



The Empire Cinema in the Mile End Road, 1937, later the ABC, has been completely refurbished and reopened in June as 'Genesis'.

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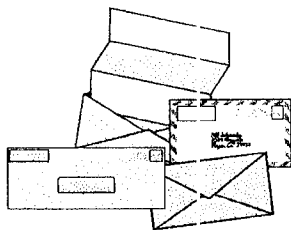
The East London History Society Newsletter is published twice yearly and is free to members of the Society.

The Newsletter is edited, typeset and produced by Rosemary Taylor with the assistance of an editorial team comprising John Harris, Doreen Kendall, David Behr, Philip Mernick and Doreen Osborn.

Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are always welcome and we make every effort to publish suitable material. Whilst handwritten articles are acceptable, items of interest that are typewritten or even better still, on disk will get priority!!

Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, E2 0RF, Tel: 0181 981 7680, or to Rosemary Taylor, 29 Stern Close, Great Fleete, Barking IG11 0XW. Tel: 0181 924 2599 E-mail: rftaylor@aol.com

All queries regarding membership should be addressed to John Harris, 13 Three Crowns Road, Colchester CO4 5AD.



Notice of the Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the East London History Society will be held on Thursday 28th October 1999 at 7.15 pm in the Latimer Church Hall in Ernest Street, Stepney, E1. There will be an election of the committee, and members are earnestly requested to consider standing for election.

The Present committee are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, John Harris, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborn, Bob Dunn, Howard Penberg and Rosemary Taylor.

BOOKSHELF

BOOKS FOR SALE

East London Records for sale at £1.00 each. A real bargain! Nos. 6 & 7, 10, 11, 14, 17 and 18 are still available.

**A Pictorial History of Victoria Park
Price £6.95 plus £1.50 postage.**

Every Stone Tells a Story - a brief history and guided tour of Tower Hamlets Cemetery £3.50.

**East London Record No. 19 -
A4 pb 48 pages Price 2.75 + 75p p&p**

The East London Record, published in 1998 in a brand new large format, making it even greater value for money.

Articles include:

- **George Lansbury and the Bow and Bromley by election of 1912 by John Shepherd.**
- **The Simple Life at Essex House in Bow, C R Ashbee and The Guild of Handicraft by Rosemary Taylor.**
- **Arthur Morrison by Stan Newens MEP.**
- **Bethnal Green's Sailor Tailor by Harold Finch.**
- **Terror at Wenlock Brewery by Stephen Sadler.**
- **Drinking in Mile End in 1750 by Derek Morris.**
- **Tunnel Vision by John Harris.**

Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF

**EAST LONDON
HISTORY SOCIETY
PROGRAMME
1999/2000**

Sunday 26th September 1999

**Coach Trip to Ightham Mote.
(See back of newsletter for details and
booking form)**

Thursday 30th September 1999

Jubilee Line Extension - The Big Dig
Al Green

Thursday 28th October 1999

London Hydraulic Power Company
(illustrated)
Tim Smith

(Preceded by AGM at 7.15 pm)

Thursday 18th November 1999

Jill the Ripper - Another approach to the
Whitechapel murders
Maggie Bird

Thursday 2nd December 1999

A Jamaican Doctor in Hackney 1906-
1953
Jeffrey Green

Thursday 27th January 2000

Spitalfields - the industries of the abyss
(illustrated)
David Burns

Thursday 24th February 2000

Samuda Brothers
(illustrated)
Stephen and Elizabeth Usherwood

Thursday 16th March 2000

Yiddish Theatre in London
(illustrated)
David Mazower

Thursday 13th April 2000

Arthur Morrison
Stan Newens

Thursday 18th May 2000

Open Evening - Street Furniture, Family
History and other favourite themes.

Note:

The lectures are held on Thursday
evenings at 7.30 pm in the Latimer
Congregational Church Hall, Ernest
Street, E1, - between Harford Street and
White Horse Lane, off Mile End Road
(opposite Queen Mary and Westfield
College). The nearest Underground
Stations are Mile End and Stepney Green.
Bus No. 25.

**Remembering Just A Few Of The Many
Women Of The East End Who Died At
Their Posts**

Nellie O'Sullivan, age 20 Hospital Nurse killed on duty when St Peter's Hospital was bombed 20th April 1941.

Home address: Cloon Lough, County Kerry, Irish Republic.

Joan Mary Bliss, age 18. Member of Auxiliary Fire Service (telephonist) killed 18th September 1940 when a parachute mine hit Saunders Ness School, Millwall.

Home address: 61 Henia Street, E14.

Mary Bridget Cooke, age 36. Civil Defence Nurse, killed at Saunders Ness School, Millwall, 18th September 1940.

Home address: 45 Parnell Road, Bow.

Florence Tyler, age 45. Member of First Aid Party, killed 18th September 1940 at Saunders Ness School. Body found two days later, identified only by personal effects.

Home address: No. 2 Dea Street, Poplar.

