

NEWSLETTER

Volume 2 Issue 2

Spring 2002



David Bellamy patron of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, pond dipping with children from the local schools when the cemetery took on its new status as a Local Nature Reserve, and the launch of the Millennium Trail in July. (See page 14 for further details)

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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 Osborne.

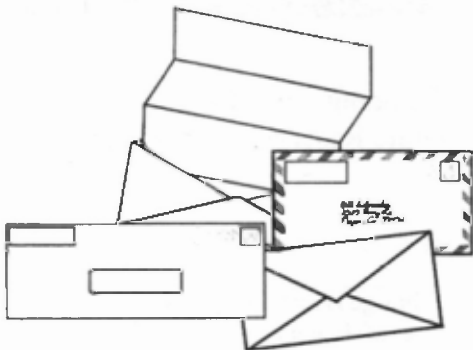
Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are always welcome and we make every effort to publish suitable material. Whilst hand-written articles are acceptable, items of interest that are typewritten or even better still, on disk will get priority!!

Enquiries to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, E2 0RF, Tel: 0208 981 7680, or Philip Mernick, email: phil@mernicks.com

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

Check out the History Society's website at www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk.

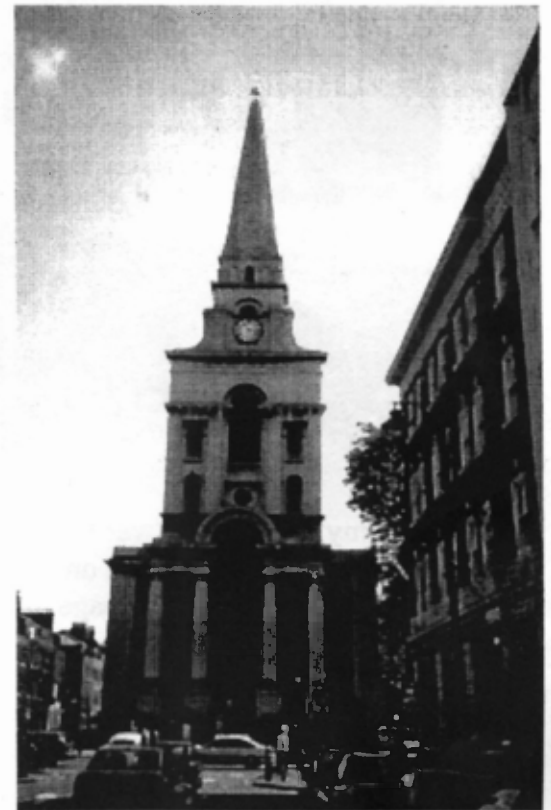
The present committee are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, John Harris, Membership, David Behr, Programme co-ordinator, Ann Sansom, Coach Outings, Doreen Osborne, Bob Dunn, Howard Penberg and Rosemary Taylor.



**East London History Society –
Report on the Annual General Meeting
November 2001**

The AGM of the East London History Society took place on Thursday 22nd November, before the lecture on Spitalfields. Philip Mernick presented the accounts, which showed that the society has a healthy balance. With the minimum of fuss the committee members, who had all agreed to continue their good work, were re-elected en masse.

As the committee have been considering a new publication, following on the success of the Victoria Park book, we have been looking at publishing Derek Morris's work on Mile End. Please see the Letters Page for his notes and update. A progress report on this work will appear in the next newsletter, when hopefully we will have finalised a publication date.



Christ Church Spitalfields

**EAST LONDON
HISTORY SOCIETY
PROGRAMME 2002**

Thursday 28th February 2002

**So Your Ancestor Worked in the
Docks?**

Speaker: Bob Aspinall

Thursday 7th March 2002

**Town Gardening in 18th century and
early 19th century London**

Speaker: Todd Longstaff-Gowan

Thursday 18th April 2002

**Developers and Residents on the
Coborn and Morgan Estates, Bow**

Speaker Nigel Glendinning

Saturday 27th April 2002

**Spring Coach Trip to the Historic
Dockyards at Chatham (See back
page for details and booking form)**

Thursday 23rd May 2002

Open Evening - Memories and Photos

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

The Programme

Suggestions and ideas for future topics and/or speakers for our Lecture Programme are always welcomed. If you can suggest someone or indeed if you would like to give a talk yourself, please do come along to the Open Evening in May, and meet David Behr, our Programme co-ordinator.

Alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick at phil@mernicks.com with your comments and suggestions.

Book Reviews

Maid in West Ham: My formative years 1924-1948 by Ivy Alexander. Price £10 inc. p&p.

