



**EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY
BULLETIN**

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EDITORIAL

It is a pleasure to give our Chairman a well earned 'breather' by writing a few pages from Hackney where interest in local history and archaeology has never been higher. In recent months, stimulated by a discussion programme, several people have enquired about the site of early refuse tips and gone off, hopefully, to Hackney Marshes to look for vases, bottles and all those discards of the Victorian era which are now being so eagerly sought after - and are to be seen on offer at such ridiculous prices. We were delighted, some time ago, to learn of a glazed earthenware water-jug, c.1840, inscribed "J. Baums, White Lion, Hackney Wick" which had come to light during sewer works at the corner of Eastway, and gratified when the proprietor presented it to Hackney for the Archives Department.

In this "underground" connection, congratulations are due to Messrs. Granick and Rayden for the excellent display, at the recent Local History Conference, of clay pipes, street name plaques and that gorgeous earthenware chamber pot! Keep digging fellows.

Finally, on behalf of the Chairman and your Committee, may I wish all members a Happy and Peaceful Christmas and some fruitful local research, be it ever so humble, in 1974.

S.C. TONGUE
Archives Department, Hackney

(Thanks must also be extended to the Hackney Borough Librarian and the staff of the Administration Department for duplicating these pages year by year. Happy Christmas!)

A man of his time;
In memory of John Bellamy, J.P.

Mr. John Bellamy, Shoreditch boy, died in September in his 90th year. Because of our ten years of delightful friendship, and out of warm affection, I venture to reprint here, by courtesy of the Borough Librarian of Hackney, the first part of an edited transcript of a taped interview with him which was first published in Profile, the magazine of the Library Services, some years ago.

"The work of rebuilding Shoreditch goes on, albeit slowly, but the fact that it does continue gives pleasure to those of us who knew something of the housing conditions as far back as the turn of the century. At that time we seldom heard of a house that contained a bathroom.

In Shoreditch, so far as I knew, the only public bathing facilities we had as kids was a pool behind a private house in Shepherdess Walk. We knew it as the Wenlock

Baths, kept by a man named Tom Thacker. It was here that I won my hundred yards certificate. I fancy there was an arrangement with Tom Thacker and the School Board for London whereby the scholars were taught to swim, hence the certificates, and the date was 1895-6 when I was twelve years old.

Prior to 1914 the population of Shoreditch was 111,000 and whilst there were amongst them a good proportion of skilled artisans the greater number were semi-skilled or unskilled and the unemployment among these latter was always considerable. So of course was the extent of their poverty, which often reached the point of destitution and premature death, especially among the newly born. The scourge of continual unemployment took the heart out of parents so that children were often neglected, ragged and dirty. Yet, strangely, the bulk of these - somehow and from somewhere - managed to get food; some begged it, some borrowed it and others pinched it. Such is the instinct to survive. Among the many, and often long, periods of unemployment some entered into crime, some became 'dippers' (pickpockets) some burglars and, because of the degree of efficiency many of them achieved, it was said that Hoxton bred the finest brand of crooks in the country. They would take the milk out of your tea.

I once knew a Shoreditch burglar. He was attached to a political party, and whilst addressing an open air meeting he was asked by a member of the audience why he was allowed on the Party's platform. He replied "It takes a man with guts to be a burglar and that you haven't got". I thought "How brazen can you get?"

I was born in Walthamstow on 30th March, 1884, and our first home after Walthamstow was in Hoxton Street over the Undertaker's shop which is now owned by Messrs. Hayes and English but at that time was owned by Mr. Hayes. I was then only three months old, and from then until I was fourteen we had twenty-one different abodes. We just could not pay the rent.

The first school I can remember in any detail was St. John's Church School in New North Road (which was demolished about 1965) and at that time we lived in Sylvia Street, New North Road. It was very seldom that I paid the weekly twopence for my education because it was not often that we had the twopence to spare. I remember at that time the 'knife-board' buses that travelled from Highbury and beyond in the mornings. The passengers sat back to back, from one end of the open bus to the other, and as they passed the school we would give a cheer and would scramble for the pennies which some of the passengers might throw into the road. I think that my next school was in St. John's Road (now Pitfield Street Youth Centre). About forty years after leaving I returned and sang a song to them that I had sung in the same class when I was a pupil and later still I was a member of the school management committee. After that I went to Wellington Street. I was at the latter school for three years and it is a period on which I often look back. I remember that I had very little to eat for dinner at this time and used to fill up on quaker oats and water and a bit of sugar. A pal of mine often stayed away from school to mind the kids and to make the porridge, which I enjoyed with him.

