

EAST LONDON HISTORY SOCIETY.

WINTER NEWSLETTER : JANUARY 1982.

PROGRAMME : On the 17th February, Seamus Duggan of the Tower Hamlets Arts Bookshop will be talking to us on Fairgrounds - a subject not hitherto attempted in the Society's history. This will be at Q.M.C. at 7.30 p.m.

It is hoped that every member will make a special effort to attend the talk by Professor P.F. Lunlin at Queen Mary College on the 24th March at 7.15 p.m. This will be on "The relationship of Queen Mary College and the local community" - a talk by the Professor of History on a subject of great interest and importance to all local people. It is believed that Professor Leslie will make mention of our late President, Professor Bindoff.

The Hackney evening will be on the 22nd April 1982 and will be at the Rose Lipman Library, De Beauvoir Road, N.1. Please note the difference in date from that shown on the printed programme. It will be at 7.30 p.m. and will take the form of a talk by Michael Sandow on "Bubbles, Bottles and Brewing" - a look at Victorian soft drink manufacturers in East London. A number of glass and stone bottles will be on display. It will be recalled that Michael Sandow gave a few words at the A.C.M. Members evening but was unable to do justice to the subject in the time permitted. So he will be having a new look at it on this occasion and it is hoped that there will be a good attendance. This will be a joint meeting with the Clapton Historical Society and the Hackney Society.

Alan Peake, an authority on Thames Paddle Steamers and Pleasure steamers will be talking on this subject on the 20th May at Queen Mary College, and many memories of the old "Laguna Belle", "Crested Eagle" etc. will be revived. The season will end with a walk round Bow and Old Ford in which it is hoped we shall be joined by an archaeologist to point out areas of interest at Old Ford. Meet Thursday, 17th June at Bow Road Station 6.15 pm.

COACH OUTING : There will be a coach outing to Broadlands, Earl Mountbatten's home and the scene of the Royal honeymoon last year, on Saturday, 15th May 1982. The coach will leave Mile End at 9.30 a.m. and there will also be a visit to the ancient Romsey Abbey. Fares will be £3.20 per person plus £1.50 price of admission to "Broadlands", where tea can also be obtained. Bookings please to Miss Sansom, 15 Hawkdene, Chingford E.4. (524 4506). We are hoping that members of the East London Family History Association may join us for this trip.

NEW TOWER HAMLETS LOCAL HISTORY LIBRARIAN

Chris Lloyd, B.Lib., A.L.A., was appointed in September to the post of Local History Librarian of Tower Hamlets Library Service in succession to Bernard Nurse, B.A., A.L.A.

Formerly local Studies Librarian of Newham Library Service he has therefore pursued his interest generally in East London history. As an Officer of this Society's Committee, he hopes to become aware of the specialist historical interests that members express to him at meetings. The purpose, of course, is to assist members to gain from a better knowledge of what the Local History Collection can offer. It would be most advisable to ring him for an appointment on 960 4366 Ext.47, to allow preparation time, if specific attention is required.

All members, and the general public, are invited to visit the library (between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday and Saturday, to consult the range of books, photographs and prints, slides, tapes, maps, journals and census returns on microfilm.

The Society takes this opportunity of expressing its grateful thanks to Bernard Nurse who over the years has inspired us with his enthusiasm and, often in difficult conditions, made himself available in the Society's activities. We wish him well in his new sphere of activity in Southwark, but hope he will be with us from time to time. /-

4. HOUNDSDITCH : Houndsditch was first paved in the year 1503. The citizens of London came out through Aldgate and Bishopsgate to walk along the new street and 'to refresh their dulled spirites in the sweete and wholesome ayre'. To the east were 'fair hedgerows of trees and pleasant fieldes' and to the west the mud wall enclosing the twelfth century moat and beyond that the ancient city wall.

The moat, which originally ran all along the wall from Ludgate to the Tower, became, during the Middle Ages, a stagnant ditch and 'much filth, especially dead Dogges were there layd or cast'. So it was called Houndsditch. But its history goes back much further. A thousand years ago, in the time of King Canute, this piece of land was part of the property of Criter (Krighton) Gild. Thirteen Knights well beloved of the King, begged him for the strip of land between the Thames and Bishopsgate. He gave it to them on condition that they 'performed three combats and ran at tilt against all comers - all of which they performed gloriously'.

The Gild of Knights held the land until the twelfth century, when they gave it to the Holy Trinity Priory, the site of which is shown by a wall plaque in nearby Mitre Square. One of the Priors of Holy Trinity built a row of cottages in the field by Houndsditch, for bedridden cripples. On Fridays devout people of the city walked along that way to bestow alms to the sick lying by their windows.

In the reign of Henry VIII there were many changes. The Prior and canons of Holy Trinity were sent away, the Priory buildings were demolished and Houndsditch field was given to Magdalen College, Cambridge. Most of the field was then made into a garden to grow herbs and roots for the market, but the area nearest Aldgate was acquired by three brothers called Owens who were Gun-founders, and here they made brass cannons. The noise was so great that 'the poore bedrid people were worn out' and moved away and the cottages were taken by 'brokers and sellers of olde apparel'. During Elizabeth's reign the garden was divided into plots, houses were built, together with carpenters' yards and a bowling alley.

As years passed, the ditch was filled in, the Roman wall removed and Houndsditch became a busy thoroughfare in the City of London. Modern buildings are gradually replacing the older shops but Houndsditch's two churches at Aldgate and Bishopsgate remain unchanged. Both are dedicated to St. Botolph, a Suffolk abbot of the seventh century, who did great work in improving the roadways across the dangerous marshes of East Anglia and so he became the English Patron Saint of Travellers.

Mrs. R. J. Griffiths.

5. A NEW YEAR MESSAGE FROM GEORGE LANSBURY

"We like to think that those who come after us will read the story of Poplarism, and recognise that, when to be destitute and poor was almost a crime, some poor men and women refused to accept that doctrine, and together proclaimed the truth that all men were not only born equal, but were also possessed of the unalienable right to share in the products of their labour..." ("My Life" 1928)

"I pin my faith in ordinary people... In my old age, in spite of days and nights of gloom, disappointment with myself and others, and almost despair, my faith and confidence remains strong and certain that out of the darkness of our day a new society is being born, and its foundations shall not rest on force and armaments, but will rest on the sure and immovable foundations of co-operation, brotherhood and peace."

(From "Looking Backwards and Forwards" 1935 per Carolyn Merrion).

6. NOTES : Hackney Borough Council is considering a scheme for an Urban Studies Centre in Hackney, which would provide a focus for environmental education both for local schools and for adults and museum. We shall follow this with interest.

We are considering a River Trip in May to the Thames Flood Barrier when an explanation of its operation will be given. Further information will be given at the April Meeting.