



Service held on the site of Single Street School, Stepney, to commemorate the second anniversary of the Battle of Britain, 15 September 1942.

Single Street, off Canal Road, was later cleared of all buildings and absorbed into Mile End Park

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Editorial Note:

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

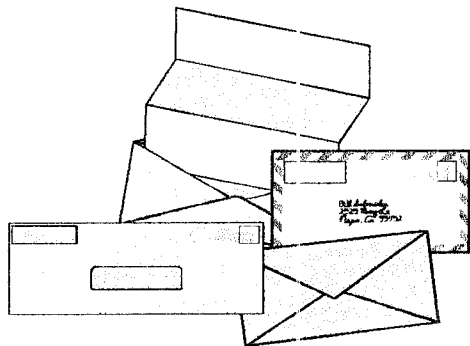
The Newsletter is edited, typeset and produced by Rosemary Taylor with the assistance of an editorial team comprising John Harris, Doreen Kendall, David Behr, Philip Mernick and Doreen Osborn.

Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are always welcome and we make every effort to publish suitable material. Whilst hand-written 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: 0208 981 7680, or to Rosemary Taylor, 29 Stern Close, Great Fleete, Barking IG11 0XW. Tel: 0208 924 2599 E-mail: rftaylor@aol.com

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

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

A Pictorial History of Victoria Park, price £6.95 plus £1.50 postage and packing.

This publication has received excellent reviews from a wide cross section of readers, and our members have had nothing but praise for the book. For those of you who have yet to purchase a copy, now is the time to buy one, treat yourself to an early Christmas present, and get another in for a family member who remembers the wonderful times they had in the Park, boating on the lake listening to the bands on a summer's evening (where have THOSE gone?)

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

For those wishing to delve further into nostalgia, two books by Sutton Publishing:

The East End at Work and The Changing East End, Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar 1860-1960

Rosemary Taylor and Christopher Lloyd
Price £9.99 plus £1.50 p+p.

Each of these books contain over 200 photographs from the Bancroft History Library collection, and make excellent gifts to family and friends. This series of books has aroused a great deal of interest and we've had letters from far and wide from people who've recognised long-forgotten streets and buildings, and even themselves and their family members in the pictures.

Enquiries to Rosemary Taylor, 29 Stern Close, Barking Essex IG11 0XW.

**EAST LONDON
HISTORY SOCIETY
PROGRAMME
2000 - 2001**

2000:

Thursday 21st September

Bow Porcelain (Illustrated)

Speaker: Patricia Wilkinson

Thursday 19th October

**The Origins of a Bethnal Green
Family from the 18th century - My
East End Roots**

Speaker: Stan Newens
(Preceded by the AGM)

Thursday 16th November

**The Struggle to Establish the London
Jewish Hospital**

Speaker: Gerry Black

Thursday 14th December

**Docklands Past and Present
(Illustrated)**

Speaker: Bob Aspinall

Note:

The lectures are held on Thursday evenings at 7.30 pm in the Latimer Congregational Church Hall, Ernest Street, E1. Ernest Street is between Harford Street and Whitehorse Lane, off Mile End Road

2001:

Thursday 25th January

**East India Company Almshouses and
Hospital in Poplar**

Speaker: Tony Fuller

Thursday 22nd February

**The Timber and Wood Burning
Trades in the East End - 1860 - 1910**

Speaker: Bryan Diamond

Thursday 29th March

**Roman Southwark - First entrepot of empire?
(Illustrated)**

Speaker: Al Green

Thursday 5th April

**The Breweries of East London
(Illustrated)**

Ken Smith

Thursday 17th May

**Open Evening
From Docks to Dockland**

Memories and Photos

(opposite Queen Mary and Westfield College). The nearest Underground Stations are Mile End and Stepney Green.
Bus No. 25.

Letters and News

David Behr, our Programme Secretary writes:

Regarding the forthcoming Programme, a talk on Southwark may surprise you in the programme of the East London History Society. The best recommendation is that Al Green's talk on the archaeological dig following the route of the Jubilee Line from Westminster to Stratford was one of the most interesting and popular in the last programme. In that talk he briefly mentioned that the finds in Southwark were helping to change ideas about Roman London, so I took up his offer to speak again on this important topic.

Bryan Diamond's talk on the timber trade will concentrate particularly on his family's involvement.

The titles of the other talks are self explanatory. I hope members can come and enjoy them.

Noel Mander, from Woodbridge, wrote to Chris Lloyd and Rosemary Taylor following the publication of the East End at Work:

I have just read your two books on the East End - they are just splendid and I am sure will never go out of print.

I am in my 89th year, started working in the East End when I was about 19, living in lodgings in Nichols Square, Hackney Road, alas no longer.

I was a volunteer fireman in the AFS until I was called up for service in the Army, attended many of the fires.

I suspect that even after the book was published you still collect notes for a future edition, perhaps the following may be of interest to you - yet another trade!

Eagles, an organ builder was established in Hackney Road about 1850. He was taken over by Speechly of Dalston about 1890. After the war Speechly was acquired by N P Mander Ltd, St Peter's Square, Hackney Road. N P Mander Ltd

became one of the leading firms in the country, organ builders to several cathedrals, including St Paul's, Canterbury, Chichester, and to the Chapel Royal, St James's. The present Principal is Mr John Pike Mander.

