



**EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY
BULLETIN**

Number 26

September 1973

EDITORIAL

The Queen Mary College Authorities are considering allowing the Society the use of the former Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel near Stepney Green Station, which they recently acquired, for a local history museum and workshop. If this project materialises, it will open up a new and exciting sphere of activity for the Society and members will be urged to assist in making it a success by assisting in ways for which they are best suited. There are many items of local interest to form the basis of a museum and there are many activities which could be complementary to those already being carried out by the Bethnal Green and Passmore Edwards Museums.

The autumn Exhibition of the Wapping Group of Artists held at the Royal Exchange (Bank Station) is well up to its usual high standard. The September Bulletin is invariably too late to announce the Exhibition which is normally held during the first half of September, but if members could make a note of the Exhibition in their 1974 diaries around the 10th-15th September, they can be assured of a breath of sea air as they see these masterpieces on Blackwall Point, Bugsby's Reach and the inevitable Tower Bridge. It is pleasing to note the predominance in recent similar Exhibitions of sailing barges, lighters and tugs which, a few years hence, will have disappeared for all time west of Gravesend. Now is the time for East London photographers to photograph these craft against their East London backgrounds. In a decade or so, all opportunity will have gone.

Mr.S.C.Tongue, Archivist of Hackney Libraries, and a Member of the Society's Committee, has again kindly agreed to take over the December Bulletin. It will be refreshing to have some local history news from Hackney.

The Tower Hamlets Library are going ahead with their folder of local prints. The prints, of high quality, are now in the stage of production and members will be advised in due course of price and availability.

It should be noted that Subscriptions for 1973/74 are due on the 1st October and the Membership Secretary (Mr.G.Bettis, 11 Osterley House, Giraud Street, Poplar E.14) or the Treasurer, (Mrs.E.Thomas, 7 East Road, West Ham, E.15) would appreciate your 50p. in good time. Payment can be made at the annual General Meeting on the 17th October 1973.

A.H.F.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held at the Queen Mary College, Mile End Road, E.1
on Wednesday, 17th October, 1973, 7 p.m.

AGENDA

1. To confirm Minutes of last Meeting
2. Reports by Officers on the concluding year
3. Election of Officers
4. Programme 1973/74
5. Any other business.

After the Meeting, a brief talk will be given by Mr.A.H.French on "The Confectionery Industry of East London".

FOREST GATE, WOODGRANGE and HAM FRITH.

Three hundred years ago, the official boundaries of what was then the Forest of Waltham extended from Bow Bridge along the modern High Street and Romford Road to the borders of Romford; up through Stapleford and Epping and across to Roydon, and down the Lea to Bow Bridge again. Thus the northern part of the 'ancient vil of West Ham' was technically 'in the forest'.

Our own Stratford figured in King Charles' endeavour to extend these boundaries southward to the Thames and northward to the line of the ancient Stane Street through Dunmow to include the greater area of the Norman forest of Essex. At forest courts here in the 1630's these enlarged bounds were confirmed under royal pressure to mulct the owners of property which had been disafforested for several centuries.

Scattered about this part of Essex are place names which derived from the gates or hatches placed at the boundaries to prevent cattle pastured on the forest wastes from straying on to the roads. Aldborough Hatch, Chingford Hatch, Pilgrims Hatch and Kelvedon Hatch are examples of such derivations.

"Forest Gate" takes its name from a gate for this purpose across the present Woodford Road near the "Eagle and Child". In 1655 Edward Lawford, the Commonwealth registrar, entered in the parish register (still preserved in West Ham Church) :

"Martha an infant daughter of George and Alice Jordan both deceased was buryed from the house of William Hare at fforest gate, where it was nursed, Monday ye 9th of Aprill",

The following year he entered :

"William the sonne of William and Rachell Smith at fforest gate was baptized ye 9th August".

These furnish the first official record yet known of the use of the name "Forest Gate" as a habitation.

