

**EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY  
PROGRAMME 1990 - 1991**

**1990**

Thurs 27 Sept	George Godwin, visitor to the London Slums (Illustrated)- Ruth Richardson	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Thurs 25 Oct	Annual General Meeting followed by Members' Evening	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Thurs 29 Nov	The Political and Communal Careers of M.H. Davis - Prof. Geoffrey Alderman	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Thurs 6 Dec	History of Indians in East London - Rozina Visram	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm

**1991**

Thurs 24 Jan	Yarrows (Illustrated) - Sarah Palmer	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Thurs 14 Feb	Dean Colet (Illustrated) - Prof. J.B. Trapp	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Thurs 7 March	School & Sport in Mile End in the 1930s. - Stan Shipley	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Thurs 9 May	St Matthias Church - Robert Baldwin	Queen Mary and Westfield College	7.30pm
Sat 18 May	Up and Down the Bow Road - walk led by Rosemary Taylor	Mile End Station	2.00pm

The talks are held at Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End, E1 (Close to Stepney Green and Mile End Stations).

The East London History Society (founded 1952) exists to further interest in the history of East London, namely the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham. We also publish two newsletters a year, and a programme of lectures and talks. Special East End Walks are arranged and two coach outings a year are organised.

All information regarding membership to: John Harris (Membership Secretary)  
15 Three Crowns Road, Colchester Essex CO4 5AD.

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**EAST LONDON  
RECORD**

No. 13

1990

## EAST LONDON RECORD

Editor: Colm Kerrigan

The East London History society publishes the London Record **once** a year. We welcome articles on any aspect of the history of the area that forms the London boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, and Newham.

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These and further copies of the present issue (£1.90 plus 30p post and packing) are available from the circulation manager, Mrs D. Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, London E2 ORF. Cheques should be made payable to the East London History society.

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Cover illustrations: A jeweller's shop in Salmon Lane, Limehouse, the windows of which were smashed during the anti-German riots of the First World War. In an attempt at averting further damage the Russian owner, Abraham Elias-how, chalked 'We are Russians' on his shutters and flew the Union Jack and French Tricolour above. See the first article in this issue for the story of the rise and decline of East London's German community.

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c East London History Society and contributors

## THE GERMAN COMMUNITY IN 19th CENTURY EAST LONDON

Jerome Farrell

Emigration from the German-speaking parts of Europe led to the establishment in London, during the 17th and 18th centuries, of a substantial German community several thousand strong. It was the second half of the 19th century, however, that saw this community grow most dramatically. Census data show that in 1851 some 9,566 London residents had been born in Germany; by 1891 this figure had jumped to 26,920, with the 1860s as the decade of fastest increase (1). Whitechapel, St. George-in-the-East and the western part of Mile End Old Town were the main districts of settlement, so much so that a part of this area - roughly rectangular in shape and bounded approximately by Whitechapel Road, Leman Street, The Highway (formerly St. George Street) and New Road/Cannon Street Road - was sometimes known as 'Little Germany'(2).

Many reasons have been put forward for the emigration of Germans from their homeland. A quest for greater political and religious freedom led some to emigrate, particularly in the earlier period and after the abortive revolution (3). The political bond between Britain and Hanover which existed under the Hanoverian Kings from 1714 to 1837 may also account for the arrival of some Germans in this country. It is likely that economic factors, however, were the main cause of large-scale emigration. Industrialisation took place later (causing sub-division of smallholdings to the point where they could no longer support those who depended upon them) and the frequent agricultural depressions of the 19th century no doubt encouraged many to seek employment overseas. America was by far the most popular destination - between 1855 and 1890 over three million Germans emigrated to the United States, the largest single national group to enter the country in that period. By 1860, New York had over 100,000 German-born inhabitants, and so many Germans settled in the Mid-Western states that cities such as Cincinnati, St. Louis and Milwaukee became noted centres of German-American culture. Many of those who left Germany for America passed through London en route, and doubtless some decided to stay - influenced perhaps by job opportunities, the existence of an established German colony in London, or simply by lack of funds to continue the journey across the Atlantic (4).

The concentration of Germans in East London led to the opening of several German churches in the area - Lutheran, Reformed (Calvinist), Roman Catholic and Wesleyan (Methodist). The first was St. George's German Lutheran Church which opened in Little Alie Street in 1763, providing a local alternative to the

Lutheran churches already existing in central London (5). In 1818 the German Protestant (or Evangelical) Reformed Church moved eastwards to Hooper Square (a Congregation had existed in the City since 1697, after fleeing from religious persecution in the Palatinate), moving again later in the century a few streets further north to Goulston Street, where it was known as St. Paul's German Reformed Church. St Boniface's German Catholic Church was established on a site in what is now Adler Street in 1862, having similarly moved out from the City (where a German Catholic chapel had been founded in 1809). All of these sites are in Whitechapel and within a few hundred yards of each other, near where Aldgate East station now stands. Slightly further east a small German Wesleyan congregation was founded in 1864, meeting in Grosvenor Street (later Mountmorres Street) and Commercial Road and Devonshire (later Winterton) Street, near the present site of Watney Market; worship continued here until the First World War, at the end of which the building was sold and became a synagogue, the German Wesleyan community meeting thereafter in west and north London (6).

The registers of two of these German churches - St. George's and St. Paul's - were recently deposited at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives in Bancroft Road (7). Similar in format to English parish registers, the later baptismal and marriage registers are remarkable in providing, as additional information, the birthplaces of those married and of the parents of those baptised. In most cases specific villages or towns in Germany are named, so the records are important not only for family historians but also for anyone interested in the pattern of German-English migration, especially since the other major source of information concerning place of birth - census returns - do not usually record places abroad with exactitude, the enumerator preferring general terms such as 'Germany' or occasionally 'Hanover' or 'Prussia'.

The majority of Germans were Lutherans, nominally at least, but a considerable minority belonged to the Reformed Church; an analysis of the birthplaces and occupations mentioned in the marriage registers of these two churches, therefore, can provide an approximate indication of the origins and types of employment of East London's German community, although it must be borne in mind that this does not take into account the other sizeable minorities of Catholics (mostly from Bavaria and the Rhineland), Jews, and those Protestants who belonged to smaller denominations or who chose to marry outside their own community.

The first decade for which the marriage registers of both churches consistently record places of birth is 1860-1869, when 605 marriages took place at St. Georges's and 92 at the Protestant Reformed Church (not at that stage known

as St. Paul's), giving a total of 1402 birth places (8). The complex political situation of early and mid-19th century Germany is reflected in the registers, which refer to the many separate independent states which it comprised before political unification of the country was brought about through Bismarck's efforts. Although most parts of Germany are represented in this sample, however, it is notable that over half of the marriage partners came from two states, 305 from Hanover in north-western Germany, and 415 from the comparatively small Hesse, to the north of Frankfurt (sub-divided into the then separate states of Electoral Hesse and the Grand-Duchy of Hesse). Significantly fewer - 221 - came from the much larger and predominantly Protestant Kingdom of Prussia further east. Figures for the other states are: Wurttemberg 86, Nassau 55, Bavaria 44, Mecklenburg 33, Oldenburg 31, Holstein 27, Brunswick 25, Baden 16, Hamburg 15, Bremen 13, the Thuringian states 12, Schleswig 11, Saxony, Waldeck and Lippe-Detmold 10 each, Schaumburg 3 and Anhalt 1. The other 59 were born outside Germany, 27 in England and the remainder in a variety of countries, mostly in northern Europe.

Germans constituted a substantial proportion of the labour involved in the sugar refining industry based in East London in the 18th and 19th century, processing the raw sugar cane imported from the West Indies. One reason suggested for this is the ownership of a number of the refineries by Germans, who may have preferred to employ their fellow countrymen; another is the system of employing workmen under a skilled foreman in sugar refineries (rather than those who had served an apprenticeship, as in many other trades), making the industry more open to foreign labourers. Undoubtedly the work of a sugar-baker was unpleasant, physically arduous and often injurious to health, involving prolonged periods in extremely hot, confined and dangerous conditions which led many to develop lung diseases, and it has also been suggested that German immigrants were simply more prepared to do such work, and accept lower rates of pay, than the local labour force (9).

Of the 697 men married at the two German churches in the 1860's, no less than 197, or between a quarter and a third, described themselves as sugarbakers, thus forming by far the largest single occupational group (women's occupations are not stated in the registers), and confirming the pre-eminence of sugarbaking among the trades followed by East London's German community. Next in numerical importance are tailors, bakers, and shoemakers, numbering a further 194 between them. Together with sugarbaking, these three trades employed just over half of those included in this sample group. A further 30 of the men were employed as seamen, 24 as carpenters, 22 as butchers, 22 as labourers, 22 as skin dressers or dyers, 21 as merchants, 13 as coopers and 10 as cigar makers. The

remainder represent a wide range of trades and include a furrier, picture-frame maker, coffee roaster, cochineal dresser and wax-fruit maker.

The typical German living in mid-Victorian East London is often portrayed as a sugarbaker from Hanover (10), and these figures suggest that whilst a considerable number of immigrants fell into this category, an equally valid image might be that of a baker, tailor or shoemaker from regions further south or east, such as Hesse, Prussia, Wurttemberg or Nassau. The marriage registers provide some further clues regarding the origins of London's German population, since they also give the names and occupations of the fathers of the bride and groom. These were nearly always people who had remained in Germany; the occupation most frequently stated is 'farmer' confirming that a large proportion of London's German immigrants had come from an agricultural background.

Towards the end of the 19th century the German community became more dispersed throughout the East London area. The sugar refining industry suffered a rapid decline due to foreign competition, causing some to move further out to the two remaining East London refineries at Silvertown (11); others diversified into different types of employment such as bread-baking, a trade which was claimed to have become virtually monopolised by Germans in the East End by 1896 (12). Certainly the lists of bakers with East London postal districts in trade directories of the Edwardian period show a preponderance of German names. No doubt many of these were London-born and assimilated into the local community, with only a Teutonic surname to distinguish their family's origin. Such names were a liability during the First World War, however, particularly in May 1915 when widespread anti-German riots broke out in London following public outrage at the sinking of the 'Lusitania'. Contemporary newspaper accounts tell of numerous attacks on shops and businesses with German (or at least foreign-sounding) names, particularly bakers' and butchers' shops, with subsequent destruction or looting of the contents. As is well known, a number of families of German extraction anglicised or changed their names at this period in an attempt to prove their British patriotism, including the Royal Family, who dropped Saxe-Coburg-Gotha for Windsor.

East London's German population dwindled further in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, with slum clearance and large-scale migration to the outer suburbs, accelerated by the bombs of World War 11. Both St. Paul's Reformed Church and St. Boniface's Catholic Church were destroyed by bombing; the former was never rebuilt, most of the remaining congregation amalgamating with St. George's. A new St. Boniface's Church was eventually constructed on the same site, opening in 1960, and still caters to London's German-speaking Catholics.



*A scene during the anti-German riots of May 1915, showing the beginning of an attack on Adolf Schoenfeld's tobacconist's shop in Crisp Street, Poplar. Minutes after this picture was taken the shop was looted and wrecked, furniture including a harmonium being passed down to the crowded street from the upstairs window.*

*The East End News report of 14 May 1915 describes the pattern of such attacks: 'In most cases a crowd assembled round the shop and a small boy was induced to throw a stone through the window. Then came the smashing of glass, and everybody shouting with excitement. Then doors were torn from their hinges, men, boys, women and children rushed into the place sweeping all before them and doing every possible damage; the few police there were about in the first instance being powerless ... Five minutes or so mostly sufficed for one shop to be broken into, and then the crowds made off to destroy another. There is no doubt that some of the ravages committed were organised by a number of young men who, as soon as the police arrived, made off to their next 'call'. Scores of places have been devastated and ruined, and the damage must run into many thousands of pounds'.*

The steady decline in a distinctive German community in East London during the 20th century has also been reflected in the history of other institutions founded by that community. In the inter-war period the proportion of German inmates at the German Hospital in Dalston, founded in 1845, dropped sharply; by the end of the Second World War this was German in name only, and closed as a Voluntary Hospital in 1948. The German Sailors' Home survived until more recently; founded in East India Dock Road in 1889, it subsequently moved to West India Dock Road and then Church Row, Limehouse, where it was bombed in 1940. From 1953 to 1965 it occupied rented premises next to the German Lutheran church in Aliè Street, moving then to a building in Jeremiah Street where it finally closed in 1980, the building being sold in 1983.

