

*Great Assembly Hall.*



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**Editorial Note:**

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

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](mailto: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](http://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.

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**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](mailto:phil@mernicks.com) with your comments and suggestions.



**EAST LONDON  
HISTORY SOCIETY  
PROGRAMME Jan-May 2004**

**Thursday 15 April**

**Brunel and the Great Eastern**  
Speaker: Clive Chambers

**Saturday 1 May 2004**

**Spring Coach Trip to  
Charleston, Alfriston, and  
Berwick Church**

Coach Trip Organiser:

Ann Sansom (Tel 020 8524 4506)  
(See back cover for details and booking  
form)

**Thursday 13 May**

**Open Meeting**

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 London Archive Users Forum

### 'A Place in the Sun'

#### Index appears online...

In February 2004 the first output of the Place in the Sun indexing project was posted on the web at [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk). This represents 53,697 policies from 30 policy registers of the Sun Fire Insurance office from 1816 – 1824.

A team of volunteers, led by project manager Susan Sneddon, has worked on the registers since January 2003. To date they have completed the indexing of 38 registers, with more in preparation. Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has supported the first 15 months of the project. LAUF has also succeeded in securing funding from Awards for All to support the project to continue to March 2005.

The Sun policy registers offer an unparalleled source for details of the business, family and social history of the times they cover. From our initial stopping point of 1824, we are continuing forwards in time to 1830. The period is one where records are especially valuable for family historians, there is an unbroken run of London-centred volumes, and Guildhall Library has an excellent series of London street maps (by Robert Horwood). We hope that the project will result in over 50 registers being

indexed – nearly one sixth of the total of surviving Sun policy registers for London.

We are indexing the volumes by name of insured, address of insured, occupation or status of insured, and location of property insured (whether land or chattels). We are also recording other names and occupations of individuals and businesses mentioned in the registers.

The index can be found at [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk). (once you have entered a search term, choose 'Guildhall Library' from the Location of Archives menu; or choose the theme 'A Place in the Sun' on the Extended Search screen). Detailed instructions on using the index are available at [www.history.ac.uk/gh/sun.htm](http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/sun.htm). Information about the project can be obtained by contacting the Project Manager at [firearchive@aol.com](mailto:firearchive@aol.com), or by leaving a telephone message on 07939 178246. If you would like to get involved in the project as a volunteer, you would be very welcome. Please contact Susan as above for details.



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**CORRESPONDENCE**  
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**David H Cutler, 27 Ravensworth Road, Mottingham, London, SE9 4LW, writes:**

I read the book that was published by your good office, **A Pictorial History of Victoria Park**. It was a wonderful book and most interesting and the photos were interesting too, they bring the past back to life, in a way.

I have to say that apart from two relatives in Dalston and two in Shoreditch, I have had little contact with Hackney apart from an annual visit to my optician in Mare Street. I have been going there for over 40 years. Recently, quite by chance I came across a group of relatives in Essex and in Ipswich that I knew nothing about. They are related on my father's side. We met and I found that my grandmother and some of my aunts and uncle were born in Chapman Road not far from Victoria Park. It would be interesting to know how my grandparents met as he lived in and was born in Lambeth.

I think local historical societies do a wonderful service to their own areas. They give people. Particularly people whose families have lived there for generations, a feeling of continuity with their past. Hackney and the East End are rich in history. I have visited parts of Hackney and Homerton, and Hackney Wick to see where my grandparents lived etc. Much of course has been pulled down but there were some buildings they may have seen. Still, it been most interesting. I hope soon to visit Victoria Park. My grandparents moved to Waterloo, then Kennington in the 1900s. In 1940 they were killed in an air raid trench in Kennington Park with many others.

In conclusion, I wish you and your colleagues well for the future and I hope your research proves to be very exciting.

**Mr H W Andrews, Haldane, 134 Fleetwood Avenue, Holland on Sea, Essex:**

I write to you as a complete stranger, so start by offering my apologies. A relative of mine, one of your subscribers, passes on to me copies of the Newsletter from time to time. I noticed in Volume 2 Issue No. 7 that 'East End history and reminiscences are always welcome, for publication.' To this end, I enclose an article from memory, of school times in the 1920s, now some eighty years ago, that might be worthy of publication. I am afraid it is not on disk or typewritten, as you request, but in plain schoolboy 'block capitals'.

