuts and we'd walk along chatting and munching and casting sly glances at the groups of boys or girls as the case might be. Occasionally we would take the bus to the West End. We might have 6d in our pockets and sit for hours in the Corner House (Lyons Corner House) with a small ice cream - much to the chagrin of the waitresses who were waiting for us to move on. As for holidays (I never knew of any grown up who could afford to have one) I went for 2 weeks in the Summer to various resorts under a scheme known as the Country Holiday Fund (a charity set up to provide holidays to deprived children). My family

paid a small amount for this (after having taken a means test to know what our family could afford). There was a Jewish branch to this. I seem to remember a Miss Moses (Miriam Moses Jewish mayor of Stepney) organising this. We would be housed in various local villages, and fish or meat (kosher) would be sent down from Blooms - as you know the kosher restaurant.

I often visited my grandparents who lived in Hackney in 2 rooms. They had come from Russia with their young children and my grandfather scraped a living working in a shoe factory. He spoke broken English and could read and write very little. I noticed they had Yiddish newspapers dotted around the place written in Hebrew script. I recall so well the enormous meals my grandmother made me eat - chicken soup, lockshen pudding etc. etc. There they would sit just watching me eat and I loved every minute of it. It was good to be made a fuss of.

During all this time we never really thought we were deprived. I was growing up with congenial friends - we discussed everything under the sun and thought we knew everything. Then along came the Blackshirts, and that turned us into bright red Communists. On one occasion I was standing with my father outside the house when a group of them marched past and actually spat at us. I knew personally of elderly couples who'd been attacked by them.

Eventually I managed to get away from the East End and was happy to do so. Life there was pretty bleak - the compensation for me were the life long friends I made at my secondary school. The physical discomforts were all forgotten. Also I suppose we gained a resilience we would not otherwise have had.

Copyright Philip Lachman

‘OPEN AIR SITTING ROOMS FOR THE POOR’

Epping Forest and West Ham Park

For those who stay at home there are the East-End parks, Victoria Park, West Ham Park, Finsbury Park, Clissold Park, Wanstead Park. They are thronged with people strolling or sitting quietly along the walks. Walter Besant, *East London*, 1901

In their book, *A Pictorial History of Victoria Park, London E3*, Doreen Kendall and Philip Mernick tell how Tower Hamlets’ prime green space was saved for the enjoyment of the residents, ownership and responsibility for running the park passing from HM Office of Works, to the Metropolitan Board of Works, and then to the London County Council when that body was formed in 1888. The land was being used by the public by 1843. The whole process seems to have been fairly straightforward and carried through without too much rancour, although no doubt there were a few political deals done.

A little further east, two other ‘lungs’ were preserved for the East End: Epping Forest, including Wanstead Park, and West Ham Park. The story of the acquisition of these tracts of land is different in every case. One border of Epping Forest lay just within the borough of West Ham, as the name ‘Forest Gate’ implies. The forest is an ancient one, where royalty and nobility hunted with enthusiasm until the days of Queen Elizabeth I. Running down to where the old forest gate stood in what became the borough of West Ham is a broad strip of heath and grassland, Wanstead Flats. Some sources say the gate was to keep the cattle which grazed the local marshes from straying into the forest, others say it was to keep deer from straying out of the trees onto the roads. It is sometimes referred to as a toll gate, but it seems that this is a mistake, although there was a keeper’s cottage alongside. The gate was demolished in 1881.

Medieval forest law gave way to common law after the 1688 revolution, but since before the coming of the Normans residents of the forest villages had relied on their rights to lop wood in winter, to pasture their swine in the woods, and to graze cattle

on the patches of grassland. Bit by bit, enclosures eroded the land available to exercise those rights, until at length the Commoners resisted.

Between Wanstead Flats and the wooded part of Epping Forest lay Wanstead Park, the first significant enclosure. The manor had passed through the hands of many royal favourites, including Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester in Elizabeth’s day, and George Villiers, later Duke of Buckingham, when James I & VI was on the throne.

The nineteenth century saw increasing public alarm at the desecration of Britain’s green spaces, and heart-searching about the hastily-built towns where the growing population was forced to find employment. Hainault Forest, one of the ancient forests on London’s doorstep, had been destroyed by the middle of the century. Charitable organisations such as Commons Preservation Society were formed to oppose such evils. This society was founded in 1865 with the object of securing ‘for the use and enjoyment of the public open spaces, situate in the neighbourhood of towns, and especially of London, still remaining unbuilt upon’. Very soon it had a fight on its hands in another Essex woodland, Epping Forest.

The Lord of the Manor of Loughton, the Reverend Mr Maitland, was intent on enclosing over 1,300 acres, but a Commoner, a poor villager called Thomas Willingale, defied him, backed by his two sons, and a number of local people. Some of these people who supported the Willingales did have money and influence, including the Buxton family, one of a network of noted inter-related Quaker families in the district.