I loved the East End, had a relative in 1890 who was curate at St James the Less, Bethnal Green. I knew some of the old characters, Fr. Groser, who led a group to break into food stores after an air raid, the authorities could not be found; Joe Williamson (whom you mention) - oh, so many of them.

Harry Willmott has been researching the whereabouts of the grave of Sidney Frank Godley, VC. He has located the grave of the First World War VC in Loughton Cemetery, and taken some pictures of the grave.

Private Sidney Godley, 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers was awarded the VC on 23rd August 1914, for bravery after he had been wounded at Mons. Godley was caretaker of Cranbrook Street School for many years. He died at St Margaret's Hospital in Epping on 29th June 1957, aged 67 years, and was buried in Loughton Cemetery. Also in the same grave is Ellen Eliza Godley, who died on 12th March 1963, aged 77 years.

Harry has noted that the registered owner of the grave is Mr Stanley Sidney Godley, son of the above.

Mr Alan Bartley, 15 Sutherlands Newbury, Berks, RG14 7RL is researching the history of the Peoples Concert Society (PCS) which was active in the East End between 1878 and 1935. The PCS was started by a group of upper class people who set up a series of cheap concerts at local settlements, and church halls to provide recreation for the lower classes. It ran for 50 years, so it must have been successful. Can any of our members help?

Book Reviews

GERMANS IN EAST LONDON
No. 1 East Ham and West Ham,
Documentary Sources 1865 - 1919
Compiled by Howard Bloch and Graham Hill.
(120 pages paperback. Price £12.50 + 1.50 p+p)

“The only thing the Germans lacked were that they were not Englishmen.” (East Ham Echo, Manor Park, Ilford and Barking Chronicle 15th April 1910)

During the course of most of the 19th century Germans formed the largest continental immigrant community in Britain surpassed only by Russian Jews in 1891. These ranged from wealthy merchants to labourers in sugar refineries.

For most of the 19th century Germans were regarded like other immigrants. As a result of the First World War they were singled out as enemies whose shops and businesses were destroyed in a frenzy of rioting. Large numbers were arrested, interned and deported. The German population declined and never recovered.

Through a range of contemporary sources, this book charts the changing attitudes to Germans in two East London districts of East Ham and West Ham. Also included is an index of names, which should be of particular value to anyone interested in family history. The book will also be a valuable source of information in studies relating to social history, race relations, the First World War, Anglo-German relations etc.

The book is available from the authors, cheques should be made payable to **All Points East**, at 69 Frinton Road, London E6. 3HE.

The Illustrated LONGITUDE, by Dava Sobel and William J H Andrews. Price £25.
 Published by Fourth Estate.
 ISBN 1 85702 714 0.

Dava Sobel researched an ancestor, a little known clock maker and carpenter called John Harrison

who created the first reliable marine clock after an obsession of 40 years attempting to solve the greatest problem of his age - longitude - to enable sailors to find their true position at sea. Dava Sobel's book, which she thought would be of interest only to nautical enthusiasts became a best seller and a TV two part serial, shown early this year. The original clock is in the Greenwich Museum so if you plan a visit, this book must be read first. I promise you, you will not put the book down until you have read straight through to the very last page.

PUBLIC HISTORY IN BRITAIN NOW, edited by Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally Morgan. Price £10. Published by Francis Boutle Publishers ISBN 09532388 9 X. If you visit heritage sites, museums and galleries, this is the essential guide for you. In this collection, the first of its kind, the contributors write about history as part of a living present. Topics range from women in marine history, place names in Newham to the history of Bishopsgate Institute, by Liverpool Street Station.

A CENTURY OF THE EAST END, events and places over the last 100 years. Rosemary Taylor and Christopher Lloyd. Price £14.99 (hardback). Published by Sutton Publishers on behalf of W H Smith. ISBN 07509 2411 X.

Since reviewed in our Spring newsletter this book has become a best-seller and the praise is well deserved, because the photographs from Bancroft Road History Library Archives are large and clear with many never having been published before. The book is exclusive to W H Smith, and copies are fast running out, last report was that there were still one or two available at the Stratford and Bexley shops.

LONDON PARK DISCOVERY PROJECT 2000. Produced by the London Historic Parks and Garden Trust, Duck Island Cottage, St James Park, London, SW1A 2BJ.

This pack of projects is designed for schools to photocopy and use for educational purposes in parks. It covers the history of London Parks, dating trees, gardening, animals and music. We were delighted to be asked as a Society for permission for them to publish an old fashioned garden

postcard from Philip Mernick's collection, which has been published in our own book on Victoria Park.

Stratford - A Locoman remembers, by Charles Middleton. Published by the East Anglian Railway Museum, price £4.95. Email: publications@earm.co.uk

This is not just a book for railway 'buffs', it's a book for everyone who lived, worked or travelled by rail through Stratford from 1943 to the 1970s. From the days of steam to diesels and on to the electric locos of today, all the tricks of the trade, plus some of the more eccentric passengers.

