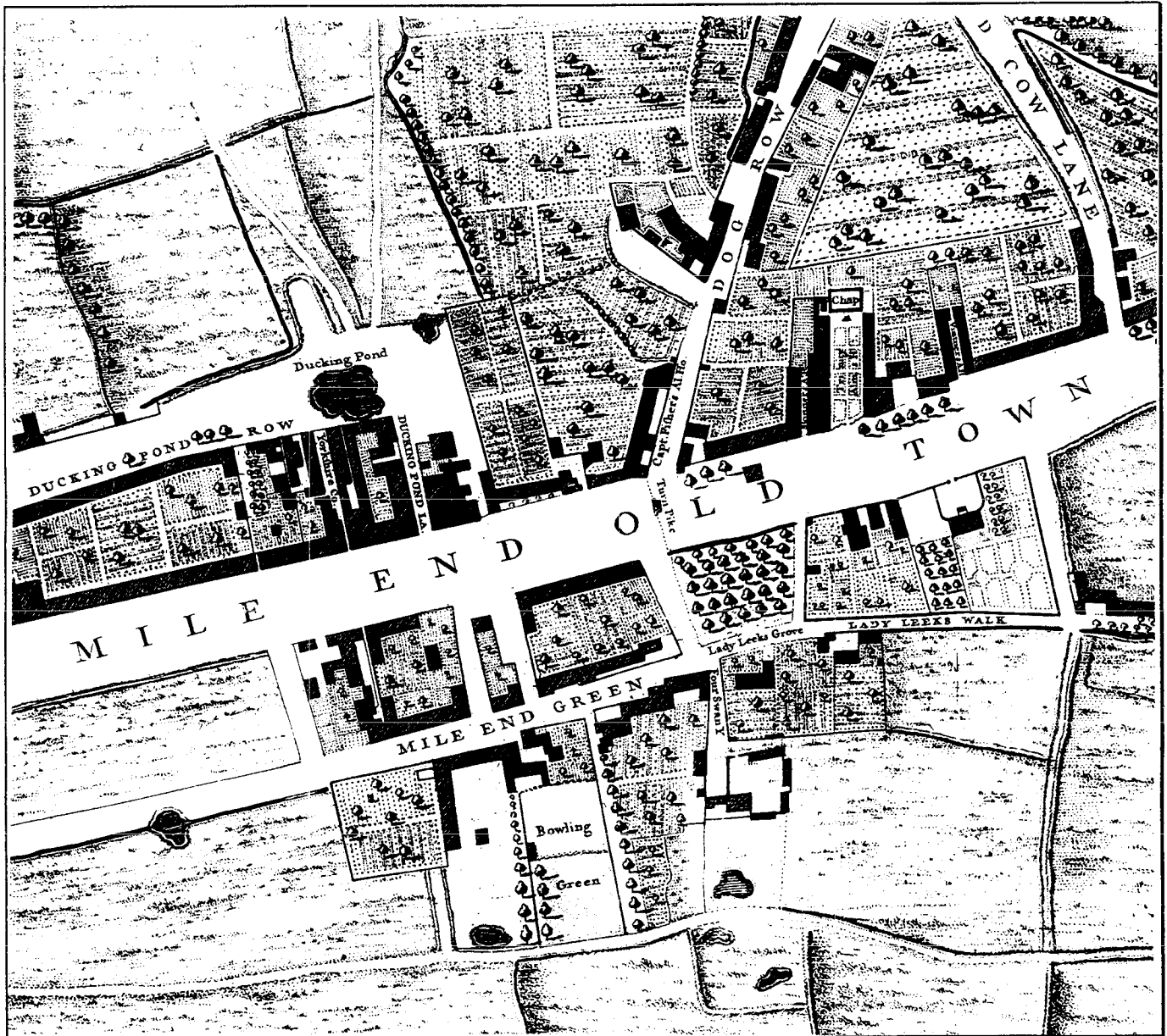


East London History Society

NEWSLETTER

Spring 1996

Vol. 1 No. 10



From Rocque's Map of London 1746

Contents:

- With the Home Guard in East London - Stephen Sadler
- In Search of the Queen Rat - Liz Thompson
- Memories of an East End Travelling Salesman - George Rider
- Entertainment in the Thirties - Billy Scotchmer
- Society Notes and News, Members' Letters and Queries, Programme News etc.

Price: 70p

Lecture Programme -1996

Thursday 22 February

Frank Small's illustrated talk is on Morpeth & Portman Place Schools - from the 3Rs to the National Curriculum.

Thursday 14 March

Margaret Crispin lectures on Edith Cavell.

Thursday 25 April

David Dewing gives an illustrated talk : From Chippendale to Curtain Road, the development of the East London furniture industry.

Thursday 16 May

Members' Evening - How We Lived: memories and research of East London Housing.

All talks are held at Latimer Congregational Church Hall, Ernest Street E1 at 7.30 pm. Refreshments available. Ernest Street is between Harford St. and White Horse Lane, off Mile End Road. the nearest underground stations are Mile End and Stepney Green.

1996 is the centenary of the death of William Morris, artist, designer, poet and socialist. Several places including the V&A, the Marx Memorial Library etc will be holding exhibitions of his life and works. The new book by Fiona McCarthy is curiously silent on Morris's work in the East End. Our next newsletter will highlight this facet of his life.

It is with great regret that we report the death of one of our most enthusiastic local historians, Joseph Waters, just before Christmas, at the age of 70.

Born at Poplar Workhouse in 1925, one of 11 children, Joseph lived all his life in the East End. He saw service in the Navy during the War and was later employed as a training instructor. The Waters' home was one of several damaged when the first V1 flying bomb landed in Bow.

Among Joseph's many achievements was his drive to install blue plaques on sites of historical significance in Tower Hamlets. The Heritage Trail around Bow was researched by him as well. Joseph was a keen supporter of the Ragged School Museum and he campaigned vigorously for greater awareness of the importance of conservation of our local heritage. Needless to say, he will be greatly missed by us all.

Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar in old photographs.

By Rosemary Taylor
and Christopher Lloyd

Now available. Price £7.99 + p & p.
Please send a cheque for **£8.80**
to Rosemary Taylor, 5 Pusey House,
Saracen Street, Poplar, London E14
6HG.