The Corporation of the City of London now enter this story for a very practical reason: by the nineteenth century, the City had run out of places to bury its dead. And so, in 1854, the Commissioners of Sewers for the City of London bought 200 acres of land on the edge of the forest, Aldersbrook Farm in the Manor of Wanstead, with the intention of making a cemetery. This was fortunate, as it made the Corporation legally a Commoner, and the City was richer than the Buxtons and carried more weight than the Commons Preservation Society; the Commoners could afford to go to law.

Because it was legally established that Commoners’ rights held throughout the whole forest and not just in the manor in which they lived, the City

Corporation were found to have acquired the right to contest enclosure in Loughton. The case was taken to court in 1871, but it was not until 1874 that judgement was given. It went against the Lord of the Manor. This affair led directly to the passing of the Epping Forest Act 1878, which not only ensured rights of access, but, most importantly, laid down that the forest was to be kept in its natural state. Epping Forest was ceremonially opened to the public by Queen Victoria in 1882.

Sadly, Tom Willingale and one of his sons had died before the matter was settled, and the City of London only very reluctantly paid a pension of five shilling a week to Mrs Willingale to keep her from the workhouse. The Commoners lost their right to lop wood after all. There was some argument, but eventually compensation was paid. Some individuals received lump sums, and the Corporation gave Loughton the cash to build a village hall – the now rather sad-looking Lopping Hall in the high street.

In the case of West Ham Park, it was some of the local residents themselves who held up the transfer of land into public ownership. Looking back, this may seem shortsighted, but the population of West Ham was growing at a prodigious rate, and consisted of far too many under-employed and consequently penniless casual workers. Merchants no longer chose to make their homes alongside the factories, which made their money. A declining middle-class, who paid the rates, saw their environment becoming daily more unsavoury, with noxious fumes from the dockside factories creating a foul-smelling fog, with houses slung together by jerry-builders in what had so recently been rural streets, and an ever-increasing number of families needing Poor Law relief crammed into them. These conditions made it all the more desirable that such open spaces as the park to the south of Forest Gate should be retained. Yet it all had to be paid for.

The earliest record of a house on the site dates from 1566. Names changed as the estate grew, and subdivided, and changed hands. One name still in use is Upton Park. An eighteenth century botanist increased and laid out some of the grounds, but it is the Gurney family which most concerns us. The Gurneys were Quakers, related to the Buxtons, who figured in the story of Epping Forest. Samuel Gurney bought the property in 1812, and died in 1856. During his occupancy, a building on the land

called Upton Lane House was the home of his married sister, Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer.

After Samuel Gurney died, the family made its home in Norfolk, and his grandson, John Gurney, conceived the notion that his beautiful park should be made over to the people of West Ham. He was not rich enough, or generous enough, to make a gift of it outright, but he did make a handsome offer in 1868, when affairs in West Ham were still administered by the Board of Health and the Vestry. West Ham could purchase the site, including the mansion and the second house and garden, for £25,000, a fair asking price. In addition, John Gurney and his family were willing to make donations of over £5,000 towards it, provided it was used entirely as a recreation ground for the public. Nevertheless, a deputation went to the Home Secretary to plead for a substantial Government grant in order to take advantage of the offer.

In reply, the Government proposed a loan, with fifty years to repay the debt. Two members of the Vestry, C W Tanner and the Nonconformist minister John Curwen, put it to a Vestry meeting that this would entail no more than a 1% rate, and wished to purchase. Thomas Crow, seconded by James Scully put the following amendment, which was carried: 'That this meeting earnestly requests the Local Board of Health to break off its negotiations for the purchase of a public Park, and under no circumstances to re-enter upon any fresh negotiations in reference to the subject'. A poll was demanded and held, and ratepayers voted 788 to 293 against adopting the scheme. The Rev. John Curwen and Major Banes, an ex-miner who was later to represent West Ham North in parliament as a Conservative, campaigned tirelessly but to no avail.

In 1872 things were stirred up, as John Gurney had received an offer for the land, and the old mansion was being pulled down. It seemed likely that the whole estate could become a building site. Upton Park was in the more affluent and respectable side of the borough, and no doubt there was an element of self-interest in those who were alarmed at the thought of yet more jerry-building in their quarter. There was some rushing around on the part of the well intentioned, but no plans as to how to raise enough money. John Gurney, still preferring to see his beautiful park kept more or less intact and enjoyed by local people, raised his family's offer of a donation to £10,000, and suggested selling off part of it, and mortgaging some.