William Ephraim Snow

The family of William Ephraim Snow, MRCS, apothecary, surgeon to the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Hospital, and General Practitioner, lived at Nos. 25-26 Tredegar Square for more than fifty years. Snow was the only person mentioned in the PO Directory for 1836 as living in Tredegar Square, and since the northern side was not completed until a few years later, it is not surprising that no house number is given for him. It is probable that he moved there in 1833-34, as soon as the double house was built, as his address is given in Robson's London Street Key or District Registry in 1834 as Mile End Road, and 26 Tredegar Square the following year. But in 1845 he was certainly living at No. 26, and what is now called No. 25 too. Very probably Snow was the first owner of the double house, and may well have chosen the decoration for the keystone over the first floor window above the porch. This shows two leaves with intertwining stems: an unusual design, strangely reminiscent of the Mercury symbol, with twisting serpents and wings, associated with medicine.

Ed. Note: Look for the large Snow Monument in Tower Hamlets Cemetery, it is in the area facing the main gate)

Bow's Scarlet Past

Nearly two hundred years ago in 1805, there was quite an industrial estate in St Mary's Parish on the west bank of the Lea, off the roads from Bow to Old Ford and from Bow to Bromley. Three dyehouses with drying grounds, a windmill and several granary stores, a brewhouse for making ale; a slaughterhouse; a vitriol manufactory, and a Printing shop with warehouse facilities, all are listed in the area of the village of Bow itself, with the parish boundaries. Of these activities, dyeing has a long history in our part of the world, still recalled in Dyehouse Lane near to the river and the old road from Bow to Hackney Wick, called rather obviously, Wick Lane. A Dutch chemist named Johannes Sibertus Kuffler set up a scarlet-dye house at Bow in the 17th century, and the bright red he obtained soon became widely known as Bow Dye. His scarlet secrets were presumably part of his wife's dowry, since he married the daughter of the famous Dutch chemist Cornelis Drebbel (1572-1633). The latter moved to England in 1604, and James I became his patron. He built the first navigable submarine in 1620 and went on to discover that certain tin compounds could be used to extract scarlet from cochineal. Kuffler's development of this technique, and others no doubt in Bow, later contributed to the success of calico printing, off the road to Stratford, and may also have been important for weavers in Bethnal Green.

(From Mile End Old Town Residents' Association Newsletter, various issues - courtesy Victoria Poland)

Recent excavations in Spitalfields by GLAAS uncovered several Roman features including boundary ditches. The eastern part of the Medieval Priory and hospital of St Mary was extensively excavated and recorded. Key features included the Prior's garden, the eastern boundary of the Priory and three late medieval monastic buildings. A detailed report should be available in Bancroft Library.

Natural History Museum in St George's in the East

Today we take for granted the nature walks, field studies and pond dipping that form an essential part of any child's education. Yet it was only at the beginning of this century that nature study was added to the school curriculum. Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that the seeds for the "School Nature Study Union" (SNSU) were sown in 1903 in one of the poorest parts of East London.

Stepney was the first London Borough to support a municipal museum out of the rates. The first museum was well established by 1900 and housed in an upper room of the Free Library in Whitechapel High Street. Among the exhibits were a skeleton, fossils, stuffed birds and small mammals, all displayed in glass cases. Many items had been given over the years by sailors returning from long sea voyages - usually exotic creatures or birds they no longer wanted to keep. Insects such as huge centipedes and spiders found amongst the cargoes of tropical fruit unloaded in the nearby docks were also handed in to the Museum. In this way the collection grew rapidly.

The greatest assets of this small museum were the undoubted enthusiasm and devotion of its curator, Miss Kate Hall. She gave talks and instruction to many children who visited the museum. Her work brought her in touch with schoolteachers, many of whom were apprehensive about the introduction of Nature Study as a school subject. She was aware of their need for help and in 1903 together with the Rev. Claude Hinscliff, a Curate at the nearby Church of St George's in the East, formed the School Nature Study Union. He was its first Honorary Secretary and Miss Hall its first Honorary Treasurer.

They soon attracted a group of eminent teachers and lecturers. Sir George Kekewich KCB, DCL, became the Society's President. He was well known for his efforts to liberalise education and remained the Society's President until 1911. The Society produced a regular journal with the motto "To see and admire : not harm or destroy."

Miss Hall and the Rev. Hinscliff suggested to Stepney Borough Museums Committee that the

disused Parish Mortuary in St George's Churchyard would provide a new and better home for a Nature Study Museum. With the promise of £100 from an anonymous benefactor, the Council readily agreed and the essential refurbishment was carried out. On 3rd June 1904 the Nature Study Museum was opened with much pomp and ceremony by Sir William Collins, Chairman of the Education Committee of the London County Council in the presence of the Mayor, Aldermen, Councillors and other dignitaries.

From the outset it proved immensely popular with regular visits from local schools. Despite the small size of this single storied building, Miss Hall collected and displayed live exhibits of many kinds. These included fish and reptiles in aquaria, insects and small animals in vivaria and seasonal exhibits such as new born chicks. Flowers and plants were displayed and examined on the nature table. In response to an appeal in the SNSU Journal, the Museum received boxes of acorns and horse chestnuts, which the children planted in pots. Fir cones from Pitlochry, spider's nests from Swalecliffe, Kent and many other objects of interest were sent to the Museum from schools around the country.