Ivy Alexander, nee Hicks, was born in Wharf Street, Old Canning Town, in 1924. She has brought together experiences in her life in *Maid in West Ham* – this is more than the story of her own life; it is an excellent example of how to write family history placed in a social context.

Her parents were an ill-matched couple – her father had been a professional boxer who started his boxing career in the boxing booths of the time and who later suffered from resulting brain damage causing him to have fits of aggression. Her mother had married him to get away from home. Her father's forebears were mostly agricultural workers in Essex; his paternal grandfather became a brickyard worker on Wanstead flats, a place where Ivy was to spend many happy hours as a child. Her grandmother is said to have had twenty-one pregnancies of which, after miscarriages and stillbirths, only eight survived to maturity.

Her mother, born in Poplar, came from generations of artisan Londoners. Ivy's maternal grandfather was a chef; her grandmother was born in Penge, south east London. Broken families are not a new phenomenon. This grandmother left her family to live with a licensed victualler while, at a later stage, Ivy's mother left her husband during the war and then emigrated to New Zealand in 1952, the last time that Ivy saw her mother. Her father lived on until 1970.

Ivy was the third child in a family of six children. It is here that her story takes off and enfolds the reader with concern for the members of her family, her friends and their circumstances. The family home for father, mother, three sons and three daughters was a two bed roomed house where a constant battle

had to be waged against the bugs which got into the bed-springs, behind the wallpaper, and even in the brickwork and plaster, in spite of the family's great efforts to wipe them out. She tells of the arms-length relations with neighbours which existed in pre-war East London, respect for people's privacy and no 'dropping in' and the strict injunction to children to 'know nothing' if a stranger called, and of an understandable coldness to the Relieving Officer.

The book is an encouraging story of how a determined girl made a break from this background and from the problems of education in the Second World War years. The key to that break is what she describes as 'a love of, and' indeed, thirst for education' which shaped her life.

Her first school was in Bidder Street where some children came from families too poor to afford footwear for them and many, like Ivy's family were provided with free breakfasts and dinners because of poverty. When she was twelve she was selected to attend Russell Central School, and at sixteen years of age, after some very temporary jobs she got employed in a Tuberculosis Clinic in Plaistow where she began to question why, in those pre-NHS days, patients had to be income-assessed for extra nourishment and wondered what was the treatment available to the rich, leading to the thought that 'something must be done' and to political campaigning for socialist ideas. Her thirst for education included five nights a week at evening classes to which was added cycling trips, rambling, dances, amateur dramatics, concert and theatre going, immediate post-war visits to France and university, all of which brought a wide circle of friends. An adventurous young woman!

The book worked for me on several levels: family relationships; social history; the importance of friendships; the need to retain a sense of humour in adversity; a love of life. I thoroughly recommend it as a life story with all those components in it.

Ivy Alexander has published the book herself. It is an excellently-produced 159 page paper back book with many photographs and it costs only £10 packing and postage paid, from Mrs Ivy Alexander, 4a Fordington Road, Winchester, Hampshire SO22 5AL. Also available at Newham Parents Centre Bookshop, Plaistow.

Eddie Dare

Upton Connections, 1732-1916, A Story of Families by Derk Pelly chronicles the history of the lives of the seafaring Pellys, plus the close-knit and interrelated Quaker families, the Sheppards, Gurneys, Frys and Buxtons, all of whom helped shape West Ham in the 18th and 19th centuries. Derk Pelly the author who is directly descended from these illustrious people has traced his family ties and the result is far more than just a family history. These were years of great change, when Upton evolved from a rural hamlet into a seething mass of smoky tenements. The book is illustrated with portraits of some notable characters, as well as maps and illustrations of Upton and drawings of the great houses.

Upton Connections – A Story of Families is published by Pentland Press, price £12.95

The Tower of London Children's Beach by Rose Baillie Price £3 inc. p&p.
Order directly from R Baillie, 15 Escuan Lodge, Aberdeen Park, London N5 2AP

Rose Baillie writes: "I set out to research the archaeology of the Tower foreshore, but found the Children's Beach such an interesting and touching story that the project took on a life of its own. I produced the book myself this summer. I would like to emphasise that I regard this as 'work in progress'. I would be delighted if any ELHS member has any personal recollections or photos that they would share with me for the Second Edition."

Rose Baillie is the Chair and Hon. Field Officer of the City of London Archaeological Society, who have been engaged in a survey of the Thames foreshore at the Tower of London, in front of what had once been the Tower's Wharf. It was during this survey in 1998 that the Society came across patches of yellow sand, which proved to be the remains of the Tower of London Children's Beach, a charitable endeavour of the 1930s. Many Eastenders have fond memories of their summer excursions to the Beach, and it was to prove an extremely popular outing for families from Stepney. Whilst the book is a factual account of the creation of the charity which ran the Beach, and its progress up to and after the War, it also gives us snippets of fascinating information about those who used the facilities and those whose task it was to maintain a watch over them.

