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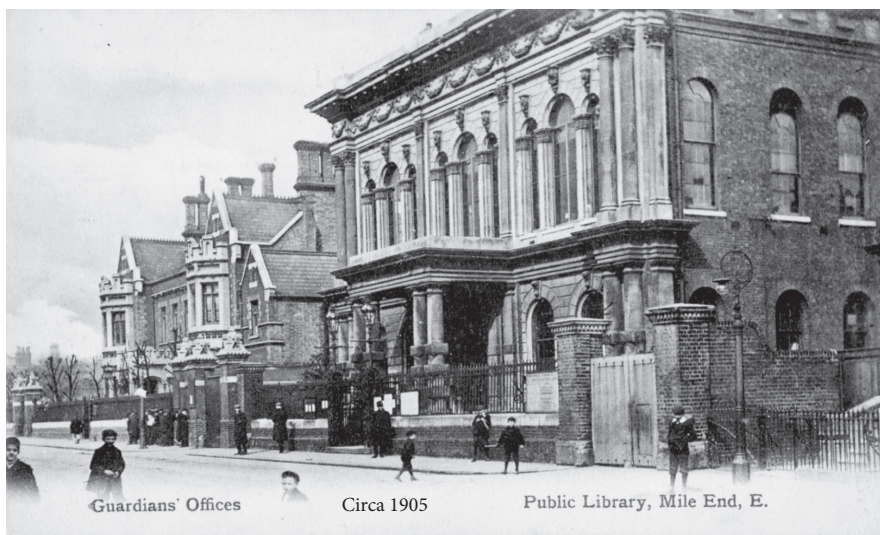
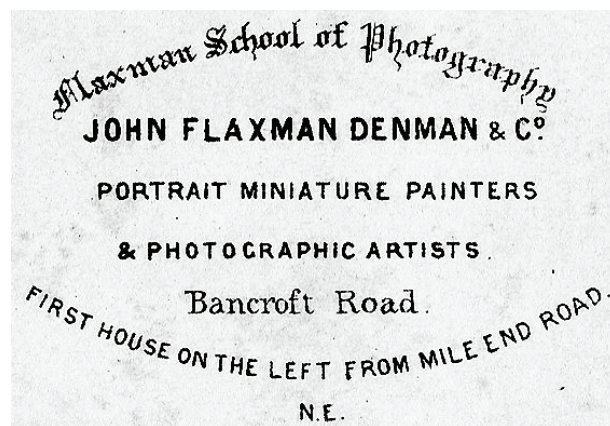
The Newsletter is edited and typeset by Rosemary Taylor with assistance of Philip Mernick, and an editorial team comprising, Doreen Kendall, Diane Kendall and David Behr.



Cover Picture

The picture shows the earliest known photograph of Mile End Old Town Vestry Hall and Offices. It is taken from a carte de visite photograph by the Bancroft Road studio of John Flaxman Denman & Co and probably dates from 1863 or 1864 as the studio moved to the south side of Mile End Road in 1865. The photographer has written on the mount beneath the image itself "Vestry Hall & Guardians Offices. Bancroft Road taken from our gates". The Vestry Hall now houses Tower Hamlets Local History Library (from 1902) & Archives and should be the first port of call for anyone researching the area. The earliest part of the present library building was completed in 1861 and extended in the 1930s. The terrace to the right survived until 1960.

Reverse of the picture with photographer's details



**East London History Society
Lecture Programme 2017**

Thursday May 25

**The Life and Death of a Burial Ground:
Archaeological Investigations of the New
Churchyard, Bethlehem. (South West of
Liverpool Street Station)
A talk by Robert Hartle**

Our programme of lectures may be over by the time you receive this, and David Behr is busy compiling a new one for 2017- 18.

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

ELHS Record and Newsletters. You can now download from our web site (no charge) PDFs of all issues of East London Record and the last three series of Newsletter (1992 to 2013). They can be found on our publications page together with indexes to aid selection. We have sold all hard copies of our Mile End and Wapping books but PDF copies can be supplied for £6 each – contact us for details. All of the PDFs can be searched for specific words. We also have older Newsletters (from 1962) scanned but the quality of printing means that the PDFs cannot be searched. If you have any Newsletters from the 1950s or 1960s please let us know, I am sure we are missing some issues.

**PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND
CONSERVATION AREAS) ACT 1990
BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL
ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC
INTEREST**

Stepney War Memorial, in churchyard of the Church of St Dunstan and All Saints, Stepney, London E1. List Entry Number: 1444026

I am writing to inform you that we have been considering adding the above war memorial to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.

We have taken into account all the representations made, and completed our assessment of the war memorial. Having considered our recommendation, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has decided to add Stepney War Memorial to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.

The List entry for this building, together with a map, has now been published on the National Heritage List for England, and will be available for public access from tomorrow. This List can be accessed through our website.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance. More information can also be found on our website at www.historicengland.org.uk.

Yours faithfully,
Philip Seely
Listing Co-ordinator - South
Listing Team
Historic England

Thomas Gibson and Son: Spitalfields Silk Manufacturers

Thomas Gibson (1777-1863) and his son Thomas Field Gibson (1803-1889) are all but forgotten today, yet two centuries ago, in the changing world of industrialisation, they were leading pioneering programmes with combined commercial and social aims to support local manufacture and working people in Spitalfields.

The Gibsons belonged to a close-knit merchant community of Nonconformist faith, with many of their cousins and friends also being in business in the area. Gibson Snr had entered the silk manufacturing trade in 1803. From their warehouse in the City and later in Spital Square, they put out work to several hundred independent weaving families who had looms in their homes. Shrewd businessmen, they were driven by personal satisfaction and financial gain, but understood that success could be achieved in ways that also benefitted the artisans. Workers told the 1840 Commission on Hand-loom Weavers that the Gibsons paid 'a price above many of the Spitalfields manufacturers' and arranged their work so the weavers 'would earn more' because little time was wasted waiting for materials. In return, their artisans 'made goods of the best description'.

The Spitalfields silk industry had for many years been protected from international competition by prohibiting imports of the much-admired French fabrics. This was soon to end as the policy of free trade took shape. Protectionism was also wrong in the Gibsons' view as it deterred innovation, which for them was a key to ongoing improvement and success. Believing that innovation sprang from the artisans as much as themselves, their wish was to foster the broad acquisition of new skills and tools of trade. These were unusual ideas at the time and the Gibsons trialled a progression of novel initiatives towards achieving their aims.

