



**EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY
BULLETIN**

Number 23

December 1972

EDITORIAL

The folder of six nineteenth century Hackney views on sale at all Hackney Libraries has proved a very popular sale and reprints have been ordered. They make a very acceptable gift, particularly when framed. Sets may still be obtained for £1.00 with a detachable descriptive text, at any Hackney Library, and members who live outside Hackney may enquire by telephone (01-985-8262). I understand Tower Hamlets are hoping to publish a similar folder shortly, so now is the time to start your East London collection.

Of the two items submitted by Mr. Wilmott in the September Bulletin, only that about Mr.Green was from the "Illustrated London News". The item concerning the "Revenge" was taken from "British Battleships, 1892-1957" by Commander E.R. Pears. My apologies for this error.

Two centuries ago, the only way to get to Westminster from Greenwich with reasonable safety, was by River. Now the River route is being redeveloped by the use of hovercraft which do the journey in 15 minutes. The hovercraft skirts have had to be modified to cope with the River's floating driftwood. It is hoped that there will soon be stops along the East London River Bank for the convenience of commuters. Passengers will not have to bargain for their fares and the safety of their belongings as they did from Ratcliff and Blackwall in earlier days.

The Central Library, Bancroft Road, E.1. are putting on an Exhibition "Lost Villages of London" from January 3rd until the 24th - this should appeal to members. There is also an Exhibition from the 4th January until the 25th February 1973 at the London Museum called "The Dutch in London". The strength of Dutch influences upon economic and cultural life in London, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries, was considerable, an influence which had much to do with development in East London.

It is understood that "East London Papers" is likely to be discontinued after the next issue. This will be most regrettable for a publication which over the years has given scholarly publicity to so much of the development of East London. However, costs have continued to rise and, even with grants, the publication is not paying its way. The future of this Bulletin is also in some doubt, but for different reasons. Most of the work in connection with this Bulletin is voluntary and cost is not involved. It does, however, require support in the way of material and this has steadily diminished. This and the last issues with one or two exceptions, have been the result of one person's efforts and researches. So this final appeal is made. If twelve people would undertake to submit a article once a year, this would alleviate the problem. If you cannot write, spend an hour once a year at the local library and dig out something we don't know much about. Relevant newspaper cuttings would be of help, or information on books of historical interest.

Members are asked to note that Mr.G.Bettis has kindly taken over as Membership Secretary and all enquiries regarding subscriptions and membership should be addressed to him at 11, Osterley House, Giraud Street, London E.14.

Finally, the Season's Greetings to you all. Throughout the centuries the people of East London have never failed to celebrate in their own special way, the particular pleasures of Yuletide. Charles Dickens, who spent so much of his time among the sordid surroundings of Dockland, showed how much more real Christmas would be to those who saw how the knowledge of the past could be a gateway to the future.

BETHNAL GREEN : EXTRACT FROM VESTRY MINUTES13th February 1850

To the Honourable The Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the Minister Churchwardens Overseers and Vestrymen-Governors of the Parish of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green County of Middlesex in Vestry assembled respectfully sheweth

That the supply of water to the inhabitants of the Metropolitan districts is defective in quantity and quality unequal and inconvenient in distribution and unnecessarily high in price. That the health of the community and the comfort and habits of the poor imperatively demand a material improvement and reform in the management of the supply of this great necessary of life, which experience has proved, cannot be or at least has never been realized through private enterprize and merely commercial speculation.

That the supply of water is not a proper subject of mercantile profit but should be in the hands of parochial representatives of the public interests introduced pure and in abundance into every house whether of the rich or poor and regulated in cost by equal parochial assessments under the control of the rate-payers so that it may be conveniently and cheaply attainable and ready for the constant use of all classes of Her Majesty's Subjects.

That it is the duty of the Guardians of the Public Health of all interested in improving the condition and habits of the people and especially of the legislature and Government to carry these views immediately into practical effect.