The booklet is fascinating, and well worth getting, especially for those who have personal memories of using the Beach.

Changing Places – A short history of the MEOTRA area, published by the Mile End Old Town Residents' Association, A4, 40pp. Price £4.50. ISBN 0-9541171-0-7

A collection of essays on various aspects of the history of this corner of Tower Hamlets, with some evocative photographs, combined with interviews of residents, bringing the history up to date, makes this a must for collectors of east end publications. The book explores every aspect of life in this, one of the most elegant areas of the borough, tracing its early development, living and working in Mile End Old Town, transport, leisure and places of worship.

Walks through History – Exploring The East End by Rosemary Taylor
published by Breedon Books, price £9.99.
ISBN 1 85983 270 9

This book of twelve walks covers almost all of Tower Hamlets, from Brick Lane to Blackwall, and places in between! The book is based on the many walking tours that the author has conducted over the years, for ELHS members, history classes, various clubs and the Museum of London. Each of the walks has a map showing points of interest, and is profusely illustrated with archive photographs and many others taken by Rosemary herself, during her explorations in search of the unusual and often hidden history of the East End. The illustrations are evocative, and the armchair traveller will get as much enjoyment from these guided tours as the adventurous who set out to explore the highways, and byways of backstreet East London.

Available from Newham Parents Centre Bookshop, on the Barking Road, Eastside Bookshop, Whitechapel (next door to the Royal London Hospital), The Ragged School Museum Bookshop and W H Smiths, among others.



In the courtyard of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry

Gilda O'Neill has produced an audio cassette of her best selling book **My East End – A History of Cockney London**. This is now available at Newham Parents' Centre Bookshop, Barking Road, Plaistow.

A Pictorial History of Victoria Park, published by the East London History Society is still available at £6.95 plus £2 postage and packing. Please send your orders to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF.

East London History Society – 50th Anniversary Call for Papers

The East London History Society will be celebrating its 50th anniversary next year 2002, with a special publication to commemorate the event.

Articles are welcomed from all our members, on any topic connected with the East End of London. If possible, please supply articles on disk and include photographs and illustrations.

Please send your material to Doreen Kendall, 20 Puteaux House, Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green, London E2 0RF, or Philip Mernick, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London E3 4DT.

The deadline is 31st March 2002.

THE CURWEN FAMILY, MUSIC AND PRINTING IN PLAISTOW

Pat Francis

Plaistow grew up as a small village in the parish of its neighbour, West Ham. In 1844, the Independent chapel in Plaistow welcomed a new minister, a 28-year-old Yorkshireman called John Curwen. In 1891 the minister's son, John Spencer Curwen, wrote and published a booklet, *Old Plaistow*. It opens with the story of a little girl in Sunday School who, on hearing of the delights of the Garden of Eden, commented, 'I expect that place you've been talking about is all built over now'.

The author goes on: 'I should say, from internal evidence, that that girl came from Plaistow. That is how we have to end many a story of Plaistow. ... We have exchanged a country village for a town, a small group of people for a crowd.'

A major cause of this transformation was the Metropolitan Building Act, passed the self-same year that the minister, John Curwen, settled in Plaistow. This Act, meant to protect residents in the already crowded streets of London, forbade within its borders industries which emitted noxious fumes. Land lying to the east of the city was free from these restrictions. Communications by road, river and the developing national railway network were good, and so factories soon covered ground where previously marshmen shouldering long poles had wandered, and sheep fattened on salt grasses. The building of Victoria Docks in 1855 settled the fate of the area for a hundred years, residents enjoying high employment, but coughing and spluttering in frequent pea-souper fogs which followed when industrial pollution met damp air on the low-lying Plaistow levels.

John Curwen had been charged by a Sunday School conference to improve congregational singing, and so his conscience was clear when in 1863 he gave up the ministry in order to

devote himself to publishing music and books about tonic sol-fa, the method he had chosen to help people, especially the poor, to sing. At first literally a cottage industry, the printing press took over an old school building in North Street in 1866. From the outset, although J. Curwen and Sons always had a publishing address elsewhere in London, printing was done at the press in Plaistow, initially called the Tonic Sol-fa Press, and later The Curwen Press.

