

SEASONS GREETINGS



carte de visite sized photographs from Louis Gumprecht's studio

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Editorial Note:

The Committee members are: Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, Bob Dunn, and Rosemary Taylor. All queries regarding membership should be addressed to Harold Mernick, 42 Campbell Road, Bow, London E3 4DT.

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

Our grateful thanks go to all the contributors of this edition of the newsletter. We have a wide variety of topics and we trust our members will enjoy reading it as much as I have, whilst compiling the newsletter. 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!!

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.



MEMORIAL RESEARCH

Doreen and Diane Kendall, with Doreen Osborne and other volunteers continue their work in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park meticulously researching graves and recording memorial inscriptions. They would welcome any help members can offer. This labour of love has grown into a project of enormous proportions and complexity, with an impressive database of graves researched, with illustrations attached. Unfortunately, due to pressure of work, Doreen and Diane cannot undertake any research on behalf of individuals, but would welcome any information that has been uncovered through personal searches. Meet them in the Park on the **2nd Sunday of every month at 2 pm**.

Cemetery Park Update

Thanks to a spirited defence mounted by the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, the site will continue with its present status, as a place to be enjoyed by all residents of Tower Hamlets. A proposal to create a burial ground for Muslims and other faiths was being considered by Tower Hamlets Council and one of the suggestions was to reopen the Cemetery. The prospect of the 350,000 or more interred there being dug up and the thousands of statues, memorials and headstones being reduced to rubble filled us all with horror and sadness. From a historical perspective this seems like sheer vandalism. For the hundreds of families who still visit and tend the graves of their loved ones, this was insensitivity beyond belief. For the environmentalists this precious little gem of green space, where endangered species of birds, butterflies and other wild life were beginning to thrive, was something they were prepared to fight for, and fight they did! Their campaign reached the national press, and fortunately for all concerned, reason prevailed.

East London History Society Programme 2008

Thursday 10 January 2008

**Heraldry Illuminating History – Tales of
the East India Men**

Speaker - Andrew Gray

Thursday 7 February 2008

**Persons Unknown: The people of the Old
Nichol, in fact, fiction and mythology**

Speaker - Sarah Wise

Thursday 6 March 2008

**The History of the Co-operative Movement
in London**

Speaker - Stan Newens (Newton?)

Thursday 10 April 2008

**Quick Tongues and Big Hearts – some East
End Women before the First World War**

Speaker - Pat Francis

Saturday 19th April 2008

**Coach Trip to Sudbury and Dedham
– See back Page**

Thursday 11 May 2008

To be confirmed

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.

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 get in touch with David Behr, our Programme co-ordinator, either at one of our lectures or, alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick with your comments and suggestions. Email: phil@mernicks.com

Note from Philip Mernick:

We are currently thinking about ways to expand the use of the web site, www.eastlondonhistory.org.uk, and are experimenting with use of short movie clips. I would like to offer members the opportunity of seeing a short clip of any local area. People who moved away years ago might like to see how the place they lived in now looks or the place their ancestor lived. Please email your requests to Philip at phil@mernicks.com

Video Biographies

Ian Burke ian@promovideo.co.uk has asked us to inform our members of his services provided: I'm a freelance filmmaker and videographer launching a video biography service aiming at making documentary style films of life stories and family histories for the purpose of preserving these for future generations. This came about as a result of documenting my mother's life before her unfortunate death a couple of years ago and realizing the importance of such a document for the family and friends left behind. **For full details, please see Page 14.**

Correspondence

Howard Isenberg, 6 Newton House, Abbey Road, London, NW8 0AH, wrote to Doreen commenting on the item in the Summer 2007 Newsletter

The very interesting articles on the Bombing of Upper North Street School on 13th June 1917, did not mention that Andrew Hyde wrote a book called *The First Blitz*, published in 2002 by Leo Cooper. Andrew Hyde's uncle was George Albert Hyde who died in the bombing incident (see newsletter page 15). The book contains a detailed description of the bombing plus some interesting photographs. Plus details of all the other bombing incidents in Britain during the First World War. I would suggest this information should be put in the next issue of the Newsletter. The book might be out of print, since the only copy I have is on loan from the local library.

(Ed. Thank you very much for this information Howard. Unfortunately, your letter reached me after the Newsletter was compiled, so it is being included in this one. As mentioned, the article was compiled from information collated by John Harris in 1992, and sadly John passed away before we could take the project any further.)

Mr J Crouch, 131 Hillcrest Road, Hornchurch, Essex also wrote in on the same subject

Whilst reading the Summer 2007 Newsletter the photo of the Angel Memorial in Poplar Recreation Ground and the eye witness accounts of the bombing of Upper North Street School made me remember a couple of items that were handed down to my by an elderly aunt who used to live with her mother and father, brothers and sisters in the family home in Mount Street which was off of Salmon Lane and not very far from Upper North Street. One item is a very fragile coloured piece of tissue, which was a souvenir of the raid listing some of the casualties, and

the other is a piece of a Zeppelin frame in a small envelope. I feel that both of these items are unique and it would be interesting to find out more about them. I have reason to believe that both of these items may have been sold to raise funds for the Angel Memorial and I assume that they were passed down to the Aunt by her mother who until her death in 1958 lived with her.

