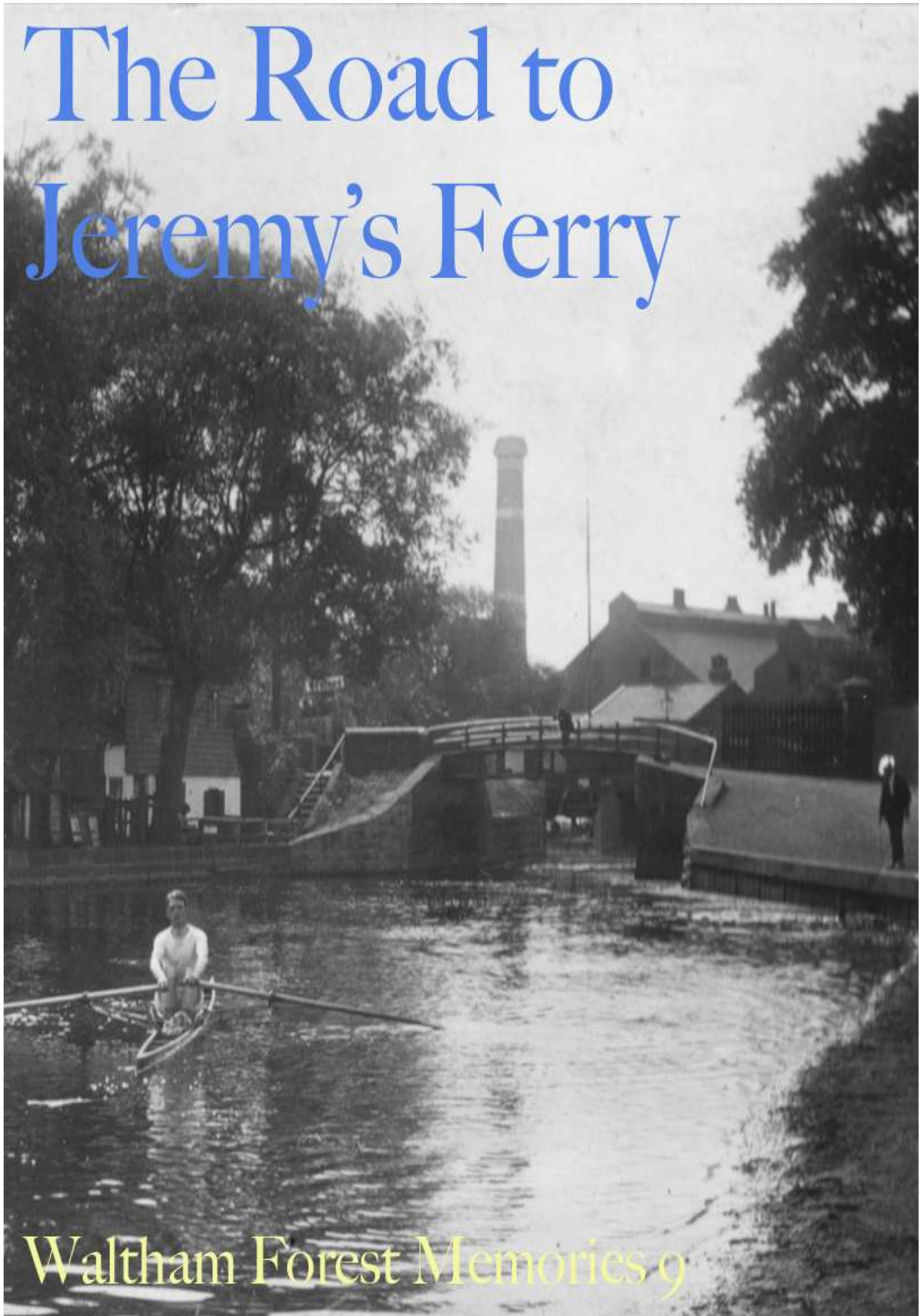


# The Road to Jeremy's Ferry

Waltham Forest Memories 9



# **The Road to Jeremy's Ferry**

Oral history of "Leyton Gateway"  
Lea Bridge Road

written and researched by Norma Crooks

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# Foreword

## Crossing the River

The present crossing of the river at Lea Bridge was known as Lockbridge as early as 14867, when the river was still tidal at Leyton, as it apparently was until at least the sixteenth century and foot and horse traffic were crossing to Hackney by Lockbridge and by the adjoining ford to Clapton. This was the busiest crossing, though there was another at Temple Mills leading to Homerton and Hackney Wick. In 1551 it is reported that Lockbridge was broken down and that Lord Wentworth, lord of the manor of Hackney, ought to repair it sufficiently for foot traffic, and in 1594 it is described as being among "the most useful bridges in Middlesex".

In 1646 the ford was still called Lockbridge. A wooden causeway led from Blackbridge (which crossed the Shortlands sewer west of Hemstall Green) over the marsh to Lockbridge. This causeway was built or repaired by Sir George Monoux (d 1544) and repaired again by Lady Laxton probably about 1580 when it was reported in ruins. When it was again dangerously decayed in 1611-13 no-one undertook repairs and the county also disclaimed responsibility for them and by 1694 only ruins remained. These were still visible in the nineteenth century. Lockbridge was replaced by a ferry known as Hackney or Jeremy's Ferry. This and a smaller one, Smith's Ferry, a little to the north, are shown on maps of 1747-8. Both ferries belonged to the lord of the manor of Hackney.

The maps show two tracks to Jeremy's Ferry. One, Water Lane, led south from Marsh Street, Walthamstow, joined on the way by another lane from Low Hall. Water Lane crossed Walthamstow Marsh. Traces of it remained in the nineteenth century. The second track, from Leyton, led north-west from the bottom of Marsh Lane across Leyton Marsh. No way to the ferry is shown from Hemstall Green, so there wasn't even a track from Hemstall Green to the Lea where now Lea Bridge Road runs. The track must have fallen into disuse with the collapse of Lockbridge.

Under the terms of the Lea Bridge Turnpike Act 1757 the old route by Hemstall Green and Blackbridge was however restored. Thus a link was made to the Middlesex and Essex Turnpike road at Eagle Pond, Snaresbrook so road traffic could journey easily to Clapton. Jeremy's Ferry was closed and the nearby ford destroyed. Lea Bridge was built, with a road across the marsh by Hemstall Green to Markhouse Lane; and Butterfield lane and Broad Lane were widened.

# PART ONE

## Methodology and critique

### Stage One

The designation of the area as the “Gateway Regeneration Area” provided the framework for this study; the community worker employed by the project introduced me to Sheila Fernandes, churchwarden of Emmanuel Church, Lea Bridge Road. I contacted The Lighthouse Methodist Church in Markhouse Road, which resulted in two more interviews. Attempts to contact other local religious and ethnic communities drew blanks. The testimony of elderly people connected even if tenuously, to Emmanuel Church and the Lighthouse became the backbone of this study.

Important exceptions are Carol Brooks and her two aunts.

In this industrial area, the primacy of work emerged very early, and I took the opportunity to get detailed testimony from some of my respondents who like Mrs Roberts otherwise had very little to say. I was glad to bring into the light of day an invaluable oral record of the Lea Bridge Gas Works. The Works was a small, independent company from its founding in the 1860s until after the Second World War when it became part of the nationalised gas industry. The site at Seymour Road, Leyton, ceased to be staffed in the 1970s. At that time, members of the Industrial Society and the staff of Vestry House Museum interviewed a number of former employees and the Managing Director. The tapes have been stored at the Museum neither transcribed nor annotated until now.

### Stage Two

I attended the afternoon tea club at Emmanuel Church to explain the nature of the project; and I explained it once again on being invited into people’s homes to do the interview itself. All respondents signed clearance notes, enabling Vestry House to store the tapes for public reference and use. Only one interviewee demurred so her material is embargoed for the maximum length of time of thirty years. This interview and its outcome is discussed below. Overall, I achieved interviews with eighteen people, spending at least two or three hours with each. Some recordings are three hours of tape, others one hour only, or occasionally a little less. I estimate the amount of recorded material to be something in the region of fifty hours. I transcribed each interview and sent a copy of the transcription to each interviewee. Retrospectively I think I should also have sent a copy of the tape itself. No interviewee asked for a copy tape, however.

My approach was perhaps too vague and caused people to feel suspicious of my motives. By its preoccupation with indigenous elderly, too, the project set its own terms of reference which effectively excluded the possibility of including the non-Christian and non-English communities who have settled here more recently.

The equipment used was a Marantz tape recorder, a Sony transcriber, Windows 95 computer software and an Aiwa tape recorder. Tapes were many and various, not always new one, of different lengths and makes.

### Stage Three

I edited the individual transcripts to make the narrative document, which forms the basis of the study as presented. It might have been more sensible and certainly less time-consuming to have made transcripts of the compilation tapes rather than every single individual tape, but I think the latter approach was the more honest one.

I edited the tapes by re-recording into a subject/narrative form with a certainly useable but not very professional outcome. This annotated material is now held on six audio tapes, four of sixty minutes and two of ninety minutes duration which I used to produce a little more discussion at the afternoon club at Emmanuel where people made a very lively response to what they heard.

On completion I gave a copy of the printed document to the group at Emmanuel to pass around and keep. I received very little feedback. The individual tapes and transcripts and clearance documentation, though not the compilation tape, were stored with VHM where they are now catalogued as part of the Waltham Forest Oral History Sound Archive.

