



1912



2012

Victoria Park wins another award!

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SEASON'S GREETINGS!

Editorial Note

Committee Members:

Philip Mernick, Chairman, Doreen Kendall, Secretary, Harold Mernick, Membership, David Behr, Programme, Ann Sansom, Doreen Osborne, Sigrid Werner and Rosemary Taylor.

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

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

The Newsletter is edited and typeset by Rosemary Taylor with collaboration of Philip Mernick, and an editorial team comprising, Doreen Kendall, David Behr, and Doreen Osborne. Contributions are welcomed from our members, on all aspects of East End history, as well as reminiscences, which provide a valuable source of information. Please send your articles, preferably by email, to Philip Mernick, who is also on hand to deal with any enquiries. Whilst we accept handwritten manuscripts, computer generated documents which can be sent as attachments, would be appreciated, as it saves us considerable time and energy, and helps us to get the newsletters completed on time!



Cover Picture

Over the last couple of years visitors to Victoria Park will have seen almost continuous building work as the lakes were drained and cleaned, the Burdette Coutts fountain restored, a new Pagoda and bridges constructed and other new buildings, including much needed toilets.

Completed at a cost of millions of pounds, we then had to wait until the end of the Olympic Games before we got it all back again. Locals obviously feel the wait to have been worthwhile because Victoria Park has beaten off stiff competition to be crowned the nation's favourite park in this year's People's Choice Award.

Organised by Keep Britain Tidy's Green Flag Plus Partnership, which gives out Green Flag status to the best open spaces in the country, Victoria Park came out on top against a staggering 1,424 parks and green spaces in the annual poll. Warley Woods in Sandwell, West Midlands came second while Reading University's Whiteknights Campus took third place.

Philip Mernick

Subscriptions

Please don't forget to send us your subscription (only £5) if you receive a reminder in this issue.

No reminder means no need to pay!

ONE TO WATCH!

Just glimpsed a trailer for the Christmas Special 'Call the Midwife'. The series on BBC was most enjoyable, with an excellent cast, including Miranda Hart. Set in 50s Poplar, it follows the work, adventures and trials of a group of midwives and the nuns they worked with.

East London History Society Programme 2012 - 2013

Thursday 13 December 2012
The history of shoemaking
Speaker-Thomas White

Thursday 24 January 2013
*This unfortunate and ignored locality:
the lost squares of Stepney*
Speaker -William Palin

Thursday 21 February 2013
*Columbia Road-mangelwirzels
to des-res*
Speaker-Linda Wilinson

Thursday 14 March 2013
*West Ham Allotments Society 1942-
2012*
Speaker- Colm Kerrigan

Thursday 18 April 2013
*St Clements Hospital, past, present and
future.*
Speaker – Calum Green

Thursday 9 May 2013
Film-Wapping Parent's Action Group
Introduced by Ray Newton and John Tarby

The lectures are usually 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 Organiser or, alternatively, email our Chairman Philip Mernick with your comments and suggestions.

Email: phil@mernicks.com

Please Note!

The date of the January 2013 lecture has been changed to 24 January 2013.

Coach Outings

Ann Sansom has regretfully announced that she will no longer be organising Coach Trips. It has become increasingly difficult to fill the coach and to seek out new places to visit, not surprisingly, considering that Ann has been organising these trips for the ELHS Members for more years than I can recall! She also undertook guided walks around the East End in her earlier days as a committee member.

The Committee would like to extend their sincere thanks and warmest appreciation for her time, effort and enthusiasm in arranging these enjoyable excursions for the Society.

Thank you, Ann!

Date for your Diary:

The AGM of the East of London Family History Society is being held on Saturday 26 January 2013 at Sarah Bonnell School, Deanery Road, Stratford E15 4LP.

All events are open to the public with the exception of the AGM. Among the lecturers will be Michael Gandy, Meryl Catty and Jeff Page, who will be talking about the Siege of Sidney Street, an event which occurred exactly one hundred years ago.

There will also be bookstalls etc and refreshments and food will be available from the school canteen.

Notes and News

Of Sculptures Old and New

Old Flo

Many Stepney residents will have fond memories of the Henry Moore sculpture 'Draped Seated Woman' which had graced the Stifford Estate for many years. Few would have known her by that name, as she was referred to affectionately as Old Flo. Bought by the London County Council for £6,000 in 1962 and installed on the Stifford Estate. When the GLC was abolished in 1986 ownership of the sculpture passed to Tower Hamlets Council. The Stifford Estate in its turn was demolished in 1997, and the Council sent Old Flo to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park for safekeeping.

Now, however, the Council have taken a decision to sell the 15 tonne bronze, whose value has increased to several million pounds, as it cannot afford the cost of insuring the sculpture against vandalism, should it be returned to the borough. The funds raised would be used for the benefit of the whole borough.

Entwined Histories

An amazing 12 foot mosaic sculpture has been unveiled in St Pauls Way on the Leopold Estate. The creation of artist Gary Drostle, who was selected from more than 50 artists, it is titled Entwined Histories and reflects the importance of



rope manufacturing industry in the East End, which was once a thriving industry serving the London Docks. Each strand of 'rope' identifies the different communities and immigrant groups who have settled in the area. There were several Rope Manufacturers in the East End, and the sculpture is sited on what had once been Huddarts Rope Works.

The Orbit Tower

Standing at 115 metres high, the Orbit Observation Tower in the Olympic Park is Britain's largest art installation. It was designed by artist Anish Kapoor, it was a talking point at the Games, but has received mixed reviews from the critics, and has been given a host of nicknames, but only time will tell which one will be the most popular!

The new sculpture on the Leopold Estate

Wilton's Music Hall has been partially re-opened following extensive repairs and refurbishment, which will be welcome news for both local theatre lovers and those from farther afield, who appreciate the determination that Wilton's has shown in fundraising to save this magnificent relic of a bygone era.

The Main Hall theatre opened at the end of October with the performance of *The Horror! The Horror!* We can only hope that funding continues to be found to complete further renovations in Phases 2 and 3.

'Being Mary? Irish Catholic Immigrant Women and Home and Community Building in Harold Hill Essex 1947-1970' by Aenne Werner-Leggett was published on 21 September 2012. Paperback, 282 pages ISBN 978-94-90947-76-6 Price 32.50

The history of Irish women in England has often been viewed from the outside and they were mostly seen as a social problem; Irish immigrant women especially do not often feature in historical research. Therefore the achievements of Irish immigrant women are pushed outside the realm of general history although their numbers had a large impact on particular areas in England. They were the reason behind an ever-growing Catholic

Church and contributed to community spirit within that church. Further, as they raised their children and worked in local schools, hospitals and children's homes, they influenced the social life of their area.

Being Mary? explores the lives of Irish immigrant women in the newly-built Harold Hill Estate in Essex in the post-war period, with reference to the influence of the cult of the Virgin Mary upon those lives.

Booth's descriptive maps of London

Poverty 1889. These maps were published by Charles Booth, and are coloured street by street to show the lifestyle of the inhabitants of London, from the wealthy upper classes to the deprived and semi-criminal lowest classes. Available for East and West, which includes both north and south, these fascinating maps are a great resource for genealogists and all lovers of London's past. Incidentally, they formed the basis of the recent BBC documentary 'The Secret History of our Streets'.

Call 08448711514 for more information or visit the website books.telegraph.co.uk for details on how to purchase.

**Max Duperray, Professeur émérite, Aix-Marseille Université, max.duperray@free.fr
tel: 0442961892**

This is to inform you that I have just published a book in French on the literary echoes of the Jack the Ripper Case from the early events to the present day in English, American and French fiction:

Max Duperray, *La lame et la plume : une littérature de Jack l'Eventreur*, Paris : l'Harmattan , 2012.

Letters, Queries, Requests etc.

