

Old Ford Lock on the Regent's Canal by Victoria Park, 1933.

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Editorial Note:

This is an extra edition of the East London History Society Newsletter, following the Special Anniversary Edition, which we hope you enjoyed reading. A special 'Thank You' to Philip Mernick who undertook the editing and production of the Special issue.

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

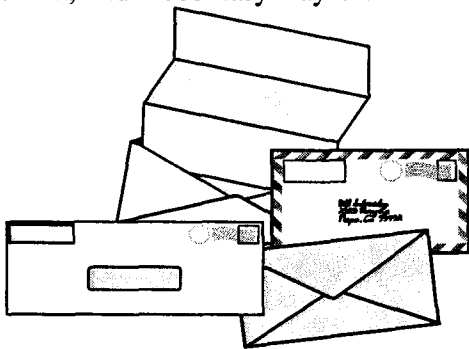
Letters and articles on East End history and reminiscences are always welcome and we make every effort to publish suitable material. Whilst hand-written articles are acceptable, items of interest that are typewritten or even better still, on disk will get priority!!

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

All queries regarding membership should be addressed to Harold Mernick, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London E3 4DT

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

The present committee are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, Bob Dunn, and Rosemary Taylor.



Subscriptions for the 2002-2003 Season are now due.

Please return the enclosed form with the appropriate payment. Cheques (payable to East London History Society) are preferred but if you have to use a postal order please make it out to H. Mernick (Banks don't like POs nowadays as they have to send a cashier round to the nearest Post Office to cash them!).

If you don't get a form you have already paid!

A Note from the Editor:

Whilst putting together this newsletter, I could not help but feel a sense of sadness and regret at the loss of our friend and colleague John Harris, who died in April, after a brief illness. Through the years I have relied on John to provide snippets of information, the 50 Years Ago item, and our discussions on what to use on the front cover were often lively, to say the least! John was also responsible for getting the newsletter printed, packed and posted., which work he did methodically and systematically. He will be greatly missed by us all.

**EAST LONDON
HISTORY SOCIETY
PROGRAMME 2002 - 3**

Thursday 26th September 2002

From Pram to Pension by Rail
Speaker: Bob Dunn

Thursday 31st October 2002

Crime in 18th century Stepney
Speaker: Derek Morris

Preceded by AGM (7.00 pm)

Thursday 21st November 2002

19th century Public Parks and Health
Speaker: Letta Jones

Thursday 5th December 2002

**Pictures that Talk: The London City
Mission in the East End 1835 to 1914**
Speaker: John Nicholls

2003

Thursday 30th January 2003

Mad Farming in East London 1800 to 1900
Speaker: Elaine Murphy

Thursday 27th February 2003

**South of Commercial Road: Aldgate to
Limehouse – Then and Now**
Speakers: Steve Kentfield and Ray Newton

Thursday 13th March 2003

The Victorian Celebration of Death
Speaker: Danny Wells

Thursday 3rd April 2003

**Two Great Ferries: The Great Steam Ferry
at Greenwich and the Great Hydraulic
Ferry at Wapping**
Speaker: Clive Chambers

Thursday 15th May 2003

Open Evening – Favourite Buildings

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

East Ender's Postcards by Brian Girling, published by Tempus Publishing Ltd 2002. 128 pages. ISBN 0 7524 2494 7. £10.99.

Not another book illustrating East End life through postcards might be your first reaction. However this book, part of Tempus's Images of London series has a lot going for it, firstly its author. Brian Girling is a post card dealer with an excellent knowledge of, and ability to find, the unusual in views of London. This is his tenth publication based on London cards and his eighth for Tempus.

Where this book differs from many others of the genre is that its illustrations come from private collections and most have not been seen in any other recent publications. Included in its 219 pictures are many of high quality and interest. This reviewer has collected East London post cards for many years and yet, has never seen the majority of these views before.

The book is divided into 7 chapters. The first six are geographic: East of the City; The River Thames, Stepney, Wapping, Limehouse and Whitechapel; Poplar and the Isle of Dogs; Spitalfields, Eastern Shoreditch and Bethnal Green; Mile End, Bow and Old Ford.

From many fascinating views I select one of the Salvation Army's City Colony Headquarters at 20 Whitechapel Road (The City Colony was the first step of William Booth's proposals in his 1890 book "In Darkest England and The Way Out"). Also a view of the entrance to Dunbar Wharf from Three Colts Street, with a large sign advertising Steamers to Dundee every Wednesday and Saturday.

The final section is entitled East Enders' Transport and includes buses and trams using both horse and mechanical power, boats and trains. A highlight (to me) of this section is a

most unusual view taken by an amateur photographer of a horse drawn L.C.C. tram passing in front of the old Eastern Hotel (demolished several years ago and replaced "temporarily" by an elaborate painted hoarding).