Your petitioners therefore most humbly pray of your Honourable House that you will be pleased forthwith to take the Subject-matter in question into your serious consideration, so that a salutary measure may be immediately passed for greatly increasing the quantity and improving to the highest practicable extent the quality of the supply of Water to the inhabitants of the Metropolitan districts, upon the principle of constant service and high pressure for introducing it in sufficient abundance to the house of every inhabitant for reducing and regulating the price by application of an equal parochial assessment and for protecting the public and securing the health of the community by placing the management of the supply of Water in the hands of a public board to be elected by the ratepayers and owners of property in the various parishes included in the Metropolitan Districts.

GRANT TO LORD WENTWORTH

16th April 1550.

Grant to the King's councillor, Thomas Wentworth, Knight, Lord Wentworth, Lord Chamberlain of the Household, of the lordships and manors of Stebenhuth, alias Stepenhyth and Hackney, alias Hakeney, with their appurtenances in Stebenhuth, alias Stebenhith, Hackeney, alias Hakeny, Shordich, Holywelstrete, Whytechapell, Stratford at Bowe, Poplar, North strete, Lymouse, Radclyffe, Clevestrete, Broke-strete, Myleende, Blethenall Grene, Oldforde, Westheth, Kyngeslond, Shakelwell, Newyngtonstrete alias Hackeneystrete, Clopton, Churchstrete, Welstert, Humberton, Grovestrete, Gonneston strete alias Merestrete, Midd; and also the marshes of Stebenhuth alias Stebenhith and the mills, lands and liberties pertaining to the said manors.

As fully as Nicholas bishop of London or any of his predecessors held them. Yearly value: Hackeney 6l.9.4. and Stebenhuth 184.8.11. To hold to the said Thomas Lord Wentworth, his heirs and assigns of the King in chief by the service of the twentieth part of one knight's fee, without rendering any tenth to the King or his successors, and gift of the issues since Michaelmas last.

THE OLD-TIME CHIMNEY SWEEPS

Anyone viewing the mechanical extravaganzas of the Great Exhibition of 1851 would have been forgiven for thinking that we had at last arrived at the Golden Age of the Machine. A walk around North East London would have quickly disabused him. He would have remarked, for example, numerous gaudily coloured signs, portraying a black-faced man shouldering a long brush, and accompanied by a young lad, approaching a home with a burning chimney. Such signs indicated the houses of chimney sweeps. In an age marked by prodigies of invention and discovery, it had seemingly not occurred to anyone that a flue could be cleansed by means other than by using some half-starved waif as a human 'pull-through'. Such was (and is) human nature.

Certain of the master sweeps earned sufficient to live in a respectable locality; with such it was a mark of caste to have a back yard in which to keep the soot, rather than dump it in a cellar. But these were the elite of the profession. For the most part the East End sweeps lived without social pretensions, in houses comprehensively lacking in the amenities displayed at the Exhibition. They tended, as did the weavers, to gather together in sub-communities. Thus we know of a house in Bethnal Green rented by a master sweep, every spare room of which was let to other sweeps and their wives and families. These places were pervaded all the year round by a strong smell of soot - a phenomenon that went unnoticed by the tenants and, we are told, "every person and everything which met the eye, even to the caps and gowns of the women, seemed as if they had been steeped in Indian ink." The men, and for that matter, their consorts, were much addicted to rowdyism and fisticuffs, and squandered their money in ginshops as fast as they obtained it.

Sweeps would start as boys, often as early as the age of seven, and serve an apprenticeship. Many of them were orphans recruited from the Workhouse, and having no one to protect their interests, they were anything but pampered by their masters. But when times were good they could collect as much as 6d per day in tips which, alas, likely as not went in 'tossing and gambling in the streets.' Of course, the time would come when the apprentice (known as a 'chummey' - a corruption of 'chimney') filled out and was of no further use to his master. Then he would join the Army or the Navy, or team up with gypsies or touring actors, or as happened all too frequently, embrace a life of crime.