John Curwen kept his prices low. For example, the paper-covered 1865 edition of *The Child's Own Hymn Book* added a further twenty-three hymns to the previous number, and still claimed to provide an improved layout. He saw the songs he published as being not only for congregations, but for Temperance Halls, schools, and cheap concerts of a wholesome nature, to lure people away from pubs and singing rooms, the forerunners of music hall.

John Curwen's sons, John Spencer and Joseph Spedding, were usually known as Spencer and Spedding. Spencer, the elder, decided against following his father and grandfather into the ministry, and trained at the Royal Academy of Music. At his father's death in 1880, he therefore took over the publishing side of the business, while Spedding managed the printing works in Plaistow. It was Spedding, though, who had the honour of singing for Queen Victoria. Alexander Graham Bell presented the queen with a new-fangled instrument, a telephone, made of ivory. To prove its worth, a quartet of tonic sol-fa singers was chosen to sing to her, they being in Cowes and she at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Spedding, possessed of a fine voice, was one of those selected.

Spencer's wife, Annie Jessy Curwen, was a noted piano teacher who wrote a manual for other teachers. Familiarly known as Mrs Curwen's Pianoforte Method, it was first published in 1886; it reached its twentieth

edition shortly before the Great War, and remained in print for many years after that. Annie Curwen followed the precepts of her father-in-law; they believed children should be taught the elements of music through singing using tonic sol-fa notation before learning to play an instrument. The Curwens had also always held firmly to the idea that teachers needed sound training. In this, as in many of their social beliefs, the Curwens were ahead of their time. Teacher training in all subjects was introduced on a national scale with the Education Act of 1870. This act called for elementary schooling for the children of a rapidly expanding population. Tonic sol-fa was quickly adopted as the method of instruction in music in schools. By 1879, John Curwen had set up the Tonic Sol-fa College in Forest Gate, near the Plaistow printing press.

Spedding took on general printing to supplement work on Curwen's own publications. Secular music was produced, in staff notation as well as tonic sol-fa. Setting music by moveable type was a highly skilled trade, and Curwen's compositors were especially looked up to, as they could transpose from one notation to the other at sight. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, lithography was introduced at North Street, making the setting of music less arduous. At about this time, cheap paper-making processes greatly increased the volume of printing in England. The gramophone had been invented, but was not yet within the reach of many people. The number of pianos, in the home, however, was increasing. Sales of sheet music were therefore good, and Curwen's produced a variety, including the 'action songs' popular during the Boer War.

Nearly half the staff at the printworks formed the Curwen Caxton Choir. They arrived at seven in the morning to practice before starting their day's work. Their efforts paid off, as they won prizes at the Stratford Music Festival three years running, from 1900 to 1903. Spencer Curwen had been instrumental in developing competitive choral singing

nationally, and had founded the Stratford festival.

In the early years of the twentieth century, running the business was taken over by the third generation of Curwens. John Kenneth (called Kenneth), eldest son of Spedding, developed the publishing side, introducing orchestral music by contemporary composers such as Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Ethel Smyth, while Spedding's youngest son, Harold, took the printing press in a new direction. As print proliferated at the end of the previous century, the choice almost everywhere was between the worthy and dull and the wildly exuberant; as befitted a man respected in chapel-going and Temperance circles, Spedding had been one of those providing an honest but uninspired service. Harold, born in 1885, was heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. Kenneth went to Oxford, but Harold chose a practical training in the craft of printing, then evolving into the new profession of typography. He introduced artists of the calibre of Paul Nash to design end-papers and illustrations.

Harold wished to follow William Morris in giving joy, or at least satisfaction, to his workers in making a beautiful object, but unlike Morris and the small private presses printing by hand, he needed to run an economical mechanised business. Perhaps these ambitions were incompatible, but he and The Curwen Press became renowned for design, and it was not at all unusual for workers to stay with the firm for thirty, forty, or even fifty years. Harold introduced the five-day week before it was legally necessary to do so. It is interesting to note that he did so in 1926, the year of the General Strike.

In time, a fourth generation of the family took over, in the person of John Christopher Curwen, born in 1911, but gradually the various functions of the business split up and were sold off. The old North Street building was bombed in 1941.

In their different ways, the Curwens strove for social justice as they saw it. The *Songs of Work and Duty for Schools* which John Spencer Curwen edited in 1879, teaching thrift, earnestness, and love of parents, and warning against debt, idleness and the merely military spirit, sound quaint and paternalistic to us. Calling the bindery 'the Girls' Room' may make us cringe, and by our standards, some of the working conditions were insupportable. In 1900, for example, there was no paid leave, though there was a sick club. The Curwens gave staff a day out once a year, and at Christmas the men received a pound of tea while the boys and girls (women usually left on marriage) were given a box of chocolates. But by their own lights, and judged by the standards of the day, they were good employers. And their intention to spread cheerfulness through song and print was not such a bad one.