Philip Mernick

South of Commercial Road, a photographic record, 1934 – 1997, compiled by Ray Newton, Steve Kentfield and Tom Newton. A History of Wapping Trust Publication. 44 pages. ISBN 1 873086 040. Price £5.95

Following on the success of **A Riverside Journey**, a book compiled from Steve and Ray's postcard collections, the History of Wapping Trust have produced a companion volume. Based on postcards and photographs collected by Steve Kentfield and Ray Newton together with John Tarby's contemporary photographs of corresponding views, this publication is a valuable addition to our store of local history knowledge.

This book has been in the pipeline for a number of years, and has been eagerly awaited. As the title suggests the book focuses on the area south of Commercial Road, from the Tower of London to West India Dock Road, an area which has undergone tremendous changes over the last sixty years. Heavily bombed during the Second World War, the redevelopment of the area during the 1960s and 70s saw the construction of tower blocks, the closure of the docks and the decline of local businesses and increasing unemployment. The 1980s and 90s introduced a new housing boom with the construction of private housing and the refurbishment of riverside warehouses to provide stylish apartments for those who could afford it.

For those who grew up in the area, lived and worked here, it's a nostalgic trip down memory lane, with some essential

contemporary views to provide a location for houses and shops, which have vanished without trace. Those who have newly settled in the area will find the book gives a fascinating insight into the history of the area and a starting point for further research.

Rosemary Taylor

Cockney Campaign by Frank R Lewey, 1944, reprinted by L.B. Tower Hamlets (2000?) 144 pages. Price £14.99

This hard back reprint is one of Tower Hamlets more expensive publications, but they don't have many copies left, so if you want one I suggest you don't leave it too long. The original book is undated but was published in 1944. In the foreword, Clement Attlee, still Deputy Prime Minister says "only now will the censor allow the story to be told". And what a story! Frank Lewey was Mayor of Stepney from November 1939 to November 1940 and was involved in all aspects of administration throughout the blitz. He paints a vivid picture of how people coped not only through his own personal memories but also reports from local clergyman, rabbis, ARP, firemen, police etc. He describes how unprepared London was for shelters when the blitz first started and how they had to set up a temporary Town Hall in the Peoples Palace because the old offices on "Wapping Island" were damaged and the area was too easily cut off from the rest of the borough. Although the heroics of the Fire and Rescue services are well covered he tells a lot about how the "ordinary people" carried on the best they could. How the "foreign" population did not panic as propaganda had widely predicted. How youngsters helped with the rescues and sometimes died doing it and how many old people were determined to stay in Stepney with their relatives and community rather than be sent away to safer areas with the fear of dying alone. His vision for a better future for the inhabitants of Stepney when the war would be finally over is also heart felt. The final few

pages are rather bizarre however, with a prediction for the future that seems difficult to comprehend nowadays. The reprint copies the original text exactly but unfortunately had to reduce the number of illustrations to keep the cost down. Highly recommended.

Philip Mernick

St. Dunstan's & All Saints, Stepney, researched by Jane Cox and The Venerable Christopher Chesun. Published by Pitkin Guides. On sale at church bookstall.

A church that goes back a thousand years, rebuilt by St. Dunstan in the 10th century. It became the Parish church of the whole of Stepney and Hackney, and its fields and orchards covered an area of seven square miles. Rebuilt in the 15th century it was the home of Bishop Foxe, the founder of Corpus Christi College Oxford and John Colet, founder of St. Paul's School. The parish then grew into an Elizabethan riverside hamlet, its sailors travelled the world and it became known as the "Church of the High Seas", and flies the Red Ensign from the tower, which also houses the ten bells made famous in the nursery rhyme "Oranges and Lemons". Always cosmopolitan, through the years Stepney has become the home of Huguenot, Irish, Chinese, Jewish, Bangladeshi and Somali communities.

The photographs by Philip Way are stunning, the memorials are outstandingly clear, with the text complementing the history and drawings. A guide book to treasure.

By way of interest, our newsletter editor, Rosemary, with Madge Hewitt of Oxford House and I worked on a schools project on the life of the Tudor Court Miniature portrait painter Levinia (Bennick) Teerling, who was born in Bruges c. 1515, and invited to the court of Henry the Eighth in 1545. She received an annuity from Queen Mary Tudor of £40 a year and Elizabeth the First granted

her the title of "Pictric Dominate Reginae" with an annuity of £40 a year. In 1556 a grant of land, copyhold, of one messuage adjoining Old Fourde Street Stratford Bow was made to her. Levinia died on June 23rd 1576 and was buried at St. Dustan's Church Stepney. Her death is recorded on micro film at Bancroft Road History Library.

A Quiet Life. A Marine in the Great War. By Pat Francis. 300 pages, text with photographs. ISBN 1 903702 02X. Price £17 including P&P from Manuscript Press, 44 Lindley Avenue, Southsea Hampshire PO4 9NU. Email ann@manuscriptpress.com.