Re: JOHN BUCKLEY VC

Following through from a previous item in the newsletter re the discovery of the grave of John

Buckley, resident of Poplar, who was awarded the VC from his actions during the 1857 Indian Uprising in Delhi, Joan Soole, who has been researching John Buckley, wrote to Ken Greenaway, Cemetery Park Liaison Officer recently:

You may remember me contacting you some time ago re the grave in Tower Hamlets Park of the above. Can the grave, which is unmarked be pinpointed with any degree of accuracy? There has been a charity set up specifically to restore and, where necessary, mark the grave of all those holders of the Victoria Cross whose graves are in a bad state or who lie in unmarked graves.

There was an article in the Daily Mail yesterday saying that Lord Michael Ashcroft has pledged £1,000 to either restore or mark these graves. Perhaps John Buckley's grave could, at long last, be marked in some way.

Ken Greenaway, Doreen and Diane have been tirelessly continuing their searches.

Ken replied:

Since the last time we were in contact with each other our fabulous history research team have finally found John's plot. Yay! It'd be great to mark it. I think the best way forward is to introduce you to Diane who leads our History research team with her Mum and have you guys directly discuss what form the marker may take. Please just keep me in the loop. Good luck and well done.

Julie Kemp emailed from Australia:

It is likely that I've been in touch before over the past 7 years whilst researching my Kemp family history in East End London. George William Kemp, my grandfather, went to a 'grammar school' somewhere close I expect to his home/father's pub, The King's Head, 8 Bow Road, Bromley-by-Bow. He was born in Nov 1885 and met a life-long friend there, Robert Ives Jones. Both boys were sons of widely established licensed victuallers in the East End. Robert's father and 3 uncles ran pubs; my great grandfather and his brother ran pubs in Whitechapel and Bow. Sadly both boys emigrated: in 1912 for my grandfather, and 1911 for Robert – to Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, my home town, albeit I now live in Toowoomba, Queensland. Both boys appear to have been something of "remittance" men. Robert came from a large family but most sadly lost his parents when a very

young fellow. My grandfather also lost both his parents by aged 16. Grandpa was an only child. Robert emigrated to Melbourne where he prepared a home for his fiance whom my grandfather later escorted to her new country. I am in touch with Robert's granddaughter who lives in Melbourne. At this point I return to a recurring search as to which school my grandfather and Mr Jones attended. Very recently Malmesbury school was mentioned in a search and being on Coburn Road, I thought it a contender?! Have you any ideas please?!

(Philip suggested Malmesbury or Southern Grove Schools and Coopers for Grammar School.)

From: Daniel Janes
Subject: BBC2 history documentary enquiry: George V and Queen Mary in the East End

I'm a researcher for *Fit To Rule*, a landmark BBC2 documentary on the history of the British monarchy. One of the items we're looking at is the reception of George V and Queen Mary in the East End between 1910 and 1936, with a particular interest in the Silver Jubilee procession of May 1935. We are getting in touch to draw on your historical expertise so you can help us with our enquiry.

We are looking at places to film in the East End that George V would have been on his many processions: particularly a street that still looks much as it did in the 1930s, or even has something of historical interest to the King in question. However, in order to do this, we need to have more idea of the history. We are interested in the following questions:

1) Where did George and Mary go on their Jubilee processions? What was their route? A contemporary account by the *Derby Daily Telegraph* suggests that, on his second Silver Jubilee procession, he rode from Buckingham Palace to Whitechapel Parish Church (now Altab Ali Park), but another source suggests he went through Brick Lane too. We also know he had two East End processions during the month of May 1935, so the routes may have been different. Do you have any information on this? Which streets are of particular significance? This can extend too to street parties and other celebrations, though

we'd prefer somewhere where he actually passed through.

2) The same question applies to George and Mary's other visits, such as during Armistice Week (when he visited five times), in 1921 or any other occasion. The more information, the better.

3) From a historical perspective, how significant would you say the King and Queen's many visits to the East End were? Do you think it's fair to say that it marked a newfound importance for the East End in the monarchy's plans to reach out to the people?

Sorry for the long enquiry but we look forward to hearing from you. We're working to a rather pressing production schedule so we'd be interested to hear from you as soon as possible!

Philip replied:

Dear Daniel, I am afraid I can't be a lot of help because I am not a historian: just a local person, interested in local history, who organises a local history society. I have certainly seen photographs taken during the 1935 visit showing huge crowds (I have one ... somewhere!) Your first port of call must be Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives in Bancroft Road. They are currently closed to the public while the roof is being replaced but it is still staffed for enquiries. They have all of the local newspapers and voluminous files which will tell you the routes taken. Then it would be a matter of finding suitably unchanged locations. Despite the huge impact of World War 2 and later developments the general layout remains basically unchanged. Please let me know if I can be of more help.

From Martin Herzog m.herzog.fm@ndr.de
(Producer)

Subject: Eyewitness for program on Great Smog of 1952 for ARD German national television

I am producer for the London office of ARD, the major German public broadcaster. Currently, we are planning a historic program about the Great Smog of 1952 and we are looking for eye witnesses of the events starting from Friday, 5 December 1952 when the city of London and especially the eastern parts of London were shrouded in this thick yellow fog which caused about 12.000 deaths during this weekend and in the aftermath.

Would You be able to get me into contact with eyewitnesses who have experienced this situation and are willing to talk about this in a tv interview? We would like to meet with one or two people, listen to their stories and walk the streets and boroughs they moved in back then.

Furthermore, we would be interested in any kind of moving images that have been filmed privately in this time or at another of the famous/infamous London fog.

Thank You for Your help! If you have any question or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me either by e-mail or telephone: 0207 391 6264 (desk) or 07905 889 867 (mobile).

Philip replied: Sorry about the delayed reply. I will ask our members at the next meeting (22nd November). I certainly remember the thick fogs, bus conductors had to walk in from of their buses with torches so the driver would know where to go! Unfortunately we have no collections and I don't know who to suggest for private films although I suppose there must be some. Pathe News must have covered the smog at the time, they seem to have filmed everything of interest.

John Dore's Coppersmiths and Distillery Engineers

John Dore's workshop was at 36 Bromley by Bow High Street where now stands the Dorrington Point Tower Block. For the best part of the twentieth century Bromley by Bow High Street housed three very important industrial sites at which many craftworkers were employed. In addition to John Dore's there was Lancaster & Co, Boilermakers, both shown on the 1893 Ordnance Map, there was also Robinsons & Co an iron moulding company. Wedged in between these three workshop was a few houses and a public house, The Moulder's Arms. This is all that remained, in the 1960's, after the London County Council's 1930's plan to redevelop the area now covered by the Bow Bridge Estate. This all changed in the 1960's when London County Council cleared the site and built housing accommodation.

Leslie Franklin who worked at John Dore & Co, as a brass finisher, gives this description of the workshop: "It was a medium size workshop which

had two large fires where the coppersmiths hang large circular sheets of copper till they were red hot then they were hammered in to shape, this process was repeated until the copper had been hammered into the required shape." All the brass work was done in a smaller workshop which had a number of lathes and drilling machines. The brass casting were supplied by the Robinson & Co the neighbouring foundry.

John Dore & Co Ltd is the oldest distillery engineering business in the world. It is the successor company of Aeneas Coffey & Sons, established in Dublin, Ireland in 1830 and in London, England in January 1835. On the 25th of March 1872 the business was made over, to John Dore, works foreman, by the sons of Aeneas Coffey. John Dore moved the works to his cottage garden in Bromley By Bow, London. He then changed the name to John Dore & Co.

In 1904 John Dore invented a "Wash" Still which is still used today by the distillery industry. A model of the "Wash Still" is either on show or in the archives of the Science Museum Kensington, London.

In the late 1960's when forced by the council to vacate the site John Dore & Co moved to Essex. They eventually moved to Surrey where the last member of the Dore family sold the business to the current company director David P Pym in 1962.