Today the most visible links with the former local German community are the two remaining German churches - the modern St. Boniface's Catholic Church, whose tall bell tower can clearly be seen from Whitechapel Road, and the original 18th century building of St. George's Lutheran Church in Aliè Street. The latter is the most evocative of the past, still looking much as it did when it opened in 1763, though the days when it was the centre of a thriving local German-speaking community and some 200 baptisms and 60 weddings a year took place there, as they did in the 1860's, have gone. Nevertheless a small congregation, drawn mostly from distant parts of London, continues to gather there for regular services in German. In this way a tradition of German Lutheran worship in the same building is maintained more than two and a quarter centuries after it began, and long after the Little Germany of the surrounding streets has vanished.

## NOTES

(1) Arthur Shadwell's article 'The German Colony in London' in the *National Review*, 26 Feb. 1896, gives (p.805) the following figures for German-born London residents: 9,556 (1851), 12,448 (1861), 19,773 (1871), 21,966 (1881) and 26,920 (1891). He points out, however, that these are only an approximate indication of the size of the community since they exclude foreigners who had become naturalized British subjects, and children born in the U.K. of foreign parents.

(2) See Charles McNaught's article in the *East London Observer*, of 30 Mar. 1912, p 7.

(3) Maldwyn A. Jones in *Destination America* (New York, 1976), chapter 6, discusses this and the other reasons behind German emigration, and gives a full account of German settlement in the United States.

(4) Maureen Specht's *The German Hospital In London and the Community it served, 1845-1948* (published in 1989 by the Anglo-German Family History Society) includes an anecdote about the author's German grandfather and a friend tossing a coin to decide whether to go to England or

America. For numbers of immigrants entering the United States from various countries, see Ann Novotny's *Strangers at the Door* (New York, 1971), p.96.

(5) One of the Lutheran churches in the City, the Hamburg Lutheran Church, founded in 1669, moved out to a site near the German Hospital in Dalston in 1873; the last German service was held there in 1989, the congregation now meeting in Essex.

(6) See extracts from *Die Deutsche Kolonie in England*, pamphlet LP 5339 in Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, for a more detailed account (written in German in 1913) of the history of these churches; see also the *East London Observer* of 8 Jan. 1870, p.3 for an article 'A Night among the Germans' describing the German Methodist community in London in its infancy, and 'The German Wesleys of Canning Town' in the *West Ham Guardian* of 19 Aug. 1893, describing the church established there as a result of German sugarbakers moving to that area.

(7) Ref. TH/8371; see the archive list available there for more details of the records deposited. The St. George's registers cover baptisms 1763-1897, marriages 1825-1896 and burials 1799-1853; other registers for St George's are held at the Public Record Office. The St. Paul's registers cover baptisms 1824-1940, marriages 1858-1938 and burials 1925-1940. Some of the registers are written in German, others in English.

(8) The data concerning birthplaces and occupations was analysed separately for the two churches, but no significant differences were detected. Some indication of the comparative size of their congregations is given by the ecclesiastical census of 1851, which states that on Sunday 30th March 1851 some 630 people attended services at St. George's and 180 at the German Protestant Reformed Church.

9) Maureen Specht (op. cit., p.11) notes that lung disease was the major cause of death at the German Hospital in Dalston, where sugarbakers formed a large proportion of those admitted. George Dodd in *Days at the Factories* (London, 1843), describing a visit to a sugar refinery (Fairrie & Co.) behind Whitechapel Church, states that the laborious work at the refinery was 'generally undertaken by stout, hardy sons of the "Emerald Isle"', suggesting that by no means all East London sugarbakers were of German origin.

10) Andrew Davies in *The East End Nobody Knows* (London, 1990), p.46., however, says 'another foreign community based in the East End were the Germans, most of whom originated from Hamburg and worked in the district's sugar-refineries'. As we have seen, only 15 of the marriage samples of 1402 people in fact gave Hamburg as their place of origin. Davies' book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

11) Tate & Sons and Lyle & Sons. See Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People In London* (London, 1896) vol VII, pp. 98-101, for an account of the sugar refinery's decline.

12) See Arthur Shadwell, op. cit., p. 808. Post Office Directories for 1894 and 1902 list a German Bakers' Club at 78, Christian Street, off Commercial Road.

## MAINLY THE HIGH-BOB

### C. Chisnall

A few years before the outbreak of World War Two High Street Poplar was officially renamed Poplar High Street. Not, one might think at first glance, a decision that may merit objection, yet there were feelings of annoyance among some residents. Poplar as a whole was already a deprived area and the further demeaning of what once must have been its principal street seemed bureaucratic interference at its maddest.

I attended Woolmore Street school, and though teachers were, at the time, rather forbidding characters, I found it easy to approach Mr Williams, the Sports Master. He explained that the growing Poplar then held its High Street as the most important thoroughfare as was the case in most towns and villages in the land. East India Dock Road grew in importance and relegated the High Street into a lesser importance. Although I admired Mr Williams as a man and teacher I could not completely accept his theory because, even though his words rang true, they did not give support to my belief that the old name should have been retained. If objections to the change were muted it might well have been because the street was familiarly known as the High-Bob. Let them call it what they will, but to us it is still the High-Bob.

There was a certain pride among the residents of the little High-Bob. Quite short in length - stretching from Cotton street to Blackwall Cross, or the end of Robin Hood Lane. But what a cosmopolitan place to live! Londoners, Irish, Welsh, Jews, Italians, and a rare sight in those days, a West Indian.

A few years ago my sister came back on holiday from Canada. I took her back to our childhood haunts and she marvelled at how much had been squeezed into the small area. Even more remarkable was the fact that the Queens' Theatre and the electric sub station took sizeable parts of the whole. The High-Bob had four pubs (if one included the Queens' own pub). There were three barbers, three greengrocers, three grocers, a bakers shop (where my father worked sixteen hours a day) and a fried fish shop. There was also a wet fish shop, and so many more that it makes my memory cry out for mercy.

We of the High-Bob thought our little street was the centre of the universe. Not that we did not recognise that there were other places in Poplar that deserved our respect. Poplar Hospital, where due to my being accident-prone, I almost qualified for squatter's rights, what with broken nose (twice), bumps, cuts, bruises and general minor accidents, together with two serious injuries,

both of which could have ended my life at an early age. I thought at the time, and this belief still persists, that Poplar Hospital was among the best in the world. It was there, as a fifteen-year old, that I believe I died for a few moments. I met Jesus who gave me the will to recover by telling me that my time had not come.

The seeds of my faith had been sown many years before at the Cotton Street Baptist Church. Later (I know not why) with others I was transferred to All Saints. I have spoken to Baptist ministers who cannot enlighten me as to why they voluntarily gave away their young. In fact they seem to doubt that this could have happened and my memory is at fault. I am sure this is not the case.

We used the upper floor of the Sunday School, the children only going into the church below on special occasions. Harvest Festival was lovely with all the produce arranged in front, with my dad's special loaf as the centre-piece. Sometimes it looked like a wheatsheaf or a complex plaited design, and knowing that this and everything else would go to Poplar Hospital after the service filled me with joy.

Two or three times a year a battered old Lusty Lloyd Loom motor would draw up outside the church. Forms would be placed inside, excited kids helped aboard, bound for our 'outing' to such far-flung places as Theydon Bois. It is impossible to exaggerate the fun we had. There were parties for we children with cakes, jelly and lemonade. Then, after my first serious accident, the offer from Mr Budd, the Minister, to give me (before the days of blood banks) a person to person transfusion. I have memories of great love for Poplar Baptist Church.

My first attendance at All Saints did nothing for me. I found the imposing priest in his robes a rather distant figure after the happy Sunday School atmosphere at the Baptist Church. But fate had taken me to All Saints and I soon learned to love and I am happy to say, I still regularly attend. All Saints remains an imposing landmark on the face of Poplar. The Baptist Church, sadly destroyed in the early days of the Blitz, was situated on the corner of Woolmore Street and Cotton Street.

I always had great respect for religious buildings. The synagogue was in Bow Lane (now Bazely Street). As a guest I attended my first Jewish wedding there. Sadly that also is gone forever. Weddings at All Saints were sometimes posh affairs. The bride and groom would arrive in horse-drawn carriages. There was something special about horses with plumes, bedecked in finery, the clip-clop of hooves on the cobbled roads ending in the muffled sound as they arrived at the church and entered the gravelled driveway.



*Preparations for the annual Catholic procession around Poplar in the 'twenties.*

I remember with great affection the annual procession in June from St Mary's and St Joseph's RC church (destroyed by a land mine on the 8th of December 1941. Ironically this date is the feast day of the parish). The church stood in Canton Street, and all that remains of the original is the mould where the High altar used to be. This is preserved for it is said that here a priest was buried. Many Catholics lived locally and the procession usually followed the route from the church, through Rook Street, Wade Street, to make its way in beautiful order through the High-Bob and beyond. One could not fail to be deeply moved by the efforts that had been put into the whole venture. Of course, in those days, money was very scarce, but the cost of the white dresses worn by the little girls was eased by the fact that many had been handed down from older sisters. In cases where there was simply no money the church had a small wardrobe of garments for the children of poorer families. These would be loaned for the occasion, then returned to be put in store for the next year.

The processions were grand affairs with several bands. Nuns would make wreaths of flowers for the girls' hair. Little boys would seem positively angelic for the occasion. I think I am right in saying that the Cleaning Department of the Borough swept the roads clear of horse dung and general dirt, and on the morning of the event, housewives, Catholics and non-Catholics, would give the streets a final sweep. Christian unity flourished as the garlands that were strung across the streets were prepared and hung from upstairs windows. The pavements would be lined with spectators. First we would hear the music. Then the procession, in honour of Our Lady, would appear. I cannot overstate the sheer beauty of it. Children carried posies celebrating their first communion. There would be nuns, ladies, men, but all eyes would be on the children. Every Catholic house had its own altar, either in the windows or in the gardens. Finally, at the back would follow a canopy held by four men, under which was the Blessed Sacrament secure in its monstrance. The parish priest brought up the rear.

Later in the evening the priest would retrace his steps and come back to bless every altar. Here he faced a dilemma. People would say "Thank you father, have a little drink with us". If the priest refused he might get a reputation of being unsociable. If he accepted, then he would be obliged to accept at every house. It is our loss that this celebration is no longer held. Perhaps one day some RC Bishop might try to revive what many of us believe was the most lovely religious event of the year.

There is a delightful little story that I think is worth the telling. A Poplar Catholic moved to Canning Town. Later in his life he became ill and asked for a priest. Dutifully the priest set out even though it was a foul night and the bottom of Canning Town bridge was notorious for its ankle-deep mud. The priest preformed his task, struggled back wet and tired, once more through the quagmire that seemed deeper and heavier than ever. At last arriving home he tried to use the mud-scraper by his doorstep. Only then did he realise that he had left one shoe somewhere lost in the mud.

Poplar has had a goodly share of special people. Some years ago I read a book entitled *Lax His Book. The Autobiography of Lax of Poplar*. I can recommend it as a good book on old Poplar. Lax's Methodist church was situated close to Poplar Baths in East India Dock Road. The book tells the story of a remarkable man, the Rev Lax, who came to Poplar from the north, full of Christian drive, and built something wonderful, not only in the religious meaning of the word, but in the basics of humanity. He lived to see the fulfillment of his dream. But then the whole venture went into a decline, which to me highpoints the truth that the love of God is an ongoing, never ending process that needs nurturing lest all the striving should fall into nothing for want of caring.

Neither let it be imagined that religion is the main topic of my thoughts. As a child I was a little sod. My mother, God bless her, must have suffered agonies as her naughty and adventurous son got in one scrape after another. Football was my consuming passion and boots would have to be replaced every couple of weeks. 'Son', she would sigh, 'Here's five shillings and a penny three farthings. Take the tram from Blackwall Tunnel to the Abbey Arms. The fare is a penny. Go to Staddons and buy a pair of strong boots. They cost four and eleven three. That leaves a penny for the fare home'. Dear mum and dad! How they managed to bring up a houseful of kids, run the bakery and shop, check out the roundsmen, make up the ledger and face the responsibilities of running someone else's business on the pittance of their combined wages, is beyond my understanding. No, it was not only in the docks and sweatshops where the poor were oppressed.