During the course of the project I was able to do some work at St Joseph's School as part of their Curriculum History, using material on "flooding", relating it to floods in Bangladesh at the time. These upper junior children were almost exclusively members of ethnic groups other than white UK; they took enthusiastically to asking family members for interviews as part of their history work on migration. I was unable to follow up early results as the teacher left and I felt under-resourced to continue.

Throughout the period of interviewing, 1997-8, I was gathering background history of the area from secondary sources, mainly the Victoria County History; studying the social and ethical implications of oral history; and considering how this particular project might be taken forward and expanded in the future. Possibilities might include interviews with landowners, factory owners and managers, and other employers; an exploration of the coming of consumerism and the destruction or manipulation of value systems inimical to it. In the wider world, there are glimpses of the powerful people who lived in or owned property in Leyton and Walthamstow, such as most obviously, the Warner family.

My line of questioning may have fed a pre-existing yearning for "it used to be lovely here", so that I elicited a particular kind of response. But this very longing, as exemplified by Annie Hatley's reminiscences, published in the 1950s, is an urban and suburban phenomenon.

The oral testimony and background history both only go as far as the 1960s. I set out below a brief and subjective view of the later period.

In 1964 the London Borough of Waltham Forest was created, locking together formally Walthamstow, Leyton and Chingford. The Gateway area thus officially became the focus of industrial development for three former independent boroughs. 2000 saw the opening of the Leyton Relief Road, over which there was a great deal of controversy. The Council's propaganda sheet trumpets their satisfaction with never a hint that anyone had ever opposed any part of the plan at all.

A Secondary School is under construction on a former industrial site adjacent to Marsh Lane playing field. It seems we have a youthful population here, regeneration of a literal sort. Surely we deserve something better than advertising placards and third rate factory jobs?

The two Anglican parishes which cover this area are antipathetic at best: Emmanuel is Evangelical, whereas St Saviour's is Anglo-Catholic. As far as I am aware, neither has much if any official contact with the local mosques. Nonconformity in the shape of Methodism seems moribund.

Warm and comfortable homes have become an achievable and universal aspiration for most of the people who live here, class differences, if not diluted into insignificance are at

least hidden away by consumerist fantasies of equality: cars, the telephone and the Internet take us where we think we want to go. In those days, everyone walked – life was circumscribed by how far your legs would take you – shopping, playing, school, work.

The large factories are gone, there are small industrial ‘units’ still, though most people are not employed locally. The car is paramount here. We service and care for its needs, and we are the motor’s undertakers too, an industrial scrapyard for breaking up, not manufacture. Hoardings scream “Come buy, come buy”.

*The last fifty years? Nothing much has changed except the traffic. And we’ve got older. The children have grown up and gone away. My husband’s died. That’s all dear, really. Nothing else to say.*

So what defines “neighbourhood” now? It must be The Road. Yet who admits it? The Churches? No. Local government? No. Estate Agents? No. But transport, first the station at Lea Bridge, now closed without trace and the road itself as the reason our estates came into being, why communities grew up here. We are here because of the ease of access to elsewhere. And now we’re stuck. What can we make of it? Can we make a go of it, a plausible existence, reinvent ourselves as some new community?

## PART TWO

### EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

*'My dad was blind, he came back from the 1914 war gassed, we never got a farthing, things were very, very, hard ... he wasn't able to work, and there was no money of any description. Dad just sat there, and we used to have to do everything for him, take him to the toilet, wash him, read to him ... there were always terrible arguments ... we were reading yesterday's paper instead of today's paper, and so on, you can understand, because in those days a man was expected to look after his wife*

Flo Temple

### The First World War

*Jack Milford's 'first recollections were of my mother taking me down to the air raid shelters in the stables under the Lea Bridge Road arches during the First World War. An air raid warning was carried out by boy scouts with their bugles, and policemen. My father, of course, was in the Services, in the Rifle Brigade, in Flanders ... I remember my father coming home on leave from the trenches still with Flanders mud on him, and he took us up to Chingford, he did, for the afternoon, and he laid out on the grass and went to sleep for the whole afternoon while the three kids played, actually. And, as I say, still had the Flanders mud on his clothes and boots he did. And that was his afternoon out with us; and very nice too, mind you. I can begin to remember the IRA came out. The IRA blew up the signal box, over by the Lea, there was a signal box over there, and they used to put bombs in the pillar boxes to blind the postmen.*

*Gladys Rowland remembers 'standing with my parents in the neighbours' next door, in the front of the flat ... looking across to Daniel's Field ..8. across Lea Bridge Road, up in the sky there was a balloon alight, it was the First World War, they sent it over and it caught fire, and it came down Potter's Bar, I think. ... I could only have been about four, but I remember they were all standing there looking up in the sky and talking about it...'*

*Margaret Churcher recalls her father 'yes, it was more or less shock, shell-shock, nerves. He was a very fair man, and when he couldn't work - mum was always at work - he would do the housework and do the cooking' and 'at that time', recalls Flo Temple, 'I never knew any woman who went out to work, the husband just kept them, but in a lot of particular cases, things were just different.'*

*Harry Burkett's father, born in 1881, 'was a professional soldier, he liked the Army he'd been in India, for seven years; he escaped the Boer War itself, because he was in India, on leaving the Army, he had to be put onto the Reserve, the Reservists, in 1914, were the first to be called on, and he was on the second boat that went across the Channel, and he was in the Cycling Corps, the Royal Army Cycling Corps. I understood he was in the Middlesex Regiment, and the whole regiment were wiped out apart from about five people, and he was one of the lucky ones ... he was in the Retreat from Mons ...*

*It was only one month into the First World War, and all the soldiers really believed it would all be over in two months ... he was in with a group of cyclists, and their job, the cyclists, was to establish the positions the Germans were in, but they also were being defeated and had to, run away, you might say, at the same time, being shot at. My father has told me, he's been on these ploughed fields withdrawing, and bullets have blown out his brake blocks, and yet he never got hit. He was just fortunate. He only retired from the Army*



*because of a frozen foot ... He committed suicide in the end, that was 1950, I think his experience in the 1914-18 war played on his mind ...*

## 'Leafy Leyton'

Annie Hatley in her book of Walthamstow Memories testifies to the rural nature of the area at the turn of the century, and old photographs illustrate this too. In the 1920s and 1930s the area still had a rural feel and Mrs Churcher who lived in a series of rented rooms in large houses near The Greyhound pub on Lea Bridge Road remembers *'right opposite where we lived was the fields, Lammas fields, I mean, during the day you'd have sheep going from one side of the road to the other, to graze on lammas land ... you know, at the side of the waterworks there ... you'd look out on an array of beautiful little cottages, a smallholding down there, with all his products, all his stuff that he sold ... looking over Lea Bridge Road itself, over into Lammas Road. It was nice, it was countrified, 'cos when we first moved down there we thought we were living in the country.*

The marshes extended up to Church Road and Jack Milford told me, *'were all level with Marsh Lane, the railway was only a double line right the way through, there was no railway yard, and there was a bridge under there by the hut for the crossing keeper's hut, and you could go underneath to take the sheep under.... You went across there, and again, it was flat, right across, hadn't been built up, and you come to a place they called The Island, they call it The Island, because it was a little island, very sandy all round, where we used to go swimming in the afternoon, all the lads swam in the river then, it was clean, a beautiful place to swim ... it had sandy banks, and the canal wasn't built then, of course ...'*

He attended Church Road school and he *'used to come home to dinner, down Marsh Lane, across the field there was a ditch the whole length of the field there - I don't mean the Dagenham Brook, there was another ditch that went along there, and then when you cross that ditch, you were on Fairhead's Farm. There was a farm, all the way from Church Road, right the way down ... when you went down Seymour Road, there was a gate across the road there, where Warner's flats finished. When you climbed that gate as I used to have to do, you were in Fairhead's Orchard, there was a big orchard over there, and it used to stretch with a piggery and everything else, all the way up to Church Road... I used to come home from school for the dinner hour, as a kid of about ten, first of all I used to jump the ditch if I was lucky - there was no bridge - and then I used to tear through Fairhead's Orchard, hoping there was no-one chasing me, and climb a whacking great big nine foot gate and fence.*

*Scrumpping? Christ, there wasn't time for that. You wouldn't dare. Otherwise it meant me walking right round Church Road and coming right round Markhouse Road, and on the corner of Markhouse Road, you know, where that cinema is, well, there was a big wall round there, and a whacking great tree on the corner, very big, and you got round the corner a little way, and then there were six very big mansion houses, about three storey houses with big long front gardens, all the way down the Markhouse Hill to that garage.'*

## Floods

Being mainly marshland, water management was always part of life for the authorities and for individuals. Gladys Rowland remembers Lea Bridge Road flooding, as it did right up to the 1950s when the relief channel was built and the Lea was culverted. She recalls, *'there were railings along there at that time, and if my father was out in Bethnal Green on his bike', (he was an insurance agent), come back and found it all flooded, he'd climb on the railings and push his bike with the other hand - I remember that happening several times'*.