Two local gentlemen you might know by name are friends of mine, and have been for years, from 'City of London' days. One is Mr David Webb, the librarian and curator of the Bishopsgate Institute, the other is Mr Barltrop, lecturer on East End History, and writer of a weekly piece for the local East Ham paper, the recorder, called Reflections. I contribute at times with pieces of City and East End times since 1930. I came to the City of London at 14 years of age, as a messenger boy to a large photographic retail shop, learnt the trade and stayed with the same firm for 56 years, retiring as a working director. I retired in 1986. As you can imagine, with my job and the camera, I took hundreds of photos over those years. On retirement, I gave them all to Mr David Webb for safekeeping. I was born in Plaistow in 1916, sadly my family were all killed in the Docks Blitz in 1940. My early days then, were spent in and around West Ham, East Ham and the Docks. In closing, I do hope I have not been out of order in writing to you, or should I say, 'printing' to you! I'm afraid that at eighty-seven years now, my longhand is very shaky!

*(Editor's Note: Thank you for writing to us, Mr Andrews, the article on your schooldays in Plaistow appears in this issue.)*

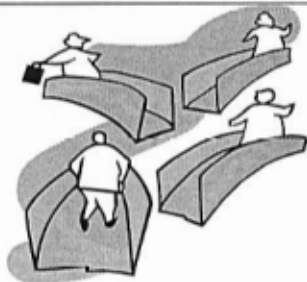
**Mrs S A Winfield, 2 St Albans Close,  
Holmewood, Chesterfield, Derbyshire  
writes:**

I received my history newsletter last week, and I do enjoy reading them very much, but I often wonder why Canning Town isn't in these letters, as I was born and lived in Canning Town in 1921. I do have books about Canning Town, but cannot seem to get the streets that I would like to see again – Alice Street, near Tidal Basin, Wick Road and streets surrounding.

I would also like to know if it is possible to get any old books, such as children's 1920-30 books, the ones I used to read when I was a child. I know this may be asking too much but at my age, and living now in Derbyshire, it's worth a try.

I like to read any book that takes me back in time, and it would be nice to read some old school books. I left London during the War, was in the ATS and met and married my husband in the army. He came from Chesterfield, hence the move from my beloved London.

(Editor's reply: There have been a few articles on Canning Town in the Record in the past, and also in the newsletters, perhaps not as many as you would like to see, Mrs Winfield, but we can only publish what is sent to us, whenever we can, and sadly, not many of our members come up with articles on Canning Town. As we have on page one, articles are always welcome, and we endeavour to publish those we receive.)



## MAKING HISTORY

Our congratulations to **Joanna Roberts** and **Ada Price**, both well known to East London history enthusiasts, who were made MBEs in the New Years Honours List.

Joanna, a regular at our lectures, and a familiar face to those who attend Ragged School Museum and the Cemetery Open Days, was honoured for her tireless work with the children of Benthall Primary School. She also runs charity events to raise money for the homeless centre at the United Reform Church, Rectory Road, and the animal welfare group, Liberty, as well as helping out as a volunteer at the Ragged School Museum in Copperfield Road, Bow.

Ada Price, an Isle of Dogs resident, was honoured for her voluntary work with the Island History Trust, which she joined nearly twenty years ago, helping to maintain the mailing list, and also assist in compiling the Trust's photographic collection.

On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January, Comedian and Entertainer **Roy Hudd** unveiled the newly restored gravestone of music hall coster singer **Alec Hurley**, in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. The work of restoring the grave of the famous comedian, was undertaken by the British Music Hall Society, of which Roy Hudd is the President. Hurley's great niece Mary Logan and other relatives, together with over fifty music hall fans attended the ceremony, which was followed by a reception at the Soanes Centre hosted by the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

The next Public Open Day at the Cemetery Park is on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> May. Join Doreen and Diane, and the Friends for a tour of the Park, and a chance to see the restoration work.

## BOOK REVIEWS



**A History Of The English School's Football Association 1904-2004** by Colm Kerrigan, foreword by Gordon Taylor. Casebound, 222 pages, published by Yore Publications on behalf of the English Schools' Football Association, 1-2 Eastgate Street, Stafford ST16 2NQ. £15.95 including P&P.

This is the fourth book by our member Colm Kerrigan, for many years editor of the East London Record. His first book, *A History of Tower Hamlets*, published more than twenty years ago, is still the definitive work on the subject. Here Colm returns to a favourite subject of his - football: his previous book telling the story of West Ham, Chelsea and England player George Hilsdon. This latest book in 21 chapters takes us from the earliest organised schools competitions in the 1880s right up to date. South London SFA was the first created in 1885 and East London followed only a year later. The driving forces behind all these Associations were teachers at the relatively recently created School Boards. Even in those early days before the 1904 creation of the English SFA many inter-city competitions were held, London teams often coming out on top, probably due to the much larger number of schools they could select their players from. The second chapter tells how the English SFA came to be formed and subsequent chapters give details of the annual competitions, usually covering a decade a chapter. The next series of chapters tell us about the schoolboy internationals, the first being England vs. Wales in 1907. The very