The Museum's policy of displaying so many live specimens which included anything from frogspawn and twigs to a cockerel and on one occasion, a particularly troublesome monkey, provided a great contrast to the usual dry and dusty museums and in this respect, was unique in London. The unusual 'hands on' approach was ahead of its time and gave the children a chance to see and enjoy so many aspects of nature. They delighted in tending the wild flower garden and watching the bees at work in the first municipal beehive. Such was the popularity of the Museum with the children that during the school holidays there were often as many as seventy crowded into a small room and on occasions, the curator would have to hurry them through in batches.

Visits to the little museum must have been a source of great joy to the children of Stepney. Much of their lives were spent in overcrowded tenements and unlovely streets teeming with the traffic to and from the docks. Thus the little building with its garden was truly an oasis for hundreds of local children.

The outbreak of the First World War forced the Museum to shut its doors for five months but on re-opening, it attracted as many young visitors as before. In an article in the Nature Study Magazine in 1917, Miss A Hibbert-Ware FLS., a temporary Curator at the Museum, writes: "The Museum stands in a densely populated district which presents to human life much that is sordid and little that is lovely. It brought so many treasures which made appeal to old and young alike, that it was made welcome and is now an integral and essential part of the community. The children from the schools in the neighbourhood come in floods to enjoy nature's treasures, which are their rightful heritage."

Its popularity continued throughout the inter-war years. Parents and friends were encouraged to come along with the children and tend the wild flower garden etc. People of all ages would come to gaze and wonder at the strange and rare things in the cases. It was not only parties of children who visited the museum. There are records of visits by, amongst others, the Ilford Branch of the WEA, the West Ham Nature Study Evening Class and the Walthamstow Adult School.

It was the Second World War that eventually brought about the end of this magical little institution. The supply of live specimens stopped, the staff were drafted to other duties and the fittings put in store. The doors, "temporarily" closed in March 1942, were never to re-open.

The building still stands today - roofless, derelict and sad - its name just discernible above the boarded doorway - a haunting reminder of a little haven which had enriched the lives of so many children in the past.

Joyce Groen

Coach Outing

Members filled the coach on our outing to Claydon House, Bucks, on a very hot May Saturday. The journey through the very green countryside full of blossom after so much heavy rain was really appreciated. The first stop was at the market town of Buckingham, where we visited a 15th century chapel, and the jail house, then browsed through the many stalls of an antiques and book market. After lunch we visited Claydon Hall, the home of the Earls of Verney since 1752, which was given over to the National Trust in 1956. The house is famous for its Rococo rooms decorated with the carvings of Luke Lightfoot. Florence Nightingale stayed here, it being the home of her older sister Parthenope Verney. The week before our visit the curator had received anonymously in the post a diary belonging to Florence Nightingale, an exciting find, as no one had previously been aware of its existence.

It was such a beautiful day, the coach driver obliged by staying an extra half hour, which we spent by the lake, enjoying the evening sun.

For Irene Rixon the outing proved to be a memorable one, for she realised she was going down the lane through Steeple Claydon where she had been evacuated for 15 months in 1940. Pear Tree Farm with its name on the gate, the church and level crossing brought back memories of Mr Reed, a gentleman farmer who had wanted to adopt Irene. Her cousins, all boys, had been evacuated with their school in Old Bethnal Green Road, and were billeted in the village also.

Lots more evacuation stories were then recalled as the coach stopped for photos. If members could write in with their memories, good and bad, we will be pleased to print them.

Doreen Kendall

Childhood Memories of Victoria Park

(The following is an extract from a manuscript sent in by James Crouch)

My earliest memories of Vicky Park were in the period just after the Second World War when my family used to live on the top floor of my Grandmother's house at 22 Libra Road. The road was situated in Bow and was a direct link between Old Ford Road and "The Roman". It was not uncommon for families to share accommodation just after the War, as obviously there was a shortage of houses. To get to the park we had to go to the bottom of Libra Road, cross over Old Ford Road and make our way down to the nearest entrance, which was the Gunmakers Lane pedestrian gate. Gunmakers Lane was a very narrow cobbled road that had several factories on either side of it. These factories included furniture factories and a large iron foundry. On some occasions especially during the summer months the foundry street side doors were left open and it was possible to see the men who were covered in soot and iron dust, working inside.

We usually went to the park accompanied by a parent or another member of the family, or if they were busy it would be with elder children who used to earn a little bit of pocket money looking after you. This was a fairly common practice especially during the school holidays when a day's outing would be a picnic consisting of bread and sugar sandwiches and a bottle of water, and a visit to the swings by St. Marks Gate.

In 1947 my family moved from Libra Road to a prefab in Monier Road, an area which was known locally as "the island". I can remember neighbours and members of the family commenting that our new home would be nearer to the park, but in reality the distance was about the same.

During the period that I spent my childhood days in the park, local motor traffic used to be allowed to go through from Hackney to Bethnal Green, with several other side roads that provided access to Old Ford Road. I seem to remember that the amount of access roads were slowly reduced until about the late eighties when traffic was banned completely from the park.