Several people recall boats going up and down Lea Bridge Road, and children seem to have enjoyed playing in the floodwater. Muriel Jones recalls, *'the marshes at the back were all flooded. I think we had to go to school the other way around [avoiding Marsh Lane], but it was lovely to go tramping through all this water in your wellingtons, I loved it ...'* For parents of small children though, it wasn't so much fun. Lily Sims recalls the floods *'used to be right deep, and I remember going out when Yvonne [her daughter] was small, about three, and we'd been out visiting some friends, got off the bus across the road, and it was all flooded, and I had to carry her across the road, I'd got a new pair of shoes on, I was so annoyed, I'd ruined my new shoes! If I'd have been bolder, I'd have taken them off and carried them ....'*

Irene Cockerton came to live in Bridge Road, an interwar development, in the 1950s. Flooding still occurred, but *'not our particular garden, because the people we bought the house from had raised the path there and built it up, so that this garden is slightly higher than the others along here, but if you got heavy rain, or a heavy storm, the gardens would be absolutely flooded, almost up to the back doors ... and it left a thick black sludge over all the gardens ... it never actually went in the houses ... I remember the main road flooding too ...but it was mainly down by the Lea, it was only once I remember we had torrential rain, and I had to take my daughter to the dental hospital, and it rained so much that we were paddling when we started out ... the drains couldn't take the water away quick enough ....'*

Harry Burkett recalls, his boyhood in Perth Road, where *'we bordered onto the school, and there was a big field and at the top there was the Lea Bridge Road School, and this field used to be divided up into patches for the boys at Sybourn Street to come once a week and do gardening ... I believe it's been raised now, because in those days, when we had flooding on the Lea Bridge Road, water would come up into this field and we would be looking out of our kitchen window onto a field full of water.'*

## Roads, People and Vehicles

The settlements and housing developments in the Gateway area grew up largely as a result of the presence of Lea Bridge Road, and the railway station at Lea Bridge which opened in 1840.

Jack Milford recalls his early boyhood, when *'the Lea Bridge Road was the same width as it is at Lea Bridge Station, all the way to Baker's Arms with a cobbled road and two tram tracks at the way, and the speed limit for buses and motor cars was twelve miles an hour. There was no motor police whatsoever. It was written on the side of the buses, it used to say "speed limit twelve miles an hour" on the side of the bus, and that was motor cars as well, until motor police were introduced. And the first motor police was a combination motor cycle with the policemen still wearing their helmets on the top! Sweet, isn't it? And the sewer men used to go down and gas all the rats; it was a different world You had the man with the pole to do lamp lighting in the evening, postmen wore shako hats . In those days, too, the postman didn't just put a letter through the box, but 'he always knocked twice; and the AA man always used to salute everyone who had a badge up ...*

*'I can also remember, you used to get the lamplighters on the street. You used to get a man come round every evening with a long pole and switch all the street lights on, and come round early in the morning and switch them all off again. On the Lea Bridge Road, I don't know how they were switched on, but they must have been done by the streetlighter, because what we had on the Lea Bridge Road at that time were carbon arc lights, they were electric, but they had two carbon pencils in them, that form an arch*

*between the pencils, and the pencils keep automatically coming down and shortening, until you get to Whipps Cross, then there was no street lighting at all, and when you came to Woodford there were still oil lamps in the street. The Epping Road that was a two lane lane, actually, and if you got as far as Epping Town, you were miles out in the country then.'*

Stan Gimson said: *'Pavements were mostly the same as today ... street lights, I can remember when a chappie used to go round when they were gas, I would have been about five, or seven, he'd have a long stick and he'd come and pull a chain down, then he had to go round in the morning and switch them off again ... early twenties, or later twenties was the change over to electric ...'*

Jack Milford: *'Those roads [like Epping New Road] have been built since. In those days, it was just the Epping Road and it was a country lane... at this time, motor buses were just coming in. You'd still got those old buses like they used in the First World War, and you sat downstairs all facing one another, that was the first general omnibus company.'*

*The terminus of the tramlines was first of all at the Chestnuts near Whipps Cross, and finally at the Rising Sun, where the tramlines parted, you couldn't go any further, and another tramline used to run back and down Forest Road for Walthamstow Council. All the tramline were run by councils, and they were like boats, used to rock about all over the place on these trams, with open tops. The buses also had open tops, and the bus driver had no protection whatsoever, no heaters, no anything, but a canvas dodger to keep the rain out, and that was all. The same sort of thing as cabmen, they'd have a cape round them, and of course there was a lot of horse vehicles.'*

*Ourselves, coming home from school, we used to hope to hang on the back of a horse and cart and get a ride all the way home if we could . If you could find a slow lorry you weren't doing so bad. The lorries were only supposed to be doing twelve miles per hour; you got steam wagons too, they were haulage vehicle. With the gas works, you got ones called Sentinel, they had a lorry front, but they were still steam engines, and they used to burn coke, and you used to see their lorries about, they were called the Gas Light and Coke Company. The other steam wagons did look like steam wagons, but they had a lorry back on them and they were made by Foden in Kent, they had a prancing horse on the front of them, the same as you get on the front of steam engines, then.'*

*'Lea Bridge Road was paved with cobblestones, with two sets of tram lines; the only place I knew that had tar blocks was Kenninghall Road. But what used to happen when it rained, the wood used to swell and they used to come up in big humps, but there wasn't any of those down the Lea Bridge Road Jack's friend recalled that tar blocks paved the road in Piccadilly until about 1964. He was a bus driver, and the surface was a tricky one to drive over. And in New Bridge Street, there was at one time an experimental rubber road, made up of rubber blocks, which was not successful ...'*

Stan Gimson recalls the road surfaces and street furniture of his youth too: *'Where the tramlines were the roads were cobbled, but on each side, before the tarmac came about, they were wood blocks, when they did away with them or dug them up for any reason, folks would stand on the kerbside waiting to put them in a sack, they pinched them to put them on the fire ... the layer of tar on them burned lovely ... the small residential streets weren't paved with the wooden blocks, as far as I can remember, they sprayed tar on top .. they used a steam roller, but they weren't tarmac'd like you'd see it done these days .. it would be earth rolled own hard with a steam roller and then sprayed over with bitumen ... less hard-wearing, suitable for horse and cart and lighter traffic ...'*

Jack Milford says that Lea Bridge Road has been widened on several occasions, on one of which the cobbles were removed: *'It's been widened twice, actually they widened the road about 1928, I should think, and I remember it then because I was a very flexible youngster, they had all the piles of cobbles half as high as an 'ouse piled in Perth Road, they did, and I used to be able to run across the top of those, without ricking me ankles or anything. I was a kerb kid'*

The era of horse-drawn traffic seems to be just beyond the memory of most of my interviewees. For example, Gladys Rowland said *'I don't remember horse-drawn traffic ... my mother had an uncle used to drive [a horse-bus] ....they used to drink a lot in those days as well, the horse-bus drivers, and he was driving a cab, absolutely blotto drunk .... he fell off and got killed'*. Lily Sims recalls an old lady who told her that when the horse-buses were going up Markhouse Hill [from about where the B and Q DIY store now is], *they used to put an extra pair of horses on the bus to pull it up ... that was tennis courts, where our church is built now, and they used to say, this was watercress beds round here'*.

Harry Burkett recalls that *'The Hare and Hounds was right out into the road, that frontage ... there was room in front of the Hare and Hounds, before you got to the pub, for carts to draw up, the brewers' drays used to pull up there, and they had a big ground at the side'*, and generally speaking, *'the gardens along there were very much longer than they are now because Lea Bridge Road was narrower, so those front gardens of those houses were almost as long as their back gardens ... especially those near the Hare and Hounds .. think how narrow Lea Bridge Road must have been .. the church has been chopped back twice'*

Harry Burkett found told me *'in the main, along Lea Bridge Road, there would be horses and carts, brewery carts, vans, there was a kind of a steam engine that carried heavy material .. the only motor combustion engines were the buses, and there could have been a few lorries ... I'm pretty sure that the pace of traffic would have been ten, fifteen miles an hour; there were no pedestrian crossings, you would have been able to just cross the road ... there were electric trams ... you didn't wait long for them, ten, fifteen minutes ...*

People's main means of getting about was by foot, though for a special outing, some form of transport was used. Harry's experience is representative: *'We would get the bus in Lea Bridge Road - open top bus, of course, and it would take us right up to the Forest Hotel... But the buses in those days couldn't go up the Mount, so they had to go along what now is New Road, get to the Forest that way. Coming back, they would go down Chingford Mount, and I can remember on Bank Holiday, crowds of people kind of assembled just after tea time, and there'd be huge crowds waiting for these buses, and you had to queue up, and everyone was quite anxious that they were going to get on the bus'*.

Brenda Jones recalls too that *'Lea Bridge Road was always busy - but nothing like it is now - and of course there was probably a policeman to see you across the road, but my mum wouldn't let me cross Lea Bridge Road, so I had to go across the marshes... there were buses and trams in my day too, they went at the same time, you had trams going along Lea Bridge Road at the same time as buses. You would have had cars and bikes .. certainly wouldn't have cars parked in the road .. I can remember a couple of cars would have been parked in the road, but no more. The only cars that I can remember people had in Bloxhall road, Elsie May's friend had a car, who lived there. Cyril Cox always had a car, but he parked his - his sideways opened - he parked his in his back, behind his shop ... but certainly the likes of us would never have had a car....*

## HOME LIFE

*'this flat of mine was gas lit - it was a downstairs flat. It had a very long passage and I used to hate it. If you went into the house, you'd have to light the gas, which nobody did when there was nobody there, of course, and nobody ever used to come into the house until ten o'clock at night and I was a kid; I was frightened to walk in the house I was ...'*

Jack Milford

### Finding A Place

Joyce Russell's mother 'moved into Blythe, about 1910, 1912, something like that about the time Sybourn was being built ... in those days, they used to give a hundredweight of coal to every new tenant ... my mother and father, they came from Springfield Park, they had rooms there, then they put in for these new flats that were being built, because there were watercress beds all along Lea Bridge Road, and it was called Butterfield Lane [wrong], and Warner's bought the land ... they moved into Blythe Road, then Lea Hall, then Malta .. they were at Blythe Road until just before the First World War, not long, because they were able to get a house ..