The Spitalfields Mechanics' Institution opened in 1825, very soon after Dr George Birkbeck had established a similar institution in the City of London – Gibson Snr was the founding President and 'subscribed liberally' to it. Housed initially in a local chapel and later in Hackney Road, the facilities included a library and reading room and there were regular evening lectures. Operations were overseen by a committee of which two-thirds were artisans rather than managers. Large numbers of weavers enrolled initially but attendance soon tailed off due to the cost and time commitment. The concept was successfully reinvented for a slightly different clientele as the Eastern Literary and Scientific Institution, with Gibson Jnr still serving as its Patron two decades later.

By 1828, Birkbeck, the Gibsons and others had developed the notion of a 'National Repository for the Exhibition of Specimens of New & Improved Productions of the Artisans and Manufacturers of the United Kingdom'. The plan was to have an annual display of the latest innovations to encourage advances in quality. Set up near Charing Cross, Gibson Snr looked after the textiles section and chose pieces from Spitalfields as well as provincial manufacturing districts. Public displays of this kind were almost unheard of and the press was scathing, calling it a 'pompous effort', 'neither called for by the tastes, habits, and necessities of the English people'. It lasted for about five years.

Gibson Jnr and other industrialists then began to promote the need for practical training in the application of the arts to manufacture. The Government School of Design was established in 1837 in Somerset House with Gibson Jnr serving on its Council. Debate raged for years as to what to teach and how to teach it to achieve the desired goal of enhancing the style and appeal of Britain's manufactured goods. In the meantime Gibson Jnr had proposed to the Council that a branch school be opened in Spitalfields and he also served on its management committee. The Spitalfields

School of Design in Crispin Street was well supported, receiving the proceeds of 'A GRAND FANCY and FULL DRESS' ball held under the patronage of Queen Victoria, with guests parading the best silk finery. Many weavers sent their children to the school's evening classes and good reports of their progress followed soon afterwards.

Prince Albert conceived another initiative that brought together the ideas of encouragement, display and international competition, and they were now sufficiently mature for the 'Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations' at Crystal Palace in 1851 to be a huge success. Gibson Jnr was appointed to the Royal Commission that oversaw the event. The Queen wore a pink dress of Spitalfields silk to the opening ceremony and the overall display from Spitalfields – although now being compared directly with long-time rivals France – fared quite well. An entry designed and woven by students at the Spitalfields School of Design won a prize medal.

The role of the Royal Commissioners was extended indefinitely when the Great Exhibition closed, with its first purpose being to build a precinct in South Kensington focussed on bringing art and science to industry. The early vehicles of practical education and display are still apparent there in institutions like the Royal College of Art (the renamed Government School of Design), Imperial College and the museums. Gibson Jnr's primary concern was how the manufacturing districts could best gain benefit from the central complex and he also helped run subsequent International Fairs in Paris and London.

The Gibsons spearheaded various other initiatives in Spitalfields as well. In 1832 the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, of which Gibson Snr was a founding committee member, resolved to establish a mission in London. Spicer Street (now part of Buxton Street) in Spitalfields was chosen for its location. The mission conducted religious

services and a Sunday school and also provided day and evening schools, lectures, a savings bank, benevolent fund and extensive pastoral care. Gibson Jnr was still funding the mission 50 years later and he also served as Treasurer for other charity schools in the area.

Beginning in 1848, the 'Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes' built a very early community housing complex around the corner from Spicer Street; it was listed in the catalogue of the Great Exhibition and open for inspection and critique. Gibson Jnr was a founding Director of the Association, which had the goal of providing affordable and sanitary rental accommodation for working people, with a 'limited return' to investors. Later studies showed the mortality rate for tenants to be well below London's average due the incorporation of modern plumbing and ventilation, and there was also a reading room and library. Part of it is now Grade II listed. The Gibson Gardens development opened by the Association in 1880 in Stoke Newington was named after Gibson Jnr as a tribute to his long-term contributions.

Thomas Field Gibson was by this time long retired from the silk industry and residing in the country, and his father was deceased. Spitalfields of course has continued to evolve ever since and relatively little evidence survives of their pioneering efforts. Their work did however bring tangible benefits to their community and particularly the silk trade while it remained centred in the area.

There is further information on the Gibsons' heritage and their family's business, social and domestic way of life in London in Sir Francis Ronalds: Father of the Electric Telegraph (2016) and at www.sirfrancisronalds.co.uk.

Beverley F Ronalds

Emails and Letters

From: Christopher Hjort

Re: Antenna House in Bethnal Green

Allow me to contact you out of the blue. As way of introduction, I am a music historian and author who has written books on rock music. I am presently working on a projected book on Fleetwood Mac founder Peter Green, who was born in 1946 in Bethnal Green at 27 Bullen House (still standing today, Collingwood Street), and then moved to 18 Antenna House. However, I am not able to find any trace of Antenna House in the literature I have been researching, nor on the internet. I assume the place is long gone but still odd that there is no easily identifiable footprint.

Briefly, I am trying to locate the Antenna House address. Perhaps you could point me in the right direction? I look forward to hear from you and I am grateful for any help you can provide.

Kind regards
Christopher Hjort
Author

Philip replied:

Hi Christopher, it's **Antenor House**, Old Bethnal Green Road (Minerva Estate). Still there.
regards
Philip Mernick, ELHS

From: George Donovan

Hello Again.

A Happy New Year to You----- and the rest of the crew. I have a couple of queries I'm wondering if you can solve. What do you know of the Pig Club that was housed in the Dog kennels in Fairfield Road during WW2.

The Bryant and May factory in Fairfield Road appears to be too vast to have been just producing matches. It stretched from Fairfield Road right back to Old Ford Road.

Are you aware of what else may have been produced there? Would it have been engaged in war work during WW2?

Bryant and May always comes to mind for me at this time of year, for I remember in my youth, as a Christmas treat, Poplar Borough Council used their social club hall in Old Ford Road as a venue for giving concert shows to us "urchins" where on exiting we were given a Apple/ Orange and a Marzipan fish---little of which was left for Mum by the time we got home. Do I remember too that the boy's [us hooligan's] were seated separately from the girls?

Regards George

From: Philip Mernick

Hi George, sorry about the delay but we have just got back from a stay with our sister who moved from Stratford to Torquay after her back garden fell into the high-speed rail tunnelling works.