I can claim without reservation that though Poplar kids of my young days were as naughty as our younger generation there was not the viciousness that plagues our lives today. One could confidently leave one's door open to pop out for a few minutes. One could safely walk the streets at any hour. We respected our elders. We respected the clergy, the police, the National Anthem, Remembrance Day. Indeed respect showed itself in all ways. Kids fought more that they do now. But if a boy stopped fighting, was knocked down and did not get up, or if he cried, then that was the end of the contest. We always went to the quiet of Bedford Street for our fights. It was always 'See yer round Beddo'.

We amused ourselves with home-made things. A scooter from two boards, two ball bearings with screw eyes and a bolt running through for a rough steering mechanism. I'm sure we got more fun out of our ingenuity than from the factory-made affairs of today. A football was no more that a tightly-rolled bundle of old newspapers tied together with string. If someone had a ball, then endless fun could be had by marking out a square on the pavement against the wall, placing in a few pebbles - the aim being to knock out the stones without losing the bounce of the ball against the wall. So many ways and means. If there was no ball then not to despair. 'Release' was a game that must have driven the tenants of Manisty Street Buildings crazy. Up and down the stairs, along the landings, kids chasing one another as the two sides tried to capture 'the enemy'. Kids would run themselves to a standstill and stagger home exhausted, pleading with their mums that they were too tired to wash before bed.

At Woolmore Street during my time we had a good football team. Mr Williams was quite lucky here because he had a team with a nucleus of naturals. Looking back I realise that he gave us no real coaching. More than once he told us that his love was rugby and as a Welshman he thought that was the better game. He kicked a ball as if he hated it and was trying to kill it stone dead. We had as winger with a Stanley Mathews' touch, and a centre forward who was skill



personified. I really believe that a few of those lads could have done well in the professional game, but sadly we were all of prime military age come the outbreak of war. Perhaps some of Woolmore Street's old team did not see the end of hostilities.

Mr Wensel was the Headmaster at the time I was there. He was mild-mannered, but when a miscreant was sent to him for punishment he honoured his responsibility and administered the six-handers without pity. I remember one lad who had been given the dreaded slip of paper and condemned to the Head's office. He held out his hand for the cane, but with precise timing withdrew it. The Head's vigour was his undoing and the swish of the cane through the air was halted only when it hit the master's leg. He limped for a few days after that. My friendly feelings towards Mr Williams is in no way diminished by the fact that he was once spiteful to me. I had thumped a kid in class and was caught in the act. Mr Williams was in no mood to hear how much I had been provoked, and had to administer the cane himself because Mr Wensel was away at the time. I was struck so hard that my whole hand blew up like a balloon. I could not hold a pen and Mr Williams would pass from time to time between the desks. I knew he was concerned for what he had done, and he may have feared the wrath of my dad. But I somehow kept my hand hidden from my parents until the swelling went down.

Like the other kids at Woolmore I had to sit the dreaded exams. Had I passed with sufficient marks for George Green's Grammar School I would have gone. But I did well enough to go to Millwall Central. A long walk over two bridges with close to an hour's walk was not for me. I pleaded with my parents not to go. I was very loyal to the football team and there was an important match against some West Ham side. We hated to lose to any school over the Canning Town bridge. We beat them and I stayed at Woolmore where I had been since Infants school.

Life for me as child was happy for many reasons. My family never went hungry. We had boots and warm clothing. The High-Bob was full of incident and so it was impossible to be bored. I can remember the Sentinel steam wagon delivering flour to our shop, its fire spilling hot embers on the tarred block roadway and setting it alight, Guy Fawkes night in Manisty Street where giant fires raged until well after bedtime, the tar blocks after a summer storm lifting up to bring chaos to the traffic, kids pinching the blocks to use as fuel on the fires at home. The boiling tar would flame so high that many a chimney fire brought the peculiar smell of scorched soot into the already polluted air. I also recall gathering horse dung and trying to sell it for a penny a bucket - and being lucky to get a half-penny. I remember the Queens Theatre and the queues forming for a good bill, buskers, peanut sellers, fruit vendors, and one evening

three small boys standing high on the electric sub-station wall seeing who could pee the furthest. Crude? Vulgar? Yes, by today's standards - and truthfully in those pre-war days - quite disgusting.

Had our mums seen us we would have been punished. But mum knew nothing about it. Hundreds of theatre-goers did and paid no attention. Little details that have remained in my memory: kids would beg programmes from first house patrons and sell them at half price (penny) to second house. The fun. The Games. Happy days despite all the hardship that we didn't feel so much because we knew nothing else. We were privileged to live in the little High-Bob, for come the evening it was alive and vibrant - full of excitement.

I have many memories of the Queens and the unique possibilities I had for viewing the show from above. If one was on the flat roof and stood on tip toes through what had been a ventilation duct, one could see into the Circle. On one such occasion just before the show was due to commence I idly watched the

*Poplar High Street around 1930.*



people coming in and searching for their seats. I saw a fat lady hanging with jewels. I took an instant dislike to her because my mum had no posh jewels. Understandably I blew her a fat raspberry. She blamed the man following her up the stairs and elbowed him so viciously that he fell back down again.

The High-Bob's kids were Cockneys. Their parents came from many parts of the county and the world. We all got on fine together. There were no racial problems as far as I can remember, but I would say a sense of decline soured our ideas of Poplar as a whole and our little street in particular. My house, the bakers, for instance, had known better days. In the master bedroom there was a speaking tube which ran down to what once was the servants quarters. There was a concealed wire attached to a bell at the other end to summon servants. The house had clearly been the residence of wealthy people. Now it was a slum. Now dad had difficulty in keeping the bakehouse clean and the mice at bay. He was fastidious about cleanliness, but the whitewashed walls threatened to flake and fall on to the kneading boards. Mum's working day never ended and she must have gone to bed totally worn out.

The High-Bob ran from Cotton Street to Pennyfields. Benny Blackmore's pawn shop stood proudly on the corner at Cotton Street, and was a very busy place every Monday morning when wives would pawn the old man's suit to live through the week. Out it would come when he got his wages only to be popped back again come the next Monday. I suppose, as a baker's son, I would be sure to remember the opposition bakers. Close to Newby Place, they seemed to specialise in stale cakes which they sold cheaply. Wicks butchers used to slaughter their own cattle and I remember the sorrow I felt as the poor beasts were driven to their fate. More than once a cow or two would escape and bring a ripple of excitement as the round-up got under way. I know I am utterly, completely, and childishly biased, but I think the Big High-Bob has none of the characters we enjoyed down the little end.

My mum and dad would cook customers' Christmas dinners for a few pence. Because it would be heavy, wives would often send the old man to bring home the one luxurious meal of the year. He would arrive very much the worse for the booze he had already consumed. 'Be careful,' my dad would say, 'the dish is brimming with fat.' I have seen many a brand new suit ruined as the giggling customer tipped hot fat all down his - not yet paid for - blue serge outfit. After many such accidents my parents would tip some of the fat into a big basin so we would have turkey dripping for weeks to come.

Sir Oswald Moseley came to Poplar with his Blackshirts to speak in Newby Place. The choice of venue seemed sacrilegious, close as it was to All Saints, and an insult to those who were buried in the grounds and crypt. Hitler was reaching

the pinnacle of his power in Germany, Mussolini was the undisputed dictator of Italy, while Spain (thanks largely to the assistance of Hitler's Luftwaffe) was the third member of the Axis that threatened the free world. Moseley, the gifted orator, with his persuasive techniques, frightened us all, but especially the Jews. I lived next door to a Jewish family and we went back home arm in arm as if in defiance. Moseley got a brick in his ear one Sunday evening.

Finally came the Blitz, the dying, and the dispersal of High-Bob residents in all directions. Our home blasted, we moved to another shop in Old Kent Road. I did not have time to settle there, for after a few weeks I enlisted in the RAF. The High-Bob died and a Soho-in-miniature was lost from the Borough. I have found memories of the past. I did not feel deprived but grateful to have lived my formative years in what surely was one of the most exciting streets in the East End. I was character-moulded - as indeed we all are - by the past. Sadly the grimey bricks and mortar are no more but live on in a man's memory. How could I ever forget... But I sometimes look at the dereliction that was once a thriving community, unique in its own way. There is something sad about losing the past. I think that if life is a matter of the quality of living then neither Poplar nor anywhere else has progressed. We have a more affluent society now. But are we happier? Has the quality of life improved? I think not. But then that is perhaps the sign of my advancing years.

I have told this story, not in the words that a little Cockney Poplar kid would have told it. But I have tried to preserve the essence of what my childhood was like. I therefore believe you will understand why I have left a very short, though special experience till the last.

I met a man - this time in the little High-Bob itself. Although I was still at school I was already bigger than him. At other times kids may have ridiculed a person in such strange garb. But we knew he had conversed with high members of the government and was himself a very learned man - and a friend of the poor. He held an aura of greatness and people greeted him with respect. I sensed he had a love for us all. I feel extremely privileged and thankful to fate that I exchanged a few smiling words with Mahatma Gandhi.

## F.C. MILLS AND THE BROAD STREET BOYS CLUB

Fred Wright

It was 1925 when our family moved from Canning Town to the Broad Street Club at 27 Broad Street, Ratcliff. My father, who was gymnastics and boxing instructor at the club, had been given the job of caretaker, and we were to live over the club. We got off the tram at Stepney Causeway and Dad guided me down that street, past Dr Barnardo's, under the arch, past Jimmy Downing's Doss House with down-and-outs draping the steps, past the iron foundry, clanging away and belching out smoke and dust, and past the forbidding length of St James' Place. We walked on, through the aptly named Coshers Buildings, down Schoolhouse Lane, taking in the stench of Charlie Poulter's stables, where cart horses were stabled floor above floor to the height of the adjacent tenements. Round the corner we continued, by Broad Street School and into the club on each side of which was a pub. My childish feelings were of trepidation - whatever was Dad bringing us into? Canning Town was nothing special but compared to this - it was a garden suburb!

During our walk, urchins of quite tender years would recognise my father and greet him with a 'Wotcher, Jim - 'ow goes it?' This shocked me. My father was a stickler for obedience and good manners, and if one of us had addressed him in that way we would have got a clip around the ear. How then was he standing for this cheek, and obviously, from the way he returned their greeting, not resenting the familiarity? The answer was that he was at home in this environment, something I began to understand after we had settled into the club. My father had begun life as far down the social scale as the children who were addressing him so familiarly. His own father had deserted the family when he was a child, leaving his mother to bring up nine children of her own. This was in Queen Victoria's day, before social security, when the penalty for failure to survive was the workhouse. Fortunately for Dad, as for hundreds like him, he had found refuge in the club and found there the means to make something of his life.

When my father's time came to become an 'old boy' of the club he made use of the skills he had learned there by becoming an instructor there himself. Football, boxing, and gymnastics were his specialities, and he helped innumerable boys acquire proficiency in these sports. With another old club member, Bill Downing, he trained gymnastics teams that excelled in competitions, some up to international and Olympic standard. By giving something back to the club he was expressing his gratitude for what he got from it.

When Canon Barnett, that extraordinary man who was responsible for so many useful movements to improve the appalling conditions in which East Londoners lived in the late nineteenth century, went to Oxford University to persuade young men there to spend some of their time in helping the poor and destitute, Arnold Toynbee and Frederick Charles Mills were among the first to respond. When Mills came to East London, one of the first tasks Barnett gave him was to look after a meeting of boys in Wentworth Street, and Mills later recalled that he took them to play cricket in the moat of the Tower of London. His next chore was to supervise a club for Jewish lads in Whitechapel. They gave him a rough time, by all accounts. On one occasion he went down to the club and found it open. The boys had taken things into their own hands, not bothering with keys. The place was in disorder, someone had violently disconnected a gaspipe. End of club for that night!

Barnett's next assignment for Mills was to take charge of a disused pub in Hooper Square, Leman Street. This was to provide a temporary home for future residents of Toynbee Hall. It was known as 'The Friary' and was also used for meetings. While there Mills took an active interest in a boys gathering (it could hardly be called a club) that was located in railway arches by Cannon Street Road. This was run by John Collins, or 'Daddy' Collins as he became known to two generations of East End boys. Collins had been left an orphan at the early age and had started work at the age of ten. This helped him to understand and communicate with the ragamuffins who roamed the streets of that locality. He was an excellent story-teller and could keep the attention of a score of tough nuts until the last train had rumbled past overhead. Mills recalled his time there '... some good work was done there with quite tough boys. We had some good concerts but the effect was rather marred by the rumble of trains passing overhead, usually at the most pathetic part of the song. We were sufficiently organised there to have a boys committee. They took their duties seriously inasmuch as one member, coming in late, voted for his own dismissal!'