A life-long resident, Harry Burkett, recalls how his family came to rent the Warner flat he lived in as a boy: *When my mother was expecting again, there wasn't room and father had to look around for accommodation, and he came to Lea Bridge Road and apparently there were great hoardings along Lea Bridge Road announcing Working Class Flat, Warner's Estate, eight shillings a week rent. It was very difficult to get into one. My father really pulled strings to get into this flat in Perth Road .. he had a brother in law who lived at 4 Perth Road, and this brother in law had lost his wife and so we moved in, contrary to regulations, and eventually my father got the tenancy, and there we lived with the family and grew up.....*

For Margaret Churcher's family, however, it was 'necessity [ which led her parents to move to Lea Bridge Road] ... well, we were living over the shop in Lower Clapton Road, right up the top of Lea Bridge Road. We moved from Glynn Road up to this place, because me father had got talking to a man who had a stall down Chatsworth Road market, and he said he'd got a couple of rooms to let, so me dad said, all right, we'll go there. We went right in the top of the house again. Well, then this man, Mr Clark, he said after a time, there's a big house going in Lea Bridge Road, number 69, would you like to have a flat at the top, and this is where we went. When I moved there I must have been about thirteen, twelve or thirteen, cos Church Road school was Senior School, and that's where I used to go.

Some people like Flo Temple moved into the area from the East End during the Second World War because they'd been bombed out. She recalls: *'the flat in Bow had been in Lefevre Road [where they later built a tower block estate in the 1960s, which is now, 1998 being demolished in its turn] I went into Liverpool Street Station, anybody could go in there and stay the night away from the bombs, and that's where I used to go every night . The fire brigade captain seems to have taken Flo under his wing, she remembers events very vividly: "you come here every night Flo, haven't you got a home?" - he knew I was married, I'd got a wedding ring on - I'd already told him George was abroad, I said, I haven't got a home any more, so he said, "I live in Walthamstow, do you know anything about the Warner flats?", I said "never even heard of them", he said "they're very, very, nice, "I tell you what", he said, "on my day off, I'll take you round", he said.*

*'To me, it was a palace ... we went there, to Hawarden Road, [the Warner's Estate Office] and he did a lot of talking, they said, "well, we'll get the car out" - this was the owner of the Warner flats, "and I'll take you round" ... that was the main offices .. the one that was in charge, he was one of the Warners himself .. I don't know which one it was, but he had a funny name, I know he was always going abroad and all that sort of thing ... his name wasn't Warner, but that was the name of the company .. he took me all round, I needed somewhere where I could get a bus easily ... I wasn't very fussy ... They stopped at 95 and I went there and I was there till about twelve years ago ... that was a downstairs, it wasn't modernised, none of them were modernised then . There were no windows, they'd all been bombed, and all you could do was put a black curtain up.*

Joyce Russell came to live in Hibbert Road in 1955, she recalls: *'I came to Hibbert Road because I'd been married a few years and this was the first home that we'd had. I was married in 1948 ... we'd applied because I'd only got one child and therefore you couldn't get Council, and we tried to buy but we never had quite enough money, because you couldn't get 100% mortgage in those days, and I'd applied to Warner's and my father went to see them at various times, to see what, and then they came round to see how we were living, to see we were living in quite cramped rooms, and they gave us the flat, which needed a lot of repair, but we were glad to get it. We were in there about five years before we could have it modernised, we put in for it to be modernised, but the lady downstairs had a boy and a girl and didn't want it done, and they had to be done in pairs.*

### A Typical Warners' Flat

Warner flats were all on the same model. Harry Burkett's home in Perth Road is typical of an upstairs flat, where *'you came in the front door, went up the stairs and along a long passage, and basically, we lived in one room, because heating was expensive. There was a range, at the very end of the passage. At the top of the stairs, though, you could turn right, there on your left would be one big bedroom, if you went forward to the front, there was an exceptionally long front room. Next to that was a small bedroom, then another door to the kitchen, there was the downstairs at the back to go into the garden, and we lived in the back room which was the warmest...*

Stan Gimson lived in a downstairs flat which *'had a long passage - not a corridor, it was a passage - you turned to the right and then to the left, then there was another bit of passage ... we had what they called a scullery in those days ... the front room, when you came in the front door, was on the left ... they had it as a sitting room, the piano was there, a very small three piece suite; but it was comfortable ... the fire in there was only ever lit on the weekends.*

*'In the kitchen we had a kitchener, we used it as heating as well, and my mother sometimes used to cook on the top of it; this room was right at the back, overlooking the little bit of a garden, two big windows ... there was a built-in cupboard what the groceries used to be kept in ... and a dresser at the side of it ... where you could hang your cups and put plates on the wall ...[it] had drawers in it [and] my mother used to put a curtain across the bottom, where the shelves were ... We used to use the kitchen as the sitting room, during the week.*

A striking feature of Warner flats was the scullery, with many doors leading from it to other parts of the flat and to the garden.

In the scullery, in Stan Gimson's home, *'there was a back door, or garden door. There was a built-in toilet in there, and a big copper, my mother used to do all the washing in; and one of those old-fashioned brown coloured very narrow sinks - it wasn't a butler's*

*sink, it was before butler's sinks it was only [about a foot] wide; next to that she had a real old-fashioned gas stove. I can remember sitting there to give it a wash ... Stan Gimson recalls: I think they [gas cookers] was in there 1908.. when they were built, there wasn't such a thing as a gas cooker ...*

*Harry Burkett describes the similar arrangement in his flat as being that 'the loo was in the kitchen ... you went through the kitchen door, you looked straight ahead to a window that looked out on the field, you looked right, there was the copper, then came the loo, which was roomy enough, then through the door on the left, behind the kitchen door would be the gate leading downstairs to the garden, and next to that would be the gas stove, walking forward on the left, and then further there would be this cupboard ... the cooker was opposite the loo door ... the loo door had always been there ... forward was the window, then just to the right of the window was this flat sink, and a table to do all your chopping, peeling potatoes ... it was quite compact ... The worst part was getting up in the morning to get a wash. My father was an army man, and he liked a certain amount of order .. we all had to wash in order ... they used to use what we called oil cloth or lino for flooring ...'*

*Stan Gimson again recalls that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when these flats were built, 'there wasn't such a thing as a gas cooker, you had a kitchener... we were the second tenants, I think they were built at the turn of the century ... Just outside the back door was another door, next door, and that went upstairs .. I think my mother had a galvanised bath' [for washing and bathing] ... Ruth Gimson remembered that in her childhood home too, 'in the kitchen we had a dresser - we had two; there was a fitted one, in the kitchen, and a cupboard for your food alongside it in the corner. And in that cupboard, you had a window that opened out so you could get the air there. We had two, because being my father was a carpenter, he'd made one for his old place ... apart from that just two armchairs and a scrubbed white table. We had lino on the floor ... patterned, I think, and you used to have lino all the way up your passage as well ... throughout the flat, with mats ...'*

*As was the case with most people, in Harry Burkett's home 'the kitchen was kind of all purpose room, it was cooking, washing your face, and also the best place to get a bath, with a separate tin bath, and in the corner was an extremely good copper, it boiled up the water very well. In the living room, you opened the door, which had a glass panel and a curtain, and there on the left was the stove, and a cupboard beyond that - I don't know what that was meant for but we used to use it for tools, firewood and odd things. Then, forward, you had two windows, sash windows. If you looked to the right there was a dresser with two big cupboards with two big drawers in it for storage. Next to the dresser in the corner there was a larder which had a window in it ... In the middle of the room we always had a big table, so it was never really a proper sitting room. Father would have his upright wooden chair ... then there would be these round chairs that the kids sat on, then eventually mother got a sitting chair' [with an upholstered seat and back]*

*He continues, 'the pots and pans were kept under the dresser . I made a meat safe, about two by one and a half, with a zinc mesh door ... there was big well over the stairs, and that's where we stood the safe, in the draught from the stairs. In Ruth Gimson's home 'you kept pots and pans underneath the dresser, I suppose in the kitchen. The only sink we had was the small one in the scullery, there was no water in the kitchen ... the only shelves we had was halfway down the passage because mum used to make a lot of pickles and jams for the bazaars - the shelves were up the passageway half way almost to where the cupboard was, the shelves were at the side, in the corner ... you didn't see it from the front door because it was round the corner.'*

Brenda Jones remembers *'in the back kitchen we had a deal table, and hard back chairs ... I don't remember any armchairs. I can remember the first armchair ... they were the only chairs we had .. we had a radio .. eventually we had a bookcase, we didn't have a lot. In the bedrooms 'we had wardrobes, not fitted, free-standing, a big wardrobe with a drawer on the bottom - the chest of drawers and dressing table I've still got ... we would have had a bed, there was a walk in cupboard in the bedroom Muriel and I shared, and our clothes went in there, and we must have had a chest of drawers to put other things on. I don't remember having a chair in the bedroom ... you only went there to go to bed. We had lino on the floor, perhaps with a rug on the top, and we had lino up the stairs. I can remember when we first had a carpet up the stairs, but that wasn't until I was out to work and earning money ... in the scullery that was lino, then plastic mats came in, so we had a plastic mat on top of that, bright garish colours, "Dandy" they were called. And we had a grating grid at the sink, so if water got spilt you weren't standing in water ...'*