last chapter talks about the challenges facing schools football, the greatest of which seems to be the rise of football academies, which "cream off" the most talented and prevent them playing for area teams. This reviewer is not a dedicated soccer fan although still following the results of the London team he "inherited" from his father but still found it fascinating. East London often features in this book. Many of their teams, later taking the Tower Hamlets name did very well although they only won once in 1966 (I am sure I remember seeing them play at the East London Stadium and also at Millwall sometime in the 60s). So many familiar names are seen in these chapters, boys who would later be playing for Chelsea and Tottenham etc. The introduction tells us that SFA referred exclusively to boys until 1992 from which dates it included boys and girls. The honour England Schoolboy is the highest honour in schools football and they hope that England Schoolgirl will soon be achievable.

**Philip Mernick**

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**Still on sale:**

**The East End I knew** by Allan Young, published by the East London History Society. ISBN 0 950625 84 1. A4 paperback. Price £7.50. Enquiries to Philip Mernick (see inside front cover for contact details)

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## Memories of Bow Road

I was born over a shop in Bow Road, just opposite the Church on 27th June 1909. There was a statue of Gladstone just in front of the churchyard. I don't know why as he had no connection with the area. Our shop projected beyond the building line on the west as the London County Council was buying properties to widen Bow Road. Someone then had the sensible idea of making the roads round the Church one way so widening was not necessary.

At the outbreak of World War my Father became a special Constable. He found it impossible to keep warm while walking his beat so purchased a Thermos flask, a gadget, which had only just come on the market. They were expensive, 10/6 I think but well worth it to get a hot drink on a cold night.

The area had many nationalities. For many years we had Dutch as neighbours, the lodging house opposite was usually full of Lascars (coloured seamen) while their vessels were in dock. Many of the bakers were German, the dairymen Welsh. A little further west was a large Jewish colony most of whom were in the 'rag' trade. Nearby was an area nicknamed "China Town" In the autumn Frenchmen came over selling strings of onions.

We used to sell dog collars and I was often taken by the shop boy to get them engraved with the owner's name and address. The engraver was the father of a large musical family. Two of his daughters used to entertain locally doing humorous sketches and playing the violin - they were 'Gert and Daisy'. Some years later a younger brother entered the entertainment himself - Jack Warner. He posed as a policeman and his opening remark was "evening all". As well as routine duties Father had to report whenever there was an air raid alert. Mother and I used to sit in the shop, occasionally going to the door to see if there

was a Zeppelin caught in the searchlight beams. One night there was a loud thump and in the morning we found that the Black Swan public house on the corner of Bow Road and Devons Road High Street had been hit and the lower and first floor badly damaged. The rest of the building was unsafe. We were cordoned off and told to remain indoors while the building was made safe. I think five people were killed as well as a boy next door.

One day we were sitting in our back room when the sky lit up - the Silver Town explosion. Father went off to report for duty. We did not see him for three days.

Some time later I remember the rabies scare. Dogs were not allowed on the streets unless muzzled. One of Father's brothers was an inventor. He had no interest in developing anything commercially. The interest was in spotting the problem and solving it. One of his best inventions was to use a board with strategically placed nails to make muzzles. By winding wire round the appropriate nails, muzzles could be made to fit any breed and size of dog. Father and the shop boy started making muzzles which I sold. Just as the order was coming to an end one of Father's suppliers sent him a sample muzzle. It was patented but just like those Father had been making but perhaps a little more neatly finished off.

In those days we walked. When I attended Coborn School for Girls which was nearly a mile away I walked as did other pupils who lived in the area, buses and trams passed every few minutes. I remember going up west to see the fireworks display, which was held to celebrate the end of the war. In those days the East End was like a village with people walking to work or going by cycle and some of them seldom ventured more than a mile or two from home.

**Ivy Corfe**

## MAKING MONEY

Doreen Osborne's article in the Summer 2003 Newsletter mentioning unscrupulous dealers and 'Billies and Charlies', counterfeit pilgrim medallions, brought to mind my family history research. I am carrying out a 'One Name Study' of my great-great grandmother's name 'Forecast' which consists of collecting and researching all incidents of the name. They were a Huguenot silk weaving family who settled in Spitalfields in the 1680's, the French version of the name being Forequest, Forques and many other variations.