My father, a coppersmith, worked for John Dore from the 1920's to the 1950's. During WII I can remember my father going back to his native Scotland to work for a few weeks in a scottish distillery; such was the scarcity of skilled craftworkers.

Alex Stratton

Stanley Franklin 1930 - 2004

Stanley Franklin was born at 100 Devons Road, Bow, the fourth son of Harry Franklin, a coppersmith at John Dore's in Bromley High Street. Stanley's formative years were spent in Bow, until the 1940's when father Harry started work at Tanquary Gordon & Co, Ltd, a gin distillery on the river Thames at Hammersmith. Soon the family moved to Hammersmith, where Stanley's final

school years were spent. It was during this period that he became very interested in the famous political cartoonists of the day such as Philip Zec of the Daily Mirror and that is where he saw his future career. When he left school aged just fourteen he wrote to the London Evening Standard offering them his service as a political cartoonist. They declined the offer pointing out that David Low already held the post and intended keeping it. He joined an advertising agency as a designer, lettering artist and occasional cartoonist. It was while working at the Agency that Stanley had his first cartoon published in the Daily Mirror. He continued his studies at the Mornington Crescent Working Men's College and Hammersmith's School of Arts and Crafts. Still in his early twenties he joined the Daily Herald and in 1954 his "Mr Farthing" cartoon appeared. He joined the Daily Mirror in 1959 to replace the very famous political cartoonist Vicky, where he stayed until 1974. He then became Editorial Cartoonist on the Sun newspaper from 1974 - 1998.

Stanley also did freelance work as a political cartoonist for the New Statesman, BBC cartoon graphics for BBC comedy shows. Other work included 'relief paintings' and making pottery figurines for the Royal Adderley Pottery Stoke on Trent. He illustrated a number of books, among them Johnny Speight's *The Thoughts of Chairman Alf*, Alf Garnett's *Little Blue Book*. One of the founder members of the British Cartoonists' Association, Stanley was also a member of the London Press Club, his work was included in an exhibition of royal cartoons, "Not By Appointment" in 1977 to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee. The Prince of Wales opened the exhibition.

Franklin's drawings were included in an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery 'Drawn and Quartered: the world of the British newspaper cartoons 1720 - 1970.' He had a number of solo exhibitions. His cartoons and paintings are held at the National Portrait Gallery and his cartoons of the Falklands war at the Imperial War Museum. He was voted Cartoonist of the Year as well as Social and Political Cartoonist of the Year by The Cartoonist Club of Great Britain in 1981.

When he joined the Sun newspaper in 1974 he marked his arrival by appearing as a pilot of a plane marked "FRANKLIN" attacking the Houses of Parliament. As well as politicians, British Royal Family were a favourite subject. Charles Nevitt's

cartoon biography of Prince Charles, *One's Life* (1988), contained over fifty of Franklin's cartoons. A number of his drawings are held in the private collections of the Royal Family.

Stanley Franklin was well liked by his fellow cartoonists and Fleet Street colleagues. Throughout his life he spoke with a very distinctive cockney accent, very proud of his East End roots. A letter he sent to my sister Margaret had a P.S., "Long Live The Cockneys."

From the age of twenty he was a vegetarian, he never married or had any children. An accomplished ballroom dancer and in 1958 he was awarded the Victor Silvester Gold Medal for Ballroom Dancing. Stanley lived all his life in London. It was said that "He was well known and liked for his pleasant personality his comments never left a bitter or sour taste, with even those he lampooned". Most of the famous politicians who Franklin lampooned asked for the original copy of the cartoon to hang on their office wall. But perhaps the greatest praise for Stanley Franklin came from the Foreign Office when it urged its staff to write reports as the Sun leaders, to quote, "Stanley Franklin is known for his sharp pencil - and his even sharper wit put them together and you have cartoons that make even the most thickest-skinned politician whince. Stanley recalled one confrontation with the then-Premier Jim Callaghan over his jokes. He said to me, "You're the cartoonist who keeps attacking me." Stanley replied, "It's the prerogative of the Press to attack the Prime Minister." Callaghan said "I knowbut every day." "Yes, Prime Minister." But he said, "The prime aim of my cartoons is to make people laugh" And he certainly did that!

Compiled by Alex Stratton and Leslie Franklin. Stanley's brother.

The Story of another Evacuee

By R W Wheatley

This is, I hope, a record of my life as I remember it, from just before the start of the Second World War in 1939 until the end of hostilities in 1945. I was 7 years old on the 19th of April 1939; my home address was 40 Three Mill Lane, Bromley by Bow, London, E3. I was in the last class of the infant's section of Old Palace School, St. Leonard's Street, Bromley by Bow.

London. E3. The Anderson shelters had been delivered to nearly every house in the area. Teams of men had dug holes in the gardens for them to be erected in. They were no lightweight things, the steel was quite thick. Then all the soil that had been dug out of the hole was put back on top for protection. In the recreation ground, our small park, men had started to dig air raid shelters, for the people who had such small gardens there was no room for an Anderson. My mother had begun her training as a nurse.

As children we just did not know what was going on. It was fun time. One thing that sticks in my memory is Pomegranates and Barrage balloons. It was a lovely day, a lot of children in the street eating pomegranates and the sky seemed to be full of these great big balloons. When I look back, there must have been so much planning going on all over the country. We as children were soon going to find out our part in it.

On or about September the 1st 1939 we, the whole school, were taken on a journey that was to take all day and was the start of a story that was to last a lot longer. We had become "Evacuees". What frame of mind was I in? I have no recollection, just pictures in my memory of lining up in the school playground. We all had our gas mask box hanging around our necks, a label with our name, address and what school we had come from, we had our little bundle of clothes, (mine was a small kit bag that my mother had made for me), and a bag with food for the day. Some children even had their Teddies. We all marched out of the school playground, one class behind the other, onto St. Leonard Street and stopped in a long line along the pavement edge. The traffic was stopped, and then at the sound of the school whistle and with teachers stationed at their class head, we all crossed the road at the same time. Mums and Dads had not been allowed to see us off. We had had to say our "good byes" when we had left for school that morning. It did not stop them standing along the road to wave to us. My mother was in my Aunt Flo's doorway, which was 73 St. Leonard Street. I could see she was crying but it meant nothing to me, as we all marched by on our way to Bromley by Bow underground station.

I cannot remember much about this journey other than a few of the children being sick because of such a long underground train ride. This part of the journey ended on the other side of London where

we got onto a main line steam train. The memories become a blank again until we got to the Moon - well it could have been, but it was, in fact, Oxford. We were all herded into the station concourse where we were all given, a cup of drink and a piece of cake. What planning!!! hundreds of children from 5 to 14 years old, each with a gas mask, a bundle of clothes, a bag of uneaten food, a Ted and now a cup of drink and a piece of cake. We only had two hands, small ones at that. One little boy about my age spilt his drink over my kit bag. I suppose it was just too much for me, it broke my heart. We now never had a mum or dad to run to. It was down to us. It was to be the start of a very unhappy part of my life.

It is so strange the way one's memory works. The next thing I can remember is walking about the streets of Oxford with a number of other children as the ladies or teachers tried to get us lodgings. It was now quite dark. (And as it was September it must it must have been 9 o'clock or after). I was shown a house that was willing to take a little boy. At this point of my recollection my cousin, Doris, who was about 12 years old and who was in the upper section of Old Palace School comes into the frame. She would not let me go by myself. So the lady of the house agreed to take her in as well. I really think that Doris could see herself on her own somewhere else. I was a lifeline. There was another girl with us who was also taken in. Her name was Ivy Glanstein. I remember the following day Mrs. Bates gave us for our dinner the bread rolls that we had taken with us the day before. I can still hear the two girls moaning about this. Ivy only stayed a short while, a week or so. That is why Doris left me a few weeks later as the lady that Ivy had gone to let them get away with anything, even smoking, which quite tempting for girl of 12.