## Paying the Rent

People said little about this, perhaps because it was an adult concern that didn't usually affect them directly. Gladys Rowland said, *'Always remember my mother what rent she paid there, and it was seven and six a week, and I think when we left it went up to about ten and six ... the rent collector came round every week,'* and Stanley Gimson recalled *'a man used to come round, and my mother - a lot of them, especially during the War, she was the only one at home - a lot of the younger ones were out at work, and indoors, just inside the front door, was a table, and she had I think about half a dozen rent books for all the neighbours. Some of them went and paid at the Estate Office, I suppose. Brenda Jones recalls 'Warner was a baronet, local landowning family' and that the rent 'at one point was 14/6, heating and lighting were separate.'*

Margaret Churcher's family never had a secure tenancy, and despite the pleasure of having a garden, they had to leave, because their 'landlord' *'unfortunately, he was a man that never paid rent, and we were evicted out of that place.'*

Gladys Rowland remembers *'also the school (he was a baker really, I suppose it was a part-time job for him) any child who hadn't been to school for a week or so, used to come round and find out why ...'*

## Heating, Cooking and Lighting

Most, if not all, homes were heated by coal, which was usually kept inside the flat. People had more or less difficulty with getting it inside. Stanley Gimson's family was one of the luckier ones in this respect, *'we was on the end of the terrace, so when we got there, they used to bring it in the sideway, and we used to have it under the stairs at the back. As time went on, we had a bunker out in the garden, because we had the straight wall, you see, so we had it against the wall. They emptied [the sacks], that's why they had that shiny wallpaper, because most of the flats had the coal shot in the front cupboard, and as he went up he would have caught the wallpaper ... that green, shiny paper ... Warners' trademark ...'*

Harry Burkett speaks for all when he comments: *'those flats were very draughty, especially in the Winter, and in his upstairs flat, there was a cupboard for coal in the kitchen, it went over the stairs the coal man would come along the road, and you'd buy a hundredweight, two hundredweight, you could never buy a big quantity ... we had a sideway, which was a advantage, and he'd go through the sideway, up the back stairs into the kitchen, tip the coal into this cupboard ... probably had to have a hundredweight every week ... he had a horse and cart, and the coal merchant was Edkins, near Lea*



*Bridge station. If you had company and you used this big front room and people came, and they played the piano, you had to light a fire, but it was only suited to a room half the size... we used to try and burn coke [from the Lea Bridge and District Gas Works to spin out the coal. There was no heating in the bedrooms ...*

*'There were very nice oil heaters coming onto the market, I can remember a very good quality Valor oil heater. If it was cold when we got up in the morning, we lit this oil stove, so the fire could be cleaned out properly and relit ... the oil stove was in the living room ... When I was seven, I was taught the piano, and in a very cold room, and my father would insist on my doing half an hour's practice every day in this cold room, so we used the oil heater in this big room, but there was no other heating.*

*'In the living room, there was a big fireplace with a high mantelpiece, and a so-called stove, which heated up hot water, but by about 1930, the pipes were chock a block, and you couldn't get very much hot water from them, so by and large we used to have our hot water for washing from a kettle on the gas stove, that was in the kitchen. Even though it didn't provide hot water, we still lit the range, it was the centre of everything really .. you had to keep this fire going with coal, which was kept in the kitchen, there was a cupboard in the kitchen .... next to that there was a very nice oven ...'*

In Ruth Gimson's flat there was a small bedroom, with a big bedroom at the front. Every room had a fireplace, though *'you might have a fire in the front room, but other than that only if anyone was ill. The one in the little room was more trouble than it was worth, because as you push the door open, there was the fireplace there, so you'd get the draught there.'*

For Harry Burkett's family, like most people, *'Sunday dinner was the great dinner, big leg of lamb, occasionally beef, pork and my mother would cook on this stove, in the oven, but through the week, the stove had to be lit for heat in the winter, but to cook this great dinner on a Sunday, in the summer, the heat was terrific, till eventually my mother was persuaded to cook by gas - the gas cooker was in the kitchen. Warner's installed a very simple, plain sort of gas stove, an iron thing, but as my father worked for the Gas Light and Coke Company in Hackney, he got to know about better gas stoves, so we had a better one. He used to have to help with the cooking, it took my mother a long time to get used to cooking with a gas stove ... but these coal fires, unless you kept that fire going, you didn't get an even, heat, whereas with a gas stove, you had a regulator on it, I can't see what was so difficult about it ...'*

Brenda Jones recalled *'my mum cooked wonderful meals on the black-leaded range ... we had a gas stove and a range, but you'd only use your gas stove in the summer. You always had a kettle on the range, when you hadn't got a fire there, first thing in the morning, if it had gone out, you would've used your gas stove, and that was about it ...'*

Ruth Gimson recalls: *'we had oil lamps, then we had gas lamps - I don't know what year they had gas. To start with there was no gas fitted in any of these places, ... then the gas meter was put on the wall, as you open the front door, there it was ... I remember dad made a frame for it, covered it ... didn't have electric put in till '49... a lot of them did ... you only needed one oil lamp to light a room ... we didn't have a tilly, we used to have the tall ones, on the table, in the centre of the room.'*

## Sleeping Arrangements

Stan Gimson's family is representative, in that *'we all slept in this one bedroom, I had my own bed, facing the door; they would come the other way down to the fireplace ...'*

Muriel and Brenda Jones, however, had a separate bedroom from their parents, and they *'slept in the back bedroom ... Mum and dad slept in the front room. We shared a bed, with brass balls on the top. Never, ever had a bed to myself until I'd been working for years ...'*

When Harry Burkett and his parents and baby sister went to 4 Perth Road, the baby *'would have slept in the big bedroom, with parents, in a cot in the corner. I would have had the small room. As we grew older, and I had a brother, we had a double bed in the small bedroom, and he slept side by side with me, and my sister had to sleep in a small bed in the long front room, this upset the parlour ... it was all kept very clean ... mum and dad had a double brass bed ...'*

*'Grandfather became very ill, my grandmother had died, and we had to accommodate my grandfather, we had to find a bed for him in this front room, which further upset the parlour, obviously my sister by the age of 14 or 15 couldn't sleep with him in the room. There was a lady two or three doors away, lived on her own in a Warner's flat, very nice lady, and for a period of a few months, my sister used to have to go to her and spend the night there, and come back in the morning, till my grandfather died with bronchitis, then my sister went back to sleeping in the front room ... The lady's name was Mrs Leach. Must have been a widow ... she might have had a daughter with her...'*

## Gardens

Ruth Gimson said *'We had a garden in front of our room, and the upstairs had the long bit against the wall, and we had the front ... we grew flowers; and of course when we came back after the war when my mum died, we took over the garden and that ...'* Harry Burkett's family *'had an unusually large garden, which was divided between upstairs and downstairs, and it was big enough for an allotment to grow vegetables. The back garden faced on the gas works, and in those days you used to get some bad smells from the gas ...'*

The houses where Mrs Churcher's family had rooms were large ones with gardens, *'you went down your own stairs, then you went down another flight of steps, stairs, into the long garden with nothing else but fruit trees, and at the bottom of the garden, me mum used to have chickens ...'*

Shirley Fraser grew up in Georgetown, Guyana, where people grew most of their own food, some for their own use, some for sale: *'When we want to go to the part, we got things growing, we make it like a Sunday, we go down there to get greens or anything, we do the greens in our garden indoors, just the way we done it here, but they had certain parts where you go and get the greens if you want to sell. But what you want to do with your little greens, you do it in the garden indoors... We had coconut trees, palm trees, all that could grow in your own garden, mango trees, pears, paw-paw ... everyone had their own garden, and everyone tried to do some planting ... you don't have to buy ... only time you buy fruits and greens is if you don't have it in your garden, you get plantains, cassava, sweet potato, then we started to do the Irish potatoes, from a little seed, then we find how it growing, so we start to do our own potatoes ... a little patch here, a little patch there ... spring onions and so on ... spinach and collalu, (it's like a spinach, but the leaves are different), yams, water coconuts ... dry coconut, you get the water ones first, you leave water ones on the tree, and they begin to get dry, so you get dry coconut from it.'*

## Decorations, Ornaments and Maintenance

In Ruth Gimson's family home there were many photographs and ornaments: *'we had pictures all the way up the passage way, on the side that the doors wasn't - photos and one thing or another - pictures of the family, big family photos ... over the mantelpiece you had all these big oval mirrors, covering all the chimney breast ...'* Stanley adds *'and if you were rich enough, you had a chiming clock - we had a chiming clock! We had a clock on the mantelpiece, and a lot of ornaments, candlesticks or little vases.*

*'In regard to decoration, Warners did it, they told us to tear it a bit, to get somebody to come and do it .. it didn't really need doing because we didn't have the coal through there ... they came round and showed you the patterns and that ... they used to paint regularly outside, not so much inside ... for years and years you had the hearth stone on the front doorstep, you wasn't allowed to paint your doorsteps ... in later years there were examples of people painting the doorstep ... but you could always tell a Warners' street, they were all the same ... on the inside, Warners' were always that dark green, it was that tongue and groove in the passage, from the first part of the passage way that more or less included the top of the stairs, was tongue and groove, each side...*

*'After a time, they did stipple it, at the top ... that came about during the [Second World] War, when they couldn't get the paper, they used to emulsion it, either a green or a red ... no picture rails ... they never had them there....*