A public meeting was held at the Town Hall, Stratford, on 30 January 1873, and, to quote local historian Dr Pagenstecher (who was John Gurney's agent) speakers 'strongly advocated the desirability of preserving Upton Park as an open space for the use and healthful recreation of the toiling masses in the numerous factories and workshops'. Local committees were now set up in Forest Gate, Plaistow, Stratford New Town, and what Pagenstecher calls 'the Dock District', in a more determined effort to raise money. Nearly £2,000 came in within two months from, to quote Pagenstecher again, 'the £500 of the wealthy Baring down to the cheerfully given sixpence of the poor labourer'. Many tradesmen, he adds, 'as well as other persons of position', held aloof. Dr Pagenstecher was asked to take over as secretary of the organising body. He turned to the Quakers, who contributed willingly in memory of Samuel Gurney. Next he thought to call upon the City Corporation, this time involving the Coal and Corn and Finance Committee. The Corporation had long had the right to collect dues for measuring corn and coal, known as metage. The need to perform these duties had ceased, but the Corporation continued to collect the money, and now looked around for ways to dispense it. Parliament had consented that the Corporation should use it to preserve open spaces for the people, in and around the metropolis. The committee were interested in the park, but didn't know where West Ham was. With another of his happy thoughts, Pagenstecher invited them down when the roses were out, and made sure the schoolchildren had a half holiday so they could rush about the grounds, and make good use of the cricket pitch. The Corporation coughed up, and the bells were rung in West Ham Church.

West Ham Park was formally opened on Monday, 20 July 1874. 'The event was celebrated as a complete holiday' Pagenstecher tells us 'in Bow, Stratford, Plaistow and West Ham [meaning the ancient village of that name], and for two miles or more, before the entrance to the park was reached, the route was gaily decorated with thousands of flags and banners of every size, shape, and colour. Triumphal arches had been erected at Bow Bridge, West Ham Lane, and at the park gates'. In return, the East End that day got a glimpse of the City regalia. It saw the Lord Mayor, accompanied by the mace-bearer and the sword-bearer, and a procession of 26 carriages.

Towards the end of his book, *West Ham Park*, Pagenstecher indulges in a bit of Victorian purple

prose, inviting those who doubt 'that open spaces are great factors in the social happiness and real education, moral, physical and religious, of the toiling masses' to come and see 'the working man, faint with toil and noxious effluvia in factory or workshop, resting his weary limbs of a summer's evening in the cool shade of the umbrageous tree'. And so on. But Pagenstecher was justified in a little pride.

Octavia Hill was one of the philanthropists behind the struggle to maintain Epping Forest and other open spaces. The involvement of the Commons Preservations Society, and of Octavia Hill and her associates in particular, led indirectly from that fight to the founding of the National Trust in January 1895, the first public body of its kind with the authority to purchase land on behalf of the nation. In *The National Trust: the First Hundred Years*, Merlin Waterson says that Octavia Hill's aim was to 'protect places of beauty for their own sake, but also to provide "open air sitting rooms for the poor"'. Simpler words than Pagenstecher's, but effective.

Further reading: William Addison, *Wanstead Park*, Corporation of London, no date; Ken Hoy, *Getting to Know Epping Forest*, Chelmsford: Friends of Epping Forest, 2002; Dr G Pagenstecher, *The Story of West Ham Park*, Stratford, Wilson & Whitworth, 1895; Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land*, Quartet Books, 1982; Merlin Waterson, *The National Trust, the First Hundred Years*, The National Trust, 1994.

Pat Francis

Coming Soon (we hope!)

The East End I Knew - A Personal Record in Pictures and Words by Allan Young. Although he has lived in Kent for the last forty years Allan grew up in Limehouse. He was a keen photographer and the quality of the images to be used in this forthcoming publication by the East London History Society will distinguish this book from most other "reminiscences". A4, about 76 pages with many photographs taken in the East End, mostly in the 1950s.



AUTUMN COACH TRIP
SATURDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER 2003
WOBURN ABBEY

After our visit to Blenheim, we will be going to another of Britain's great houses. There is a wonderful collection of paintings, including a whole roomful of Canalettos, and also splendid furniture, porcelain, silver etc.

It is set in a very large deer park, and surrounded by garden. If you are feeling rich, there are gift shops and an antiques centre.

We'll be stopping on the way to have lunch and look around, perhaps at Leighton Buzzard. Tea is available at Woburn.

The pick-up will be at the bus pull-in in Grove Road, round the corner from Mile End Station, at 9.30 a.m.

The fare is £7.50. Entrance fees to Woburn are £7.00 full rate and £6.00 concessions. However I have arranged for a guided tour, for which there is an extra charge. It will not be very much more, perhaps £1 a head or a bit more. I cannot give an exact figure as it depends on our numbers, we pay so much per guide, not per person. I will collect this extra money and entrances on the coach.

Please send the coach fare to me, Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF, using the booking slip below. My home phone is 020 8524 4506 and my mobile (for last minute messages) is 078 1569 5428.



AUTUMN COACH TRIP
Woburn Abbey
Saturday 13th September 2003

I/We would like _____ seat/s for the coach trip.

NAME/S _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL NO. _____ I enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____

(Cheque made payable to the East London History Society.)