



Cockney Ancestor



Summer 2023

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The East of London Family History Society

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Front Cover Illustration

The Front cover illustration shows George Collier, Lottie, baby Arthur and an unknown woman taken in 1915. You can read about them in *The Collier Orphans* by Dawn Adams on page 20 of this magazine.

Image courtesy of Dawn Adams.

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In this Issue

Jesse Pound's London – Stepney Church...	Peter Holford.....	3
Horton Cemetery Project.....	Diane Gardner.....	5
The Cain Mystery, Part III – The Origins of the Cains.....	Peter Holford.....	8
Wonderful Wills.....	Susan Jarvis.....	12
Off The Rails.....	Madeline Seviour.....	13
August Rohwetter – The Missing Hairdresser – Part I.....	Martin Jordan.....	16
The Collier Orphans.....	Dawn Adams.....	20
Do You Know What Scumbling Is?.....	Sandra Davey.....	24
The Puddefoots of East London.....	Peter Morris.....	27
Our Cockney Ancestors.....	Sandra Davey	28
Report on the AGM 2023.....	Janet Seward.....	30
Submission of School Photos.....	Doug Andrews.....	32
The Reminiscences of An Ordinary Man – Part XIII	Reg Coleman.....	36
The Legacy.....	Peter Ferdinando.....	40
Miss Maie Rogers, Theatrical Costumier 1905 – 2003.....	Chris Langford.....	46
Message from the Membership Secretary.	Sue Waine.....	52
The Newham and Redbridge Connection..	Melissa Ford.....	53

Regular Features

Editorial.....	2	Recycling for CA.....	55
Writing for CA.....	2	Advertisement Rates.....	55
Post Box.....	15	Diary Dates.....	56

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Editorial

Well, our AGM 2023 is done and dusted and our Executive Committee have been re-elected. We had a very good day at the Ecology Pavilion, Mile End with about 60 people attending in person and 35 members via Zoom. You can read Janet Seward's report on page 30 of this magazine.

As stated in *CA178* the Treasurer's Report and Accounts are not being published in *Cockney Ancestor* but you can read them in full on our website or on the Charity Commissioners' website or you can request a copy from our Treasurer via his address on the inside cover of this magazine but please include a stamped addressed envelope for his reply.

I hope you have all had a look at our new look website. Bill Hughes, our webmaster, has put a lot of work into making it easier to negotiate and updating the membership area. All the previous *Cockney Ancestors* have been indexed and uploaded to the website, so you can now search for names, places and authors and articles.

It is still a work in progress but eventually we hope to have all the projects uploaded for members to look at and search.

Once you have entered the members area you can update your own profile, surname interests and check whether anyone else is researching the same names. Do take a look.

On page 52 of this magazine is a reminder from our Membership secretary about renewals. Sue does an amazing job, keeping our databases up-to-date so that we all get our magazines on time. It makes her job a lot easier if we all remember to renew on time. If you don't receive the latest CA it is probably because you have forgotten to renew!

Thank you to all of you who have submitted articles this year. I have received some very interesting articles and it is good to see new authors contributing. But please keep them coming, especially articles where you have conquered a brick wall, or have approached a problem a different way – it's always good to share. We also need centrespreads and cover pictures, but please submit them as jpg files. Someone out there must have photos of the 1953 coronation.

Editor

The Editorial Committee is a Sub-committee set up by the Executive.

Members are:

Vera Bangs (layout), Audrey Neal (article preparation), Brian McDonald (grammar and postbox), Tom Cannon (proof-reading) and Graham Keeler (photo editor).

Jesse Pound's London – Stepney Church

Peter Holford No.14359

Jesse: *I married, which was on Christmas Day 1813, in the old church at Stepney, being then eighteen years and nine months old.*

Jesse's bride, Sophia SALE, was even younger! She was just seventeen years and three months old. In his autobiography Jesse accepts that they were too young for marriage.



St Dunstan's, Stepney
Image courtesy of Peter Holford

It was a game of hazard played by two children, who ought to have been restrained therefrom by those having control over us, and interested in the future happiness of each. Our characters were unformed, for we neither knew what we did in taking this unadvised step, nor what we wanted.

The choice of St. Dunstan's, Stepney for the marriage is a puzzling one. Jesse was a native of Bethnal Green and attended Gibraltar Chapel. Sophia was one of a very large family.

Jesse says that her father was Richard Sale who was *then residing at Hackney Wick* (presumably with his wife and many children!). Sophia herself had been born and christened at Sevenoaks in Kent. It seems as though the Sale family may have moved around a lot. Jesse says that his father-in-law was working as a machinist at **LENY**

SMITH, Esq. who owned large mills there (Hackney Wick), for the manufacture of crape, and employed many hands therein in the varied departments. Mr Sale was foreman of the machinists and much respected and relied upon by his employer.

In 1813 Stepney Church still had a very rural setting. The map of 1799 shows the church building (black shape, top centre) surrounded by fields. To the south, next to the river, are the hamlets of Shadwell and Limehouse while the road at the top

leads to Mile End. The original parish area was huge and covered much of what is now the East End and, as the population grew, was eventually subdivided into twelve other parishes from Christchurch, Spitalfields in the west to All Saints, Poplar and St. Leonard, Bromley in the east.

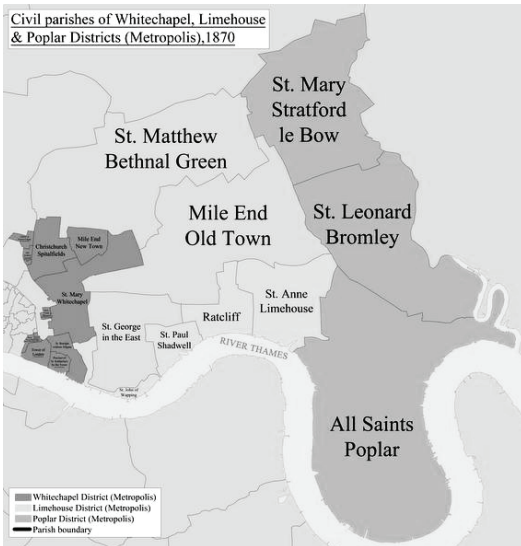
St. Dunstan's is now the parish church for Mile End Old Town.

The church is very ancient with the original church recorded here in the 10th century. The present church is the third on the site, dating from the 15th century but heavily restored in 1899. The churchyard is large but until the early 17th century it was much smaller. It was then enlarged due to several outbreaks of plague



1799 Map

Image courtesy of Peter Holford



Stepney Parish Map 1870
Image courtesy of Peter Holford

causing the death of very large numbers of the parishioners and the need to provide land on which they could be buried to prevent the further spread of the disease. Jesse and Sophia may have chosen Stepney Church to get married but it is the only time this church was used in the Pound and Holford families. An enigmatic choice indeed.

References

Wikipedia – St. Dunstan's, Stepney, parish
<https://alondoninheritance.com/london-churches/st.-dunstan-and-all-saints/>

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Horton Cemetery Project

Diane Gardner No. 6062



Horton Cemetery memorial stone situated outside private land
Image courtesy of Friends of Horton Cemetery www.hortoncemetery.org

Into my inbox dropped the latest East of London Family History Society newsletter. My main interest, along with the news, was what are the Zoom talks available to come and then what Zoom talks might I have missed? There was one that sounded really interesting, how had I missed it?

I duly tuned in and I am so glad I did. It was a really interesting talk about Horton Cemetery in Epsom. Although out of our area, Kevin **McDONNELL**, the speaker, explained the cemetery was used between 1899 to 1955 to bury the bodies of 9,000 unclaimed patients who had died in the Epsom Cluster of psychiatric

hospitals (<https://eehe.org.uk/?p=25027>). Many East Enders had been admitted to these hospitals as they had been built by London County Council for the care of patients from London Boroughs.

The main message from the talk was that their volunteer researchers were *Bringing forgotten and abandoned people buried in this cemetery 'back to life' and to briefly tell their stories in an attempt to protect their final resting place and give them the respect and care that they may not have experienced in life.* The protection was needed as the NHS had sold the cemetery to a developer in 1983.

My interest in social history along with women's place in it was piqued. I knew there were many reasons that women may have found themselves in an asylum, because of illnesses that were not fully understood at the time, epilepsy being one, post-partum conditions ie post-natal depression, later in life the menopause, dementia and, of course, the beloved plot of Victorian thriller writers, the rich wife who is *got rid of* and locked up as mad.

Men also, of course, found themselves as inmates. Along with epilepsy, there were the effects of shell shock after the WWI, and workplaces were dangerous places without today's safety rules and many occupations involved using noxious substances. Mostly affecting men were also venereal diseases for which a treatment had yet to be found. An illness where the symptoms including personality changes, hallucinations, incontinence, and seizures, that could only be managed, not cured.

As I was going through a dry period with my own family history it seemed the perfect project for the upcoming winter of high-cost heating bills, I could do the research in the warm at the local library, or at home in my box-room office just heating the one room.

Keen to find out more, I contacted Gary who was kind enough to pass on my email and details to Kevin, who contacted me with the introductions to the scheme. He explained that, in most cases, asylum records had been lost or destroyed and initially (as Covid had closed all the physical archives) all their researchers had to work with was the information transcribed from *Horton Cemetery Burial records, the UK Lunacy Asylum Register* (which gives the person's name, date of entry to the asylum system, the name of the asylum, and date of death) and the usual online resources such as censuses, birth, marriage & death records etc.

Not knowing where each person was born, because although these people were admitted to these asylums mostly from London Boroughs doesn't necessarily mean that they were born in London. Also, initially without access to hospital records, it was not possible to know whether a woman's name was her maiden name or married name. There was not much starting information from which to recreate a whole life. Along with the Epsom Cluster of psychiatric hospitals there are other similar cemetery sites that have mysteries to be solved. One such was *Cane Hill Asylum*, south of Croydon, which had also shut down and where the

graveyard had already been cleared of bodies. Kevin sent me the names of twenty people from the *Cane Hill Asylum registry*, all of whom had died in the first few months of 1901.

Using my membership of various family history sites, I tentatively entered one of the more unusual names from the list along with the known date of death and immediately up popped the death certificate and adding this information to the search engine it then turned up the entry to *the UK Lunacy Asylum Registry*, so here she was, a presence. Now to build her life-story. Good research states that information should be verified by at least three other sources before being accepted as fact, was I going to be able to find enough documents to be able to do this? As in all family history research an unusual name or aspect of your subject helps and in this instance her name was reasonably unusual. It turned out she, along with her brothers and sisters were born, baptised, and confirmed, as Roman Catholics, in France and their names entered into the UK, *Foreign and Overseas Registers of British Subjects*, 1628–1969. This information was apparent on all her and her family's census records, so I was able to follow the family through the years and construct a private family tree on *Ancestry*, going up one generation to her parents and down several generations to try and understand the dynamics of the family as a whole. I wanted to understand why our subject might not only have entered the asylum but also why her body was buried in the cemetery there and not claimed by her family.

There are several family trees on *Ancestry* that had her on their tree but not one mentioned her death in the asylum, did they know? Her story has now been submitted for peer review before publication and when signed off will appear on the Horton Cemetery website alongside the other people who have been brought *back to life*.

Many of our East End families had people in workhouses and asylums and the asylums were often in Surrey. Kevin's project on researching Horton Cemetery in Epsom is now two and a half-years-old and we are starting a similar project for Cane Hill Hospital cemetery near Coulsdon, this cemetery is now covered in housing.

We would like to start projects on other psychiatric hospital cemeteries in which people from the East End died and were buried, and in most cases forgotten. If you would like more information and are interested in volunteering as a researcher, you will be welcomed with open arms. Please contact Kevin at *hortoncemetery@gmail.com* .