Woodgrange and Ham Frith have long record as estate names and between them covered a large part of the present Forest Gate postal district north of the Romford Road. Some confusion exists, as Ham Frith was sometimes used as an alternative name for the estate of Woodgrange.

Woodgrange was a grange or manor forming part of the endowment of the Abbey of Stratford Langthorne and is thought by some authorities to have been part of William de Montfichet's original gift to the Abbey with the manor of West Ham.

It passed to the Crown at the Dissolution of the Monasteries and after being leased to several personages (including Queen Elizabeth's favourite, the Earl of Leicester) it was sold into private hands some time during the seventeenth century. A large part of it eventually came into the possession of Samuel Gurney. It survived as a farm by the Woodgrange Road almost to within living memory.

Ham Frith (as its name denotes) was originally a woodland of over 100 acres, lying to the north of Romford Road, partly in West and partly in East Ham. John Meade's survey of the "King's woods in Essex" in the time of James I, says:-

"There is one Wodd lying in the said Parishes of Estham and Westham in this countie called Hamfrithe conteyninge by Estimacion one hundred acres thou halfe thereof was felled the last yeare and thother halfe is now in felling: it lyeth within three miles of the Tems and in or neare unto Waltham Forest, and is in leas unto one Mrs Colsonn widdowe"

The "coppice wood of Ham Frith" was part of the dower of Charles I's queen and at the East Ham Central Library there is a copy of the survey made by the Parliamentary authorities after the execution of that unhappy King.

Apart from the parish register entry mentioned above, there are several other early references to habitations in the neighbourhood.

Under burials in 1653 :

"Thomas Rogers a chapman or pedlar who died at the Lodge or fforest house at one Edward Evans was buried in the parish of Westham on ffriday the 24th of ffebruarie."

In 1656 also under burials :

"Marie Dalbie the wife of Mr Thomas Dalbie a stranger was Buried from Woodgrang house in the fforest on ffriday the 20th day of the (4th) moneth called Tamuz als June 1656".

(This also gives an interesting example of the Puritans' aversion to what they described as the pagan names for the months of the year and their preference for the Old Testament).

In the 18th century Forest Gate was still a very small hamlet on the verge of the Forest. An older "Eagle and Child" looked across Wanstead Flats to the grounds of Wanstead House. Apart from the large house known as The Lodge mentioned in the 1653 extract above and the Woodgrange and Ham Frith farm buildings, there was little to the east until Ilford apart from the "Three Coneyes" (The "Three Rabbits" of modern Manor Park). The nearest habitations in West Ham were round Gallows Green, otherwise Stratford Common, (now the site of the Polytechnic and Stratford Library) and at Maryland Point and Upton Cross.

A survey of 1787 mentioned twelve horse chestnuts which no doubt gave the present Chestnut Avenue its name.

In 1821 about forty houses and cottages with their grounds and gardens were grouped round the edge of the Flats along the lines of the present Capel and Forest Roads and Chestnut Avenue. The district was separately named "Forest Gate" in the parochial survey of that year. The family name of Dames appears amongst the occupiers of property. Over three-quarters of the area was still open and agricultural land.

One of the most significant entries in the 1851 Census returns was that of James Adams, Railway Station Master.

The coming of the Eastern Counties railway had brought clerks and trades people to the present Woodgrange Road and the neighbourhood was beginning to assume the large "dormitory" character we know today. Over eighty men, however, were still shown as engaged in agricultural and similar employment. The population was approaching a thousand.

Several authorities on local history have said that the forest gate was never a tollgate, but the 1851 Census described Robert Baker at the "Forest gate toll house" as a "Toll keeper", and a draft Ordnance Survey about the same time places a toll gate at that point across the road. It is possible that, with the development of the neighbourhood, tolls may have been charged for the upkeep of the main road.

