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# East London History Society Newsletter

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Volume 1 Issue 11

Summer 1996

## 50 YEARS AGO

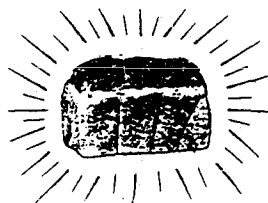
### The East End in 1946

The thoughts of most Eastenders in 1946 were on food, warmth, housing and jobs, all of which were very hard to come by. All essential foods were still rationed, this included meat (fresh and tinned), bread, milk, all chocolate and confectionery, potatoes, oranges, soap, coal, coke and petrol. A special permit was required to purchase new (utility) furniture, these permits were only issued to newly married couples.

If you had a pocketful of money all the above items could be bought without a ration book simply by going to Romford market, which at the time was the biggest centre of "black market" deals in the east of London.

Meanwhile, life for the ordinary people of the East End (the ones who did not have a pocketful of money) went on; the search for work by returning service men and women began to intensify as the services began to discharge thousands of people each week. The building trades were slack because of the very bad weather and a shortage of

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building materials. Fords of Dagenham had not yet tooled up its assembly lines for peacetime production and were not taking on many workers;

London Transport had a waiting list of people applying for work. The reason for this was that during the war any employee who went into the armed forces continued to be paid by London Transport and guaranteed their job back when they returned from the war.

Many Eastenders who went into the services as teenagers had been earning what can only be described as "boys wages". They were now in their twenties and demanded adult rates of pay. The employment situation was not good, even when all eighteen year old males were taken out of the labour market by conscription which was to remain in force for many years.

In Stepney a new block of flats was opened - West India House, situated in West India Dock Road. It was said to be

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the first permanent post-war building to be erected in London. Sadly, it was the only block of flats built in Stepney in 1946, and over 4,000 people were on the housing list.

Poplar had rehoused 4,585 families, which still left 6,000 on the housing list, which included over 1,000 who had no accommodation since they were bombed out of their houses. The local councils did what they could but were up against all sorts of obstructions. For example, many of the pre-fabs that were erected in Millwall could not be occupied because of a shortage of fittings (toilets and sinks). They were just empty shells.

The new Central Line Tube extension was finally opened. It ran from Liverpool Street to Stratford with new stations at Bethnal Green and Mile End. If and when building materials became available it was planned to extend the line to Loughton and Hainault by the end of 1947, and to Newbury Park and Ongar in 1948. Coborn Road station was to be closed permanently.

When the train carrying the VIPs left Mile End for Stratford it had great difficulty in making any progress. The tunnel had been sealed up for the whole of the war and the running rails were thick with rust and the train could not pick up the current.

Meanwhile, in Pennyfields, Limehouse, the police raided an "opium den" where large amounts of opium were found

with pipes and other items.

The owner was fined £300 and ordered to be deported to China.

### **John Harris**

#### **In Search of.....**

Doreen Kendall and John Harris will be happy to help with any problems members may have with research. Doreen in particular would be pleased to receive any information from members whose families are buried in Tower Hamlets Cemetery. Research is continuing and some very interesting discoveries have been made.

**Please Note:** All enquiries regarding membership and/or renewals should be directed to the Membership Secretary, John Harris, 15 Three Crowns Road, Colchester, CO4 5AD.

*The East London History Newsletter is published twice yearly, and is free to members of the Society.*

*The Newsletter is typeset and produced by Rosemary Taylor. The editorial team comprises John Harris, Doreen Kendall, David Behr, Philip Mernick and Rosemary Taylor.*

*Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are welcomed and we make every effort to publish suitable material.*

*Letters and enquiries may be sent to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF, or to Rosemary Taylor, 5 Pusey House, Saracen Street, Poplar, London E14 6HG.*

### **Sutherland Road 1940 The Final Chapter**

In the 1995 summer issue of the newsletter we printed an item about a bomb incident in Sutherland Road, Bow, in which we described a direct hit on a brick built surface shelter. Many of the dead, including 6 women were never identified.

Further research into this incident by the Society has shown that many of the victims were passengers from buses and trolley buses. When an air raid started all road transport services had to stop and passengers were directed to the nearest air raid shelter.

In the afternoon of the same day a bus had been hit by a bomb in Bow Road. This caused all buses to be diverted. While following the diversion route another air raid started. This put the nearest shelter for the bus passengers in Sutherland Road.

That is how the six unidentified ladies came to a violent end by being on a bus that was in the wrong road at the wrong time.

**John Harris**

### Tower Hamlets Honours 'King Cole'

The first Australian cricket team to tour England was in 1868 and was composed entirely of Aborigines. The team arrived in England in May, to play 47 matches, 10 of which were in the London area. King Cole, a member of the team was admitted to Guys Hospital where he died of tuberculosis on 24th June. He was buried in a pauper's grave in the Victoria Park Cemetery, now known as Meath Gardens.

In 1988, during a tour by the Aboriginal Cricket Association, a plaque was laid in King Cole's memory in Meath Gardens and a Eucalyptus tree was planted. Sadly, some years later, the plaque was stolen.

Tower Hamlets Borough, through the Arts, Leisure and Sports Committee has now replaced the plaque, in order to preserve the historical link with this unique occasion.

On Wednesday 31st July the new plaque was installed in the presence of the Australian

Deputy High Commissioner, Rosaleen McGovern.

Following the speeches, Rikki Shields, an Australian Aborigine presently living in London, performed a very moving ceremony. He laid a wreath by the plaque in the colours of the Aborigine flag, then placed various artifacts, including a boomerang, around the plaque, explaining that these sacred objects would help the bones and spirit of King Cole on the journey to its beginning time.

Rikki Shields then read a poem he had composed in honour of King Cole.

The occasion was marked with a cricket match between Tower Hamlets XI and a team from the Australian High Commission in Victoria Park. The Mayor of Tower Hamlets and the Australian Deputy High Commissioner enjoyed a pleasant afternoon in the Park, accompanied by the very few guests who were invited and a handful of spectators who happened by.

It was indeed a great pity that more publicity was not given to the occasion, as I am sure many of our members would have come along to support Doreen Kendall and Rosemary Taylor, who were the sole representatives of the ELHS.