(Tower Hamlets Local History Library holds a similar commemorative souvenir of the Upper North Street School tragedy. I have examined it and it appears to be a small paper napkin, and it is possible that it was sold to raise funds for the children. A closer look at the zeppelin souvenir reveals the words – Presented by HM War Office to the Sailors' and Soldiers' Tobacco Fund in aid of the charity. So we have our answer there.)

Notes from Doreen Kendall

Becky, who celebrated her 90th Birthday in 2003, at Mariner Road with a party of friends, recounted to Doreen her memories of Little Ilford. She has a clear memory, aged five, of witnessing a raid by Gotha aircraft, with bombs falling on Seventh Avenue, Manor Park, destroying houses and killing their occupants.

The First World War (1914-1918) saw the first aerial attacks by airships manned by German Naval and Air Force personnel based in Belgium and France. The first Zeppelin raid on the English coast was in January 1915. Then on 31st May London was attacked, many raids are recorded, always on dark moonless nights, the airships in formations of six to eight. The bombs would be manually thrown over the side of the airship. Bombs fell in that area in Leyton, Walthamstow and Wanstead. The Zeppelin airship was replaced by the smaller Gotha aircraft in June 1917, they were constructed to carry bombs which could be released by pulling a lever. Gothas came over in large numbers in formation and were more

difficult to locate as they flew at a higher altitude and on moonlit nights followed the River Thames towards the City. Local damage in Alexander Road, East Ham, Sebert Road, Forest Gate and the Keepers Cottages in Wanstead Park are recorded.

The raid that Becky recalls was the final raid on London in 1918, after midnight on Whit Sunday 19th/20th May. 28 Gothas were mustered for an attack on the City, six failed to return, being hit by anti-aircraft defenses and the Royal Air Force. One Gotha was attacked over Hainault at 11,000 ft, chased by a Bristol fighter, then with its starboard engine on fire, the bomber spun across the Borough of East Ham and fell to the ground in a fall of fire, by the sewer bank of the Northern Outfall Sewer at Roman Road and Boundary Road. The crew of three were killed and were given a low key military funeral on the following Friday at the City of London Cemetery.

In May 1918 the original goal of bombing England into submission was lost, high altitude bombing was poor, the sacrifices of so many men unacceptable. The Naval airship division was relegated to the status of reconnaissance for the fleet and propaganda for the German Government.

The book 'East Ham. From Village to County Borough' by Alfred Stokes, Mayor of East Ham in 1921-22, published in 1933 has a detailed account of the raids over the borough.

The first meeting of the Victoria Park Society took place on Saturday 1 December at 3 pm. The venue was the V & A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road. The meeting was called to hear proposals for the restoration of the Park and plans for the future. You can contact the society via their email: victoriaparksociety@hotmail.co.uk

Photographing the Victorian East End

By David Webb

It seems rather surprising that there has been virtually no research published on the photographers who worked in the 19th century East End of London, unlike the wealth of material on the Victorian West End. Clearly, the famous studios of the period are grouped in the Oxford Street/Regent Street axis, comprising in all over 670 firms. In contrast, the East End includes a mere 170, centred on Bethnal Green Road, Commercial Road, East India Dock Road, Mile End Road and Whitechapel Road. Bernard Nurse's pioneer article in the former East London Record in 1980 still remains the benchmark for all future work on the subject. The editors have asked me to put together accounts of some of the leading photographic firms in the area during the period up to 1914. This series, then, will feature, in no particular order, Thomas Barnes, the Averys, the Baumgarts, Goltheil, Gumprecht, the Martins, Perkoff, the Susses, Whiffin & Wright. And a place must be found for the East End's first lady of photography, in every sense of the phrase - Eliza Emma Burrows, a dentist's wife, who independently opened a daguerrotype studio on the top floor of her husband's surgery in the year of the Great Exhibition, 1851, in Somerset Place, off Commercial Road, and ran it for almost a decade. Nor should we forget that female partnership of Dumain & Orchard, off Commercial Road East, in the mid - 1860s. If there is still space in a few years' time, it would be interesting to look at a couple of printed accounts of East End studios from the pages of Henry Mayhew and the Strand Magazine.

The first East End photographer to be featured in this series has been largely forgotten today, but in his day, he had both a formidable reputation, and a most unusual sideline, even for a Victorian photographer. I quote from William Collinson's 'The apostle of free

labour" (London, 1913)": "There were at this time of day (the period is the 1860s) a ghoulish-like class of riverside men, who earned a living by watching for dead bodies, towing them to the River Police, and getting the reward of five shillings for each body.

They received five shillings for a dead body, recovered at no risk to themselves, but nothing for the rescue of a living person from drowning. So much was this the case that the police employed a photographer to take portraits of these dead men with a view to identification". The photographer in question was Georg Ludwig Gumprecht, who arrived in London in the late 1850s after several years spent avoiding the various revolutions then endemic across much of Western Europe.