Further reading: *Old Plaistow* by John Spencer Curwen; 4th ed. published 1905, republished 1994 by Plaistow Press Ltd; *Printer and Playground: an autobiography* by Oliver Simon, Faber & Faber, 1955; *Song and Words: a history of the Curwen Press* by Herbert Simon, George Allen & Unwin, 1973; *The Printing of Books* by Holbrook Jackson, Cassell & Co Ltd, 1938.

(Pat Francis writes: Although the information was all gathered from books and records, I remember the old print works. I was born and brought up in Plaistow, and my forebears all came from Bethnal Green/Mile End.)

East End 1888 by William J Fishman, 376 pages, Hardback, ISBN 0-9541059-0-7. Published by Hanbury, 65 Hanbury Street, London E1 5JP. Price £20.00 (inc. p&p)

Professor Bill Fishman's book originally published in 1988, has been republished, and is available at Eastside Bookshops or direct from the publishers.

UNIVERSITY HOUSE

Mrs Bertha Bell was housekeeper at University House, Bethnal Green from October 1919 to March 1923. Her husband was the doorman. In the late 1980s she recalled some of her memories of the house, and sadly died soon after in the early 1990s, having lived for many years at 32 St Peter's Avenue, Bethnal Green.

In 1919 University House contained the offices of the War Ministry of Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen, situated on the ground floor at the rear. In a small office in the front the Customs and Excise were housed. Other rooms held the Ministry of Food, Clothing and Coal. This was also where the First World War veterans saw the medical staff for extra food rations, clothing and coal vouchers which were to supplement their small pensions received for being limbless, shell-shocked or suffering the after effects of being gassed. Many were ragged and homeless, having lost touch with their families, and were a pitiful sight.

On the first floor were the temporary lending rooms of Bethnal Green Library, which had been bombed out. The third floor was used for staff offices.

Visitors to the House always remarked on the fine French staircase which was highly polished.

The entire house was lit by gas lighting and had shutters at the windows. The garden at the back of the house had large flower beds and vegetable plots, and chickens were also kept.

Mr and Mrs Bell, doorman and housekeeper, lived in a basement flat and were paid wages of £3 a week for the both of them. They worked from 5.30 am lighting fires in every

room, preparing and serving lunches, morning coffees and afternoon teas for 26. There were also two committee teas per week for up to 20 staff.

In 1922 the Government had an economy cut and their wages were reduced to 22 shillings a week. The Ministry was closed down in March 1923 and the House was let to an Engineering Firm. Lord and Lady Buchanan of Oxford House then bought the building for theological students and social workers. Sir Wyndham Deedes opened up a social centre for local people, a boxing club and there was also a ballroom where many elderly people today recall chatting up the opposite sex, which led to courtships and marriages. The local paper, East End News was published here in the 1980s, then the House was bought and turned into residential flats.

A Memorial Service was held for Mr Frank Sainsbury on Sunday 18th November at St John's Church in Newbury Park.

Frank Sainsbury was a founder member of the Newham History Society, formed in 1971, and was the society's secretary until 1997. He worked for the former West Ham Council for 35 years up to 1965, the last ten years of service as Borough Librarian.

Frank retired to Southport in 1997, and died aged 86 in October 2001.

Cambridge Heath Road – My Memory Lane

Stephen Sadler

The article on Allinson's by Christopher Lloyd in the Summer 2001 ELHS Newsletter got me thinking. In the far off 1920's my family lived in gas lit rooms above Harvey's, a fruit and veg shop in Old Bethnal Green Road. We moved to Victoria Park before many houses in that part of the 'Old Road' were demolished by the LCC about 1938.

50 yards to the left of our home was a railway arch. Looking through it one saw Cambridge Heath Road. On the far side was the Allinsons building. That view is indelibly printed on my mind. To my child like thinking the road became a grand highway leading to an unchartered world waiting to be explored. Now a senior citizen I am still doing just that. Recently I took a slow walk along pavements where once I skipped. From Hackney Road to Bethnal green Road was my playground. The many buildings and three small gardens in that stretch of Cambridge Heath Road all hold memories of sights, sounds and even smells.