The various playgrounds, which no matter where you lived were always called the "swings" were situated at three different spots within the park. With their ready made facilities they provided many a good day out for the children of the area. Who in their right mind could forget an afternoon playing in the sandpit? The sand that just seemed to get absolutely everywhere and when you got home and took off your shoes and socks, it seemed as though you had brought buckets of it home with you. It was understandable how our parents used to give us a ticking off for playing in the sandpits. To many children who never had a chance to go to the seaside, the sandpits became their beaches. To the back of the sandpit in the swings by St Marks Gate there was a small wooded plantation area and this was where I saw my first grey squirrel. The railings that separated the plantation area and the sandpit represented a challenge and it was always a dare as to who could climb over them safely. As a dare we used to try to get into the wooded area by climbing over the fence without being caught by the "Parkie" or the lady attendant in the swings.

As most of our spare time seemed to be spent in the surrounds and the security of "Vicky Park" the long summer evenings were always that bit special. Parents did not seem to mind you staying out that bit later. Possibly because they knew where you were and that you were not under their feet. In those far off days there did not seem to be the criminal type of person frequenting the park or perhaps if they were we were unaware of them. Of course you did occasionally disturb the courting couples who were seeking a place of privacy in the bushes. In our young innocence we did not really understand why they were there and we used to treat it as a big joke when we disturbed them.

I can also remember a Prisoner of War camp that was situated to the rear of the park near Victoria Park Road, and I believe that the prisoners were Italian soldiers. Not that this really meant anything to us other than the fact we were told by our parents in no uncertain terms not to speak to them. Of course, we soon became friendly with these soldiers who spoke in a language that we did not understand. I can remember on one occasion one of the soldiers gave me a little wooden horse. Being very pleased with this unexpected present I hurried

home to show it to my parents, who were none too pleased and so it was another "ticking off."

To the rear of the POW camp there were the ruins and shell of an old church that was obviously bombed during the war. Now this was something special as a playground because the first challenge was to get inside the shell of the deserted church. Access was usually gained by somebody giving you a "leg up" or by standing on a readily assembled pile of bricks. Despite the warnings that it was supposed to be haunted and other odd tales that you heard, we took very little notice, because once inside a whole new area for exploring opened up. I seemed to remember that there was a large statue or perhaps the remnants of a statue at one end of the interior. The part of the church that I remember most was the old iron ladders that provided access to the bell tower. Of course the bigger boys had no problems in climbing the ladder and getting into the tower, but for us "titches" it was one major problem, and we could only look on in envy, and wait for them to reappear. The problem was that if the police were called on to remove us the smaller lads were always the one to get caught. We dare not tell the police that there were older boys in the bell tower. We usually got let off with a warning or a whack around the head with a policeman's rolled up cape, which he seemed to carry just for that purpose.

In the years immediately after the war and until the early fifties there used to be allotments in many areas of the park. Until the early fifties food rationing was still in operation and people could subsidise their vegetable rations by growing their vegetable crops and flowers. By walking along beside the allotments you soon got to know what was being grown and the type of seasonal vegetables, and when they were ready for picking. To this day I should imagine some of the allotment owners who are probably in their late seventies or eighties must have wondered where some of their crops vanished to during these years. On one occasion a couple of us happened to be leaning on the fence watching the grown ups at work when we noticed they were catching tiny funny looking animals, using a bucket and spade. When they brought the buckets over to the fence, there for the first time I saw a prickly hedgehog. The men were giving them away to anybody who wanted them,

and not being slow to come forward, I acquired one. To get it home, I removed my jumper and wrapped the hedgehog in it, but when I got home my mother absolutely "cleaned" me and told me to take the hedgehog and put it in the back yard. I had not realised that hedgehogs were infested with fleas, which transferred themselves to my jumper. Sadly, the hedgehog died a couple of days later, so it must have been sick when I got it.

Sunday afternoons always seemed to be the highlight of the week in the park, especially during the summer. This was the time that families would normally go to the park together and it was also when the "Sunday best" got its weekly airing before being returned to the pawnshop on Monday. The bandstand used to be the focal point and families would gather there to hear the brass band concerts, usually between three and five pm. Following this people would line up at the bandstand cafeteria for a cup of tea and a cake for a "tanner" (sixpence). There was also the ice-cream stall, which sold three-penny cornets, and fourpenny wafers. If you did not like the band you could always wander over to watch the cricket matches, or the matches on the bowling green.