Pat's father Jack Watson, was born in 1898 in Sewardstone Road Bethnal Green, and moved to Forest Gate in 1912-13. In 1914 he enlisted in the Royal Marines. He was a very quiet man who never spoke about the hardships of the First World War, yet died in 1942 as a result of injuries received at the front in that war, when Pat was eleven years old.

This book reflects Pat's career as a Librarian, and her search for her father's Marine history. Researching archives at the Public Record Office Kew for his discharge papers, Bancroft Road local history archives for his childhood near the Bonner Road Gate of Victoria Park, and Newham for his life after the war when he bought a house in Plaistow, and the Royal Marine Museum for diaries and reports of troop movements. Through descriptions of the blood drenched battles fought in Gallipoli, the Somme, and Passchendaele, and the writings and poetry of his comrades, she discovers the full horror of the First World War, which is recorded in a book written with compassion, a compelling book, which all the way through you keep recalling the young east end boy whose upbringing would not have prepared him for the mud, bullets, vermin and hardships he and his comrades had to endure.

Winter Forest and other poems, by Sir William Addison. Edited by Richard Morris, Verderer of Epping Forest and Illustrated by Clare Eastwood. ISBN 0852 030762. Published by the City of London Corporation. Price £1. On sale at the Guildhall, London Metropolitan Archives, and Epping Information Centre, High Beech.

William Addison (1905-1992) was a Verderer of Epping Forest and President of many local historical societies, writing eighteen books on topographical subjects. He knew the forest well from the fifty five years he lived in the area. This is reflected in this well produced book of thirty poems which touch on memories of times past. This poem recalls September trips out to the country.

Berries

**"They gather hips for jelly now"
My wife says drawing down a bough
September laden red ashine
"And sloes", she says, "to make the wine."**

**Old country sweets in time of war
Return to fill the larder store
And long forgotten recipes
Are used again for fireside teas.**

**So all this Sunday afternoon
We pick our berries knowing soon
How we shall smile when tea is spread
To see again these berries red.**

(Copyright Epping Forest Centenary Trust, Waltham Abbey Church, St. John's Church Epping)

Under Hackney, the Archaeological Story, script by Keith Sugden with Kieron Tyler. 64 pages. Published by the Friends of Hackney Archives. Copies available from Hackney Archives Department, 43 De Beauvoir Road, London N1 5SS. Email archives@hackney.gov.uk.

Hackney Heritage is well described in this book, tracing its modern shape from the large Georgian and Victorian houses. Before this Daniel Defoe in his book "Tour Through London" published in 1725 states, "Hackney is of great extent, containing no less than twelve hamlets of separate villages. All of these though some of them are very large villages, make up one Parish of Hackney. The town is remarkable for the retreat of wealthy citizens that there is at this time near a hundred coaches kept."

This book records the origins of Hackney from archaeological finds from Mesolithic Hackney of tiny flint blades, an Iron Age Track believed to have existed from Colchester to Old Ford and on to Shoreditch, Roman burials, the place names of Saxon Hackney, the Clapton long boat, medieval houses, Holywell Priory and the churches. Tudor Hackney of Sutton House and Brook House and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre are all described. The five appendices list the archaeological finds and where they can be viewed. The text describes the sites, the plans and locations in an understandable layout making this book a pleasure to read.

Doreen Kendall

Victoria Park Tree Walks

Tower Hamlets Leisure Services has published three leaflets of Tree Walks around Victoria Park, an East Walk, a West Walk and an Avenue Perimeter Walk.

The East Walk takes just over an hour and covers the largest section of the park, starting and finishing at Crown Gates in Grove Road. The West Walk takes 45 – 60 minutes and is a gentle stroll across the ornamental side of the park, from the Tea Rooms by the lake. The Avenue Perimeter Walk takes about an hour and fifteen minutes and is the longest walk. It concentrates more on the history and design

concepts of planting instead of individual trees.

The leaflets are beautifully designed, are easy to follow, and provide a wealth of information about the various trees in Victoria Park. An excellent addition to our store of knowledge about the park!

Asians in Britain, 400 years of

history, by Rozina Visram. Published by Pluto Press. 504 pp. Price £15.99. Order by email at www.plutobooks.com

Members may recall Rozina Visram's lecture on Ayahs, Lascars and Princes, which was a pioneering study of the Asian connection with Britain and received very favourable reviews.