Footnotes:

<https://hortoncemetery.org/>

<https://hortoncemetery.org/horton-cemetery-stories/>

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The Cain Mystery, Part III–The Origin of the Cains

Peter Holford No.14359

In part one I traced my great-grandmother, Elizabeth **KAIN** in Shoreditch and discovered her mother, also Elizabeth **CAIN**. In part two I found through DNA matching, the Cain family of Poplar and discovered the link between the two sets of records in Shoreditch and Poplar. Now to work out where this family came from.

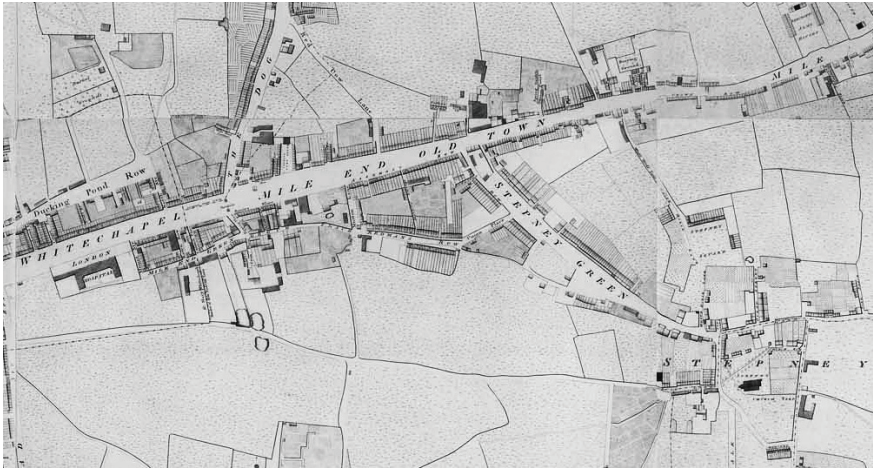
The DNA connections confirm that Elizabeth was born near to her extended family in Poplar. The problem had been connecting the Kains of Shoreditch to the Cains of Poplar. The difference in spelling has been shown by DNA to be irrelevant; they are the same extended family. Most of the Cain men in Poplar seem to have been mariners, shipwrights or labourers. Some of the descendants are resident in subsequent censuses on Grundy Street itself where Elizabeth was



Poplar Map 1703
Image courtesy of Peter Holford

born. I can now trace my ancestry back to Joseph Cain and Amelia Ann **HILL** of Mile End Old Town who are my 4 x great-grandparents.

They were married at St Dunstan's in 1775. At that time there were very few houses; just linear developments along Mile End Old Town and Stepney Green with a small cluster of houses around the church. Unbelievably to those who



Horwood's Map 1799
Image courtesy of Peter Holford

know it now, the rest was just fields stretching towards the river where there were wharves, rope walks, timber yards and a few rows of houses. This is Horwood's map of 1799. The black shape in the bottom right of the map is St Dunstan's, Stepney, located in its large churchyard at the southern end of the hamlet of Stepney. The map is dominated by open spaces.

Joseph Cain and Ann **SMITH** were my 3 x great-grandparents. They were married in Stepney in 1809. Joseph was recorded as being a mariner. This was a great discovery because of the family tales of an ancestor being lost at sea. Also Poplar was an obvious location for all those earning their living from boats and ships. Subsequent generations saw Cain family members who were shipwrights, waterman and more mariners.

Joseph was probably born around 1785 and so I searched for a record of his birth and death. I failed to find a birth record but discovered two possible death records. I knew that he died young because the marriage record of his son, William, in 1837 recorded him as 'deceased'. I found two possible deaths for Joseph Kain around that time. The first occurred on a boat called the *Morley* which was transporting convicts to Australia. But Joseph Kain wasn't one of the sailors; he was a convict. His death is described in some detail – bilious attack with cough, foul tongue, pains in the head, etc. He died 11 Jan 1828. The cause of death was whooping cough. We can be sure of this because it was the *Morley's* fifth voyage to Australia and it was notorious as the one that introduced whooping cough to Australia, killing multiple people including the son of the governor.

But the more prosaic option is probably the correct one; the Joseph Cain who was buried at All Saint's Poplar at the end of May 1829. He was 39. At first sight that appears to be very young but, of the sixteen people buried in the last two weeks of that month, he was the second oldest. Life expectancy must have been very low in an environment of ships' trades, poor housing and low-lying land near to the river.

Ann was now a widow having had nine children. But at least the three eldest boys were now of working age. The decision to relocate the family to Shoreditch was taken at some point between 1830 and 1839. Her granddaughter, Elizabeth was born on Grundy Street, Poplar in 1838 but two of the boys were married at St Leonard's in 1837 and 1841. But they can't be found in the 1841 census possibly because they too were mariners. For Ann and other members of the family the proximity of the city meant more chance of employment even if it was low wage work like washing clothes.

So where did the Cains come from originally? Perhaps the first Cains in Stepney came on ships into the quays at Limehouse and Shadwell in the 18th century or earlier. There are Cains being baptised in Stepney from at least the 1690s. There is no way of being certain but the circumstantial evidence says that they arrived on the lower Thames as mariners. The name originates in Ireland and other Irish names crop up in the Cain story. Joseph Cain, jnr. married Margaret **McBRIDE** who was born in Cork in 1813, and names like **McNAB** and **O'NEILL** married into the Cain family. There is also a Mr **SHEA** who is a witness at one of the marriages. And like most immigrants to London, the Cain family gravitated towards the city from the port. But the DNA inheritance poses a conundrum. The Cains are my dad's ancestors and I have a strong DNA inheritance from the Cain family. But I haven't inherited any Irish DNA from my dad. What he passed on to me is mostly English and North European DNA with a large chunk of Scandinavian genes according to *Ancestry*. So, the Cains can't be of Irish origin! Back to the drawing board – the origin of the Cains remains as elusive as ever but at least their history has now been rolled back another 150 years!

Conclusions

Once again *AncestryDNA*, with its large databases has provided the breakthrough and its tool, *Thrulines*, that matches different family trees, has worked superbly. But it requires fully researched family trees that can be matched to each other. Too often people with close DNA matches have no family tree and it is impossible to make this sort of breakthrough. For example my closest DNA match on *Ancestry* (322cM) is proving to be a total mystery. She is probably a second cousin and

her ethnicity intriguingly includes a large portion of Bantu and Xhosa (Black African) DNA. But she doesn't have a family tree and doesn't respond to any of our family messages. I can respect that; there may well be valid reasons for wanting privacy. Not everyone takes a DNA test to explore their family history or to be pestered by distant cousins. There are other things in life!

Despite having a number of Henry or Harry Cains in my tree I know I won't be closely related to that Harry Kane (another spelling variation); his grandad came from Ireland. And of course, there will be no link to Michael **CAINE** who was born Maurice **MICKLEWHITE**.

Knocking down the Cain brick wall has shown me again that lateral thinking can make a difference. It took me many years in this case to stop looking for the baptism record of Elizabeth Cain senior and to look around at possibilities in her extended family to build a more complete picture and find the clues. Perhaps I'm a slow learner! It seems that Elizabeth Kain (mother) had a chaotic life. She had her daughter Elizabeth at the age of just 16 as an unmarried mother. That was in an age where it would have carried huge social consequences. The biological father, William **CADMAN**, was a married man of 33 with a large family (see CA168). We can only guess the circumstances behind that 'relationship'. None of the possibilities seem to put Cadman in a good light. With a young daughter, Elizabeth probably grasped at any domestic security that came her way. The information on the birth certificate of her son James **UPTON** suggests she lived with a Mr **DICK** for a bit before meeting John Upton.

This investigation has also confirmed the value of taking on board a piece of dubious and sketchy family history. It has been proven to be partly correct despite my doubts.

Elizabeth did become an orphan and she was brought up by her grandmother. And she did have a (half) brother called James Upton. But the stories of 'sea captains' and 'drowned at sea' have been proven to be a fabrication to conceal a very difficult upbringing in the slums of Shoreditch. And it worked.

Elizabeth (the daughter) was a survivor, probably with the support and nurturing of her grandmother. She eventually found her security with James **HOLFORD** and the couple lived for over thirty years on Lamb Lane, Hackney where they raised eleven children. Husband James would not have known the truth. I doubt that Elizabeth herself knew the truth. The only person who did was grandma Ann and she would have taken the story to her grave secure in the knowledge that nobody would ever find out.

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Wonderful Wills

Susan Jarvis No. 8490

When Mary **WHARHAM**, widow, of Shadwell, made her will in 1762 I doubt she would have thought that 250 years later a descendant would find it a mine of information.

Mary was born in 1695 to Thomas **JOPLING**, tobacconist of Wapping Wall and his wife Elizabeth, and she married William Wharham, a distiller in Wapping at the church of St. Paul, Shadwell in 1717.

Her will was quite short but it named her only daughter, Elizabeth, who was married to John **SHEPPARD**, mastmaker of Wapping Wall, and her five grandchildren, James, Mary, Thomas, Elizabeth and John, all of whom received some money and silver items. She asked to be buried with her relatives in the Parish churchyard of Shadwell.

But perhaps the most fascinating sentence was the bequest to son-in-law John and daughter Elizabeth of 'all my share in a farmhouse and ground lying or being in the County of Durham known by the name of *Landew*'. A search for *Landew* on Google brought up a book published in 1929 by Brigadier-General H. Conyers **SURTEES** called 'The History of the Parish of Wolsingham' which had a section on *Landew* (or *Landieu*) which included a family tree of the Jopling family and the information that Mary Wharham was niece and heir at law of William Jopling, who was son of Arthur Jopling of Landew.

I was able to obtain a copy of William Jopling's will from Durham University Library, and with it came copies of letters between the officers of the Bishops of London and Durham regarding the grant of probate, and also a bond signed by Mary Wharham and her son-in-law John Sheppard, which cost them £100, an enormous sum in 1755.

This information sent me back another couple of generations, and on *Ancestry* I found an indenture dated February 3, 1684 for Thomas Jopling, son of Arthur Jopling of Landew, Durham to be apprenticed to a clothworker in London. However, he became a 'tobacconist'. I found that his older brother, Ralph, went to Virginia to grow tobacco, so is that why Thomas was selling it?

To return to Landew, I would love to know if any of the Shadwell family ever went all the way to Durham to see it. In his will, proved in 1794, John Sheppard, now 'gentleman of Stratford, Essex', directed his executors to sell his property in

Durham. Thomas **DYKES**, Attorney of Shadwell, placed an advertisement in the *Times* on 5 July 1797 for the sale at **GARRAWAYS**.

I have several other ancestors who lived in Shadwell in the 1700s who also left informative wills, but I think Mary Wharham's has proved the most interesting so far.

Sources

Ancestry Wills

LMA records on *Ancestry*

PDF file of transcript of *The History of the Parish of Wolsingham* by Brigadier-General H. Conyers Surtees (1929) on www.fivenine.co.uk

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Off The Rails

Madeline Seviour No. 14195

The recent release of new records on the 'Railway Work, Life and Death' project of the University of Portsmouth and the National Railway Museum in York reminded me of two incidents in which members of my family were involved.

My great-grandfather, James William **BOATWRIGHT** (1865–1962), was an engine driver with the Great Eastern Railway, retiring around 1930. He lived to the age of 97. I was 14 when he died and remember him telling many stories of his life on the railway, but I don't recall this one. Maybe he was too traumatised to speak of it, more than sixty years later.

This fatal accident was reported in the *Chelmsford Chronicle* on 23 June 1893. James was fireman on the Liverpool Street to Southend express—referred to as the 'down train'. The accident occurred at Squirrels Heath, near Romford. The express, travelling at around 50 mph, was approaching a gang of platelayers on the line. The driver, Charles **HINES**, said that he 'blew the whistle strongly'. In answer to a question, he said that there was nothing in the regulations requiring him to do so.

At the critical moment a train was approaching from the other direction but, according to the testimony of George **HARDING**, one of the platelayers, this

train did not sound a whistle. This train (the ‘up’ train) unfortunately reached the platelayers first – the foreman, William **RUSH**, having heard one whistle and assuming it to be that of the ‘up’ train, stepped into the path of the express and was killed instantly.