When Toynbee Hall was opened Mills elected to move to a small house in Ratcliff. He had then been appointed manager of a group of Board Schools, with special responsibility for Broad Street and Collingwood Street (later Heckford Street) Schools. Having no aptitude for games, Mills refused offers to help with boys clubs, but was persuaded by a group that met in a shop in Hardinge Street that he could be of assistance. He bought number 27, Broad Street, and the shop next door adjacent to Broad Street School and started what he called 'a club of my own.'

The club opened its doors on the 26 August 1886, when a Scots family named McMullen moved in as caretakers. The nucleus of the club already

existed and there was no lack of candidates for membership to expand it. The premises had originally been a ships' block, mast and tackle makers, and the sail loft was quickly put to use for practice by the Boy Foresters Drum and Fife Band, a junior section of one of the many Friendly Societies then in existence. This band, which became incorporated into the club, was under the tuition of Mr Wells, whose son joined the club and eventually became world famous as Bombardier Billy Wells. His early teaching in the noble art was given to him by Mr R Chambers, the club's boxing and gymnastics instructor.

John Collins' group from 'underneath the arches' also moved along to Broad Street. Their mentor came with them and spent many years helping in the organisation of the club and as friend and benefactor to a host of boys that were to pass through it. Boys attending night school classes at Broad Street School were also allowed to join. The qualifying age for joining was thirteen, the age when boys could have left school and been out at work, and the upper limit was eighteen. In later years an old boys club was formed for those who wished to continue their association with the club.

The club was successful from the start, with boys enthusiastically taking advantage of the many classes and activities provided for them. Apart from the band, there was boxing, cross-country, athletics, football, cricket, gymnastics and swimming. There was also chess, draughts and other indoor pursuits. There was a carpentry and wood carving class and minstrel troupe. Making good use of the river, a rowing club was formed, Mr Mills providing two boats - chock fours - in which members took part in races on the Thames. There was also a sea-scout troupe.

In 1887 the London Federation of Working Boys Clubs was formed and Broad Street was one of the founder members. The club was successful in many of the 'Fed' individual and team events. The first entry in the club's record book shows that a member, T. Field, was draughts champion in 1888. My father, James Wright, was a member of the gymnastics team that won the 'Feds' championship in 1900.

In 1904 Mills was finding it difficult to give the club as much attention as he would have liked. He was a barrister and JP, and through his connection with Canon Barnett and Toynbee Hall he was involved in many other charitable endeavours in the area. Apart from his duties with the School Board he made it his concern to fill the bellies of the pupils of the schools for which he had responsibility. On two days a week he provided them with breakfasts and dinners at the club. The caretaker and his wife would serve 70 pupils for breakfast and 160 for dinner! His response to the excuse for school absences, 'Please sir, no boots, sir', was to provide them with these necessities. He gave



*Broad Street Club members at Clacton in 1896.*

help also to boys who wished to try their luck abroad in what were then 'our Dominions and colonies overseas'.

Health, education and cleanliness seemed to have been his particular concerns. For many years Broad Street boys were able to enjoy an annual break at the club's holiday home, provided by Mr Mills, at Clacton-on-Sea. He was actively involved in providing laundry and bathing facilities for local women in Ratcliff and had a hand in the opening of libraries in the area.

An example of the character of the man appears in Mrs. Barnett's book, *Canon Barnett: his life, work and friends* (London, 1918). Mrs Barnett had secured the release of Ellen Mather, an 'incorrigible pauper' from the workhouse and promised her that she would never be sent back there. Having failed

to keep several jobs, she was found a position in Mr. Mill's house, but the consumption from which she suffered grew worse. Having been told of Mrs Barnett's promise to Ellen, Mills at once accepted the burden,

and had the 'incorrigible pauper' nursed in his house with every comfort until the end came.

To quote Mrs Barnett's words:

'What is that?' I asked her one day, pointing to a beautiful Brett seascape standing on an easel at bottom of the bed.

'Mr Mills bought it,' she said, 'He thought it would be company for me.'

'Nursed with every comfort,' I have written, but such consideration was holier than any comfort!

Mrs Barnett praised Mr Mill's work at the Broad Street Club and attributed its success to the long time he devoted to it. This was in 1918, but although he was still responsible for the club at that date, the club management had been handed over to J.G. Cloete, another Toynbee man, in 1904. Sometimes we were invited to his house in Limpsfield, Surrey, as a family, and despite the differences in their background, my father and Mr Mills got on well together. Socialist, trade unionist and atheist though my father was, this did not prevent him admiring that aristocratic, Tory and deeply religious man. Indeed, my father even named his youngest son - which was me - after the man he thought so highly of. And it was easy to see why.

As a man of independent means he could have lived a life of ease. Instead, he chose to respond to Canon Barnett's challenge and come to the East End at a time when the Highway was notorious for all the vices designed to cater for 'Jack' ashore with money to spend. My father was grateful for the chance the club had given him. He, like the many others who benefitted from Mr Mills' work, are dead and gone and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren that may still live in the area have a better life than that of their forebears. F.C. Mills and others like him deserve some of the credit for these improvements. They should not be forgotten.

**NOTE:**

Mr Wright's manuscript history of the Highway Clubs is lodged in the Tower Hamlets Local History collection at Bancroft Road under reference TH/8192/16.

## SIR THOMAS BUXTON BT., 1786-1845

Harold Finch

August 1833 was a great month for British reformers. That month the House of Commons passed two major bills. The first, a factory act forbidding the employment of children under the age of nine in textile factories, and limiting to nine hours a day those between nine and thirteen years of age. The second abolished slavery in the British colonies, after a long campaign led by William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton. The slave trade had been made illegal in 1807.

William Wilberforce died on 29 July in that year, and was on his death bed when he was able to know that his life's work was coming to fruition. He had been in poor health for some years and on 24 May 1821 had written to Buxton asking if he would take over the leadership of the anti-slavery campaign.(1) This letter followed a speech Wilberforce had heard Buxton make in Parliament on a bill to abolish the death penalty for every crime except murder.

Thomas Buxton had married a sister of Elizabeth Fry and had accompanied her on many of her prison visits. He had been deeply moved by a visit to Newgate prison with his brother-in-law, Sam. Hoare, and Elizabeth Fry. He wrote to his wife at that time - 'I saw four poor creatures who are to be executed on Tuesday next. Poor things, God have mercy on them. It made me long that my life may not pass quite uselessly'. (2)

Buxton was born at Earl's Colne, Essex, the eldest son of Thomas Fowell Buxton and his wife Anna (formerly Hanbury) who was a member of the Society of Friends. Leaving school at fifteen, he spent much of his time with the Gurney family, to whom he was distantly related. His mother hoped he would inherit an Irish estate, and in preparation sent him to Trinity College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself in many subjects and was awarded the university gold medal.

On the completion of the course, he was pressed to stand as a candidate to represent the university in Parliament. He declined, owing to his imminent marriage to Hannah Gurney, which took place in 1807. As the Irish estate did not materialise, he was invited to join the well-known firm of brewers, Truman, Hanbury & Co., with the prospect of becoming a partner in three years. He re-organised the firm's accounting system and generally improved the firm's affairs. Encouraged by his mother and by William Allen, between 1808 and 1816 he interested himself in many of the charitable societies in the distressed district of Spitalfields. He was particularly interested in those societies concerned with education and the sufferings of the weavers.(3)

While living in Spitalfields, Buxton and his wife were persuaded to attend Wheler Street Chapel, Spital Square, where they listened to the Reverend Josiah Pratt, who was secretary of the Church Missionary Society. Later he wrote to Pratt, 'Whatever I have done in my life for Africa, the seeds of it were sown in my heart in Wheler Street Chapel'.(4) Josiah Pratt was President of the Spitalfields Benevolent Society formed in 1811. Its objects were 'For visiting and relieving cases of great distress, chiefly among the numerous poor of Spitalfields and its vicinity'.(5)

In 1816 virtually the whole population of Spitalfields was on the verge of starvation. A meeting was called at the Mansion House on 26 November on the subject of the distress in Spitalfields. Thomas Buxton narrated the results of his personal investigations. As a result of his powerful speech an amount of £43,369 was raised at this one meeting, and an extensive and well organised system of relief was established.(6)

The Annual Report of the Spitalfields Soup Society 1811/2 includes as committee members: T. F. Buxton, Brick Lane, William Allen, Plough Court, Lombard Street, Cornelius Hanbury of the same address and Peter Bedford, 32, Steward Street. The report records 'the sale of 425,784 quarts of soup at 1d a quart'. It calculated that upon average, upwards of 6,000 persons were daily provided with a wholesome and nutritious meal. A tolerable estimate may be formed of the degrees of distress throughout the season by the quantities of soup delivered at different periods. The Soup House opened on the 30 December 1811 and until the end of

Janaury 1812 sold	77,214
February.....	77,021
March....	80,762
April.....	81,438
May.....	61,785
June.....	46,964.

'The Committee guarding against imposition made a laborious and particular inquiry into the circumstances of upwards of 1,500 families visited in their own homes. The investigation has produced the fullest conviction that the lives of many children have been saved by the charity'.(7)



*Thomas Fowell Buxton.*

Another great interest of Buxton's was the work of the London Hospital. Early in his business life he had become an active life-governor and served for many years on the house committee. Later he was to become Chairman of the hospital; he was also treasurer of the London Hospital Medical College. The hospital committee was able to acquire Woodford Hall which became 'Mrs Gladstone's Free Convalescent Home for the Poor'.

It continued for many years to provide care for over one thousand patients each year. It was not strictly part of the hospital but it remained closely associated with it. Buxton was its treasurer, and the committee of management met at the London Hospital and most of the patients were sent from there. While it cannot be claimed that this was the first convalescent home, it was certainly the first free one; not only did the patients pay nothing, but there were no closed places, no canvassing for admission and no privileges for subscribers. Admission was purely on need. After Buxton's death in 1845, other members of his family continued the tradition with the London Hospital, several serving as chairman or treasurer. Every list of governors, up to end of the voluntary system, contained the names of the Buxton family.(8)

In 1816, Buxton joined the committee of the newly formed Society for the Reformation of Prison Discipline. His visits to Newgate and other prisons provided material for a book entitled *An Inquiry whether crime and misery are produced or prevented by our present system of Prison Discipline* (London 1818). The book went through five large editions and was translated into French. In 1818 he was elected to Parliament on a Tory ticket, but later he became a Whig.

He was appointed a member of two select committees to inquire into the penal code. When they reported in 1824 Sir James Macintosh said of Buxton's speech on the Bill, that 'it was the most powerful speech he has ever heard in Parliament'.(9)

In 1826, Robert Peel, Home Secretary, reduced the number of offences punishable by death. These had included forgery, damage to Westminster Bridge and impersonation of a Chelsea Pensioner. (10) It was after an earlier speech in 1821 that Wilberforce wrote to Buxton to beseech him to 'commence the war on slavery, should he himself be unable to undertake the task, or to continue should he be compelled to desist'.

In 1823 Wilberforce and Buxton were involved on forming 'The Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominion', and on 15 May 1823, Buxton brought forward a resolution in the House of Commons for the gradual abolition of slavery, which was carried, with the addition of some words added by George Canning, relating to the planters' interest. The planters rejected the proposals and denounced the

attack upon their rights. Buxton continued the fight by addressing public meetings and collecting statistics to support his case. Meanwhile there was a lull in the campaign in Parliament between 1828 and 1830 as the Tory governments were unsympathetic and largely concerned with Catholic emancipation and other reforms. With the return of a Whig government in 1830 the movement took on new life. Buxton again brought the matter to the attention of the House of Commons. Finally, at the opening of the parliamentary session of 1833, Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the government would introduce a measure. On 28 August 1833 the Bill for the total abolition of slavery throughout the British dominions received the Royal Assent. On emancipation day, 1 August 1834, a number of friends assembled at Buxton's house and presented him with two pieces of plate. (11)

The Anti-Slavery Society of 1823 had suspended operations and was now replaced by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society founded 17-18 April 1839. Still in existence, the Anti-Slavery Society celebrated its 150th anniversary last year. Among the original thirty committee members, there were only five who had not served on earlier committees, among them Thomas Clarkson and Thomas Buxton.(12)

In June 1837, the death of William IV necessitated the dissolution of parliament and Buxton lost his seat at Weymouth. Although he received invitations from many other boroughs to stand as a candidate, he refused them. He wanted to set Africa free from the slave trade and in 1839 he published *The African Slave Trade and its remedy*. He recommended a larger naval force to be stationed off the African coast, the formation of treaties with African chiefs, and the purchase by the British government of Fernando Po, to provide a naval base and headquarters for commerce. On his recommendation an expedition was sent with the purpose of developing agriculture and trade. The expedition was not a success in the short term, as many died from fever, but it was the means of opening up communications and further trade with other countries.