You always manage to ask questions on subjects new to me! No I don't know anything about local pig clubs although I used to know a man whose father worked for the government, during WW2, organising the breeding of chickens, he may also have been involved with pigs - appropriately his name was Hams! I could try to contact him (the son I mean) although he was somewhat eccentric, and probably hasn't improved with age.

As far as I am aware that Bryant & May factory just made matches and the boxes and tins to hold them. Their archives, by the way, are held by Hackney. I am sure that they did do war work, probably making flares or tracer rounds or something in that line. I have a history of the company (including the

Liverpool factory), 1960s? but finding it would be a problem. Bancroft Road would be a better option, at least they know where their books are!

From: Richard Hemmings

Subject: Family History Enquiry

I am sure you receive many queries of this kind, so I will be brief!

I am retired, living in East Anglia, and endeavouring to find out more about my family. I am particularly interested in a family business, an Off Licence, that once operated at 74 Grove Road, from circa 1917. My Grandfather, with the unusual name of Zibia, (John Louis), Hemmings ran it, but it may have been in his wife's name at the time, (during the war). The building was one of several later demolished by the first V1 rocket to hit London in the next war! (Before then, they had moved!).

I would love to find photographs or entries in Trade or other Directories and believe I will have to visit the Local History Library nearby. I wish eventually to learn more about my Grandfather, my Father and my Great Grandfather. My Great Grandfather ran a whalebone business, at the turn of the century, in the same area.

I would be grateful for advice, any contacts and other organisations that would be useful.

Yours Faithfully
Richard Hemmings

Philip replied:

Dear Richard, trade directories are a very good source of information. I looked at 1934 which I have on CD and found at 74 Grove Road: Hemmings, Zibia, John Louis, Wine & Spirit Dealer. Tower Hamlets Local History Library has a good run of original directories and a complete

set on microfilm which is more awkward to read.

The Bishopsgate Institute has a full run of paper copies. I have a number of post cards of Grove Road but would need to figure out if any show 74. If you would like me to check the date range for Hemmings at 74 let me know.

best regards
Philip Mernick, Chairman ELHS

From: ANDREW HYDE

Subject: Photograph(s) of Upper North Street School, Poplar

On 13th June this year we will be commemorating the centenary of the first daylight air raid on London. In particular, the raid resulted in the bombing of Upper North Street School Poplar, which caused the deaths of eighteen children, most of whom were only five years of age. One of these was my uncle, George Hyde. I have been searching high and low for photographs which may have been taken of the scene on the day of the raid, or of the school before or after the tragedy. I would be extremely grateful therefore for any guidance or assistance you may be able to offer to assist me in my search, as a photograph of the school itself would really serve to add to the commemoration. I thank you in advance, and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Best Regards
Andrew Hyde

Philip replied:

Dear Andrew, I don't have any images of the school other than two showing bomb damaged class rooms from the series published by William Whiffin. I have checked with a major post card dealer who also collects East London and he hasn't

seen any others. If you don't already have the Whiffin images I would be happy to send you scans.

best regards

Philip Mernick

From: Michelle Ballard

Subject: Jane Savoy - Woodgrange Park Cemetery

Hello Rosemary,

I received an e-mail from one of my cousins yesterday with an attachment of a couple of Memorial Cards. My eyes popped out of my head! My cousin has come across Jane and Alfred Savoy's death/burial details.

You were aware that I was searching for Jane's burial details and had tried all the cemetery archives but one, and yes, it was the last one on my list I needed to get in touch with!

Jane was buried at Woodgrange Park Cemetery, 540, Romford Road, London, E7 8AX, Grave 1761 Square 34. Her husband, Alfred Savoy, who died on 12th October, 1925, was interred at Tower Hamlets Cemetery, Bow, so she obviously wasn't with him.

I've been in touch with the grounds man to see if it is possible to visit her grave. The eastern section of the cemetery has been developed into housing and he believes Jane's (private) grave may have been reburied on. I should have information on what is what come the middle of next week.

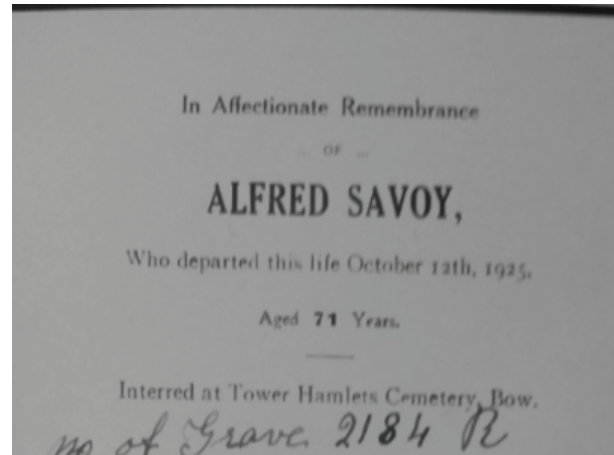
Well, I thought you might like to see Jane's Memorial Card as attached. It seems that I have more or less concluded Jane's story, that is unless my cousin comes across any more family archival papers.

Best wishes for 2017

Michelle

What we have is Alfred Savoy's Memorial Card. Diane Kendall has promised to try and

locate the grave. However, she warns the area has been cleared, so there may not be a headstone.



Dear Philip

The latest project of the Family and Community Historical Research Society (FACHRS) **Communities of Dissent** is investigating the role of Nonconformity in over 50 locations in England, Wales and the Channel Islands between 1850 and 1939. More information can be found on www.fachrs-dissent.com.

As well as acting as Project Co-ordinator, I am researching Nonconformity in Spitalfields, Whitechapel, St. George in the East and Stepney.

I would be interested in hearing from readers who have knowledge of any of the many congregations in these areas during the study

period. These include varieties of Baptists and Methodists, Congregationalists, German churches, the Swedish Church and numerous Missions. Most of the buildings are long gone, so I am especially interested in any photos of the buildings or the activities associated with them. Unfortunately, many chapel records have not found their way into regular repositories. If anyone knows of unusual locations for local Nonconformist records, please let me know. I can be contacted on cumnerjanet@aol.com.