In the Old Bailey Session Papers I discovered an incident concerning a George Forecast, which occurred in July 1831. A William Brummitt, a journeyman potter, who lived in Lambeth, together with a Robert Lawrence, was asked by a Parish Constable to go to a house in Dean's Yard, Wentworth Street, where it was believed that counterfeit coins were being made. On arrival at the house they spoke to a George Bagley. Lawrence asked him if he had any half-bulls (half crowns). Bagley said 'No' but he would soon make him some, and asked how many he would like. Lawrence said he would like a score of half-bulls, a score of garter-bobs (shillings) and a score of plain (plain shillings without the garter round them). He asked Bagley how long it would take. He said he would have them ready in an hour and a half, and showed them some moulds which he had made. They then left and went to a public house at the corner of the street, where two officers were waiting, with whom they returned to the house in the evening. They found George Bagley and his wife Frances, and George Forecast and another woman at the house. Forecast was sitting by the fire putting metal into a pot. Frances Bagley had the moulds in her hand and, when she saw the Officers, tried to break them. Forecast jumped from his chair and threw what appeared to be chalk out of the window. He said he didn't live at the house

and attempted to attack Lawrence with a mallet. The Officers took them into custody. They then discovered in the room some twelve half-crowns and some shillings and equipment for making moulds. One mould was for a half-crown of the date 1817 and the coins which were found bore this date.

At the trial George and Frances Bagley denied the charge. Forecast in his defence said that he did not live at the house but in the same street. He said he had gone to the 'Star' pub to ask for a newspaper. They said it was out and if he went to the house in Deans Yard he could get it. When he arrived at the house, the Officers took him. The Bagleys and George Forecast, all in their early twenties, were found guilty of making base coin and sentenced to death. Forecast's sentence was later commuted to transportation for life. He was a 23 year old weaver, a protestant. 5'7" tall with a ruddy complexion, brown hair, grey eyes and had two tattoos, an anchor and sun and G.F. inside his lower left arm and a mermaid inside his lower right arm. This seems to suggest that he had been in the navy at some time.

George sailed to Australia on the 'Hercules II' arriving there in August 1832, where he became a servant to a James Thorn at Paramatta, Yass. He was granted a ticket of leave in 1840 for good conduct on condition that he remain in Yass, New South Wales. In 1846 he married a Catherine Tully in the Roman Catholic Church in Yass. Two years later he was granted a Conditional Pardon to take effect in all parts of the world except the United Kingdom, but if he should come to this country the pardon would be void. He died in Yass in 1850.

### Joan Hardinges

References: Old Bailey Sessions Papers 8 September 1831 - Guildhall Library  
Convict Transportation Regs. (4/4017 p.102),  
Ticket of Leave (40/2710), Pardon (701)  
Marriage and Death Certificates - Archives -  
Authority New South Wales.



## Bromley Hall

**Having read the good news that Bromley Hall is being restored, I thought the following notes I had made would be of interest:**

The former parish of Bromley St Leonard contained two manors. The Upper Manor grounds were in the vicinity of St Mary's Church, whilst those of the Lower Manor spread around the house known as Bromley Hall, standing on the east side of Brunswick Road (formerly Quag Lane), near what was formerly the library.

It has been established that Bromley Hall was constructed in the 1490s, with additional Tudor extensions, when it became a three storey Tudor lodging house. It underwent further extensive rebuilding in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the addition of a Regency staircase.

During the reign of Richard I the manor was held by Ralph Triket, the King's Chamberlain, and the story goes that Idonea Triket, the Lady Ida, held lands in Bromley by service of holding the king's napkin at the coronation.

In 1509 the house was occupied by John Blount, a notable figure in Henry VIII's court. His daughter Elizabeth Blount was the King's mistress, and they may even have met here on occasion.

Before the dissolution of the monasteries the Manor of Bromley Hall was in the possession of the Priory of Christchurch (Holy Trinity), Aldgate, but when the Priory was dissolved in 1531 the property passed into the hands of the Crown. There is a possibility that the original Manor House was demolished at this time, for all subsequent deeds refer to 'the site of the manor.'

About the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the manor was held by Ralph Sadler, but the property changed hands frequently, and another notable occupier was Sir William Cecil, who served in Henry VIII's household. On the death of Julius Morgan in 1557 the manor passed to his three year old son Henry, who held it for about thirty years. Henry Morgan however, was by 1587, a 'lunatic'. Some years later, in 1606, the property was purchased by Arthur Ingram for £900 and ten years later it passed to William Ferrers, who was buried in the parish church when he died in 1625. Ferrers probably rebuilt Bromley Hall as the Manor House shortly after acquiring the manor in 1616.

Henry Ferrers, a cousin of William's inherited the property and lived there until his death in 1663. The next purchaser was a well known gunpowder manufacturer, John Samyne, who evidently used the grounds of the Hall for factory premises, because a deed of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century refers to a great workhouse or storehouse for refining saltpetre for powder called the Peter House.