Brenda Jones recalled *'Warner, they always came and did the outsides, and they were responsible for the insides, but that gradually died away, and people did their own. Officially they were responsible, because they used to come and do ours ... When you were decorated, your rent went up, always went up to pay for it. Decorations weren't light in those days, paintwork was always brown, and khaki coloured ...I don't ever remember choosing, but by the 50s you were decorating for yourselves ... if you couldn't do it yourself, you had to pay someone to do it ... they still decorated outside....*

Harry Burkett's family's Warner flat, like all the others, had no bathroom *'The Warner's family, as I understood, were connected with the Diocese and the Church, and I think they looked upon the Warner's flat as a kind of benefit for working class people they didn't think they ought to have a bath so we had to have a separate tin bath, and as for decorations, they were very good in attending to the roof or any dampness from the outside, but inside, it was a very difficult job to get them to do much more than whitewash a ceiling. In my father's case, he began life, when he left the army, as a builder, so, knowing something about decorating, he was able to do some painting of the woodwork and so on, though Warner's didn't approve of that, because I understood that people had left their flats to move somewhere else, and if they'd altered the colour of the paint on the woodwork, to put it back as they found it ...so, to ask for the hot water system to be renewed would be quite out of the question, you wouldn't get it done .... eventually we got a bit of separate carpet for the parlour, we had slip carpets for stepping on to get into bed ... all those carpets had to come up and the lino thoroughly washed with Hudson's soap powder water....'*

Flo Temple thinks that *'This at the time was the nicest road here, there were all lovely gates up ... as you walked out, we were all divided off with a gate, an iron gate ... and the hedges used to be cut every three months, Warner's did all that, they supplied you with a dustbin, but you had to keep it in the garden, you were told off if you forgot to take it in after it had been emptied, someone would come round and say, "it's past dustbin day, what's that dustbin doing out?" They were very, very fussy landlords. They used to come and do the pointing regularly ...*

*We had electricity, but the flat in Morieux that was opposite ours, old Mrs Butcher, she still had gas, and she had until she died, and didn't die till the 1950s.... we always had electricity.....*

## **Washing and Bathing**

*Like most families, Brenda Jones' 'had a copper which went on Sunday night ready for the washing on Monday, a wringer, an old mangle ... The back stairs were awful, they went round and turned round into the garden ... We used to go down there ... and we had this enamel bath, zinc bath, it lived in various places. I can remember it living outside in the garden, I can remember it living on the back stairs ... we heated water up for baths once a week, but not on the same day as the washing was done.*

*'When we had a bath, we all had a bath. I think I was lucky, I went first ... we shared the water. I can remember my mum skimming the soap off the top and then topping up. You couldn't have spared all that ... and the thing was, it was such an effort to empty it, you had to dipper the water out ... down the stone sink,, we bathed on the floor in front of the fire in the back room .. I think very often we had it in the back room where it was nice and warm ... the copper was in the scullery. In the summer, we would have had our baths in there, in the winter, you had it in front of the fire, in front of the range ...*

*'The copper was made of stone. You lit a fire underneath it. [There was no inner container] we got the water out through a tap in the side. My mother would have boiled the clothes up inside. The water they'd boiled up in would then have done all the rest of the clothes. What was boilable went in the boiling bit, and that might have boiled up all night, I can't remember, but I know the fire was lit the night before. Then she'd have taken the things out with a copper stick, and carried it across in a bucket to the sink, then washed and rinsed it in the sink. She used a scrubbing board, Sunlight soap, and she used to grate Sunlight soap into the copper to make soapsuds. And then the rest of the clothes, perhaps they weren't boilable, she would wash in the water that the other things had been boiled up in, because that was the only hot water there would be. Monday was totally taken up with washing ... she wrung it out with her hands, and then mangled it.... Most people had a mangle .. must have been stored next to the copper, in the space where the copper was. It was wheeled out and pushed back. And you would save that water that came out of the clothes for washing the floor. Nothing got wasted. It wasn't because water was metered, you just didn't waste things. It was dried by hanging it in the garden... she'd carry it all down in a bowl into the garden and peg it all out. When you couldn't peg it out, it was hung on a clothes horse indoors, where it steamed everywhere - it was horrible in the winter....*

*'We had a line that went the length of the garden - there were two lines, one for us and one for the people downstairs. By the 50s, we had different neighbours, a really nice lady, my mother didn't always get on terribly well with the others. We would mix and match our washing, which ... people didn't wash on a Monday by then, if one washed one day and one another, you could use both lines ... before that, that was my line, that was your line, if that one broke, you replaced ...*

*'In those days, everybody washed on a Monday when I was little, probably you did the ironing on a Tuesday, perhaps you baked on a Wednesday, did mending another day .... [things changed when] washing machines and things came in, when shops changed, and you had supermarkets, there was a big air of change, that was round about the end of the 50s, the beginning of the 60s ... I still knew people who did their washing on a Monday, even as late as the late 60s and 70s.*

*'When I was very small, we had an iron that you put into the fire to heat up, then you cooled it off and wiped it clean a bit - you put it on the gas of course, on the gas cooker ... and eventually electric irons came in, you had a lead and a plug, and you plugged the plug down into the iron. And you also did the sleeve with a sleeve board which is like a little narrow ironing board that fitted over the top ... the flat irons were ever so heavy ... you had to have all sorts of cloths and things to hold those with.'*

The Russells moved into their Warner flat in Hibbert Road in the early fifties: *'We didn't have a bathroom when we moved in. We bathed round my mum's, or the Leyton Baths. There was no old-fashioned copper here, if they ever had it, it had gone ... where the bath is now was the coal cupboard, and I can remember getting inside and washing out till I looked as though I'd been down the mines, then my husband whitewashed it, so that we could keep our brooms and things in there. We never ever kept coal in there. They put coal bunkers in, and we had coal downstairs, it had to be brought up and down the stairs, and the coal man, poor soul, didn't like obviously .'. and made all the place dirty ...'*

## **SHOPS AND SHOPPING**

*'but when you went across the road to Morieux, on the corner, there was the most famous one, chap named Jones, he sold paraffin oil, jam, if you took your own pot, the biscuits would be in tins all round, sugar, groceries, oil, we called it the oil shop, yet you bought biscuits and sugar, and sugar it used to be served up in a cone of paper .. you walked in, and you had to look for whoever was serving, because it was a mass of goods ... Mr Jones was a real character, and very obliging ... there was also another Jones, a bit further up.'*

Harry Burkett

Long term residents have vivid memories of shops and shopping in the area. Here's Brenda Jones talking about the Clementina Estate:

*'There was only one shop on the Clementina Road, that was on the end of Kettlebaston, and it was the off licence [It's now called The Image Centre and is presumably a printing and reproduction company]... you could get drinks and sweets, and went there to take the radio to have the accumulator boosted ... I don't know how they did it, it was done with acid ... I can remember [my sister] Muriel taking me down there, that was a place I was often allowed to go on my own as I got a bit older, because it was only down the road.'*

### **The Sweet Shop**

*'On Perth Road was the school on one corner, and I can't remember the other corner, because that was hit by a bomb, and it's got like a little park piece there,' Muriel recalls 'it was a sweet shop, I used to go in there ... it was just a couple in there, they were, a man and his wife, they weren't young, they were middle aged, they were quite friendly.' Harry Burkett remembers it as 'The Tuck Shop, a lovely shop that was, we always used to go and get a ha'p'orth of toffee or a drink ... this was 22/23, they used to have a big globe with gas coming up inside, and you could buy a drink, I don't think I could afford one, I never had one, but I used to remember this as you walked into the shop ... and inside the shop was very big, a big space ... the sweets were all on show on the counter, and you had to look for the person serving you because they were behind the sweet bottles, the jars of sweets.'*

*'The people who ran the shop were called Clewer, and he, to us, was a bit toffee nosed, because on Sunday, he was the organist, and he played for a time an Emmanuel, he was in the choir, toffee nosed because he wore spats, very, very smart, well dressed and discreet, and he ran the sweet shop, so he was quite ordinary during the week, with the children! 'The sweet shop would be open till eight. You could go shopping in the evening after tea They lived above the shop, because those Warner shops had quite good accommodation. He had a daughter and son, and they were in the choir [at Emmanuel], there was a very big choir in those days. I can't remember his wife, but I think she worked in the shop ... when you went into a shop like that you felt you were going into a family, because there was a family, and one or other of the would come out and serve you ... that's all I know about the Clewers, they were a bit above us, never really got to know them ...*

*I don't remember who took over the shop .. somebody who wasn't of the same calibre as Clewer took over, like many of these shops, new people come and they seem to wreck the place, because they haven't got the personality, haven't got the style of running it .. it was the end of the War ... but there was no bombing going on ... we later learned that men were doing the gas outside the shop, there was an explosion brought the whole lot down, and they never rebuilt it ...*

*'The next shop on the next corner was a put up for car men, a place with high back seats .. this was the shop on the Bloxhall side of the corner [vacant for many years, briefly a roofing company, now a glass and glazing establishment] they'd go in for their breakfast very early in the morning ... it was the old type of coffee house...*

## Strong's Dairy

*Brenda continues 'Now the Strong family had had that dairy a long time, and Gladys Strong, I knew ... she was still alive about ten years ago ... she had a brother and he committed suicide ... she went a little bit funny after that ... that was a little dairy that sold, well, milk, obviously, butter and cheese and that sort of thing, a few odds and ends.'* Although they were the local dairy, milk deliveries came from a different firm - Strong's round was in Clapton. Harry Burkett also remembers this *'old style dairy, where they sold butter, sugar, a few groceries, and mainly milk, and eggs. Strong's was their name, a real family business, and the man used to go out early in the morning and in those days we had those wheel carts that you pushed, with all the bottles and things hanging round the cart with a big churn in the middle, and he would push that from Strong's dairy in Kettlebaston Road right up to Clapton where he did his round, a tremendously strong man .. outside the shop, he had the notice, "Strong's Dairies, and at Clapton".*