In this new groundbreaking book, Rozina offers an extensively researched, comprehensive study of Asians from the Indian subcontinent in Britain. Spanning four centuries, it tells the history of Asian settlement in Britain from the first recorded baptism in 1616 to the servants, ayahs and sailors of the 17th century, to the students, princes, soldiers, professionals and entrepreneurs of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The book examines the nature and pattern of Asian migration, official attitudes to Asian settlement, the reactions and perceptions of the British people, the responses of the Asians themselves and their social, cultural and political lives in Britain. It is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the origins of the many different Asian communities who have a substantial presence in the East End of London. Chapters cover early arrivals from 1600 to the 1830s, Parliamentarians, Revolutionaries and Suffragettes, Asians in Britain from 1919 to 1947 and the contributions of Indians who fought and died in World Wars One and Two.

Rosemary Taylor

NEWS AND VIEWS

Island History News

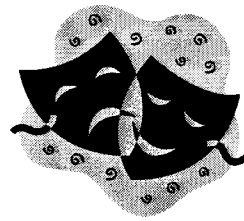
Published by the Island History Trust, Dockland Settlement, 197 East Ferry Road, London E14 3BA. A valuable resource for those interested in the history of the Isle of Dogs and its community, and is worth subscribing to. The Trust has a good collection of photographs, and hosts Open Days, usually in May and October, which are very well attended. They also publish books on various aspects of Island history, and I believe there is a new book out now, although I do not have the details. You might try their website www.islandhistory.org.uk.

Bethnal Green Workhouse 1881

Whilst trawling through the 1881 census records, I stumbled across the details of the inmates of the Bethnal Green Workhouse, Waterloo Road. There are twenty-five men listed, all down as 'pauper', but what struck me was their listed occupations.

Twelve of the twenty-five were silkweavers. The rest are listed with a variety of professions, with only two down as 'general labourers'. There are two Shoemakers, and one each of the following: Blacksmith, Whitesmith, Clockmaker, Walking Stick Maker, Tin Plate Maker, Gilder, Carpenter and Hatter. The majority of the men are in their seventies and widowers, the oldest being seventy-nine, and the youngest fifty. The PRO ref is RG11, piece 0423, folio 96, page 3.

Rosemary Taylor



ALEC HURLEY AND THE MUSIC HALLS

Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery were treated to an entertaining evening at the Soanes Centre on 3rd October, when Terry Lomas talked about the great days of the Music Halls. It was an appropriate setting for the subject, as we have our very own resident comedian, Alec Hurley, who lies buried in a grave he bought for his mother Maria Hurley (d. Sept 27th 1902), just a few days over a hundred years to the date of the lecture!

The lecture was a huge success. Terry came with two projectors and on one showed the music hall artists and on right their memorials, all in London cemeteries (including Alec Hurley). Many of these graves are being restored to nearly new (not too new because of vandals) by Roy Hudd, with the aid of money raised through the Music Hall Friends Society. Terry also sang lines of their songs. Doreen Osborne has written to Roy Hudd to see if Alec Hurley's memorial can be repaired, it would cost approximately five hundred pounds.

Alec Hurley was a great entertainer, who regaled audiences the world over. His career was overshadowed by his marriage to Marie Lloyd, although the union was short lived. Hurley died after a short illness on 6th December 1913. His grave can be found near Westwood (no. 3-4 on the Millennium Trail leaflet.) Walking east it is 3 rows in on the right hand side. The cross has fallen down, but in spring the plot is a mass of white bluebells.



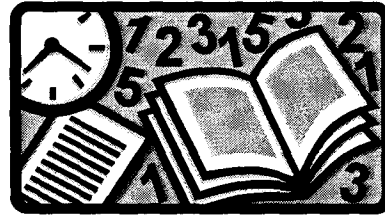
Easton Lodge Gardens Under Threat

Members will remember the coach trip to the Gardens of Easton Lodge, the hard work put in by its owners and volunteers to restore this beautiful tranquil garden to its former glory, originally created by the Countess of Warwick, 'Daisy' to her friends, who gave employment, food and beds for three months at a time to men of the East End who were having a hard time finding manual jobs.

The gardens are threatened by road widening and the extension to the runway in Stansted. If you feel strongly about this, please send your comments on a postcard to: Gardens of Easton Lodge, Warwick House, Easton Lodge, Great Dunmow, CM6 2BB, on the lines of:

'I/we the undersigned wish to register the following comments in respect of the proposed runway and road expansion plans for Stansted Airport and the threat they pose to the Gardens of Easton Lodge.'

Doreen Kendall



Family and Local History Day

The East of London Family History Society are holding a Family and Local History Day at Barking Town Hall on Saturday 23rd November 2002.

Open from 10 am to 4 pm, there will be a host of things to see and do on the day from visiting the stalls of the various local history societies, the family history societies, bookstalls, search facilities, help and advice on genealogy, and the sounds of the Essex Corps of Drums to liven things up.

There will also be a series of talks on subjects ranging from the Fishing Fleet of Barking, How to begin tracing your Ancestors, and the LDS resources for the Family Historian.