Gumprecht, who anglicized his name to George Louis Gumprecht soon after establishing himself in London, was born in Hanover in 1832. He had worked as a translator and linguist before his enforced arrival in England, and settled in St George Street, Ratcliff Highway. Within a few years he had decided to move into photography, opening a studio at 12 Cannon Street Road in 1864. The following year he married Elizabeth Ann Marden, who lived in Grove Place, and celebrated by moving into a larger studio opposite, at 11 Cannon Street Road. Gumprecht stayed here for the next 20 years, gradually building up a considerable passing trade, much of it based on the crews of ships tied up in the docks. Cannon Street Road attracted one or two other studios over the years, including Jacob Pacifico in the early 1860s, and Isaac Martin in the mid - 1880s.

Like many such studio operators, Gumprecht had a number of sidelines as backup for the proverbial rainy day. We have already seen how the River Police employed him as their first official corpse photographer; he also ran a small picture framing business, and in 1881 took over as licensee of the "Jolly Sailor" public house at 182 St George Street, Ratcliff Highway (now known as The Highway),

hardly a stone's throw from where Gumprecht had lodged when he first arrived in London. The public house had a dancing saloon attached, with a substantial raised platform, giving it more of a music-hall atmosphere, and Gumprecht exploited this to its full extent. Unfortunately, when the newly-established London County Council took over from the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1888, the licenses for music and dancing were withdrawn, on the grounds that "low public houses", like the "Jolly Sailor", were flouting the health and safety regulations. Gumprecht decided to circumvent the regulations by arranging the installation of an electric organ, acquired from the continent at the enormous expense of £800. To no avail - the LCC refused permission for its use, and Gumprecht decided at this stage to cut his losses and leave the East End altogether.

His decision was probably hastened by the premature death of his wife, Elizabeth, who had died at the end of 1886, and the sale of his studio to his assistant, Joseph Martin. It may no longer have been very profitable; there had been a considerable proliferation in studios during the 1880s as the volume of trade in the docks area increased, and it is noticeable that Joseph Martin closed the studio after only six years, before moving further east to the West India Dock Road. Gumprecht himself, however, followed the classic pattern of generations of migrants who flourished in the East End, by moving out to Essex and starting an entirely new career. In 1888, he took over the proprietorship of the King's Oak Hotel, at High Beech, Loughton, on the edge of Epping Forest. One of his first acts was to rescue and install the Orchestrion, once the pride of the "Jolly Sailor", in the hotel's concert hall. Described in a contemporary advertisement as "the best accommodation for beanfeasts, schools and wedding parties in the People's Hall", the hotel also offered bicycling, trotting, running, cricket, lawn tennis and pleasure grounds, including a hall for artisans. Gumprecht passed the last twenty years of his life among the hotel's luxurious surroundings, dying there still in harness on May 1 1908, at

the age of 75. In 1880, he had finally been granted British citizenship; it is therefore rather ironic that the Gumprecht family - he had four children - jointly decided, in the face of the anti-German sentiment prevalent in the run-up to World War I, and the very real possibility of internment during the war, to change their name to that of Marden, the maiden name of their mother. The Mardens subsequently became successful traders in the Far East, eventually emigrating to Australia - but the Gumprecht name has now utterly vanished from the London area.

And sadly, so have the photographs which Gumprecht took for the River Police. The Metropolitan Police Archives, now deposited at the National Archives at Kew, no longer include examples of Gumprecht's work. As far as it is possible to assess the situation, there appear to have been a series of "weedings" carried out between the wars, and Gumprecht's work probably vanished at this period. Today, only his cartes de visite from the 1870s & 80s survive in any quantity. Look out for cartes of Victorian sailors posed against unconvincing fake ships' rigging mocked up in the studio, and you may well have found an authentic Gumprecht.

While Gumprecht faded out of the photographic picture, his apprentice, Joseph Martin took over his old roles, including the police commissions. But he also found himself in unexpected new territory - and a role which would ensure his photographs lasted for ever in the annals of infamy...

To be continued.

Wanstead Flats Exhibition

A exhibition remembering the 60th anniversary of the campaign to protect Wanstead Flats from development can be seen in Newham Archives and Local Study Library, Stratford, until 1st February 2008. Please check with library for opening times.

West Ham 1928-1945 Reflections and Memories

By Eric Robert Percival

I was born on the 4th October 1923 at New City Road, Plaistow, West Ham. The earliest factual memory I can recall is a Paddle Steamer trip to either Clacton or Margate with my grandfather somewhere in the misty depths of the mind. That semi-march, seawater smell still lingers as the boat docked, the long seats of varnished wood, perforated with holes for drainage of seawater or rain are locked in my brain although I calculate that I was circa 3 or 4 years old. The next is a School at Hamfrith Road that ran off Romford Road. It was a small school, the floor was a series of wide step like platforms and the next classroom was to my left behind a heavy canvas screen or curtain. My next is to a much larger, three storey school in Ham Park Road where I progressed from Infants to junior classes. After that it was a senior school - Deanery Road School that backed onto another large school, namely Water Lane. This housed our carpentry and Woodwork and Technical Drawing Classes. Just across the road sat the mighty Technical College. All these buildings were red brick with Portland Stone dressings.