I can remember hiding under a stall in Hoxton Street sorting out rotten apples and on one occasion looking down and there was my medal for regular attendance. I thought to myself even then as a kid that it didn't make sense. If you had the

money, of course, food was not difficult to come by. There was a shop in Hoxton which would give you a cut off the joint and two veg. for 2½d. and there was also Manze's the eel and pie shop. He used to sell a half-penny worth of eel liquor, in a basin with a spoon, and a ha'porth of chips. A bowl of liquor and more potatoes than you could get in the bowl for a penny. If you bought a penny three farthing loaf they would give you a 'makeweight' which was a separate piece of bread cut to make up the weight. Cracked eggs were three pence a dozen at this time.

Talking about food, I remember a painter friend of mine. His wife belonged to a family who had a fair income but he wasn't well off. There came a time in the week when he was broke. His wife was determined to stick to her pride. It was Friday morning and she wanted to get him some meat for his tea. This was in Goldsmith's Row and she looked in the window of the butchers and saw a mutton chop. "Will you weigh that for me please" she said. "Threepence halfpenny madam" said the butcher. She nearly had a fit. All she had in her pocket was threepence and she had to walk out of the shop without it. Her pride was humble and it is an incident I have never forgotten.

Unemployment was serious. I have seen a note from the Hackney Gazette of 1884 - the year I was born - and it said that a Hackney draper advertised for an assistant and had five hundred applications for the post. If that was true it was some indication of the extent of the unemployment problem. I had a number of jobs as a youngster - some of them when I was still at school. When I was twelve I used to deliver coal. We had been in the workhouse and when we came out I had to help mother to build a new home and had to take every opportunity that presented itself, to earn money.

I sometimes recall the incident of our entry into the workhouse. Dad had left home the day before to look for work and found none. This must have been the end of the road, for on the following morning Mum received a letter from him in which he wrote to the effect that as he could not find the money to feed his family it would be better for them and for herself if she took them all into the 'House'. "At least", he wrote, "you would all get the food which I cannot provide. God knows I have tried but it is hopeless."

On that same day Mum sent me off to school with instructions to ask my teacher for a soup ticket; this I got and in the meantime she had secured another. With these we collected 2 cans of soup from Jackson's soup kitchen while Mum had found some bread from somewhere. When the feast was over, with Mum leading her 5 sons we set off on the short journey to the 'LUMP', the workhouse in Hoxton Street.

After a few days Mum had to meet the Board of Guardians. After she had told them of our plight she persuaded them to set her free with me to fend for ourselves and to try to rebuild our home.

It proved a long, hard trail but fortunately after a year or two we reached our goal and although Mum had kept her word she and Dad never met again.

I delivered coal until past ten o'clock at night. The coal merchants premises were in St. John's Road nearly opposite the school. I stuck to that job

because I got in with the family and had some good eats there and I was loath to lose it; but I did, and then I got a job turning the wheel of a box mangle. It was about five feet long by about two feet wide and I had to turn the handle. A heavy weight was put into the box so that it had the effect of ironing the clothes. I used to work after school hours on Friday until about eight o'clock at night and then on Saturday afternoon. I used to go home dead tired but I got one and three-pence for it. Then I took a job with the Schoolkeeper at Wellington Street School.

When school ended I went straight into the school keeper's house to have tea - two slices of bread and jam and a cup of tea - and then into the school and set about helping him to clean up. I don't know at what time I finished but I got eighteen pence a week for that. Another job I had after school hours was in a polisher's shop mixing up the white plaster filling. You spread it over the article, rubbed off the surplus and covered the wood with linseed oil to bring out the grain. That was in Rivington Street, off Curtain Road."

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Other men's flowers

Congratulations to the Reverend Ian Brooks, Assistant Curate, on the publication of The Parish of Saint Mary, Stoke Newington; a short history. Painstaking research and careful writing make these twenty large pages (with six illustrations) a very good buy indeed at only 30p plus postage. Available from the author at The Rectory Flat, S. Mary's Church, Stoke Newington Church Street, N16 9ES.

Congratulations also to the Local Historian (formerly the Amateur Historian) on reaching its twenty-first year of publication. Since 1961 the Standing Conference for Local History has been responsible for the regular appearance of this so valuable quarterly (and, incidentally, many happy returns to the S.C.L.H. which was founded in December 1948). I just do not know how, even with the financial support of the National Council of Social Service, it is possible to offer four issues annually for £1.50 post free. What a Christmas present for some one.

Moving up the price-scale - but back in Hoxton - there may be some readers who have not yet heard of May Hobbs. Born to struggle (Quartet Books £2.50) tells the story of one person's struggle "with a sharpness and wit that is always on target, refusing to give in to bitterness". The other aspect of May Hobbs' struggle culminated in her attempt to organise her fellow officer cleaners into a union and the now famous strike at the Ministry of Defence in 1972. Written straight from the heart, the language is at times a little basic - so be warned.