Entrance is free, but there is a £1 charge for each talk.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Valerie Given, Garden House, Horton, Northampton, writes:

I was very sorry to read of the death of John Harris – although I never had the opportunity to meet him, his membership reminder every year in that distinctive handwriting always sent me to my chequebook. He will surely be missed by everyone. Thank you for publishing his photo – I can now put a face to that familiar signature.

Your 20002-2003 programme looks fascinating – one day I shall have to try and come to a meeting.

Best wishes to the Society for the next 50 years – may you prosper.

Mrs E Farrow, Chalfont St. Peter, Gerrards Cross:

I too was saddened by the report of John Harris's sudden death in the 50th Anniversary issue of the ELHS.

I have every reason to be grateful to John for some research and photographs he took on my behalf. Although I never met John I felt I knew him through the correspondence we had. I'm sorry I'm unable to attend the monthly meetings, they all sound very interesting.

I'm sure he will be greatly missed by you all, he was such a kindly fellow.

R. Dawson, 'Woodridge' Priors Court Road, Hermitage, Thatcham:

I was sorry to read of the death of John Harris, there are not so many left now that remember the war days, but it is for that reason that I am writing to bring to your attention some errors in the account of his experience at that time. The first Vengeance weapons were not fired in this country until 1944, with the V1 flying

bomb, aka Buzz Bombs or Doodlebugs, attacks starting in June. This was not a rocket but a pulse jet.

The V2 rockets did not start until later that year, August possibly. The accuracy of both these weapons was such that they could not have been intended for a target as small as Gas Works. The speed of the V1 was about 300 mph, and a short period of warning of their arrival could be given, but that of the V2 was some 3000 mph, and certainly no warning was possible. Had a V2 rocket hit the houses opposite, then there would have been little or no wreckage left of John's house, just a crater.

I suggest that the destruction was caused by a bomb from one of the 'nuisance raiders' which did occur at the time.

T E Robinson, of Cranham, Essex, had a pleasant surprise when he bought the book of Walks 'Exploring the East End', for right at the front was a double page spread depicting the annual outing of the Mann Crossman Brewery outside his grandfather's pub in Bethnal Green, with his grandfather standing in the front. Although I had borrowed it from a friend whose own grandfather was in the picture, she knew very little about the location. Mr Robinson has been able to enlighten us.

The pub was called the Victoria and was located on the corner of Hassard Street and Hassard Place, just off Hackney Road. It was owned by Edward Bennett, and the pub was known locally as 'Bennetts'. The pub passed out of the family in the late 1940s and was demolished in the 1950s. A new Victoria pub was later built, on the opposite corner of Hassard Place. I am very grateful to Mr Robinson for supplying this crucial information, and will add this to the caption of the picture in the next edition of the book.

Rosemary Taylor

The First Night of the Blitz

By Jim O'Sullivan

When Dad became its caretaker in 1934, the school in Chisenhale Road, Bow, became our home for the next fifteen years. Opened in 1893, the premises were gas lit and the main school building heated by two massive coke boilers and crowned with a roof playground. We lived in the two upper floors of the schoolkeeper's house which stood in a corner of the main playground, adjacent to Chisenhale and Zealand Roads. Beneath us were a ground floor domestic science classroom and a large cellar. My sister Mary, and when he was older, brother Pat and myself ambled along Grove Road each day to attend Mile End's Guardian Angels School. Although before marriage Mum had gained both teaching and nursing experience, she now remained at home, a housewife. Ours was a well organised little family, but one like so many others, which was severely disrupted by the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Even before the declaration of war, my sister and brother had already arrived in Somerset with the other Guardian Angels' evacuees, nine year old Mary obeying our parents' instructions that she was not to allow anyone to separate her from six year old Pat, by clinging firmly to his hand, until finally, after all the other children were billeted, someone was found who grudgingly agreed to house them both. Not as it turned out, a very nice person, but it wasn't too long before a much nicer home was found for them. Meanwhile, I and another boy who had never been abroad before, were still holidaying at my grandparents' home in Cork, but eager to return home. However, the sinking of the passenger liner ATHENIA resulted in some seamen striking for more pay, including the crew of the ship on which we were booked to return to England, the INNISFALLAN. Consequently, many people were stranded in neutral Eire for a while. But the authorities considered our ages, only eleven at the time, and made special arrangements for us to get

passage home from Rosslare on another ship, the St. DAVID. Arriving home I found that mother was already a full time member of the ARPs Mobile Unit, but Dad, an ex Irish Guardsman who had expected to be recalled to the colours, had failed his army medical and was to be the only one of the family to remain permanently at home. Soon after my return, I was on my way again, travelling to Welwyn Garden City, that being where my new school, Tottenham's St. Ignatius College, had been evacuated.