I will deal with my reflections and memory call back as they come into my mind and try to date the occurrences. So to the past of a lad and life in Stratford E15 from 1928 to 1945.

Stratford Broadway, with a large church in the centre of the main road, one road to Leyton and the other towards Forest Gate. A Memorial to some martyrs within the church grounds, I believe they were burnt at the stake. A vibrant area of roadside stalls, busy shops, a large department store (J R Roberts) was the centre piece and they held a fantastic Christmas Bazaar in the cellars that always had a water feature that I gazed on with awe, year after year until Father Christmas passed into redundancy.

Maryland Point was another busy area with a large Co-op Store down a side street. There was also a marvellous Toy Store, Gardiners, where model trains ran around a window display. Expensive (in those days) Hobby Engines and Carriages were my dream but were not to be. The whole scene was magic and we walked many miles within this wonderland of noises, smells and a constant moving mass of people.

The stalls had paraffin pressure lamps that hissed and smelt. A particular attraction was the Sweet Stall where its owner made toffee and humbugs on the spot, twisting the product in his hands as it was in the flexible state. Imagine the horror of the Health and Safety wallah as this process was carried out in the street with the traffic passing by. Remember, we still had horse drawn vehicles with the resultant deposits of dung being splattered by the constant traffic. Angel Lane was another oasis of activity. It had a Tobacco Shop where later on I would buy a variety of cigarettes and small cheroots for a few pence. The Tobacconists window was a work of art with an enormous range of exotic products.

One such oasis was almost on our doorstep and that was Vicarage Lane. It ran from the fringes of West Ham church at the Portway end to Romford Road at the other where the magnificent show rooms/offices of the Electricity Board were located. Vicarage Lane was used to walk to Deanery Road School, no cars or transport in those days. The range of shops was diverse – Cats Meat, Cooked meats, butchers, slaughter house adjacent, bakers, grocers, cheap sweets, bicycles and radios, drapers and so on. You could buy 120v batteries and acid accumulators with recharging service. Radios were known as wirelesses and used both, rather than mains electricity. My memory takes me to the so-called Cats Meat shop, run by a one-armed man. He wore a collarless shirt of a flannel like material and always looked the same. Huge legs of horsemeat hung on hooks and effused a very distinctive odour. We were lead

to believe that the Belgian people eat such meat, but it was not for the British. Little did we know that we would be facing whale meat in the war years to come. This one-armed man would strap down a slab of this meat onto a wooden block with chain and blocking device, then pick up a fearsome carving knife and slice away. It was wrapped in old newspaper and this was his sole means of making a living. What a lesson for today!

The Butcher's shop backed onto a slaughter house and livestock was driven up the side entrance to appear later on a hook in the butchers shop. Not for the squeamish. A flock of sheep once bolted from this alley of death, and ran in every direction. The round up took hours with one young lad finding out that sheep could leap and butt when cornered. Life in our streets was exciting and varied.

Throughout the maze of streets many pubs existed, supplied by Brewers' Drays, usually drawn by a team of shire horses. Wooden barrels were slid down into the cellar of the pub as the empties came up. Beer bottles were returnable and had a refund value of 2d or 3d each. A useful addition to a lad's pocket money if such bottle were found. These pubs would discharge their clientele after 10 pm – closing time by law, and they would wend their way home singing all the way. Fried fish shops were everywhere and kept open to match the pub closing time. A portion of fish and chips wrapped in yesterday's newspaper cost 2d or 3d. Those that worked in the fish and chip shops tended to reek of cooking oil!

Saturday night was late shopping hours with meat being sold on open stalls or from a 'hole in the wall' for as little as 1d a pound! Massive long shallow crates of eggs were brought onto the shops forecourt and sold off by the dozen, everything that was perishable had to go for Sunday was holy and literally a complete shutdown except for the odd corner shop. Sunday and Good Friday were solemn days. It was a day of rest except for vital services. These were the days when you put on clean

clothes and went for a walk in the park or to Wanstead Flats, the so-called Sand Hills at Manor Park.

So on to West Ham that I knew. Stratford Railway Works, with some 5,000 employees. Massive machine tools, huge steam hammers forging steel parts, yet the washing facilities were galvanised buckets.

The Borough had so much – docks, ship repairing, railway works, massive sewer works and gasworks at Becton, many industries, manufacturers, warehouses, with the ultra modern box factory of Yardley's Lavender looking down on the main East to West highway. An exciting day was to journey through Silvertown, Canning Town and Custom House to board the Woolwich Ferry and return. The Thames had a very distinctive aroma particularly at the turn of the tide. The theory was that if you fell in you were more likely to die of poisoning than drowning. This was the West Ham that I knew in my younger days.