Lilian Hawkrige, age 30. Member of First Aid Party killed 18th September 1940, Saunders Ness School.

Home address: 64 Abbotts Road, Poplar.

Violet Pengelly, age 18. Member of Auxiliary Fire Service, killed 18th September 1940 at Saunders Ness School.

Home address: No. 8 Gaverick Street, Millwall.

Mary Alice Wilson, age 39. State Registered Nurse, killed 11th May 1941 while on duty at Poplar Hospital.

Winifred Peters, age 39. Member of Auxiliary Fire Service killed 20th April 1941 at Old Palace School, Bow.

Home address: 122 Canton Street, Poplar.

Hilda Helen Dupree, age 21. Member of Auxiliary Fire Service, killed 20th April 1941 at Old Palace School.

Home address: 13 Warwick Road, Walthamstow.

Notes on Speakers:

Our series of Lectures starts on Thursday 29th September with a talk by Dr Al Green. Dr Green was in charge of the archeological excavations of the Jubilee Line Extension. In East London the major site was the great cistercian abbey of St Mary Stratford Langthorne.

On Thursday 28th October Tim Smith will tell the story of the London Hydraulic Power Company. The company had five pump houses including those of Blackwall and Wapping. A network of 165 miles of underground pipes used the power they produced all over London. For example, it raised the safety curtain at the London Palladium and powered lifts.

Maggie Bird is the custodian of the Metropolitan Police Archives Department. On 18th November she will introduce a not too serious different approach to the Whitechapel murders.

Jeffrey Green is the author of 'Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901-1914'. On 2nd December he will speak about Jamaican born Dr J J Brown of Lauritson Road. His son Gerald also became an East London doctor. Jeffrey Green will also detail how to research the black presence in British history.

David Behr

THE CEMETERY BOMB

August 1940 was not a good month for Londoners, massive German air raids on RAF airfields close to London, among them Hornchurch, North Weald, Debden, Biggin Hill and Croydon. Also under attack were the oil storage tanks at Purfleet and Thames Haven, as all these targets were within the London Defence Region, the air raid sirens in London sent out their warning. Everything in the capital came to a halt, all traffic stopped, all work stopped, Londoners went to the bomb shelters, fire services, civil defence units and hospitals went on full alert, and they stayed that way until the 'All Clear' was given.

Londoners called these 'nuisance raids' because despite the fact that no bombs had dropped on London, the constant air raid warnings disrupted the normal pattern of sleep and work. Very strict censorship of press and radio prevented the people from knowing of the desperate air battles that were taking place over Kent.

All that changed on Saturday 24th August at 3 pm. Four groups of bombers attacked the airfields at Hornchurch and North Weald, five bombers were shot down at Hornchurch but North Weald received heavy damage and was out of action for a time. During this raid some stray bombs fell on Dagenham and Upminster.

That night the bombers returned, and the first air raid on central London since 1918 took place. Some time between 11.30 pm and 1.30 am a bomb fell on Tower Hamlets Cemetery, no deaths or injuries were reported but nearby streets had their windows blown out and ceilings fell down. The bomb had landed in a part of the cemetery where many Germans who had immigrated to this country in the 1870s were buried.

There is an interesting story about this bomb. It was said that a group of German bombers were ordered to bomb the oil tanks at Thames Haven, but due to a navigational error lost

their way and bombed the East End by mistake.

This story is open to question. Tower Hamlets Cemetery was not the only place to be bombed that night. Stepney, Bethnal Green, East Ham, West Ham, Edmonton, Walthamstow and the City all got their share of bombs. There must have been more than two bombers over London that night.

When Winston Churchill was told that the city had been bombed he ordered the RAF to bomb Berlin, and although the raid did very little damage, with no casualties, it did upset Adolf Hitler, who stated that for every bomb on Germany the British would receive ten German bombs. Thus it all started, the constant retaliatory bombing of each other's centres of population.

There were two main reasons why Hitler gave strict orders that London must not be bombed. The first was that Hitler was still looking for some sort of peace deal with the British. The second, the German Air Force was putting all its efforts into destroying all airfields in Southern England to make way for a German invasion. In this they almost succeeded. The RAF were within 48 hours of evacuating all airfields in the south and moving to airfields north of London.

The situation was saved when Hitler ordered his Air Force to stop bombing airfields and start bombing London and other big cities. This gave the RAF a chance to recover. This could be described as a turning point in the war, and all because a bomb was dropped on Tower Hamlets Cemetery by mistake?

JOHN HARRIS

LETTERS AND QUERIES

Harry Willmott, 59 Bushfields, Loughton, Essex, IG10 3JR

I am sorry I have been out of touch as regards Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, but I am very interested in the bomb that fell there some days before the mass attack on London as I believe it must have been the first bomb to fall on East London. I was living in Tidey Street at the time, I was with my family in the Anderson shelter and heard the bomb coming down and next morning went to see the damage in South Grove as it was then called. Do you know the exact date that the bomb fell?