The climbing of chimneys "wasn't so bad as some people would make you believe" said a veteran of the trade; evidently a man of singular tastes. "In wide flues you climb with your elbows and your legs spread out, your feet pressing against the sides of the flue; but in narrow flues, such as nine-inch ones, you must slant it, you must have your sides in the angles - its wider there - and go up just that way.

But for all these refinements of technique, it was no uncommon thing for the chummy to get wedged - incurably, as the Greeks would say, and many a youngster was brought out dead of asphyxiation. One sweep has left an account which illustrates the hazards of the trade. "I had a boy once - we were called to sweep a chimney down at Poplar. When we went in he looked up the flues. 'Well, what is it like?' I said. 'Very narrow' says he, 'don't think I can get up there'; so after some time we gets on top of the house, and takes off the chimney-pot, and has a look down. It was wider at the top, and I thought as how he could go down. 'You had better buff it, Jim' says I." (meaning to strip naked). "But Jim wouldn't do it, and kept his trousers on. So down he goes and gets on very well till he comes to the shoulder of the flue, and then he couldn't stir ... Well, the people of the house got fretted like, but I says to them, 'Now my boy's stuck, but for Heaven's sake don't make a word of noise; I'll see what I can do.' So I locks the door, and

buffs it, and forces myself up until I could reach him with my hand, and as soon as he got his foot on my hand he begins to prize himself up, and he gets loosened, and comes out at the top again." However, "I was now stuck myself, but I was stronger nor he, and I manages to get out again. Now I'll be bound to say that if there was another master there as would kick up a row and get a-worritted that there boy 'd a niver come out o' that 'ere flue alive."

Like the weavers, the sweeps suffered grievously in the chill winds of trade depression. During the chartist days when money was 'bright', 3d or 6d was often as much as a sweep could get per chimney, and he was lucky if he could achieve an average of 1/- a day throughout the year.

Stanley Snaith.

REPAIR OF OLD DOCUMENTS AND ARCHIVES.

It has often been found that some documents and archives presented to libraries and museums, or brought in for inspection, identification, etc. have been "repaired" by the use of self-adhesive tape. Although such tape is convenient for the repair of current office or domestic papers, it is not intended for valuable documents and its use on these can be disastrous. The adhesive is liable to discolour badly and to bleed right into the paper, thus rendering the text illegible, and the tape itself may shrink, allowing the adhesive to exude round the edges, causing documents to stick together. These can be easily damaged when an attempt is made to separate them. There are three ways in which damaged documents can be handled in order to prevent further deterioration.-

1. The documents should be kept flat, or in a folded condition, each between two sheets of clean, white, blotting paper inside two pieces of white cardboard tied up with tape.
2. Temporary repairs can be made with "butterfly" music tape, which is a transparent tape having a water-soluble adhesive - it is available in various widths. If the document is likely to be flexed, it is wise to "pink" the edges of the tape with pinking shears as this prevents there being a hard edge between the mend and the paper.
3. Good quality tissue paper, preferably "lens tissue" or "Japanese" tissue can be pasted over tears. The tissue should be torn, not cut, to size as this makes a less visible edge and avoids the hard edge mentioned above. Where a tear comes to the edge of a piece of paper, the tissue should be folded over the edge for a quarter of an inch or so. The best paste to use is the traditional flour paste made by plain cooking flour and water in the proportion 1 oz.(av.) flour to 3 fluid ozs. of water. Alternatively, Polycell paste, made slightly thicker than usual, can be used. In each case, as little paste as possible should be used and the document should be allowed to dry under slight pressure.

In the case of documents, minute books, maps, etc. with textual material on both sides, the repair should be made with strips of "butterfly" or tissue paper affixed in such a way (between lines and in the margin) as not to obscure the text.

Parchment or vellum documents should be repaired only by experts.

Co-operation in this matter will help to ensure that historic material will be preserved for posterity in reasonable condition.

AF/UGLE/BM.