*'Then there was a girl in that shop, she died only a few years ago, her mother and her always used to serve, they were really old fashioned, you didn't so much feel as though you were buying something as meeting someone who was family, part of the scene. If my mother ran out of milk as she did sometimes on a Sunday, there were no shops open the, but you go round to Strong's and knock on the back door and say, can you let me have half a pint of milk, as a kind of favour for doing it on Sunday, they'd quite willingly give you it, and you had to walk with the jug back ...'*

## The 'Cosy Cafe' and Mildred's Hairdresser

*'Then on the next corner,' continues Brenda Jones 'was the cafe ... mum worked in a cafe on the opposite side of the road [Lea Bridge Road] by then, called the Cosy Cafe ... she cooked in there and did vegetables, and I used to go over there, and I used to cook in there when I was ten years old ... obviously not in the week, but on Saturdays, 'cos mum*

*worked Saturdays 'til twelve, and I can remember frying sausages to make sausage sandwiches, and all sorts of things, frying eggs, bacon ...*

*'On the parade on the other side of Lea Bridge Road, where the cafe was, first there was the hairdresser, Mildred's ... I had my first perm there, all strung up to things above your head ... then there was the cafe, there was the chemist - Randall's? No, Jean was the daughter, 'cos I had to wear her cast down clothes ... they were the church and the daughter Jean was older than me, but not as old as you [her sister Muriel], and they used to pass on their daughter's cast off clothes to me, I hated them; I had to wear them on a Sunday, and she had seen me wearing them in Church, I hated that ...'*

## May's the Bakers

On the next corner along from Strong's was May's the bakers. There were several branches all owned by a family by the name of Farrington, in Capworth Street, one at the Baker's Arms, the one on the Clementina Estate, and one in Leytonstone. Bread was baked in the Capworth Street branch, and delivered. The shop opened early, catering for factory trade, even up till recent times when it traded as Philips. The premises were empty for a couple of years, briefly sold wholesale electrical goods, catering for passing car trade and now in 2000 it's vacant once again.

*Muriel 'used to run errands for her, for the daughter, and the family lived there, their name was Farrington, there was two sisters and the other .. these were the people that ran May's the baker's ... What was the elderly lady ... ? Elsie May, makeup you could have scraped off with a knife, but she was a lovely person. Harry Burkett remembers her as a character, a relation to our family, a bit like Gracie Fields ... lively atmosphere, as soon as you entered the shop.*

*BJ and I did errands [For the woman at May's the Bakers] she trusted me to the end ... for a few coppers, that was my pocket money. And I used to do the main shopping on a Saturday for them, used to go up to the Baker's Arms. I got the massive sum of a shilling. Walked there and walked back, carriers, no shopping trolleys, oh no.'*

## Grocers' - Wallins'

*Opposite to May's, at Bloxhall Road, there was a grocer's I remember it being called Wallins,' said Harry Burkett, 'that was the old style grocer. That was Wallins; it was only later that it became a post office ... the chap who eventually ran that came to Emmanuel, he was well up in the choir, Cyril something ... him and his wife ... my mother would go to Wallins for certain things but she would go up the road to Markhouse Hill there on the left, there was a Perks' - Perks was a big chain of grocery people, butter, they used to chop up the butter and serve the tea and that and she'd go further afield to the Baker's Arms to the Home and Colonial, another chain, and they sold all their own...*

*'Then you come to Seymour .. can't remember what the first shop was , but when you crossed the road, there was a barber's I used to go there for my haircut, chap named Jorishch, Jewish feller, used to make the boys wait, used to be there a couple of hours waiting for a haircut, because he'd deal with the men, the regulars ... he used to shave as well in those days ...'*

Brenda Jones continues: *'Then on the opposite corner was the post office. It wasn't like it is now, with groceries as well, though it did have a little bit of grocery, and was owned by the Cox family ... then you walk further on ... that's the corner of Morieux, there's been all sorts of things there ... and I knew the Cox family well, because Cecil Cox, he used to sing in the church choir, and he was a big soloist too, and his brother Cliff, he ran the post*

office. Then, on the corner of Morieux, on one corner, the far corner, there was a greengrocer's. Can't remember the name of the person who owned that ...

*That was a lovely little greengrocer's and during the War, I can't ever remember having seen fruit, and I can remember, I'd been out with the Randalls who lived down below us - we lived in an upstairs flat - but I can remember telling my mum, they've got little green balls round the corner. They were apples, I'd never seen an apple before And she went rushing out - the minute word went round there were bananas, there were oranges ... but we just hadn't seen things like that ... there weren't very many vegetables ... we had carrots and potatoes and greens, but that was about it ... and you were glad to have those during the War.*

*'Then Seymour had a laundry on the corner, nearest to Morieux, and on the opposite corner, it had a little tobacconist. I went to school with a boy from the tobacconist. That was a Jewish family. And eventually, they had like a little estate agent in there ... that fizzled out when the family moved ... I think most tobacconists sold a few sweets, but the thing is, there wasn't the range like it is now ... most people bought tobacco and not cigarettes, that was it along that little road.'*

Irene Cockerton moved to Bridge Road after the Second World War, and used the local shops nearly every day, as well as the local traders who delivered: *'It was a coal lorry, but I remember the milkman had a horse and cart ... we had United Dairies, but I don't remember where their depot was ... we had a baker used to come round with a hand cart ... used to pull it along behind him, nothing electric, just man power .. he was a funny old man, because if you weren't in, he'd leave you boxes of cakes, loaves of bread, that you didn't want .. that was the co-op ... we used to have a greengrocery man come round with a van once a week ... private, he had a small shop.*

*'I shopped along Lea Bridge Road, there was Sainsbury's there, greengrocers', butchers', an ironmongery shop where you got all your soap powder and stuff, all separate little shops .. it was more of a morning out ... my friend and I, who lived next door but one, we both had two children, we'd take the children to school in the morning and then do our shop, cut into Lea Bridge Road from Boundary Road, and toddle along ... you'd spend time talking to the shopkeepers, you got to know people .. we didn't need to go far away, because everything was near at hand here ... we used the shops round about Markhouse Road, going up to the Baker's Arms ... used to be the bank on the corner...*

*'You would probably walk round the shops every morning when you left the children ... probably do a weekend shop on Fridays ... we'd still go to those local shops for the weekend shop .. there were no big supermarkets anyway .. then of course there was Walthamstow Market, for fruit and vegetables, and the stalls were probably cheaper than they would be in the shops .. there was a chestnut man down there, with a big fire in the winter ...*

*'Walthamstow High Street for furniture and clothes, Woolworth's, Marks and Spencer, British Home Stores, though not in the same place as they are today; and the Baker's Arms there were nice furniture shops there, and little clothes shops ... it was adequate for what we wanted ... we very often walked, sometimes went by bus ... did a lot of walking when the children were little ... my husband didn't often have the time to take us in the car.*

*'I think my weekly shopping bill used to come to £5 and that included my joint of meat for the weekend ... my husband gave me my housekeeping for the week, then we got Family Allowance, that was eight shillings for your second child a week ... nothing for the first*



*child ... you had a book and collected it every week ... I always used the Co-op and the Home and Colonial, that as another one, they used to do all sorts of thing like that ... 120498 I think was my dividend number. The Co-op on Lea Bridge Road was just a grocer, and you queued up at each counter the [thing that went "zing" across the ceiling] don't know if they had one of those, they had those in all the department stores.*

*'They patted the butter together and cut the cheese as you wanted it ... tea I think that was packeted, but you could still get biscuits loose, half a pound of broken biscuits out of the tins along the front, bacon of course you bought loose, you used to go to the butchers for the meat ... there used to be a couple in Lea Bridge Road, Parsons, used to get the Christmas turkey from him ...'*

*Mrs Fraser came to live in the area from Guyana via Clapton in the 1960s: 'When we came we couldn't get rice ... no-one was eating rice over here. Our family used to send parcels for us, and they send rice, and peas ... We had cane home. Cane, we find at the Greek shop and the Indian shop, they selling cane ... we couldn't get demerara sugar, what we used to, we had to get used to using this white sugar...*

*'In the 'sixties, you find you start to get our food in Ridley, Ridley Market was the first place start to bring the yam and the potatoes and then we used to teach you all how to cook it, when they see us buying it, they ask, how we cook it, and we tell them, and they'll try it, and you ask them again, and they say, yes, it was nice ... Ridley Road, any time you go down there, you meet the whole of the West Indian people, and you find people that you had known from home, there as the place where you could go and hang about and you'd find people that you never see, that came over here, and you didn't get to see them, and we start go give out addresses, you get close to each other ...*

*'I used to feel [lonely] most when the kids to going to school, but they get on, and grow to like it, and they were all right, but I didn't take long to get into it ... when we was in Clapton, too, they had a grocery shop there which used to sell West Indian things - Ridley Road was already going - the grocer used to sell the sugar and other things, Ridley Road used to sell the greens, then they start to import West Indian fish, and you're missing nothing ... it was expensive, but you go all out for it because you know you're used to that ...'*