The traffic was so light a pedestrian could easily cross Cambridge Heath Road at any point. But one had to watch out for electric trams that ran in the centre. I recall a small horse drawn cart getting a wheel caught in the tram line. The exasperated carman tugged and pushed to release it, but to no avail. Meanwhile, trams, unable to pass, began to queue in each direction with their drivers and conductors all bellowing advice to the sweating carman. I was one of a crowd of children enjoying the comedy. The horse was taken from the shafts and from adjacent garages helpers appeared. When the wheel would not budge hammers and crowbars were used. That splintered the wooden wheel, left the metal rim in a twisted mess and the disabled cart was dragged from the lines to

join the nag contentedly munching at a feed bag.

All the locals then knew Glickman's. A large shiny radio shop (now a supermarket) at the Hackney Road intersection. When television got going in the late 1930's this new gadget was added to its stock. To attract buyers a working set was displayed in the window. I, one of many kids who just had to see this magic, stood outside Glickman's, nose pressed against plate glass, watching the flickering TV picture of a football match.

From Cambridge Heath railway station a child could take a return journey to Liverpool Street for one penny. I remember several of these adventures with some chums and being thrilled by wonderful, if short train rides along a viaduct and through smoky tunnels. The original 19th century Liverpool Street station, and its maze of stairs were just waiting to be explored. If lucky, the young searchers might get to see a giant express from East Anglia just steaming in. But a novel entertainment was finding a machine that punched your name on a strip of aluminium for one penny. In retrospect it is astonishing that children could then move about London so freely – and in safety – without being accompanied by an adult.

To the south of Cambridge Heath station is a line of railway arches – nearly all garages. Opposite was Bethnal Green Hospital. I used its services three times. The first was with mumps – 'Orrible; the second time round I must have been a very sorry small boy in casualty with a bloody finger smashed in a metal gate. That and my third visit were painful. At 14, working in print, I got ink into a cut finger. The septic wound received rough but effective treatment. BGH itself has become a casualty in the march of progress. No longer a hospital the old place looks sad.

Another casualty is the Bethnal Green Town Hall. As a child I was awed by the place and regarded it as the seat of Great Authority. Now

that imposing building sits unused and forlorn with dirty windows and locked doors.

Next to the Town Hall stood Museum Cinema. I spent whatever coppers I could save for flicks at the 'Museum'. I recall a rare occasion when my older brother Wal took me there to see a Hitchcock classic: *Thirty Nine Steps* made in 1935. In one scene Richard Hannay, the hero, is chased across Scottish Highlands. I found it so exciting I jumped noisily up and down in my seat. That rapidly brought an irate attendant who threatened to chuck us out. In the 1960's the cinema joined the casualty list. Part of the site became a council laundry.

I retain a soft spot for York Hall as the place I learned to swim. A dip in the pool then cost us kids one penny. That included a towel and bathing trunks, both freshly laundered. Mother did the weekly wash at York Hall and all the family used the baths. At the height of the Blitz, I had not undressed for several days and so my Saturday tub was extra welcome. Barely had I relaxed in the hot bath when the air raid siren wailed. All bathers were ordered out. When nearly dressed the all clear sounded. Annoyed I marched off into Cambridge Heath Road in a state of damp disgust.

In my day the Museum (a branch of the V & A) had a reputation for stuffiness. Young visitors were discouraged unless accompanied by an adult. And even then we had to stay together. To be seen apart meant the door. In that hallowed hall children spoke in whispers. Happily that has changed. Coaches from schools regularly bring parties to the Museum of Childhood to enjoy and learn from museum displays.

On the far side of the road was a line of small shops supplying every kind of service from barbers to butchers. There were several pubs and of course the essential pawnbroker mixed in with small factories. Remarkably many of those buildings have survived. But in World War Two some took a knock from a V1 rocket. That is why there is a patch of new

development leading to that strip of fronting Paradise Row. Everyone knew it as Pussy Cat Park, due I think, to the army of stray moggies living in the shrubbery.

At the junction of Bethnal Green Road helpful and chatty bus conductors – an extinct race – would call out ‘Salmon and Ball’ after that celebrated Victorian pub, referred to by my Aunt Margaret as ‘The Snuff Takers Arms’. Before the Gardens (corner of Roman Road) became an open space, part of the site was occupied by the Bethnal Green Asylum. Victorian cockneys did not forget that association and in a forthright manner named it Barmy Park. And that was the name I knew it by. I still recall falling in the park pool and running home in my wet clothes.

When I progressed from Comic Cuts and Film Fun to books I joined the borough library in the Gardens. Browsers then walked around the library quietly. The slightest noise brought disapproving tuts from staff. I became a keen reader, especially on discovering Richmal Crompton’s Just William stories. What magic! Kept me chuckling for hours. Then I found C S Forrester’s Hornblower naval novels. Sheer entertainment in print! At that library I acquired a self-taught education and consider it aided my learning at Mowlem Street School. Why, I even began reading Charles Dickens.