Calico printing was introduced into England in the year 1690, and soon afterwards a large manufactory was established at Bromley Hall. In 1799 the property was sold to Joseph Foster of Bromley, a calico printer, and the deed described the property as a capital mansion, with a great garden and orchard. References are also made to a Starch House and four acre Bleaching Ground, the Blue House and the Boiling House.

In 1823 Foster sold the property to Hugh McIntosh of Bloomsbury, and there is no evidence that calico printing continued in the area, although J Grant and Co, linen and cotton bleachers were operating close by at No. 4 Manor Terrace from 1842 to 1861, so it is likely the Grant's factory was previously Fosters. By 1883 the grounds of the Hall were occupied by a wharfinger, and by 1900 the site contained an oil company's works.

From 1894 to 1914 Bromley Hall was occupied by the Regions Beyond Missionary Union, whose headquarters were at Harley House in the Bow Road. The premises were used as a training centre for missionary nurses learning midwifery, and it still boasted a splendid garden in which open air bible talks were given and Mothers' tea parties were held. When the Missionary Union vacated the house in 1914, it was taken over by the Royal College of St Katharine, together with 228 Brunswick Road as an annexe and used as an Infant Welfare Centre. Ten years later the McIntosh Estate, which included Bromley Hall and a considerable area was offered for sale and the College Chapter purchased the two houses, eventually taking over 230 Brunswick Road as well. They also occupied No. 240 Brunswick Road, which had been known as the Manor House, although it had no title to this claim.

Bromley Hall and adjoining premises were damaged during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and 228, 230 and 240 Brunswick Road were subsequently demolished. In 1949 the Royal Foundation put Bromley Hall up for sale, together with the site of No. 240. In 1951 the London County Council put a preservation order on Bromley Hall, and the building is standing, used by a garage.

The house No. 240 Brunswick Road came to be known misleadingly as the Manor House. It stood between the library and Bromley Hall and was built around 1823. It was a Georgian house with a frontage of about eighty feet, containing with eight bedrooms, and was obviously built for someone of importance.

### Rosemary Taylor

## The Great Assembly Hall

### 31 Mile End Road. (Established by Frederick N Charrington in 1870)

I was born in Doveton Street Bethnal Green in June 1931. My earliest memories of the Hall were visiting my paternal grandfather, who lived and worked there. His rooms were at the top of the building. I was allowed to go into the clock room, to use a huge key to wind the said clock. On a Sunday we attended classes in the Children's hall. Very often a kind gentleman with silver hair would look in, he would give us a text to learn. From his pocket out would come a chocolate toffee if you knew the text, I learned my way around the Bible that way. One thing that has stuck in my mind ever since is - always leave room for Jesus. This gentleman must have been Frederick Charrington. (**Frederick Nicholas Charrington** - Born at Bow Road February 4<sup>th</sup> 1850, died 1936.)

As a young man son and heir to the Charrington Brewery he was entitled to a large sum of money, some one and a quarter million pounds. As a brewery director he had a salary of £1,000 a week.

The story many of you may know, on passing a public house "The Rising Sun" he saw a woman with her children clutching her skirts, begging her husband for money for food. The man's only reply was to knock her into the gutter. Going to help Frederick looked up and saw the name Charrington in huge letters.

Said he "Well, you have knocked your poor wife down, and with the same blow you have knocked me out of the liquor business".

This was the start of Frederick Charrington's work of caring for the poor.

My grandfather was Charles Henry Blowers: I always called him Blowski. Here I shall endeavour to highlight some of the work he did at the Hall. He prepared food for thousands of people, many homeless, poor or sick. Two pieces of bread and margarine, a slab of Kensington cake and a pint mug of cocoa. Christmas time he made many puddings, these were put in cloths and baked in a large copper boiler. During the World War two my mother made Christmas cakes. Local stallholders and shopkeepers donated food.

Harvest Festival was a sight to see. The Hall had beautiful carved woodwork in front of the organ. Blowski would build up long wooden forms into different heights, these he piled high with fruit and vegetables. All donated, the people were free to come and eat. It was optional whether they stayed for the service. Blowski lovingly polished all the wood.

As young man in his twenty's my father approached Mr Charrington for a loan of twenty pounds, to form a cricket team, this was quickly agreed. F. C. said on condition that regular weekly payments are made. On reaching the final payment my father was told by F. C. well done lad, you have proved yourself to me. The money was returned and given to club funds. The cricket team was given the name of Sphinx Assembly Sports. They often played at Victoria Park.

My parents were the only couple ever to be married at The Hall. Special licence was given. Boxing Day 1927. Snow lay on the ground so Mr Charrington had a red carpet laid out for mother to walk on. A sumptuous wedding breakfast including a large Norfolk turkey all provided by F. C. His wedding gift was a 12 cup and saucer tea service. This I still have. Mother attended the women's group. Many famous people came to speak. Mother and father met at The Hall, both had a love of music and sang there. My memories are always being happy at The Hall; the only disappointment was of not being

allowed to join the Boys Brigade. I seem to remember a well-equipped gym,

I am not sure how long my Grandfather worked and lived at The Hall. He was there during the Second World War: his accommodation was in F. C. old rooms.