The lady, who had taken us in was a Mrs. Bates, about 60 years old with twin daughters about 28 years old. Mrs. Bates lived at 40 Bartlemas Road, Oxford. It is about a half a mile from the centre of town on the Cowley Road. For the first month or so I think I was quite happy. Then Doris moved to another house to be with her friend Ivy. That was when the fear started to come into my life. I can remember being a very frightened little boy. Mrs. Bates would put me to bed and leave a small oil lamp burning, for light Then when she went to bed it would be blown out. That was the moment I dreaded, I would try to get as far away from the

bed edge as possible, then cry myself to sleep. On Saturdays I would have my head checked for nits. None were ever found. In my young way I was very proud of that, I NEVER HAD NITS. I must say I do not think I was ever badly treated. Looking back I can never remember the two young women talking to me. I suppose that is twins. Every night I would be allowed to sit in the parlour (front room) in the dark of course because of the black out restriction and listen to children's hour. If I hear talk about Toy Town, Larry the Lamb or any other characters from this radio programme, I'm back in Oxford.

My parents would come to Oxford by coach to see me. This meant I would walk into the centre of the town, as I said before about a half a mile, to meet the coach. I cannot remember how I knew they were coming. Then after they had spent the day with me I would go back into the town to wave them off. What frame of mind I must have been in, I can only imagine as I walked back to Bartlemas Road crying all the way. I can remember trying to kill myself with a dinner knife. (Perhaps I knew it would be too blunt). But it was a measure of the state I was getting in. This meant that my parents had to stop coming to see me.

I am quite sure that I was taken back to London for Christmas of that year (1939) but I just cannot remember. I only have vague memories. I think it was when I was taken back to Oxford after Christmas and left, there I had such a bad screaming fit that Mrs Bates hurt her back trying to pacify me. Or so she said, that meant I had to go.

Sometime just after Christmas 1939 into 1940, I was moved from this house to a much younger household. The family's name was Robinson. There was Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, aged about 40 years, a son named Jack who was 18 years, another son Morris of 12 and a girl Shirley about 5 years. There was another little boy, an evacuee Billy, he came from Bromley-by-Bow as well, and he must have been in a younger class than me at Old Palace School. I was in this household for quite a few months, well into 1941. I was not so lonely and can remember doing things that little boys do. I would walk to the Morris Motor Works where the fighters damaged in the fighting during the Battle of Britain, were repaired. Before they were sent back they would have to be put through their paces. It was like an air show every time I went there. It must have started my keen interest in all things

that fly. Mrs. Robinson had a mother and father so I used to go and visit Grandma and Granddad. It was always a drink and a piece of cake. Lodging with Mr. and Mrs. Robinson was a man in his twenties. I cannot remember if he was a student at Oxford or whether he worked in a factory. At weekends he would take us (Billy, Morris, and me), either boating or swimming along the Thames. We had a great time, as we did not live far from the river.

One of the things I often wonder about is the episode of the H. M. S. Hood. I can remember Lord Haw Haw on the radio announcing that Germany had sunk it. This would have been May 1941. It was quite late and dark mid-May so it would have been lighter. I can see it all very clearly in my mind's eye, so it might just be in my imagination.

If my mental calendar is correct, Mrs. Robinson started to board a set of twins around this time, a boy and girl, about my age, which meant the house, was getting crowded. The father and mother brought them to Morris Crescent in a car. In 1941 not many people were allowed to use a car and you had to have money to own one. It was not long after this that Billy and myself were told we were to be moved. I do not know how my mother found out this was going to happen, but she came and took me back to London. I have no recollection of what happened to Billy.

When my mother and I arrived back in London, the underground trains were not running because of bombing so we had a taxi all the way from Paddington to Bromley-by-Bow. In those days that was quite a journey. I do not think I had ever been in one before. This period must have been about May or June 1941. My mother and father were still sleeping in the Anderson shelter we had in the garden. I did not stay in London very long. My father had a friend who lived in Leigh on Sea, near Southend. As the bombing was still bad at the time he took me to Leigh so that I could stay with his family. Leigh on Sea was a strange place in 1941, with all the empty houses, the barbed wire and the concrete blocks along the sea front. At night, well, it sounded just like a massive drum band marching up and down the road. It was all the shooting at the German aircraft flying along the Thames to London. I used to creep into the elder daughter's room to sleep. Once again, I was in the room at the top of the house all by myself, like most of the

early days. I cannot understand how adults did not understand the fear that small children experienced.

I never really had a bad time at Leigh. Within the family was a boy, a son about my age or just a little older. We spent quite a lot of time behind the sheds all along the Leigh on Sea riverfront. We were planning to get a boat. Don't ask me how. When you are children everything seems possible. I never went to school while I was there. Whether it was because it was approaching the holidays or the lady did not want to keep me I will never know. She used to tell me that the school her son went to would be the one I was going to after the holidays.

My mother and father came to Leigh to see me. It must have been a holiday, as Aunt Eva and Uncle Arthur came with them for a day out. As they had a shop they would not have been able to get away at any other time. When it came time for them all to return home, I went with them! I think it was because I would not let them go without me but once again, I will never know.

My mother and father had now moved house they now lived at 32 Bruce Road, still in Bromley-by-Bow. There was now a new tactic to get me away. That was a stay with a relative. My mother took me to stay with her nephew Ernie and his wife Emmie. They lived on the Nevendon Road, Wickford. Once again, I was stuck at the other end of their rather long bungalow at night, in a bedroom full of deep terrifying shadows. How people are blind to children's fear I just cannot understand. Or was it that I was a child that could hide it. I was soon home again but my mother had me away again, as quickly as I could say "Jack Robinson".

This time I went to my Aunt Mag's house at Dagenham Heathway. Their daughter Jean and I had grown up together. I was able to be happy with someone who was the sister of my mother and cared and loved me as such. I always had feelings towards my Aunt Mag and Uncle Charlie, right up until they died and still do. Once again, I am tormented by fear. One of my Uncles, the brother to my mother and Aunt Mag, had been run over as a small child and had had to have one of his legs amputated. Now that he was getting on, age wise, he had learnt to walk with his good leg and just one crutch. Even so he still had a false leg which was kept in a large box. The box and leg had been left on top of the wardrobe. To me it was a real leg.

I was terrified of it. Jean, with whom I used to sleep with, would drop off leaving me to face this fear alone. I could never admit it to any one, just hide it.

My mother's family was quite large, eleven brothers and sisters. It was a close family, even closer because of the war. At Christmas time it would hold a get together/party at my Aunt Flo's house, which would last over the holiday period, about three to four days. My aunt Flo's house was only four doors from my mother's. That meant I was home for those days. All was well, until the "break" ended. No way was I going back to Heathway. I screamed and cried. My Uncle Charlie showed great compassion. He cuddled me all the way back to their home. I learnt a lot that night. I watched all the stations so that I could get home by myself. With the little job I did, helping the milkman at weekends. I soon had enough money for the train journey home. Then, I ran away. It was not that I did not like my Aunt and Uncle. What a way to treat them after all they had done for me, I never did get round to saying I was sorry. Like most children, I wanted my mother.

This time, I stayed at home quite a long time. I went back to school, but not to Old Palace School. That school had been taken over by the Civil Defence Organisation. On the 19th April 1941 it had been struck by a bomb. 34 A.F.S. firemen were killed. It was one of those items of news that, at the time, had been suppressed as "bad news". Consequently the school was so badly damaged it was never used again. There is a plaque on the wall of the new school building that replaced the old one commemorating the event of 19th April 1941.

As I stated in the last paragraph, I was home for quite a long time. My mother was a trained nurse. Her duties meant she was on duty 24 hours, and then had 24 hours off. My father worked in an engineering factory, along with long hours and fire watching at night. On reflection, this might have been the reason I was sent away so often. Because of my parent's shift pattern I spent most of my time living with my Aunt Flo. As I said before she only lived four doors from my mother. The house that my parents had moved into had been damaged during a bombing raid so it was not completely safe to live in. After about eight months we moved to Poplar, (111 Teviot St. Poplar. E14.)