Towards the close of 1839, Buxton made a tour through Italy and while there inquired into the state of the prisons in Rome. In 1840 he was created a baronet.

He now devoted himself to the development of his estates. Writing an essay on the management of his model farms gained him the gold medal of the Royal Agricultural Society in 1843.

His interests were wide, he gave support in practical ways to many voluntary organisations. He was the first treasurer of the interdenominational London City Mission, he supported the newly formed British and Foreign Bible Society, a savings bank in Spitalfields and in 1824 with William Wilberforce became a founder member of the RSPCA.

Thomas Fowell died on 19 February 1845 and was buried at Overstrand Church near his home. A committee was formed to consider a public tribute to his memory. Many distinguished people of the day contributed, but donations came also from the West Indies, as well as from Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa. Over 50,000 people contributed. A statue by Frederick Trupp was placed near that of his friend William Wilberforce in the north transept of Westminster Abbey. A Gothic memorial fountain designed by S.S. Teulon was erected by his son Charles in 1865. Until 1957 it stood at the north-west corner of Parliament Square. It now stands in the Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster.

There are two interesting developments to notice which relate to the anti-slavery campaign. The Anti-Slavery Society was able to cut clean across old party differences; its purpose was to draw attention to respect for the dignity of human beings. It could not have succeeded in its endeavour without persuading men of many different types to support it.(13) Wilberforce, Buxton and their friends introduced in English life and politics new methods of agitating and educating public opinion. The dissemination of facts and arguments, the tracts, the subscriptions, the public meetings, were all systematised by methods familiar enough today, but which were strange and new in that age. Their methods were afterwards imitated by myriad leagues and societies. Public discussion and public agitation on every kind of question became the habit of the English people. Voluntary associations for every conceivable sort of purpose became an integral part of English social life in the nineteenth century.(14)

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## DICK TURPIN IN HACKNEY

### Clifford Gully

In the eighteenth century the village of Hackney was dominated by the River Lea which ran through Enfield, Tottenham and of course Hackney Marshes. The best picture of the area in this century is given to us by the Frenchman John Rocque, whose great map survey was completed in 1745. In this year, cattle and sheep would be grazing on the Marsh which was covered with narrow and shallow trenches and dotted by posts which indicated which plot of land was owned by whom. Amongst the list of owners were the Dean of St Paul's and the Hackney Poor. At this time the whole parish was mostly rural,



*Beresford White House, Hackney Marsh.*



as was Stamford Hill and Walthamstow, which took as its boundary with Hackney the River Lea. Before the building of the locks at Old Ford the north east corner of the Marsh, particularly in the winter months, could become a huge lake due to periodic flooding. This lake would extend from Temple Mills in the east of the Marsh to what is now the navigable cut of the river in the west. Today, the Marshes consist of 350 acres of open grass which are used for much of the year as football pitches. This recreational space is bordered on the east by the River Lea and on the west by the Hackney Cut.

One important building which does not exist now was the Beresford White House. In 1732 Hackney's very own highwayman, horse-stealer, house-breaker, robber and murderer lived in this building which was near a tavern which was the meeting place for the Newmarket and sporting men of the time. There was a cock-pit and regular cock fights took place. The White House is featured in Rocque's map survey mentioned earlier and was situated in the north east of the Marshes. The property was near the banks of the River Lea not far from Temple Mills stonebridge. Attached to the building was an extensive fishery which was much used by anglers following the sport.

Rather than being considered a bandit, however, Turpin was looked upon as being a gentleman of private means and judging by his posthumous reputation, the luckiest highwayman of the eighteenth century. Even so, he was no Robin Hood robbing the rich to give to the poor - he robbed, pillaged and tortured both men and women in his efforts to pursue his criminal activities. Richard 'Dick' Turpin was a butcher's son, born in the village of Hempstead which is near Saffron Walden in Essex in 1705. Later his father became an innkeeper and was able to afford to give the boy some schooling, so that by the age of sixteen he could both read and write. Young Turpin was apprenticed to a butcher in Whitechapel, East London, in 1721. The village of Whitechapel and the High Street was well known for its butchers' shops and abattoirs as well as for the many inns and rich merchants houses that lined the street. After serving his apprenticeship he married Betty Millington at the age of twenty three. She was a maid to a schoolmaster. The butchery business, however, was not to his liking and he was soon in financial difficulties, with unpaid bills for meat to stock his shop. Therefore, to stay in business he went into cattle-stealing, was detected and forced to run away, joined a gang of smugglers and deer-stealers and took part in some brutal robberies around Hackney, Walthamstow and Stamford Hill.

They principally selected isolated farmhouses for attack and, now known as 'Gregory's Gang', they became notorious for the burglaries they committed, torturing the occupants to reveal the whereabouts of their possessions. In one instance in north east London for example, Turpin held the landlady of an inn over the grate of a fire until she was forced to reveal where her savings were kept. With a mounting list of charges of robbery, rape and murder to their debit a reward of one hundred guineas was posted on the notices for their



*Dick Turpin clearing Homsey Toll Gate.*

arrest. In addition, a free pardon was offered for any of the gang who turned King's evidence. Peace officers subsequently surprised Turpin and some members of the gang in a tavern in Westminster. Turpin managed to escape by jumping out of a window but three of his accomplices were caught. One turned King's evidence and sent his comrades and Sam Gregory to the gallows. Turpin took to highway robbery with Thomas Rowden, a pewterer by trade.

Rowden, however, was soon caught and hanged and in 1736 he had a memorable encounter with another highwayman, Tom King, who had as notorious a reputation as Turpin himself. King was well dressed and well mounted and was returning to London via Stamford Hill. This was because it was a main coach road which ran from Mile End via Cambridge Heath to link up with the main North Road at Stamford Hill. Turpin, seeing King to have the appearance of a gentleman, produced his pistols, challenged him and told him to deliver his money. King is said to have laughingly replied, 'What, dog eat dog? Come brother Turpin, if you don't know me, I know you and should be glad of your company'. Both highwaymen decided to go into business together and the criminal partnership lasted for three years.

They frequently left their hide-out to take to the highway, Turpin on Black Bess to ride out to seek suitable plunder and commit many highway robberies. On one of these they robbed the mail coach on the main coaching road at Stamford Hill. Furthermore, Turpin and King stopped and robbed a man in Hackney, but the victim was in such distress that he burst into tears saying that he only had eighteen pence. Instead of taking this paltry sum they gave him half-a-crown. Such is the honour among thieves. After these incidents and the subsequent accidental killing of King, Turpin went into Yorkshire where he was unfortunately identified as Richard Turpin the highwayman. In March 1739 he was arrested, tried before Sir William Chapple and found guilty of horse-stealing and sentenced to death. His last weeks were spent entertaining the many visitors who paid to see the legendary prisoner, purchasing a new suit to be hanged in and for dividing three shillings and ten pence among five mourners to follow the prisoner's cart to the gallows and attend his burial. He went out in style to the scaffold, bearing himself bravely and dying at the age of thirty-three.

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## STEPNEY AND TRINITY HOUSE

Derek Morris

### INTRODUCTION

As Stepney was the 'natural home for seamen' and Trinity House was responsible for many nautical matters, such as ballasting, pilotage and lights, and the distribution of charitable funds to seamen and their families, it is easy to understand why there should be connections between the two, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, in 1629 a list of seventy six Younger Brethren showed that over fifty lived in or near London on the north side of the Thames, the great majority in what is now the East End. The monument in St. Dunstan's church, Stepney to Sir Thomas Spert, who died in 1541 and was the first Master of Trinity House, is the earliest sign of the Stepney connection.

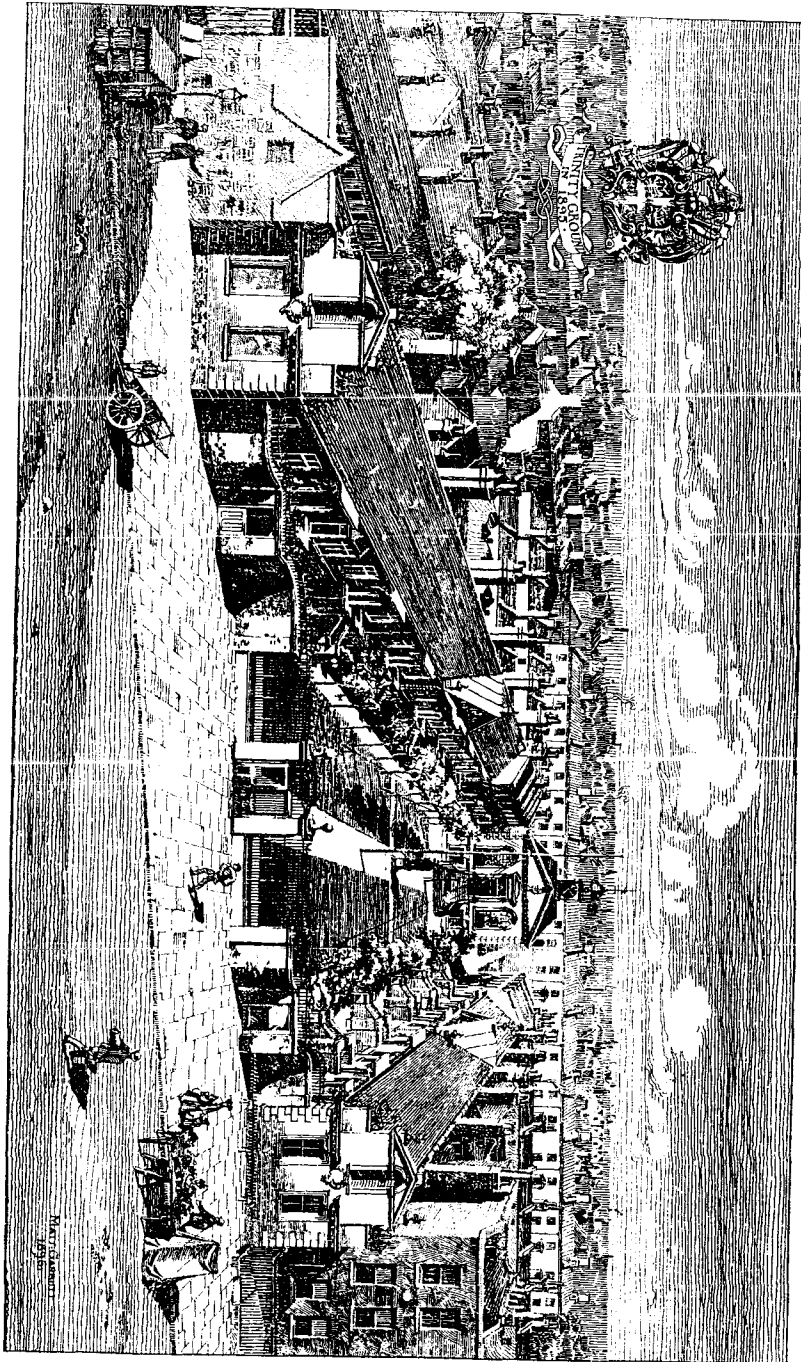
The origins of the Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford Strand were in the medieval principles of voluntary association and Trinity Houses were also established in Newcastle, Dover, Hull and elsewhere. In part they were religious in character as well as social and they concerned themselves with many aspects of the sea. With time Trinity House became very powerful and influential and its Wardens and Elder Brethren were selected from the most important merchants and sea captains of the time.