Thank you

Janet Cumner

The George Tavern

Victory in the nine-year war to save east London's historic George Tavern music venue from "encroaching" developers next door has finally been claimed this week by pub landlady Pauline Forster. The 67-Year-old grandmother has seen off Swan Housing in a 'David and Goliath' struggle after the Secretary of State's ruling to stop a luxury block of flats being built on her doorstep.

An appeal by the housing body against Pauline's High Court victory last summer has finally been rejected, after a three-day hearing by senior government planning inspector Christina Downes in March against the scheme to site a block of six luxury flats next to the 400-year-old watering hole in the Commercial Road. The scheme was ruled "incompatible" next to a music venue with a 3am licence and would also have blotted out natural light in the listed Georgian building used by film and TV organisations.

The George is on the site of the Halfway House tavern that is recorded in the 17th century—even before the Commercial Road was built. Cromwell was said to have stabled his cavalry there during the English Civil War. But the 21st century tavern war could break out again. Swan Housing, which bought the

former Stepney's nightclub site next to The George in a £1 million deal in 2007, still owns the land and has the option to go back to the High Court.

But all legal arguments now seem to have been exhausted—in Pauline's favour.

Pauline has put her savings into the legal struggle and the campaign she launched with the late Amy Whitehouse and a host of A-List celebrity stars a decade ago in defence of her business.

The authentic interior of The George makes it a popular location to film period dramas such as Sherlock Holmes with Sir Ian McKeller. A documentary on The Krays was also shot on the premises. The proposed block would have encroached on its natural daylight, the Town Hall planning hearing in March was told. But The George is best known as a top London music attraction.

Music Heritage UK's James Ketchell said: "Common sense has prevailed. This is a musical 'oasis' in a cultural desert—it should be protected to provide east London with an eclectic and diverse musical menu."

Source: East London Advertiser



The George Tavern in the 19th century

Book Shelf

Cargoes & Capers - Autobiography of Johnny Ringwood age 81. The book is available from Amazon in Kindle for £1.99 and soft back for £5.99.

It's very hard to dissect the book into condensed fragments the reason being there over forty aspects of life covered in the book. Back in 2014, I was involved in a video shoot along with a group of people in the Royal Victoria Dock it concerned a fund-raising appeal for the oldest steam ship in the world the SS Robin.

After the group appeal was finished, I was approached by the film director, who asked me if I could do an individual spot, when I asked concerning what, he replied just talk about growing up in Docklands. The result can be seen on YouTube, titled "Johnny Ringwood interview 2014"

It was after this I started to write my book. I hope it does, as one the readers has written, that honestly reflect eighty one years of a Docklands man. I was asked to contact you by a friend of mine named James (Jim) Crouch, who told me you might be interested in sharing my book with your members.

I was born and raised in Custom House 1936' So I reckoned that I had sufficient life experiences to put it into a book which I have now done, it's published by Amazon, and so far the feed-back so far has been very favourable, the story starts mainly as a child living in Docklands during the war, then off to sea at the age of sixteen, stayed ashore too long on one on my leaves and had to do national services as well. Stepped outside the law on a couple of occasions and paid the price accordingly, but turned the negative into a positive afterwards. Had the idea for the Dockers Statue featured on the front cover in 2000 but it took nine long years for the idea to become a reality, it now stands on the entrance steps of the ExCeL exhibition centre in

Custom House. Those featured on the front are from the left Mark Tibbs, Patrick Holland, and myself, Mark is unhooking the chain, Patrick is tallying the load (he was a Tally Clerk) and I am pushing the barrow.

I spoke to Doreen your Secretary about this during our conversation she asked if I could give a talk on my life, I replied I am pretty sure I could give it a fair crack.

Johnny Ringwood

London's East End History Tour, Michael Foley, 2017, 96 pages, ISBN-978-1-4456-6882-6. Amberly Publishing £6.99

This is a small (168mm x 124mm) format book that should readily fit in a pocket or bag, although more likely to be read at home as it gives no walking instructions. I have to admit that I was initially put off by the statement in the introduction that the Olympic Park replaced an "industrial wasteland" the propaganda put about by the 2012 Olympic Development Authority, but repudiated by Lance Forman in his *Forman's Games of 2016*. Any way I will get off my hobby horse and get back to the book being reviewed. It comprises two tours and covers an area east from Bow to East Ham. Here comes another hobby horse of mine: isn't this "East London" rather than "East End".

Two helpful maps (location 8 on map one should read Romford Road, not Romford) and lots of well cropped illustrations almost all derived from postcards. The descriptive text and history is interesting and seems accurate although rather repetitive and peppered with examples of questionable grammar. Tour one starts in Bow Road and goes to Upton Park via Leyton and Forest Gate. Tour two goes from East Ham to Canning Town via Plashet and Plaistow.

Philip Mernick

In Spitalfields, 1842

by the Gentle Author

George Dodd came to Spitalfields to write this account for Charles Knight's LONDON published in 1842. Dodds recalls the rural East End that still lingered in the collective memory and described the East End of weavers living in ramshackle timber and plaster dwellings which in his century would be 'redeveloped' out of existence by the rising tide of brick terraces, erasing the history that existed before.



Spitalfields Market

It is not easy to express a general idea respecting Spitalfields as a district. There is a parish of that name but this parish contains a small portion only of the silk weavers and it is probable that most persons apply the term Spitalfields to the whole district where the weavers reside. In this enlarged acceptance, we will lay down something like a boundary in the following manner – begin at Shoreditch Church and proceed along the Hackney Rd till it is intersected by Regent's Canal, follow the course of the canal to Mile End Rd and then proceed westward through Whitechapel to Aldgate, through Houndsditch to Bishopsgate, and thence northward to where the tour commenced.

This boundary encloses an irregularly-shaped district in which nearly the whole of the

weavers reside and these weavers are universally known as "Spitalfields" weavers. Indeed, the entire district is frequently called Spitalfields although including large portions of Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Whitechapel and Mile End New Town. By far the larger portion of this extensive district was open fields until comparatively modern times. Bethnal Green was really a green and Spitalfields was covered with grassy sward in the last century.

It may now not unreasonably be asked, what is "Spitalfields"? A street called Crispin St on the western side of Spitalfields Market is nearly coincident in position with the eastern wall of the Old Artillery Ground and this wall separated the Ground from the Fields which stretched out far eastward. Great indeed is the change which this portion of the district has undergone. Rows of houses, inhabited by weavers and other humble persons, and pent up far too close for the maintenance of health, now cover the green spot now known as Spitalfields.