Ed: Although John Harris could find no details from Stepney/Poplar ARP files, which appear to be 'lost', the newspaper dated Saturday 31st August 1939 refers to the raids and says: One of the bombs released in the midnight raid on Saturday dropped in a cemetery. Houses nearby suffered shattered windows.

The East End Then and Now (Editor Winston Ramsey) has further details of the first raids on London. On the night of August 24/25 two or more German aircraft, having apparently lost their way, dropped their bombs on the East End. At various times between 2300 and 0130 high explosives were dropped on Stepney, Walthamstow, Leyton and East and West Ham. So as far as we can ascertain, the first bombs fell at 11.36 pm on 24th August.

DISCOVERY IN THE CEMETERY

A letter from Mrs Lilian Carry to Doreen Kendall, as a result of a search carried out in the records:

Yes, the family from 13 Lessada Street was mine. Public Grave R4932: Charles Rogers, Father, 49 years; May Rogers, Mother, 52

years; May Kenee, Sister, 23 years; John Kenee, Nephew, 5 months.

They were killed by a V2 bomb which was called a rocket on 22.1.44 but were buried on the 28th. The ages of my mother and father were wrong even on the memorial card, but I was in shock at the time and never rectified it.

I can never thank you enough for doing this for me. I used to sit at the grave everyday when it happened but was on the way to a nervous breakdown as I was only 19 years old and the doctor told me to keep away to recover.

Then 20 years ago the only one I had left, my brother, dropped dead from a heart attack and something made me go to the Tower Hamlets Cemetery. I couldn't believe the state it was in.

They were buried in a public grave as my uncles arranged it. I couldn't buy the grave as somebody was already buried there. My single name was Lilian Rogers. I have kept the reference which is my family, which I understood I should, but if that is not right let me know. I would love a photograph in the spring. If at anytime I can help, I know I can't do much as I am now 75 years old but if I can help in anyway let me know.

Rodney A Silk, 20 Home Meadows, Billericay, Essex CM12 9HQ

Earlier this year I purchased the book **A Pictorial History of Victoria Park** which I found very interesting and among the features was pleased to learn of the fate of St Augustine's Church, Hackney Wick. I should really say saddened to learn of its fate. My mother was baptized at the church on the 12th March 1905 and I enclose a photocopy of the framed certificate which I still possess. On my visits to the park I usually go to look through the lines of trees where the church once stood.

The photograph of 'Old Wood Houses' shows Joseph Silk, my first cousin twice removed, standing in the doorway of his fishmongers

shop at 179 Mile End Road. Joseph's father, George Thomas Silk and my great grandfather David Silk were brothers. David and his wife and family lived nearby opposite, 179 Mile End Road in Beaumont Street, now Beaumont Mews. I cannot decipher the name of the photographer but he came from nearby at 75 Cephas Street and no doubt took the picture early one morning as no one has opened their shops. However, Joseph's shop and the ones on the corner of Globe Road were due for demolition to make way for the building of Stepney Green Railway Station which opened in June 1902. Joseph then transferred his business to 135 Caledonian Road Islington and a photocopy of the notice he issued to this effect is enclosed. Joseph Silk died in 1927 and was buried in Tower Hamlets Cemetery. I do know that other photographs of this row of shops do exist and may be known to your society, however, it may be possible that you have not seen the one I enclose here.

Ed: Please see Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar in Old Photographs for a picture of the wooden houses and the Black Boy Pub, as well as the Stepney Green Station.

Mrs Phyllis Upchurch, 33 Cedars Road, Hampton Wick, Surrey, writes:

Concerning the article about Will Crooks MP, our family the Foster family, were told that Will Crooks at one time resided where we lived at 74 Northumberland Street, Poplar.

Concerning the Pavilion of Remembrance, I note that there is no mention of the bombing of the school in Upper North Street. A memorial to this event stands in Poplar Recreation Ground, East India Dock Road. Was it the 1914-1918 War?

(ED: The Upper North Street School was bombed on 13th June 1917).

I have a number of copies of 'Cockney Ancestor', about 20 or more. If any member

wishes to have one or more, I will send them postage paid by them.

I am still seeking 'my roots' knowing nothing about my family after adoption. I am now searching for any of the Hall families, about 4 families who lived in Northumberland Street Poplar, 1916-1936. I would be grateful if any of your readers could help.

I was a nurse at Poplar Hospital until I left to have my first child. A Sister nominated me to receive a baby parcel from the Red Cross, Canada. This was greatly treasured by me, and kept for many years. About 5 years ago I wrote to the Red Cross in London about these things. They passed on my letter to the Red Cross Canada, who said they would be delighted to receive the pillow case and cot cover as they knew of these parcels but would love to have one for their museum. I sent it off to Canada and received postage and a nice letter of thanks. I must explain that on a blue background there were a number of squares, each one embroidered by a child with an animal and the child's name. I was told that as this embroidery was raised it enabled blind children to feel and enjoy it. I still have the photograph taken in the museum of this Cot Cover.