Also available from local libraries.

Letters from our Members

The Rev. Prebendary Arthur Royall has written from Swaffham, Norfolk:

Re: Gas Company War Memorials at Bromley by Bow. On page 40 of Cockney Ancestor No. 58 there is a reference to a War Memorial in the grounds of the old Gas Light and Coke Company complex alongside the River Lea at Bow. This had a special association with The Rangers, a Territorial Army unit of the KRRC which in World War I was the 12th London Regiment. This unit has particular connection with Beckton.

I feared that the memorial had been disposed of, but my fears were unfounded, although the memorial may now be at risk. The Rev. G W Garner, Rector of Bow tells me that on the almost completely cleared site there is a Gas Museum and next to it a memorial garden. In the garden there are three large memorial plaques commemorating the dead of the two World Wars. One of these plaques has been brought from the Beckton Gas Works, the other two are concerned with personnel from Bromley-by-Bow. Sited by the memorials is a column surmounted by a gaslamp that never goes out.

The site now belongs to British Gas and is no longer used commercially. I understand that British Gas has offered the site to the Millennium Commission as a site for a great exhibition in 2000 AD. If the site was indeed used for such a purpose what I wonder would become of the memorials? I am sure that societies such as our own should keep a close watch on developments and let it be known that they are doing so. So many 'special' memorials have been lost in recent years it would be a pity if those at Bromley-by-Bow were 'developed' into oblivion.

The Gas Museum at Bromley-by-Bow has a complete archive of East London Gas Works documents and photographs. The museum is only opened by appointment.

Mrs. E Shirley, Springfield, Chelmsford:

I have just received my copy of the latest Newsletter and once again it has been a wonderful stroll down memory lane. I do congratulate all the contributors and the committee for making it all possible.

I am very envious of the fact that I cannot attend the monthly meetings and other excursions which are arranged for the members. However, I follow the news with interest.

Thank you very much for the picture postcard of Bryant and Mays and the reminder of your new book. As soon as I read about it in the Society's Newsletter, I ordered a copy from a local bookshop and am happy to say that I collected it last week.

May I say how much I am enjoying it, not only the pictures, but the history of some of the contents. When I saw the picture of Devine's the whalebone factory, I was amazed. I lived in Chad Street (a turning off Wrights Road) until we were bombed out by the V2 rocket which fell on Beale Place in November 1944, and although I knew the whalebone factory was at the bottom of the street I never actually realised what lay behind the gates and the wall surrounding the area.

Congratulations to you and Christopher Lloyd and good luck to you both with the new book. I'm sure I shall spend many happy hours reading it again and again.

Harry Willmott of Loughton, Essex:

"Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar in old photographs" revived many memories for me. I was very interested in the photo of Limehouse Library on page 38. Back in 1937 I was working at the age of 14 as a van boy for Pledge Windette and Pledger, wholes grocers of Chrisp Street, Poplar. Every morning, six days a week I would walk from Tidey Street, Bow to John Pritchard's place at Limehouse. There I would help the driver, whose name was Scotchmoor, to harness up the horse, then we would drive to Pledgers to load up. The vans were on hire from John Pritchard. Another

photo I was interested in was the one of the old stinkhouse bridge in Bow Common Lane (page 92). The boy in the light coloured jersey standing with the others on the far side of the bridge was named Chambers, he had some other brothers. The family lived just part the Moore's Arms in Devons Road, the used to sell shrimps and winkles from their front room window. The factory on the far left with the pointed roofs was the Echo Battery Factory. My mother often told me that when she was a young girl she used to beg for crusts of bread from the workers at the Echo. She died in 1955, aged 56.

Past the bridge on the right hand side can just be seen the Bridge House pub kept by my cousin some years after the last war, his name was Billy Stevens. His older brother Harry was in the Merchant Navy. Just past the Echo Factory and out of sight in the photo was the Holy Name RC School. I attended the school with the Chambers family. The school was bombed in 1940.

I can just remember the old Stinkhouse Bridge, I also remember a very old man telling me that very many years ago it was called Lavender Hill.

I hope the above information will add interest to the two photos mentioned.

Ed. Note: Many thanks, Harry, for your detailed descriptions. I am passing on your letter to Chris Lloyd at Bancroft Library, who will append the information to the relevant photographs for future researchers. Local history relies on source material such as the above, which forms such a valuable aspect of research.

Elsie Sanders, Alresford Hants:

Thanks for the Summer Issue of the Newsletter. Quite a history in itself. Unfortunately, these days I find it almost impossible to read ordinary print (your front cover "VJ Day etc" is about my mark. My eyesight is failing due to an inoperable condition and I'm afraid it won't improve. This makes reading almost impossible, good as your print is - in fact, better than most.

I'm finding it difficult to write this, as I've so enjoyed my years with the Society, far away as I am, you have always felt family. However, the time has come to face the inevitable and so I am having to discontinue my membership. All my Newsletters and Records over the years are being given to my niece whose family came from Poplar, as did mine.

My sincere thanks to you all. I really do know how very hard you work. I appreciate all your work. Sorry I haven't been able to go on your walks and be at the meetings.

Good luck and God Bless.

Ed Note: Both Doreen and I were really sorry to hear about Elsie's problems with her eyesight and the fact that she feels she can no longer continue her membership with the Society. Elsie has been very supportive over the years, and I cherish many happy memories of Elsie and Reg on our walks around Poplar. It was always a delight to receive a letter from Elsie, in response to an article or letter published in the Newsletter. Since writing the above, Elsie has reconsidered her decision, and we have assured her we will assist her in every way possible.

Laura Bratton, who reads books on tape for the library service, contacted me recently, with some queries re Poplar names. She is at present preparing to read Gilda O'Neill's latest novel "Just Around the Corner" which is set in Poplar. Laura has offered to put our Newsletter onto tape for our visually impaired members. The tapes will then be available from the library as well as the Society. This is really wonderful news and a great step forward in our efforts to reach as wide an audience as possible.

It is also possible for me to print out a limited number of Newsletters in large print. Should any of our members wish to avail themselves of this offer, please contact

Rosemary Taylor, Editor, 5 Pusey House, Saracen Street, Poplar, London E14 6HG.