From its inception in 1932 Sir Oswald Moseley’s British Union of Fascists became increasingly active in Bethnal Green. I recall its ‘Blackshirt’ soapbox orators holding meetings outside the Salmon and Ball and nearby in Victoria Park Square. One Sunday afternoon I watched a massive parade of BUF members dressed in black Nazi type uniforms sweep across Cambridge Heath Road and march into Roman Road heading for a rally. Alarmed by the threat of a political army the government banned all political parties from wearing uniform. Over 60 years later that law is still effective.

Eastenders were delighted to learn some travel news. The Underground Central Lines was to be extended from Liverpool Street to Ongar,

Essex. The Bethnal Green station would be at the corner of Cambridge Heath Road and Roman Road. The date for completion of a 3 year project: 1942. Although World War Two brought an end to all construction we did have a partly finished station. And it became a well used deep air raid shelter. I only went there once, and that was on an exceptionally rough Blitz night. Down on the platform of the ‘Iron Lung’ I recall grim bare lighting, harsh unfinished concrete walls, bodies lying everywhere, and the stink. The scene remains with me as a grey morbid picture of life at a low ebb.

In 1943 I joined the Royal Marines. On a dull January morning, nervously clutching a small case, I boarded a bus in Cambridge Heath Road, the first leg of a journey to a West Country RM Depot. As I later moved out of the borough, that never to be forgotten winter morning seemed to be my last memorable appearance in that road but

Whilst enduring the life of a raw recruit I heard terrible news from home. 173 Eastenders had died in the Bethnal Green tube shelter. It happened on 3rd March and later described as the ‘worst civilian disaster of WW2’. After surviving the D Day landing and service in the far east with the Marines, I waited a lifetime to pay homage to those tube victims and did so in 1993 by joining the congregation at the 50th Anniversary Memorial Service held at St John on the Green. Seated in a pew, waiting for the service to begin, I had time to reflect. I had spent my early life in the borough but it was the first time I had ever been Bethnal Green’s premier church, which of course is in Cambridge Heath Road. And that is my walk down memory lane.

MEMBERS' LETTERS

Jim Crouch, of 131 Hillcrest Road, Hornchurch, Essex, whose excellent contributions to the newsletter has been much appreciated, had requested copies of the pictures that were added to accompany his articles. He writes:

Many thanks for the discs and the photographs which were much appreciated. It is when you get this type of response from the society that you realise just how invaluable the membership is.

I have recently purchased your latest book of Walks in the East End and would like to congratulate you on yet another excellent book.

(Ed. Thank you, Jim, for your kind words.)

R Cushion, 8 Beech Grove, Millgate, Bentley, Doncaster DN5 0DG writes:

I have just had the pleasure of renewing my membership and having read the current issue of the newsletter thought that I would let you know how much I enjoyed it. There are always similarities in each number with my childhood in Hull in the 1930s.

I particularly enjoyed John Payne's article and was able to identify with the characters such as the ex RSM and the lady 'Mad Lou'. In a terrace near us was a similar character who was known as 'Gimme the Wire' so called because when on the rampage and smashing windows with a shoe she would call out to the kids who were following her progress, I was one, 'Gimme the wire when the slops are coming.' (Slops – coppers; Wire – warning.)

I remember another character in the same terrace gassed himself and an older lad told me thought I must see, and I waited for what seemed hours for the body to be carried out, I can't describe my disappointment at it being

covered with a blanket. With such entertainment, who needed television?

Looking forward to the next issue of the Record, and with apologies for the writing.

Derek Morris, 21 Haddon Court, Shakespeare Road, Harpenden, Herts AL5 5NB has sent this update on the proposed publication of his Monograph on Mile End Old Town, 1740-1780.

'I have now completed 90 percent of the first draft and various friends are currently reading the chapters and checking for readability, obvious errors etc.

While they do this I am working on reference, illustrations and an essential glossary.

Their comments have been very favourable such as from an Official London Guide: 'Not only was it very entertaining and the personal details and way of speech very revealing of the way of life, but your aims and conclusions interpret the area well.' Another wrote: 'I found the introduction to your book extremely absorbing. It will certainly interest not only the East London History Society members, but hopefully, a wider readership. The best piece is about John Bond, which gives a wonderful word picture of just where he lived and what he did as a tax collector and how he did it.'