Mrs Sarah Abbot of Bethnal Green, with her gift of a handmade quilt sent by the people of Timaru, New Zealand, 17 October 1950.

Shirley Harrison, 54 Borough High Street, London, SE1, 1XL, wrote to Doreen Kendall:

I believe you are a cemetery enthusiast and I wonder if you can possibly help me? As a result of a book which I wrote in 1993 (The Diary of Jack the Ripper) I have become deeply involved in trying to establish the authenticity of a handwritten journal which was brought to me from Liverpool seven years ago. My book has been updated twice since then and research continues.

Because the man who appears to have written the Diary - a cotton merchant from Liverpool named James Maybrick, lived for a time in Stepney (Bromley Road) and had an office in Cullum Street near Middlesex Street, I have been investigating the family connections.

This is where I come to you! There is a phrase in the book which we now know to be a quotation from a 17th century poet - Richard Crashaw, who was popular in late Victorian times. It is "O Costly Intercourse of Deaths and Divided Loves ..."

I need to establish whether anyone has any knowledge of this phrase being used in a church or churchyard in your area? I have asked the same question in Liverpool. Could you be kind enough simply to keep an eye and an ear open? I don't mean you to go looking of course! But there is always a chance, however remote, that the words may ring a bell.

Joyce Garwood, 42 Aberdeen Gardens, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, writes:

Thank you for sending the extra newsletter, I have passed it on to an old gentleman who lives nearby, he is in his eighties but loves to talk about his young days in East London, he went to St Ann's School, the same as me, and he is a master baker and pastry cook, and is also a Freeman of the City of London, so is very interesting to talk to.

I don't know if it is of any help, but I can remember my mother telling me that they had a lady lodging in their house in Stepney, she was a Mrs Crooks and I know that she had a family, a son Will and a daughter Maggie, and I think another son Jimmy. This must have been about 1914 or thereabouts. I never heard of a husband. This was at No. 11 Maroon Street. Reading the newsletter made me think there may be a connection, hope it helps.

LIFEBOAT SHELTER

28th July 1941, a heavy air raid was in progress, the target, the east end and docklands.

At 2.30 am a bomb shelter in Broomfield Street, Poplar, was hit with a high explosive bomb. As there was no such thing as a bomb proof building the casualty rate for this incident was heavy. The shelter was situated on the ground floor of an old building which had been the main workshop for the repair and servicing of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution fleet of lifeboats since the 1880s. When the RNLi moved to a new site in 1936 the building remained empty until 1939, when the Ministry of Food had the upper floors reinforced and used for bulk storage of food stocks.

Poplar Civil Defence Committee had the lower floor adapted to provide a bomb shelter for 160 people.

This was one of the many bomb incidents that took place in the east end that night. The dead numbered 34 - 5 complete families were wiped out, many more injured. Most of the victims came from the surrounding streets - Broomfield St, Barchester St, Brabazon St. there was a strong rumour at the time that most of the victims were suffocated by a large amount of pepper which had been blown down from the upper floor. This rumour is still around today.

Our society has done some research into the incident. The war time mortuary records show that the victims died of head injuries and in one case decapitation. No deaths are listed as suffocation. Readers must bear in mind that stocks of food were stored on the upper floor of the building, next door was a warehouse that belonged to the CWS, which would also hold stocks of food.

The site is now being redeveloped and the old buildings are gone. Will we ever know what happened on that hectic Night in 1941?

John Harris

Note:

A full casualty list is available for the Broomfield Street bombing from the society. If any of our members require it, please write in and we will post it to you.

Blackwall Update:



The former Memorial at Blackwall

STEPNEY GAS WORKS

The eight and a half acre Gas Works site on the corner of Harford Street and Ben Jonson Road, Stepney have been sold for private and affordable housing. Local people with Tom Ridge as spokesperson, are trying to save what is believed to be the two oldest gas holder structure frames in the UK complete with colLars and girders dated from 1853/54. The meter and governor wall with nine bays dating from 1853 and the Victory Bridge wall dating from 1907 and the layby walls dating from 1847/54, where coal was delivered along the Regents Canal, are all under threat from the developers. These could be retained in the building programme as a memorial and a unique industrial monument to the bravery of the Gas Workers who kept the gas supply working throughout the war and to Stepney residents who lost their homes in the nearby streets in the Second World War.

Members who like to take photographs are advised that planning permission is in the pipeline and this unique site with its industrial views will soon vanish. In St Dunstan's Parish Church there is a memorial window at the High Altar which depicts Jesus on the Cross, and Stepney rising from the ashes of the Blitz with the Gas Holders clearly shown.

Doreen Kendall

The new housing development at Blackwall, Virginia Quay, has been developed by Barratts on the site of the former East India Export Dock and Brunswick Pier. The developers have been keen to promote the 'American Connection' once they saw its marketing potential, and have announced that they will be unveiling a new memorial to the Virginia Settlers on the 23 September 1999. No details are available as to whether this will be a public event, or for VIPS only.