### MEETINGS IN STEPNEY 1600 - 1670

By the early seventeenth century the working headquarters of Trinity House had moved from Deptford to Stepney but later there was a move to Water Lane near the Tower of London. Meetings were then held on Saturdays in Stepney and on Tuesdays in Water Lane. In 1660 the Corporation obtained the lease of a house in Stepney; the house is thought to have been in White Horse Lane between the Thames and St. Dunstons Church. In 1666, after the Great Fire of London, the Court of Assistants held their meetings at this house until 1670 but then returned to London, which was probably more convenient. The house was let to a Dr. Russell for £30 per year. A deed does exist in the Bancroft Library for a Dr. Russell but for a house near the Great Essex Road and more study is required to prove a connection.

Brethren would have travelled from all over London to their meetings and we are fortunate to have several descriptions of such meetings from Samuel Pepys, who was Master of Trinity House in 1676 and 1685. Thus in 1667 he records 'thence by water to Deptford, it being Trinity Monday when the Maister is chosen. And there finding them all at church, and thinking they dined as usual

*View of Trinity Almshouses by Matt. Garbutt for Ashbee's monograph (1896).*



in Stepney, I turned back, having a good book (*The Life of Cardinal Wolsey*) and to Ratcliffe; and so walked to Stepney and spent my time in the churchyard looking over the gravestones, expecting when the company would come; but finding no company stirring, I sent to the house to see, and it seems they dined not there but at Deptford and there find them just sat down.' It would thus seem that the house in White Horse Lane was large enough for meetings as well as for the very convivial dinners, which Pepys frequently described, as there seems to have been at least one dinner a month.

### **TRINITY HOSPITAL**

Trinity House had a long tradition of maintaining almshouses for its poorer members; thus before the Restoration there were 38 almshouses in Church Street, Deptford. Then in 1692 Captain Henry Mudd bequeathed to Trinity House one acre of land at Mile End. Mudd had been a Deputy Master of Trinity House (1688-1691) and the building of the almshouses began in 1695. The almshouses were well described by Ashbee who concluded that 'the existing hospital was designed probably by Evelyn himself, with the assistance, and under the immediate superintendence of Wren, that indeed it was their joint creation'

As Evelyn and Wren had been friends for many years such cooperation may have appeared to be very natural, especially as Evelyn was connected to Trinity House through his father-in-law.

In the 1890s the Corporation of Trinity House wanted to pull down the almshouses on the grounds that the money could be better used for pensions rather than the provision of accommodation. There was a widespread outcry against the destruction of these beautiful buildings and William Morris in November 1896 wrote to 'The Daily Chronicle' enclosing 'my subscription towards the sum of £150, which it seems, the Trinity Brethren are too poor to find'

Fortunately the campaign by Morris, Octavia Hill (one of the founders of the National Trust) and others was successful and the almshouses are the last remaining physical link between Stepney and Trinity House.

### **ELDER BRETHERN FROM STEPNEY**

The original Charter of Incorporation was granted by King Henry VIII in 1514 and allowed the Master, four wardens and eight assistants to be elected by the members annually. In 1660 the number of Elder Brethren was increased to thirty one, the remaining members being known as Younger Brethren and this tradition has continued until the present day. The Elder Brethren were men with distinguished careers and connections with the sea either as Captains or as merchants. It is an indication of the size and strength of the maritime community in Stepney that in the eighteenth century between four and six of the Elder brethren were always Stepney men.

An Elder Brethren was elected for life but there does not seem to have been an automatic election of a Stepney man on the death of a Stepney man. There was no limit to the number of Younger Brethren; the qualification being a Master commanding a vessel in the foreign trade or trading in foreign parts. In 1680 Pepys complained 'that all the shipmen and mariners of England are Brothers though they do not come to be made Brothers, which is their own fault'.

The table lists all those Elder Brethren between 1705 and 1790, who either lived in Stepney or in the case of Captain Martin married the daughter of a Stepney resident.

**ELDER BRETHERN OF TRINITY HOUSE WHO LIVED IN STEPNEY 1705 - 1790**

No.*	Name	Dates as Elder Brethren	Dates in Stepney	Note
137	Admiral Sir Cloudisley Shovell	1705-1707	?-1707	1
139	Capt. Samuel Jones	1705 - 1713	1713	2
144	Admiral Sir John Leake	1707 - 1720	? - 1720	3
157	Capt. Stephen Martin	1712 - 1736	1720 - 1736	4
165	Capt. Samuel Jones	1717-1735	1733 - 35	5
171	Capt. Matthew Martin	1720 - 1749	?	6
195	Capt. James Winter	1733 - 1756	1733 - 1756	7
196	Capt. Richard Haddock	1734 - 1751	1724 - 1751	8
197	Capt. John Redman	1734 - 1763	1723 - 1763	9
212	Capt. Caleb Grantham	1739 - 1762	1749 - 1760	10
214	Capt. William Snelgrave	1741 - 1744	1731 - 1743	11
219	Capt. Sabine Chandler	1742 - 1750	1741 -1750	12
249	Capt. Richard Shubrick	1757 - 1765	1738 -1766	13
255	Capt. James Sanders	1762 - 1778	1750 -1777	14
256	Capt. Samuel Malbon	1762 - 1781	1762 - 1780	15
261	Capt. Nicholas Burnell	1763 - 1774	1774	16
264	Capt. Gilbert Slater	1765 - 1785	1746 - 1785	17

\* The number given in the list compiled by Chaplin.

**NOTES**

1. Admiral Shovell had a house in Goodmans Fields, near Tower Hill. Several Trinity House Elder Brethren were to live in this area. Shovell died when he led the English fleet onto the rocks off the Scilly Isles with great loss of life. He was buried in Westminster Abbey where an elaborate monument of 'questionable taste' was erected.
2. The Bancroft Road Library has a will dated 17 February 1713 of Samuel Jones, Gent, of Stepney. His daughter Sarah married Capt. Matthew Martin, an Elder Brethren 1720-1749. In 1693 Captain Jones commanded the 'Josiah' with 43 guns and 63 men on a voyage to Jamaica carrying stores for the Commissioners of Victualling of the Royal Navy. In 1697 he commanded the 'Tavistock' an East Indiaman on a voyage to the Bay of Bengal. He was succeeded in the captaincy by Captain Matthew Martin; yet another example of the close family connections that pervaded the East India Company.
3. Admiral Leake owned houses at the Grove, Mile End Old Town. These were inherited by his brother-in-law, Captain Stephen Martin and later by Stephen Martin Leake, Herald at Arms.
4. Capt. Martin and Admiral Leake were very close friends having married sisters and served together for many years in the Royal Navy. On the death of Leake, Capt. Martin added Leake to his name. He was Master of Trinity House in 1709. See D.N.B.
5. The shareholder lists for the United East India Company record Samuel Jones of Mile End in 1733 and in 1735 refer to him as 'deceased'. His father was an Elder Brethren (No. 139). He was prominent in the affairs of the Hudson Bay Company, an original Director of London Assurance and a Director of the East India Company. He was buried in Poplar chapel and bequeathed to the poor of Trinity House the sum of £50 and to every Elder Brethren a ring of twenty shillings value.
6. Captain Martin married Sarah, daughter of Samuel Jones of Mile End Old Town. Martin was an East Indiaman Captain, who was famous for fighting off an attack by three French warships when he was trying to bring back from India a valuable cargo. He owned considerable property in Wivenhoe, Essex and was MP for Colchester in 1721-22 and 1734-35.
7. Capt. Winter commanded East Indiamen to India and China and became a Director of the East India Company. He was a leading Dissident.
8. Capt. Haddock was Comptroller of the Navy and one of his forebears Admiral Haddock had been an Elder Brethren in 1675 (No. 69). He retired in 1749 on a pension of £300 a year and lived in the Mile End Road. The Haddock family are famous in Royal Navy annals and came from Leigh-on-Sea.
9. Capt. Redman was prominent in the Vestry affairs of St. Dunstons, Stepney. Redman Street near the London Hospital is named after him. He traded with the Leeward Islands.
10. Capt. Grantham first served in the Royal Navy and then in the East India Company. He was a London Assurance Director and from 1754 until 1760 lived in Mansell Street, Goodmans Fields, afterwards moving to West Thurrock in Essex. He was a Governor of the London Hospital from 1747 to 1760. In 1735 Samuel Jones (165) left Grantham £10 'for Mourning', which indicates a close relationship. Grantham also had an account at the Bank of England.
11. Capt. Snelgrave was chosen in 1740 at a St. Dunstons Town Meeting to join 'A comite to look for a new poor house'. Snelgrave traded to Guinea and the West Coast of Africa in the early part

of the eighteenth century and was engaged in the slave trade. He was captured by pirates off the Gold Coast in 1718 and only returned to England in 1719 after a series of exciting adventures. He wrote *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade*, printed 1734.

12. Capt. Chandler was described in a 1749 Guide to London as an 'Assurance Director, Stepney Green' and was an eminent West Indian merchant. He had a Bank of England account. *The Morning Advertiser* of 9 February 1750 described him a 'a gentleman of strict honour and much esteemed by all who knew him'.

13. Capt. Shubrick traded with Virginia and South Carolina from 1717 when his ship was recorded as arriving in Charles Town from London with a cargo of 'European goods'. His trading continued until his death. Because of his long knowledge of trading along the east coast between Florida and Virginia he was called to the Commission of Trade and Plantations to give evidence in 1734. He was a major stockholder in Mile-End Old Town, 1738 - 1755. His company was also involved in the slave trade between the Gambia and North America.

14. Capt. James Sanders was employed by the Levant Company 1743 - 1756. His marriage deed is in the Bancroft Road Library. From 1754 to 1777 London Trade Directories record him as a 'Turkey Merchant' and he lived in Mansell Street, Goodmans Fields, from 1760 to 1777.

15. Capt. Malbon was a native of Shadwell and later was a ratepayer in Mile End Old Town (1762 - 1778). He attended the Vestry meetings 1762 - 1778 and was elected vestryman for Ratcliffe in 1762. Buried St. Dunstons, Stepney, 25 August 1780.

16. Capt. Burnell was a native of Pembroke, a merchant and was buried at St. Dunstons, Stepney, 22 January 1774. He has some connection with the owners of the 'Augustine Caesar', who had presented him with a silver cup, probably because of some major feat of sailing.

17. Capt. Slater was a native of Stepney and was born in 1712. He was Commander of the East Indiaman 'Triton' that sailed to China 1750/51 and 1753/54. He was a major shipowner of East Indiamen between 1766 and 1785 and was prominent in the affairs of the East India Company. In 1763 he was described in a Guide to London as an 'Assurance Director of Stepney'.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Trinity House for supplying copies of the unpublished notes on Elder Brethren compiled by Captain Chaplain.

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## NOTES AND NEWS

The cover of last year's *East London Record* was the nearest our printer could get to the colour of the dye discovered by William Perkin, the subject of Dr. Leaback's article. We omitted to mention this fact anywhere in the magazine!

This year's annual history lecture was given by Dr. Bob Holman, who spoke about George Lansbury. Dr. Holman's book, *Good Old George*, is due out from Lion in the autumn and we hope to have a review of it in the next *Record*. The book will be the first full length study in nearly forty years of this important local and national figure. Well done Globe Town Neighbourhood, who organised the lecture.

Not so well done Globe Town Neighbourhood for their plan to build a Family Centre on Meath Gardens in Bethnal Green. The Gardens stand on the site of Victoria Park Cemetery, where nearly a third of a million people were buried. The East London History Society has been active in trying to ensure that the Gardens be retained for recreational use in accordance with the sentiment expressed by the Chairman of the London County Council in 1894, that they be 'open to the public for ever'.

Two magazines which have recently drawn attention to the *Record* are *Family Tree Magazine* and *Wanstead Historical Society Journal*. The April, 1990, edition of the latter includes 'An Old Ilfordian's Recollections' and a short piece on Arthur Parsons (1875 - 1952), an artist who lived in Wanstead.

*The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, edited by David Casarani (Basil Blackwell), contains several articles of local interest, including Elaine Smith on trade unionism and politics and Tony Kushner on anti-semitism. David Feldman and Gareth Stedman-Jones are editors of *Metropolis: London Histories and Representations since 1885* (Routledge); it has an article by Feldman on the 1905 Aliens' Act and one by Deborah Weiner on The People's Palace. Ruth Adler recalls her schooldays at Stepney Jewish School in *Generations of Memories* (Women's Press), collected by The Jewish Women in London Group.