I do not know how it happened but within a few weeks I was away again. I suppose I was getting used to it. It did not worry me at all this time. I went to Frome in Somerset. It was with one of my father's elder sisters this time. She and her family had been bombed out early in the war. They had lived in Frome since that time. I stayed with my Aunt Alice nearly a year.

I left Somerset just after I was eleven years old. I had had quite a journey since I was seven and a half, I was never to be sent way again. This meant I had ceased to be an "Evacuee" from mid 1943. Did being an evacuee have any effect on me? There is no one alive now, except me that can answer that question. My mother used to say as she got older "she would never do it again" (send me away). It did break the love bond between me and my parents, though I did not realise it at the time. I missed a lot of schooling, (as most of us did), that's my excuse for not being very clever, and so please forgive all my mistakes, perhaps I was not very bright to start with. Is it all self-pity? maybe.

If you want know any more you will have to ask me.

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Spitalfields Life by The Gentle Author
<http://spitalfieldslife.com>

Another plug as I love the variety of items covered on this daily blog.
Cats, dogs, boxers and staircases, a short read that enlivens the new day.
Philip

Growing Up in Hoxton Part 1 – 1946-1954

By David Blacketer

I was born in The Nursing Home, 33 Lynn Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire on Tuesday 28th May 1946. Food rationing was still in existence and, according to The Times newspaper for that date, a large packet of Weetabix cost one shilling and a penny (just over five new pence in modern terms) plus 4 points off your ration coupons, and a bottle of Haig "Gold Label" whiskey would set you back a massive twenty five shillings and nine pence (around one pound and twenty nine pence). Although there must have been other events happening I am unable to find any further news of any significance for that day. I assume that, because of the shortage of medical facilities in London due to the bombing and maybe the fact that 1946 was the start of the "baby boom" era, Mum was despatched to the countryside to give birth. Or maybe she just fancied a holiday. I am not sure. But I would guess that we were not away from town for very long. My father was not demobbed from the army until 17th June 1946 so I expect we returned to greet him. What a homecoming present I must have been!!

My earliest memories were of living at number 44 Norfolk Buildings which, at the time of writing, no longer exist. The Victorian buildings were situated in Curtain Road, Shoreditch, within spitting distance of James Burbage's original Theatre. Looking at an old map of the area it would seem that they were named after a street called Norfolk Place. The Barley Mow public house was opposite on the other side of Curtain Road and if you had your back to the pub you walked across the street between two bollards, made to resemble cannons with the cannon balls stuck in the top, (I was told that these were weapons left over from the Napoleonic Wars, and I believed it), down a path with a bomb site on your left and a block of flats on the right. The block had two entrances, each entrance led via stairs to two flats on each floor including the ground floor and the block was, as far as my memory serves me, four or possibly five floors high. The buildings, unlike the Guinness and Peabody estates that were built with a red coloured brick, seem to be constructed of a dark almost black brick. I don't think that this was just because of the dust and soot deposits that were in

abundance at the time. The steps to the flats were of stone and were worn away in the middle due to the constant traffic and the scrubbing that the women subjected them to. There were more blocks of flats at the back of our block. We lived, as I remember on the second or third floor and my Aunt Maud, Mum's sister, lived opposite with her family. There were five in her family, Aunt Maud, Uncle Tom and older cousins, Tommy, Maud and Susan. Before I was born, my Nan and Grandfather also lived on the ground floor. Again as my memory serves me, the flats consisted of one room, approached directly from the front door, which served as a kitchen, dining room and living room. There was a sink within a cupboard in which, I imagine, the washing was done. People probably washed themselves in the kitchen sink.

At the rear of the buildings was a yard. It may have been called "Frenches Place" and the yard was owned by an old fellow we knew as Mr Chapman. He had a business in hiring out barrows. People would use the barrows for all sorts of things and quite often they were used to move property when moving house. In these times with all the possessions in an average household this would be unthinkable, but families did not have much in the way of furniture in those days and two or three trips with the "barra" would see you ensconced in your new abode. Being very young at the time I did not realise that our homes were in fact overcrowded, damp and ridden with vermin.

An elder cousin of mine who spent some of her early years in Westmoreland Place and wrote an article entitled "Down the Nile in the East End" put it like this: "*Now we come to the other inhabitants of the Nile – the fleas, the bugs, the rats, the mice and all the other vermin and probably a few unknown ones as well. Public enemy No. 1 was the bugs – mostly little dark red things that came in through the brick work and crawled up the wallpaper, not in ones or twos but by the dozen. They came in the warm weather and stayed away in the cold. So bugs in the summer and rats and mice in the winter – the latter came in from the cold. Fleas (head lice) of course were with us all seasons, sometimes you had them and sometimes you didn't, according to how often "Nitty Norah" appeared at your school. For the uninitiated "Nitty Norah" was the school health visitor, who made periodic checks for these little visitors. She looked at your head looking for nits, and if you had any, off you went to the cleansing*

station, where the hair was sloshed with something that sounded like "Quositships" when it was pronounced, but I have no idea of its correct name. If you were a boy they shaved your head; most of the boys had shaved heads most of the time, but they were never derided because a full head of hair was hardly ever seen. It would be difficult to describe the worst enemy, the crooks or the vermin – either way poverty was the true aggressor – so, in spite of, but mostly because of this adversary, we learned to become survivors."

I remember people saying that if you pulled your bed away from the wall then the bugs would not get you. I tried this once but the bugs used to pull the bed back again!

Opposite the flats, as I mentioned, was a bomb site. Half of this wasteland was taken up with scrap metal including a large boat, which was owned by the scrap metal dealer who also lived in the buildings on the ground floor. His name was Mr Hearne and I remember that he had a few sons. One was named Danny and another called Benny who was a friend. Benny was the proud possessor of a real .303 rifle that may have seen service in the First or Second World War. I am not sure if it would have fired but all the parts seemed to work. Needless to say, the gun gave Benny much kudos among his peers. At one time the other half of the wasteland was used as a speedway track, only with bicycles instead of motorbikes. The track was made of cinders and marked with parallel lines of real railway tracks laid out in a circle, the tracks donated by Mr Hearne. I never competed in these races as I was too young and did not possess a bike, but I liked to watch the older boys racing. If they came off the bikes as they often would, they would be covered in grazes and cuts from the cinder track.

There were a couple of characters that lived in the flats apart from the Hearne family. One was Mrs Howard known as "Old Mother Howard" She was a short but very large lady with swollen legs covered by baggy stockings and it seems as if she always wore the same clothes. She sticks out in my memory, not just for the way she looked but for the strange "perfume" she wore, redolent of our feline friends.

I was probably about four years old when we moved from Curtain Road to our next place, just about half a mile away in Singer Street off Old Street, about a hundred yards from the tube station.

It was called Singer Street Chambers. Sounds grand but it was the smaller twin of Norfolk Buildings. These flats are still there although they have been spruced up somewhat and are probably a lot nicer inside than they used to be.

Our flat was number twelve and situated on the ground floor. As you opened the street door it led directly onto the living room. The furniture consisted of a table and three wooden chairs and a wooden armchair that was for the exclusive use of my father. The floor covering was oilcloth. This was a cheap substitute for linoleum or lino and was, as its name suggests, manufactured from oil. With the price of oil as it is in 2008 linoleum would have been the cheaper option.

There was a kitchen off of the living room and a passage led to a scullery, a place where the laundry was done. There was a bedroom on the right and my Mum and Dad slept in the bedroom at the end of the passage. Curiously, there were wide double doors in this bedroom that led onto an outside fenced area. The doors must have had some purpose at some time but I have no idea what it was. The only heating was from a fire in the living room. Each bedroom had a fire but these were only lit if someone was ill in bed. The view from both bedrooms was of another bomb site. Quick access to this could be gained directly from stepping out of the windows and straight onto the wasteland.