DOWN THE NILE IN THE EAST END

(This is by way of a prologue to my memoirs. I am now 75 years old and in very poor health, so I may not be able to complete all I have written over the years. I did hope, when I started writing, that I could go to the 50s, but alas, it will not be so. After the 50s, life changed forever and will never hold the fascination for me that my youth enjoyed, warts and all! Everything you read is absolutely true, and the laughter you won't be able to suppress will continue with you whenever you remember me.)

“Hurry up and get your coat on,” called my mother, “We’re going down the Nile.” Sounds an exotic journey, doesn’t it? Far from it! Cleopatra never sailed majestically down this Nile in a barge! ‘Nile Street’ was its real name, but no one ever called it that, except, perhaps, the odd commercial traveller, new to the area, which was Hoxton.

In a way it was a journey - a journey into the unknown - because to venture down it could be quite hazardous in its way. Its inhabitants were mostly petty crooks, bookies and their runners, costermongers, and the usual assortment of rogues, thieves and vagabonds.

During the day it was a small, busy, noisy little market, probably only 1/4 mile long, with rough, stinking streets heading off it. It was in these few streets that petty thieves plotted and schemed - nothing elaborate, of course, just a bit of housebreaking in a more affluent area, or perhaps a factory or warehouse needing relieving of their goods.

Among the assortment of felons, one particular person stood out from the rest - a woman, Dinkie, a bookmaker’s widow. She was far from being ‘dinkie’. However, a large, well corseted lump would describe her, and as shrewd as Shylock. Primarily, she was a money lender, with a retinue of thugs to make sure the loan repayment were kept up to date!

Anyone seen about with a broken arm or leg was suspect - in fact, these breakages were called ‘dinkies’, so hard luck on the poor sod who had a legitimate break!

Dinkie could fix almost anything, at a price, including people: on the run, she could hide you, unwanted pregnancies, she could get aborted, landlord trouble, she could get him out, and sex - no problem!

Apart from the money-lending, she did none of these things herself, but she knew people who did, all for a fee, of course. No-one ever broke into her house, or attempted to snatch her handbag, and as for her jewellery, she appeared to wear most of it. Platinum was her favourite, and it was said that it looked so like silver that it deterred people from pinching it. She wore her gold in her teeth, it was safer there!

When she died in 1938, it was rumoured that she was worth about half a million or more. She owned a considerable amount of slum property and most of the small shopkeepers rented their premises from her. She certainly wouldn’t have had a bank account, but she did have a big safe in her house, and needless to say, no attempt was ever made to blow it! No-one ever thwarted ‘Dinkie’, the local godmother!

Now we come to the other inhabitants of the Nile - the fleas, the bugs, the rats, the mice and all the other vermin, and probably a few unknown ones as well. Public enemy No. 1 was the bugs - mostly little dark red things that came in through the brickwork and crawled up the wallpaper, not in ones and twos, but by the dozen. They came in the warm weather and stayed away in the cold. So bugs in the summer and rats and mice in the winter - the latter came in from the cold.

Fleas (head lice), of course, were with us all seasons, sometimes you had them and sometimes you didn’t, according to how often ‘Nitty Norah’ appeared at your school. For the uninitiated, ‘Nitty Norah’ was the school

health visitor, who made periodic checks for these little visitors. She looked at your head, looking for nits, and if you had any, off you went to the cleansing station, where the hair was sloshed with something that sounded like 'Quositships' when it was pronounced, but I have no idea of its correct name.

If you were a boy they shaved your head; most of the boys had shaved heads most of the time, but they were never derided because a full head of hair on a boy was hardly ever seen. It would be difficult to describe the worst enemy, the crooks or the vermin - either way poverty was the true aggressor - so, in spite of, but mostly because of this adversary, we learned to become survivors.

The arch enemy, though, was drink. Sometimes it was just the husband who imbibed but, quite often it was the wife too, so naturally, the kids went without. Fortunately, the Salvation Army were there with Soup Kitchens and clothing for the urchins who were neglected and rejected by their drunken parents.

Twice a year, the 'boot lady' came to the school with free boots for the needy children: when I say boots I mean real heavy hob-nailed ones - for girls as well as for boys! So, if you wore these monstrosities, everyone knew you were of the lowest order. Even down the 'Nile' there were degrees of being poor!

It is true to say, however, that there were many people like my own parents, who struggled along, striving to keep their self respect and integrity.

My father, was the eldest son; he was a hard-working man and a walking stick maker by trade, as was his father before him. My mother, too, earned a few bob as a hat-trimmer, working at home for a small millinery factory. I was fascinated by the way she transformed these hats - they came to her plain and unadorned and were returned trimmed and ready to wear. The speed with which she

sewed never ceased to amaze me and the straw basket in which she kept her trimmings was, to me, an Aladdin's Cave, beautiful ribbons of many colours, delicate veils and multi-coloured flowers and feathers.