In 1940 incendiary bombs landed on the roof. Blowski, my grandfather, managed to put them out, but alas in March 1941 the hall received a direct hit. Blowski managed to carry his elderly aunt down several flights of stairs to safety.

At ten years of age I can remember the utter devastation of seeing such a beautiful building reduced to rubble.



Names that I remember of people involved at the hall are: Mrs. Booth, Mrs Hampshire, Sister Hilda, Mr Sydney Goodger, Mr Wookey. **I would love to hear from anyone with memories of The Hall.**

Thank you for taking time to share my memories.

**Joan Philp nee Blowers.  
Cassandra, 3 Upper Hillcrest, Perranporth  
Cornwall TR6 0LA**

## Morpeth Street Central School

Roy Hibbard's WWII memories in the ELHS Newsletter sparked off memories for me. In particular the mention of Morpeth Street School. I would guess Roy and myself are the same age, and went to the school about the same time, since I remember the headmaster Mr Bloom, and his addressing the school when the Bethnal Green Tube station disaster occurred in 1943. He warned us against spreading rumours and exaggerating the casualties.

I went to Morpeth Street Central from 1941 to 1943, when I was between 11 and 13 years old. We lived in Brokesley Street, off Mile End Road and I used to catch the 106 bus along Grove Road, left along Roman Road, getting off at Bonner Street. Or sometimes I would walk. The 106 had outside stairs at the back, and we considered it fun and rather daring to negotiate the stairs while the bus was moving.

I thoroughly enjoyed those three years at Morpeth Street. After the various elementary schools I attended, Morpeth was the first school that made the lessons interesting, that demonstrated that school could indeed be enjoyable. This was due to a large extent to the headmaster, Mr Bloom. Looking back I realise how advanced he was in the matter of education. He treated us boys and girls decently and with respect, he genuinely strove to improve our manners and develop our interests. This was so different to the authoritarian attitude of the usual headmasters, who saw their job primarily as enforcing discipline. For instance, Mr Bloom let us attend hobby groups on Friday afternoons – I went to the stamp-collecting group. Another innovation was to allow some of us boys to learn cookery and housekeeping, much to the amusement of my parents I remember. And because of the Anglo-Jewish mix of us pupils, Mr Bloom's morning assembly avoided

religious doctrine, instead told us parables and he told us how to get along with our fellow beings, to be good citizens.

I can remember the mild mannered Mr Bloom getting angry on only one occasion, when a real problem boy was very abusive, and Mr Bloom's patience finally snapped and he thoroughly caned the boy in front of the whole school. I also remember Mr Bloom chiding me for pronouncing *nails* as 'nales', and for telling us Bethnal Green lads to refer to 'sweet' or 'pudding', not our 'afters'

I remember some of the teachers too. There was Mr Cope who taught both art and PE, and also played the hall piano and taught ballroom dancing (the girls liked this but we boys thought it a bit sissy and were a bit embarrassed about holding on to a girl!) He took a party of us on a YHA hike once, in deepest Kent. In the finer weather our PE sessions were held on the flat roof of the older part of the school. We had Miss Atterbury for English. The thing I can recall about Miss Attenborough was her unbounded faith that we could understand, and act Shakespeare. We even put on a public performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in the Bethnal Green Town Hall, and did 'As You Like It' in the open air in Meath Gardens. None of us boys knew what these plays were about, what was going on, we learnt our lines, and learnt when to come on and go off, and reducing Miss Atterbury to tears on one occasion.

The metalwork master, Mr Graseman, had a broad country accent; we would always titter when he pronounced *solder* as 'sodder'. He had a quaint habit of calling us 'brother' - Brother Young, Brother Read, etc. - it sounded as if we were monks in a monastery. And he taught us astronomy as well. I remember we made pieces of smoked glass and all trooped out into the playground to watch a solar eclipse.

The enterprising Mr Graseman organised us into creating a vegetable allotment opposite the school. He managed to acquire enough

spades and forks and rakes and we cleared a bombsite of the rubble, dug over what I suppose were the original house gardens, and we planted potatoes. Its surprising what can be achieved by enough school-boys and sufficient tools, bit like building the pyramids or the canals. This was our contribution to the 'Dig for Victory' campaign and was highly productive. But even in those days our allotment suffered from vandalism.