There was no bathroom in Singer Street. Instead we bathed in a galvanised metal bath that was hanging from a hook on the wall of the scullery. The bath would be set up by the fire and cold water poured into it from a jug. The water level would be topped up with hot water from the kettle. In the winter, with the fire on, one side of you would be roasting and the other cold. We children normally bathed once a week whether we needed to or not!

The kitchen was furnished with a small gate legged table, a couple of chairs and a gas stove. Apart from the beds in the bedrooms there was also the odd dressing table and sideboard dotted about. One thing that no visitor to the flat could fail to ignore was the amount of wireless sets or radios there were that seemed to occupy most of the free space. Dad considered himself a bit of a whiz at repairing broken sets and quite a lot of his spare time was taken up with tinkering about with them. To be fair, he was very good at it and was successful in many cases. Often all they required was a new valve and

Dad had quite a stock of them. Of course, it would have gone against the grain to spend time doing anything without some gain at the end of it and so Dad used to take them down "The Lane" and sell them.

"The Lane" was a Sunday market that centred on Brick Lane just off of Bethnal Green Road. It included streets like Club Row, Sclater Street, Cheshire Street and others and one could buy almost anything there. Sclater Street sold animals and pets including dogs, cats, goats, goldfish and frogs' spawn. Pigeons were very popular and became even more so until it was realised that the Asian immigrants seemed to be buying more than they could possibly want to use for homing pigeons. Eventually, the pet market was closed down due to complaints from the animal rights organisations.

Dad and I would set off with a pram with the wireless sets in and I would take my comics to try and sell them. When we arrived we would set up a sheet on one of the bomb sites and weigh the corners down with some stones or bricks and start to sell our wares. Sometimes Dad would sell other things like watch parts and any other things that came to hand. It hardly seems believable but once he had a suitcase full of suitcase handles and a guy came and bought the lot from him. Another time, we weighed down the corners of the sheet with some angle iron that I had found at the back of the bomb site. A man came along and asked my Dad if he had any more. He asked the chap to come back later and sent me off to find all the iron I could. There was plenty of it and, sure enough, the guy returned and bought the lot. As I mentioned before, you could buy and sell almost anything down The Lane in those days.

I used to collect stamps when I was young and spent time on those Sundays to browse the stalls looking for sets of Commonwealth issues to add to my collection. Most Sundays we would buy shrimps and winkles to take home for Sunday tea and also peanuts still in the shells and a toffee apple for me. Often we would stop at a stall owned and run by my Mum's sister, my aunty Em and her husband uncle George. They sold all sorts of things from flints, wicks and tins of fuel for cigarette lighters to torches, bicycle parts and batteries.

For Sunday dinner we always had a roast meal. Either beef or lamb accompanied by roast potatoes,

cabbage, cauliflower or maybe brussel sprouts, peas and Yorkshire puddings. For desert or "afters" as we called it there was tinned fruit and custard or maybe one of Mums home-made puddings. We ate roast chicken only at Christmas as in those days it was too expensive.

After dinner my parents normally had a lie down while I was despatched, along with my cousins, to Sunday school. I can't remember much of what happened while we were there but we were always quite pleased when it was over. On Sunday evenings we normally had our winkles and shrimps and it was my job to pick out the winkles with a pin and place them in a plate with some vinegar in it. We considered this a treat and I always enjoyed it.

After tea, weather permitting, we normally had a walk into the city. I used to enjoy it very much. It was always so peaceful and quiet there on Sundays. It must be remembered that nobody we knew owned a car and as it wasn't a working day there was very little traffic. We would walk to the Tower of London and along the embankment and look at the River Thames. There were many more barges and lighters then than now. The river was a very busy place then. My Dad would sit me on the balustrade of the embankment and pretend to drop me into the river. It was scary but fun at the same time. We would also return home by using some of the very narrow streets and passages and I got great pleasure from looking at the old buildings never realising then that there was so much history in this part of London.

Our flat in Singer Street, like many homes in the 1950's, had the minimum of electrical outlets. The only way to have a radio working was to plug it into the light socket. If you wished to connect another appliance it was possible by means of adaptors that would also connect to the socket. The finished result could be compared to a Christmas tree. The old valve set radios worked by a large battery called an accumulator that was comprised of mainly glass. It was another of my jobs to take these to the local garage and get them charged. One day my Dad thought he would save on the expense of this and connected the accumulator to the light socket. It was a good thing that none of us were that near to the battery when the light was switched on as the resulting explosion could have seriously hurt someone.

Another thing that Dad made up was a crystal set. This consisted of a pair of earphones with wires attached that you would touch a crystal with. Somehow it picked up radio stations but you had to be pretty lucky with it to actually hear much. A bit like the valve radios, as the battery always seemed to run down when we were listening to our favourite programmes. My favourite was a science fiction serial called "Journey into Space". We also used to like listening to Family Favourites, Round the Horn, the Goon Show and other comedy programmes on a Sunday.

One more item of entertainment that is worth a mention was our "home media centre". This consisted of a movie projector played onto the white enamelled raised underside of our gas cooker lid. The only film we had was called the "Ten Little Nigger Boys", and was a film of dancing cartoon African natives singing the song of the title. The projector was turned by hand and sometimes went at the wrong speeds but it didn't matter. You could barely make out the figures or much of the sound but it managed to keep me amused and was always a great treat for me.

Another of Dad's hobbies at the time was keeping tropical fish. He worked as a lorry driver for a firm called Monroe that was situated near Mount Pleasant, and one of his regular trips was bringing animals from the docks to London Zoo. Often his load was tropical fish and some of them would inevitably find their way into his fish tank. Sometimes he would take me on one of his trips and I remember going to Brighton with him. Whilst we were there we picked up some pretty looking rocks and when we went home Dad arranged them in the tank. The next day we awoke to find that the tank was black and all the fish were floating on the top. Dad had tried to soak the salt out of the stones but obviously it hadn't worked. After that he kept only fish called guppies and sometimes he would let me stay up and watch the pregnant fish giving birth. I was fascinated watching these tiny creatures appearing from the mother and swimming off on their own. We had to separate them from the adult fish, including the mother; otherwise they could and would eat their own young.

Our next door neighbours in Singer Street were George and May Hooker. I wasn't used to hearing different accents in those days but I later realised they were from Liverpool. George was also a lorry

driver and they were a nice couple. They had two children, Peter and Janet. Peter was my age and his sister was a year or two younger. Peter and I became good friends and that was just as well as we were the only two children of anywhere near the same age in the street.

As I have mentioned before, there was very little traffic around at the time compared with the volume that exists now. It was not unusual to see horse drawn carts, and water troughs were a familiar site. Brewer's drays were pulled by Shire horses, beautiful animals that, to me, as a youngster seemed huge. The coal man used to have a flat bed horse drawn truck for his deliveries. There were lots of police horses, some stabled behind the police station in Shepherdess Walk. The rag and bone men also used horses to pull their carts, as seen in the classic comedy "Steptoe & Son". I remember accompanying my father on our usual Sunday morning trip to "The Lane" once when a horse and cart went by in Shoreditch High Street. The near side wheel struck a parked vehicle and the wheel just collapsed. The horse bolted and bits of cart were taken along with it. It galloped for some distance before a rather brave chap was able to hold onto the reigns and bring it to a halt. It managed to create lots of damage to other parked vehicles on its way.

Because the streets were generally quieter then, we often managed to play in them without interference from cars or lorries. Football was our favourite past time and the roller shutter doors of the factory opposite made great although rather noisy goals. Our main playgrounds though were the bomb sites. They seemed to provide us with almost everything we required. Just across the road in Cowper Street was a large bomb site. This had walls all around and you entered it via a slope of black cinders. There was a spacious flat area, ideal for a football pitch, complete with two proper wooden goal posts and cross bars. There were other areas to play that were once rooms of houses and plenty of places to climb and jump. Adjacent to this, another area that we called the tank would fill up with water and we were able to fish for sticklebacks by using string tied to a jam jar.