Volume 1 of E.R. Oakley's *London County Council Tramways* (London Tramways History Group) came out last year and deals with South London. Volume 2, covering The North London part of the L.C.C. system, is due out within the next year, and should be of considerable local interest. The Group's address is 16 Edendale Road, Barnehurst, Bexleyheath, Kent DA7 6RW. John Blackwood's *London's Immortals: The Complete Outdoor Commemorative Statues* (Savoy Press) has a picture of Gladstone's statue in Bow Road. It was taken a few days after Gladstone died and it shows the statue draped in wreaths. The accompanying text seems to question the traditional view that

the unfortunate matchgirls at Bryant and May's factory paid for the statue. I wonder what the evidence is for both views, traditional and revisionist. The text also mentions a proposal to erect a statue to the matchgirls on the site of Fairfield Works, now Bow Quarter.

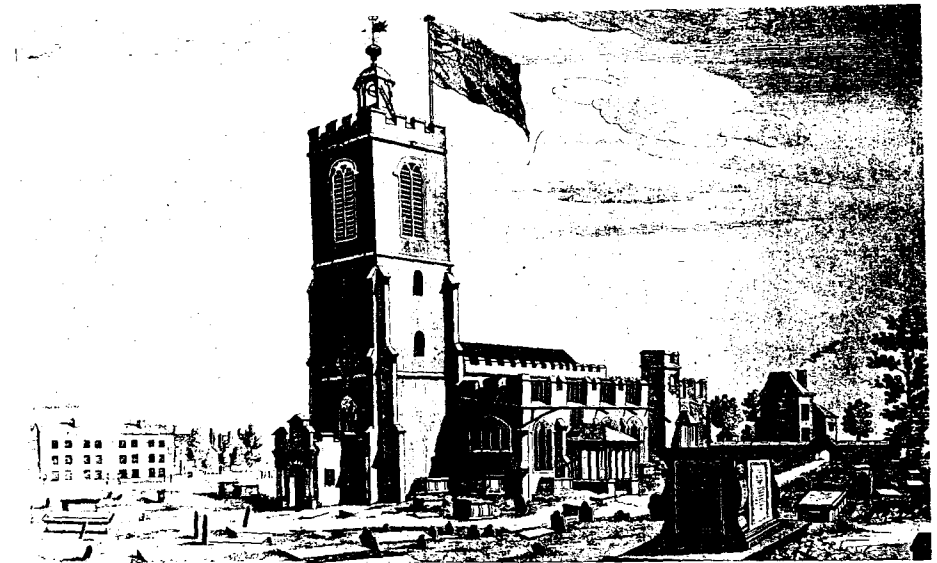
Peter Marcan Publications still have the following available in the 'East End Reprint' series: *East London, One Dinner a Week and Travels in the East, Down in the East End* and *A Mid-Victorian East End Album*.

Harold W. Walker's *Mainly Memories* was reviewed in *Record* 10 (1987). His latest publication is *Games Forgotten (or nearly so)* and is published by Sewardstone Investments (E4) Ltd., 2 Sewardstone Road, Waltham Abbey, EN9 1NB. A teacher who used it in a Hackney school found that for young children it made an interesting link between games recorded in Victorian times and those played today. She was surprised at how many of the games were known to today's children, albeit with changed words in many instances.

In a feature on Hackney Down School in *ILEA News*, 18 December 1989, an old friend of the *Record*, Dr Melvyn Brooks (see his contribution to No. 9, p. 47 and No. 11, 1988, pp. 34 - 7) is quoted at length on the number of old boys of the school who have distinguished themselves in public, academic and scientific life in Israel. *ILEA News* closed down in March with the demise of the Inner London Education Authority, and schools in Hackney and Tower Hamlets are now run by the individual boroughs for the first time since the introduction of free education for all children in 1870. To what lands, one wonders, will restless East End youths of the future turn, in search of ideals and service...? Meanwhile, the history of 120 years of education in the East End remains largely unwritten, with the exception of a handful of studies on the provision for Jewish children and a few histories of individual schools, all, (except for Henry Wilks' *George Green School 1828 - 1978*) conspicuous by their brevity. It is to be hoped that the new education authorities, busy with plans for the future, do not neglect the past and the importance of examining it.

It may be my imagination, but local newspapers seem to be carrying more material that reflects East London's rich history. Robert Barltrop's writing and sketches in the *Dockland Recorder* perhaps led the way. A Stewart Fowler feature in the *Hackney Gazette* (9 Mar.'90) on the 250th Anniversary of the London Hospital reminded us, among other things, that 'The London' took in the first wounded soldiers to return to England in 1914. The same paper (13 Oct.'89) had a full page article on *Shot at Dawn* by Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes (Wharncliffe Publishing) which considered the cases of two East Enders executed for desertion during the First World War. Another *Gazette* notice (1 June '90) drew attention to William Harding's *A Cockney Soldier* (Merlin Books), which includes the author's memories of Hoxton before the First

World War. *The East London Advertiser* (1 June '90) reported on the 'Massey Shaw's' part in the 50th anniversary of Dunkirk. It also drew attention to the ship's role as a fire fighting vessel along the Thames during the Blitz. The Blitz also features in Charlie Jones' *When I was Young*, part of the World War II series published by Franklin Watts Ltd. He was approached to do the book following the appearance of a photograph in the *Hackney Gazette's* 'All Our Yesterdays' series.



*S. Dunstan's, Stepney, in the mid-18th century.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

Venetia Murray. *Echoes of the East End*. Viking, £16.95.

A fascinating book about life in the East End before the Second World War - personal reminiscences from books by 19 writers, some of whom became famous, like Arnold Wesker, the playwright, and Jack London. They cover most aspects of life in the East End: labourer, suffragette, music-hall performer, boxer, costermonger, housewife etc., etc. I can't imagine a richer, more informative account of life in the old East End.

What stands out is the poverty and squalor of those days. What a transformation we have seen. I live in the East End off Mile End Road on the less fashionable side - we're all Council tenants, the 'yuppies' live on the north side in beautiful early 19th century squares and terraces. The old squalor and extreme poverty has gone: ten taxis outside Mile End station, neighbours with cars and holidays in Spain! I dare say there are still some small areas of squalor, but the East End had indeed been transformed.



*Ivory at S. Katherine's Dock; one of many excellent pictures in Andrew Davies' book.*

Yet I remember, when I was a child in Woodford, that we were kept out of 'the slums' save for well-meaning but patronising visits to the lower orders. As one old East Ender said to me: 'We sent our wives to your chapels to get your wives' cast-off clothes.'

There is one omission from this series of fascinating extracts - no reference at all to church and chapel life. Most of the residents appear as Jewish (or Irish) - today many of our neighbours are Asian, the most elegantly dressed women in the East End. The men don't stand out so vividly - there will be some West Indians too (the West Africans live in the posh suburbs!); they'll be at work, and as Methodist minister I never enter a pub, so don't get to know my brothers from home and abroad so well. This side of life, so dominating on TV, is also missing from this fascinating volume, which I cannot recommend too highly. It is beautifully illustrated too - the photo of a baby boy in granny's arms with his little girl cousin standing alongside is a delightful picture of the old East End, so full of family life - I guess the father is at work (or at the pub!).

Revd. Douglas Wollen

Andrew Davies. *The East End Nobody Knows*. A History, a Guide, an Exploration. Macmillan 1990, £16.95.

Here is the perfect accompaniment of *Echoes of the East End*, also beautifully illustrated, with Wren's Trinity Almshouses in Mile End Road, appropriately the first - just as beautiful as St. Paul's!

The history begins splendidly with St Dunstan in the tenth century, and moves via the Peasants' Revolt, the Tower and the Port of London, the first London Playhouses, the riverside pubs, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, with a climax in Hawksmoor's three great ecclesiastical architectural masterpieces. The East End has as much to offer as the West.

Two wonderful people stand out in more modern history: Angela Burdett-Coutts, 'the Queen of the Poor' and George Lansbury, 'the John Bull of Poplar.' And I was happy to find my famous predecessor at the Poplar Methodist ministry praised not only for chapel services, but for street parties. I was glad, too, to see John Wesley quoted - 'Why do not all rich people that fear God constantly visit the poor?' After all, Wesley did say, 'I never want to meet a rich Methodist; the poor are the Christians.'

At the end of the book Andrew Davies is critical of the new East End dominated by tower-blocks. I don't think I share his attitude. I live in a small block, on the fourth floor, and as I look out at night, the view is diversified by many illuminated towers. But I'm told they often diminish the old terrace neighbourliness. I am, however, bound to add that much of the old neighbourliness lives on, much more than in the 'posh' suburbs.

This vivid picture of the East End concludes with ten fascinating walks. Yes, the East End has as much to offer as the West. I hope this book will lead to 'The East End Everybody Knows.'

Revd. Douglas Wollen

Eve Hostettler (ed.) *The Island at War. Memories of War-Time Life on the Isle of Dogs, East London*. Island History Trust, 1990 £3.00.

This little book sets out some of the memories and impressions of War-time life on the Isle of Dogs. It gives a remarkable picture of the resilience and cheerfulness of a community virtually isolated from the mainstream of London's War-time sufferers. Much has been written about this 'isolation'

due mainly to the positioning of the Docks, but the closeness and sharing in adversity seen in most 'blitzed' cities was special to the Island. This was a sort of backwater where everyone knew everybody else and when a bomb was known to have fallen in a particular street or area conversation and anxiety were immediately directed to Aunt Elsie or Uncle Bill who were known to live in the area.

The book has only two pages devoted to the first World War, due largely to the diminishing number of people with memories of that War. This, I think, is a pity as there are still many who remember the manufacture of warship parts, the mass-produced military clothing, Morton's 'plum and apple', McConochie's 'M. & V.' and Keiller's Service Marmalade, all of which the Island produced among other things.

It is not surprising that the bulk of the memories in this book relate to the 'blitz' but the Island contributed parts of the Mulberry Harbour and Landing Craft for the D-Day landings which, together with its magnificent 'dig for Victory' efforts might have found a place in the book.

Altogether a gripping little book of memories ably combined and presented by Eve Hostettler.

A.H. French

**A London Docklands Album.** Peter Marcan Publications, 1990. £5.95, plus 75p postage from 31 Rowcliffe Rd, High Wycombe, Bucks HP12 3LD.

This book is one more in the series of picture collections put out by Peter Marcan, and I think he has found a winning formula. It contains a wide ranging selection of picture material from as wide a range of sources, illustrations carefully chosen for an enchanting album that is a delight in itself. This is the kind of book that needs to be savoured at leisure, in measured portions to guarantee enjoyment that will appreciate over the years. These vintage illustrations have been culled from magazines as diverse as *The Builder* and the *Illustrated London News* of the 19th century down to our present day *Docklands Recorder*. The illustrations date from 1860 to present day and trace the historical past of London's Docklands, as well as sketching the shape of things to come. The book falls naturally into two sections. The first section records the docks in their heyday during the 19th century when they were the centre of Victorian colonial trade and shipping, receiving merchandise from all over the world, docks bustling and alive, drawing to them dockers and seamen from all over the globe. In stark contrast, the 20th century section is one of silent wharves, empty warehouses and the grim desolation of abandoned people. This is nostalgia with more than a tinge of bitterness. It concludes with a glimpse into the future with scenes of the new Docklands, the high-rise office buildings, featuring the latest techniques in cladding and curtain-walling, built to service a different kind of commerce and trade, a future still eyed with suspicion and hostility by the 'Islanders'.

This book is a must for all collectors of East London memorabilia.

Rosemary Taylor

B Piggot & B.J. Page **East of London Old and New.** Ilford Old and New Series, 1989. £2.50.

Having just bought three very similar books at £1.50 each, the £2.50 price of this one seems at first a bit steep. However, a quick analysis of what you get for your money reveals that 64 pictures work out at under four pence each and one cannot really quibble with such value. The pictures are attractively presented, each printed with a black border and with captions giving a nice amount of information without becoming too wordy for a picture book. All the pictures are about postcard size.

Most of the old locations have been rephotographed from near identical points of view but some are a bit misleading. Two cases in point are page 6, where the Tower Hamlets Mission appears much larger than it is, compared to the old Great Assembly Hall (judge by the adjacent house), and page 28, where the photographer has gone too far back, including far too much foreground street.

I cannot help but comment on the quality of the modern pictures. One would think that these would be superior in quality to the old pictures, but in many cases this is not so. Quite a few of the modern pictures suffer from poor technique. Opening the book at random, instances of this are page 14, where the walls of old North Woolwich Station are made to slope inward (converging verticals), and page 15 where the print is overexposed. I defer from making any further criticism of specific pictures but would make the general observation that many of the modern pictures were not taken at the best time, i.e. when weather or lighting conditions are ideal.