In the evidence taken before a Committee in the House of Commons on the silk trade in 1831-2, it was stated that the population of the district in which the Spitalfields weavers resided could be no less at that time than one hundred thousand, of whom fifty thousand were entirely dependent on the silk manufacture and remaining moiety more or less dependent indirectly. The number of looms seems to vary between about fourteen to seventeen thousand and, of these, four to five thousand are unemployed in times of depression. It seems probable, as far as the means exist of determining it, that the weavers are principally English or of English origin. To the masters, however the same remark does not apply, for the names of the partners in the firms now existing, point to the French origin of manufacture in that district.

A characteristic employment or amusement of the Spitalfields weavers is the catching of birds. This is principally carried on in the

months of March and October. They train “call-birds” in the most peculiar manner and there is an odd sort of emulation between them as to which of their birds will sing the longest, and the bird-catchers frequently lay considerable wagers on this, as that determines their superiority. They place them opposite each other by the width of a candle and the bird who sings the oftenest before the candle is burnt out wins the wager.

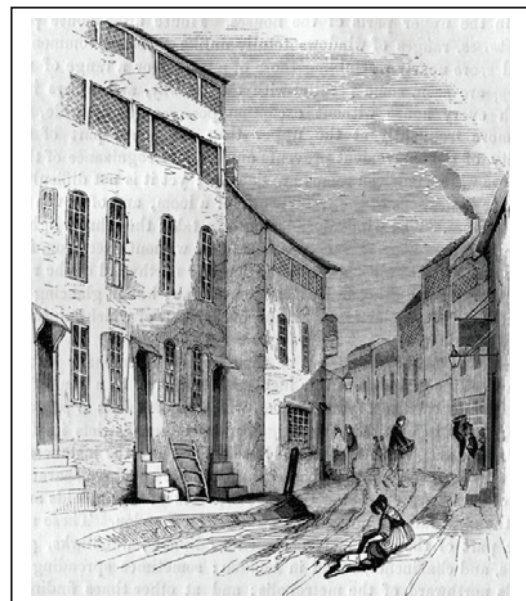
If we have, on the one hand, to record the unthrifty habits and odd propensities of the weavers, let us not forget to do them justice in other matters. In passing through Crispin St, adjoining the Spitalfields Market, we see on the western side of the way a humble building, bearing much the appearance of a weaver’s house and having the words “Mathematical Society” written up in front. Lowly and inelegant the building may be but there is a pleasure in seeing Science rear her head in a locality, even if it is humble one.

A ramble through Bethnal Green and Mile End New Town in which the weavers principally reside, presents us with many curious features illustrative of the peculiarities of the district. Proceeding through Crispin St to the Spitalfields Market, the visitor will find some of the usual arrangements of a vegetable market but potatoes, sold wholesale, form the staple commodity. He then proceeds eastwards to the Spitalfields Church, one of the “fifty new churches” built in the reign of Queen Anne and along Church St to Brick Lane. If he proceed northward up the latter, he will arrive, first, at the vast premises of Truman, Hanbury & Buxton’s brewery, and then at the Eastern Counties Railway which crosses the street at a considerable elevation. If he extends his steps eastwards, he will at once enter upon the districts inhabited by the weavers.

On passing through most of the streets, a visitor is conscious of a noiselessness, a dearth of bustle and activity. The clack of the looms is heard here and there, but not to a noisy degree. It is evident in a glance that many of

the streets, all the houses were built expressly for weavers, and in walking through them we noticed the short and unhealthy appearance of the inhabitants. In one street, we met with a barber’s shop in which persons could have “a good wash for a farthing.” Here we espied a school at which children were taught “to read and work at tuppence a week.” There was a chandler’s shop at which shuttles, reeds and quills, and the smaller parts of weaving apparatus were exposed for sale in a window in company with split-peas, bundles of wood and red herrings. In one little shop, patchwork was sold at 10d, 12d and 16d a pound. At another place was a bill from the parish authorities, warning the inhabitants that they were liable to a penalty if their dwelling were kept dirty and unwholesome, and in another – we regretted this more than anything else – astrological predictions, interpretations of dreams and nativities, were to be purchased “from three pence upwards.”

In very many of the houses, the windows numbered more sheets of paper than panes of glass and no considerable number of houses were shut up altogether. We would willingly present a brighter picture, but ours is a copy from the life.



Pelham St (now Woodseer St), Spitalfields

The Bombing of Upper North Street School – 13 June 1917

The Background

The onset of the First World War in August 1914 was to give the East End of London its first experience of aerial bombardment. Zeppelins were used to drop bombs over London by night, but by October 1916, these Zeppelin air ships, which had been manned by the German Navy had been countered by the defences of London. The capital had nine peaceful months. In December 1916, because of heavy losses suffered by the army during the Battle of the Somme, the government decided to send five squadrons of fighter aircraft to France. These aircraft were the original Zeppelin fighters who had defended London. It was now decided that they were needed elsewhere. Six weeks later, half of the new A A guns ordered for the defence of London were diverted to the Merchant Navy for defence against submarine attacks. A large number of A A gunners and searchlight operators were also sent to France. Against this background, the German High Command, who had also suffered heavy losses on the Somme, and Verdun, decided to relieve the pressure on the German army. This would be in the form of a two-pronged attack, namely, unrestricted submarine warfare i.e. attack all ships on sight, and secondly, bombing London, (the seat of government and financial centre) by long range aircraft in broad daylight. This, they believed, would strike terror into the civil population, who would then demand 'peace at any price.'

The weapon selected for the attack on London would be the Gotha bomber manned by the army. To reach London these bombers would have to use airfields close to the Belgian coast. This would still mean a five-hour flight, most of it over water. To achieve this, weather conditions had to be perfect, clear skies with no cloud, for navigational purposes, no headwind, because this would cause the

aircraft to use extra fuel, which they did not have.

That fateful day, 13th June 1917, the weather conditions were as perfect as they could wish for. German army meteorologists had forecast exceptional flying weather for the 13th-14th period, with clear skies over the target area. Take off time would be 9 am. This would put them over London about mid-day, thus increasing the terror effect on the civil population. It would also get them back to their base before darkness set in.