My Father would sometimes make me toys from wood. He had been a wood turner and like most of my ancestors, started his working life as a walking stick maker and cabinetmaker. I remember him producing a toy cowboy gun that looked pretty real

and a scooter with roller bearings for wheels that I managed to put my foot through on the first day of using it. The best toy he made was a "go - cart". This was basically a plank of wood fitted with two large pram wheels at the back, two smaller wheels at the front and an orange box on top to sit in. The cart was steered by a piece of rope attached to the front axle. We would take turns to ride in it while someone would push with the aid of a stick placed behind the box. When we reached the bomb site with the black cinder slope we would let it go and it was great fun to go speeding down, hoping to turn it before hitting the wall at the bottom. We were often thrown from the cart and sustained minor cuts and grazes but that was all part of the thrill.

Peter was fortunate to be given a second hand bicycle. Most days, and also some of the long summer evenings, we would teach ourselves to ride it. I can still recall the magic feeling when we finally achieved our goal and it provided many hours of fun for us.

Around the age of five I started at Hoxton House School. This had been an asylum from 1695 and my first impressions were that it was still one. I can't remember much about it but I do remember that the headmistress was a Mrs Rouse and that our teacher was called Miss Knight. After the mid day meal that was eaten at the school we always had a little lie down to recharge our batteries. Another thing is that on May Day a Maypole would be erected and we would all dance around it holding onto the ends of ribbons that would form a pattern when we had finished. We also had dancing lessons and I remember my partners name was Pauline Mudd. I don't remember us winning any prizes but, again, it was all good fun.

I have good memories of Singer Street as I suppose many of us have of our early childhood days. Mainly because we had very little to worry about except what we were going to play next. Our games seemed to have "seasons". In other words, certain games would be more popular than others at different times. In the autumn we would collect horse chestnuts to use in a game of "conkers". We would attach the conker to a piece of string and attempt to smash the other person's conker by having a swing at it. If you were successful then your conker would be a "oner and if you managed to break another it would become a twoer and so on. In order to improve ones chances of winning

we tried all sorts of things to toughen the conkers such as soaking them in vinegar. Other games included playing with marbles and gobs. Gobs was a game played with five cubes made of wood or stone and consisted of throwing them in the air and catching some whilst at the same time picking up others.

At this time Dad worked as a heavy goods driver for Monroe and went to work very early in the morning. He must have walked or cycled there. Sometimes he would take me with him for the day, especially if he happened to be delivering around the seaside areas like Southend or Brighton. I used to love these trips as the rest of the time was spent in London and it was nice to just get away and see a bit of the countryside.

My Mum used to work as a cleaner at Brown Brothers in Great Eastern Street next to Curtain Road. I am not sure how many hours she did but she was always there for me when I returned home from school. Lots of children whose mothers went to work had to let themselves in after school by means of a key attached to a bit of string on the inside of the letter box. These children were known as latch key kids and there were plenty of them.

At about the same time as we moved from Norfolk Buildings, My Aunt Maud and her family also moved. They had the top half of a house in Pitfield Street not far from the junction with Old Street so they were only a hundred yards or so from us. All you had to do was cross Old Street and you were there. My cousins, Maudie and Susan used to accompany me to school after the first day when my Mum took me. They used to look after me quite a lot and on rainy days we would play games indoors or maybe they would teach me to read. We often went to the Library that was situated in the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall and sometimes spent long periods choosing our books. I particularly liked to read the "Just William" stories by Richmal Crompton and was very surprised to discover, many years later, that "he" was in fact a woman, as I had always believed she was a man. My cousin Susan has recently reminded me that the librarian was named Stan and, as we left the library, we would call out, "Stan, Stan, the dirty old man," before legging it up the stairs and running away.

Our Mothers would often get together and go shopping in Hoxton and sometimes we would go

with them. We had no refrigerators that meant most of our food had to be bought regularly and so shopping trips were frequent. There were lots of shops and stalls in Hoxton including Sainsburys that was nothing like the large supermarkets that exist now. Mum would have a list and would know, to the nearest penny, how much the total would come to. The girl behind the counter would take the list and pick the items from the shelf and then, probably add the bill up in her head.

Other shops included the "German" butchers, that sold lots of offal that looked most unappetising but my Mum and Dad used to love all of the cheaper food. Things like pig's trotters, faggots, and the parson's nose off the chicken. One thing we all liked was pie and mash. In Hoxton the pie and mash shop was called "Fortune's". It was identical to many other pie shops in the fact that outside the shop was a tray of live eels ready to be cut up, cooked, and served as jellied eels, an East London delicacy that many people outside of the area cannot abide. But that is their loss, we loved them. Inside the shop, sawdust would be strewn over the floor to soak up any spillage and the tables had marble tops. The walls were covered with tile, normally green to match the colour of the "gravy" or liquor that was served with the pies. Many of these pie shops have disappeared but some still exist. Sadly I have yet to sample any that have the same, unique flavour that I remember. I have even seen a website that advertises pie and mash online. Maybe one day I will give it a try.

In the summer holidays, Maud, Susan and I would often catch a bus to Victoria Park in Hackney. We would take all the necessary items for a picnic and often spend the whole day there. It was a great place to be and providing you had a couple of pennies on you there were lots of things to do. There was a herd of deer in the park and also some wallabies. Sometimes we went on the rowing boats or even swimming in the outside pool known as the lido. We also spent days in our summer holiday going to play centre in Pitfield Street. This was a place which the council organised to keep us children busy and off the streets, at least for a while.

Most Saturdays we could be found at the cinema. This we called "Saturday Morning Pictures" for obvious reasons. We would take egg sandwiches and a bottle of water and for some reason we always had plenty of spare seats around us!! There

would be a range of films including cartoons like Mickey Mouse and Tom and Jerry. Cowboy and Indian films would feature regularly like "Tom Mix" and "Lash Larue", but the favourite was the serials that would leave you in suspense until the following week. "Flash Gordon" was a popular one but the so-called special effects left a lot to be desired and the modern youngsters would have a fit if they saw them. Nevertheless to us kids it was a great experience. Sometimes I would beg my Dad to take me to an evening performance but most times I just fell asleep and he would not be very amused.

On the corner of Old Street and Pitfield Street was a sweet shop and tobacconist called Seccas. This was where we spent some of our pocket money on things like liquorice sticks that looked like twigs from a tree and that tasted of liquorice. They seemed to last forever and made your mouth very black. Other tasty morsels were flying saucers, sherbet dabs, sweet cigarettes, gobstoppers and lots more.

We children also belonged to the cubs and brownies. On Sunday evenings I would attend the church parade for the cubs and scouts and then, one night in the week, I would go the cubs meeting. I enjoyed these evenings as we learnt things like knot tying, signalling, map skills and many others. We felt a great sense of achievement when we were presented with our badges and also we took part in lots of games while we were there. We also went on a camping holiday with the cubs. Maud and Susan were in the Brownies and we all travelled to Dovercourt in Essex and stayed on a farm. Our beds were in Nissan huts and we had a great time on the four wheeled cycles and canoeing in the lake near the sea front. Maudie later moved to Dovercourt and has lived there with her family for many years.

Christmas was a wonderful time in those days. It would start on Christmas Eve in either our house or Aunt Maud's. The adults would have their drinks and we kids would have lemonade or tizer. When the adults had had a few drinks they would start singing and dancing and having a good laugh. One of our jobs was to wind the gramophone up and to change the records and the needles as they wore out after a few times around. Christmas Day we would have a smashing roast dinner and chicken would be the main course. Dad would have bought it on Christmas Eve and cleaned and

gutted it the same day. There would also be lots of different pickles on the table that we would not normally have like red cabbage, pickled onions, gherkins and my favourites, pickled walnuts. Christmas Eve would be another party and Boxing Day would be the same. Before dinner on these days, the whole family would gather at the Blue Last Public House or the Barley Mow Public House, both in Curtain Road, for a lunchtime drink and my cousins and I would stand outside with a bag of crisps and a drink playing our games and chatting.