A highlight of all this was the date that the Borough of West Ham was 50 years old circa 1936. There were celebrations, the publication of a thick glossy book with a magnificent coat of arms of the Borough inside the cover. I was selected to produce replicas of the coat of arms on large size displays, some 40 inches diameter (1 metre) for holding aloft at the top of a pyramid of lads. Four pyramids, so many times per day for a whole week. We all wallowed in this time off from formal studies, whilst I consumed vast quantities of poster paint and enjoyed doing my favourite subject. How proud we were of our Borough, how simple life was yet the dark clouds of war and the terrible destruction of all that we knew was not far away.

My Apprenticeship without Premium for a working lad now follows. I served my apprenticeship at S H Johnsons, Chemical Engineers, of Carpenters Road. We had our own blast furnace, foundry, pattern makers,

machine shop, overhead cranes and so forth. We machined our own castings that weighed up to 1.5 tons. Our raw materials came in on barges as we backed on to a canal. A typical load was 70 ton of pig iron that was mixed with cast iron scrap. We were just one of many factories and workshops that existed right down the River Lea and a labyrinth of canals that made their way to the Thames.

The Engineering Works that I served my time in had huge doors with a wicket gate. No windows, it had the look of a prison. The way to get an apprenticeship was to enter these portals, stand by the time clock, a fearsome contraption of about one metre diameter with swinging arm that carried a punching device that recorded your works number and time of entry and exit. My first venture to enter found me so awed that I walked away. Eventually, I overcame my fear and entered and stood in front of that time clock. After a while a stern looking man with a bowler hat and winged stiff collar came up to me and barked 'What do you want, lad?' 'I want to be an apprentice, Sir.' I answered. So I started that lowly route through life at the rate of 3 old pence per hour. You steadily progressed from menial to more and more skilled jobs until you were operating all types of lathes, drills, milling machines etc. Some were massive and you operated cranes or block and tackle to load and unload these machine tools. It was hard work, it was dirty work but you were proud to be a skilled man and be one or more steps up in the hierarchy of those days. Paid by the hour or by a piecework price, no sick or lost hours pay.

The Works Manager reigned supreme and had the power to sack you on the spot. Our man was known as 'The Bloke'. His word was law and he carried out the Company policy faithfully. Such was life in those days although the railway works had a Union and a Shop Steward. Technical training was scoffed at as the company believed it could teach you all that was needed. Eventually, I progressed from engineering workshop practice to toolmaking, technical studies at an adult age, as 'the Bloke'

was wrong. Thence into Plastics and Technical Management, BSI and ISO Standards in respect of plastic pipes and fittings for world wide applications. But all this was in the future.

The clouds of war now came and our engineering Works went on to vital war work. Our hours of work went from 48 to 64 hours per week. Then the real war came and West Ham was a prime target. The bombs rained down but we would go to the shelter and hope that you did not get a direct hit. The raids passed over us with some bombs falling around us but the main thrust was the docks and the surrounding area. Somehow the tall tower of the Tate and Lyle factory remained intact amidst this onslaught. There was bad damage around West Ham Station with large blocks of flats sheared to the ground. However, life went on without the lights of Stratford Broadway. Its illuminated sign for 'The Fifty Shilling Tailor' went out together with the Stratford Empire, the many cinemas and the street market activities at night time. So it went on and we learnt how to live through the raids, rationing, the blackout and the draconian rules of wartime existence. The cinemas and other entertainment began to reopen with guidelines and the option to take cover if you wished, if an air raid was coming your way. In the beginning it was normal to go to a shelter when the sirens sounded.

Then a lull in the onslaught came with a mixture of attacks, some savage, others dropping parachute mines that created extensive damage to property. Lives were lost but this was usually where people had not been in a shelter. One such incident occurred in a night raid when such a device, commonly known as a land mine, was dropped on Meeson Road. The aircraft had passed over and we were relaxing some minutes later when a blinding white flash illuminated the shelter followed by an enormous explosion and blast wave with choking dust and dirt clouds. In the morning light the scene of devastation could not be grasped. The familiar skyline of the

terrace houses of Amity Road had gone and in its place a screeched undulating row of rubble stretched to the left and the right of the explosion point. Then the rubble gave way to roofless houses, tapering to minor damage. The pool of the blast action extended out into other streets, our house was rendered uninhabitable, so hundreds of families were made homeless by one such weapon. The following day canvas covered bodies were removed from Meeson Road via the shattered ruins of Amity Road on stretchers – a mother and daughter.