Being only about twenty miles outside London, when the expected air raids did not materialise I was allowed to make regular week-end trips home, sometimes by train, sometimes on my bicycle. With most of the Chisenhale's school children away, Dad put his extra spare time to good use by turning the cellar into a fairly habitable air raid shelter and becoming an enthusiastic member of Victoria Park's newly formed pig club. Apart from attending lectures and various training exercises, mother, too, seemed to be enjoying a fairly relaxed, if boring time, waiting for attacks that never came. But for a while the easy time apparently being enjoyed by the paid Civil Defence volunteers attracted hostility from others who felt that they would be better employed elsewhere, perhaps in the armed services. Particular targets for that resentment were those who had volunteered for the Auxiliary Fire Service, and so strong was that criticism that the Government began reducing the numbers in the AFS and many volunteers resigned from the service. The apparent lack of belligerent activity, recalled now as the 'Phoney War', also resulted in many evacuees returning home, including about a hundred boys from my school with the result that the school premises in Stamford Hill finally had to be reopened in September – the month, ironically, during which the Blitz began. Consequently, for much of the rest of the war, my school was a divided one, but I was told to stay with the majority who remained in Hertfordshire.

Few seemed to doubt our eventual victory, even when France capitulated. But in August the conflict moved nearer to the East End when the oil tanks at Thameshaven were attacked, and finally reached it on the 24th of that month when some pilots headed for that Essex fuel depot lost their way and unloaded their incendiary and explosive bombs on a line stretching from the City to the West India Docks. A number of major fires broke out and people hurriedly took a much closer look at the matter of their own safety. Many lived in places that lacked either the outside space for an Anderson shelter or a suitable cellar. The brick built street shelters looked very vulnerable, and were regarded by many as being nothing more than havens for courting couples on a wet night and sometimes, were kept locked by the authorities to prevent vandalism or theft of their light bulbs! A large underground shelter had been constructed in Victoria Park but the number it could hold was limited. The underground stations seemed obvious places to use, but that option was refused and once the last train had gone for the night, station gates were kept firmly locked.

Saturday September 7th was a beautiful sunny day and we looked forward to a pleasant weekend. The August bombing of London had not been repeated but the RAF had replied with several attacks on Berlin. A new soccer season had begun and the big match in the East End that afternoon was the one between West Ham and Tottenham. Both my parents were at home, mother being off duty until Monday morning and once I'd finished my chores I boarded the trolleybus for the Regal, Hackney and an afternoon at the cinema. Shortly after my return home, the sirens sounded, their moans swiftly being drowned out by the roar of aircraft. Instead of racing for shelter, everyone seemed to be gazing up at a great armada of bombers and escorting fighters flying serenely towards London's massive complex of docks where more than a quarter of the nation's imports were discharged. Neither random anti-aircraft fire nor our much vaunted barrage balloons

perturbed them, not even that errant balloon based in nearby Meath Gardens which had earlier caused great amusement when it broke free from its moorings. For a few minutes everyone seemed mesmerised by the display above but as the bombs dropped we all scurried for cover, when the sound of distant explosions brought us back to reality. Dad hustled us and two of our neighbours, Mr and Mrs Dingle, into the cellar, to wait for the all clear.

That first big raid lasted for a couple of hours and although we lived on the perimeter of the attack, the cacophony of noise still rattled the cellar. But with three floors above us, we felt moderately safe from everything but a direct hit. During the occasional lull, Dad looked outside to check the state of things. When we did emerge we found the atmosphere was already affected by smoke billowing from the conflagrations of Dockland where the never to be maligned again firemen fought heroically to control them. Anticipating another raid we prepared for the coming night. While Mum sorted out a meal, Dad checked out the school and found a suitably safe place in the basement for the Dingles to bed down, and I sneaked up to the roof playground where I got an alarming view of those distant fires which made a mockery of the blackout regulations when the bombers returned a few hours later. When they did so, we heard a continuous throbbing of engines as the aircraft queued up to select their target. It was a noisy night and when matters sometimes became a bit too noisy we were joined by one of the wardens or policemen patrolling outside. The all clear signalled the return of daylight when we saw that, once again, despite all the whistling of bombs, loud bangs and ringing of bells, our own locality still seemed to have survived the ordeal intact.

When mother checked with the ARP she heard that considerable damage had been inflicted on other parts of our Borough, Bethnal Green but was told her services were not yet needed. Some time previously, it had been decided that

that particular Sunday was to be a National Day of Prayer. Ignoring my yawns, Dad ordained that it really wasn't the wisest time NOT to attend Mass and we found the service at Guardian Angels well attended, if shorter and more hurried than usual – Father Brown dispensed with his usual sermon. Until then we had little knowledge of what had actually occurred in other parts of East London but word of mouth information gradually filtered through and we heard of those areas around the docks that had taken a terrible hammering, particularly Silvertown where my sister used to go every Sunday to take lessons in Irish dancing.