In 1852 the parish of Emmanuel was formed from the old parishes of East and West Ham and originally extended from Manor Park to the Stratford boundary and from Wanstead Flats to Upton Cross. It has since been divided into the modern ecclesiastical parishes of Emmanuel, St. Saviour's, St. James and St. Mark's in West Ham and All Saints in East Ham.

About twenty years later the area north of Forest Lane was gradually filling up with houses as small plots were sold. Artisans from Shoreditch bought plots and lived in huts on them at the weekends for a short time, much as "East Enders"

in later days bought little pieces of land further out in Essex. South of the railway there was still open land between Ham Frith and Woodgrange Roads and to the east of the latter. West Ham Hall stood in its grounds on the site of the former Ham Frith farm with a driveway from Chestnut Walk. (The line of its boundary wall can still be seen in Sebert Road).

The old gate was fastened back and gradually decayed, but older residents in their eighties may still remember the gate house at the corner of Forest Street and the gate post which were finally demolished in 1881.

In the last two decades of the 19th century the estate named from the Royal residences was laid out by Mr. Cameron Corbett (who also developed Seven Kings) and the open land between Hamfrith and Woodgrange Roads was filled in by the property named from the Norfolk associations of the Gurney family.

At the turn of the century the modern pattern of roads and population was fixed and a contemporary picture shows a hansom cab and horse-drawn vehicles driving down a prosperous shopping centre. The population of the Forest Gate ward alone at the 1901 Census was 20,000.

Economic stresses in the 30's and war damage in the 40's left their mark, but the new Forest Gate rises on the site of the old Grange - still pleasantly within reach of the forest which gave it its name.

F. Sainsbury.

LEYTON

"Leyton, or Low Leyton, so named from its situation on low ground near the River Lea, is a pleasant village, chiefly consisting of respectable houses, embosomed in trees. Various antiquities have been found in this parish, but the evidence of its having been the site of a Roman station, though supported by Camden, and some other antiquaries, does not appear to be sufficiently strong to warrant its being positively asserted. Camden himself speaks with hesitation; and though willing to suppose it the DUROLITUM of Antoninus, from its name Leyton, or the town on the Ley, retaining some traces of the former appellation which "in British signifies Water of Ley", acknowledges that, to justify this opinion, the distance of DUROLITUM from London (fifteen miles) must be regarded as inaccurate. It is therefore most probable that the remains discovered at Leyton, and in its neighbourhood, belonged only to some Roman villas. That the arguments for the site of DUROLITUM being in this parish are not incontestable, is evinced by the contrariety of opinions respecting that station: Baxter places it at Waltham, Salmon at Cheshunt, and Stukeley at Romford. The following particulars of Antiquities discovered here are given by Gough from a letter of Mr. Lethieullier's, "In the year 1718, Mr. Gansell (then owner of the manor house) having occasion to enlarge his gardens, on digging up about two acres of ground, found under the whole, very large and strong foundations; in one place all stone, with considerable arches, an arched doorway with steps down to it, but filled up with gravel. In many of the foundations were a great quantity of Roman tiles and bricks, mixed with more modern materials, and several rough and broken pieces of hard stone, some part of which, when polished proved to be Egyptian granite; two large, deep, wells, covered with stone; and in digging a pond, after the workmen had sunk through a bed of clay about ten feet, they met with a great quantity of oak timber, mortized together like a floor, grown very hard and black, but uncertain how far it reached. Several Roman brass and silver coins, both Consular and Imperial, to the time of Julius Caesar, were scattered about; as well as some silver coins with Saxon characters. The ground where these discoveries were made, adjoins the Churchyard where, some time before, a large urn of coarse red earth was found."