Mrs Ivy M Gardner, Cirencester, Glos:

I have just received my Newsletter, No. 9 and I was very pleased as most of the letters to the Editor were of where I lived. I was born in Whitethorn Street, Bow Common, moved to Turners Road, then Devons road next to the Band of Hope, facing the Carpenters Arms as it was then.

Also knew Clara Grant well, lined up for farthing bundles every Saturday. My mother went once a fortnight on a Wednesday to a sale of work to buy clothes and shoes etc. Miss Grant used to get them from people she knew, with money to spare and who could afford to give them away, as she did come from Wiltshire herself. I have a small book I obtained from Frances Mary Buss House, with details. I also used to go to the club from 1935-39 so knew the teacher and girls from the North London Collegiate School, Edgware, went to a summer camp with them each year.

I would like to know where to write to obtain the book, Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar, when it is published, also the one on evacuation as I was an evacuee, that is how I come to live here as it was 10 miles from here it all happened. I came back to live 15 years ago, I don't go to London as such, so you see I would like to obtain some of these books. I found Harry Salton of Dagenham's letter *my own life* also all the people he knew.

Ed. Note: *I trust you have received your copy of Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar, in old photographs, by now, and it gives you many hours of pleasant reading.*

Mrs Deanna Nippres, Forest Side, Epping writes:

I recently purchased your book "In Letters of Gold" from the East of London Family History Society booklist. I did so because of my interest in the area discussed and because of my family connections with the early East End socialist movement and the suffragettes.

I enjoyed the book, and after reading it thought that my elderly mother (now 88 years and by coincidence nee Taylor), would find it

interesting too. She had lived in Bow, off Devons Road around 1909-1913, first going to school in the district.

After reading your book she talked reminiscently about the time. Her mother, a widow and dressmaker, was active in the early socialist and suffrage movements, often attending meetings in the area. My mother can remember being taken, as a child, to these meetings. She mentioned one occasion then Sylvia Pankhurst changed clothes with another woman to escape via another door, to avoid being arrested by police, waiting at the front of the hall. My mother also knew George and Bessie Lansbury, speaking of their dedicated work and how clearly she could remember them as they appear in the photo on page 13. I just thought that you may like to know of the interest you have aroused by your efforts with the book.

Alan Willis, 19 Blantyre Street, Bishopmill, Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland IV30 2DW:

Over the past few years I have been researching my father's origins in Bethnal Green - albeit from a long distance! I would now like to share some of the information I have, in the hope that ELHS members may be able to fill in some gaps.

My father (WILLIAM WILLIS - born in 1903) was living with his mother (Mary Ann Willis nee Craig - born 1883) and stepfather (George Henry Willis - born 1874) at 7 Virginia Road Bethnal Green in 1909. How long they lived there after that, I do not know, but they certainly remained in the Bethnal Green/Hackney area.

Also living with them were George Byerley (age 63) and Codelia Byerley (age 54). She was my father's maternal grandmother.

George Willis was a toymaker (rocking horses) and George Byerley was a toy dealer. Later on, George Willis was operating a general haulage business under the name of George Willis and Sons.

I would welcome any information about these relatives and also about the businesses they were involved in, (manufacturing rocking horses was surely not a very common enterprise!)

I notice in the Summer 1994 Newsletter that Mr FW Ballisat from Sawbridgeworth once worked at F Shadbolts in Virginia Road. Also in the East London Record of 1987, George Bishop mentions Virginia Road. Perhaps Mr Ballisat and Mr Bishop particularly may be able to help?

Finally, I would welcome any photographs, which after taking copies I would promptly return.

David Behr, our Programme Secretary, found this interesting snippet:

Answers to correspondents, Daily Mail, Tuesday December 7, 1993:

Question: Opposite the London Hospital is a public house, The Grave Maurice. The sign depicts the head of a man wearing a ruff. Who was he?

Answer: The word Grave is an English corruption of the German 'graf', meaning Count or Prince. Graf Maurice of the Rhine was born in 1620. At 22 he fought as a general for King Charles against the Roundheads. After the surrender at Oxford in 1646 both he and his brother Prince Rupert were banished from England. Two years later Prince Maurice became a pirate in the English Channel then sailed with his brother to Portugal and the Gambia where he captured an English ship, the Friendship. On a later voyage to the West Indies, his ship foundered and he was drowned, aged 32. The pub bearing his name was built in 1882 in Whitechapel Road. Its name is thought to arise from the Truman Brewery's close links with the Royal Family at the time. It is the only pub so named. Another, near London's Blackwall Tunnel, has since been closed down. (Kristyna Adams, Manageress, The Grave Maurice, quoted in Mitteilungsblatt, No. 27, March 1994).

RAGGED SCHOOL MUSEUM WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

The 1995 National Heritage IBM Museum of the Year Awards were presented in October by the Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley MP at the Museum of London.

The Ragged School Museum was awarded the prize for Best Museum Educational Initiative. This national award has been given in recognition for both the acclaimed role-play activities enjoyed by school parties and the varied programme of community education activities.

The ELHS works closely with the Ragged School Museum and Rosemary and Doreen have been responsible for two exhibitions at the museum, The East End Suffragettes, and Clara Grant and the Education of Girls.

The Clara Grant Exhibition attracted a large number of visitors during the three months from October. In fact, the opening, which coincided with the Museum's first Sunday of the month opening saw a record attendance, and staff and volunteers were rushed off their feet.

The Society and the Museum also held a joint Christmas Quiz, followed by mulled wine and mince pies. This is our second successful Christmas celebration and we hope it will prove to be a regular annual event.

Congratulations to Mary Ann and Claudia for their splendid efforts, and we must not forget Pauline Plumb, who works so efficiently behind the scenes.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day on Friday 8 March 1996, will be celebrated with an illustrated talk on East End Women, 1888 - 1928, Struggle for Survival. Venue is Bethnal Green Library, 7 - 9 pm. The Speaker is Rosemary Taylor.

With the Home Guard in East London

Stephen Sadler

At the fall of France in the summer of 1940 the victorious Germans chased the British Army out of Europe via Dunkirk. As a defence against the invasion a civilian army was then created to protect the whole of Britain. Originally called the Local Defence Volunteers, this mouthful was changed to the more positive Home Guard. Now, entirely due to an immensely popular TV programme, that extraordinary group of unpaid military men is affectionately known as Dad's Army.