Extracts from newspaper cuttings from the Tyssen Collection in Hackney Library :

"Mr. Moreland, late Schoolmaster at Hackney, is chosen Headmaster of St. Paul's School (being in the gift of the Mercers Company) in the room of the Rev. Mr. Ayscough who hath resigned."

June 21. 1721.

To be Lett

"At Bishop's Hall betwixt Bednal Green and Hackney situated upon a Gravel, in a fine Air and pleasant prospect, a commodious House Also a Public House with a good oven for baking Buns or Cheese cakes, a stable, Garden, and several pleasant Arbours with a good Skittles Ground and a Boss Ground
N.B. This Air has given such great Relief within these few Weeks to Persons who were in a bad state of Health which is Amazement to all that knew them."

1732.

S.C.T.

From the Vestry Minutes, Bethnal Green:-

"Resolved That the broken granite in the stone yard be sold to the best advantage and that the Vestry Clerk do offer the same to Mr McAddam accordingly at 13/6d per ton." 24th January 1834.

"Resolved That the exhibition of Penny Plays opposite Harts Lane+ be considered not only as tending to demoralize the lower order of the people but that it is now become a very great annoyance to the inhabitant householders. That this Vestry do therefore strongly recommend the constituted authorities to devise means to abate so intolerable nuisance which has been too long permitted near so great a thoroughfare as Bethnal Green Road." 31st March 1834. +Now Barnet Grove.

"...That a piece of water called Wellington Pond - the Windmill in Felix Street, Hackney Road, etc. be surveyed, assessed and rated, etc. etc." 26th July 1834.

A note is made of letters received from the Vestry Clerk of Whitechapel to petition Parliament against any railroad coming through that parish and inviting Bethnal Green to join a deputation to the Secretary of State on the subject and that no rail road should be permitted to terminate within three miles of the General Post Office. 24th February 1836. (The Vestry declined to co-operate with Whitechapel).

A FOLDER OF NINETEENTH CENTURY HACKNEY VIEWS.

The six views now on sale make very fetching and acceptable seasonal gifts, particularly when framed.

They are on sale at all Hackney Libraries, price £1.00 for the set of six with a detachable descriptive text.

(Members who live outside Hackney may enquire by telephone 01-985-8262).

S.C.T.

THE CHANGING RIVERSIDE

A River Trip has been organised between Tower Pier and the Royal Docks on Saturday afternoon, 17th March 1973, embarking at Tower Pier at 2.15 p.m. The Chairman will give a commentary on the historic background of the Riverside and indicate the changes which have been and are now taking place. The fare is £1.00 (half-price for children) and as numbers are limited, names should be handed to Mr. French at the January or February Meetings, or sent to him at 36, Parkland Road, Woodford Green, Essex. A ticket will be necessary for each person.

THE EAST LONDON TABERNACLE

The East London Tabernacle Baptist Church celebrated its centenary a few years ago, but its ancestry can be traced back more than three centuries to Samuel Loveday, who was preaching near Tower Hill in 1650, and formed, in or about 1653, the fourth General Baptist Church in London. That Church moved to various places in Whitechapel, and to Commercial Road, Stepney, and in 1913 to Seven Kings, Ilford. Perhaps its most famous Pastor was Daniel Taylor, 1785-1794, the Founder of the Assembly of Free-Grace General Baptists, which soon became known as the New Connexion. Earlin in 1858, nineteen of its members became dissatisfied, and with eight other people formed a Church which met in a school-room at Chapman Street, Shadwell. On August 7th 1859, they removed to a Hall in Grosvenor Street, Stepney, and their first morning service was conducted by the Rev. John Clifford of Paddington. In June, 1860, the Rev. Thomas Freeman, B.A. was Pastor, but his stay must have been very short, for Josph Harrison, student at Spurgeon's College, was preaching there at the end of that year, and appears to have been Pastor in 1861.