I remember that, on Christmas morning, after lying awake for at least some of the night, trying to get a glimpse of Santa Claus I would get up very early to see what he had left me. On Christmas Eve, I would hang a stocking (or a large sock) from the end of the bed. The next day it would contain an orange and a few walnuts and almonds and also some sweets. I would then race into the living room to find my main present. Of these I remember having a fort with loads of lead soldiers, a clockwork railway track with locomotives made of tin and many others that I can't quite bring to mind. Although I only received one main present from my parents I had other presents from my Aunts and Uncles and I considered myself very lucky.

On the occasional Sunday we would have a day trip to Southend. Often the trip would include other members of the family and we would all travel en masse from Liverpool Street railway station to Southend on board a train pulled by a steam locomotive. We would not travel light as we took deck chairs, windbreaks and food with us. In those days the seafront was lined with tea-shops. These were constructed mostly of timber and were in easy reach from the beach. I often wonder if my Mum and Aunts could have survived for very long without a cup of tea, as they seemed to drink it all the time. I am convinced that, for them at least, "the cup that cheers" must have had medicinal qualities.

For us children, it was wonderful to play on the beach and paddle in the sea. One of my cousins, Hettie, actually lived in Southend and we seemed to bump into her on most occasions that we visited the town. In hindsight I wouldn't be surprised if these co-incidental meetings were pre-arranged by my Aunts.

My Mother and her sisters always kept in touch with each other. Aunt Maud and Mum spent lots of time together and we would visit Mum's other sisters regularly. Aunt Hett, real name Harriett, lived near Brick Lane and would also visit us, normally on a Sunday, with her daughter Caroline. I liked Aunt Hett, she had some great mannerisms and, when telling a story, she could be very amusing and reminded me of Les Dawson doing his "Gert and Daisy" thing.

My Aunt Em and Uncle George lived in Tottenham and we would visit them and sometimes have tea on Sunday with her family. Her youngest daughter Doreen would be there, and her other daughter Emily and her son George would also arrive with their families. My Aunt Carrie lived with her sister Em and so we would get to meet her at the same time.

Mum's other sister Jesse lived in Bethnal Green and we would often visit her and Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam was a very quiet man and apart from greeting us when we first arrived I don't think he spoke a word. My Grandfather, Henry, lived with Aunt Jesse and we would also go to his room and Mum would have a chat to him although at this time he was not very well.

Before this, he lived with my aunt Em and we would visit him there. He would drink his tea from a saucer and blow on it to make it cool down. The tea would be dripping off his moustache and I wondered why he didn't drink it from the cup. My own father used to drink tea in this fashion too. I did not know my Grand dad very well but I found him rather intimidating. They had a yard at the back of the house and kept chickens. They also had a dog, named Nellie, and she would often be in the stage of having puppies. One time, whilst playing in the yard, I picked up one of the puppies. Granddad told me to pick all the others up too. I did this until my arms were too full and then managed to drop one of them and the rest followed. I was devastated as I imagined that I had seriously injured the poor little things but Granddad just laughed his head off. Looking back I can see that most people would have behaved similarly but, at the time, I was quite frightened of him. When Granddad gave up the walking stick making trade he became a market trader and had a thriving business in Hoxton selling sweets. He also worked down the Lane and probably other markets too.

I was about eight years old when we bought our first television. I was looking forward to getting home from school and seeing it but when I arrived it still had not been delivered. I could scarcely contain my excitement when, later that evening, the man delivered it. After instructing my father in its use, we sat back to be entertained by the black and white moving picture. I was absolutely gutted when I realised that the first programme on our brand new television turned out to be, "La Traviata", an opera. Needless to say, I went to bed that evening rather disappointed with our new purchase.

I feel I must point out that living in our area was a little bit like living in a small village. Whilst in ones own neighbourhood, one could feel relatively safe and so we would rarely wander far from our immediate surroundings. We possessed a real community spirit and were, for the most part, extremely patriotic and proud of our country and its achievements. In 1953 Sir Edmund Hillary climbed to the summit of Mount Everest and our school took us to the cinema to watch the film. Queen Elizabeth 2 succeeded to the throne that same year and anyone who could get to a television watched the ceremony in monochrome. In nearly every street, there were parties in honour of the occasion and a great time was had by children and parents alike. In 1954 Roger Bannister broke the time record for running the mile and was the first man to accomplish this in under four minutes. I wanted to emphasise that we were proud to be a part of Great Britain and proud to be English.

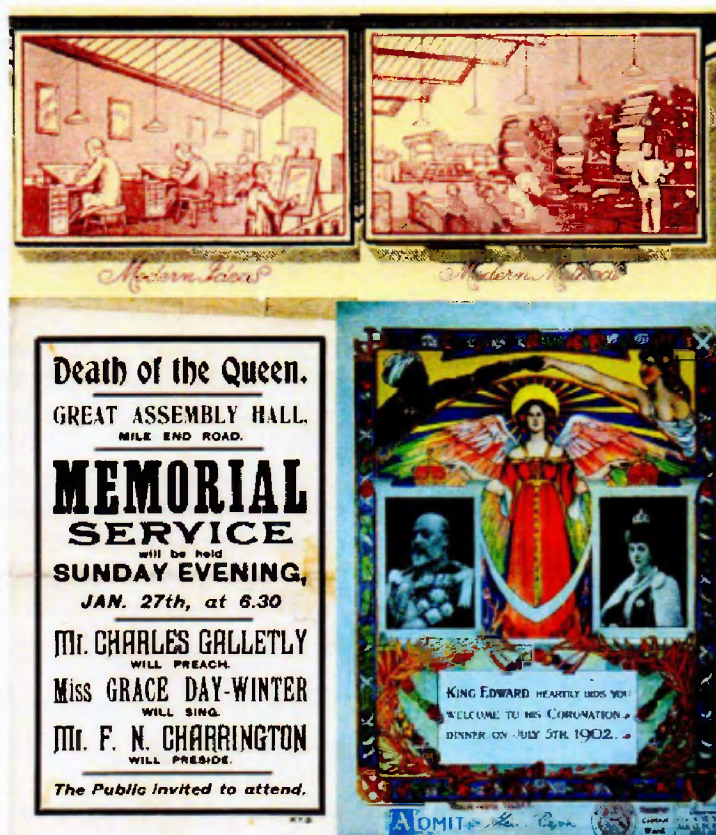
For many years my parents had been on the waiting list for a council house. In those days one needed to accumulate a certain amount of points to warrant being considered for a house or flat. Around 1954 the council must have decided that we had suffered enough over the years in damp, rat infested accommodation, and allotted us a new flat. So, for the third time in my short life, we were about to start over again, this time in a brand new dwelling.



MEMENTOES OF TOWER HAMLETS

In Newsletter 3-03 (Spring 2009) we mentioned the creation of ELHS's MOTH web site, www.mernick.org.uk/moth

Its purpose is to showcase items illustrating many aspects of Tower Hamlets, and its people. We have gradually added more and more images under the categories Commerce, Education, Entertainment, Invites, Medical, People, Political, Views and Wartime. Here are some recent additions.



Top: vignettes from Evershed & Co (Fairfield Road) letter head, 1931

Left: Queen Victoria memorial service at Great Assembly Hall, 1901

Right: Invitation to Bromley Central Ward's King Edward VII coronation party 1902

We got no response from members to our request for items for MOTH. Come on have a dig into your sideboards or kitchen drawers for old Tower Hamlets related items! They can be paper, metal or plastic: note we need a picture not the item itself.