1917 was a very bad year for weather over England, there had been very few days of sun, but lots of wind, cloud, and rainstorms. The German squadron commander was determined to make the most of this lucky break in the weather. Twenty two Gothas took off from their Belgian airfield and set course for the Essex coast. By the time they crossed that coast there were only fourteen Gothas left. The rest had turned back with mechanical problems.

A light-ship anchored off the coast had spotted the flight and had radioed a warning to the War Office, who alerted all police stations and fire brigades, but no general warning was given to the public. One reason for this was that many people, on hearing the air raid warning would rush out into the streets to watch 'the sights'.

In two groups the raiders flew on over Essex. At 11.20 am the right wing passed over Brentwood, the left wing over Upminster. By this time every gun in the path of the raiders opened fire. Barking was the first to feel the weight of bombs, next East Ham, where five people were killed, and fifteen injured. The Royal Docks were next, with eight dockers killed and many injured.

The two wings now came together and headed for the City of London. The A A guns at Blackwall fired five rounds, then jammed, and the Gothas flew on unscathed. Below them, the whole of London was basking in the warm

sunshine. Seventy-five bombs were dropped within a radius of one mile of the City. Three bombs hit Liverpool Street station, causing a train to catch fire. Fifteen people were killed, many injured by flying glass from the glass roof of the station. One bomb landed in Fenchurch Street, where fifteen people were killed. The Royal Mint was hit and many of its workers injured. A bomb landed on the pavement in Aldgate High Street, killing twelve and injuring a further twenty people. A school in Hoxton received a direct hit from a bomb which penetrated three floors of the building, before coming to rest in the basement, where it failed to explode. The school was full of children at the time, a very lucky escape indeed. Many of the victims in Fenchurch Street were killed when they ran out into the street to watch the gunfire. The buildings from which they emerged were not damaged. Most of the victims at Aldgate were on a passing bus, one of whom was an inmate of Bow Institution, having a day out. The victims at the Royal Mint were standing on the roof of the Mint watching the raiders when it was hit.

After bombing the Liverpool Street area the enemy aircraft split into two groups. Six Gothas flew across the Thames near Tower Bridge and attacked the railway stations in the Southwark district. The warehouses along the river took the brunt of the bomb blasts, setting them on fire, and heavy smoke was seen rising into the clear skies.

The second wing of Gothas headed north to attack rail targets in Dalston, then turned south again to join the others. As they neared the Thames, the Gothas passed over Poplar. In this borough one 110 pound bomb struck the Upper North Street School, where around 600 pupils were attending lessons. The bomb, falling from the south east, struck a corner of the roof of the Girls Department, causing it to break into two. It did not explode immediately, but killed one pupil, and cut off the foot of another, on its path downwards. It then passed

through one of the boys' classrooms into the Infants Department, where it exploded.

The Infants classroom E was divided by a partition into two sections. At the time of the raid fifty four children were present in the combined rooms being supervised by two teachers, Miss Watkins and Mrs Middleton. Fortunately, the strength of the partition saved the lives of those in Miss Watkins section, but all the children in Mrs Middleton's class were fatally injured. Mrs Middleton, who happened to be standing in a corner of the room, survived. Mrs Watkins stated that there were two hundred and sixty children on the Infants School roll. She said they heard the sound of the bombs, but they continued with their work, until there was a terrific noise, sudden darkness, and strong fumes and a lot of white powder which floated about the room. She thought the school was collapsing, but on seeing a gleam of light from the corridor, managed to escort all her children out. All were injured and needed attention. She then assisted Mrs Middleton, carrying out four children, and helping three boys who had fallen from the floor above into the crater.



Mrs Ely, another teacher spoke of the courage and devotion of the teachers, and especially of the school-keeper, Mr Batt, who had the terrible experience of discovering his own son, aged six, among the debris. She said she found the children coming out covered in soot and red powder. There were fifty four scholars in Room E, and only two had not been accounted for. Another teacher Miss Tiejjen stated that the Attendance register was blown out of the

window by the rush of air, and was found subsequently on the roof of a neighbouring shed. Unfortunately, this register does not appear to have survived, and seems to have been inadvertently destroyed.



Kaiser Wilhelm II was so pleased with the success of this raid on London that he commanded the two leaders of the flight to be presented to him at his headquarters in southern Germany. On the day after the attack, Squadron Commander Hauptmann Ernst Brandenburg, and Von Trotha, his chief pilot, took off in a small plane enroute to the Kaiser's Headquarters, with Von Trotha as pilot. Brandenburg gave the Kaiser a detailed report of the attack, explaining that the raid had been a complete success and that a number of military targets had been hit including docks and railways. The Kaiser then awarded Brandenburg the 'Pour Le Merite' (The Blue Max). At dawn the next morning the two men took off on their return flight to their base in Belgium. At a height of 300 feet the engine failed, and the plane crashed, killing Von Trotha and leaving Brandenburg so badly injured that he never flew again. After the War, Brandenburg was one of the founders of Lufthansa, which in the 1920s was used as cover to train military pilots for the Luftwaffe. Brandenburg died in Berlin in 1952.

When the British government protested about the bombing of women and children, the German government replied that they held the British government responsible for their deaths, as the Germans regarded London as a fortress containing munitions works, military

installations and defended by heavy guns. It was also the nerve centre of the war against Germany. They advised the British government to remove all civilians from London.

The Children

William Thomas Challen, aged 5 years
 Vera M Clayson, aged 5 years
 Elizabeth Taylor, aged 5 years
 Louisa Ann Acampora, aged 5 years
 Grace Jones, aged 5 years
 Robert Stimson, aged 5 years
 William Hollis, aged 4 years
 George E Morris, aged 6 years
 George Albert Hyde, aged 5 years
 Alice Maude Cross, aged 5 years
 Alfred E Batt, aged 5 years
 Leonard Charles Barford, aged 5 years
 Rose Tuffin, aged 5 years
 Edwin Powell, aged 12 years
 Frank Wingfield, aged 5 years
 Rose Marlin, aged 10 years
 Florence Lilian Woods, aged 5 years
 John Percy Brennan, aged 5 years.



John Percy Brennan

Of the eighteen children who died as a result of the bomb, five died instantly from skull fractures, eleven children were pronounced dead on 14th June, their injuries being mainly fractured skulls or crush injuries, and two children were pronounced dead on 15th June, as it took some time for all the children to be extricated from the rubble.

One little girl Rose Symmons was rescued three days after the explosion. Her brother Jimmy refused to leave the school or give up his search for his sister. She was eventually found alive, though badly injured, and made a good recovery.