Came 1941. My chum George Lane was in the Sea Cadets. He found that it wasn't much fun boating in a dusty drill hall, decided to try the military and join the Home Guard. I got caught up in his enthusiasm and went along with him. We were both 17, and great pals. Together we had gone through a few hairy scrapes in the Blitz on our home ground in Bethnal Green. My home was in St. James's Avenue, whilst George was just around the corner in Bandon Road (blasted to oblivion in June 1944). When night bombing was at its worst both our families used the same nearby surface air raid shelter built at the junction of Old Ford and Bonner's Road.

Our Home Guard unit's HQ was at an LCC school in Cassland Road (now the Hackney Community Centre). We paraded in the playground, attended two evenings a week and turned out some Sundays. The unit had been formed by staff at two Hackney firms. One was Bush and Co, the pungent odour from its essences and oils kept the air in Mare Street very sweet. The other was the Mentmore Pen Company. Our CO was its Managing Director. As a lowly private, I was wheeled in to his illustrious presence at the Mentmore factory in Tudor Grove to answer a charge of poor attendance. Overtime at work and all night fire watching was my excuse. But he sternly reminded me that although a civilian, I was still subject to military law.

Many of the officers and NCO's were from management in these firms, whilst other ranks came from the factory floor, so to speak. an interesting comparison of how the set-up in industry was imposed on a military organisation. Of all those men I clearly recall our Sergeant Major. A heavily built bantam, deep voice, immaculately turned out. Khaki trousers with razor crease, boots and belt polished to perfection. When leading the company he marched with superb military precision, arms and knees raised in an exaggerated parade ground manner. With the rest of us shambling along behind, often out of step, we looked a Fred Karno's army.

At its inception this civilian army only had armbands and an odd collection of archaic weapons, including medieval pikes! By the time I joined the HQ Quartermaster General, whoever he was, had done a good job. I was equipped with a khaki battledress, steel helmet, sundry bits of gear, and a .300 Springfield 17, ex American army rifle with bayonet. Rumour has it that half a million Springfields were sent by the USA government in response to a request from Winston Churchill. Obsolete they may have been but with the right calibre ammunition they were just as lethal as the standard British Army rifle, the .303 Lee Enfield.

All my gear had to be kept at home with the Springfield rifle taking pride of place alongside my bed. At its peak the Home Guard consisted of over one and a half million armed men. In that civilian army there must have been many other teenagers, who like me stored a killer weapon at home, but that considerable privilege was never abused. Nobody did a John Wayne and went gunning for a shoot-out.

My HG unit's patch was a large part of east London. That included Well Street Common, bits of Hackney Marsh and Wansted Flats. We used each of them for drilling and exercises. One of our war games on the Flats became a "Dad's Army" caper. Someone had concluded that the opposing army would attack from the rear of the City of London cemetery. In order to combat the enemy we had to go in through the main cemetery gate in Aldersbrook Road. It was a Sunday morning, the place was full of

mourners - many with bunches of flowers - visiting graves of their departed loved ones. There we were, uniformed HG's, each man carrying a rifle running at a defensive crouch through this soberly dressed throng.

In the cemetery grounds we dodged about behind gravestones to protect ourselves from an unseen enemy. But the real enemy turned out to be the cemetery authority. They and the mourners were horrified to see armed military chasing through the gravestones playing a war time version of cops and robbers. There was uproar over our presence and we were ordered to leave. Like naughty boys, motley groups of HG's gathered outside the main gate puffing at their woodbines, muttering with annoyance whilst waiting for instruction from higher command. They all wanted to know, were they to continue the mock battle, go home or retire to the nearest pub?

We were required to supply a group of men for all night guard on public service sites. I recall a very unpleasant stay in a blacked out gas works overlooking Grand Union canal and Andrews Road in Hackney. The guard room was tacky, noisy, no food with just one miserable cup of tea. My hungry and sleepless night passed by very, very slowly. The following morning brought another hard act. Tired and desperate for food I had to go straight off to work still in uniform, clutching my rifle whilst fighting my way on to a crowded bus that headed for Islington and a long day in a factory.

Some of those evening training sessions seemed to be a sort of DIY affair. There was uncertainty as to what we should be doing. And so it was often the lot of a junior NCO to map out an evening's programme. But on the more positive side as urban HG's we were taught house to house fighting and used partly built council estates in Cassland Road for practice (all construction work ceased in 1939). For practical weapon training we had weekends at an army camp at Purfleet, Essex, where I recall my first ever taste of roughing it military style. On the firing range we learned from professionals how to use small arms effectively. Our tuition included priming and throwing live hand grenades, an unhealthy

pastime that left no margin for error. I recall an occasion when a daft companion played ball with his grenade. When he dropped it into a cavity wall we all rapidly moved well away from the danger zone.

In those war years Victoria Park contained allotments and underground air raid shelters. The latter were frequently flooded. When precious commercial vehicles were not in use owners were allowed to leave them under trees to hide them from marauding German bombers, consequently Vicky Park was open all hours. But in the blackout, and if bombing was out of season, it was eerily quiet. The quickest way home from the Cassland Road HQ was to cut across the park. George and I, a couple of Jack the Lads, would march, or stumble, into its inky blackness, frequently lost and going round in circles, but enlivening the journey by bawling daft drill commands or singing a medley of obscene songs just to make some noise.

George went into the Royal Navy in the summer of 1942 and served in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. I retired from the Home Guard at the end of that year and joined the Royal Marines. There was a wide gulf between the HG and the Marines, but somehow they were joined by a connecting link and that showed in the way they both operated. Each was controlled by military authority, discipline and training. For this reason, when I as a recruit, entered the Exton Camp, Devon, carrying my suitcase, I had a feeling of being on familiar ground and knew that I was not quite so green as other lads who were in that intake.

In the Royal Marines I took part in the Normandy coastal assault on D Day. As the German army was driven back to its homeland the invasion threat to Britain receded and so the Home Guard, no longer needed, stood down at the end of 1944, although much of southern England, especially London, continued to feel the violence of V1 rockets well into 1945. By the end of the war in Europe, I was in the Far East. My unit was preparing for coastal assault against the Japanese army in Malaya but events in

Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought that exercise to an abrupt halt and an end to World War II.