Alan Gardner, 23 The Daedings, Deddington, Banbury, OX15 0RT:

In a recent newsletter there is a reference to a book 'Bow Then and Now' but I can find no trace in the newsletters of how I can obtain it. Can you help, please? My father was born in Tredegar Road in 1890 and I am therefore particularly interested in that photograph. I am also trying to discover where George Gardens, Bethnal Green is – or was. My grandmother was born there in 1866 but I can find no trace of it on any past or current maps that I have of

BG, although there is a photograph if it taken in 1903 – in Gilda O'Neill's 'My East End'.

Although I was born in Hackney and have not lived in East London since 1937, I still look upon Bethnal Green and Bow as my spiritual home as I have had so many family connections there.

I would love to take a more active interest in the affairs of the society, but distance and age deter it. The newsletter is an excellent link to keep in touch and I normally find a number of items of interest. It is a great credit to its editor and contributors.

I was walking around Cranbrook Estate recently, rekindling memories of Cranbrook Street of long ago – they were mainly happy – and then walked across Victoria Park. It is still a lovely park, although I am not saying that I agree with all the changes that have been made. Is it possible to obtain a copy of the photograph of the lake which appears at the foot of page 34 of the Pictorial History of the Park? I would, of course, be prepared to pay for it, as I wish to frame what has special memories for me.

(Ed. Doreen and Diane obliged with a scanned copy of the above picture, and information on Bow Then and Now, and George Gardens – which was near Gibraltar Walk in Bethnal Green.)

Alan Gardner responded with the following:

Very many thanks for your letter and for the trouble you have taken in answering my queries. The photograph by Diane is excellent especially as it is in colour and I am trying to find the best spot in the house to show it to the advantage it deserves.

The photo-copies of the Bow pictures were also very interesting. My father was born in a house just out of shot behind the camera in Tredegar Road.

The other literature is also very interesting, especially the development of Mile End Park. One small point – in the Time Out leaflet there is no mention of BG Museum. It is still open, isn't it? I spent many childhood hours there looking at the exhibits. You have given me enough further information to make another day's visit well worth while!

(Ed. The Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood is still open, and well worth a visit.)

Cemetery Update

In July 2001 Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park took on its new status as a Local Nature Reserve, and the new Millennium Trail was launched with the publication of a Guide to the cemetery. David Bellamy, who is patron of the Cemetery Park spent the afternoon in the Cemetery Park with children from local schools, and Doreen Kendall led a walk around the cemetery.

If you would like to help Doreen and Diane in their sterling work of recording grave inscriptions, meet them in the cemetery on the second Sunday of every month, at 2.00 pm. Over the past few years they have done an enormous amount of work and have helped scores of people locate their ancestors' graves. During last year's Bank Holiday Open Day, Mrs Pearl Amoddeo from Canada flew over specially to see the grave of her mother, Olive Anderson, which had been located by Doreen, and Mrs Mollie Elliot and her husband made a special trip from Bristol.



As this newsletter was being put together the news came through of the sad death of HRH Princess Margaret. The Princess made several visits to the East End with her sister, our present Queen and her parents, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, as well as on her own. This is one occasion, when the new building was opened to replace the bombed churches of St Nicholas at Blackwall and All Hallows on East India Dock Road. HRH Princess Margaret is pictured cutting the ribbon at the opening of St Nicholas and All Hallows Church Hall in Aberfeldy Street, Saturday 22 October 1955. On the left is Prebendary Mark Hodson, Rector of All Saints, Poplar, who was later Bishop of Hereford.



SPRING COACH TRIP
SATURDAY 27TH APRIL 2002
THE HISTORIC DOCKYARD
AT CHATHAM

This has been highly recommended for a visit.

There is very much to see, including three historic warships to explore (one a submarine). There is a ropery, where you can see rope making being done in the traditional way. There is the RNLI's collection of lifeboats. The history of Chatham and the Royal Navy is displayed in a museum. Many of the buildings are scheduled as ancient monuments. The sounds, sights and smells of an 18th century dockyard are recreated.

Because there is so much on the site, I am not sure if there will be time for a visit to Rochester as well – we'll see on the day.

Lunches and teas can be obtained, or bring a picnic.

Entrance is £7.00 full rate, £5.00 concessions, £4.50 child. I will be collecting this on the coach.

The coach fare will be £7.50. Please send this to me on the booking form below. The pick-up will be at Mile End, at the bus pull-in in Grove Road, just round the corner from Mile End Station, at 9.30 am.

Please send your bookings on the form below to me, Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London E4 7PF. Tel. 020 8524 4506. My mobile no. is 078 1569 5428. I will have this with me on the day in case of problems.

✂

SPRING COACH TRIP
The Historic Dockyard at Chatham
Saturday 27th April 2002

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.)