The funeral service for the children was held at All Saints Church on 20th June 1917. Fifteen children were buried in a common grave in East London cemetery, Plaistow, and a sixteenth coffin with unidentified remains was also buried with them. Three of the children were buried privately, including John Percy Brennan. Three years later, on 13th June 1920 a memorial was unveiled in Poplar Recreation Park by the Mayor, Alderman Sam March. It stands there, in the grounds of the park, a mute reminder of the tragedy.

(I am indebted to John Harris for his enthusiastic and exhaustive research into the background of the bombing of Upper North Street School. We had in mind a publication, and were collecting source material, photographs and interviews with Poplar residents. Unfortunately, other projects were given precedence, and sadly John's untimely death caused the project to be shelved.)

Rosemary Taylor

Eyewitness Account of Upper North Street School Bombing by Frederick Pepper:

I was born in Cotton Street, Poplar and my family moved to South East Row, a row of cottages in Upper North Street, Poplar, facing Pekin Street.

At the outbreak of the First World War my father went to France as he was a Militia Man. I was 7 years old, my brother Albert 3 years, Alex 1 year old. My Aunt Lizzie lived in the same row of cottages with my cousins Elizabeth and Maggie. My Mother and my Aunt went to work at wine vaults at the Minories at Aldgate. Times were very hard. My Mother and Aunt went to work at 7 am.

I used to take Albert to school at Upper North Street Poplar. You could start school at 3 years at that time. My younger brother and cousin were looked after by a neighbour. Food was not rationed and I would have to go out at 5 am and queue for sometimes 3 hours or longer to buy 2 lb potatoes, sometimes at Chrisp Street or Salmon Lane for 1d of condensed milk or pennyworth of plum jam in a cup, sometimes 7 lb of coal at Mrs Long's at the corner of Grundy Street. I used to go and get a loaf of bread for tuppence at John Blunts (?) the German baker at Canton Street, and he always gave a piece of mince or a crust as overweight. A couple of weeks after the outbreak of the war the police took the German people away. The people started to smash the windows and doors of their shops and looted their furniture. I and other children watched. When the Zeppelins started dropping their bombs, the Maroons would fire and the police would ride around on their bikes with a board hung on them telling people to take cover and blow their whistles. The guns would fire and the searchlights would sometimes get the Zeppelins in their beams. My Mother, Aunt, brothers and cousins would all get under the stairs. Later the people were told it was

safer to go into church vaults or the Blackwall Tunnel under the river section.

At first we went into the Board of Guardians building at Gough Street. I remember the Mayor of Poplar, Sam March, Will Crooks and George Lansbury coming to visit the people and children and talk to them. During the night sometimes the welfare workers would give us a cup of cocoa or soup. In the mornings other boys and myself would go and dig pieces of shrapnel out of the wooden blocks and swap at school for other things.

In 1916 my brother Alex and Cousin Lizzie started school. On Wednesday 13th June 1917 we went to school. I was in Mr Denman's class (the Headmaster). At about ten to twelve we heard the air raid warning and the sound of the German planes. Suddenly there was a terrible explosion and dust everywhere. It seemed to be coloured. I climbed over some desks to get out. I knew my brothers and my cousin were in the ground floor classroom. When I got out into the playground people and police were getting the children together. I found Albert and Alex but could not find Lizzie. A policeman took us home and my Mother and Aunt Lizzie came home. I heard somebody say workmen were clearing the debris to get the infants out. The next morning everybody had to go to the school for a roll call to find out if any more children were missing. Lots of children and myself were all coloured orange. The doctors told me it was the TNT in the bomb and it would wear off. My Mother told me that night that Lizzie had got killed and she and the neighbours asked me how I got out and what I remembered. I told them I saw the Headmaster standing up and calling us to stay where we were and then this crash came. I saw his white waistcoat he wore covered in red. I thought it was blood but I knew afterwards it was red ink from the inkwell that he used to mark our papers with. Where my school friend used to sit there was a large hole. I told them when I got out of the classroom I got into the service lift and lowered myself down to the ground floor. It was hand operated, and that's

how I was able to find my brothers. It was in later years I was told my Headmaster took his own life. It could have been because of the loss of his pupils. In the August after the bombing we were sent to a house at Bridport for a holiday. This was also a place where they used to serve tea and cakes. I remembered being told that the cakes were going missing and one day I found Alex behind the sofa eating some. After that we were not allowed near the shop part of the house.

Eye Witness - The Bombing of Upper North Street School

Interview with Agnes Hill (aged 88) –
Wednesday 20th May 1992:

The whole thing is very clear in my mind when it happened, the whole hour that it took place, is very clear in my mind. I was thirteen, (I was almost thirteen – I went in for the board of trade test and left school the day I was thirteen, and the bombing was just about three weeks before that. So I left school soon after that. The war was on, so I left school and got a job which was my idea of helping in those days.

We lived in Suffolk Street, a turning off Upper North Street. It was the shortest street in the area. There were six shops which made the length of the street.

But from the actual bombing period, I can't ever forget that. Often at night when I'm awake it comes back to my mind. I think the memory and the horrible shock attached to it makes a mark that never goes away. My sister went into a terrible turn, she got St Vitus's Dance, you see she was actually in the room when it was bombed, blown up, bounced up, she wasn't injured but within five days she got St Vitus's Dance which lasted for over a year.

We'd gone swimming that Wednesday, and we'd come back and we hadn't been back ten minutes or a quarter of an hour when we heard thee bang-bang-bangs going up in the sky and

before you knew where you were this crash of our ceiling, that's what it sounded like, right through the building. You heard the shrieks of the smaller children, the girls on the top you see, they were the youngest of each group. They were the five year olds, and then the nine year olds, I don't think there was anyone over eleven years old that was killed.

In those days the church that was in the main road had a very nice garden that led on to the back of our school, so we had a nice view. I can visualize it all the time, nothing will ever go away from me. Me and another girl, we had been swimming and when we came back, they had had a painting lesson, and I suppose they were a bit fed up what we had been swimming. So the teacher said: Take them paint things and wash them all up and bring them back. And then pop, pop, pop, and then Bang! They were funny little things in the sky, three little planes in the sky, they were a bit different from ours. We were in the cloakroom and the bomb dropped on that side, and we hadn't realised that the bomb had gone off, and we heard the crash and the children scream. We were between two classrooms, where the cloakrooms were. We could see it, because it was all glass. It was a very old fashioned school. There was only glass between the classrooms. When we tried to get out we could look down and see all these children screaming, and these great big pieces of glass hanging about, it was an eerie feeling. Washing paint pots and then all at once all these bits of glass floating in the air, then broke away.