Among people who were attracted to Grosvenor Hall was Frederick Wickers, a shipchandler of Ratcliff. He was a member of the ancient Congregational Church at Stepney Meeting, but being convinced that infact baptism was wrong, he was baptized by the Rev. Charles Stovel at Prescot Street. He became a member at Grosvenor Street in July 1861, and the Church Meeting that received him into membership also elected him deacon. But things were not going well with this young Church. It is possible that some of the people thought that Mr. Harrison was too Calvinistic; there was certainly financial trouble, but Mr. Wickers dealt with the problem firmly. He personally cleared the debts, dissolved the Church, and called a meeting at his own house on 2nd December 1861, at which a Particular or Calvinistic Baptist Church was formed, to have a baptised membership, but practising Open Communion. This was on exactly the same lines as the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and new Church rules were adopted, agreeing with those of that Church. Mr. Wickers thus became Senior Deacon of this new Church, and as he lived until 10th April 1915, that is for over fifty-three years and four months, it is believed that he was Senior Deacon longer than any other man has been in any Church.

Grosvenor Hall could seat about 150 people, but the congregation soon became too large for it, so Beaumont Hall in Beaumont Square was hired for evening services, and on 2nd December 1864, the third anniversary of the formation of the Church, Pastor C.H. Spurgeon opened Stepney Green Tabernacle. It was a brick building meant to accommodate about 800 people. There was a school hall below, and the Chapel was approached by stone steps outside.

In January, 1867, Archibald G. Brown began his pastorate, having been recommended by C.H. Spurgeon. Thus began the ministry of a man who for thirty years was to fly the flag of evangelism in East London and whose preaching was to have so great an effect upon the social conscience of the day. General Booth asked his advice on beginning the Salvation Army Social Relief Work. Archibald Brown resigned the Pastorate in 1896, and was succeeded by various ministries, notably F.J. Scroggie who was Pastor from 1914 until 1921, and D.H. Moore who retired in 1934. He was succeeded by the Rev. Geoffrey R. King who was Pastor from 1934 until 1954, and whose name is still high on the list of the preachers of the day. The Rev. Paul Tucker, still with the "Tab" began his work in 1955.

To revert to the building, Stepney Green Tabernacle proved far too small during A.G. Brown's ministry and the present site in Burdett Road was acquired in 1870, the neighbourhood still being suburban. The new building was massive, and there were often 3,200 people present on a Sunday evening. The Tabernacle was destroyed by bombing in 1941, and its congregation moved from place to place as

hospitality provided until the present building was erected in 1955.

The history of the East London Tabernacle is very much a history of East London for it tells the story of triumph over suffering, hope in despair, generosity in poverty, faith in darkness, and the typical East Londoner's cheerfulness in adversity.

G.E.P./A.H.F.

HACKNEY HISTORY

History comes alive in a unique Jackdaw-style information pack published by Hackney Teachers Association to mark their centenary.

It tells the story of Hackney through contemporary maps, pictures and publications, and builds up a vivid picture of a landscape which has gone through many changes over the centuries. The child of today, in his centrally-heated tower block flat, will find it hard to imagine the squalid conditions his counterparts suffered in the Victorian era. He will find it even harder to accept that only 200 years ago, Hackney was an area of green fields and sleepy villages.

Three views of Mare Street tell the story. In 1791 it was a quiet country lane, with a bridge crossing Hackney Brook. The traffic - just two men on horseback. By the 19th century, the brook has been piped underground and the bridge of the new North London Railway dominates the scene. In 1920 the busy street features trams and open top buses. The only constant landmark in the three pictures is the spire of St. John's Church.

Maps and pictures may show what Hackney looked like, but only first hand accounts can tell us how people lived. The pack includes extracts from "A child of the Jago", a story of the Victorian slums, and A.S.Jaspar's "Hoxton Xhildhood" of a generation later. Also included - a playbill of the Hoxton Music Hall, and an item on Cockney dialect.

The story of Hackney is often the story of strife. Two publications from the 1926 General Strike illustrate the strong feelings at that time. While the official strike bulletin urges on the workers, the "Hackney Gazette" emergency bulletin talks of "tyrannical powers" and "avowed enemies of the Constitution". The results of another kind of strife are told in the report of an air raid warden on the 1941 bombing of houses in Rock Road.