Happily those precious bits of greenery where Home Guards from Cassland Road once marched remain open spaces to East Londoners for exercise and pleasure. Now a senior citizen, I occasionally stroll across Well Street Common, pause, and in my imagination hear an HG corporal shouting a drill command. One of my pet jokes is to tell young people of how I once helped defend Hackney Marsh. Remarkably those ugly Victorian gasometers alongside the Grand Union Canal had survived fifty years of peace. When driving through Andrews Road and they come into sight I am always reminded of that awful night so long ago when I baby sat for those bulky horrors. And I ponder, is it possible they will eventually become museum pieces protected from destruction by a preservation order?

Documents, records, photographs, even personal diaries of many Home Guard units have been carefully preserved but all recollection of the Cassland Road Home Guard Group seems to have disappeared completely. Anyone out there who has any knowledge of the group who would like to share their memories should contact Stephen Sadler, 39 Wenlock Court, New North Road, London N1 7QS. Tel: 0171 253 5772.

BOOKMARK

Two privately published books have recently come to our attention:

Poplar in the 20's by John Hector.

£3.95 (inc. postage) from the author:

J Hector, 46 Frinton Road, Holland on Sea, Essex, CO15 5UL

St. James's School Ratcliff

by Dorothy Howell-Thomas. Free, postage 75p, from D Howell-Thomas,

31 Littlehaven, Beaulieu Road, Dibden Purlieu, Hants SO45 4JF. This school stood on the site of the present St. Katharine's Foundation, Butcher Row.

FREDDIE AND LOUISA ASHWELL

It is not often that I make a contribution of my own to the Newsletter, I'd rather leave the space for our members' own stories. Having pursued this particular line of research now for several frustrating months, I am hoping that perhaps someone may know something about the subjects of my research.

Although the main line of my enquiries concern Freddie and Louisa Ashwell, there are two other key players in this drama - Louisa's first husband, Harry Jacobs and their only son, Henry 'Halifax' Jacobs.

Harry Jacobs may be well known to many as one of two brothers (David was the other) who ran **Alfred Jacobs Ltd.**, the garage on Mile End Road. Halifax Jacobs had several photographic shops, **Halifax Studios** in and around the East End.

Sometime during the early 1930's, Louisa left Harry (who had found a new love) and moved to Fred Ashwell's flat in Holloway Road. Soon after, she bought a house in Golders Green. Halifax was married from here in 1943, and shortly afterwards began to work for the East London Advertiser, before setting up his own studios.

In 1950 Fred and Louisa Ashwell came to live in the flat over Halifax Studios in Burdett Road, Poplar, where Freddie would regale customers and staff with stories of his career as a 'Girl Impressionist' before, during and after the First World War. When Freddie died in 1972, his friend Charlie Hagon (now the owner of the Burdett Photographic Studios) discovered a packet of Freddie's photographs, showing him in various stage costumes, which bear out Freddie's stories of being with a Dance Troupe. I offered to research Freddie's stage career, a very rash and foolhardy attempt, as I have found very little of any consequence!

I set out the facts as I know them, briefly:

Frederick Ernest Ashwell was born in March 1885 at 7 Canon Street, Islington, to Henry Ashwell, goldsmith, and Mary Ann nee

Rayment. Where did they go from here? Where did he go to school? Where did he learn to dance? Freddie was a stretcher bearer in France in World War I - a photograph has 'Speedwell' and 'Hendon' telephone numbers on the back.

Freddie danced with a group called 'The Splinters' and later 'The New Splinters', at least till the 1930's. They were an all-male female impressionist troupe. Has anyone heard of this troupe?

Louisa (Lardant/Jacobs/Ashwell) was the daughter of Henry Lardant, bootmaker, and Julia Desmond of Bethnal Green. She appears to have had connections with the stage or music halls as well. She certainly posed for publicity photographs. It is possible she was on the stage before she married Harry Jacobs (a picture has 'Nana, aged 20 at the Grand Theatre, Islington, on reverse. The dates of the theatre eliminate both Freddie and Louisa's mothers).

Shortly before the First World War, Louisa, Harry and baby Halifax emigrated to Australia, and a picture of 1920 shows Harry in uniform. Sometime after this Harry Jacobs returned to East London, where he eventually settled down at Woodford Avenue, Ilford with Margaret. The first mention of Louisa in the Mile End Road Electoral Registers is in 1934, the same year that she moves to Holloway Road! Louisa in all probability knew Freddie as an old friend, and moved in with him when her marriage broke down.

As you can see, there are so many mysteries and unanswered questions. I have searched the GLRO, PRO, Census, Imperial War Museum, Islington, Westminster and Bancroft Libraries, approached the Music Hall Society - the list goes on and on. If anyone can offer any helpful advice or information, I would be very, very grateful!

Rosemary Taylor
5 Pusey House, Saracen St, Poplar,
London E14 6HG

IN SEARCH OF THE 'QUEEN RAT'

Liz Thompson has written in seeking information with regard to a piece of East End folklore. Liz has spent a number of years delving into family history, and members may recall her entertaining talk on Toshers on the Thames, based on the life and times of her great-grandfather. She writes:

I am doing research into an urban folk-belief which was handed down to me from my mother's family, the men of which were toshers, i.e. working down the sewers and along the river in London in the last century, and probably before that. They believed in a character called the Queen Rat, and I want to find out if there is any similarity between these beliefs and those about the Roman goddess of the sewers, Venus Cloacina. All I could find out about her was that she was originally the goddess of the Etruscan drainage system under Rome, and that there was a shrine to her in the Forum.

Briefly, the idea about the Queen Rat was that there was a kind of spirit down the sewers who would invisibly follow the men about, and if she saw one she liked, she would listen to his conversations with his mates, find out what kind of ladies he fancied, and then turn herself into a woman that matched his particular tastes, and appear next to him when he was out enjoying himself.

If the man gave her a night to remember, she would reward him by seeing to it that he had good luck while he was working, and found plenty of money and other valuable that got lost down the gratings. The man would not necessarily suspect who she was, because she would look like a normal woman, and be like one to get hold of. If he did start to suspect, and then boasted of it, his luck would go into reverse, he might drown or have a horrible accident. People would wind up anyone who seemed to be a lucky finder by saying he must have been with the Queen Rat.