People prepared for further attacks but were also determined to continue with their normal routine as long as they were allowed. I knew that I had to return to school on Monday morning and, this time my parents said, I was to remain there. When the bombers returned that night, we settled down for another disturbed night, but one that I found more exciting than anything ever experienced in the cinema. More aware than I of the danger, however, the adults may not have felt so sanguine. Sometime during the early hours, after a considerable lull in the bombing, my parents decided to move upstairs but told me to remain in the cellar. Their departure coincided with the arrival of another bomber and the unloading of two 1,000 kilogram bombs on Bethnal Green, the largest high explosive bombs to be dropped on London at that time, and one of them landed slap bang in the middle of Chisenhale Road, just beyond the school and next to Cohen's Veneer wood factory. I never heard a whistle, just a whoosh and a very loud bang, and I can never recall which came first.

There was a lot of dust, a large chunk of wood was dislodged from the ceiling and thankfully bounced over my head, and then the flickering gas light went out. My parents quickly returned, safe, though shaken. Mum had only got halfway up the stairs to be sent down again by the force of the explosion, and Dad had not

even got out of the back door. The Dingles had the biggest fright. Snug in the school basement, they were woken up by the bang to find that the blast had shunted them to the other side of their makeshift bedroom. The all clear sounded with the coming of daylight, which was fortunate because the gas mains had been damaged, which left us without any light. Because the bomb had landed in the middle of the road, all the houses in Chisenhale were still standing and we didn't hear reports of any serious casualties. But every house had their windows blasted out and most, like ours, had considerable damage to their ceilings. The plaster in each of our three bedrooms had fallen in. There was a lot of tidying up to be done in the house, but the first thing we all needed was a warm drink, especially me! Although I was still gripped by the excitement of the bomb incident, my teeth had started to chatter and I couldn't prevent them from doing so. However, we had no gas, although we still had water. The Dingles had electricity, but no water. So a combined operation resulted in an early breakfast in their home, windowless though it was. A cup of warm tea soon stopped my teeth from chattering, and the adults began to feel a bit more relaxed, but not for long. With the school in a mess and the emergency services needing his assistance, Dad had to remain at home, and mother was expected on duty, the borough had suffered terribly that night, so I left them and caught the 106 bus for Finsbury Park and onto Welwyn Garden City. A slightly longer route than the one I usually took, but many of the trolleybus cables had been blown down. There were few people on the bus, it was still quite early in the morning, and I finished my journey without incident.

That's how it was for one twelve year old on the first weekend of the Blitz.



BUILDING ON BOW WHARF

The proposal to construct apartment blocks on an area of Bow Wharf has met with strong opposition from members of the ELHS, who view this as an unnecessary encroachment on our already beleaguered environment. The plan is to develop the area on land still not developed at the end of the very up market "Jingles" and craft shops entrance in Grove Road and along the Hertford Canal right at the end of the New Mile End Park. There is an old barn warehouse which they plan to develop, and their need for new access from Old Ford Road, would destroy the little bridge entrance from Regents Canal to Hertford Canal right opposite Cranbrook Estate. At one time there was a plaque to an old music hall that was there, the access is still very ancient with cobbles and iron rails.

Right opposite on Cranbrook side, several years ago the ELHS and local residents objected to them planning to knock down the old house with twelve chimneys next to the dock area where the bricks for roads and houses were landed for Type Street Old Ford area. We lost that appeal after they set alight to the house. Today there are three storey curved flats belonging to Brompton Hospital Trust on the site.

Tom Ridge has asked the Society to support him in this objection to the proposed building works. He argues that they constitute a gross overdevelopment of two relatively small sites and would destroy the historic canalscape at the junction of the Regent's Canal (1820) and the Hertford Union Canal (1830).

This part of Bow Wharf was originally a paving stone wharf, known as Victoria Park Wharf, which was all open except for a row of small single-storey buildings on the southern boundary until the warehouse was built in the north central part of the wharf in 1901. The former warehouse is the only one of its age and type surviving on the waterways in Tower Hamlets.

A sense of this original open space is preserved by the low buildings around the former warehouse and in particular, by the space occupied by the car park on which it is proposed to build. The open setting of the locally listed former warehouse preserves this part of the historic canalscape and allows Bow Wharf to be visually integrated with the recently laid-out part of Mile End Park to the south and, to some extent, with Victoria Park to the north.

The height and bulk of the proposed blocks and their proximity to the former stop lock passage and the Regent's Canal towpath, and their connection by the proposed high level walkway, would create a dense urban sense of enclosure which never existed at this canal junction. The proposed development would completely obliterate the historic and important sense of space which links the two parks and allows good views down the Hertford Union Canal, especially from Stop Lock Bridge which is the main focal feature and vantage point at the junction of the two canals. The bridge is a popular view point for pedestrians and cyclists, in particular the view down the Hertford Union Canal which would be seriously impaired by the proposed high level walkway; of which there are no other examples on the waterways in Tower Hamlets. The proposed development will also block the view from the bridge of the locally-listed former warehouse (1901). Furthermore, pedestrians and cyclists will probably be denied access to the proposed 'new bridge' linking the proposed blocks.