The Church at Leyton is of brick, and consists of a nave, chancel and north aisle; with a tower at the west end. The interior walls are covered with escutcheons and monuments, many of them in commemoration of eminent persons who have been interred here. Among the tombs in the chancel, is a memorial of the much-celebrated Historian and Antiquary, JOHN STRYPE, who, by license of the Bishop of London, though never inducted, held this vicarage during the long period of sixty-eight years. He was buried here in 1737, at the age of ninety-four. In the north aisle is the monument of Charles Goring, Earl of Norwich, who died in 1670; and a marble tablet to the memory of Mr. William Bowyer, a learned and eminent Printer, whose life as written by Mr. John Nichols, his apprentice, partner, and successor, and at whose charge the tablet was erected, contains many interesting particulars of the State of Literature and of Literary Characters, through a great part of the last century. Mr. Bowyer died at the age of seventyfour, in the year 1777.

At Leyton is a Free-School for twenty boys of this, and the adjoining parish of Walthamstow; a School of Industry for thirty girls; and four Sunday Schools, supported by subscription, in which 120 children receive education. Sir Thomas Roe, the first Ambassador to the East, was born in this parish about the year 1580. In 1604 he was knighted, and went on a voyage of discovery to the West Indies. In 1614 he was sent by James I, on an Embassy to the Great Mogul, from whose Court he removed to that of the Grand Signior, where he obtained very essential advantages for his countrymen. On his return, he was made Chancellor of the Garter, and a member of the Privy Council. He died in the year 1644. The celebrated Alexandrian Manuscript of the Greek Testament, of which a facsimile was published by Dr. Woide a few years ago, was brought by Sir Thomas into this country."

From "The Beauties of England and Wales," by Edward Wedlake
Brayley and John Britton, published 1803.
Submitted by Mr. H. Willmott.

EAST LONDON'S MIDDLE CLASS

We hear much of the wealthy and influential people who lived in East London in the past - the Captains and maritime dealers of Ratcliff, the Ship-owners and builders of Poplar, the officials and merchants of Stratford, the academics and traders of Hackney. The list of great names is a long one and we have followed the fortunes and misfortunes of so many of them.

We have also heard much of the poor of East London, the seafarers and apprentices, the dockers, labourers, scavengers, costers and sweeps - many of them human driftwood on the wave of the Industrial Revolution.

We have heard very little of the silent, middle-class, who for a century and a half have kept East London "ticking over". The enormous developments in this area particularly around the middle of the 19th century, where whole highways were constructed, churches and schools sprang up, and thousands of homes, good and bad, appeared almost overnight on what had been mainly virgin soil, needed and acquired a background of support far beyond what the authorities could provide.

The Church Commissioners provided much of the money for their churches and it was not difficult to find incumbents, but it was the local middle-men, artisans, traders, etc. (and particularly their women-folk), with a sufficient sprinkling of the lower paid groups to gain the Church a place in local affairs and keep its Sunday School supplied, who kept the churches going. The development of the Salvation Army in East London was largely due, not to the converted drunkards and gamblers who merely provided a shop window, nor to the big contributors whose donations went mainly to big projects, but to the thousands of shopkeepers, clerks,

brokers, teachers, etc. who gave their time and money to a cause to which they had pledged themselves. Some of Methodism's greatest preachers and scholars made their name in East London, but it was not their names, nor those on the foundation stones which really kept Methodism alive - it was the local draper, grocer, public servant, etc. who attended church regularly with his family and was at the helm of church activities. The Roman Catholic Church was probably weakest in this sense. The Catholic churches at the turn of the century were crowded, but their adherents were predominantly Irish labour who were desperately poor. Only the discipline of that Church could have kept it going financially, but there was still a nucleus of professional and semi-professional people "who were always there".

School life, hospitals and local administration, already dull, would have been a great deal less effective without the Committees and Boards of local personalities which gave them a soul. It is true that not all people so involved acted always in the best public interest, but the vast majority were devoted to the public cause and served it selflessly. From time to time, philanthropic people and institutions built clubs and societies and sponsored projects, but it was the background of devoted people who, in many cases voluntarily, carried the projects into effect.

This is disappearing everywhere, but particularly in East London. It can be said, in many cases quite justifiably, that better conditions do not require the needs of the past, and people should no longer have to feel indebted to "superiors" financially. In this respect we are capable of looking after ourselves.