Finally, another "struggler", in a reduced format, is represented by Dot Starn's small autobiography When I was a child. Published and printed by Hackney W.E.A. and Centerprise Publications, 34 Dalston Lane, E.8. (close to Dalston Library) at 15p, this childhood reminiscence forms part of Hackney W.E.A.'s larger, and continuing project on local social history, called A Peoples' Autobiography of Hackney, a project which aims, commendably, to build up a record of the area through publishing documents, photographs and such transcribed tape recordings as Dot Starn's. Yes, its all happening in Hackney and posterity will be enriched for the efforts of Ken Warpole and his colleagues on this project.

"170 years on: historical notes on
Clapton Park United Reformed Church
('The Round Chapel')"

These notes form the substance of a lecture delivered to a joint meeting of the East London History Society, the Clapton Historical Society and Church Members, on 17 April 1973, at the Church.

The Church now worshipping at Lower Clapton was constituted on 6 March 1804 and the founder members were a small group who had broken away from Ram's Chapel, Homerton. Stephen Ram, variously described as a goldsmith or banker served as a Vestryman of Hackney Parish between 1727 and 1746.

In 1722, he had purchased for £2,300 the Homerton estate of Sir Thomas Cooke which, some sixty years earlier, had been described by the Revd. Dr. Hamilton in A short account of the gardens near London as "... Very large and not so fine at present... There are two greenhouses in it but the greens are not extraordinary because one of the roofs, being made a receptacle for water, overcharged by weight, fell down last year upon the greens and made a great destruction among the trees and pots..."

On this site Stephen Ram built a chapel for the use of his family and his friends. It is said that this action may have resulted from a dispute over a particular pew at the parish church of S. John at Hackney. Certainly, the dates coincide broadly for, on 22 Oct 1726 the Vestry Minutes record that "Mr. Stephen Ram, being refused the sole use of pew number thirteen at the upper end of the south aisle, ... requested that it should be equally refused to any other particular family ..." In fact, it was not.

Ram died in 1746, without issue. The estate passed via his brother to four individuals who inaugurated a proprietary chapel, still within the Anglican communion, in 1776; John Eyre was appointed as clergyman about 1785. He was an active evangelist, a founder member of the London Missionary Society, c.1794, and opened a school in Well Street about this time; in 1803 he inaugurated, with others, the Hackney (or Homerton) Theological College for the purpose of evangelising preachers in the southern counties.

Eyre died in the same year. His successor appears to have been far more orthodox in his churchmanship and many supporters withdrew. Of these, seven met in a room at the Theological College where one of their number, John Pye-Smith was resident tutor. This small meeting asked him to lead them and he was ordained on 11 April 1804.

Slowly the meeting grew; members were received by transfer from other (often City) churches as the parish of Hackney increased in numbers. The population at the 1801 Census was 12,730; at 1821 it had grown to some 22,000 and increased during the following decade by almost one thousand annually. Students at the College

may also have supported the Meeting which, by November 1810, was sufficiently established to take the lease of the Old Gravel Pit Meeting House off Morning Lane (fronting what is now Chatham Place). This building had been vacated by the Unitarians because of fears as to its stability but the apparently stranger faith of the newcomers led them to take a three year lease, with an option of fifty-eight years thereafter.

Even so, transfers of membership were not received lightly and the case of Thomas Pilby Burford of the Antipoedo baptists in Shore Place, Hackney, illustrates this point. He and his wife applied for transfer but the Homerton Meeting "made most careful enquiries to satisfy themselves that the causes of separation were questions of opinion and doubtful disputation which do not affect his Christian character."

Early in 1846, in the forty second year of John Pye Smith's pastorate, when infirmity began to tell of his 72 years the Revd. John Davies was appointed Co-Pastor. He lived at Upper Clapton and was Pastor at Aldermanbury Postern, City, which church was shortly to become a casualty of re-development. Four years later, on 30 December 1849, and increasingly infirm the Pastor resigned his charge and an era ended. He died in 1851 and was buried in Abney Park which had succeeded Bunhill Fields as one of the Dissenters' places of burial.

The Gravel Pit Chapel was enlarged in 1853 to meet the needs of a population which had quadrupled since 1801. Edward Ellis of Fenchurch Street was the architect and the building, now in industrial occupation, still stands in Chatham Place below the school. John Davies' quiet pastorate continued for eighteen years. He was said to be one of the best pulpit teachers in Congregationalism and a contemporary said "We never had a sermon that we did not wish longer". He retired in 1867 after a pastorate of twenty-two years but his Minutes are rarely very full and give only the broad outline of the Church in these years.