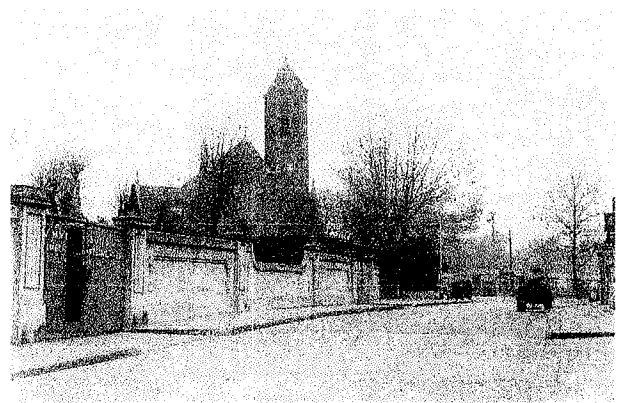
The Victoria Fountain - a gift from Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts

Near the large fountain there was a speakers corner and on a Sunday afternoon this was a local venue for many aspiring and established politicians to voice their opinions. It was always good to watch the speakers, not that we understood what they were talking about, but the hecklers in the crowds always provided a source of entertainment. Often the discussions became a bit overheated and people came to blows, perhaps this was why there used to be a policeman standing nearby. There were also political rallies held there and on one occasion in the early fifties there was a large meeting in support of the National Dock Strike.

Summertime always brought with it the long queues at the Lido swimming pool, which was always well patronised by what seemed to be half the population of London. Taking into account that not many people had bathrooms, the weekly dip at the Lido took the place of their weekly bath and in the summer, although it was cold, it was certainly better than the old tin bath in front of the fire.

In addition to the Lido there was another place of communal bathing, which was the paddling pool, situated between the three lakes. A further attraction was the lake where you could hire boats. People queued up for hours to hire one of the boats, the queues for the motor boats were the longest. The price was about four pence an hour for canoes or rowing boats, or the petrol powered motor boats which could be hired for sixpence for twenty minutes, or ninepence for half an hour. Next to the boating lake was a small teahouse and whatever the weather the teahouse was always well patronised, especially in the summer, when the queue stretched halfway around the lake. The other lake that comprised the three lakes was by the running track end. This was where they used to have model boat shows and competitions most Sundays throughout the summer. This lake was also one that we used to go fishing in with our home made fishing nets and drags. The nets were usually made from the foot of an old stocking stretched over a circular piece of wire and attached to a long stick. The drags were made from old bicycle wheels with the spokes removed and a piece of sacking over the frame secured with string. You then fitted a longer length of string to the top, in three sections to allow you to lower the drag into the water. For bait we used stale bread or the crusts from our sandwiches. The fish

we caught were mainly sitchlebacks, divided into groups such as tiddlers, pop bellies and red throat, the biggest of them all. The Parkies did not mind you using fishing nets, but would not allow you to use a drag, and would confiscate them and return your catch to the lake.



The new Mitford Bridge and St Mark's Church

Our greatest challenge entailed walking from one end of the park to the other. Starting at St Marks Gate and then walking back to the end of Cadogan Terrace, retracing our steps and finally ending up at the Hackney end of the park. We would set off with our supply of jam sandwiches and a couple of old lemonade bottles of water. The first stopping point would be on the way back from St Augustines Gate. There were the two big stone alcove shelters that came from the original London Bridge. Then we walked back past the red ochre football pitch, the first swings by St Marks and then on to the first part of the "plarnie" near the Old Ford Locks by Jodrell Road. This part of the "plarnie" ran parallel to the running track of part of its way.

When we eventually reached the end of the first section of the "plarnie" by Gunmakers Lane, a detour was made to the big water fountain, which we called Victoria Fountain. This was to obtain a drink if the fountain was working, and by using the well-worn metal cups that were secured on anchoring points to the side of the fountain. Nobody gave a second thought as to if they were clean enough, all we wanted was drink and to replenish the supply of water in our bottles. We would then proceed to the park gates by the Queens Hotel and from here we would cross Grove Road into the second part, as we called it, stopping only to watch the big red trolley buses with their wobbly roof poles go past.

Once across the road we would stop in the second swings for a while, then on past the putting green and the deer pens, and if we were feeling a little generous we would feed one of our sandwiches to the deer. another slight diversion would take us alongside the deer pens to the old round rustic wooden shelter. This was normally the second official stop to eat a sandwich and have a swig of water. Once refreshed, it was back down the side paths and past a small aviary known as the Parrot Cage, which on some occasions actually had a parrot in it. The next stop would be the drinking water fountain by the third swings. We walked on past the big white stone statues of the Alsatian dogs that were near the park greenhouses. The statues seemed to be standing forever on constant duty as silent guard dogs for the park or could it have been the Bonner gates leading from Approach Road and the old London Chest Hospital. There were many local tales about the dogs. One such tale was that the dog whose statue was near the greenhouses saved the life of a child who had fallen into the nearby canal, but lost his own life in the attempt. Its funny how imaginative the young mind can be and how local tales are spread. Once past the statues we went through the park gates and reached the drinking fountain, we now knew that we were on the last stage of the adventure.

By this time our bottles of water had long been used so this particular stop was welcomed. Unfortunately, sometimes the fountain was not working. We then headed towards the swings, in the hope that we would be able to have a go on the magnificent "Double American Swings". There was always a queue for these and unfortunately there was an age restriction that I think was ten years, and on occasions you would fib your age so that you could get in them. From the swings we made our way past the large rockery to the round aviary that always seemed to have a large selection of different caged birds on display. After a walk around the aviary it was on to the final stage of the adventure. This was another small wooded plantation area and what appeared to be a storage area for the park's equipment. There were also some old greenhouses and another park entrance called St Agnes Gate.