But what society always needs and what we are losing today is people "who are always there". Those who formulate programmes, do correspondence, accounts and minutes, who attend to problems, open up and close, make the tea, clean up, carry the can, and support those who are weak in their particular sphere of activity. How many parsons are desperately striving to cope with these things always done by a layman or woman in the past? How many clubs and societies are grinding to a halt because although membership is numerically good it melts like the crowd when the busker's hat is passed round, at the mention of someone required to do a job of work? If television had been invented a century or so ago, one wonders how many of those who were the mainsprings of social activity and progress would have found the time or inclination.

A.H.F.

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, BOW

How old is the parish church of St. Mary, Stratford Bow? The question has never been satisfactorily answered, but there is evidence that a licence to build a chapel was obtained from the Bishop of London in 1311, when Edward II was on the throne, and that the site was given by his successor, Edward III, who for this reason is credited with being the founder of the church.

Until the church was built the inhabitants of Stratford Bow and Old Ford had to make their wearisome journey to Stepney Parish Church, along roads that were often impassable in bad weather; this was one of the reasons they asked for a building of their own to worship in. The License stipulated that the inhabitants were to assign a sufficient income for the chaplain to attend divine service on all the "great holidays" at the mother church of Stepney, and to contribute to its repair. Bow, it might here be said, was at that time part of the parish of Stepney.

Some years later there was disagreement between Stepney and the people of Bow who wanted to be independent of the mother church, and in 1497, when Bow had lost the struggle, an agreement was drawn up whereby the inhabitants promised to acknowledge themselves parishioners of Stepney, and their chapel subject to that

church. This meant they had to attend Stepney Church twice a year, viz. on the Feast of St. Dunstan (being the dedication Fest of Stepney Church), and on the third holy day, in Whitsun-week.

At the time of the historical battle for supremacy between the Cavaliers and Roundheads, Bow was a rural town, its people mainly peaceful and law-abiding, but the quiet was rudely disturbed one day in 1648 when fighting took place in the vicinity of the church and Bow Bridge between rival factions, when Colonel Whalley and his "Ironsides" followed and attempted to take a Royalist party camped on Stratford Green. Receiving warning, the Cavaliers attacked and drove back Whalley's men towards Mile End, but were themselves opposed by the inhabitants of Bow who were forced to take refuge in the church. Surrounded by soldiers on horse and foot the people were induced to come out and go home quietly, and made to promise never to fight the King's men again.

The minister's salary in the days of Henry VIII was £7 per annum; it appears he was given what the parishioners could afford to give. Fulk Bellars, minister in 1654, was more fortunate for the sum of £92 was voted for his use. It was not until 1730 that an Act was passed providing a maintenance of £40 a year to the then Rector, Robert Warren, and his successors. The Rector was also to receive "and enjoy all surplice fees and perquisites..... over and above the house for the habitation of the said Rector..... and over and above all gifts, bequests and profits whatsoever."

The people of Bow renewed their claim for independence at the beginning of the 18th century, and in 1719 St. Mary's ceased to be a chapel-of-ease to Stepney, Bow becoming a parish in its own right. The fact that the Deed of Consecration is illegible in parts is due to a fire which took place in April, 1747, when the tower (in which it was customary to keep church documents) was damaged and the clock destroyed.

In Old Ford Road, not far from the church, stands the Five Bells Public House, its name probably being derived from the fact that St. Mary's had originally five bells in its peal. They were given to the church in 1760, the principal subscriber being John Cook, collar maker to the King; a sixth was added in 1797, and two others in 1858.

Because of the crowded condition of the church and churchyard an appeal was made to Parliament in 1824 for power to purchase the old market-place (then disused) at the east end of the church, and a tavern and some houses at the west end. Shortly after the Bill was passed on 20th May 1825, demolition of the buildings began and the cleared area used to extend the burial ground. There have been no interments in the church since 1846, and in the churchyard since 1854.