The crew of the express are unlikely to have felt the impact, but driver Hines thought that something was wrong and so pulled up at Harold Wood Station, where he found blood and hair on the buffer beam.

James William Boatwright gave evidence (not recorded in the newspaper report), after which the coroner exonerated driver and fireman of any blame, and gave a verdict of Accidental Death.

An earlier accident involved James William’s father, James Boatwright (1824 – 1908). He was Station Master at Hertford from 1860 to 1893, when he retired and went to live at Bexhill-on-Sea. He became a prominent member of the local community and when he died received a fulsome obituary in the *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 17 October 1908. This must have been re-printed in the Hertfordshire papers as it produced a response from Harry P. **POLLARD** of Watford which appeared in the *Bexhill Observer* on 7 November 1908.

According to Mr. Pollard, the incident occurred in July 1868, when three goods trains collided in a tunnel at Welwyn, halting trains on the Great Northern and Midland main lines. James Boatwright was put in charge of managing the process of diverting rail traffic via Hertford. This involved sending trains along a single-line track. Apparently, he sent trains off from Hatfield in batches of six, at five-minute intervals, each driver being instructed to ‘keep a sharp lookout’ for the back of the train in front! When all six had arrived at Hertford he sent off six in the opposite direction in the same manner.

Mr. Pollard added that this situation persisted for nearly three weeks without a hitch, apart from one minor mishap. A trainload of fish had been left standing for some hours in the hot July sun and, not surprisingly, when discovered was well past its best!

I did some research into this story and found that the accident actually occurred two years earlier, in 1866. It was true that three goods trains had collided inside the Welwyn tunnel, but the blockage was cleared and the line re-opened within a couple of days. Mr. Pollard might be forgiven if he ‘improved’ the story, but he was recalling something that had happened more than forty years before, and the fish wouldn’t have survived whether it was three days or three weeks.

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Post Box

The Editor reserves the right to edit letters due to space considerations.



Valerie Perkins (14662) says that, amongst her late father's effects, she has come across a small medal, 1½ x 1 inches in size. On the back is engraved his name and 'The Trill Cup 1932'. He would have been 13 years old then. Valerie wants to know if anyone has any idea what the Trill Cup was awarded for; could it be boxing or swimming which she knows her father did around that time. He was living in the St Pancras area of London and he also attended Hawkshill boys summer camps which she believes were near Walmer in Kent. Could it be from there? Valerie has tried the Kent FHS but nobody there knew the answer. Any information or links would be much appreciated. (val.dogface@outlook.com)

Peter Holford (14359) had the following reply from Kevin Herridge who now lives in New Orleans, after the publication of his article about George Holford.

I saw your article in *Cockney Ancestor* and thought I would try and help you out as I live in New Orleans. I am from Romford, Essex, and have been here for 30 years, I noticed a couple of minor errors in the article—Poet Street should be spelled Poets Street and Bernard de Marginy should be Marigny. George Holford—a difficult man to track down! But, I did find this in the *New Orleans Daily Crescent* of Oct. 20, 1859: List of letters remaining at the Post Office up to Friday, Oct. 28th, 1859—Gentlemen's list: Holford, Geo. There was another George Holford who died in the Civil War in 1863, and another who murdered his wife then committed suicide in Illinois in 1886. Much more interesting stories but not your George, alas. *The Times Picayune* of March 27, 1872: Screwman's Benevolent Association—At the regular meeting of the above association held Monday evening, 25th inst., the following officers were elected to serve for the remainder of the present year (1872)—George Holford. There are several explanations of a screwman's job but as he was in New Orleans, I think this one is favourite: one who loads bales of cotton onto a river boat.

August Rohwetter - The Missing Hairdresser - Part I

Martin Jordan No. 15434



August and Eleanor Rohwetter
Image courtesy of Martin Jordan

Like many members I began my family history search in the pre-computer days of the 1980s, starting with a little information from my father including the interesting detail that his grandfather, who he had never known, had been German. I joined the EoLFHS as member 1724 and from trips to St. Catherine's House and by ordering certificates I was able to tell him that August **ROHWETTER** had actually been born in London 8 November 1872, at 165 High Street, Poplar and was the son of migrants.

I also discovered that August's parents were Emil Rohwetter from Stettin, Germany although it is now Szczecin in Poland. His wife, Dorette, was from Bremen, Germany.

But August presented a mystery in that I could not find what had happened to him. He had married Eleanor **VINE** in July 1895 at Poole, Dorset and my grandmother, Dorette, was born 23 September 1900. He was shown on the 1901 census still at 165 High Street and on the electoral register there in 1903 and 1904.

But although his wife, Eleanor, remarried as a widow in December 1910, I could find no record of his death or indeed any other reference to him after 1904. The search was hindered by the name Rohwetter often appearing incorrectly on documents. From contact with members of the Vine family also carrying

out family history research, I found that they too had hit the same wall. The mystery remained for almost 40 years during which I searched on websites such as *Ancestry*, *Findmypast* and others, using wildcard characters in the hope of finding information under a misspelling of Rohwetter, but nothing came to light.

Lockdown brought a new focus and my knowledge of the Rohwetter family in England became much greater as I learned the story of two German immigrants arriving in London in the 1860s.

My ancestors appear in the 1871 census as Emil and Dorette Rohwetter living at 38 Forest Street, Forest Gate with their 2-year-old daughter, Wilhelmina A M Rohwetter.

They had married 29 October 1867 at Emmanuel Church, Forest Gate, their address given at that time as 22 Forest Street, Forest Gate.

On their marriage certificate, Emil's father, Friedrich Wilhelm Rohwetter, is shown as an organ builder whilst Dorette's father was August Ferdinand **LOTZE**, a butcher.

Emil was born 14 August 1841 and his christening as Emil Gustav Adolph Rohwetter took place 17 October 1841 in Sankt Marien, Stettin Stadt, Pommern, Prussia. His parents are recorded as Friedrich Wilhelm Rohwetter and Sophie Marie **VON DER DELL**.

Emil is shown in the 1871 and 1874 *Essex trade directories* under *Hairdressers* at Forest Gate and then in an 1875 directory as a hairdresser at 165 High Street, Poplar. I will cover the full story of the Rohwetters and their six children in Part II of their story.

In the search for August, I came across a curious snippet in *The East London Observer* of 9 January 1904, a casual comment on the bottom corner of page 7, records that *Aqua Fortis*, kept for curing customers' wart and bunions was the poison by which a Poplar hairdresser committed suicide.

No name or any further details are given but could this have referred to August? I went back online looking at deaths around that time in Poplar using all variations of his name, but nothing came to light and there was no reporting of the details or inquest into the suicide.

I also found that August and Eleanor had two other children apart from my grandmother. My father had not known of either of them and both are very sad. Richard Rohwetter was born and died in December 1896, with the registration of both taking place in Southampton.

Ivy Lillian Rohwetter was born 9 November 1901, 14 months after my grandmother. But she was admitted to the Poplar workhouse and then discharged at least five times between 1904 and 1907. She was just two and a half at the time of the first admittance in May 1904.

The last workhouse record sheet records that Ivy was finally discharged to *Tooting Bec*. This probably refers to Tooting Bec Asylum, a hospital erected by



Frederick Charles Robertson, Cecilia and their son
Image courtesy of Martin Jordan

the *Metropolitan Asylums Board* to supplement existing institutions including one at Leavesden, Hertfordshire.

Ivy died 1 February 1922 in Leavesden Mental Hospital, Watford aged 19. The cause of death was influenza pneumonia.

So, August disappeared around the time that his second daughter went into a workhouse. This seemed significant but what does it mean?

Around Christmas 2020 I decided to take a DNA test, out of interest for what it would tell of my genetic make-up and any connections that would come to light. When the results were received, the closest connection was shown as Tony **BAKER**; this was not a surname that I had any knowledge of. I sent a message via *Ancestry* and will never forget reading the response a few days later.

My DNA connection's grandfather was one Frederick **ROBERTSON**, a widowed hairdresser who, at 41, had married 17-year-old Cecilia **SPRY** in Portsmouth in 1913.

His grandson knew that Frederick was of German descent, that he had changed his name and had also been known as Auguste. They had been searching in vain for a birth record of Frederick Robertson whilst I was searching for a death record

for August. It all seemed clear, August Lotze Rohwetter and Frederick Charles Robertson were one and the same person, DNA can't lie, can it?

I then received a photo of Frederick from his grandson, it showed him standing outside his barber's shop in Twyford Avenue, Portsmouth with his wife and son. I then found a photo of August with his wife Eleanor. Definitely the same man!

I learned that Frederick had been required to report to a police station during WWI because of his German connections and it was believed that is why he had changed his name. He had a daughter and son by Cecilia, the daughter Margery being born in March 1928, just one month before his grandson, my father, was born. August appears as Frederick Robertson in the 1911 census as a hairdresser boarding in Liphook, Hampshire. He later met Cecilia whilst he was a boarder elsewhere, where she was in service. Frederick remained married to Cecilia until his death in 1939, his first wife Eleanor died in 1947.

So, we now know that August Rohwetter absconded around 1904, possibly after seeking to fake his death by suicide, and lived his new life as Frederick Robertson until he died in 1939.

He appears to have escaped detection for over a century until 2020, when I spat into a tube, posted it and all was revealed.

Questions still remain though.

August had four adult siblings, one of which he seemed close to as she also lived and married in Poole. His eldest sister was a witness at his daughter Dorette's wedding in 1923. Did either of them know he was still alive?

My father had spoken of whispering amongst relatives when his grandfather was mentioned; perhaps his new life was known or suspected.

Did August know of my father's birth in April 1928 or of poor Ivy Lilian's death in 1922?

August knew that he was committing bigamy when he remarried but did Eleanor know that she was, when she married three years earlier? Her second husband Billy MITCHELL died in a docks accident in 1912.

Sadly, I was never able to tell my father that I had found August and he also never knew about his aunt, Ivy Lillian.

I have become closer to my Germanic relatives through researching the family.

One of the things that had fascinated me was that although the original migrants had six children, there was no one to carry on the name, after August became a Robertson.

I have not found any other family by that name in the UK although there are Rohwetter families in the USA as well as Germany. I will tell the story of the rest of the family in part II.

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The Collier Orphans

Dawn Adams No. 8923

When George **COLLIER** joined up for the war 12 September 1914 in Shoreditch, he was 38-years-old, had a steady job on the railway as a checker and had been married to my great-aunt, Ann Charlotte **DORRELL**, since 25 December 1902. They lived at 16 Laburnum St, off Kingsland Road and had five children: George Thomas Tugela Alfred, 10; John William, 9; Thomas Alfred, 7; Edith, 3; and Arthur, 6-months-old.

George wasn't conscripted, that didn't come in until 1916 and, in any case, married men with children were not called. But he had spent some time in the Royal West Kent Regiment before his marriage, signing on as a militiaman when he was 17, and that was the Regiment he re-joined, in the Special Reserve ⁽¹⁾. And we must not allow ourselves to be too swayed by the war poets and by *Blackadder* in our views of why ordinary men went to war ⁽²⁾.

After attesting in September, George joined the Regiment on 30 December, was appointed a lance-corporal and sailed with the British Expeditionary Force on 17 April 1915. He had a photo taken before he left, with Ann Charlotte and his youngest son.

George died less than three weeks later, on 5 May 1915, following the 2nd Battle of Ypres, and is commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres, with those who have no known grave.

Six months later, Ann Charlotte (known to my father as 'Aunt Lottie') was notified that she had been awarded a pension of 27 shillings a week for herself and the five children. According to the National Archives currency converter, this was four days wages for a skilled tradesman at the time ⁽³⁾. The Bank of England inflation calculator says the goods she could buy with her 27 shillings might cost £105 in 2022 ⁽⁴⁾. It was probably just about enough to live on, at her then address, 144 Columbia Square.