This took our family to Caister Park Road, a terrace house without an Anderson Shelter, but we soon dug the necessary hole and life went on. I recall the periods that followed the major onslaught on London when several intensive raids returned with sudden smaller raids when you least expected them. A major night raid occurred when heavy bombs dropped on Caister Park Road, and its junction with Plaistow Road and Red Bull Road. After the raid my father and I went to view the scene. The damage was so complete at the Plaistow Road site that I asked my father, 'Where is it?' The four corners that had shops were sloping heaps of rubble with raging fires rising from the heaps, a skeletal frame burning fiercely was all that remained of a trolley bus and the power lines just hung in great loops over the scene. We walked back recalling how each bomb whistled down louder and louder until we thought this one is ours, but the nearest one shook the Anderson Shelter violently but did not explode. The next day we were cordoned off as it was an unexploded bomb that had gone through the roof and floors of a nearby house. We had walked past it twice that night. The bomb squad removed it the next day. In another episode, I was visiting a bombed out, rehoused friend at the West Ham Station area known as the Buildings, when the siren sounded. We took cover in a surface shelter and grovelled as a string of bombs fell, getting nearer, then past us. The same awful feeling that this one is yours. We emerged to find a huge crater close by with wisps of smoke, and

huge bomb splinters the size of saucers lying about. The string had straddled the railway lines and Berks Chemical Works. I was to spend time at this site later on as it was converted to a Home Guard Anti-aircraft Rocket Establishment, and I had to man one of these Heath Robinson contraptions – two 3.5 rockets of 2 metres length per launcher and 32 launchers per site. Although I was working 64 hours per week, I was made to become a Home Guard, train one evening and man a Launcher another night for a 12 hour shift and go straight to work after an army style breakfast with roll call at six in the morning. We slept in blister shelters on top of a stack of the rockets. I never fired the Launcher but did track an aircraft, so it was a nearly. I wonder how many such sites existed in West Ham as it was in the direct firing line of so many raids with its docks, railway network and so much industry.

To return to Carpenters Road and the adjacent areas – factory after factory, workshop after workshop, Jenson and Nicolson, paintmakers, Boake Roberts, a vast chemical works, Cairns. Civil engineers and fabricators, Excel Meat Products, S H Johnson, chemical engineers, Glaxo, soap works, glue works and so on. This was a better scene than the 1930 era when mass unemployment was rife and the unemployed marched along the roads with drums beating. We were a lucky family as my father was a postman and enjoyed a semi-protected type of employment. This period also saw the Fascist Party appear on our streets with violent meetings outside Stratford Town Hall. There were baton charges by mounted policemen. For a lad it was exciting and frightening but above our heads.

A feature of life in this area was the network of railways and frequent trains running here and there. As children we would go to a railway bridge and wait for a train to pass below so we could run about in the cloud of smoke and steam that spewed from the engine's funnel. We had a strong smell of coal about us when we went home. At night the sky

would light up blood red as the engine's furnace was fed and the blaze was reflected on the clouds of steam and smoke. – quite a dramatic sight. Then there were the excursions by train. Plaistow Station thronged with life, the train came in already loaded with passengers to make its way to Southend for the day.

Another feature of life with the railway network of those days was the shunting of goods trucks into sidings to make up a goods train load. As you lay in your bed at night you could hear the continuous clanking of the shunted trucks buffers contacting the stationery truck already in the siding. The process was constantly repeated throughout the night, until a trainload was made up for taking to its destination. Another railway noise was the detonation of fog warning indicators that were placed on the railway lines and exploded thus giving an audible indication as visibility could be down to zero with the dense pea soup fog of those days.

The docks skyline was an amazing sight with so many ships, some fifty plus shipping lines existed and each had a house coloured funnel or more, with an individual flag of the company owning the vessel. This network across the sky was interlaced with cranes swinging and dipping as they unloaded or loaded the ships' holds. Here again on a foggy day or night the eerie sound of the ships horns would punctuate the atmosphere.

So much activity, so many people on the move, so much heavy manual labour, and so many casualties. This scene was highlighted by the special events such as the visit and docking of the Cunard Lines ship, the Mauritania at the King George V Dock. A vessel of some 50,000 tons that just cleared the lock gates by three feet per side. Little did I know then as a boy that I would sail on her in wartime conditions to India in early 1945 – the largest ship to sail through the Suez Canal at that time. However, crowds visited the docks

for days just to view the vessel as it sat at its moorings.

Another reflection is the vision of West Ham Church, sitting on the junction of West Ham Lane and Plaistow Road. The tower was reputed to go back to Norman times. A row of old Alms Houses and an alley formed its other border. My memory recalls an impressive interior and an oasis of peace in the centre of busy streets, shops and passing traffic.

I remember the long rows of terrace houses, particularly in the Dock areas. People knew each other and conversed with a simple compassion for the less fortunate or when tragedy struck. We lived at 88 Gladstone Road, my grandparents at 10 Beale Street, Plaistow and uncles and aunts close by them. Both these addresses no longer exist. Our house was a semi detached and faced across the end of West Ham Park, controlled by the London County Council. Its Park Keepers were a fearsome lot that wore a semi uniform of bowler hat, breeches with calf length leather gaiters. They carried out the LCC rules and regulations rigorously. We had no need for ASBO then.

No. 10 Beale Street had a long dark windowless passage that ran the entire length of the house. Rooms opened off the left hand side with a cavern of a stairway to the rooms above. The passage terminated in the kitchen and scullery and an outside covered extension. A large family bible stood on a small table in the passage way. Granddad was a sideman at the local church, and wore a surplice as he undertook his weekly duties. I assume that the bible was read daily and the pages turned accordingly. Both houses were lit by gas lamps. I never did understand the ritual of fitting a new gas mantle. You fitted it but had to hold a match to it to cause it to flare and die down before you could turn on the gas for the first time. Heating was by coal stoves or fireplaces, primitive and dirty as well as labour intensive. Coal was stored under the stairs and

had to be carried into the house down the passage way.