On rainy days she allowed me to play with these colourful trinkets, and I would dress my dolls in this finery and imagine they were fairies in a beautiful glen, dancing round an enchanted tree. (Trees were in short supply in my neighbourhood; I'd never seen a tree growing in splendour as was depicted in books, the only greenery seemed to be in the graveyards, so I assumed that that was there only habitat). The dolls to which I refer were tatty old things, with a sawdust body, papier-mâché limbs, and naked - not a pretty sight, but the ribbons transformed them into things of beauty.

A universal toy was a whip and top. This was a piece of wood shaped like a mushroom and to start it off, you placed it in the soft earth between the paving stones, wound the thong of the whip round the base, pulled it, and it spun. Then, in order to keep it spinning, you whipped it along. Many happy hours were enjoyed playing whip and top - all this pleasure from a toy that cost 2d!

Kids in those days made their own amusement. Old wooden boxes were made good use of if you were fortunate enough to acquire one and most people used orange boxes for small cupboards in their sparsely-furnished rooms. Note, I said 'rooms' not 'flats'. To live in a self-contained flat was an aspect of life far beyond the means of our parents, so most people lived in the rented rooms of a three-storey tenement, which could sometimes house, perhaps, four independent families. All the children slept in one bed, some at the head and some at the bottom. It was amazing how many people could live in just two rooms. They did, however, and it was a commonplace way of life.

Babies yearly was almost the norm and couples played their sex-life by ear as contraceptives

were rarely purchased. I suppose the majority of brides were pregnant, and nobody bothered with the consequence of births five or six months later. Of the girls who were left in the lurch when they became pregnant before marriage, most of the time the offspring was added to the girl's mother's herd and blended along with the other kids in the family, to be dragged up the same as the rest.

At the other end of the scale, deaths and funerals were usually something to splash out on. The insurance money was used to see them off right, with a booze-up afterwards, an event not to be missed!

Births and deaths created a good livelihood for a local woman called Mrs Mapstead. She was neither a midwife nor a mortician, but she was the person you called upon, for a fee, to assist at home birth. She fetched and carried, and looked after the kids and generally took over whilst you were confined, and in cases of death, she laid out the corpse and got it ready for visitors saying their last farewells before the undertakers removed it to their premises.

I have a sneaky feeling that this ritual was enjoyed by the people that came to pay their respects - probably because they got a glass of sherry or port, so needless to say, these functions were well attended, the crocodile tears thrown in for good effect.

The aforementioned Mrs Mapstead was kept busy all the time. Her motto was 'I gets them into the world and I sees them off!' Most likely that epitaph was engraved on her own tombstone when her time came to leave this mortal coil.

She used to be seen about daily, trotting along - she never seemed to be walking - with her carpet bag and air of slight superiority. She was very well respected, and I suspect she earned a lucrative living attending these happy and sad occasions as they arose. She had no competition and was therefore, always in demand for her services. She was another large

woman, with a large bosom and tiny feet, which to me as a child reminded me of tweedledum and tweedledee, only singular! She probably did abortions too, on the quiet. There wasn't much she wouldn't do, for a fee. Her husband, it was rumoured, had disappeared many years ago. Some said she'd done him in and did a deal with the undertaker to dispose of the body, from my own point of view, I wouldn't have put it past her, but nobody seemed to be put off by these tales, and her services came highly recommended.

Another aspect of our daily lives was the various assortment of street vendors. There was a milkman with his churns, who called out 'Milko' and people brought out their assorted jugs and containers for him to ladle milk into.

Then there was the iceman, in the summer, with his blocks of ice stacked on his horse and cart for delivering to the fishmongers. Us kids loved to jump on the cart, swiping bits of ice to quench our thirst on a hot summer's day. If he caught you, he'd swipe you with his whip, so you had to be quick and to jump off the cart before he caught you. Not many of us kids were caught - we were pretty adept at jumping off carts!

Then there was the Indian Toffee man. It wasn't toffee from India, as you may think; this Indian toffee was like candy-floss, only heavier, and was always sold by an Indian, never anyone else. It cost 1d, and you didn't get much for your penny, but what you did get was delicious.

The ice-cream was the best, though, especially if it was made by an Italian, they were the experts, and named companies weren't anywhere near as good. You could take a bowl along and get it filled up for 2d, I've never tasted anything like it since, and you always got a slice of lemon to go with it.

In the winter you got hot chestnuts and baked potatoes, and that hasn't changed; people still sell these things and cook them the same way.

A lovely nosh up which you could buy in the pork butcher's was faggots and saveloys, with pease pudding, or a pie and mash in the eel and pie shop. Not many of these shops left now; people want the fast food and all sorts of takeaways, even the traditional fish and chips doesn't compare anymore - the passing of an era.

I believe that the quality of life has gone downhill since my youth. Despite the aforementioned poverty and tribulations, people cared about people most of the time. No one appeared to be isolated, everybody mucked in. It seemed to me that although people had a private life, naturally you weren't a private person. Too many others touched you in your daily existence - life was an adventure!