But only two years later, on 10th July 1917, Lottie herself died, of TB, aged 40 (not of Spanish flu as I had thought). The informant was her mother, Mary Ann **BURTON**, whose life (and brief remarriage in Wales) I described in CA 174. The children were older, but not old enough, ranging between three and thirteen. Their grandmother was 63 and earned her living by brush making at home. Enter Miss Amy G.**WATSON** of St. Hilda's East, founded in 1889 as a charitable

enterprise by former pupils of Cheltenham Ladies' College, and still active today, based in Club Row, Bethnal Green ⁽⁵⁾.

A document in George's army service record notes that any personal effects, medals etc, which would previously have been sent to his widow should now be sent to his eldest son c/o Miss Watson at St Hilda's. It is annotated 'no effects' by an official, also 'no medal', but later in the file there are receipts for a 1914–15 Star and a Victory medal, both signed 'G Collier', dated 21 August 1920. George's memorial scroll was signed for by Mr G.T.T.A. Collier, receipt date stamped 15 Jan 1920. This document gives an address 'c/o Mrs M.A. Burton, 5 Meadow Dwellings'.

So were the children with their grandmother after all? Whenever a soldier died, his account was entered in a ledger showing effects and monies to be passed to his family. George's entry shows his war gratuity of £3 divided between Mary Ann Burton, guardian of his sons John and Thomas, and Miss Amy Gertrude Watson, guardian of George, Arthur and Edith. The 1921 census helps to identify where they went—and changes the story I touched on in my previous article.

George T.T.A. Collier joined the Royal Navy in July 1921 at the age of 17—I haven't yet found him in the census. He might indeed have gone to one of those naval training establishments for orphans as the family story had it—but then who signed for the medals and memorial scroll that were delivered to Meadow Dwellings in 1920? George's 12 year stint in the Royal Navy finished prematurely: after 6 years they decided his astigmatism was too severe for him



**Four Collier orphans with Granny Burton
after 1917**

Image courtesy of Dawn Adams

to be a successful sailor. At his wedding in Fulham on 27 May 1928, to Winifred **STANTON**, a 17 year old housemaid, his occupation was ‘waiter and valet’.

In 1921, George’s second son, John William Collier, aged 16, was living with his father’s youngest brother, James Francis Collier, in Pollard St, Bethnal Green. James Francis was 24, a railwayman recently married with a one-year-old daughter, Doris. John William worked as an artificial limb maker in Baker St. Two years later he married Marjorie **WILKINSON** in Bethnal Green and soon moved to Portsmouth where their family remained.

Thomas Alfred, 14, was at the Stoke Farm Reformatory in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, learning to be a boot repairer ⁽⁶⁾. Clearly he had been seen as ‘at risk’, or had already committed offences: I have not located him since.

That leaves Edith and Alfred, the two youngest, Miss Watson’s wards. Initially I could not find them in 1921. However, for twenty years, until her untimely death, I was fortunate to be in correspondence with Edith’s granddaughter: we shared our Dorrell research, reminiscences and family photos. Thus I could be sure that Edith had married in Wadhurst in Sussex in 1934. So I tried any girl of the right age, named Edith and living in Wadhurst. Edith and Arthur were indeed there, surnames mis-transcribed, ‘visitors’ to the caretaker of the Wadhurst Institute, George **MUCK** (actually **MEECH**), and his wife Kate. When I found Edith’s marriage in a parish register online I saw that George was a witness: perhaps he ‘gave her away’.

But why Wadhurst? Neither George nor Kate Meech had any connection with Bethnal Green. I looked for local newspaper references to Meech or Collier in Wadhurst. I learnt from the many sports reports that Meech was a formidable cricketer and Arthur was a local footballer. Then, aged 17, Arthur advertised that he needed a situation—and that he was recommended by Miss Amy Watson at The Lodge, Wadhurst. Here was the Wadhurst connection. Miss Watson’s occupation in 1921 was ‘social work’—her work at St Hilda’s. Her family home was a house called ‘Uplands’ in Wadhurst—after her parents’ death, Amy and her sister lived in the Lodge to that house. As guardian, Miss Watson had found a local family to look after Edith and Arthur, one that she knew and could keep an eye on.

That still leaves me with another question: where, when Lottie died, were the Collier and Dorrell aunties and uncles who might have taken the children?

Susan Collier (nee **BELL** or **COQUARD**), George’s mother, had been widowed since 1910 and lived with her youngest son, James Francis, until his marriage. By 1921, aged 65, she was living alone in Columbia Buildings—her neighbour completed and signed her census form so she may have been frail or illiterate, or

both. George's seven traceable brothers and sisters (not counting James Francis) mostly lived in the streets off Bacon St, not far from the 'blackest streets' described by Sarah WISE⁽⁷⁾. *Alfred*, at the age of 45 was away at the war, having left his wife at home with four children, living on the separation allowance; *Louisa* and her husband, Thomas PETTIT, and their five children were sharing their house with George's sister *Susan LEWIS*, a war widow with two young children; *William* and his wife, Jane, had five children between the ages of one and thirteen; *Hannah Sarah MATTHEWS* was another war widow with four young children and about to remarry; the youngest sister, *Maria WOOD*, 25, had a toddler and a baby. Only *Jane* and her husband, George SALMON, had no children, and never did have children – which can mean illness or a succession of miscarriages and, in any case, no parental experience.

The five surviving Dorrell aunts and uncles were also unavailable. *Thomas* was away at the war, recovering from wounds; *Esther ADAMS* had moved to Edmonton and her husband, too, was away at the front; *Mary Ann* was unmarried and 'living in' as a housekeeper; *George* was in the Royal Navy; *Nell OWEN*, not long married, had a baby son less than a year old.

Looking at all these with the eyes of a lady social worker of the time, the actions taken are understandable. A studio photograph shows Granny Burton with four of the Collier orphans, probably the four youngest, before they dispersed.

In memory of Tracy 1967–2021

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Do You Know What Scumbling Is?

Sandra Davey No. 6048

George Herbert **DAVEY** was born in Friern Barnet, Middlesex in 1862, the eldest of four children. His father, George, had come from rural Suffolk; his mother, Margaret, was born nearer in Highgate but her parents came from Gloucestershire and Co Durham (how they met or where they married is still a mystery). Dad was a gardener and Mum had been a cook so no doubt they enjoyed good food.

Sometime between the censuses of 1871 and 1881 the family moved to Hackney where William Davey (George snr's brother) had a Chemical Works near Homerton Bridge.

Both George snr and George H lived and worked at the factory for a time. They left cousins behind in Friern Barnet and good friends too that they had lived next door to; they made frequent visits to both. In fact so close was

the friendship between the Daveys and their old neighbours, the **HOLLIDAYS**, that, in 1882, George H married the girl next door, Emma Maud Mary Holliday, known by the name of Maud. Their only child, Herbert William, was born in 1885 at home in 13 Chippendale Street, Lower Clapton. However, by 1891 they had moved again, this time to Finchley. George H was working for his father-in-law's business as a decorator and we know he became very skilled at decorative paint



Herbert Davey

Image courtesy of Sandra Davey

finishes. The family story is that he could shade distemper cleverly down a wall so that it looked the same colour all over rather than the usual darker shade at the bottom. The story also went that he made decorative mouldings out of papier mâché, in the style of **GRINLING GIBBONS** (what we would give to see some of those!).

We do, however, have a little case containing brushes, metal combs and lots of chalk in various colours.

Recently, a carpenter working at our house was able to point me in the right

direction to research what these tools would have been used for—wood graining and the word ‘scumble’ came in to my vocabulary. Faux graining is a traditional technique that resulted in a painted surface giving the impression of real and more expensive wood; often pine was made to look like oak or mahogany. A skilled grainer could produce an effect that was extremely difficult to tell from the real thing.

Apparently the Egyptians, 3,000 years ago, were known to practice this technique. In more recent times it became popular during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in the baroque, regency and Victorian periods. However its use continues to this day as can be seen by modern versions of the tools being offered for sale.

Firstly a base coat of paint was applied, then further layers were added, starting with a pale brown and building up to darker brown, in either oil (white lead and pigment in linseed oil) or distemper (chalk and pigment diluted in beer). Next a water based ‘scumble’ layer (very thin and slow drying which was a bit like a wood stain) which would be manipulated with a flogger brush which had long, whippy



An example of scumbling
Image courtesy of Sandra Davey



Various combs and brushes for scumbling
Image courtesy of Sandra Davey

bristles that were struck or flogged on to the 'scumble' producing a simple texture of pores. When this was dry, an oil 'scumble' layer was applied and various combs (for open-grained wood such as oak) or brushes (for close-grained wood such as mahogany) were used to create the grain effect. A twist of the wrist

would introduce a curve, a 'rocker' gave the look of a knot or this might be produced with a rag removing a round spot and brushing in the lights above and below. A badger hair brush gently applied would then soften the markings. Finally a translucent oil glaze would enhance the relief and add more depth.

Above I mentioned mouldings made of papier mâché, I have recently found in the 1921 census that George H's son, Herbert William Davey, born in Lower Clapton, went on to work for G Jackson & Sons Ltd, fibrous plaster decorators. They were one of the first companies to introduce papier mâché. Sadly Herbert was not one of the craftsmen but a cost accountant for the company.

George Jackson & Sons, founded in 1780, was the leading company making picture and mirror frames and architectural ornaments, using boxwood moulds to press Adam-style ornamentation. For example they supplied The National Portrait Gallery and Buckingham Palace. They are still in business to this day.

So George H was obviously a skilled craftsman but we don't know if he also worked for George Jackson at any time or if our family story has become a little confused with his son working in the offices at Jackson's. Perhaps I should contact the company to see if he or his son are mentioned in their archives.

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The Puddefoots of East London

Peter Morris No. 15820



Syd Puddefoot

Image courtesy of Peter Morris

I am beginning the process of researching a biography of the famous footballer, Syd **PUDDEFOOT**, who was born in Limehouse in 1894 and went on to play for West Ham and England.

I would be particularly interested in hearing from any of Syd's extended family, who may have stories or documents about their illustrious forebear.

Syd had four brothers who lived to adulthood, so I am hoping that there are some great (or great great!) nieces and nephews out there who can shed some light on Syd's life and career.

He lived at various places in East London, including St. Paul's Road (now Way) in Limehouse where he was born, Aston Street also in Limehouse, Dirleton Road and Vicarage Road, both in Stratford, among others.

He also played for two local teams prior to signing for West Ham in 1913— Condor Athletic and Limehouse Town.

Any information, no matter how seemingly trivial, will be most welcome.

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Our Cockne



Sandra Davey (6048) sent in this photograph of T H Holliday & Sons
more in her article Do You Know

y Ancestors



n, Undertakers and Builders, where George H Davey worked. Read
What Scumbling Is? on page 24.

REPORT ON THE 2023 AGM

Janet Seward, General Secretary

We were in the Ecology Pavilion at Mile End once more for the society's 44th AGM on 15 April 2023. There were just over 60 of us in the hall and about 35 members on Zoom.

We started with the AGM. Gary Barnes, our Chairman, gave his report. He was pleased to announce that Bill Hughes, our Webmaster, has rejuvenated the website and that Bill would talk about the website later in the day. Gary said that membership was fairly static and welcomed any ideas to attract new members. He did point out that zooming talks meant that members outside of London could get the full benefits of membership. Gary regretted the closure of two branches, the IT Group and the Barking and Dagenham branch, and paid tribute to those branch committees for their years of service. Gary described the various projects that the society was working on, namely St. Mary Magdalene, East Ham memorial inscriptions, the complete indexing of the *Cockney Ancestors* (now on the website) and the indexing of the records of Woodgrange Park Cemetery. As in previous years, it was Gary's sad duty to pay tribute to members who we have lost since we last met and who had given so much to the society. They are John Reynolds, Roy Gibbs and Meryl Catty.