The coalman was another feature of life, they were always around humping huge sacks of coal weighing 112 lbs, their faces and hands jet black, with an inverted sack on their head for protection. Horse drawn vehicles were used a lot as they could move slowly from house to house. We also had the Ragmen who would take old clothes for a tinplate kettle or something similar. Milkmen were also a great user of the horse and cart technique, a slow moving horse would keep in time with its fast moving master and somehow this human-animal partnership worked in complete harmony. The Dustmen also used horse drawn carts and had a similar technique to the milkman. The streets and roads got more than their share of horse dung droppings. A common practice was to collect this in a bucket and sell it for about one old penny, or use it yourself for the garden. Back gardens could also house chicken runs and roosts, pigeon lofts, as well as a garden patch.

As time passed the trams gave way to the wonder trolleybus and the steam driven vehicles to the motor car. However the side roads were still fairly free of traffic and were used for rollerskating, on steel wheeled skates. They could be bought at Woolworths in the High Street for sixpence a skate. You had to save for the next one to make a pair.

I loved the library at Water Lane. It was part of the Technical College block and seemed huge. O would spend many an hour in the reading room and also became a member of the Lending Library. Here I pause to think and question today's standards. We could read and write and enjoy books by Dickens etc. I cannot recall a lad that could not read or write yet our school took in some of the toughest specimens and it had a high percentage of poverty. Some of our classmates were issued with coupons for boots and food as their parents were on the dole. We were law abiding with an inbuilt code of honour and conduct. We obeyed the

law, did not walk on the grass where it stated so, the teacher's word was law and you were proud of your country, the Empire and royalty, although there was a minute republican factor about. When the war came and conscription followed, the man in the street believed the reasons were right.

The final chapter – that devastation of Plaistow Road described above was cleared and boarded up windows fitted, and the traders restarted their activities. By this time my apprenticeship had been served and I was conscripted into the RAF in 1944. Ten weeks basic training in how to fire weapons various, throw a grenade, drill, march, unarmed combat, and I was on embarkation leave! My beloved and I got married before I left for India and Singapore and our floral items came from one of those boarded up shops in Plaistow Road, when flowers were almost verboten to the war effort. It was February 18th 1945 and the wartime restrictions were at a peak. Greenhouse flowers were non-existent but that poor little shop made up bouquets of snowdrops and violets.

So this was the West Ham that I knew and was proud to live there. I never returned to live there but would come back to visit my parents, sisters and brother. Now we are spread wide apart from Aberdeen to Saltash, Cornwall with age making travel difficult. Will West Ham rise again to its former place in the East End of London with the Olympic venture?

An Interesting Find in the Cemetery

This spring the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, were clearing away overgrowth around some gravestones near the centre and so made a number of gravestones more easily accessible. One of the gravestones (In Square no. 64) had the following inscriptions:

Front:

Louis Johnson

Died 20th January 1862

Aged 79 years

Also

Caron Rebecca Chambers

Daughter of the above

Died 24th September 1888

Aged 75 years

Right hand side:

Also

Captain John Scurr

Died 21 August 1900

Aged 66 years

Interred at Ilford cemetery

Also

Caroline Scurr

Wife of the above

Died 31 December 1907

Aged 71 years

Interred at Ilford Cemetery

Back:

Also

Jane Scurr

Died 18 July 1866

Aged 26 years

Also

Jane Scurr

Died 30th July 1866

In her 3rd year

Also

Caroline Scurr

Died 7th August 1866

Aged 9 months

Left hand side:

Also

James Wilson

Died 24th September 1866

Aged 61 years

Sarah Wilson

Died 15th June 1873

Aged 71 years

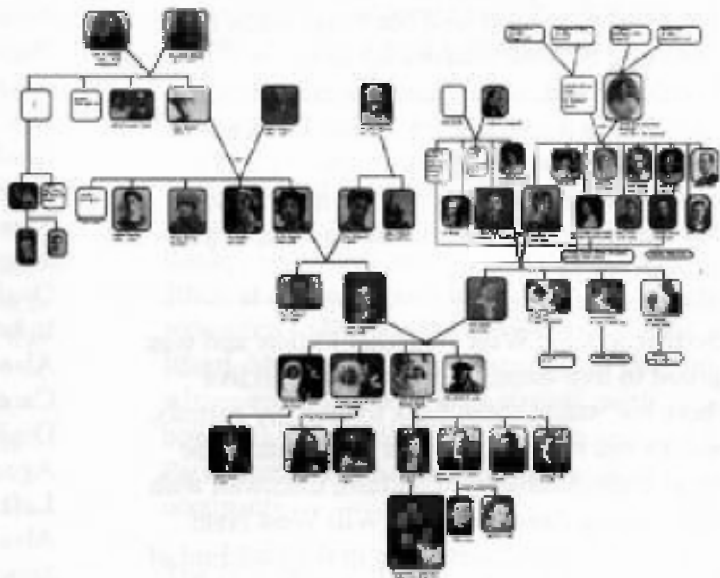
Our thanks to Sigrid at the Soanes Centre, for this information, an interesting follow up to our article on John and Julia Scurr in Newsletter No. 13. Sigrid's article may be found in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park Newsletter.



www.lifeonscreen.co.uk

Several years ago I embarked on a project to record my mother's life story knowing that she wouldn't be around forever and with her would disappear not only her own 74 year history, but also that of the several generations before her of which she was the only surviving chronicler. Being a freelance film maker and videographer it was clear to do it in the form of a film documentary. A casual project at first incorporating filmed interviews, photographs, home video and super 8 cine film, music, family documents, journals and other memorabilia. Within a month of the first interview however, she became ill and was soon diagnosed with cancer. Things deteriorate quickly with cancer though I managed to edit the first half an hour for her to see in the hospital. She was very touched. A few weeks later she died at home surrounded by her family. Following her death the film became extremely poignant for the family and friends left behind and was a way of remembering her as a lively, vibrant woman, in stark contrast to her last couple of months.

The family history dating back to the mid 19th century was related by her own anecdotes illustrated with photos and documents. The complex interfamily relationships and connections between family members was illustrated and made coherent by zooming and panning on a photographic family tree which I constructed for the purpose. These long deceased characters rather than disappearing from memory as generations move on now become almost legendary when immortalized in documentary. They interweave into the personal story of growing up through the war, meeting her husband, having children and a variety of celebrations and crisis on the way.



Digitizing the old film and photographs necessary for the project also provides a safe copy free from decay or loss. Along with the main film and several other shorts such as wedding videos, baby/ growing up videos etc. the DVD contains 20 or so slideshows with some 300

photos accessed by clicking a picture on the photographic family tree. This all provides a great multimedia summary of the family history which can be then copied and given to everyone concerned.

Having seen how important this has been to my own family and will no doubt continue to be so to future generations I have decided to offer this as a service to other people interested in making such a document. It's a unique gift or commemoration for a birthday or event though ideally it shouldn't be left too late. A terminal illness for many, is too delicate a time to think about such an idea though in such a case a sound only recording may be an unobtrusive way of providing a compelling narration through the photos and film. The cost depends on the scale of the project but a very basic DVD could be put together for as low as £250. Please take a look at my website for more details and demos. www.lifeonscreen.co.uk

Whether you commission me or try it yourself I cannot recommend strongly enough how important such a document is. My only regret is not having a biographic film for the relatives that have died before now.

Ian Burke - ian@lifeonscreen.co.uk

East London History Society

Accounts from 20/10/2006 to 25/10/2007

Assets at	27/10/2007	27/10/2006
Cash	£ 44	£ 15
Bank	£20,598	£21,982
Total	£20,642	£21,997
Income		
Subscriptions	£ 951	£ 1,051
Entrance/tea	£ 17	£ 14
Interest	£ 534	£ 180
Coach Trips	£ (230)	£ (335)
Donations	£ -	£ -
Total	£ 1,272	£ 910
Expenditure		
Newsletter 3	£ 1,469	£ 1,467
Speakers	£ 50	£ -
Postage & stationery	£ 15	£ 17
Room	£ 180	£ 180
Web site	£ -	£ 10
Total	£ 1,714	£ 1,674
 Excess of Expenditure over income	 £ 442	 £ 764
Publishing		
Cost	£ 3,577	£ 973
Sales	£ 1,294	£ 623
Excess of expenditure over income	£ 2,283	£ 349
Total excess of expenditure over income	 £ 2,725	 £ 1,113

Comment from Treasurer: we spent quite a lot on books this year; we should get this back eventually.



SPRING COACH TRIP Advance Notice

SATURDAY APRIL 19th 2008
TO GAINSBOROUGH'S HOUSE SUDBURY
& FLATFORD MILL NEAR DEDHAM

These are places associated with two of our greatest artists, Gainsborough and Constable.

In the morning we will go to Sudbury, Suffolk. The House is a Georgian mansion, and contains a fine collection of paintings by him and some other artists. There will also be a temporary exhibition. There is an entrance charge of £3.20, Art Fund members free. Lunch will be in Sudbury, own arrangements.

In the afternoon we will go to Flatford Mill, possibly also stopping at Dedham. Arrangements here are not yet finalised. We will probably have a conducted tour of the mill, which will cost £3.00. If not we shall still be able to see the views of the Mill and Willie Lott's Cottage which Constable painted, they have not altered very much. Bridge Cottage, nearby, has an exhibition on Constable, free. Tea will be arranged either at Flatford Mill or at the tea rooms by the Cottage.

The coach company could not give me a price for next year, but if you would like to reserve places on the trip please write with your name, address phone and number of seats required. Send no money at present. Letters should be addressed to: Ann Sansom, 18 Hawkdene, London, E4 7PF. Tel. 020 8524 4506