GRACE BLACKETER

Note: Grace Blacketer died in July 1999. The article above was sent in on tape by Grace's nephew, who thought it would interest members. It is unlike any other reminiscences we have published, and the views expressed are strictly the author's own.

London's Lea Valley, Britain's Best kept Secret, edited by Jim Lewis. Published by Phillimore, price £14.99.

From glasshouses, potteries and pumping stations to building trains and warships to manufacturing vacuum flasks and plastic mouldings, this book celebrates the unique contribution to industrial development made by the Lea Valley and its workforce.

Many interesting items in this book, including numerous references to East London firms and manufacturers, and information on the Match Girls, C.J. Mare, William Perkins, Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Abbey Mills Pumping Station. The book is very well illustrated with line drawings and very informative.

PRE WAR RECOLLECTIONS OF BOW

Many times in the past, I pondered the question, "Where did my ancestors originate from before settling in East London, and who were they?" I eventually decided to find out. I obtained a copy of my late father's birth certificate, and discovered he was born at No. 2 Turner's Buildings, Poplar, in 1896. With other information contained on the certificate, and coming to one or two dead ends, I managed with the help of expert researchers, to trace back to the century before last. My 4 x great grandfather was born at Portsmouth about 1750. His grandson who was born in 1799 was a warrant officer in the Royal Navy, who died in 1843. My great grandfather was born at Portsmouth in 1840 and in 1868 he was living at No. 3 Seyssel Terrace, Millwall. He was married at Christ Church Poplar. In 1869, when my grandfather was born, they were living at No. 22 Queens Terrace, Poplar and sometime later they were living at Westferry Road, Millwall. I myself was born at No. 53 Blackthorn Street, Bow.

One of my earliest memories is of my mother pushing a pram to the council yard at Glaucus Street for tarry blocks for the fire. At the corner of Blackthorn Street and Sherwood Street, later renamed Lawes Street, was Adams the Bakers, who on Sundays would cook your dinner for a small fee. Every Sunday you would see women hurrying there with their prepared dinners covered with a cloth.

A daily sight was the milkman with his pony and cart selling milk straight from the churn. Another well known character who was known far and wide was 'Annie, the Fish Girl.' She also had a pony and cart, and Annie looked the picture of health with her ruddy complexion and leather apron. On the corner of Blackthorn Street and Devon's Road was and still is, All Hallows church, known locally as the red church, built in 1873. It is believed that Devon's Road follows an ancient track leading to Stepney Way.

There used to be a coloured man come down Tidey Street who was known as Johnny the Indian Toffee man, he used to have a metal container strapped to his shoulders and carried a small hand bell.

About 1931 we moved to Tidey Street. On the corner of Tidey Street and Whitethorn Street was a dairy with a cow barn at the back. The dairy later became the Frances Mary Buss House, which was a club for young women, the cow barn was used as an air raid shelter during World War 2. Opposite the dairy was a building known as the Tidey Street Cinema, where they showed silent films. A lady by the name of Mrs James from Blackthorn Street used to sell peanuts outside. Later the cinema was demolished and on the site was built the Queen Mary Day Nursery which was opened about 1936 by the Duchess of Gloucester. One of my sisters who was four years old at the time had her photo in the press with the Duchess stooping over the table talking to the children.

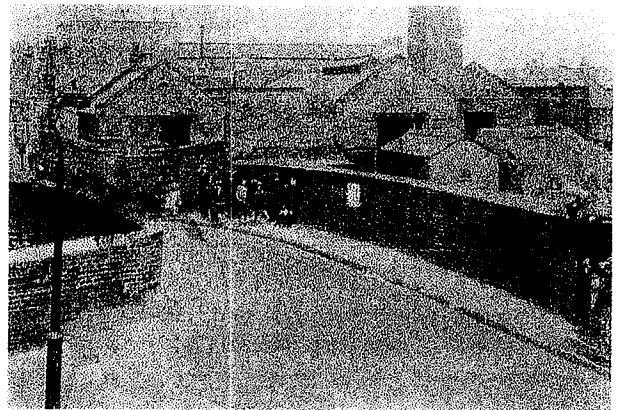
Tidey Street had its share of tragedy, during a short period of time several women lost their husbands, and a gentleman living in Whitethorn Street wrote a letter to a very well known newspaper about it. They nicknamed it Widows Street.

At the corner of Bow Common Lane and St Paul's Way, formerly St Paul's Road was the Holy Name School and Catholic Church which I attended. The big event of the year was the Catholic outdoor procession which took place in May. People would come from far and wide to see it and the streets would be packed, Catholics in the area would have a candle lit shrine in their front room window consisting of a crucifix, statues of the virgin Mary and St Joseph and highly polished brass candlesticks. At nightfall the priest would visit each shrine and bless the house.

When Armistice Day came round God help anyone who did not observe the two minutes silence. I once saw a man very roughly handled

when was pulled from his bike because he ignored it.