There were school dinners of course. We went across to Bonner Street School for these. One day after dinner the air raid sirens sounded just as were leaving Bonner Street and the guns started up, my mates and I raced into one of those brick street shelters, followed by a distraught mother who feared for her boy somewhere out in the streets. We went out to search for him, brave maybe foolhardy, and I don't think we found the lad. We used to have a strenuous session on the swings in Meath Gardens before going back to Morpeth Street, goodness only how our digestions coped with that immediately after the stodge of school dinners!

Looking back, I owe a lot to Morpeth Street Central School. We learnt French, I could just about cope with the written work, but my speaking was appalling. Even so, those basic lessons many years ago were a grounding for my holiday French to this day. I am still interested in astronomy, and I still collect stamps. And I learnt to swim when we went to York Hall baths. But a particular happening at Morpeth Street actually dictated the course of my future life. One term a strange subject turned up on the timetable: machine drawing. None of us boys knew what that was. It was in fact technical drawing – draughtsmanship, preparing engineering drawings with a drawing board, tee square and drawing instruments. I took to that straight away, I was hooked, I wanted to be a draughtsman! I cannot remember the teacher's name now, but I do remember how icy cold the classroom was that winter. It was in the larger building and had just an open coke fire in the corner, no

central heating. I remember telling the teacher how my fingers were too cold to hold the pencil to achieve neat lettering. That machine drawing experience led to me going on to Hackney Technical Institute, and to a lifetime in building services design.

Does anybody else have memories of Morpeth Street School about this time? I wonder what became of my friends Norman Holmes, and Dennis Levrington, Ronnie Read, Johnnie Morgan? And what about Barbara Sleaf who played Titania in the school play? Would she remember that incident on stage, it was a hot afternoon and I was wearing a paper maché asses head, and I never had any lines to say in that scene, and I dozed off with my head in her lap! Luckily it was only a rehearsal in the school hall.

Allan Young

## School Times in the 1920s

School times these days are so different from those of eighty or so years ago, that I thought it would be an idea to record a few from memory of the 1920s.

I was first taken to school by my mother in 1921. The school, near my home, a large brick building, was the New City Road School, Plaistow, London E13. I was placed in an infants class, and given the register No. of 4068. In the hall of the Infants section was a large rocking horse, much used by all the children, as it 'eased' them into school. A year or so later, I was transferred to the Boys classes on the top floor. How life changed! Eight classes, with a master in charge of each, and a 'headmaster' by the name of Mr Hildred. He was not 'backward' with his cane, and one soon learned right from wrong! The school gates in the morning were closed at 9 am, and if late you had to form a line, known as the 'late line', a teacher would then re-open the gates, and all would be marched up, and into the front of the headmaster. Here you would then get a 'whack' from his cane, across the palm of your hand. Pupils soon learned to be punctual!

All the teachers, I recall, were very fair, and respected, and were excellent at teaching. The classes were large, sometimes two, in a large room. There were of course, no school dinners, etc., in those days, and the pupils went home to lunch. The teachers 'ate in' at the school and had a room above the headmaster's, in the hall. This room incidentally, was used by the travelling school nurse at the time, for examination of the children's hair for lice, and other hair complaints. She was known, off the record, as 'The Nit Nurse'.

Fridays every week, the teachers had Fish and Chips, that is, the male teachers only. At 11.30 am I was detailed to go around the classrooms

and get the teachers' orders. I would then go off to the local shop, and back at 12 noon with the orders for their lunches. I don't ever remember being rewarded for these errands!

Opposite the school playground for boys were two shops, one was a sweet shop and the other a bakers, by the name of Dillaways. At break times in the mornings, a baker's assistant would bring over on a tray, all the bread and 'stale cakes' and sell them through the iron railings. She sold them all in no time, the children were all hungry. Those times for us then, in the 1920s were 'hard', mass unemployment, and we made full use of the relief Offices, for food. I can recall three boys in my class at the time, coming to school barefooted, as their parents could not afford footwear. This led to collections in aid of the needy – The Mayor's Boot Fund.

The sweet shop mentioned before, apart from sweets, gobstoppers and chocolate, plus 'Black man's coconut', which was the dried copra of the coconut, and very hard. A small piece of this would last one all day, being sucked almost continuously. For swimming lessons weekly, we went to the baths in Balaam Street, Abbey Arms. This was a two-mile walk, return, from the school. Even this did pay off, and nearly all collected certificates. To the best of my knowledge, we only had one outing by coach, all the time I was at the school. This was to see tea being packed at a factory at Greenford in Middlesex. Even so, not very educational!

Truancy was never heard of, as it is today. If a child was absent from school more than two days, the parents would get a visit from a person known as the School Board Man. In our case he was an old soldier from the Great War, and nicknamed 'Uno' as he had lost one arm in France during hostilities. He would enquire the reason why, and if genuine, would ask to see any doctor's certificate. Satisfied, he would report back to the headmaster.