Dr. James Spence succeeded Davies. The ever increasing support for his predecessor, the development of Hackney - and of Clapton in particular - and the reputation which the new Pastor brought with him from the Poultry, City, emphasised the inadequacies of the chapel at Homerton.

During the first year of his Pastorate, one hundred and thirteen persons were received into membership, sixty eight of whom were by transfer. The lease, as noted earlier, was to expire in 1871 however so there was neither point nor possibility in discussing an extension.

(To be continued)

A Hackney Diary

The diaries and law notes of Sir Dudley Ryder cover the period 1715-1756. In shorthand, the greater part consists of notes of trials, particularly between

1746 and 1756 - the year of his death - when he was Attorney General and Chief Justice, but the early section, 1715 - 1716, when Ryder was a law student at the Middle Temple is of particular interest for the record of his frequent visits to his father's house at Hackney. He had been at a Nonconformist academy in Hackney, one of those excellent schools forced upon the Dissenters by the persecution of Church and State and Defoe's praise of these schools, as represented by the neighbouring academy at Stoke Newington, is confirmed by the accomplishments which Dudley Ryder had acquired in Hackney. The extracts which follow are taken from William Matthews' transcription of The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716 (Methuen, 1939).

"1715. Sunday, July 3

Came to Hackney in the stage coach with a merchant and a gentlewoman that lives in Yarmouth. Her husband deals in corn beyond the sea. Dreamt a very disturbing dream about the Pretender, that he was come and had got possession of the throne, that I was myself a very active man against him. Went to meeting in the afternoon, heard cousin Billio. He has a very ill manner and method in prayers. (The Revd. Robt. Billio of S. Thomas's Square Chapel, Mare Street). Father uneasy to hear the bellows blow because it consumes the coals too fast."

"1715. Sunday August 28

Rose at past 7. Found my leg pained me, had it rubbed with Hungary water. Found it easier. Put on a piece of flannel and so went to church with it. After church stayed with Cousin Ryder and Mrs. Loyd. They had their house robbed last night of about £30 of plate."

"1715. Sunday, November 20

Young Defoe came to the meeting in the afternoon and sat in our pew. He had some company with him. I was concerned lest he should go home with me. He would expect a bottle of wine, which I had not. However, I asked him but he did not go with me."

LOOKING BACK

by John Bellamy (continued from page 4)

Between the time we left the workhouse and I went to work I used to sell toys. I remember mother would go and leave two shillings on the mantelpiece on Saturday morning. After I had cleaned up the other room I used to go and buy toys at eight-pence a dozen in Bethnal Green Road and sell them for a shilling. Then I used to go and help sell potatoes also. A bag of potatoes cost three and sixpence. I used to sell cabbages and fruit also but I was a shocking arithmetician.

After I left school I spent the next eleven years in the picture frame making business - glass fitting, frame making, packing and so on and then I left because I was offered another job in a paint merchants for thirty shillings a week. That was fortunate. It was quite a large wage and it enabled me to leave the two rooms I was renting and rent a house instead and take some of my brothers with us. The paint merchants were in Goswell Road and I worked there for three years. Then the war started and about that time I began to teach myself carpentry and joinery. I followed that trade until I became a Friends Secretary in 1923, and later a certified political agent.

I have been a Liberal all my life and I was a candidate for the Shoreditch Borough Council at the elections of 1904 and 1912. On both occasions I was unsuccessful and in 1915 I enlisted in the Army and was transferred to the Munition Service. I stood again for Council in 1919, was elected, and sat until 1925 for Kingsland Ward. During this period I became Chairman of the Electricity Committee and Vice-Chairman of the Housing Committee. I was also on the Committee of the Pitfield Street Institute and Chairman of the School Management Committee, a member also of the Hackney Employment Committee.

In 1923 during my term on the Council I became the organising secretary of the local Liberal Party and resigned from Council on that account in 1925. I well remember one incident towards the end of my term when I was on the Child Welfare Committee. We built the Health Centre at the corner of Laburnam Street and Kingsland Road. Its purpose was to provide beds for the post-natal care and treatment of mothers who had had a bad confinement. It was opened in 1923 and the Princess Royal and another member of the monarchy were present at the ceremony. It fell to me to second the vote of thanks and I said "One of the difficulties that we have with the child welfare service in this Borough is that there are too many mothers who are apt to measure their maternal virtues by the number of memorial cards they kept in the drawer - you know the type - I ought to know Mrs. Brown I've buried six". I'd hardly got the words out when they were pulling at my coat tail from behind. I'd shocked the life out of some of them but it was true although the silly blighters wouldn't stand for it. This incident didn't enhance my liking for the "do-gooders" and I thought to myself that although this lay in the back of their own minds also they could not bear the raw truth to be stated.