Of course, we didn't stop that long. We ran out to find our teachers, and the teachers were carrying the children out of their classes. One girl's father was manager of Lusty's Stores, her foot was taken off up to there (indicates knee), my boyfriend was killed, Billy Powell, he was killed. Several of the boys and infants, of course we didn't know the infants. The church gardens were at the back of the school, there was only a pathway about three feet wide and then the church grounds. And of course

every teacher was saying, Go away, go down the stairs, go down the stairs, and we wanted to go in and see what ha happened.

The horror of it and the unbelief, that's what I was trying to think of. The unbelief. It couldn't be, you know that class was there and then it wasn't. And the next day they had put tarpaulin sheets over it. I don't know what any other child felt like but I felt it was wrong to go there and see. There wasn't such a bad crash on the top, you see it came through the roof, at an angle through the boys school, and then exploded in the infants class in the bottom. Some of them were three years old. The horror is gone now, but the memory still remains.

Mrs Prevost, she was in that class. Because of the war they had kept her on, you see the men had all gone and the women teachers were kept on. Mrs Cunningham, Mrs Mead and another teacher, a big stout lady. She was the teacher who carried, picked up the girl that had her foot, half her foot blown off. We had a first aid box in the other room and we ran and got the first aid box. And we got her into a classroom and tied her leg up as tightly as we could to stop the bleeding, but they had to take her away. Her father was the manager of Lustys Sawmills. I hear she did very well in the education word later on. She took up teaching, because they could fit an artificial leg. I don't know much about it, because I had to leave school later that month. I had passed the board of education exam, and I went back to school the next day, then on the Friday I had to go up for my leaving certificate. I was finished with the school. In a way I was thankful I didn't hae to go back to the school. My sister was nearly a year in and out of hospital before she went back to school, and there were several other children who also got St. Vitus's Dance.

The gas was downstairs in the children's room. They said the children turned a funny colour, but I don't know, I never saw anything, all I could see was mothers cuddling their children

and crying their eyes out. I never saw their faces to know whether they were bloodstained or gas burned. As the police were getting them out and giving them to the mothers, there was a covered area in the playground which had seats all around it. You see, there were no ambulances or anything there for at least half an hour. At least, that's what it seemed like to me, but it might have been the shock, it may not have been that long but it seemed like that to me.

After a bit they were taking a roll call for us as we went down the stairs. One of the teachers stood there. We were on the top floor. Nearly all the girls classes were on the top floor. There were five classes, on the ground floor, first floor and second floor. The Infants, then the boys and then the girls on top. There was a playground on the top but the boys were not allowed there. There was only a railing on the top, and any adventurous boy could have cocked his leg over the top. You see it never had a hall. Every school now has a hall, but that glass between the two classes, it folded back in three, so for any ceremony at the school they opened the glass back, it took two or three men to open it, for any big function. But when they rebuilt it they rebuilt it the same. They told me that it was the same, with the fold-up walls. Just occasionally once or twice it was opened up in my time. Like Empire Day. For drill and things like that we went out into the playground.

It was horrible when we got there to see what they were dragging out. They were lying them down in rows, and any woman that was there was trying to see if it was her child, looking at it. There was twenty-one not actually killed on the spot, but died within a day or two from injuries. But it was said that by the end of the year there wasn't one child from the babies class or the next class that was still alive. I suppose there would have been about twenty in each class.

I suppose it must have been a year by the time they got it built up again. Then you couldn't

see any ruins or anything. But by the cloakrooms where we used to wash all the paint pots, that was where the classroom was bombed. But I think some of the children used to wonder if any of the children were still lying there underneath the rubble. Children think funny things, but I never said anything to anyone. I often wondered, you know, what happened to this one and that one. I wonder if they found him, or what they looked like. Funny things came into your mind years after, because you didn't see it. I think it was worse, not letting us see anything, because not letting us see a tragedy was worse for us. If you don't work it out of your system it's there for years after. I didn't see what they looked like. The only one I'd seen was Annie Pittard, with her foot blown off. When I was younger, I found I would wake up in the morning wondering what so and so looked like, those who were killed in the bombing. It's not fair to children not to let us look at them, just to see two or three in their coffins. I mean, they were in the school, and some of them were found in the front of the church so it must have been a big explosion, they were found in the church grounds. Somehow, you're a coward at heart, and you don't want to go against things. But I did used to go to the park regularly and read all the names on the memorial. And remember them. It's something that if you are in it, you have to live with it until it subsides.

On the Monday morning I went and got a job in Nestles Chocolate factory. It was almost on the river bank, well down. It was a big factory, the biggest one in London. They turned out hundreds of chocolates. Later I got into St Andrews and trained as a nurse for two years. Then I got to work in Poplar Workhouse as an assistant nurse, for 4shillings and sixpence a week. Some of the finest nursing was done in my day. I was there for five years, before I went to St Matthews in the City. I did forty years of nursing.

Interview taped by Rosemary Taylor



The funeral procession of the children travelling down the East India Dock Road



The Angel Memorial in Poplar Park

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are always seeking to augment their store of information on the burials in the cemetery, and any history related to the area.

If you have information or memorabilia you would like to share or allow the FTHCP to copy, please contact friendsthcp@yahoo.co.uk or contact Diane Kendall c/o The Soanes Centre Southern Grove London E3 4PX.

Join Doreen and Diane Kendall and assist in recording monumental inscriptions in Tower Hamlets Cemetery on the second Sunday of each month, from 2-4 pm.

All volunteers welcome.

Latest developments

Sainsbury's application for permission to demolish its Whitechapel premises and replace them with a 28 storey tower block, that would loom over the Grade 1 listed Trinity Alms Houses, has been rejected by Tower Hamlets Council.

The Whitechapel Bell Foundry has cast its last bell (for the Museum of London). The manufacture of tower bells will continue at Newcastle under Lyme. It is hoped (expected?) that the Grade 2* listed buildings on Whitechapel Road will be sympathetically treated by their new owner. We eagerly await further news.