Once a week we went to another school near by for woodwork tuition. This was at Creedon Road school. Benches and sets of carpenters' tools were supplied, and at a later date, a written and practical exam took place. For the practical test one had to make a round ruler, 12 inches long, perfect in diameter, from a piece of hard wood, using only plane, chisel and sandpaper, Not so easy! In those times, the round rulers were used in the offices and banks to rule the ledgers.

From time to time, we would see small groups of Lascar seamen, from the ships in the docks nearby, walking to the second hand markets at Aldgate. Here they would buy old used sewing machines, and the like. Back in their own countries, these old second hand Singer machines were 'gold dust' to them.

Such then was school life for me, eighty or more years ago. The school was opened in 1897, and celebrated its centenary as a mixed class school in 1997. During my times, we never had the used of calculators, computers and the like. Mental arithmetic was a daily lesson, which paid off in later years. Whilst the schooling was very elementary, scholars in later life did well at various trades and professions.

We left school at fourteen years of age, and out into the wide-wide-world we went! One of my school friends became a legal adviser at the Old Bailey and the Law Courts in London. Another became a Master Printer, yet another became a Fire Officer with the London Fire Brigade. For myself, I joined a City of London Photographic Firm near the Bank of England, learned photography, and was with them for fifty-six years, except for the years in the army during World War II. I started as a messenger boy, and retired as a working director, with the same Company. Time has marched on, as the old saying goes.

Thinking back now to those school times, the cane from time to time did us no harm, but made you stop and think about what you had

done wrong! The mental arithmetic sessions daily paid off in later years, likewise the calling out together of the arithmetic tables. Praise then to the teachers of those days, who taught us to read and write, and much more. Happy days, now just a memory.

**H W Andrews**

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## **STREET BARREL PIANOS**

Over the years I have collected and restored many mechanical musical instruments, my favourite being the Street Barrel Piano, of which I owned two for a good number of years, both now residing in Museums. Recently I acquired another, which I am in the process of restoring.

As you may not be aware, the majority of Street Barrel Pianos were manufactured in the East End of London, mainly in the vicinity of the Clerkenwell Road area. I have done a lot of research into the subject of the manufacturers, the hirers and the area covered with a view to writing a book, as to date no such work has been published solely on street pianos.

I would therefore ask the members of the ELHS if anyone has either photos or their own personal memories of the factories, builders, hirers or just recollections of any of the above. Any photos would be copied and returned, in fact any out of pocket expenses would be readily paid.

Please write to:

**David Gavioli-Dakin**, 'The Cheesewell',  
125 Rendell Street, Loughborough, Leics,  
LE11 1LN

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### **Derek Morris Lecture**

Derek is giving a lecture at the Museum in Docklands, "Spices to Stepney, a Fortune from the Sea" - Thursday May 20 at 1.15 pm

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## SPRING COACH TRIP

SATURDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2004

### CHARLESTON, ALFRISTON & BERWICK CHURCH

**C**harleston was the Sussex home of Virginia Woolf's sister, Vanessa Bell, and Duncan Grant. Many other members of the Group visited them. They were artists, and decorated almost everything in the house. They even painted the sides of the bathtubs! It is a showcase of their art and design. The garden too was redesigned in Mediterranean style.

We shall be going to Charleston first, where we shall have a conducted tour. Coffee and biscuits will be provided. Afterwards we go to Alfriston for lunch and a look round.

Alfriston is an attractive village with plenty of pubs and cafes. It has a fine church and nearby there is the mediaeval Clergy House. This is a National Trust property, which illustrates 14<sup>th</sup> century building methods. A visit here is optional, only 40p is saved by booking a party, and some people may prefer to look round elsewhere. Entrance is £2.80, NT members free.

Afterwards we should be visiting Berwick Church (this has not been finalised). Here, the Bells and Duncan Grant got a commission to redecorate it, and covered the walls with paintings. The Nativity scene is set in a Sussex barn, with the Downs beyond, and shepherds with local crooks. Finally, we return to Alfriston for tea (own arrangements).

The coach fare is £8.25. Please send this to me with the booking slip below. Entrance to Charleston is £5.50. Coffee and biscuits are £1.50. I will collect this on the coach. Please make cheques out to the East London History Society.

The pick-up will be at the bus pull-in in Grove Road, round the corner from Mile End Station, at 9.00 am. Please note the earlier time.

**Please fill in the booking slip below and send to me, Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PE. Tel. 020 8524 4506. (Photocopy it if you don't wish to spoil your newsletter.)**



**SPRING COACH TRIP**  
**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004**

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.)