There were other ideas about her, like never to work with any silver money on you or you wouldn't find any more that night, having had your luck already. The only exception to this is that the first silver coin a man found when he started working, he would always carry on him as a luck piece. If he survived, it got handed down in his family, always to the youngest son. If a man got killed working and could not be got out from the sewers, his silver coin would be left in his mouth by his

mates. This was supposed to protect him against being eaten by rats.

I have not found a published account of these beliefs anywhere, though I have seen accounts of toshers, like Henry Mayhew's who mentions another of their beliefs: the wild hogs in the sewers of Hampstead. They didn't talk much to outsiders, so it is likely the Queen Rat beliefs never got written up by anyone.

My mother thinks the Queen Rat legend is some to do with the Plague in London; my grandfather thought so too, but I'm not so sure. I think its got the feel of something much older about it. It could be an older belief handed on with the names changed, in the same way as a miners' belief in protective underground spirits got transferred onto St. Barbara in Poland. I would be most grateful for any information readers can give me.

Write to Liz Thompson, 1 Holmsdale Road, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3JZ

**East London Record 1996
No. 18 Price £2.50 + 40p p&p**

Good news for all our faithful members - the East London record No. 18 is out, enquiries should be sent to Colm Kerrigan, 13 Abbotsbury Close, Stratford, E15 2RR. Doreen Kendal, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF also has copies for sale.

Contents include:

Childhood Days in Hackney and Abbey Lane, by George Berry; George Webster Ltd - Horse Contractors and Carmen, by Sue Winter; Agricultural Holdings, East and West Ham, by W Bran Tyler; East London Schooldays by Fred Wright; The Victory Parade of 1946 by Doreen Kendall; Baynes Street, Whitechapel, by Derek Morris; and Down the Ground (Bow Cemetery) by Bradley Snooks. Notes and News and Book Reviews complete the package.

Memories of an East End Travelling Salesman

George Rider

For about 20 years I was a Technical Sales Representative covering East London as part of my territory. I was about 28 when I started and finished when 48, when unfortunately, my firm went into liquidation. It was known as Cefmer Brehmer Ltd, which derived from C F Moore and Brehmer. They made equipment and machines for Letterpress composition and Wire Stitching machines for printers and bookmakers. The districts I covered were from E1 to E18. The east side of the river always fascinated me as I was born in Hackney at the Salvation Army Hospital, Hackney.

I used to make about 8 calls per day in a car, usually Ford, and when in 'central' east would have a lunch break in Victoria Park at the Tea Bar there.

The calls were varied and would range from a tiny printshop with 1 or 2 men such Cousins of Mare Street to the large, such as Fosh and Cross of Mansell Street, one of the nicest calls because Arthur Fosh would always come out and have a chat, even though not buying, which he did eventually. I say this because selling from 'cold' can be soul destroying at times when getting a day's work of total negatives, such as, 'nothing wanted' or 'too busy to see you'. at the reception desk. Fosh and Cross did a great deal of work for H M Stationery Office, but have gone to the wall as have many of those on my 'route book'. I could sell anything from an item worth £1 50p such as a typescale, or a folding machine at £5,000. Yardley's of Stratford, the cosmetic manufacturers had their own boxmaking department and bought several of our special box wire stitchers as did Bryant and Mays and Clarice the sweet people at Hackney.

The smaller printers were in the Brick Lane area and usually Jewish. We also made a Wire Stitcher for handbags and a firm called Sasta bought about 20 machines, but I can't recall their address. Also, Cordwainers Technical College bought one. Evershade the calendar printers of Bow I did quite well with, they had a branch at St. Albans. There was a firm making wooden boxes in Fairfield Road called Three Ply Box Company

where I sold a French machine specially for this work - Rapidex.

Crossley Reynolds in Artillery Passage specialised in pharmaceutical printing of small leaflets. They bought a special miniature folder costing £1500 after I had taken them to Boots of Nottingham for a demonstration. It folded tiny sheets of printed matter for insertion into drug packets.

Vitebsky had a small boxmaking factory in the Dalston area. A W Bain had a sizeable factory for bookbinding. I was unsuccessful here although I called continuously. Plaistow Press of Stratford is still in business with Winston Ramsey the owner and prints 'After the Battle' and a few years ago a magnificent book on Epping Forest, then and now, which called for a great deal of research, which I truly admire.

Two partners, Mr Graham and Mr Graeme ran a medium sized general printing company, Premier Press, in Brick Lane, and I sold them a German Folding machine.

Keeley and Bird had a medium sized factory in Mare Street near Hackney Town Hall, where the owner Frank Keeley ordered a wire sticher from me for book stapling.

Commercial Colour Press were in Forest Gate and specialised in music printing. I sold them a book sewing machine for bound books.

In Walthamstow, the Guardian had their letterpress works in Forest Road which has now gone and the paper is printed by Web Offset somewhere in Essex. Lamson Paragon of Canning Town were very good customers for book wire stitching machines. Mendham Brothers of Mackintosh Lane purchased from us two book wire stitchers for stapling sets of Daily Mirrors (1 week's publications) when I first started as a rep. on foot.

Trade Finishers of Neulah Road, E 17 was run by a friend of mine, Peter Smith, who retired and moved west upon the sudden death of his father Bert and brother Don. The latter ran a small print finishers at Stratford called Watermill Press.

Tower Press Ltd. of Palmerton Road, Walthamstow, E 17, were a firm specialising in the printing and cutting of jigsaw puzzles. They came from Westbourne Grove, West London.

They had several Brehmer No. 5 staplers. However, they in turn closed down.

Taylor and Smith Ltd. of Maybank Road, E18 came from Brick Lane, and were medium sized printers. In recent years they specialised in old Victorian views of towns and cities in Britain. They moved to the Hainault area where they traded under the new name of 20/20 Printers. When they were in Brick Lane they used a Brehmer No. 7 B wire sticher.

H. Fitch and Co Ltd. of Mansell Street were medium sized printers and they purchased a Bendy Creasing Machine, which operated without cracking the surface of coated boards. I believe they did work for the Stock Exchange.