Gary finished by saying that we were doing better financially. Unfortunately, some of those savings have been as a result of the closing of the two branches. Gary did, however, credit Vera Bangs, editor of *Cockney Ancestor*, who, with her team, has done a sterling job in reviewing the costs of producing and printing the magazine. Finally, Gary said that, as a result of the member survey last year, many volunteers have come forward but the society is always looking for more, especially members with experience of publicity.

Our Treasurer, Kevin Dopson, presented highlights of the accounts for the last financial year. He said that the society's income had been slightly higher but our expenses were significant. *Cockney Ancestor* is our greatest expense but he credited Vera with helping to substantially reduce it. Kevin said that through careful management of spend and various fund-raising activities, the society is still managing to operate without taking anything from our reserves. However, he did advise the meeting that the Executive Committee is considering raising the subscriptions next year. Our Executive Committee remains unchanged. Gary thanked the membership for re-electing him and the committee.

Our theme of the day was *Women of the East End* which we saw as an opportunity

to celebrate the wives, mothers and other relatives and friends who kept families going through the tough times in the history of the East End. We also wanted to honour the memory of the volunteers who worked within organisations and institutions to improve conditions for the people.

In the morning, Mark Watson, the Interpretation and Outreach Officer for the Heritage Services of the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, talked about the Barking fisherwomen. For about 100 years, from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid- nineteenth century, Barking was one of England's largest fishing ports and women played their part in keeping the community together by hard work and mutual support.

After lunch, Dr. Louise Raw talked about the Bryant and May matchwomen's strike in 1888 and how women and girls, little regarded by their bosses, changed the world for working women.

The East End Women's Institute kept us going with tea, coffee, cake and soup.

The Society Stall run by Melissa Ford and her husband was a great success and raised £180 selling books and maps.



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Submission of School Photos

Doug Andrews No. 5210

I first saw the light of day from within *The Salvation Army Mothers' Hospital* in Lower Clapton and I am old enough to have a George V postage stamp on my birth certificate. My family had, not long before my birth, moved from Islington into what must have been a modern estate of 400 flats erected by *The Guinness Trust* at Stamford Hill (next door to *George Ewer's Grey Green Coach Station*, for any readers nearly as old as me) since my father had secured a regular job as a postman, attached to Upper Street Sorting Office in Islington.

I had an older brother Stan, who was three, and when war was declared 3 September 1939, was already attending his junior school at Stoke Newington Church Street. We were part of the rush to be evacuated out of London for safety but, because I was slightly under the age of five, we had to be accompanied by a parent—our mother. We were sent to Great Shelford just south of Cambridge, and I can see from family records that Stan left Church Street on 1 September and resumed his lessons on the 18 September at Stapleford School. This was, however, what was known as The Phoney War, and we, like so many others, very soon returned to London. Stan left Stapleford School on 4 November '39 and went to St. Thomas's in Upper Clapton, starting there just ten days later.

Air raid shelters had been built in our flats, both at ground level and under it—in what had been the flower beds and on the embankment of the Liverpool Street—Enfield Town railway line, and we sometimes used the one below ground level allocated to us when a raid seemed to be coming our way. We boys were woken on one occasion, and from my parents' bedroom—we were four floors up—we could see the red glow in the sky from yet another raid on the docks.

Stan left St. Thomas's 14 June 1940 and resumed his lessons just three days later on 17 June at a school in Oakford, a village just four miles from Bampton in Devon where, after a shaky and unhappy start, we spent the next two years or so on a mixed farm where we were extremely well cared for and enjoyed a wonderful life-changing experience which has left me with treasured memories that are as vivid now as if they were yesterday. My big brother brought this idyllic life to an end by passing his 11-Plus, which resulted in his being brought back to London to join a grammar school—*The Worshipful Company of Grocers' School*, or Hackney Downs as it was more popularly known.

Sadly, I too was brought home towards the end of 1942, to start at Church Street Stoke Newington. Our family got used to living in war-torn Britain, and the 'doodle bugs' (the V1s) were a familiar sight in the sky—our locality had some 'near misses'—but even this changed for the worse with the arrival of the V2s, the world's first supersonic missile. I was evacuated by myself for the third time, in about



Stan's class
Image courtesy of Doug Andrews

September '44, and again 'landed on my feet,' in that I was billeted in a village pub, *The Old Crown* in Manea near March, in the Fen District of



Doug's class
Image courtesy of Doug Andrews

Cambridgeshire, with a Mr & Mrs **WAYMAN** and their two sons John & Peter. This period away from home lasted until about April 1945, because I can remember the two celebratory bonfires for (1) V.E. Day—Victory in Europe—which was lit on some allotments near the flats, and (2) V.J. Day – marking the victory in Japan, which took place on the large concrete area near the railway line at the bottom of them.

On looking back, it is a matter of debate as to whether I was safer in Manea or London, because in the short period I was there, an American Mustang fighter crashed just behind our school (the village hall) and a short while after, a four-engine Liberator bomber also crashed, with its double-fin tail section coming to rest on the two-acre plot being worked by Mr Wayman. Events like this always come in threes, and my third one occurred one night during a gale, when a tall brick-built chimney stack fell through the slate roof onto the beams in the loft of the pub, thereby dislodging the ceiling which fell on me, asleep in my bed below it. Luckily, because I slept curled up, I was uninjured.

The first of the two school photographs is of Stan's class, which appears to have been taken on Empire Day, judging by some of the items of clothing worn. My brother is the lad in the white jumper, fourth from the right in the back row. Living in the flats, we both had numerous friends, and I can identify Roy **SHEPHERD**, three places to the left of Stan, and Philip **HAWKINS** is the lad in the pith helmet. The picture could possibly have been taken in May 1939 or 1940.

In the second picture of my class, I am in the back row, third from the right, the boy with the fringe. To my right is Lionel(?) and to his right is David **BALDRY**. In the row in front of me, again second from the right, the blond girl with the large white bow in her hair is Pamela Shepherd, Roy Shepherd's sister. Three places to her right is Shirley **LEVER**, another resident of *Guinness Trust*. Finally, Peter **MOULE** is sitting in the front row, the third boy from the left. The board on which is written in chalk 'VI' might indicate that this was our sixth year of schooling, suggesting perhaps that it was taken in 1944/45. This is borne out by the brick wall behind us, built very quickly to protect the ground floor windows from possible bomb blast. This whole floor had been a rest centre for bombed out residents of the borough, and was still occupied by them on my return home from Manea, just after the war in Europe ended.

A thought for the present day—compare my brother's and my class sizes with modern-day ones, with 40 pupils in his very early year in the war, and 45 in mine when the conflict finally ended. I wonder how well 21st century teachers would cope with 20th century classes of this magnitude? Finally, it would really make my day if one or more of my, or my brother's class members recognised themselves from so long ago and got in touch through '*Cockney Ancestor*.'

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The Reminiscences of an Ordinary Man – Part XIII

Non-Member

This article was written by Reg Coleman in late 1970/80s

The privations of war, with its strain on my nerves, coupled with a shortage of good food, was beginning to make itself felt in a fast-growing lad such as I was.

Almost suddenly, like the legendary Jack and the Beanstalk, I grew taller and, it seemed, outgrew my strength. The busy shipping office too, with a manager who was driving me like a slave, did not help.

Steadily I developed a nervous complex. I was afraid to swallow my food for fear that it would choke me and chewed to finally disgorging it on a piece of paper when nobody was looking.

Afraid to cross the street in case I got knocked down. When I laid down to sleep at night, I was afraid to close my eyes and go to sleep lest I should not wake up in the morning. There were more fears, life was becoming intolerable and a real nightmare, inwardly I bore my sufferings not telling anybody, not even my parents.

This condition went on for months till one day during my lunch hour I chanced to look in a newsagent's window and saw a periodical with a picture of an athlete flexing his muscles, it was a magazine called *Health and Strength*.

On another page was an article by a man named T.W. STANDWELL on how to treat the post war complaint called *Neurasthenia*. Everything he mentioned seemed to coincide with my trouble, I went straight in and bought this magazine and every issue afterwards. It appeared that the only

cure was exercise and acquiring the right state of mind.

Gradually I began to fight my nervous condition. Then by some miracle I met my old friend, George, again who had just been demobilised from the army and he induced me to come back to my old Chapel where I grew up as a boy. It was a social on a Saturday evening and there it was I was to meet a girl who later became my wife.

I then began to go to Chapel again on a Sunday and, every night after the exercise shown in the health magazine, I prayed for help and steadily regained my strength.

Later, I noticed that there was a League of Athletes connected with the magazine, called *The Health and Strength League*, whose motto was *Sacred thy body even as thy soul*. I joined it and such was my enthusiasm that I became a Silver Leaguer, having introduced many more young men to join.

I began an Athletic club in the Chapel and, for the first time in my life, donned the boxing gloves and I

shall never forget my first lesson. I was around nine-stone and the instructor I had engaged to teach me was around eleven-stones. As we faced each other, he moved around and told me to strike him on the jaw. He looked so vicious with his big square jaw and broken nose and he stood so solidly that it seemed like hitting a brick wall but, without any warning, something hit me in return and I blacked out momentarily and on coming around with my fists still up, he said *Are you still going on with it because if you do not, I won't teach you.*

Later I developed a good straight left and a right hook, such as Henry **COOPER** employed in his tactics.

Sometime later, when at a boxing hall known as *Premierland*, a professional had not turned up for his fight and a substitute was called for. I, being hard up at the time, volunteered and went 15 rounds. Nobody knew it, but I was an amateur and gave a different name. I got a real bashing for ten shillings and was sore for a fortnight, but had the satisfaction that I went the distance.

During my association with the instructor, I met many up and coming professionals, including the late Len **HARVEY** when he first came to London from Cornwall. My first meeting with him was at Putney, when he was training in the early 1920s. He was so good that he boxed with five of us, one after the other, and was the fittest at the finish.

As time went on, my first club was closed and I formed another with just five members. I wrote an article

in the local newspaper about it and within three months it steadily grew to 200 members. Our instructor was a man named Gus **CUMMINGS** who was a ten-stone champion amateur weightlifter.

We were allowed by the pastor of my Chapel to use their hall and one evening he told me that he was starting what was known as a P.S.A. The full meaning being a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon in the Chapel and could I get these chaps to attend. I circulated all of them and to my surprise they all turned up and when one realised there were Jews, Catholics and other denominations among them, it must have shown how popular I must have been.

On one particular Sunday the pastor came to me and said he could not take the service and could I do it for him. It was five minutes notice. However, I agreed to do it. It was the first time I had been in the pulpit and when I stood there all I could see was literally hundreds of eyes staring at me and I was momentarily speechless till suddenly a thought came to me. Look over their heads to the back of the hall, This I did and announced the first hymn and from that moment my fright had gone and I accomplished something I never knew I could do.

On Saturday afternoons we had weightlifting competitions against other clubs one of which was in the back room of a pub called *The Prodigals Return* in Battersea Bridge Road, Battersea, London. The instructor there was a rat catcher by trade and

a champion heavyweight lifter who could speak five languages. His name I recall was Harold **WOOD**. I've often wondered if he is alive today. Brawn and brains certainly went together here.

I felt that a new incentive was needed to keep the interest and attendance of my friends and suggested that after the service we retired to an adjoining room to have a cup of tea and chat together.

Pastor **GATES** agreed but asked who was going to make the tea. Unknown to him I had spoken to my mother about that chore and, being a good cook, she had agreed to make cakes and sausage rolls as well.

As her finances were meagre, I said that I would foot the bill and also allowed her to make a small charge for her work.

This proved to be a wonderful success and drew these fellows together in a closer friendship than ever. They were also able to have a conversation with the speakers of the afternoon meeting and debate on the subject taken.

It was amazing how one thing quickly led to another when I suggested to the pastor to allow us to use the Church Hall nearby on Saturday evenings for a social and dance.

He agreed and I then sounded out my members as to whether anybody could play a musical instrument. Two said they could play the violin, another the piano, whilst one even gave a tune on a mouth organ. This was a start and I suggested that they brought their girls and parents along and we were on our way.