I have already mentioned the captions but would query that to the pictures on page 31. Both places mentioned, Banbury Reservoir and Friday Mill House, are over a mile away from here in different directions; North Chingford, which is still referred to as 'the village' is further still. A more relevant piece of information for this site is that some criminals committed a robbery in Tottenham, fled to Chingford where they commandeered a tram, and were finally trapped in one of the old wooden cottages shown in the picture. To sum up my impressions of the book, it is worth buying for the old pictures. If I was writing a school report I would have to conclude with 'the authors could do much better and must keep trying'.

John Curtis

**Isobel Watson Gentlemen in the Building Line: The development of South Hackney.** Passfield Publications, 1989 £4.95 (£5.80 including p.& p. from Passfield Publications, Roland House, 29 Stepany Green, E1 3JX).

John Rocque's map of 1745 records a South Hackney of mainly market garden fields and a few houses. By 1880 South Hackney had become largely the area it is today. This book is a detailed study of the builders and speculators who erected the houses in those fields. Above all, Isobel Watson marshals her research to demonstrate the varying policies the major freeholders - Sir John Cass's Charity, St Thomas's Hospital and the Norris family - followed in leasing their land. They had to decide the type of houses and, therefore, people they wanted and pick leasees who would be able to fulfil their agreements and build the houses. For the reader South Hackney becomes living history as she locates the buildings that remain and explains how deals between the freeholders created the very streets of the area. Moreover, the text is supplemented by illustrations and maps. There is also a sketch of the people who lived in the houses and the society they formed.

There is much more. For example, there are some intriguing sidelights on how building societies developed. The buildings in Hackney Terrace in Cassland Road built in the 1790s are believed to be the oldest surviving ones built by a 'building society'. However, untypically, the members were middle class and the buildings were erected for profits not to be lived in by the members. By contrast Warnford and Freemont Streets were built by St Pancras Marylebone and Paddington Freehold Land Society in the 1850s. The aim of that society was to enfranchise men by providing them with freehold property. In return they were expected to vote for the Whigs!

In short, an admirably researched and well organised book.  
H. David Behr.



**Jan Kemp. *Cheerful Charlie*.** A biography of C.P. McGahey. Published by the author and available from P.O. Box 271, Great Wakering, Essex, SS3 OJU. £10.95 hardback, £7.95 paperback.

The subject of this biography was born in Nelson Street, Bethnal Green, in 1871. He had a career in football and became a professional cricketer. Later he turned to coaching. While the book tells us a lot about the sports in the East London area, it is also good on 'village' life in the East End at the turn of the century. But it is with cricket that the book is principally concerned, and McGahey's interesting career in that sport is supplemented with 5 pages of statistics compiled by Robert Brooke.

Bradley Snooks

**David Mander. *The London Borough of Hackney in Old Photographs*.** Alan Sutton, 1989. £6.95. Elizabeth Robinson. ***Lost Hackney*.** The Hackney Society, 1989. £5.25.

David Mander, the Hackney Borough Archivist, has brought together a long awaited comprehensive coverage of Hackney life before 1914 in 263 photographs. The excellent book is divided into 11 geographical sections with additional sections on leisure activities, schools, the home and garden and poverty and sickness. The photographs concentrate on the changing scene in the historic parts of Hackney, particularly central Hackney pre 1880s so the late 19th century suburbs in northern Hackney are less covered. The photographs are accompanied by short descriptions of the fate of the buildings shown and what now occupies the sites.

There is a particularly comprehensive coverage of Mare Street. Here we can follow the street from top to bottom, noting with pleasure some old friends which still survive almost unchanged, for example, the junction of Mare Street and Anhurst Road by Hackney Central station. This section also identifies the origin of the title Mare Street (nothing to do with horses but from the middle English Meare meaning a boundary, referring to the original settlement down by the boundary with Bethnal Green at the bottom of Mare Street.) The chapter on health and poverty, aptly entitled 'The poor, the sick and the damned,' provides a welcome antidote to the rosy view of the past all too common in the touristic heritage view of good old cockney London.

The book would have been improved with an index. Can we have one when it is reprinted? Can we also, David, have a book soon on the period 1914 to 1940, before the blitz and comprehensive redevelopment changed Hackney decisively?

Elizabeth Robinson's excellent book is divided into five sections: squares, houses, almshouse, churches and schools. Whilst these sections cover the main types of older buildings in Hackney, it is a pity that lost historic industrial/commercial building were not included and some well known houses, e.g. Black and White House, Bohemia Place and Fleetwood House, Stoke Newington Church Street are missing. On the other hand you cannot include everything in a small book of 78 pages.

My main reaction to the book was one of sadness that so many beautiful old buildings have been lost. What is even worse is that many were demolished quite recently when still in a structurally sound condition and recoverable. The councillors who demolished Brooke House in 1954 should hang their heads in shame - the excellent photographs of it show what a gem was lost. Similar acts of civic vandalism or failure to stop others from committing similar brutalities continued until the

early 1970s when the tide of opinion began to change - due in no small part locally to the efforts of the Hackney Society. The book is lavishly illustrated with photographs, prints and extracts of old Ordnance survey maps. The descriptions of the 35 buildings contain many lively thumbnail sketches of the famous people living or visiting Hackney in the last 500 years. All lovers of Hackney will be interested in the episodes described and little known details exposed. Did you know we have our very own Lenin Was Here site in Hackney (No. 6, Clapton Square)? Highly recommended.

John Paton

**Dick Hobbs. *Doing the Business*.** Entrepreneurship, The Working Class and Detectives in East London. Oxford University Press, 1989. £25 hardback, £4.95 paperback.

While I was reading this book long queues were forming to see the film about the Krays. Everyone seems to be interested in crime, especially East End crime. Dick Hobbs tries to trace the origins of the East End's association with crime to the area's unique economic system.

Unlike northern towns where a factory system, with its supposed virtues of thrift and sobriety created a disciplined working class, the East End's tradition of making cheap goods for the City produced a different kind of work force. Unskilled immigrants, equally undisciplined, adapted easily to the local economy, finding casual employment in the docks or street trading, while more skilled immigrants found a measure of economic independence in small workshops engaged in 'finishing off' goods. An entrepreneurial style based on small amounts of capital became a feature of the area's economy, and the East Ender's wits were sharpened by early exposure to market forces. He had to be sharp to survive.

Trading and dealing are an integral feature of a culture strengthened by a lack of middle-class influence, yet stereotyped working-class solidarity is tempered with a powerful independence forged by centuries of individualistic endeavour, both in and out of work (p 118).

How this 'trading and dealing' took on illegal forms, how the forces of law and order reacted to it and how the East Ender in turn was able to accommodate himself to the 'detective' are explained at length in this unusual book. If you can take the style (the piece I have quoted is typical), then you will find much that is interesting and provocative here. I did.

Colm Kerrigan

## CONTRIBUTORS

Jerome Farrell, until recently the Archivist at Bancroft Road, is now Borough Archivist and Records Manager for the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Mr Chisnall was brought up in Poplar and now lives in Custom House; Mr Wright lives in Romford; Harold Finch had an article on George Howell in *Record 11* (1988); Clifford Gulley has been active in local history in Hackney since 1985. Derick Morris' article on local residents and the East India Company appeared in *Record 9* (1986). Douglas Wollen is a Methodist minister and lives in Southern Grove, Mile End; Harold French was a founder member of the East London History Society in 1952; Rosemary Taylor is the Society's secretary at present; John Curtis was until recently the membership secretary and David Behr organises the Society's programme of talks; Bradley Snooks is working on the history of Bow and John Paton is interested in south Hackney, where he gives guided history tours.

## SOME RECENT ITEMS RELATING TO EAST LONDON

### Books and Booklets (excluding those reviewed)

- Abbott, G. **The Tower of London as it was.** Hendon Publishing, 1988.
- Blacker, Henry **East Endings.** Graphic Press, 1989.
- Calvocoressi, Paul **Conversation in Docklands: Old Buildings in a changing environment.** Docklands Forum, 1989.
- Darby, Madge **Judge Jeffreys and the Ivy Case.** Connor and Butler, 1989.
- Daunton, Claire (Ed) **The London Hospital, Illustrated.** Batsford, 1990.
- Hartog, Alexander **Born to Sing.** Dobson/Murphy, 1989.
- Holmes, Colin **John Bull's Island. Immigration and British Society 1871-1971.** Macmillan, 1988.
- Leech, Kenneth **Struggle in Babylon: Racism in the Cities and Churches of Britain.** Sheldon Press, 1988.
- Lyal, John **Just Like My Dreams.** Viking, 1989.
- Specht, Maureen **The German Hospital in London and the Community it served.** Anglo-German Family History Society, 1989.
- Articles**
- Baker, Tim 'The West Hackney Almshouses' in **The Terrier**, 15 (1989).
- Betts, R. 'A J Mandella, Robert Wild and Continental systems of education, 1884-1889: conflicting views on the status of Teachers'. In **Higher Education**, 17 (1988). (Wild was head of Byron Street Board School, Poplar).
- Brown, Malcolm 'The Jews of Hackney before 1840' in **Jewish Historical Studies**, xxx, 1987-9.
- East of London Family History Society Among several interesting items in recent issues of **Cockney Ancestor** is a listing of occupations in Brick Lane in 1851. (Spring 1990)
- Goldsmith, Sam 'East End link with Hebrew Letters' in **Jewish Chronicle** 1 June 1990.
- Greenberg, Suzanne Krish 'Anglicization and Education of Jewish Immigrant Children in the East End of

London' in A. Rapoport - Albert and S.J. Zipperstein (eds). **Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky.**

- Kershen, Anne 'All Out! East End Jewish Tailors' Strike of 1889' in **Jewish Chronicle**, 18 Aug. 1889
- Rayner, Olive 'DON'T GIVE UP!! Persistence and patience rewarded after nearly SIXTY years'. (on Hudson family, Bethnal Green) in **The Essex Family Historian**, 47, (1988).
- Reed, John Shelton 'Ritualism rampant in East London. Anglo-Catholicism and the urban Poor' in **Victorian Studies** 31 (1988).
- Sloane, Barney 'Archaeology on Hackney: The Hunt for Holywell Priory' in **The Terrier**, 17 (1990).
- Tolson, Andrew 'Social surveillance and Subjection: Emergence of a "subculture" in the work of Henry Mayhew' in **Cultural Studies**, 4 (1990).
- Theses**
- Kershen, A.J. 'Trade Unionism amongst the tailoring workers in London and Leeds, 1872-1915. A study of industrial and social assimilation'. M.Phil. (Warwick).
- Koven, S.D. 'Culture and Poverty: the London Settlement House movement, 1870-1914'. Ph.D. (Harvard).
- Mullings, M.M. 'The Left and Facism in the East End of London 1932-39'. Ph.D. (N. London Polytechnic).
- Rose, Gillian Cathryn 'Localities, Politics and Culture: Poplar in the 1920s'. Ph.D. (Queen Mary College, 1988).

### Some recent additions to Tower Hamlets Local Libraries and Archives

- Mile End, Whitechapel and Cheshire St. Baths: Plans, 1929-1981. Ref. TH/8355.
- Bond re William Bygat of Ratcliff, seaman, 1597. Ref. TH/8359.
- All Saints, Poplar: Records, including banns books, burial order books and Overseers' bills, 1813-1976. Ref. TH/8360.
- Capt. William Glass: Shipping records, 20th century. Ref. TH/8361.
- Manuscript history of Bow by D.E. Gratwick, c.1925. Ref. TH/8364.
- Manuscript history of Bromley-by-Bow by Coad, 1902. Ref. TH/8366.
- East India Company records (re-listed), 1654-1870. Ref. TH/8367.
- St. George's German Lutheran Church and St. Paul's German Reformed Church: Registers, 1763-1940. Ref. TH/8371.
- Photograph albums of buildings in Stepney (14 vols.), 1903-1957. Ref. TH/8373.
- Morpeth Street Central School: Hounours Book, 1912-1939. Ref. TH/8382.
- Diaries of Elijah Goff, coal merchant of St. George-in-the-East, 1788-1799. Ref. TH/8383.
- Thanks to David H. Behr, Chris Lloyd, Harry Watton, and Jerome Farrell for help in compiling this list.