Many more firms with whom I did business over the years have now closed down.

(Editor's Note:

The above article has been put together from notes sent in by George Rider. He has also listed a large number of firms that went into liquidation or are no longer trading. If anyone is interested in the subject and wishes to obtain further information, please contact the editor.

The Square Mile by Warren Grynberg

A photographic tour around the City of London, published by Windrush Press, £9.99. The book is based on the author's collection of old postcards of London and his experience as a tour guide. One of his most popular walks is titled *The Macabre and Ghostly City*, and graveyards, plague pits and execution sites also feature. As mentioned elsewhere, you can meet the author at Bancroft Library, where he will be giving a talk and signing his book.

A reminder to those members who have not renewed their membership. Please send your subscriptions to John Harris, 15 Three Crowns Road, Colchester, Essex CO4 5AD. £5.00 membership, £3.00 concessions.

Entertainment in the Thirties

Billy Scotchmer

When I hear people come out with the words 'Did you see so and so on the television last night (I am also guilty) I often wonder how they would have coped with our means of entertainment in the 20s and 30s. There was very little laid on entertainment and we had to resort to more practical means.

When I look back, there was much to choose from. There was The Hackney and Stratford Empires with their motley of performers who to us in those days were the acme of entertainment. We would form up in the queue outside long before the performance began and there we would be entertained by the street buskers. I well remember two of them, brothers I believe, one of which always sang Marta, a tenor rendering song of the day. His voice was clear and well pitched and I often thought he should be inside on the stage. There were the escape artists and the strong man, the juggler and tap dancers who having finished their acts would pass along the queue to collect their just rewards.

Once inside and having taken our seat in the (Gods) upstairs gallery the lights would dim and the orchestra would start to play. A board with Act 1 would appear at the side of the stage and we would sit back to enjoy the songs and jokes of people like Ernie Lotinga, Kate Carney, George Robey, Nosmo King etc., not forgetting the sand dance of Forsyth Seaman and Farrell. We would sit there in wonder as Horace Golding performed his magic, he was termed the Royal Illusionist and reputed to have been the first magician to saw a woman in half.

The pictures (cinema) were another form of enjoyment. For sixpence one could sit back in a fantasy world and enjoy the love scenes of Charles Boyer (very clean and acceptable) or Clark Gable fighting the bad men in some far away jungle, there were the gangsters James Cagney, George Raft, Lloyd Nolan, Edward G Robinson to name a few, and those wonderful westerns with the countless cowboys who fought off the Indians in the American badlands. How did they manage to fire all those shots from a six shooter without reloading?

If you so felt you would perhaps have an evening at the Peoples Palace in Mile End Road, its new architecture stood out against the drab surrounding buildings and inside in its theatre you could listen to classical music, watch plays and if so inclined listen to lectures and political speeches. Today it is part of Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London.

There was also music in Victoria Park where one could sit round the bandstand and watch the resplendently dressed bandmaster wielding his baton as the uniformed band played various marches and ballads. On Sunday mornings in the small lake by the flower gardens strangely dressed men in long rubber waders sent model motorboats careering at speed around a centre pole in the middle of the lake. And on other days in the summer if you wished, you could swim in your birthday suit in the small lake. You could, of course, hire a rowing boat on the large lake by Grove Road Gate for sixpence and hour or have a ride around the lake for a penny on the motor boat, which would pause half way round to give you a glimpse of the lovely Chinese Pagoda in the middle of the lake, sadly there no more, having been destroyed by fire in later days.

There were trips on the trams where you could travel anywhere in London for a shilling all day. A favourite pastime of mine was to go to Croydon Airport on a tram and stand by the railings at the Purley Way gate to watch the airliners arrive and depart to and from those far away places with their strange sounding names.

Some of us would go dancing at the Ball Room next door to Bow Road main line station where if you had half a crown to spare you could indulge in a tango or rumba or may be the Palais Glide and of course the Fox Trot, Quick Step and Waltz. Very little is heard of this type of dancing today. In Cambridge Heath Road was the Bethnal Green Museum, now the Museum of Childhood, where there were countless toys and dolls some of which could be activated with the touch of a button. Around the corner was York Hall with its Boxing Arena and Swimming Baths.

I am sure many readers will remember names like Arthur Danahagh, Georges Carpentier, Jimmy Wild, Dickie Corbett and Len Harvey who entertained us with their fisticuffs in those pre-war years, not forgetting the wrestling bouts of Izzy van Dutch, the Bearded Man Mounting, and Doctor Death.

A well visited venue was the Tower of London with its gaunt grey walls and forbidding towers which were full of historic and macabre memories. It was sentinelled by the Yeomen of the Guard (the Beefeaters) dressed in their medieval historic uniforms and carrying their long pikes. Next to the Tower was Tower Pier with its small pebbled beach, a haunt of the mudlarks. Who could forget the pleasure boats that paddled from here to Southend, Margate and Ramsgate. The Royal Sovereign, the Laguna Belle and the Golden Eagle. It was while returning to these moorings from a pleasure trip to the resort towns of the Thames Estuary in September 1878 that the Princess Alice paddle steams was struck by the collier Bywell Castle off Gravesend, there were only a few survivors out of 700 passengers.

On Friday night my next door neighbour would take me to Hackney Wick Speedway where stars like Dickie Case, Dusty Haigh (sadly killed in 1937) Tommy Croombs, the Parker Brothers and Lionel Van Praag, to name a few, would perform their wizardly acts of speed and daring on the cinders.

On the domestic front there was much to do by way of entertainment. Most homes had a piano and usually some ones could play a tune. so on Sunday it was not uncommon for the parlour to be opened and would be troubadours gather around the piano to sing the latest hit from a song sheet purchased for twopence from the music shop. There was also the wind up gramophone on which we played the latest dance music, Joe Loss, Geraldo, Carroll Gibbons, Henry Hall, Roy Fox and Glen Miller, or listen to the lovely voices of Steve Conway, Cavan O'Connor, Monti Ray and John McCormack.

As children of the 30s our pastimes were of our own making and seasonally there would appear such things as glanis (glass marbles), whipping tops and peg tops, cap pistols, conkers, roller skates, cigarette cards and pea shooters. Neither must one forget the girls who with their skipping ropes danced and chanted the musical lyrics of Toy Town Major, Salt Pepper Mustard Vinegar, Nick Nack Paddywack, One two three alairy, etc. I wonder how children of today would cope with our 30s way of life?

The ELHS Newsletter is published twice yearly and is free to members of the Society. Editorial Team: Rosemary Taylor, Doreen Kendall and John Harris. Articles and letters welcomed.

Society Notes and News

The East London History Society held its Annual General Meeting on the 19th October 1995 at the Latimer Congregational Church Hall in Ernest Street.

In the absence of Mr. Alfred French, President, who was unwell, proceedings got under way. The Committee presented its report detailing the Society's activities over the past year. Rosemary Taylor, Chair, gave a brief summary of events and thanked the committee members for their hard work and support over the year. Philip Mernick, Treasurer presented the ELHS accounts. The Committee then stood down and indicated their willingness to continue for the year 1995-96.

Acting upon a suggestion from the floor and a show of hands, it was proposed that the committee be re-elected enmasse. This motion was seconded and carried unanimously. The following committee members have been re-elected:

Chair -	Rosemary Taylor
Secretary -	Doreen Kendall
Treasurer -	Philip Mernick
Membership -	John Harris
Programme -	David Behr
Coach Trips -	Ann Sansom
Members -	Doreen Osborne, Bradley Snooks.

The Society of Friends' faith in the East End is woven into our local history. Our speaker on Thursday 14 September, Edward Milligan spoke for 90 minutes about the meeting houses from Stepney Causeway to West Ham and personalities who are familiar to us. Mary Hughes, who, disgusted by the attitude of the churches in the First World War joined the Society of Friends in 1918; Elizabeth Fry, Quaker Minister and Prison Reformer (1780-1845) and her involvement with the Gracechurch Street Meeting House and Devonshire House; Samuel Gurney of Ham House, a banker and education reformer; Joseph Lister born in West Ham (1827-1912)

founder of antiseptic surgery. The lecture was well attended by a number of Friends who came along to support the Speaker.

The History of Blackwall Yard was an illustrated talk by Ann Robey, who researched and edited the Blackwall volume of the new Survey of London volume on Poplar and Blackwall. This was a detailed history of the yard from 1615 to 1995, supported by slides of archive material hitherto unseen.

On Saturday 28th October we were guests at the 40th anniversary of the re-dedication of All Hallows Church in Devons Road. This red brick church was built in 1870 from the proceeds of the sale of All Hallows Staining. Its patrons are the Grocers Guild, who still maintain their links and interest in the church today. The Revd Michael Peet made us all welcome and gave us an enjoyable talk on the history of the church. An impressive exhibition of valuable silver was on display, together with church registers and memorabilia. Prominent among the entries in the Baptism Register is that of George Leonard Carey of Fern Street, baptised on 8th December 1935. Today we know him as the Archbishop of Canterbury. On a humbler note, but no less important is the impressive font dedicated to Clara Grant, who for many years was a churchwarden, while she ran the Fern Street Settlement. Also displayed with archive photographs was a letter from the American Army requesting the use of the bombed church as a storage depot. One of our members thought it had been used to store equipment for D Day and some boys, including her brother, had got inside and helped themselves to a dingy which they used on the canal.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable day and the church members made us most welcome with refreshments laid on. It is a pity that so few of our members could find the time to come along and support the occasion, especially when so much time and trouble had gone into organising the visit.

For our lecture by Peter Shore MP, we had many students from Queen Mary College. We are all proud of Clement Atlee's long and dedicated association to the East End. Mr

Shore gave us an insight into how the government works, and how the coalition government during the war years was organised. Whilst Winston Churchill dealt with generals and admirals and the morale of the people, it was left to Clement Atlee to run the Home Front from evacuees and bombed out civilians, to rations and taxes. It was Atlee who had the vision to introduce prefabs for the thousands who were made homeless throughout the country.

Eddie Noble who lives in Upper Clapton is a frail elderly gentleman of 78 years of age. He came along to give us a fascinating account of his remarkable career in the RAF. Born in Jamaica and raised by his grandparents, he and his friends signed up in 1943 as volunteers to fight for Britain. When he left the RAF he worked as a legal clerk before applying for a position as a Telephone Operator, giving as a reference an acquaintance, who just happened to be the new Postmaster General! Eddie Noble has written extensively on his experiences, and has just launched his latest book, a fictional account of a West Indian married to a white woman "Invited Intruder".

Doreen Rosemary and hope to join Maggie Hewitt once again in their week long event for Tower Hamlets Schools. This year the topic will be Dr Hannah Billig of Cable Street. If any of our members knew her or have personal recollections of this remarkable lady, please do get in touch with Doreen or Rosemary soon. The project is sub-titled "Home Remedies" so if you have any memories of alternative remedies and treatment, please do pass them on to us.

The ELHS members will be at Tower Hamlets Cemetery on the second Sunday of every month, from 2 to 4 pm, if the weather is fair, until the birds start nesting. We will be recording memorial inscriptions and chasing up leads to any unusual or interesting graves and burials. Enquiries are welcomed and walks can be arranged if a group turns up. Rosemary will again be organising monthly walks through the Spring and Summer. Check with the Soanes Centre for details.

Spring Coach Trip 1996
on
Saturday 27th April
Otley Hall and Needham Market, Suffolk

Otley Hall is a moated manor house, 15th century, which the AA in 1994 voted one of the top twenty historic houses in the country. It has lovely gardens too. It is only open to the public very few days a year - I have arranged a special opening for our party.

We shall be stopping at the small but attractive town of Needham Market for lunch (own arrangements) and a look round. The church has a splendid hammer beam roof.

Tea will be at Otley Hall.

The pick up will be at Mile End opposite the station at 9.30 am.

The coach fare will be £6.50 a head and entrance to the house, which includes a guided tour, £5.00 (to be collected on the coach)

Please send bookings to Ann Sansom, using the form below.

To: Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London, E4 7PF. Tele: 0181 524 4506. Spring Coach Trip to Otley Hall and Needham Market.
I/we would like seats for the coach trip.
NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
TELE NO. _____
I/we enclose a cheque/PO for £..... payable to the East London History Society.