Unless kept in a good state of repair time plays havoc with buildings, and perhaps neglect contributed to the falling down of the tower in January, 1829, although it was probably due largely to a severe storm raging at the time. The tower was rebuilt, but by 1890 there was great concern as to the safety of the church. so much so that six years later there was talk (and a lot of controversy) of demolishing it. Money contributed to a fund created in 1898 saved the building, and it was carefully restored under the direction of Osborne C. Hills, an architect who had been closely associated with the district for many years.

Escaping damage in the war years of 1914-18 the building was not so fortunate in the 2nd World War, the tower being demolished and the rest of the structure receiving a heavy blasting in May, 1941. On November 30th 1952, residents heard the bells ring out again when the repaired church was re-dedicated by the Bishop of London. In his address the Bishop referred to the church dating back to 1311, and remarked that when there came an end to the church, then would be an end to history.

St. Mary's has changed little in appearance over the past century or so, but those who knew it before the last War will notice the tower has a much changed look about it. The original stone could not be used in rebuilding and it had to be constructed of red bricks, surmounted by a small white cupola with a four-faced clock.

A. L. Hellicar.

OUT AND ABOUT

At some time after the building of the East India Docks there was placed on the dock wall, near the main entrance, a small and unpretentious drinking fountain inscribed - "In memoriam - Charles Kingsley - F.E.K.". When the East India Dock Road was widened between Poplar Hospital and Abbott Road in 1912-13 the fountain was removed and re-sited just inside the Tunnel Gardens. It had to be moved again when work on the duplicate Blackwall Tunnel and approach commenced some years ago. It now appears to be lying somewhere in the West India Dock and it is not known whether there is any intention to re-erect it.

Scarcely an object of beauty or a worthy memorial to the author of that children's classic "The Water Babies", nevertheless it was the only memorial in London to the famous writer (apart from the bust by Woolner in Westminster Abbey). We have often wondered why it was erected in Poplar for there appears to have been no connection between Charles Kingsley and Tower Hamlets, but perhaps somebody with a little more knowledge might, some day, enlighten us on the matter.

There stood in Bromley Recreation Ground two stone figures, male and female, on either side of the arch or gateway which formerly adorned the old Northumberland House, Whitehall, demolished in 1873-4. The Recreation Ground occupies the site of "Tudor House" which dated from the end of the 16th century, and in its later years passed to the ownership of George Gamon Ratty, public contractor, who died in 1894. During his residence the house was known locally as "Ratty's House". Ratty may have had something to do with the demolition of Northumberland House; at any rate he purchased the gateway for his garden, adding the stone figures on either side. Damaged during the last World War, and subsequently more by vandals, the figures became little more than debris, and were eventually taken away and, it is presumed, broken up.

Why was Hancock Road, Bromley, so named? The reason for naming many of the roads and streets in Poplar has been lost in obscurity, but recently a book was brought to our attention which might provide an answer to this question. "The life and work of Robert Hancock" by Cyril Cook., published in 1949, is an account of the life of the 18th century engraver and of his designs on Battersea and Staffordshire enamels, and Bow and Worcester porcelain. Prior to 1753, all porcelain and enamels were decorated by hand-painting. In that year and the subsequent period to 1756 a process of transferring designs from engraved copper plates was developed, and in the latter year the new method had reached the Bow Porcelain Works. The new art was closely associated with Robert Hancock, born at Burslem, Staffordshire in 1731, and who worked at Bow for a short time in 1756. He died in 1817, 48 years before Hancock Road was laid out, and it seems likely was remembered when the question of naming the road was being considered.

A. L. Hellicar

OBSERVATION

We are continuing to lose many of our boundary stones, plaques, bollards, foundation stones, etc. owing to the bulldozer and vandalism. Please report to one of the Committee any demolition commencement or other danger to our local landmarks.