The return journey had to be by another route and part of this included looking at the large stone

swans nest on the big lake and of course the every mysterious Chinese pagoda on what we called "Chinaman's Island." The access to this island was very tricky. as there were only two ways onto it. One via a path and over a small bridge that the park staff used and the other was over what appeared to be a suspension type bridge that had seen better days. The gates to this bridge were chained up so the only way on to the island was to climb over the gates when the Park Keeper was not around. Once over the gates, it was a quick careful run across the bridge, making sure that you avoided the boards that were damaged. Unknown to us at this time there was another bridge on the other side of the island where the Park staff used to gain access, to store their equipment. When you were at last on the island we made our way to the ruins of the old Chinese Pagoda, this was where our ideas and imagination usually ran riot. We played many games in this forbidden area and although it was possibly a trick of the imagination many of us are sure that we saw the occasional pigtailed Chinaman in the bushes on the island. The object now was to get off the island without being caught, which was just as precarious.



The lake in Victoria Park

When we were off the island we carried on our way alongside the big lake to the shell of another old impressive looking stone type building which was the old Burdett Shelter. A wooden fence that was damaged in places, gave us just enough space to squeeze through and explore the seven or eight alcoves. Now we came to the boating station with its old wooden buildings where you could hire a large rowing boat or go for a ride on the pleasure boat that took you around the lake and its islands. There was also the cafeteria alongside the

boathouse, and an old wooden shelter which provided cover when the weather was not too good.

The journey then resumed by going back across Grove Road near the traffic lights and into the next part of the park by Old Ford Road, which was through the area that we called "the last plarnie". This part of the adventure involved going past a couple of bomb craters. These were supposedly caused by a German bomber missing its target during the Second World War and bombing the park. In amongst the bomb craters was a large hill that we called the Sand Hill. The bigger boys used to ride their bicycles up and down and many a mishap occurred then they got it wrong. The slope also provided a natural slide as the surface became worn with constant use. If there was an old piece of flat metal or an old dusty bin lid to hand this was soon used as a home made sledge. Many a grazed knee and elbow happened as a result of falling off the sledge when you reached the bottom.

We continued our way through the Plarnie alongside the canal, until tired and exhausted we finally reached the park gates that were by the Old Ford Lock. If any of us had any pennies, a quick visit was made to the "Dolls House", a small cafe which sold sweets, penny drinks, and ice cream. It was located on the corner of Jodrell Road. Occasionally we would find the odd lemonade bottle in the park and we would return it to the nearest shop to get the tuppence deposit back. We knew that the Dolls House sold R Whites lemonade and Tizer so any empty bottles that we found in the park with those labels we took there. Of course, we had to make out that the bottle was originally purchased at the cafe.

What an adventure and what a sense of achievement we experienced when we finally arrived home. I suppose in modern thinking it would not appear to have been much to achieve, but for us children it was something that we would talk about at school for the next few days, or until the next time.

James F Crouch

Want to know more about Victoria Park? Turn to Page 2 for details of A Pictorial History of Victoria Park.

Notes and News

Open Day at Tower Hamlets Cemetery

As part of London 'Open House' which takes place on the weekend on 23rd and 24th September, don't miss this opportunity to visit the cemetery, there will be special walks, an exhibition and a chance to view the results of Diane and Doreen Kendall's painstaking research, all being collated onto a database. Our Society also holds the microfiche of Tower Hamlets Cemetery burial index for the years 1841 to 1853, from the opening of the cemetery. During this time there were 7580 burials. Contact John Harris for further information.

Museum of London Exhibitions:

Grave Concerns

From 1st September to 29th October 2000
Exhibition on the subject of the disposal of London's dead covers archaeological discoveries up to the present day.

Collecting 2000

From 29th September to 4th February 2001
Various London groups, clubs etc are invited to select and donate to the Museum of London one item, object, image or recording that defines their identity at the start of the 21st century.

The Meridian

The Prime Meridian - 0 degrees longitude. since the world accepted it as the pivot of world navigation 116 years ago, the Meridian has been almost invisible outside of Greenwich. for the Millennium Greenwich Observatory created a blue laser beam which travels the Meridian Line. From the Millennium Dome across Blackwall at East India Dock Road, then on over Abbey Mills Pumping Station on a line crossing Carpenters Road on to Leytonstone Coronation Gardens, Leyton and Wanstead before travelling through Norfolk to

the Wash. On a clear night it is an eerie feeling to be in the Abbey Lane area and see the blue beam above.

A Project started in 1999 by the University of Greenwich with the help of computers has been able to pin point the Meridian Line. They are at present marking the Meridian Line with a line of trees of elm and ash attached to 4ft 6in. stakes. It is hoped that when the trees, native to Britain, mature, a clear line will emerge from which pilots will be able to chart a course. One of the best places to visit the line north of London is the Lea Valley Regional Park, St Margaret's, near Hoddesden. A footpath 22.5 miles long will end at East India Docks opposite the Millennium Dome.

Millwall, Isle of Dogs

One of the seven windmills believed to have stood on the west side of the Isle of Dogs, recalled in the name Millwall, has been uncovered by the Kingsbridge Arms on West Ferry Road. This is believed to be the first evidence of their existence. Archaeologists working on this southern-most mill hope to find other structures that may predate the 16th century mill.