"If it wasn't for the house in between" named after an old music hall tune, was compiled by local teachers Richard Whitburn and Ken Warpole. It is obtainable from Centerprise, 34 Dalston Lane, E.8. price 60p.

Per S.C.T.

"GROUNDSEL AND GROTTOS"

"A pen'orth of Groundsel for the birrd, ma" was a familiar vendor's cry in the street markets of East London some fifty years ago. For a penny, a liberal supply of the weed, gathered probably from the Dockland wastes or Canal banks by gypsies or other itinerants, would be handed over for the temporary satisfaction of the canary at home. What East London owed to these pathetic little birds, bought for a few pence from unknown and doubtful characters at the "local" or among the teeming Sunday morning crowds in Club Row. No-one seemed to worry about psitticosis in those days. Cramped in their tiny wire cages, suspended precariously by a nail outside the window, thousands of these little things poured out their hearts in song on a sunny Sunday morning, bringing light and pleasure into the gloom of many a morning after in the Grosvenor and Peabody Buildings and other slums of East London. Few will regret the passing of the slums and with them the cramped conditions

under which people lived, often exceeded only by the even worse conditions many of these tiny feathered beings endured. Yet I miss their song and reflect wistfully upon the message of hope and comfort they gave.

Talking of birds, do you remember the Sunday morning pigeon-races? Many East Londoners kept a pigeon-house in the backyard. The pigeons, piled into a basket, were railed to a suburban station, ringed, and released. The owners of the first birds home had to remove the ring and run to a check-point, usually a well-known local hostelry, to claim their prize. In these days of coronaries, one shudders at the thought of these middle-aged and often corpulent bird-fanciers flying along East London's streets to get to the check-point first.

Which brings me to the grottoes. We are all familiar with the rather tiresome "Penny for the guy" cry from children in November, but during the early part of the century one would often be approached with "A penny for the grotter, mister" and by the side of the road, street, or house, would be a little structure made from grass, shells and coloured stones. Some would be very simple, others elaborately adorned with pictures, ribbons and flowers. No one seems to know the origin of this custom. Was it a remnant from the days when devout people erected religious shrines and implored alms for some noble cause? The Keeper of Muniments at Westminster Abbey mentions this quaint custom in his memoirs but can offer no explanation. Perhaps a reader can enlighten me on this old custom.

A.E.F.

BOW BRIDGE

"The Lea and Bow and its bridge have a long association with the traditions of the great city. The medieval bridge at this point linked the main road from London with Essex and the east, and Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, in his fascinating "History of East London", develops a very interesting view when he writes: "The well-known children's singing game 'London Bridge is broken down', is usually associated with the bridge over the Thames. But the refrain 'Dance over my Lady Lea' at least suggests the possibility that the reference is to the bridge by which London was approached from the east." Sir Hubert quotes the lines from the song, "Build it up with penny loaves," and "Build it up with iron bars," and "Gold and silver we have not got,". He then points to their correspondence with known events in the history of the bridge's maintenance according to documents of 1303 - an Abbot of Stratford's allowance of loaves to a repairer, an iron railing being set up and collapsing, and a custodian extorting money from travellers. I would like to think that Sir Hubert's suggestion is right, and that a proper chapter of East London's history was stolen by "another place" and should now be restored".

("East London" - Robert Sinclair).

LOCAL WHISKY

John S. Davidson, of the North East London Polytechnic, Stratford, in a letter to the "Essex Countryside" (January) makes the following interesting observation: "Alfred Barnard in "The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom" 1887 (reprinted 1969) describes the Lea Valley Distillery, Stratford, London. It was the only malt distillery in England and its annual output of grain and malt whisky totalled 460,000 gallons. I believe the distillery was situated in Warton Road, London E.15, and was still operating in 1902. Perhaps some of your older readers will be able to provide more information. I would like to know when the English decided to give up competing with the Scots."