It seems for the plans that the 'new bridge' would require the demolition of the eastern two-thirds of Stop Lock Bridge. This original canal bridge dates from the opening of the Hertford Union Canal in 1830. It was built to take the Regent's Canal towpath over the entrance to the Hertford Union Canal and an adjoining trackway between what is now Roman Road and Old Ford Road. Subsequently, the southern part of the

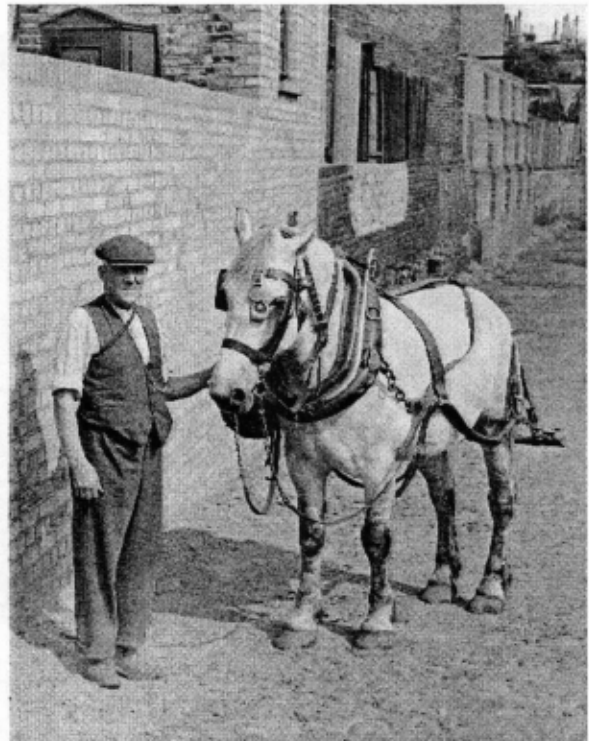
trackway was lost in a mid-C19 residential development and the eastern two-thirds of the bridge was used for access to Victoria Park Wharf from Old Ford Road via the granite stoneway along the northern part of the trackway. The towpath part of the bridge was formerly used by horses towing coal, timber and other barges along the Regent's Canal and the Hertford Union Canal.

Stop Lock Bridge is therefore a rare and important example of a former combined towing and access bridge. It is also a rare and important example of an early C19 cast-iron skew bridge; consisting of seven arched beams and intervening deck plates. As such, it is contemporary with and similar to the two other original Hertford Union Canal bridges, Three Colt Bridge and Parnell Road Bridge which are both scheduled ancient monuments. The only slight differences are the Stop Lock Bridge's arched beams are not pierced, its outer arched beams are not decorated and its original railings are missing. Stop Lock Bridge should not be demolished, nor should there be any new bridges across the Hertford Union Canal, especially between Stop Lock Bridge and Grove Road Bridge; nor should the now rare example of a granite stoneway and its interesting composite retaining wall be threatened by any development.

The granite stoneway access from Old Ford Road is currently used by vehicles using the car park at the western end of Bow Wharf. This car park is already well used and is likely to be even more necessary as the new units under the shed are opened. The car park is needed to ensure the long-term economic viability of the existing and planned new businesses at Bow Wharf and should not be built on. The two mini-cab offices occupy two former single-storey cottages (pre-1870) which should not be demolished. They contribute to the historic and important sense of space, are the oldest buildings on the wharf and the only ones which survive from the former paving stone wharf and have been reasonably well repaired.

The Society hopes the Borough planning department take the above objections into consideration and refuse the applications for building. A letter has been sent to the planning department, but if any members would like to add weight to the argument, please write to Bryan Jones, Head of Service, LBTH Town Planning, 41-47 Bow Road, London E3 2BS, referring to Applications PA/02/951 and 950/KNP.

(Report compiled from information received from Tom Ridge and Doreen Kendall)

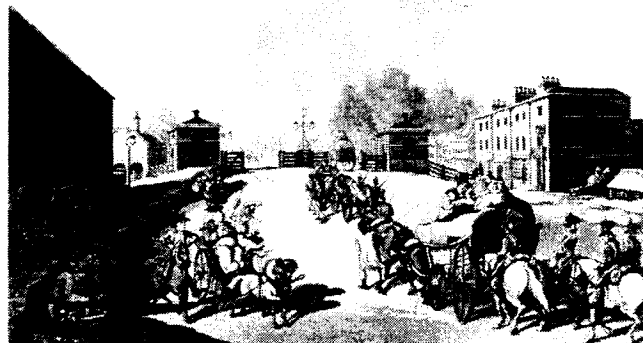


Towpath by Cricketers Bridge, 1937



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