The teams, umpires and guests retired to the Flounder & Firkin Public House for tea, where refreshments were laid on courtesy of Tower Hamlets. The Australians thoroughly enjoyed their afternoon away from their desks, and assured us that should we be unveiling any other plaques in the future, they would be delighted to celebrate the occasion with a cricket match in Victoria Park!

The ELHS is pleased with the commitment shown by the Arts, Leisure and Sports Committee in putting local history on the agenda, and we were delighted to hear that Dr. Hannah Billig has been put on the list.

**(see following page for Rikki's poem)**

### Notes and News on the William Morris Centenary

Two successful exhibitions have been held at the V & A Museum and the Vestry House Museum, to mark the centenary of William Morris's death.

The William Morris Gallery, Water House, Walthamstow is also a treasure trove of Morris work. Morris lived here as a boy from 1846 to 1856 and many of his tapestries reflect his love of animals and Epping Forest. In later life he supported the banning of exotic trees that were being planted in Epping Forest which would have altered the whole character of the forest. He was keen to see the forest remain a natural woodland. William Morris also founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, which has its offices in Spital Square, Spitalfields.

Rosemary has been researching William Morris's activities in the East End during the years when he was active with the Socialist League and lectured in Workingmen's Clubs and in Victoria Park. Originally intended as a piece for the newsletter, the work grew and grew, until it expanded to 8,000 words! With the help of Nicholas Salmon, editor of the William Morris Society Journal, the article has been accepted for the Spring 1997 edition of the Journal. For the benefit of our members, extracts from the article have been included in the newsletter.

## **The Last Over**

**(Written in honour of King Cole on the occasion of the unveiling of a plaque in Meath Gardens and reproduced here with the kind permission of the author)**

Legend of the Southern Cross Stars that light the night-sky over Australia,

Seven Aboriginal Women fetch the wood at sundown, then they fly into the sky  
and make seven campfires, while they wait eternally for the lost warriors to return home.

1866 was a stormy night as the women watched the wooden ships sailing  
from Botany Bay, inside the ship were twelve gallant warriors

They went as Ambassadors in games and humanity, to play this strange sport ... Cricket.

Behind their land was ravaged and claimed in the name of fair play

Loyoranna the Wind, blew the ship, across mountainous seas

Then finally to the River Snake ... Thames

London Town where Clay People dwell, Who rule by class, Stone hearts, Darkness, No Fire in  
the Sky.

The Cricket warriors knew the dangers if they failed on this Mission  
wondrous people did they meet, the old young, but not Politicians.

Then tragedy struck - off spinner bowler Sugar died, whereabouts unknown.

Chief King Cole passed away in white-fella death house at St. Guy's

No sacred ceremony, No Weeping Women, to help their bones and spirit return to their  
beginning time.

Did the evil Clayface doctor swap King's bones for their own?

Does he sit in a shoebox or glass jar in Royal college of Surgeons in central London Town  
...we'll never know.

Yet the seven Aboriginal Women's night fire shines brightly

The women still weeping, still hoping.

There is humanity in this hostile jungle city of London

The People of Tower Hamlets erected a stone for the journey and memory of our Dusky  
Warrior of Cricket

Ambassador King Cole ...

The names of other members in team were: Sugar, Neddy, Jellico Cousins, Mullagh, Bullocky,  
Tarpot, Sundown, Officer, Peter and Captain.

© **Rikki Shields**

## Edward Francis Coke & the Legend of the Red Church

Stories of Victorian East London's social problems are dominated by the famous who straddled the scene like giants of their time: Dr. Barnardo and destitute children, William Booth and the Salvation Army are among those whose histories are well documented. But there were others who set out in their own way to resolve different social problems with equal fervour. The names of such people are virtually unknown. Edward Francis Coke is in this category.

E F Coke was born in Jamaica in 1817 where his family had been plantation owners since 1741. Edward, a student at St. Paul's London took his MA at Oxford University. After ordination in 1840 he served as a curate at All Saints Hereford and later as Vicar at Plymstock, Devon. In 1842 Edward married Fanny Symons. She was born in rural Hackney and came from a family of clergy. The couple had four daughters: Frances, Juliana, Amy and Charlotte.

St. James the Great, Bethnal Green - known by locals as The Red Church - was built in 1843-44 and cost £8,000.

Constructed in red brick with stone dressing, it had a pulpit and fittings of oak and the organ, installed by Joseph Walker, was said to cost £800. The Bishop of London, Dr. CJ Blomfield, consecrated the

church on 4 June 1844. Eight years later Revd. Coke gave up his quiet living in Plymstock and came to the rough and tumble of East London where began a life-long career as the Vicar of St. James the Great, the second incumbent of that office.

At St. James Revd. Coke learned that many parishioners were not married. Among their reasons for living together in this unblest state included the high cost of a wedding. In a forthright manner he sought out such people and married them free of charge. Clergy opposition to Revd. Coke's action was equally forthright. The grant aid to St. James ceased. From 1854 - the year of the Crimea War - Revd. Coke appears to have carried out church duties without the assistance of a curate. All marriage certificates bear his signature.

Revd. Coke proved to be a determined man. He set out to get round this problem of funding by launching an appeal for money. His novel method was to advertise: "Wanted forty thousand shillings (£2000) to secure an additional minister in Bethnal Green. Collections of 5s, 10s, or 30s will much oblige. Revd. E Coke, Parsonage, Bethnal Green." That small ad - one of many - appeared in The Times on 13 February 1860.

A few days later that ad resulted in a letter in The Times signed by a "Bethnal Green

Incumbent". The unknown parson whinged about his colleague "begging for the endowment of a curate". In spite of clergy opposition it was said that Revd. Coke's modern methods of chasing elusive shillings met with the Bishop of London's approval.

Apart from a temporary appointment in 1861 the church operated without assistant clergy until 1863 when a full time curate was appointed. That happy event - however it came about - was just before Revd. Coke's press campaign for additional funds achieved its target.

The finance of a church is partly dependent on marriage fees. Without fees the money must come from another source. At St. James the source was created in this fashion: in 1864, with the money from his successful appeal, Revd. Coke set up a trust of £2000. A wall plaque in the church stated that the 4% interest from that trust was to be used for supplementing the stipend of the curate, caretaker and choirmaster. The remainder to be used for fuel, light and incidental expenses. The trust required that *no fee shall be charged in the church for the performance of the marriage ceremony; banns and licenses only to be paid for.*

Revd. Coke's concern for the physical well being of people led him to become involved in Queen Adelaide's Dispensary. On 23 June 1865 he and 8 other

trustees set up a charity *for the purpose of building a new QAD for the benefit of the poor in Bethnal Green*. A handsome dispensary was constructed in Pollards Row costing over £7000 raised by voluntary contributions. Probably as an acknowledgment of his fundraising ability Revd. Coke became the QAD charity treasurer, a position he still held in 1893 having then outlived the other 8 original trustees.

The Dispensary became renowned for its good work. And the growing pressure for free marriages at nearby St. James became so great that group ceremonies were held daily. It seems that proof of intended couples address was not sought and thus many came from outside the parish in order to tie the knot.

George Page, Emma Goff and five other couples were married on Monday 12 November 1877 at St. James. All six certificates give their address simply as "Bethnal Green" but Mr. and Mrs. Page came from Holborn. 63 years later the widowed Emma, then 85, died from the effects of the 1940 Blitz. Her cherished marriage certificate was salvaged twice in WW2 from bombed-out homes. That family treasure, a yellowing document, boldly headed, St. James the Great, Bethnal Green, is now in her granddaughter's possession.

The November when the Pages married, there were 67 weddings at St. James. For comparison one needs to look at records of nearby churches

for the same month. At St. John there were 5 weddings. At St. Matthew there were 8. J C Tattershall, curate at St. James, must have been word perfect when quoting the marriage vows. Doubtless he could have written a certificate in the dark.

We get a glimpse of St. James in Arthur Morrison's book, *A Child of the Jago*, published in the 1890s. The Jago is based on the harsh reality of the Old Nichol, a vile ghetto of 5,000 souls in Bethnal Green where poverty, disease and crime flourished. In the story a Jago youth of 17 contemplates marriage. Morrison picks up the theme and describes a group wedding at the "sevenpenny church", clearly intended to be the Red Church:

"There was a church in Bethnal Green where you might be married for sevenpence if you were 14 and no questions asked. If they were, then answers were easy to invent. You just came in, drunk if possible, with a batch of some scores, and rowdied about the church with your hat on and the curate worked off the crowd at one go, calling out the names one after another. You sang, or you drank out of a bottle, or you flung a prayer book at a friend. The whole thing was not a bad joke for the money, though after all sevenpence is half a gallon and not to be wasted."

Revd. Coke is referred to as a "caring man" but there are not handed-down stories to describe his characteristics. He was clearly a more practical

Christian than many of his contemporaries. And he was that rare creature, a commuting vicar. The Coke family lived in West Green Road, Tottenham, a Victorian North London suburb that was then pleasantly green.

The poor quality of life in Victorian Bethnal Green plus the squalor of nearby Old Nichol may have influenced Edward and Fanny Coke to raise their four genteel daughters in a softer environment. As a reminder of their former home in Devon, the Coke house in suburban Tottenham was named Plymcoot. The commuting vicar must have had a travel problem in his early years at St. James for the railway across North East London was not cut until 1865. Revd. Coke never retired. He died in office in November 1897 at the age of 80 having given 45 years of his life to the Red Church and its parish problems.

St. James reputation became legendary. Often brief articles appeared in the press "marriages solemnised gratis" wrote one hack, but seldom was its originator mentioned by name. Even entertainers picked up the subject. Marie Lloyd, from nearby Shoreditch, would have known about St. James. At the turn of the century dear Marie entertained her music hall audiences with a song that went on about "The Old Red Church in Bethnal Green". Her stage patter on that theme would have been interesting to hear.

Throughout the years St. James suffered from a number of costly structural problems. It also survived WW2 bombs that created so much damage and death in East London. In post-war years the church continued to offer free marriages but required one of the twosome to be resident in the parish. One of St. James most publicised weddings took place in 1965 when East End gangster Reg Kray married Frances Shea, with Ron Kray as Best Man. Records do not show whether the marriage was a freebie. If it was then it happened just one hundred years after Revd. Coke's offer of "no fee" began.

The advent of the National Health Service brought an end to the QAD. Though now used for other purposes the building still carries the title "Queen Elizabeth Dispensary" cut in stone. In the 1980's The Red Church closed its doors for the last time. A few years later property developers bought the empty church and converted it into 27 modern flats. St. James the Great, where many thousands of free weddings took place acquired a new identity. In 1991 it became St. James Court.

### Stephen Sadler

Sources of information:

*Endowed Charities 1895, GLRO. GRO. IGI. Tower Hamlets History Library. Coke and Page family archives. East London Advertiser. Census Records. Crockford's Cler. Dir. The Times.*

### The Virginia Settlers Memorial - a plea

As Chair of the ELHS I am continually seeking ways of creating wider awareness of our local history and heritage. For several years I have been researching the history of Blackwall. I have also led guided walks around the area and one of the highlights of the walk is leading people to the Blackwall Stairs, from where the Virginia Settlers, the first permanent white settlers in America embarked upon the greatest journey of their lives to a new world.

At present a great deal of development has taken place at Blackwall, but as yet the Virginia Settlers Memorial has not be refurbished or replaced. The Memorial originally comprised a granite base, a plaque and a bronze mermaid. The mermaid was stolen in the late 1970's and the plaque taken into safekeeping by the Museum in Docklands whilst the area was undergoing extensive redevelopment. Today, all that remains is the granite plinth.

At present the Council are landscaping the area and the LDDC have indicated that part of the area will be developed by Barratts as a housing complex.

There is no access to what was

Brunswick Pier, as the gate leading to the area is padlocked. Access via Reuters' car park is impossible because of their security system.

A group of us have approached the LDDC and Tower Hamlets Council with a plan to create access to the river at this point, to refurbish the Memorial and to reconstruct Blackwall Stairs, which would have been the point of departure of the Settlers.

We are anxious that this matter should be expedited as the site chosen for the Millennium Exhibition at Blackwall Point is exactly opposite to the Memorial, on the south bank of the Thames. The whole area will be the focus of attention and a tremendous source of tourist interest, as millions of visitors attend the exhibition site. It would be wonderful to see the Virginia Settlers Memorial restored and become the focal point of interest on the north bank of the river.

I have written to various societies in Virginia, but have not received a single reply. I am hoping that members of the ELHS will support this campaign and if anyone has any ideas or suggestions as to how we can proceed, I would be delighted to hear from them.

**Rosemary Taylor**

### Hannah Billig at the Ragged School Museum

The Exhibition on this much loved and dedicated East End doctor will be on display at the Ragged School Museum from Sunday 6th October. There will be an opening ceremony at noon, which will be followed by the usual opening of the Museum to the general public. All ELHS members are invited to attend.

## MEMBERS' MAILBOX

**Mrs. Ellen Twine, Sutton in Ashfield writes:**

I must just say how much I enjoyed the Spring Newsletter No. 10. It's only six years since we moved away from London and I know all the places mentioned, it brings back so many memories. I also sent for a copy of "Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar in Old Photographs", and its just great and wonderful photos.

One of the letters that was really interesting in the newsletter was from Stephen Sadler, about the Home Guard. My Dad was in the Home Guard, Mr. A C Cox, he worked at Bryant and Mays for 55 years altogether. During the war years he was of military age but was exempt because of his job. Bryants were making all kinds of munitions, including incendiary bombs, flame throwers etc. I remember him saying how hard it was, doing a long day in the factory then having to do his Home Guard duty. He was often on duty during air raids, and was sent with a group to help when the terrible disaster happened at Bethnal Green Tube Station. His Home Guard section was stationed at, if I've got it right, "Coopers School" off Coborn Road. If I remember right, there was a big Square there, that's where they did their "square bashing."

It's because of my Dad's connections with Bryants, I was envious when I read Mrs. Shirley's mention of "Thank you for the picture postcard of Bryant and Mays", is this available, please because I would like one. I'm very interested in anything connected to Bryants.

**Ed. Note:** *Hope you received the postcard, which Doreen Kendall posted off to you. It is one of a set of 6 views of East London done by Rosemary Taylor in 1989.*

**A L Hellicar, Benfleet, Essex:**

I have just finished reading John Hector's "Poplar in the 20's", and in doing so, corrected several errors. I found it interesting. His memories are much about the same as mine.

Cardosi (p.26) who kept a cafe rather than just a coffee shop, played a silver trumpet very well. He once accompanied me as I played piano at a party in Limehouse in the late 20's.

Eaton, oil and colourman, supplied his wares to ships in the local docks, and far afield from Poplar. My brother started working for him on leaving school, and I often helped push a barrow when he had to make a delivery in Hackney. On the way back we invariably stopped at a "good pull up for carman" (coffee shop) for a mug of tea and bread and dripping.

The Tunnel Avenue Park mentioned (p.28) is, of course, Tunnel Gardens. I went there often as a lad and remember it as a large asphalted area with swings and parallel bars. There was also a bandstand.

It seemed that most front rooms in my part of Poplar contained a piano (p.33). We had one and I could manage to play a tune for my sisters to dance to, but mainly it was performed on by a well-taught pianist. Gladys Thompson was one and she often came to play bringing with her a couple of chorus girls from the Queen's theatre.

The "Grand Cinema" (p.37) was not in Tunnel Avenue. The address

was either East India Dock Road or Robin Hood Lane. It was a little more select than the nearby "Pavilion".

I do remember the "Gaiety" cinema. Was it not on the corner of East India Dock Road and Saracen Street? King George's Hall was conducted by the Methodist Church, corner of Woodstock Terrace. Pictures at the Poplar and Bromley Tabernacle for children was on Thursdays after school hours. Films were shown on a large white sheet which could be lowered on a roller. Adults went later in the evening for fourpence, many carrying a cushion to counter the hard wooden seating.

Mr. Hector remembers St. Leonard's Road very well, as it was in its heyday. I used to buy hay for my rabbit at the cornchandler's Cornclius. He kept a parrot which talked better than a lot of locals. I never heard it swear! His shop sign was a large horse's head.

The disinfectant given free by the Council was, I think, formalin and not chloride of lime (p.7). I collected bottles of it for my parents from a depot in Violet Road.

Like Hector I too took on a delivery, of tea, for an old gentleman and earned half-a-crown a week at the age of eight to nine years. It was in pound packets and cost one shilling and nine pence per pound.

Mention of George Green Grammar School (p.13) reminded me of the day I was passing by and stopped to watch a signwriter completing a notice board. He had spelt grammar as 'grammer'. I tipped the secretary off and it was promptly corrected.



St. Leonard's Street School is, or was, of course, St. Leonard's Road School (p.14). I don't remember a St. Matthias School in Grundy Street. Was Howrah House, East India Dock Road, a Catholic School? My sister Edith went there and we were Baptists, normally attending Poplar and Bromley Tabernacle. The building was originally built for Duncan Dunbar, shipbuilder and owner.

East India Dock Road was Poplar's "Monkey Parade". Most shops were well lit at night and attracted the attention of potential customers. Lads and lasses gallivanted up and down hoping to pair off together. (P.20).

The bank on the corner of Chrisp Street was Barclay's, not the Midland. An old gentleman lived next door in the Victoria Wine Company shop who used the Poplar Central Library. He only ever borrowed two books, one at a time. They were "The Crossing" by Winston Churchill and "Nicholas Nickleby" by Dickens. We kept them under the counter for him.

There were no canteens in schools (p.23) but some, if not all, had cookery classes.

When I was between 13 and 14 years old, as a monitor, I collected teachers' dinners from the cookery section of the Cripples School attached to Bromley Hall Road School. When taking the plates back I often scooped a baked potato left over.

"The Admiral" fried fish shop was once a public house of that name. The average person bought a "tuppenny piece", but a well off customer went for a "fourpenny", with chips and a "wally" (gherkin).

*Contd in col.3*

## Crested China

This is the collector's name for a very extensive series of souvenirs widely sold for more than fifty years. Made of white pottery in a tremendous variety of shapes they are printed with the coat of arms of the town or district they were to be sold in. The firm of W H Goss, active from the 1880's until about 1930, is easily the most prolific, although there were other makers.

New designs were continually being introduced to encourage sales and there are now quite a lot of dealers specialising in the sale of them.

As a collector of almost anything local, I registered my name with some of these dealers and asked them to look out for any pieces from Poplar, Stepney or Bethnal Green. Within a year I had acquired eight different examples from Poplar but none from the other two boroughs. Why should there be more souvenirs of this borough than the others? Some Poplar pieces are likely to have been bought by sailors coming into the Millwall, East India and West India Docks, but Stepney had its St. Katharine's and London Docks and Bethnal Green has always been proud of its Blind Beggar legend.

Has any reader any theory about why Poplar seems to have sold more souvenirs or indeed does anyone have any of these curious mementos.

**Philip Mernick**

*contd from col. 1*

I often got treated to the larger piece by my brother-in-law after acting as a baby-sitter.

I don't remember the parrots in Mo Lewis's surgery. He was a "rough and ready" dentist, no messing about. Sit down, hold tight, one big yank, out it comes, one shilling, please! (P.24).

I could write another page at least, but I'll stop now and I hope you'll find just a little of interest in my meandering.

**Ed Note:** *It is always a pleasure to hear from Mr. Hellicar. Thank you very much indeed for your review.*

*Howrah House was a Catholic Convent, the nuns were of the Order of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. They also taught at Wade Street School. Revd. Mother Alice Barton was in charge in the 1920's. The School was bombed in WW2 and moved to St. Victoire's, later merging with Philip Howard (now Blessed John Roche in Upper North Street.) and yes, there was a St. Matthias School in Grundy Street.*

**Mrs. Elsie Shirley, Springfield, Chelmsford, has sent in a photograph and a copy of a certificate she received as a member of the Better Britain Brigade. She writes:**

Although many of your readers will remember the Girl Guide movement, I wonder how many will know of the "Better Britain Brigade".

This is a photograph of a group who joined this movement as they progressed from the Brownies. We all went to St. Paul's church in St. Stephen's Road, Old Ford, and the meetings for the "Better Britains" were held in the tin hut in Parnell

Road. We learnt the same things as the Girl Guides and looked forward to the weekly meetings.

As you can see the uniform was very different but very practical as we could wear the gym slip and blouse for school, The tie was red and white, and the hat was navy blue with a red and white cord around the turn up.

Sister Savage, in the centre of the picture was respected by us all.

The original photograph was taken by H Harrison, 119 Roman Road, Bow. Perhaps you would like this copy to add to your collection.

The photocopy is of the certificate we received when we were proficient enough.

I hope it brings back memories to at least some members who may happen to see the photo.

#### Ed. Note:

*The photograph, which shows 19 girls with Sister Savage, was taken in 1938/9. It will be available at the Bancroft Road Local History Library, should any members wish to see it.*

*The Certificate has the caption BETTER BRITAIN BRIGADE against the background of the Union Jack, with the words:*

*I mean to try God helping me so to lead my life that I may leave my country better than I found it.*

*The address of the Brigade Headquarters is that of the Church Army, 55 Bryanston Street, Marble Arch. The Better Britain Brigade was founded by Miss Burn and the Brigade Secretary at the time was Captain R Olive.*

#### Urban Theology work at St. Botolph's Aldgate - an appeal to assist in the work of Fr. Ken Leech

St. Botolph's church, Aldgate, stands at the point where the City of London meets the East End. For many years the church has been a centre for crisis ministries of various kinds as well as for pastoral and social care of people in many different communities. There has been a long history of Jewish-Christian dialogue and cooperation while today many of the children in the church school are of Muslim background. There is a well-established work with homeless people and with people with HIV/AIDS as well as the 'normal' activity of a parish church in the city.

In 1990 Fr. Ken Leech was employed as a community theologian by St. Botolph's. His role was threefold: first, to develop thinking and action in the field of drug abuse, homelessness and racial justice, building on work which he has been doing on these issues in the East End for thirty years. Secondly, to help to link the local with the global, to connect the work at St. Botolph's with wider networks of thought, with the church beyond Aldgate. Thirdly, to pursue theological reflection from the context of inner East London, and to make links with the growing numbers of people in many different places who have chosen to do their theology outside the academic world.

Ken Leech's many years' experience in East London and his work at St. Botolph's has made it possible for him to develop his thinking and practice not only for the good of St. Botolph and the East End, also in places as diverse as Manchester, Devon and Chicago!

He is the author of several books and articles on the East End, on various topics including Brick Lane 1978, Cable Street, and Stewart Headlam.

**Donations to assist Fr. Ken may be sent to Revd. Brian Lee, St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate, London EC3 1AB, or write for further information.**

#### LECTURE NOTES

We had a very successful lecture programme during the season 95-96, and all credit must go to David Behr, who works extremely hard throughout the year, following up leads on speakers and topics which might be of interest to our members. We have been packed to overflowing on several occasions, with some members travelling miles to attend.

Anne Kershen's talk on East London Tailors was excellent, informative and enlightening. She has a wealth of knowledge on the 19th century rag trade, especially the influence of Jewish masters and workers on employment in the East End.

Frank Small has spent years painstakingly researching the history of Morpeth Street School, and illustrated his talk with slides of the school through the years. The talk was attended by some of the pupils from the school, and a surprise ingredient was a beautifully decorated cake with the school motto and badge.

The lecture of Edith Cavell was everything one could hope for and Margaret Crispin did more than justice to her subject. The slides of archival material were superb and Margaret's enthusiasm for her subject was evident. She gave a moving account of the events which led up to the execution of this brave nurse, and told us that even today she is remembered by the nurses of the London Hospital, who lay a wreath at the foot of her statue in St Martin's Lane.

Our final lecture was on furniture makers in and around Curtain Road, by David Dewing of the Geffrye Museum. Again, the slides superbly illustrated the subject matter.

## World Jubilee Jamboree, 1957 - An East End Lad Remembers

I was just over 13 years old when I was given the chance to be selected to represent England as a member of the East London 'B' Troop at the Boys Scouts World Jubilee Jamboree in August 1957. This great event was to take place at Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield in Warwickshire. I worked hard for the next few months to pass the remaining parts needed for my first class badge.

I had joined the Scouts at the age of 11, becoming a member of the 36th Poplar Troop, who held their meetings at the Bow Methodist Church Hall, situated just outside at what is now the Bow flyover but was then the old Bow Bridge. We lived in Leggatt Street, Stratford, and I attended the Three Mills School in Abbey Lane.

I became a patrol leader of the 'horse patrol'. The name was my choice because of my great love of horses, our colours being black and white. Our skipper was a lovely man by the name of Jim Jones, who was a great help to me in many ways. With the deadline rapidly approaching, I still had my tracking and 24 mile hike to do to gain first class.

It was a bitterly cold day in March when my Deputy Patrol Leader, Melvin (who was also at the Jamboree interview with me and had to obtain his first class) went for a weekend camp in Kent to take our exam for the tracking badge. We passed, but arrived home on Sunday afternoon absolutely frozen. For our 24-mile hike we chose a route that went through Ingatestone, Margaretting and several other lovely little villages in Essex. We had a

fantastic weekend and after spending the best part of the following week writing our reports, were delighted to receive a pass with honours.

We then had to attend a further selection interview and I was over the moon at being selected. Poor Melvin froze with nerves and unfortunately failed.

As hosts, the United Kingdom contingent arrived on the 29th July where we assembled tents and dining shelters, which was hard work after a 1 1/2 mile walk with our kit from Sutton Coldfield Station to our site.

Our sub-camp was called "Godollo". The gateway entrance was two towers with the white stags motif of Hungary, symbol of the 1933 World Jamboree there. The camp gateways attracted much attention from the International Scout gatherings. Each United Kingdom area and each visiting country had constructed their own gateways.

There were 9,772 scouts representing the United Kingdom, 2,041 from France, 1,766 from the USA, 638 from Luxembourg down to as few as 6 from North Borneo, 3 from Burma and 1 each from Argentina, El Salvador and Lebanon. Total attendance in all was 31,426.

Our meals were all cooked on open fires, of course, and camp fires were held on most evenings in the sub-camps.

I had an excellent time mixing with scouts from abroad, swapping badges and learning their ways. There were many displays by various countries every day, including a brilliant display by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Unfortunately, it all passed too quickly and on the 12th August at

9 am came the closing ceremony conducted by Olave, Lady Baden-Powell OBE World Chief Guide and wife of our founder, Lord Baden-Powell. Part of her speech remains in my memory: "This great Jamboree and our world camps have been but tokens. Millions of boys and girls, men and women of every colour, creed and country, living together as brothers and sisters under one promise and one law. Over the last two weeks scouts of so many different lands and languages have lived in harmony together, forgetting all the differences that separate, thinking only of the ties that unite. Your founder knew the great truth that happiness comes not from what we have, but from what we give and share."

At the end of her speech, the World Chief Guide invited all to reaffirm the scout promise in their own language. As the lights dimmed, from out of the darkness many brilliant fireworks blazed skyward. It was a thrilling moment for all. The lights came back on, and the great mass of scouts surged forward.

Lady Baden-Powell retired to the Royal Box as tremendous cheers filled the arena in a demonstration of love and affection for this gracious lady. The cheers finally stopped, then as all scouts linked arms in international groups, we marched away from the arena for the last time, singing the Jamboree song.

Over the past almost 40 years, I occasionally relax, close my eyes and relive this wonderful time and I now realise what a sacrifice my parents must have made in providing me with everything I needed for this Jamboree.

**George Smith**

## BOOKSHELF

**Life and Death in Spitalfields 1700 to 1850** by Margaret Cox (Published by the Council for British Archaeology 1996.)

Price £15 inc. p&p from CBA, 111 Walmgate, York YO1 2UA.

This beautifully produced book, lavishly illustrated, is a detailed account of an archaeological project which took place at Christ Church, Spitalfields between 1984 and 1989. The project centred around the excavation of the vaults beneath the church, and analysis of the skeletons and artefacts within them. Almost 1000 skeletons were recovered, comprising burials from 1729, when the church was opened for burials, to 1859. The excavations were one of the most important ever undertaken, and provided a wealth of information, which was then supplemented by an abundance of historical data from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Whilst successive newspaper articles have highlighted some of the more spectacular finds as they came to light, including that of Louisa Courtauld, one of the more famous Huguenots to lie buried here, Margaret Cox has put together a documentation of the project which not only graphically depicts the hazards encountered by the archaeologists involved, but also the often heart-rending personal stories their investigations brought to light. As the author justly points out, the project could not have succeeded without the support of the various funding bodies who sponsored it, but more crucially the cooperation of those whose ancestors were buried in Christ Church. It was the work of those dedicated to researching their family histories who helped to give

substance to scientific exploration and to put flesh on the bones (if I may be forgiven this pun).

The author has given us a wealth of detail about the area, starting with its use in Roman times as a cemetery. Her story takes us through the construction of Christ Church, one of Hawksmoor's three East End churches, and leads us skillfully up to moment when the decision to excavate the vaults was taken.

The whole project was photographed in very difficult conditions, poor light and restricted access hampering the workers at every stage, but we have been provided with invaluable historic evidence of 18th and 19th century funerary customs amongst the Huguenots, who were the main community in Spitalfields during this period.

The book details the results of the archaeologists' and anthropologists' studies of the 'named sample' i.e. of those whose skeletal remains could be identified by name and historical data.

For the researcher into family history, there is an abundance of material to sift through, and for those with a Huguenot connection, an opportunity to augment their knowledge of their forebears. A fascinating read for anyone interested in life and death in Georgian London.

Whilst the coffin decorations and clothing recovered proved invaluable evidence of funerary rites, the condition of the skeletal remains revealed a great deal about the people themselves, their health, their diet and their lifestyles.

Some of the coffins excavated contained embalmed bodies impervious to decay, and

mummified remains and it soon became evident that the archaeologists were not fully prepared for the psychological effect of finding bodies in varying stages of decay.

So, a word of warning - this book is not for the squeamish. But for the rest of us, compulsive reading. I, for one, could not put it down. Well-researched, well-produced and well worth the price.

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**Refugees - We Left Because We Had To** by Jill Rutter, The Refugee Council. Price £6.00 from the Refugee Council, 3 Bondway, London SW8 1SF.

A hefty book, A4 size, 248 pages, this is an educational book for 14-18 year olds, but makes for very informative reading. Tracing the history of refugees in Britain from 1200 to 1970 is no mean feat and the author has included personal testimonies as well as statistical data. If this were required reading on the National Curriculum, young people's attitudes to strangers in their neighbourhoods would alter significantly.

Perhaps it is too much to hope that publications of this kind would eliminate racial tensions, but the heart-rending tales of torture and man's inhumanity to man which force people to seek safety in foreign lands, go a long way towards educating people and creating a more tolerant society.

Incidentally, the book is fully illustrated and the low price (no doubt heavily subsidised) does not reflect the high quality of the publication.

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**Pie 'N' Mash, A Guide to Londoners Traditional Eating Houses**, by the Pie 'n' Mash Club of Great Britain, 1995 Edition

published by J Smith and Sons.  
Price £3.00, available at the  
Ragged School Museum  
Bookshop.

I picked up this quirky book out of curiosity shortly after the Exhibition of Pic and Mash Shops closed. Fully illustrated and comprehensively indexed, it is intended for the true connoisseur of not just pie and mash and liquor, but jellied eels too.

Included with details of what could be every single Pie and Mash shop in the south of England, are the histories of the Cockney, the Pearlies and the Costers of London's markets.

An excellent publication somewhat marred by over-production. While the graphics are excellent in themselves, there is a tendency to overuse and the quaint typeface makes for difficult reading.

**Rosemary Taylor**

**The Infernal Diver** by John Bevan (£59.00 inc. p&p. Available from Submex Ltd., 21 Roland Way, London SW7 3RF)

Case Bound, 314 pages, 185 figures, 24 colour plates.

In the past we have been asked by member John Bevan for help in his search for the burial place of John Deane who, with his brother invented the diving helmet. John Deane lived in East London and was believed to have committed suicide here. Ten years of research and a Ph.D. thesis has culminated in this definitive work on the invention and development of the diving helmet and dress. This book reinstates the importance of the Deanes in the history of diving. From concept to initial trials in Deptford, from dock clearance to wreck salvage, their remarkable

adventures rewrite an important part of history - the birth of today's international diving industry.

The Archives Photograph series have produced a number of books on the following areas: **Forest Gate, Ilford, Stoke Newington, Islington, Wanstead, Walthamstow, Canning Town, Leyton, Newham Dockland, Around Plaistow, and The Annual Hop - London to Kent.**

These books are all of photographs and postcards of places and people of the area. Price for each is £8.99 plus postage.

In the same series as Rosemary and Chris Lloyd's book on **Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar** are the following: **Chadwell Heath and the Road to Romford Market, Islington, Stoke Newington, Stamford Hill and Upper Clapton.** All are of the same format, that is, archive photographs with brief histories of the areas. All the books in this series are £7.99 plus postage of £1.

These books would make super Christmas or Birthday presents and can be ordered from the East of London Family History Society, who run a very successful mail order service, but no facilities for personal callers. Write to Mr. Filby, 19 Cavendish Gardens, Ilford, Essex IGI 3EA.

During a visit to the National Trust shop at Suttons House, Hackney, where they stock all publications of the Hackney Society, I bought **Loddiges of Hackney** by David Solman (£4.50 plus postage £1). For 100 years the most famous nursery garden in Europe stood near to the present Hackney Town Hall. They

supplied all the trees for Albany Park Cemetery and the Victorian craze for ferns which were sold here and displayed in large palm houses.

In 1795 Captain Bligh of The Bounty fame brought 37 species of fern to Britain from the West Indies. John Bailey trained and worked here for 20 years before establishing in 1839 the Botanical Garden in Adelaide, South Australia for the Colonial Governor Gawley. Later when funding failed he founded the Hackney Nursery and today this area is marked by Hackney Road and the district of Hackney Adelaide.

**Hackney History** Vol. 1 - A4 size, price £3 + 50p postage or free to members of Friends of Hackney Archives, is another publication worthy of mention.

**Vanished Churches of the City of London** by Gordon Huelin, Guildhall Library Publications, price £5.95, postage £1.00. 69 churches were destroyed in the bombing of the City from 1940-1.

A few years ago Rosemary Taylor was told by an elderly resident of Poplar that 49 churches had been bombed in Poplar. Harry Watton, then librarian at Bancroft Local History Library was very sceptical, so Rosemary started to track down the number of churches which were damaged or destroyed in Poplar - she has so far found 26 in the area, and still keeps uncovering forgotten chapels and places of worship which disappeared in the Blitz. If one were to add the churches in Bow, Bromley by Bow and the Isle of Dogs (all part of the old Borough) the number would be significantly more. So perhaps Agnes Hill was

right, after all. Which takes us back to the above book, whose value to future researchers cannot be measured.

For those who like walking the Ragged School Museum has on sale the Regents Canal Walk, written and researched by Tom Ridge, price 30p + 36p postage. Describes in detail a walk between Limehouse and the Museum along the Regents Canal.

**The Special Charms of Waterside Pubs** produced by London Docklands £1.50 plus 50p postage. The pamphlet describes 25 drinking and eating places in the docklands, their history and name changes.

Patrick Hanshaw has just published a sequel to **Nothing is Forever**, this one is titled **All My Yesterdays**, and describes life in Wapping and the East End in the 1950s and 60s. Published by Bancroft Library, where the book is on sale, please check with the library for details.

#### **Doreen Kendall**

**Arts and Events in Tower Hamlets** are publishing listings of events bi-monthly. Copies are obtainable from the Spitalfields Information Centre. Information and contributions to future events may be sent to Brian Oakaby, LBTH Town Hall, Mulberry Place, Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG.

**Every Stone Tells a Story, a short history and history trail of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.** A new edition will be out in September, fully illustrated with line drawings and with additional information on new finds. Price £3.50 + £1.00 p&p, from Rosemary Taylor, 5 Pusey House, Saracen St. Poplar, London E14 6HG.

#### **William Morris in Victoria Park**

Victoria Park was a popular spot for Sunday gatherings and during the years 1885 to 1888, along with the Salvation Army Bands, the Union leaders, and various assorted soap box orators could be seen the unmistakable figure of William Morris. On 26th July 1885 Tom Mann, one of the leaders of the Dockers' Tanner strike, saw Morris on what was to be the first of several visits he made to the Park. He was being heartily applauded by his audience of workers, but to Mann's mind Morris looked 'the picture of Bluff King Hal.'

However, to others he presented a somewhat different profile. In a letter dated 30th March 1887, Morris wrote, '*Last Sunday it befell me to go to Victoria Park (beyond Bethnal Green) to a meeting. Now I have mounted a cape or cloak grey in colour so that people doubt whether I be a brigand or a parson; this seemed too picturesque for some 'Arrys' who were passing by and they sung out after me, Shakespeare - Yah!*'

Morris visited the Park on 11th October 1885, shortly after the Dod Street episode, when the Free Speech Radicals were arrested for speaking at Limchouse and taken to Thames Magistrate's Court. In the confusion at the Court, Morris himself was arrested and brought before the Magistrate.

In 1886 Morris made just one visit to the Park, on 8th August, after which he wrote: '*... and then away Eastward Ho to Victoria Park, rather sulky at having to turn out so soon after dinner. Though Victoria Park is rather a pretty place with water (dirty though) and lots of trees. Had a*

*good meeting there also spoke for nearly an hour altogether in a place made noisy by other meetings, also a band not far off. Whereby I was somewhat hoarse for our evening lecture ...'*

In 1887 Morris was back in the Park as a regular visitor and addressed the crowds no less than 5 times, on 27th March, 21st May, 23rd July, 21st August and 11th September. In August 1887 Morris wrote to his dear friend Georgiana Burne-Jones: '*It is a beautiful bright Autumn morning here, as fresh as daisies; and I am not over-inclined for my morning preachment at Walham Green but go I must, as also to Victoria Park in the afternoon. I had a sort of dastardly hope that it might rain. Mind you, I don't pretend to say that I don't like it in some way or other, when I am on my legs. I fear that I am an inveterate word-spinner and not good for much else.'*

In the summer of 1888 Morris was the star attraction in the Park and the authorities began to fear a recurrence of the Trafalgar Square incidents, (Bloody Sunday). In June the Metropolitan Board of Works, who controlled the Park forbade the taking of collections. Since this was a popular way of augmenting funds, the Socialist League took the initiative and called a protest meeting on 10th June. The main speaker was Annie Besant, who made a collection to ensure that her name was taken down. However, no action was taken.

From 1889 onwards, although Morris continued to speak at the Workingmen's Clubs in the East End, his increasing ill-health forced him to curtail his open-air speaking.

**Rosemary Taylor**

**LECTURE PROGRAMME  
1996-1997**

**Thursday 26 September**

The Postwar Communist Party in East London till 1956 - John Gorman

**Thursday 17 October**

William Morris in the East End (illustrated) - Rosemary Taylor (preceded by AGM at 7.15 pm)

**Thursday 14 November**

Asians in East London 1700-1940 - Rozina Visram

**Thursday 5 December**

Homeworking Women in Spitalfields 1880-1909 - Diane Atkinson

**Thursday 30 January**

Police in Stepney and Whitechapel - Terry Brown

**Thursday 20 February**

Bad Smells in Stepney - the chemical industry in East London - Mary Mills

**Thursday 13 March**

Rise and Destruction of Mosley's British Fascist Party 1932 - 1948 - Morris Beckman

**Thursday 10 April**

Three Mills - Their story and area (illustrated) - Brian Strong and Michael Burkham

**Thursday 8 May**

Transport in East London - memories and research, Members' Open Evening.

All meetings are held in Latimer Congregational Church, Ernest Street, Stepney E1 at 7.30 pm. Ernest Street is between Harford Street and White Horse Lane, off Mile End Road, just opposite Queen Mary and Westfield College. The nearest stations are Stepney Green and Mile End.

**The Speakers:**

John Gorman, besides being a distinguished printer is a labour historian and author of "Banner Bright". On 26 September he will speak on the postwar East London Communist Party (he was a member from 1949 to 1956).

On 17 October the Society will mark the William Morris centenary when Rosemary Taylor will give an illustrated talk on his East London activities. The talk will be preceded at 7.15 pm by the AGM so come early with your comments and suggestions. (The talk will be at 7.45 pm).

On 14 November Rozina Visram will speak about the long history of Asians in East London. She concentrates on the largely unknown period between the two World Wars.

On 5 December Diane Atkinson will combine women's and Jewish history when she will talk on Homeworking, women in Spitalfields.

**David Behr welcomes suggestions for future topics and speakers. Discuss your ideas with him before or after the lectures.**

**Annual General Meeting  
of the East London History Society**

The AGM of the East London History Society will take place on Thursday 17 October at 7.15 pm.

If you would like to join the committee and support our work throughout the year, please do come along and speak to either Rosemary or Doreen beforehand. If you can help in any way, we would welcome your contribution.

*Autumn Coach Trip*  
on  
*Saturday 21st September 1996*  
*Bury St. Edmunds & Ickworth*

**B**ury St. Edmunds is an attractive small town in Suffolk. Once the site of the great monastery where St. Edmund was finally buried after lying at Greensted, Essex, it has a fine church. There is also a museum and the Theatre Royal, built in 1819 and largely unchanged (open, free).

We shall be going there first and stopping for a look round and lunch (own arrangements).

In the afternoon we visit Ickworth, a National Trust house. Set in a Capability Brown park, with deer, it was built in 1795 by the eccentric Earl of Bristol. It is itself eccentric and strikingly neo-classical in design. There is a fine collection of pictures, including works by Titian, Gainsborough and Velazquez, and of Georgian silver. Tea is available.

**The coach fare will be £6.50 a head and entry to Ickworth is free for National Trust members and £3.75 for others. Entry fees will be collected on the coach.**

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

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

To: Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London, E4 7PF. Tele: 0181 524 4506. Autumn Coach Trip to Bury St. Edmunds & Ickworth.
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.
NATIONAL TRUST MEMBER - YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>