The hall was a very drab, old

fashioned one dating back to 1843, having been built to become a day school for the Wesleyan Church. It was dimly lit by gas mantles and would have been rejected on today's standards.

The name of the hall was '*The Mitre*' and it stood right alongside the Blackwell railway viaduct.

When a steam train passed by, the whole building shook and vibrated, the gas mantles flickered and shook in their sockets and it seemed as though a fight for survival was going on between the train and the hall. None the more we were quite happy with it.

We erected some tables on trestles at one end, with a large tea urn and again dear mother stepped into the fun to make the tea and supplied homemade cakes and sausage rolls.

My oh my, how those fellows tucked into mother's sausage rolls and what a lovely evening we had with a makeshift band.

It was a sheer delight to see the happy faces of the healthy young men as they danced and waltzed with their girls who, although poor, were dressed in their best Sunday frocks for the occasion.

At that time of day, we did not have any juke boxes, radio or discotheques and had to make our own pleasure in a simple form and I firmly believe that we were happier for it.

This year, 1920, was full of events for me.

My manager notified me that, as I had been in the firm for over year, I was entitled to a week's holiday. This was the first holiday in my two years of

working life and so mother arranged for us all to visit my dear sweet old granny **READ**, in Wicklewood, Norfolk.

I was delighted for not only did I love my sweet old granny and grandad, but I also loved the countryside and the clean and flower-scented air.

When we arrived at the cottage a surprise waited us and I was to meet another aunt named Nellie and her daughter, also called Nellie.

Mother had not seen her sister for a great many years so it was a happy reunion, although unfortunately my aunt was very ill owing to a domestic upset and had come from Doncaster in an endeavour to recuperate.

My cousin Nellie was a very pretty girl and sweet tempered and we got on well together.

We would go to a small stream at the end of the village and sit on the bank and I taught her some of the latest songs.

We spent hours happily singing there and laughing and talking, watching the beautiful clear spring water rippling over the stones.

On one occasion, owing to the long walk, I developed blisters on the balls of my feet and went to the stream to bathe my feet and the result was wonderful as my blisters disappeared and never

A week was far too short to see all our relations and friends when most of it had to be done on foot.

The tearful goodbyes began and we were off down the road, turning and waving every so often until out of sight, on our two-mile walk to Kimberley Station.

On arriving home another surprise was to await us.

To be continued.....

returned. There must have been some curative mineral in that spring water, which surpassed medical balm.

There was the usual visit to my aunt Lucy at Wymondham which entailed a three mile walk each way.

Her son Arthur was now home from the war, safe and sound, and we were entertained by Arthur when he played his violin after tea in the evening.

Then there was the 26-mile journey to Norwich to see aunt Alice and on to Loddon to visit aunt and uncle Lewis and my cousin, Florrie.

Travel was so slow in those far off days that this short visit took two days to accomplish.

Just like me, cousin Florrie had grown taller and strangely we were drawn to each other and were very happy in each other's company.

In the evening Flo played the piano and I stood alongside her and sang with gusto as I'd never sung before, although I had been a member of the Chapel choir as a boy.

We were so happy and I felt on top of the world as they say. What youthful bliss this was.

Time was short and alas we had to return to Wicklewood and prepare to go back to London the following day.

The Legacy

Peter Ferdinando No.7

Peter Hamden **PRIDIE**, an unmarried Edinburgh solicitor, died on 2 January 1895 aged 85. He had made his will in 1891 and, as is fitting for a man of the law, he had written a very long and comprehensive document, leaving absolutely nothing to chance. In fact, in the copy form that I was able to obtain online (for just £2.50) from *Scotlandspeople.gov.uk*, it was 66 pages long. In fairness to him, he had a pretty extensive and complex estate, involving several properties and investments. According to the, happily much shorter, inventory that I was also able to obtain from the same excellent website, his gross personal estate amounted to £4019.15s.6d (perhaps about £680,000 today), so he was a man of some substance.

The almost impenetrable legal language which Peter used makes the will very difficult to decipher, but to the best of my understanding, these are among the main provisions. Having no immediate heirs, Peter left the bulk of his estate to the descendants of a late cousin, who were also appointed as trustees of the estate, together with certain other named individuals. These included other professional men in law and medicine. Peter was also clearly something of an optimist. Despite being a bachelor of 81 when he made his will, it included numerous pages setting out how the provisions in the will were to be adjusted in the event that he married and had children. In addition to the main provisions of the will, Peter left several bequests ranging from £5 to £30 to his current and former servants, as well as to a variety of charitable causes, largely based in Edinburgh.

Peter Hamden Pridie was clearly a thorough and conscientious man for whom family ties and responsibilities were very important. In addition to the main and secondary beneficiaries he left £100 to be equally divided between the family of his deceased relative John **MOIR** (or perhaps **MUIR**), a farmer from Strathblane. Peter's grandfather, Hamden Pridie, had married Martha Muir. Peter Hamden Pridie's precise family relationship to John Mo/uir was not spelt out, but it is likely that it came through this line.

A further sum of £200 (or £100 in the unlikely event of his marrying and having offspring at the age of 81!) was left to be shared equally between the family and descendants of another deceased relative, Hamden Stephen Pridie, a London gunmaker who had at one time worked for Barnetts and Sons based in

the Minorities. The exact nature of the relationship was once again not specified, though the shared use of an unusual christian name by Peter Hamden, his grandfather Hamden, and Stephen Hamden probably suggests a fairly close family connection. What I know of Hamden Stephen's family suggests that they may have been second cousins.

This is where my interest comes in, since Hamden Stephen Pridie the gunmaker, who had lived at various addresses in the East End between his birth in 1795 and his death of lung disease in 1856, was my great-great-grandfather.

He married Judith **MOULE** in 1819 in Shoreditch, and they had 12 children that I know of between 1820 and 1840. Their seventh child, Mary Ann Pridie, born about 1833, became the second wife of my great-grandfather, George John **FERDINANDO**, after the death of his first wife, who had died in 1864, also of lung disease, only two months after the infant death of their only child, another George John, and only seven months after her marriage to George John senior.

George John's second marriage to Mary Ann Pridie took place in Hackney in January 1866, 17 months after his first wife's death, and their first child, yet another George John, was born less than six months later.

My grandfather Herbert Stephen Ferdinando, their second child, was born in Mile End in October 1868, and less than three months later Mary Ann died of causes which seem to suggest a link with childbirth.

George John married for a third time in 1870, about a year and a half after Mary Ann's death, and this proved to be a much longer and more fruitful marriage, producing a further nine children.

Of Hamden Stephen's 12 children, only seven were mentioned in Peter Hamden's will, but from my knowledge of the Pridie family I can account for at least three of the remaining five as having died without leaving descendants before Peter Hamden made his will, and the absence of traceable records of the other two suggests that they too had died early in life.

He itemised what he knew of Hamden Stephen's other seven children and their descendants at length:

*'First, the descendants or heirs or representatives of [Hamden Stephen's] son, the deceased Henry Stephen Pridie whose widow's name is Caroline Maria Pridie. He left a daughter named Emily Emma Pridie, sometime a housemaid at no.49 Westmoreland Road, Bayswater, and a granddaughter named Eva Caroline **OUGH**, who was the daughter of Caroline Louisa Pridie, whose husband was Henri Bendic Ough [who] married after his wife's death and deserted his child. This child, Eva Caroline Ough is now or was lately residing in St. Peter's Home,*

Isle of Thanet, Kent [and] succeeds equally to her grandfather's share along with Emily Emma Pridie'.

Tracing this group of people has not been straightforward for me using modern records, so I wonder how Peter Hamden Pridie's representatives fared with the task in the 1890s.

Henry Stephen Pridie, born in 1824, married Caroline Maria **MUNDAY** in 1851 and they had two daughters both born in the East End of London, Caroline Louisa in 1853 and Emily Emma in 1869. Henry Stephen, who was a gun maker like his father, died in 1878. I've found Caroline Louisa's marriage in 1872, not to Henri Bendic Ough but to John **BARNES**, and I've found no reference to a later marriage to Henri Ough. Ough, though, was the surname by which Caroline Louisa was known at her death only three years later in 1875, immediately following the birth of her daughter, Eva Caroline Ough. I can only speculate as to what exactly happened, but it seems likely that Caroline Louisa had the child by Henri Bendic Ough while she was married to John Barnes, who then disappears from the family record.

Henri Bendic Ough has proved to be a rather elusive character, but I'm fairly confident that I can identify him as Benedict Henry Ough, a journeyman painter born in 1848 in Bodmin, Cornwall. In 1881 he was living in Battersea with his wife, Mary Ann, and two young daughters, neither of whom was Eva Caroline. This is consistent with the account of his having abandoned Eva Caroline following the death of her mother

He had married Mary Ann **WATSON** in Wandsworth in 1877, and birth registration records confirm her as the mother of the two daughters. This was Benedict Ough's second marriage, his first having been in 1872 in Lambeth, but not, of course, to Caroline Louisa Pridie. I've not found Eva Caroline, then a six-year-old child, in the 1881 census but by 1891 she was a 16 year-old general domestic servant in the home of George **WILSON**, curate of Chilham in Kent, to where, if Peter Hamden Pridie's information is correct, she had moved from St. Peter's Home, Thanet.

In 1881 Henry Stephen Pridie's other daughter, Emily Emma, was resident in an institution of over 200 teenage girls in Southwark called King Edward Schools. I have been unable to find her in the 1891 or 1901 censuses, and in particular, although there was a domestic servant at 49 Westmoreland Road in 1891, it was not Emily. Caroline Maria Pridie, Henry Stephen's widow, is equally elusive.

*'Second, his [Hamden Stephen's] daughter Eliza Pridie now deceased who married a person named **JENNER** now believed to be deceased who left a*

daughter though I cannot learn where she is or how employed or if deceased.'

Eliza, Hamden Stephen and Judith's second child, was christened at St. Katherine Coleman in London in October 1821, but beyond that my searches have not been very fruitful. I have found no relevant Pridie/Jenner marriage, but I think I may have found her in the 1871 census in Bethnal Green with her husband, Edward H Jenner, an ironmongery warehouseman, and three sons, one aged ten, and two, presumably twins, aged eight. The birth registration for each of these boys recorded the mother's maiden name as Pridie, which is promising, but in other respects the facts are not altogether consistent with this being Henry Stephen's daughter.

The will does not mention any sons, but perhaps they might all have died young, and the census entry does include a married daughter, Eliza **WOOD**, aged 17, who might be the one mentioned in the will. Eliza's age is recorded as 40, which is ten years too young for someone born in 1821, but her husband's age is recorded as 30, so they may have tried to disguise the very large apparent age gap between them. All in all, the difficulty I have had in tracing the family doesn't suggest that Peter Hamden Pridie's executors would be likely to have had much more success in trying to trace a potential beneficiary from this family.

*'Third, his daughter Henrietta Emma Pridie or **MILLAR** the widow of Bigsby Millar who died in Peckham House Lunatic Asylum about 12 years ago, he was there about 9 months, when she married him, he was in business as an Accountant, he failed through losses. She is now or lately resided at 22 Jardine Street, Albany Road, Camberwell. She has a son born of the marriage named Henry Robert Millar a publisher's assistant to Mr **MORRISH**, 20 Paternoster Square, City of London and a daughter named Emma Henrietta Millar sometime met of a situation and afterwards residing with her brother.'*

Henrietta Emma Pridie was baptised at St Katherine Coleman on 2 May 1847, aged ten, and married Bigsby Millar in Stepney in 1863. The family has eluded me in successive censuses, including a search through Jardine Street, Camberwell in 1891, but I have identified three children born to Bigsby and Henrietta Emma; namely Bigsby Hamden born in 1864 (he died in 1875), Albert Edward born in 1865 and Emma Henrietta born in 1867. I have found no trace of the Henry Robert Millar named in the will. Bigsby Millar senior died in 1874 in Camberwell aged 47. Once again, I wonder how Peter Hamden's executors fared.

'Fourth, his daughter Amelia Pridie unmarried now or lately ... residing at 14 Belham Street Church Street Camberwell.

Fifth, his daughter Sarah Pridie unmarried now or lately residing at 11 Bedford

Grove Upperton Eastbourne. Sixth, his daughter Jane Pridie unmarried now or lately residing at 59 Warrior Square, St. Leonards on Sea'.

Amelia Pridie, who was baptised at St. Katherine Coleman on 27 October 1838, died in 1913 at the age of 77, but in 1901 she was living as a domestic cook at the address given in the will, so hopefully the executors would have been able to contact her without difficulty.

Sarah Pridie was baptised at St. Katherine Coleman on 28 August 1831 and in 1901 was 'living on own means' in Eastbourne, and although this was not at the address given in the will, there must have been a reasonable chance of the executors tracing her. She died in 1903.

Jane Pridie was born on 26 July 1840, and in 1891 she was indeed living at Warrior Square as a domestic nurse in the home of a doctor in general practice and his large family, together with six other domestic servants. By 1901 she was a domestic nurse in the Eastbourne home of an elderly widow of private means and her two unmarried daughters, and ten years later, now aged 70, she was still a domestic servant with the same family. She lived until the age of 93 before dying in Bath. It is likely that the executors would have been able to pass on her bequest to her.

So, we come to the final bequest to Hamden Stephen Pridie's offspring, and this is the one of most interest to me.

'Seventh, his deceased daughter Margaret Pridie who died at the birth of her second child, her husband's name was Terrynando or Ternando or Ferrynando or somewhat similar Spanish or Foreign name. She left two sons who it is understood now or lately resided with their Father near Aldgate, the Father is said to be in the employment of a Tea Merchant in Crutched Friars, London.'

Now, over the years I have become well used to my rather exotic-sounding surname receiving some pretty cavalier treatment (I've written in earlier CAs about its 17th century Portuguese Jewish origins), but this surely takes the biscuit.

Peter Hamden Pridie also had another fact not quite right in this passage. George John Ferdinando did indeed work in a tea warehouse, but the Pridie he married was of course Mary Ann, there being no Margaret in this family. The details about the two sons, and about her death following the birth of the second one, are however correct, and I have no doubt that this is the family for whom Peter Hamden intended the share of his bequest to go.

Whether any of the money ever reached either of Mary Ann's two sons is another matter altogether. Her first son, George John, was, around this time, working as a 'boot clicker' (cutting the uppers for boots or, in an alternative account, punching

the eyelet holes for the laces), living in Sidney Street, Bethnal Green with his wife, Jane Sarah, and their large family, which eventually grew to 11.

Because the family home remained stable for several years it is just possible that Peter Hamden Pridie's executors may have been able to trace him but given the vagueness and inaccuracy of the information in the will, which is probably all they had to guide them, I think this is very unlikely.

When it comes to Mary Ann's second son, my grandfather, Herbert Stephen Ferdinando, though, I think the chances of his ever having received his legacy are vanishingly small.

Throughout the relevant period Herbert, his wife and his growing family lived at a series of different addresses in Bethnal Green, pursuing his occupation of 'boot finisher' (doing just what the job title suggests), never staying at any one address for an extended period, and this, combined with the confusion and imprecision arising from the wording of the will, would surely have meant that Peter Hamden Pridie's executors would have been unable to trace him.

If by any chance (and their own great diligence) they had managed to catch up with him, then the amount due to him would, if I understand the terms of will correctly, have been £200 divided by 14 (half of one seventh of the bequest of £200 to be divided between Hamden Stephen Pridie's surviving offspring). That amounts to £14.5s.8½d, which would be worth perhaps £2400 at today's values.

Perhaps, depending on how many of Hamden Stephen's progeny the executors had been able to trace, it might even have been more.

For someone in Herbert Stephen's straightened circumstances it is likely that this could have had a significant impact.

It probably could not have saved him from the bleakest times of his life, after his wife had died in 1903 leaving him with a young family, including my three-year-old father, with his own health deteriorating from the tuberculosis which would kill him nine years later after years in and out of the Poor Law Infirmary, most of which years my father and his next elder brother spent in Leytonstone Schools, the huge Poor Law children's home for those who had become a burden on the parish.

However, it may at least have made the last years of the 19th century rather more comfortable for Herbert Stephen and his family. But I fear that it almost certainly did not happen.

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Miss Maie Rogers, Theatrical Costumier 1905 – 2003

Chris Langford No. 1338



May Alice Rogers

Image courtesy of Chris Langford

My aunt, May Alice **ROGERS**, was a diminutive, dominant figure, one of life's 'movers and shakers' who reached the very top of her profession. She was born 3 November 1905 in Leyton. On leaving school, May was apprenticed to the Theatre Royal, Stratford where she learned her dress-making skills. Her first job took her to the *Artillery Theatre*, Woolwich where she was to meet her future husband, 'her Bobby,' Albert **ROBERTS**. He worked at the theatre as a carpenter and stage hand. They married in 1939 and there were no children from the union.

The *Artillery Theatre* was owned by the **LITTLER** family and managed

by the children, Prince, Emile and Blanche. In May 1928 Blanche and May became firm friends while May was working on the pantomime, *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Prince Frank Littler CBE (1901–1973) was a theatre and television impresario. By 1947 he owned fifty three theatres and became the chairman of the Moss Empires Group which was eventually, I believe, owned by Andrew Lloyd **WEBBER**.

After the success of the musical *White Horse Inn* at the Coliseum in London in 1931, May and Bobby went on tour nationally with the show. The picture (overleaf) shows May supervising the loading of the costume baskets onto the lorry.

Employed by Prince Littler, May (stage name Maie Rogers) worked her way up to become his wardrobe supervisor, with her name shown in the programme credits. As well as the numerous shows, she had as many as seven pantomimes to



May supervising the loading of costume baskets onto a lorry
Image courtesy of Chris Langford

oversee at one time. Following are some examples of her heavy schedule:

September 1930

Theatre Royal Bognor Regis, Town Hall Theatre Cromer, Yellow Sands Company Malvern, the Picture House Stratford-on-Avon, Theatre Royal Margate.

July 1931

Grand Theatre Douglas Isle-of-Man, Spa Theatre Bridlington, The Pavilion Weymouth, Alexandra Hall Ilfracombe.

August 1931

Palace Theatre Westcliff, Theatre Royal Bognor Regis, Knightstone Pavilion Weston-super-Mare, The Pavilion Rhyl and Colony Bay, Theatre Royal Leamington Spa.

September 1931

Gaiety Theatre Hastings, Grand Theatre Swansea, Theatre Royal Halifax, Theatre Royal Norwich, West Pier Brighton.

May travelled extensively, mainly by public transport, and stayed in 'digs' of varying standards. It was a very heavy schedule and it took its toll on her health as she suffered from frequent migraines. At the end of September 1931 May gave



Costume fitting

Image courtesy of Chris Langford

New York—*Oklahoma* 1947, *Brigadoon* 1950, *Carousel* 1950, *South Pacific* 1951, *Guys and Dolls* 1953, *Teahouse of the August Moon* 1953, *Pyjama Game* 1955, *Plain and Fancy* 1956 and *Damn Yankees* 1957.’ It went on to say ‘The glamour of these shows was owed to her.’ Other shows attributed to May’s talents were *Glamorous Night* 1936, *Showboat* 1943, *Can Can* 1954,

notice to her boss. It must be assumed that alternative arrangements were made as she continued to work for Mr Littler. From the following year she travelled far less and had a new office at the *Aldwych Theatre*. (In 1942 Mr Littler paid for a medical consultation for the pains in her head).

Costumes were made to perfection and had to be hard-wearing to withstand the frequent changes. They were repaired and replaced often. Her office at Drury Lane was filled with dresses and photographs of the stars. Adjacent rooms were piled high with costumes and props.

An article appeared about May in the *Daily Mirror* on 16 December 1943 and in 1958 there was another report that ‘Miss Rogers was a moving talent behind the shows from



Costume making and repairing

Image courtesy of Chris Langford



May and Bobby

Image courtesy of Chris Langford

The Black and White Minstrel Show 1966, Desert Song 1967, Royal Command Performances and pantomimes.

May and Bobby first lived in rented properties in London. Bobby joined the RAF in 1942 as a clerk orderly and in February 1943 May moved to an apartment overlooking the River Thames at Barnes.

During the height of the bombing in WWII May preferred to commute from London to the family home in Stratford. However, May's travels continued to places including Nottingham, Manchester, Leicester, Bournemouth, Brighton, Golders Green and much time was spent at the wardrobe store, near her apartment, at Barnes.

During an extensive bombing raid on West London, on 26 February 1944, an incendiary bomb set the store alight destroying everything, dresses, props and papers. But, the

show in Brighton went on!

Post war, in February 1947 power cuts affected the pantomime at Golders Green and in February 1948 the *Bristol Theatre* was ablaze. Fortunately, on that occasion the wardrobe contents were saved.

In June 1944 Bobby was invalided out of the RAF with constant chest and ear infections. His records show that his service was one year and 231 days. He, then, found employment with an advertising company.

May and Bobby had a wide circle of theatrical friends. May's friend, Blanche Littler, was the second wife of George **ROBEY** (1869–1954). George was a music hall comedian, the self-styled 'Minister of Mirth,' a regular pantomime dame, sportsman and charity worker. He is known for the song 'If You Were The Only Girl In The World' and was knighted in 1954. May and Bobby were in

attendance at the funeral of Ivor **NOVELLO**. Others I heard her mention were Mary **MARTIN** the American actress, Nita **CROFT** a pantomime principal boy, Dan **LENO** a pantomime dame, Jimmy **JEWEL** and others. I wish I had been more attentive at family gatherings. May had many stories to tell and I recall how she found some chorus girls and stars to be difficult and wilful during fittings.

May was generous to a fault. For two years, from the time her younger brother, Freddie, went into the army in 1940 until he was posted abroad she sent weekly parcels and postal orders. She was admonished for sending 'sticky cakes'!

Bobby also received regular parcels, postal orders and '*the Stage*' magazine. Parcels would include practical items such as gloves, face flannels, books, cigarettes, food, chocolate and sweets. Bobby sent his dirty washing home from his RAF bases and it was returned freshly laundered. Postal orders were also sent home to her mum.

When her brother-in-law, Don, my dad, was called up May gave him a silver 'Joey' (silver 3d piece) which dad carried as a token of good luck. She offered to keep an eye on her sister, Lily, my mum, while he was away and, true to her word, she rang her daily.

By the 1950s May and Bobby were living in Orpington. They were the only members of the family who had a private telephone and a car. My grandfather died in 1945. Weekly, every Sunday (or maybe it was fortnightly) they would drive to his grave in Woodgrange Park Cemetery, Manor Park, to lay flowers and meet up with the family. This was followed by tea at our house in East Ham, where I was expected to 'perform!' May had given me dressing up clothes and ballet shoes. She also gave complimentary show tickets to members of her family. My mum told me that I slept in a drawer, as a baby, in the Drury Lane workroom while mum and dad attended the show.

When I was small May took mum and I out for afternoon tea. I played up and said the cream in the éclair tasted like soap. May, not being used to the whims of children said 'I never thought a little girl could cause so much upheaval!' Mis-hearing, my retort was 'And you're a flying eagle!' The incident was never forgotten. Aged six, I was entered into a fancy dress competition at the 'Coronation' street party in 1953. May made me a beautiful red velvet and white satin 'peeress' dress. She borrowed the crown worn by Humpty Dumpty in the Golders Green pantomime. Needless to say, I won.

My daughter wore that same dress at a Silver Jubilee street party in 1978. I still have the dress but it has faded with time.

In 1957 May made a fairy dress for me to wear as 'Moth' in my junior school



**Dress made by May for Coronation
Street Party in 1953**

Image courtesy of Chris Langford

production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in 1967 she skilfully altered an ill-fitting wedding dress, which I had hired, and returned it to its original state before it was taken back to the shop.

Bobby was a freemason and in their retirement they attended and hosted many functions.

After Bobby's death in 1976, May moved from Sidcup to Wanstead and then to Barkingside. She arranged for her older sister, Hetty, to go into the care of a nursing home and well into her 90s was visiting her regularly and dealing with her affairs.

Towards the end of May's life she suffered with macular degeneration. Unable to see to thread sewing needles, it was my task to thread a quantity and leave them pinned in the back of an armchair. Such was her passion for needlework!

May also kept a close watch on her younger sister, Ivy, who had become

a recluse having never got over their mother's death in 1959. Ivy outlived May and died tragically in a house fire in the family home in 2006.

May died in the same Woodford nursing home as her sister, Hetty, in 2003 aged 98 and is now at rest with 'her Bobby' in the City of London Crematorium.

As the only surviving relative, the onerous task of dealing with her affairs and clearing her house fell to me. May was an inveterate hoarder. The whole house, garage and shed were crammed with multiple possessions and theatrical paraphernalia, even ancient food shopping receipts. Old newspapers, magazines and documents were tied in neat bundles and stored behind the lounge furniture. The downstairs toilet was unusable, filled with bedside lamps and kettles. It seems that she disposed of nothing in her lifetime.

Among the items in the garage I found a collection of beautiful Charles

WILHELM costume designs. Some had disintegrated but nearly thirty survived. Along with an article on May, Nigel **ELLACOTT** from the *Kenneth More Theatre* in Ilford uploaded the designs to his website www.its-behind-you.com. He was instrumental in their purchase by a private buyer who has them on loan to the V&A Theatre Museum. It took me over nine months to finally clear May's premises. I am grateful that most of the information in this article was taken from letters and documents which May had kept. The odd detail has been confirmed by *Wikipedia* and *Ancestry*. Some of the photographs are not of good quality. The originals are now held at the V&A Museum.

24 Whybridge Close, Rainham, Essex RM13 8BD

Message from the Membership Secretary

How quickly the year rolls by, it doesn't seem possible that for the vast majority of members it is nearly time to renew their membership again. Email renewal reminders are sent out about 30 days before your membership is due to expire so please do not pay unless you receive an email. You can always check your renewal date when you login to the member only area of our website or you can contact me at membership.secretary@eolfhs.org.uk.

Those members who pay by standing order **will not** receive a reminder. Members who do not have an email address will receive a reminder in the post.

If you wish to make a card payment just go to our website and click on the *renew tab* at the top of the page (no need to login), then click on *renew membership*, scroll down and click on the type of membership you require. If you prefer to pay by cheque please send a cheque (with membership number written on the back) made out to East of London Family History Society for the correct amount, to me at the address shown on the inside front cover of the *Cockney Ancestor* magazine. Our annual membership fees remain the same as last year. CA magazines are sent out to all members apart from those paying the £10 online fee, these members can read/download the magazine in the member only area on our website.

Annual Membership Fees for 2023/2024

£10 online membership

£15 UK members

£20 European members

£25 for members in the rest of the world.

Thank you for your support this year, I hope you will continue to do so next year.

The Newham and Redbridge Connection

Melissa Ford No. 7658



Noele and her mum outside 139 Clements Road

Image courtesy of Melissa Ford

Joan Noele Gordon was born on 25th December 1919 in the borough of West Ham.

She was brought up by her mum and aunt at 139 Clements Road, East Ham.

Her father was an engineer in

the Merchant Navy and doesn't seem to appear in her life.

Her mum and aunt realised at the age of two that she had talent, so she was taught to dance by Maude Wells at Shrewsbury Road and she had her first taste of fame at *East Ham Palace* where she sang 'Dear Little Jammy Face'.

By the age nine she had won a scholarship for Ilford Convent School.

She trained as an actress at RADA.

She was the first woman ever to be seen on colour television as she took part, as a teenager, in John Logie Baird's world's first colour transmission on 3 July 1938.

From June 1943 to July 1944, she appeared in the musical *The Lisbon Story* at the *London Hippodrome*. In April 1949, she took the role of Meg Brockie in the original London production of *Brigadoon* for 685 performances at *Her Majesty's Theatre*.

She stayed with the show for a national tour. In 1953, she toured as Mrs Sally Adams in *Call Me Madam* after Billie Adams had played the role in the London



Noele Gordon and her mum in her kitchen
Image courtesy of Melissa Ford

season at the Coliseum.

She appeared in two British films, *29 A c c a c i a A v e n u e* (1945) and *Lisbon Story* (1946) in minor parts.

In 1954, Gordon spent a year in New York City learning American

television production at New York University. Her acting career came to a halt in 1955, when she joined Associated Television in London, where she presented their first-ever programme, *The Weekend Show*. She worked behind the scenes as Head of Lifestyle programmes. Gordon helped Reg Watson and Ned Sherrin launch ATV Midlands in 1956.

As well as being a producer, Gordon became a presenter for the new Birmingham-based service.

Her first television appearance for ATV in the Midlands, *Tea With Noele Gordon*, was the first popular ITV chat show, and while presenting this series, she became the first woman to interview a British Prime Minister, when Harold **MACMILLAN** was in office.

Initially commissioned as an emergency schedule filler, the show became so successful that Gordon gave up her executive position to concentrate on presenting. She then moved on to present a daily live entertainment show, *Lunchbox*, an early daytime programme.

She appeared in 3,521 episodes of *Crossroads* between 1964–1981. and made two guest appearances in 1983. You can learn all about her on ITV X *Nolly*

Email: historymel4@gmail.com

Recycle your printer cartridges

Recycle4Charity collect used printer cartridges and make a donation to the charity of your choice – preferably the East of London FHS.

Go to <http://www.recycle4charity.co.uk>. On the home screen click on Register Now.

Further down, on the same screen, type the word East in the Choose Your Charity box. A drop down list of charities beginning with the word East will appear. Select East of London FHS–C916.

Check you have selected the correct charity at the top left of the next screen. Add your name and address details so they can send you the envelopes for returning your used ink cartridges.

On the next screen choose envelopes rather than boxes.

PLEASE DO NOT SEND Epson or Kodak cartridges, damaged cartridges, cartridges that have been previously refilled, cartridges that have been labelled for another brand eg. Tesco, PC World or Office Depot, cartridges with labels removed or extra holes (signs that refilling has been attempted).

ADVERTISING IN COCKNEY ANCESTOR

For those offering personal or commercial services to members:

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Email: editor@eolfhs.org.uk or contact:

Mrs Vera Bangs

24 Alderney Gardens, Wickford, Essex SS11 7BD

Branch Information

Havering (H): First Saturday of the month at *Trinity Church, Gaynes Road, Upminster, Essex RM14 2YS*. Doors open at 1pm, meeting starts at 2pm.

Newham & Redbridge (NR): Fourth Wednesday of the month at *The Churchill Room, Wanstead Library, Spratt Hall Road, Wanstead, London E11 2RQ*. Doors open at 7pm, meeting starts at 7.30pm.

Central London (CL): Last Friday of the month at *St. Andrew's, Short Street, Waterloo, SE1 8LJ*. The meeting starts at 5.45pm. The meeting room will be available from 5.30pm.

Diary Dates

Check for updates to the Society's Online News at www.eolfhs.org.uk/news/

JULY 2023

(H)	1st	<i>London: City in Turmoil</i>	Nick Dobson
(NR)	26th	<i>Above and Below Ground</i>	Celia Heritage
(CL)	28th	<i>The East India Company</i>	Jef Page

AUGUST 2023

(H)	5th	<i>The Only Coastal Way is Essex</i>	Tony Tuckwell
(NR)	23rd	<i>Members' Evening</i>	
(CL)	25th	<i>My Ancestor Was a Shopkeeper</i>	Sue Gibbons

SEPTEMBER 2023

(H)	2nd	<i>Error, Lies and Misinformation</i>	David Cufley
(NR)	27th	<i>A Schoolgirls' War</i>	Mary Smith
(CL)	29th	<i>The London Hippodrome</i>	Luci Gosling

OCTOBER 2023

(H)	7th	<i>Jew's Resources, Introduction, UK</i>	Jeanette Rosenberg
(NR)	25th	<i>Tidal Thames, Folklore & Traditions</i>	Mark Lewis
(CL)	27th	<i>AGM</i>	

NOVEMBER 2023

(H)	4th	<i>The English Language Pt II</i>	Charlie Haylock
(NR)	22nd	<i>Members' Evening and AGM</i>	
(CL)	24th	<i>A History of Christmas</i>	Nick Dobson

Society Information

Surnames of Interest:

Until the Surname Interests position has been filled please follow the instructions set out below:

Members with Internet Access and an email address are encouraged to submit their Surnames of Interest via the Society Website. Members without internet access may send details of their Interests or request a search of the Surnames of Interest to the General Secretary, Janet Seward, at the address on the inside front cover. Please remember to quote your membership number and enclose a stamped self addressed envelope. The same service is available to non-members of the Society.

Contact Email Addresses

Chairman: chairman@eolfhs.org.uk

Secretary: society.secretary@eolfhs.org.uk

Treasurer: treasurer@eolfhs.org.uk

Membership: membership.secretary@eolfhs.org.uk

Projects: projects@eolfhs.org.uk

Helpdesk: helpdesk@eolfhs.org.uk

Editor: editor@eolfhs.org.uk

Enquiries and Correspondence:

In all correspondence with the Society, please quote your membership number. When writing it is essential to enclose a SAE for a reply.

Webmaster: Bill Hughes. Email: webmaster@eolfhs.org.uk

Website: Put <http://www.eolfhs.org.uk> into your browser and add it to your favourites or bookmarks.

Writing for Cockney Ancestor

All material for inclusion in *Cockney Ancestor* should be sent to the Editor, 24 Alderney Gardens, Wickford, Essex SS11 7BD or email to editor@eolfhs.org.uk. Please quote your name and membership number and enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope for any returns.

There is no guarantee that an article will be included in any particular edition. Please do not send any original photographs in case they are lost or damaged. Your article submission will be acknowledged and you will be asked to complete and submit a copyright form. Further details can be found on our website at <https://www.eolfhs.org.uk/casubmissions/>.

The Area of the East of London F. H. S.



The Society's area is to the east of the City of London, and it comprises the London Boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Redbridge, Barking & Dagenham, and Havering. A selective list of places within these boroughs is as follows:

Hackney: Clapton, Dalston, Hackney, Haggerston, Hoxton, Kingsland, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington.

Tower Hamlets: Aldgate, Artillery Liberty, Bethnal Green, Bishopsgate, Bow, Bromley-by-Bow, Bromley St. Leonard, St. George in the East, Isle of Dogs, Limehouse, Mile End, Millwall, Old Ford, Norton Folgate, Poplar, Ratcliff, Shadwell, Spitalfields, Stepney, Stratford-le-Bow, Tower Liberty, Wapping and Whitechapel.

Newham: Beckton, Canning Town, Custom House, East Ham, Forest Gate, Little Ilford, Manor Park, Plaistow, Silvertown, Stratford Langthorne, Upton Park, West Ham and North Woolwich.

Redbridge: Barkingside, Chadwell Heath, Chigwell, Clayhall, Cranbrook, Fairlop, Fullwell Cross, Gants Hill Cross, Goodmayes, Hainault, Ilford, Great Ilford, Little Heath, Newbury Park, Redbridge, Seven Kings, Snaresbrook, South Woodford, Wanstead, Woodford, Woodford Bridge, and Woodford Green.

Barking and Dagenham: Barking, Beacontree, Part of Chadwell Heath, Dagenham East, Dagenham Heathway, Dagenham Village, Rush Green and Upney.

Havering: Chadwell Heath, Collier Row, Corbets Tey, Cranham, Elm Park, Emerson Park, Gidea Park, Havering-atte-Bower, Harold Hill, Harold Wood, Hornchurch, Rainham, Romford, Upminster, and Wennington.