West India Dock Gate

Part of our heritage was recreated on 12th July 2000 as Mayor of London Ken Livingstone opened a 32ft replica of the main gate to West India Dock, which had been originally named after the dock pioneer George Hibbert, chairman of the West India Dock Company, and featured a West India trading ship that bore his name. The Mayor following the tradition of the Prime Minister William Pitt 200 years ago, was rowed across the dock, accompanied by the High Commissioner from the West Indies.

The replica gate has been built by the Canary Wharf Group as a tribute to the local community who worked in the docks. The 32

ft replica had to be researched and recreated from an old photograph of the gate. They calculated the exact size of the structure by counting the number of bricks in the old black and white photograph. The new ship's model is in bronze. It stands near the same location as the original gate in Hertsmere Park before a view of the original warehouses built in 1800.

Society members will recall that the original was known locally as the Hibbert Ship Gate, designed for horse and cart to pass through. It was demolished in the 1930s as motorised transport became common and the gate was no longer wide enough for them to pass through. Over the years many letters to our Society wondered in which warehouse the model of the ship was stored. Mr French, our President researched it and found that the model had been carved in stone then gilded gold. It had been sadly neglected and when moved it had collapsed into rubble.

The Changing East End

Our area is changing so rapidly it is hard to keep up, and it is history in the making. The skyline around the East End which has been dominated by Canary Wharf since 1991 has two new tower blocks which seem to grow higher every day. The Dome viewed from West Ferry Road area at night looks like a giant space ship with all lights flashing for take off, will be with us for the next 35 years.

The Jubilee Line has won many architectural awards for Stratford and Canning Town Stations and travels under the Thames four times in its journey towards Westminster. The new Channel Tunnel Rail Link will be developed by 2007. Docklands Light Railway has been extended to Lewisham and in the near future to City Airport, this line will take you to Beckton where you will see being built by the Royal Victoria Dock a new Excel Exhibition Centre will all its new roads and a station, will open with its first exhibition on "Careers and

Jobs Live” in March 25-26 2001. The contract for the Boat Show in 2004 has been signed.

Eagle Slayer

The sculpture in cast iron of the Eagle Slayer created by the sculptor John Bell and displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851 has stood in the garden entrance outside the Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green, since 1927. It will soon be on the move back to the V & A Museum if a planning application by them is successful. Our Society’s members have supported Tom Ridge in his protests about the statue being removed for conservation, then to be displayed inside the V & A. The argument for its removal is that it was never created for the Bethnal Green Museum and was only moved there in 1926 on a temporary basis.



The Eagle Slayer being erected in Bethnal Green Museum Gardens in April 1927

The Green Bridge, Mile End

Opening of the Green Bridge over Mile End Road took place on 17th June 2000. The

bridge has been built as part of a major £25 million scheme to redevelop the Mile End Park. Designed by architect and local resident, Piers Gough, who also designed the nearby Onyx House, opposite Mile End Underground Station, the bridge carries a footpath and cycle track and is planted with deciduous and evergreen trees.

The 90 acre park was created after the Second World War from bomb sites, including that of Single Street School, where the Battle of Britain Commemorative Service was held on 15th September 1942.

As well as the bridge, other attractions include a terraced garden, fountain and water cascade features. A new adventure playground, sports centre and swimming pool, an arts park, exhibition centre and an ecology park containing 880 plants, are all part of the ambitious plan.

The revenue to pay for maintenance work and park rangers will come from the leases of 10 shops, a restaurant and cafe under the bridge. A plan to sell and market water currently held in aquifers, holes in the chalkface underground, has also been put forward. The green glazed tiles on the bridge are graffiti proof and cameras and infra-red lights at night should deter vandals.

Will Crooks

Ray Jefferd and other family descendants of Will Crooks are trying to bring together all the material and memories they have collected from their family research, and our members’ memories to make a video. Paul Tyler who is researching for the biography he is writing on Will Crooks and hopefully will be published in 2002, spends many hours in Bancroft Road History Library and Greenwich Local Study Library carrying out his research.

Doreen Kendall



AUTUMN COACH TRIP

SUNDAY 1st October 2000
BLETCHLEY PARK

This was the famous 'Station X' where top secret work went on to break the German codes in World War II. You may have seen the recent TV series.

Visitors are given a guided tour, to explain what went on at different locations. There are also various exhibitions, such as World War II uniforms and memorabilia, wartime vehicles, model railways and boats.

The centrepiece of the park is a Victorian mansion, each addition in a different architectural style, with opulent interiors. The nearby St Mary's Church is worth a visit.

Before visiting Bletchley Park we will make a stop, probably in the centre of Bletchley, for possible shopping. Refreshments are available at Bletchley Park.

The coach fare will be £7.50, please send this to me with the form below. Entrance is £5.00 full rate, £4.00 concessions, which will be collected on the coach.

The pick-up will be at Mile End, opposite the station, at 10.00 am. Please send your bookings to: Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF (Tel: 0208 524 4506)

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AUTUMN COACH TRIP TO BLETCHLEY PARK Sunday 1st October 2000	
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.)	

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