The iron bridge in Bow Common Lane which crosses the Limehouse Cut was always known as 'Stink House Bridge' and it replaced an old brick one. Just over the other side and leading off Upper North Street was Guildford Road. Here there was a barber who was reputed to be the first one in the area to use electric hair clippers.



'Stink House Bridge'

Between Tidey Street and Sherwood Street was a small cul-de-sac with a dirt road. It was called Tryphena Place. On the left hand side was some old cottages, while on the right was a building known as the Centre where there was a team of nurses to treat cut fingers, grazed legs etc.

When I was a boy I spent many happy hours on Brunswick Pier watching the ships sail by. If a child was 'chesty' the doctor would tell the parents to let him spend a couple of hours on Brunswick Pier because the air was fresher there.

Upstairs in No. 10 Tidey Street there was an old lady by the name of Mrs Garrotte, who was bedridden. She was an accomplished linguist. Her father was a Mr Wright, a wine merchant, who was also a widower. When she was young her father used to travel between England and Australia and when he went on these trips, he used to leave his daughter with some people living near the docks. These people ill treated

her and used her as a drudge. When her father came home she complained about it and he decided to take his daughter abroad. He took her to Constantinople and left her at an English Convent School, then went on to Australia, where he died. The convent brought up his daughter and taught her several languages.

When war broke out between Russia and Turkey, Mrs Garrotte had to leave Constantinople, and eventually arrived back in England, after getting a passage on the ship that was towing Cleopatra's Needle. My family lived in the bottom half of No. 10, and I often heard Mrs Garrotte telling her grandchildren about the very rough sea journey she experienced. One of her grand-daughters still lives in Bow.

Every Saturday morning you would see a procession of children pushing prams and pushcarts backwards and forwards to Bow Common Lane Gas Works for sacks of coke.

Every time there was a pub outing, the customers on the coaches would throw handfuls of coppers to the waiting children, and what a mad scramble there would be to get to the money. I think myself that this custom must have had its origins in the ancient past. The Romans were known to put a coin under the masts of their ships.

The area around Tidey Street was a very close knit community and everybody knew one another and the people were the most sociable you could ever wish to meet. I think that now most people watch television, they have lost the art of conversing with their neighbours. We are told it is progress, but how can it be progress when people are drifting away from one another as they are today.

HARRY WILLMOTT

COVER PICTURE - THE EMPIRE

In June of this year a new cinema, **Genesis**, opened its doors to the public. Barbara Windsor, the famous East End actress was guest of honour and the proprietor, Tyrone Walker-Hebborn could not have chosen a more suitable person.

The first building on this site was the Eagle Public House, built in 1848. This later became Lusby's Music Hall. The premises were destroyed by fire in 1884, and rebuilt later as the Paragon Theatre of Varieties. In 1912 the theatre became a cinema, the Mile End Cinema. It then became the Empire, run by the ABC company. In 1939 it was rebuilt. It later became known as the ABC.

In 1963 the premiere of 'Sparrows Can't Sing', starring Barbara Windsor, was held at the ABC in the presence of Lord Snowdon. Princess Margaret was to have been the guest of honour, but she went down with the flu, and had to cancel the engagement. It was said that her non-appearance was in reality because Buckingham Palace discovered a few days before the occasion that the hosts were Ronnie and Reggie Kray!

There was a second charity performance of 'Sparrows Can't Sing' in 1985, but shortly afterwards, the cinema, as with several others in the East End, closed down.

The opening of a cinema in the Mile End Road has been greeted with enthusiasm by all, young and old, and couldn't have come at a better time. In recent years cinema-going has increased in popularity, and the East End did not have even a single theatre. Now, thanks to Tyrone Walker-Hebborn we can once again 'go to the pictures'.

Rosemary Taylor



AUTUMN COACH TRIP

Sunday 26th September

Ightham Mote, near Sevenoaks, Kent

Our main visit will be to Ightham Mote, near Sevenoaks, Kent. This moated manor house dates from 1340 onwards and features include a Great Hall, a Tudor Chapel and a drawing room with a Jacobean fireplace and 18th century wallpaper. There are fine gardens with fishponds and peacocks and woodland walks.

The manor house has undergone extensive renovation and has now been fully reopened. As it is a National Trust property, entry is free to members.

We shall also have a lunch stop at Sevenoaks, allowing time to look round. Lunch will be own arrangements, tea is available at Ightham Mote.

The coach fare is £6.50, please send this to me with the form below. Entry to the house is £5.00 for non NT members, I will collect this on the coach.

The pick-up will be at Mile End, opposite the station, at 10.00 am. (Note the later time, as it is a short journey).

Please send your bookings to:

Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF (Tel: 0181 524 4506)

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AUTUMN COACH TRIP To Ightham Mote and Sevenoaks
SUNDAY 26th September 1999

I/We would like _____ seat/s for the coach trip.

NAME/S _____

ADDRESS _____

TEL. NO. _____ I enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____

(Cheque made payable to the East London History Society.)

National Trust Member: Yes. No.

Post this form to Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF