



EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY  
BULLETIN

Number 19

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EDITORIAL

A brief Editorial this quarter to convey Seasonal Greetings to all Members and a reminder that volunteers are still welcome to assist in the "dig" at Maverton Road, Old Ford, at week-ends. Members and friends are invited to the following talks:-

"Some recent Excavations in London".- Harvey Sheldon, Feb.14th 1972,  
Harrow Green Library, Cathall Rd., Leytonstone E.11. 7.45 p.m.

"East London and the Forest".- A.H.French M.B.E., Feb.21st 1972.  
United Free Church, Woodford Green, 8 p.m.

"The work of the Passmore Edwards Museum".- I.G.Robertson M.A. Apr.17th.  
Harrow Green Library, Cathall Rd., Leytonstone E.11. 7.45 p.m.

Special Exhibitions are also being held at the Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road. There is "London Porcelain" (29/11/71-8/1/72) in which you will see examples of Bow China, and "The Victorian Greeting Card" (31/1/72-25/3/72) which contains some early examples. There is also a display for those interested in children "The Museum in Schools" (13/1-27/1/72) which illustrates the unique service the Museum provides for Schools.

Our friends at Hackney are "taking over" the Bulletin for the March issue and I am looking forward to it immensely.

A.H.F.

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NAT TRAVERS

In the heyday of the Music Halls (1880 onwards) when "Burlington Bertie from Bow" was born, there was strutting the "boards" a great Cockney character comedian named Nat Travers who was to become as famous to East Londoners as Tower Bridge. Nat Travers was Bow and vice-versa. Barrel organs churned out his famous ditties and East Enders bawled them out in the pubs. This famous character lived all his life at Bancroft Road, Bow, about a mile from the old Bow Palais (alas, now a derelict goods depot) where he held his famous "Beer songs" competitions, and which was his stronghold.

He often performed at Charity Concerts - his photographs, depicting him surrounded by East End Pearly Kings and Queens whose pearly garb he often donned, appearing in the local Press.

His first engagement was at the "Duke of Wellington" in Spitalfields for which he received the princely sum of seven shillings and sixpence. Following this, he was engaged at the "York Minster Music Hall" in Commercial Road and the "Garrick" Music Hall in Leman Street, and as he was working these two Music Halls at the same time, he was allowed a penny fare for a horse-bus to convey him to and from the two Halls.

He had a repertoire of twentytwo songs (all Coster of course) but the most popular used in his singing competitions were "Arf a pint of Ale", "Beer is Best", "The Coster's Mother", "Shake hands with a Cockney" and "The Man with a big cigar". He was a great Artiste, still performing at the ripe old age of eighty, and when he died the Cockney spirit of the East End seemed to fade. He was a "true blue Cockney" who fostered friendship to its utmost among the Cockney fraternity. Fortunately, some of his fame passed to his daughter, Ivy, whose Dancing School (The Ivy Travers Stage Academy) carries on the professional tradition, and perpetuates the memory of this famous old East Londoner of the Stage.

Wal Scott.

Music Hall veteran and historian.

ST. BOTOLPH'S PARISH REGISTER - ALDGATEDec. 7th 1618.

"Thomas Speller, a Dumbt person, by trade a smith of Hatfield Broadoke in the Countie of Essex, and Sara Earle, a daughter to one John Earle, of Great Parmgdon in the same countie, yeoman, were married by a Licence granted by Doctor Edwardes Chauncellor of the Dioces of London, the sauventh day of November Anno Dm 1618, which licence aforesaid was graunted at the request of Sir Ffrancis Barrington, knight and others of the place above named, who by their letters, certified by Mr. Chauncellor, that the parente of either of them had given their consente to the said marriage, and the said Thomas Speller, the Dumbte parties willingness to have the same performed, appeared by taking the booke of Comon prayer and his licence in the one hand, and his Bride in the other, and coming to Mr. John Briggs our minister and preacher and made the best signes he could, to show that he was willing to be married, which was then performed accordinglie. And also the said Lord Cheife Justice of the Kings Bench (as Mr. Briggs was informed) was made acquainted with the said marriage before it was solemnized and allowed it to be lawfull.

This marriage is sett downe at large because wee never had the like before."

The above entry in St. Botolph's Parish Register is a record of a resolute man's determination to marry the woman of his choice. In 1618 it could not have been easy for a dumb man to have persuaded the notables of his county to vouch for him to the Chancellor of the Diocese for the granting of a licence to marry, especially as the Lord Chief Justice had to be consulted as to the lawfulness of the marriage. The parson, or clerk, of St. Botolph's was obviously very impressed, even to the extent of drawing a hand with a pointing finger at the entry in the margin of the register. His description of the occupations of Thomas Speller and his father-in-law, however, do not tally with the Bishop's T<sub>r</sub>anscripts in which they are reversed, Thomas Speller being the yeoman and John Earle the smith. As there seems to have been a long line of farmers in the Speller family, in Hatfield Broadoak, the Bishop's Transcript is probably the correct one.

M.N.S.

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COMMON LAND

There is a well-known saying that "all land was at one time common". That is undoubtedly true, but there are few localities which can show that so great a portion of its area was common land, at so recent a date as Bethnal Green can. It has been already mentioned that Bishop's Woods were "common" at the time of Bishop Gravesend. At the period of which I am writing, the beginning of the sixteenth century - one of them still remained and covered the land of the East Ward round about Bishop's Hall, and most probably was still "common" although in the Survey, 1549-50, Sir Randolph Warren is reputed tenant of seventy acres here, Bishop's Woods included. This land remained open, if not "common" - Bonner's Fields - until some few years after the formation of Victoria Park in 1845. But there were numerous other commons in the hamlet, that portion of "West Heath" already mentioned, and apparently known as Bednal Green Common - lying within the parish at the Mile End portion of the Cambridge Road; and along the sides of Cambridge Road there were a number of smaller wastes and commons. The chief of

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these was the Green i.e. all that land on which the Museum, St. John's Church and Vicarage stands, with the adjoining recreation ground and the whole of the land - which of late has assumed some importance in local politics - under the title of the "Poor's Land". The Green, which gave a portion of its name to the locality, actually stretched several yards further south than the land at present does, coming off to a fine point. The Great Eastern Railway arches must stand upon a portion of it. Passing smaller wastes further north along the Cambridge Road was another large common, called "Cambridge Heath". This was a triangular tract of land, four and a half acres in extent. Its most northern point reached to about the spot now occupied by the "Hare" public-house, Cambridge Road; its boundaries roughly defined, are from the "Hare" in a south westerly direction, to the opening of the Oval, Hackney Road; from there south easterly along Cambridge Circus, its most southerly extremity being a few yards north of Old Bethnal Green Road. Cambridge Road formed the eastern boundary. At the period under review, Hackney Road, or as it was then known, the "Road to Hackney", did not as now cross the centre of the Heath, but turned sharp off at the Oval - of course the Oval did not exist in those days - and ran along the boundary of the Heath in a north easterly direction, apparently in the exact spot where Hare Row now is. The "Nag's Head" is a very old hostelry in the Hackney Road. There must have been another common at the Shoreditch end of Hackney Road, because Stow calls attention to one of the earliest bits of parochial "land-grabbing" there. He says: "On the right hand beyond Shoreditch Church toward Hackney, are some late built houses upon the common soil, for it was a leystall, but those houses belong to the Parish of Stebunheath". In all probability, this was a portion of "Hyde", a common field twenty-five acres in extent.

Another undoubted common was that afterwards known as "Swan's Fields", and later "Swan's Close". This was a tract of land which may be marked out by the following modern boundaries: north, Church-street; south Sclater-street; east, Brick Lane; west, coming within a few yards of Club Row; its area being upwards of four and a half acres.

All these were undoubtedly common lands. Having so much to go upon it is safe to say that nearly one half of the land of Bethnal Green was, at this period, unoccupied and common land. The rest of the land was largely in use for agricultural purposes, excepting so much as was covered by the houses of the gentry, with their pleasure grounds, and a few cottages for laborers and others.

(Extract from: "The History of Bethnal Green," 1st Ed. by Henry G.C. Allgood, Published 1894. Per H. Willmott.)

#### "THE WHITE HART" - FOREST GATE.

When Mr. Laurie Pratt was clearing out the cellar of the "White Hart", Forest Gate, of which he is proprietor, he discovered an earthenware  $\frac{1}{2}$ -gallon jar with the name of his pub "The White Hart Hotel", Gypsy Lane, engraved upon it. This was rather puzzling as the pub stands in Green Street, but a local resident who was also a long-standing regular at the pub, recalled that Gypsy Lane was the original name of the road, the name having been changed in 1801. "There were mostly cottages and fields here then" he said.

"STONE AGE" DIG AT HACKNEY.

Archaeologists from Oxford University have been given permission to excavate Stoke Newington Common in search of remains of old Stone Age man who lived from 50,000 to a quarter of a million years ago. The work is to be carried out next summer under the direction of Dr. Derek Roe, Lecturer in Prehistoric Archaeology at Oxford, and Dr. Garth Sampson, assistant professor at Oregon University, U.S.A.

They say the Common is one of the few completely undisturbed sites anywhere in the world known to have been inhabited by Palaeolithic or old Stone Age man. The oldest human remains found in Britain date from 250,000 years ago and were found at Swanscombe, Kent.

A spokesman at the Natural History Museum told the "Hackney Gazette" that the remains at Stoke Newington are likely to be of the middle Palaeolithic period, that is from 50,000 to 100,000 years old, though it is possible they could be much older and even rival those of Swanscombe.

The existence of the old Stone Age site at Stoke Newington has been known to archaeologists since the end of the last century when builders digging the cellars of houses in Alkham, Kyverdale and Geldeston-roads found large numbers of flint tools and exceptional quantities of animal and plant remains. These finds, says Dr. Roe, were carefully observed by W.G. Smith, one of the great amateur archaeologists and natural historians of the day, who lived nearby.

He wrote a book, "Man the Primeval Savage", that shows beyond doubt, says Dr. Roe, that the old Stone Age sites around Stoke Newington Common were completely undisturbed, and this cannot be said of more than a handful of sites of that age anywhere in the world. "The present state of Old Stone Age studies makes it highly desirable that the Stoke Newington sites should be reinvestigated, using the full array of modern scientific techniques now available" he writes in an application to Hackney Planning Authority for permission to excavate on the Common.

He adds that the cellar digging of the past destroyed a good deal of evidence and that they had to find areas that had not been dug. The Common was such an area and they hoped Hackney Council might be able to tell them of other likely places, e.g. sites for redevelopment which might contain former gardens. Dr Roe says they propose to dig pits about 12 feet square with extension trenches where worthwhile finds are made. The area will be surrounded by a security fence and a night watchman employed.

A Planning Committee report shows these precautions to be very necessary. It says the five-acre Common where Stone Age man once dressed his skins and fashioned his flints, is subjected to "much wanton damage". A paved section with seats and shrubs and drinking fountains has been damaged and a naturalised area where spring flowers were grown now has no sign of flowers.

("Hackney Gazette" 17/9/71)

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Would you like to know something of East London's ancient Abbeys and Religious Houses? Meet at St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate, at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, March 25th and join us in a walk around some of their historic sites.

KATE

The month of November 1971 marked the seventieth anniversary of the death of the gifted illustrator Kate Greenaway. She was born at Cavendish Street, Hoxton, quite close to the New North Road on 17th March 1846, the daughter of John Greenaway, a prominent wood engraver whose work appeared regularly in many books and magazines of the period, but because of her mother's illness Kate was taken off to Rolleston, in Nottinghamshire, before her second birthday, returning to London (but not Hoxton) two years later, revisting the countryside from time to time.

Whilst the family were living at Islington, it is recorded that among her happiest memories were her family visits to Britannia Street, in Hoxton, close to the City Road, where maternal Grandma Jones always produced Coburg loaves, toast and raspberry jam. An aunt, Rebecca, was a bookbinder and another, Mary, was a wood engraver like Greenaway Senior, so that it may fairly be said that Kate had dexterity and a fine craft tradition on her side from birth.

At an early age, she showed sufficient artistic promise to encourage her parents to enrol her at twelve years in an art school, or class, at Clerkenwell, under the auspices of the Board of Education, and her award-winning title designs in colour, at the age of seventeen, are exemplary.

The accounts that survive show that from the time of her twenty-first birthday, she was working on a variety of commissions and in various media - paintings, Christmas cards, book covers - and the influence of her early years at the Rolleston farm is seen to emerge for the first time in "Little Folks" (Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1873). By 1877 Kate had her first picture in the Royal Academy and at this time she was taken up by the colour printer Edmund Evans, himself an outstanding craftsman. There followed "Under the Window", "The Birthday Book", "Mother Goose", "Marigold Garden (1885)", "The Pied Piper" and so on. The term "epoch making" has been used to describe the work of this wonderfully gifted woman. "Under the Window" brought Kate's name to the fore and her work has been published and re-published, pirated, sold in Europe and America at a time when such rivals as Randolph Caldecott and Walter Crane were also competing to bring the art of book illustration to a pinnacle never perhaps to be seen again in so simple yet so inspired a form.

Kate moved to Hampstead in 1885 and exhibited in New Bond Street in 1891 and subsequently, always to the acclaim of old and new admirers until, in 1900, failing health led her to decline an invitation to show at the Paris Exhibition. The end came, at Hampstead, on 6th November, 1901.

Her residence in Shoreditch was not very lengthy and we have none of her original watercolours nor drawings, but Kate of "Under the Window" is appropriately commemorated in the name of the Children's Library, close to the Hackney Road - the Kate Greenaway Library.

"She said her mother never let  
Her speak a word at meals;  
"But now" said Grandmamma, "you'd think  
That children's tongues had wheels".

(from "When we went out with Grandmamma").

S.C.T.

THE DEVIL'S HOUSE

Around 1800, the only house to be seen in the wide expanse of Marsh between Bow Creek and Barking Creek was the "Devil's House". This stood on the

banks of Gallion Reach, a little to the east of the present entrance to the Albert Docks. There are many conflicting explanations of the origin of its name. Some think that "Devil's House" is a corruption of "Duval's House", a Dutchman, whom they suppose to have built it. Mr. Henry Carter, Marsh Bailiff to the borough of West Ham, spells the name "Deval", and Mr. Matthews, De Wall. Others have confused the name with that of Claude Duval, the celebrated highwayman, and imagine the house to have been his residence. There is no authority, however, for believing that he ever lived in the neighbourhood.

Mr. W. T. Vincent, in his "Records of the Woolwich District", says that he has traced the "Devil's House" as far back as 1720. Although Cox, the Essex historian of that date, makes no mention of it in his books, nor marks it on his map, Peter Muilman in 1770 speaks of it by that name. In 1802, a publication called "The Water Companion from Gravesend to London", mentions the "Devil's House" as the only landmark on the northern bank between Bow Creek and Barking Creek, and goes on to say, "The Devil's House was once a public-house, and is probably so called in derision from being part of a religious order, for the Monastery of Stratford Langthorne was possessed of lands in this part of Woolwich.

Although the explanation here given is not satisfactory in itself, it seems to afford a clue to one. In a history of Kent by John Harris, published in 1719, the author says, when speaking of Woolwich, "This parish hath 500 acres of land and some few houses (saith an old manuscript which I have seen) on the Essex side of the Thames; and there was also a chapel of ease". In 1770, Muilman repeats the story about the chapel-of-ease, "the foundations of which" he says, "are still visible. The houses are all fallen down except the "Devil's House" an alehouse near Thames Wall, much frequented in summer time." At one period it is probable that the ruined chapel-of-ease and the public house were the only two buildings visible on the bank of the river opposite Woolwich. The contrast between the purposes for which they had been erected would strike the most casual observer. According to the old lines: "Wherever God erects a house of prayer, the devil's sure to build a chapel there". This couplet may very probably have given rise to the title of the "Devil's House".

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the "Devil's House" together with the land attached, some 130 acres, was occupied by the Ismay French family. In later years it became a mere shelter for marshmen, who tended cattle on the marshes. Walter White, in his "Eastern England" published 1865, mentions the "Devil's House" as a "building with a red roof, standing all alone in the midst of the pastures" in which hundreds of Scotch cattle grazed. The house was finally bought by the Albert Dock Company, who pulled it down on making the Dock entrance, close to which it stood.

A. P. Crouch (1900).

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PAGES FROM THE PAST - DECEMBER 1871.

In Europe, the year had seen the dying struggles of the Franco-Prussian war - the French defeat at St. Quentin in January, and the capitulation of Paris which had been under siege since September. William I was proclaimed Emperor at Versailles and the peace treaty of May ceded Alsace Lorraine to the victors. Britain annexed the diamond fields of Kimberley whilst, in another part of the African Continent, Stanley met Livingstone at Ujiji and presumably uttered the now immortal words.

At home, Trade Unions were legalised on 29th June, the purchase system of obtaining commissions in the Army was abolished and the Local Govern-

ment Board was created in August. Darwin's great work on the descent of man was published and this alone must have provided endless table talk.

Beyond all doubt, the topic on everyone's lips as December dawned was "the terrible malady that had stricken the Prince of Wales" who was flickering between life and death having contracted typhoid fever following a sojourn in Scarborough where, in common with the length and breadth of the country, the drainage system was potentially lethal. On the 15th of December, the daily bulletin recorded, with a glimmer of hope, that "the dreadful fourteenth day has passed and the Prince still lives. The issue is with God".

Amidst this ever-changing scene, East London had its own pre-occupations - perhaps spurred by the near escape of the future King. A Hackney deputation to the Lea Conservancy Board spoke forcefully of the dangerous pollution of the river and under pressure from their leader, Chas. Reed M.P., the Chairman assured the deputation that the "nuisance" of the Tottenham sewage (that was at present discharged untreated into the Lea) would soon be abated.

The urge for "improvement" continued in full spate. The Hackney Literary & Scientific Institute met regularly at the Manor Rooms, Moore Street, under the patronage of the Lord of the Manor, Wm. A. Tyssen-Amhurst, and Hackney's two M.P.'s, John Holms and Charles Reed. The lecture for the month was announced as "Queer Flames", whilst in nearby Dalston, the St. Philip's Church Association announced "an interesting lecture on the chemistry of invisible substances". In respectable Bow and Bromley, the local Institute were proudly producing a Drawing Room entertainment by members of the elocution class.

Those who sought to be otherwise entertained were faced with an agonising choice. The Royal Standard Theatre in Shoreditch High Street were offering Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth & Lady of Lyons on consecutive weeknights plus a musical operetta, "The Swiss Cottage" (on every evening) and the Boxing Night Panto was 'Aladdin'. The Grecian, Shepherdess Walk, offered its patrons a Ballet Divertissement followed by "Not in Vain" and "The Motto on the Duke's Crest". The Panto was "Zig-Zag, the crooked Harlequin", whilst at Hoxton's very own "Brit", Sam Lane was directing his last Christmas Bill before passing on to his Final Curtain, leaving Sally to run the theatre for a further 30 years in the best show biz tradition. Macbeth on Monday and Tuesday let the Standard know that Hoxton also knew the Bard whilst those who were possibly less certain of their Scottish history might be regaled by Sally Lane as "The Lodger" with Adair, the modern Sampson, every evening after the play and, to conclude, "Woman, her rise or fall in life". How the hours between seven and midnight must have flown for that captive and captivated audience between pit and gallery. The Panto was "The Old Man and the Ass".

Meanwhile, outside the naptha flares burned brightly in the market, but not for one individual who was saved by P.C.193N from rolling off the parapet of the Kingsland Road bridge into the Regents Canal. Charged with attempted suicide, he told the Court he "had no intention to jump but only wanted to scare his wife whom he thought to be behind him". Having had some words with her on money matters, he had told her he could stand it no longer. Another unfortunate charged at Worship Street, had cut his throat badly because he was about to be married and "feared he should not make the lady as happy as he could desire".

A Meeting of the East and West India Dock labourers was held at the Abbey Street School Room, Bethnal Green, "for the purpose of forming a Trade Union to resist the reduction of wages from 18/- to 15/- per week, now made by the Company by their action in paying the gangers 30/- and not allowing them



overtime, thereby preventing the men from the same". It was resolved to form a Trade Union and Mr. Caulfield was appointed Secretary at 24/- weekly.

Following the closure of the Congregational Schools in Gascoigne Place, Shoreditch, which were demolished in constructing the approach to Columbia Market, a site was secured at Church Street, Mile End New Town from funds provided by the sale of the Shoreditch building. The Schools were rebuilt on the north side of Church Street with accommodation for five hundred pupils at a cost of £2700. The same denomination were busy also in South Hackney where John Morley M.P., a local resident and business man whose wools and hose remain household words today, laid the foundation stone of the South Hackney Congregational Church at the corner of Victoria Park overlooking Cadogan Terrace. A temporary iron church had been purchased from Canonbury for £350.

The public were also a little anxious regarding the adequacy of fire prevention measures. In De Beauvoir Town, it was reported, there had been three outbreaks within recent weeks and, in each instance, when the engines arrived there was no water to hand and on one occasion it took half an hour to find the right plug!

On the administrative front, the local Boards of Guardians bickered as ever, over gross expenditure for the year. In Hackney the Clerk reported that a Hackney lunatic pauper hitherto confined in Colney Hatch had escaped for the second time and had been killed by a train on the Great Northern Line near Hornsey Station.

Soup! It was observed on the question of sustenance that a quart of soup would serve a poor man and his wife for two days as there was a great deal of meat in it. This led to an interesting discussion in the course of which another member retorted that if a quart of soup cost only one penny and could be made to last for two days, then the present weekly out-relief of five shillings and three pence could be reduced!

A member complained that when he visited the male wards in the workhouse he was greeted with cries of "Pig" and "Would you like a pig's tail?". This part of the report was received with loud laughter by his fellow-Guardians.

In Shoreditch, the Guardians considered it desirable to introduce Australian meat into the Workhouse and the Workhouse Schools (including Brentwood where there were 359 children). Other Boards had tried it, declared one enthusiast, and spoken favourably of it. Further the price was much lower than that of English meat. In a further discussion on finance, it was revealed that the Shoreditch Vestry could not pay to the Guardians the £10,000 due to them because the money in hand was required for the police-rate.

At Christmas the reports from the Workhouses were as follows:-

	<u>In</u>	<u>Out-relief (adults)</u>	<u>(children)</u>
HACKNEY	749	2575	2366
Xmas Day Menu:- Roast Beef, plum pudding, beer and other extras.			
SHOREDITCH	1219	1749	1461
Xmas Day Menu:- Roast Beef, plum pudding, porter for adults and oranges etc for the children.			
BETHNAL GREEN	1044	1128	1209
at Leytonstone School :			350
Xmas Day Menu:- 5 ozs. Roast Beef, 1 lb baked potatoes, 1 lb pudding and 1 pint of ale.			

A Happy Christmas to you also!

S.C.T.