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

*'I mean, the highest point of my parents' life in a year was Christmas Day, they'd go out, this is all they could afford to have, was a little tiny bottle of whisky like that, and they'd share it between one another in their tea first thing in the morning. That was their drink. For Christmas. That is all they could afford. I mean, you've heard people talking about the poor mouse? Church mouse, well, God help us, we were, we were ...'*

Margaret Churcher

### Games and Escapades

Mrs Churcher remembers *'when we were young ... we used to have walks from Lower Clapton Road down to the River Lea. You see, for an outing, that's all the outings we ever had, to walk along the River Lea, that was a beautiful place to walk down, while Jack Milford recalls 'we swam over The Island, over the fields there, a lovely place to swim, then at midday we used to buy a packet of woodbines amongst ourselves, all the out-of-works, five for tuppence, a bunch of us, all swimming, all out of work, all being communists, we were, all going to mend the world, we were. We used to lie about in the sun ...'*

*'The other side [of the river], continues Margaret Churcher, on the Clapton side, you walked down to Springfield Park, and that's all people in those days could afford to do. We never had holidays, didn't know what a holiday was ...'* Another outing was *'from Lea Bridge Station - that's where the bus stop was - to the Wake Arms, that was another treat, see, to go to those places, you're out in the country. No, you couldn't afford to go up [to London], because you never had the money for that sort of thing'.*

There were local activities on a more organised basis, for those who could afford it. Gladys Rowland, for example, recalls *'Vera, my friend, and I, we joined a gymnasium group, all girls, that was over the other side of Leyton High Road. We used to go through Coronation Gardens, it was halfway to going to the gym place, probably have a little sit down and carry on to the gym ... it was quite a way ... we wore a uniform, a green blouse and a navy blue slip, and we had the dumb-bells and bars and things, they were floor and bar exercises, and the horse, used to love it. I went there for quite a few years, once a week, on a Tuesday I think it was. One of the teachers was called Madame Defay. We didn't take any exams, I don't think any exams were available. I think it was age that stopped me going, I don't know who decided to pack up first, Vera or me I think it was her. I was probably about ten to twelve years, when we did the gym and swimming - we used to go swimming a lot, and done a bit of toe dancing at a little school somewhere.*

*'They used to take us out from the school, I can remember going to see a film about the golden eagle, one of the teachers took us up to the West End to see it, we were no more than about twelve - she used to take us swimming sometimes, on her own as well, Saturday morning to the Hackney Baths . When Leyton Baths opened up, that was quite something. They could turn [Leyton Baths] into a ballroom as well, which I went to quite a lot when I was single . Every New Year's Eve we used to go there, and I used to go to little dances sometimes at Leyton Town Hall, different church halls we used to go to ...*

*'I met my husband at Whipps Cross - I'd been to tea with Vera, then we went for a walk ... from Kettlebaston Road to Whipps Cross, and it was frozen over - they even had bonfires on it from what I remember, and these three fellas come along - only eighteen, youngsters, and Vera knew them, they worked for Sainsbury's. He asked me out to the pictures, to see "The Singing Fool"; I said "I'm not going", but I changed my mind, and I*

*said I'd go, but I wouldn't wait if he wasn't there. It used to be the old clanging trams then, it was about tuppence. I got off, nobody there, I waited a little while, and as I was turning round to go back, he turned up ...he told me one of his uncles had been killed that day by one of the buses; I went out with him for eight years after that before we got married. We used to play tennis, he played cricket, we used to go about dancing with various friends. I really enjoyed that part of my life ...'*

Visiting relations was a normal part of social activity for Joyce Russell as with many other people: *'you didn't live very far away from your family ... three of my father's brothers moved to Chingford, that was a long way away, you were going very upmarket. The other one lived at Loughton, that was really a long way ... mostly though you lived within walking distance of your family.'*

Gladys Rowland recalls again *'My mother's mother and father used to live up near Hackney in the top part of a house somewhere, near the Downs. They only had one room; I remember my mother taking me there when my grandmother was very old and dying, and I didn't really want to go, but she got me to go. I think she died there.'* [My mother] *used to go and see them sometimes on a Sunday evening - my father never used to go, he probably did a bit of work with his books - used to take me, and when she come home, they used to walk with her as far as this particular pub, where they bought me an arrowroot biscuit; then we got a tram from Kenninghall Road.*

*'A family lived next door but one in the upstairs flat, and their name was Cleeman, I forget what nationality he was, not Irish, Italian, I think, or Spanish - Sneeman - he had a son called Gordon, and we used to play with Gordon at school, and they were always quarrelling his mother and father, always, and eventually she walked out on him. I think Gordon must have gone with her, and Mr Sleeman opened a garage on - must have bought the land off of Daniels - on the edge of Lea Bridge Road, [Daniel's Field] would be probably approximately opposite Bloxhall, had a big lump of land he bought there, and had a huge garage built - he had his mind to business just at the time cars were coming on the road, and he was there quite a number of years ... that's all gone now'* [though a Gordon's Garage exists at a premises in the High Road opposite Grange Park Road]

For Some folk, like Margaret Churcher close family seems to have provided all the friendship and companionship they required: *Before [my brother] was ill, we used to hang about together, with his mates, and my girlfriends down the road, I mean they weren't friends, they were just someone you played with, I can't say that they were friends; I only ever had one friend, and that's it, you know. I had acquaintances, that's all I can say.*

Ruth Gimson stayed even closer to home; she recalls playing in the garden only, as *'we had a bit wider, being on the end, but I never played in the street,'* and she doesn't remember other children playing in her street either, *'there were two or three of us, we used to go and play in one garden or in another garden; as we got older, we used to go over the marshes, play tennis and that. The church had their own tennis and cricket teams, we'd go over as a club'*. She recalls later in her youth, *'on a Saturday evening, you used to have a dance, a waltz and a foxtrot at the Warner's Club'*. The Warner's Club was more properly known as the Bloxhall Institute, and was only for men, as Ruth recalls, and ladies were by invitation only on dance nights.

Emmanuel Church, which was built in the 1930s. The influence of Warners, and of the Church, as well as the non-alcohol ethos of those days if you considered yourself respectable, led to refreshments consisting of tea and coffee, and lemonade mixed from lemonade powder and water, supplied by the women from the church. Ruth recalls *'they had dances about once a month. And other churches would do the same. The Warner's*

*Club was part of the church; before the new church, we used to have our Girls' Friendly Society, we used to have our dancing classes, everything over there ... Stanley Gimson recalls too 'I had some friends who played there; they played the saxophone, pianist, drummer, double bass. The pianist was this Mr Wright's son, who lived opposite. Ted Speed played the double bass. He was the one who used to run the Carnivals, the other players, one of them lived on the estate but you really lost touch when the War broke out ...*

*'We used to play cards, games, reading a lot,' recalls Lily Sims 'the library was there, you could get Woman's Own sort of things, knitting, sewing, it takes a lot of your time up ... and when I was a child, we used to go to the Guides, and Brownies, round the Church ... something else we went to for girls, that was quite good ... there was Scouts and Cubs, then we used to have round the Church hall on Saturdays, might have been once a month or fortnightly, dances, there was always something going on.' While for mass media entertainment, 'radio was the main thing, and we had newspapers, even during the War - there was the Mirror, and the local paper, the Guardian, same as it is now, Hackney Gazette, the Express ....*

*'There was the pictures - we had plenty of picture palaces, one of which is now the bingo hall, that was the Savoy, and that was new, and that was something special, you had two pictures, a newsreel, then you'd have the organ come up and you'd have an organ recital, quite a lovely evening .... Nearly opposite the library, on the corner, that used to be a picture palace, we called it the Fleapit, that was an old cinema, and they used to change it twice a week, you could go four times in one week just in that little bit ...*

*'You didn't have to go further than Markhouse for your entertainment, and mostly we didn't ... then there was the swimming baths, quite a lot to do .. we used to walk a lot, for pleasure, and to save money ... there was a lovely tea place at the Napier Arms called the bungalow, not there now, it's a garage now, it was very la de da ... when I first started work, I took my sister there for a cup of tea ... Big Deal! We'd either ride there, or walk and have a cup of tea and a cake when we got there ...'*

Muriel Jones, and her sister Brenda, who is several years her junior, recall street games of the 1930s. Brenda *'used to play ball on the wall outside there, [Cox'] there was like a little ledge and I used to play out there. For my mother to let me play in the street, it had to be safe. All the children played in the street, huge football games, sometimes the ball went through windows, huge games ... the whole street would become the football pitch, all the kids in the street went ... there weren't all that many my age, but just down from me, say six years younger, there were lots of boys, mostly boys, and they all played together out in the street. But these boys who were a lot younger, they played great big football games, an on occasion the parents would go out and join in ...'*

Unlike Brenda, Muriel remembers playing in the street, but not participating in the games, *'I played on my own, the games were very much boy geared, you'd get boys from Lea Bridge Road coming round. Our road was the road they all played in, much to mum's annoyance when you lost your window. Poor old Colin, who eventually lived down below us, he did our windows ever so many times, his family always replaced them, so there was no problem, but my mum used to get quite irate ....but then we lost our windows during the War when the bomb fell on the gasometer at the end of Bloxhall Road...*

*'I don't know that there were that many girls ... Doreen Wellams was the only one. Jean in Lea Bridge Road, the girl with the humped back, she had fallen down the back stairs, and she could have gone into plaster in hospital for a long time, it might have straightened it, but her parents wouldn't let her do it ... her family were at the church, I used to feel ever*

*so sorry for her, her parents wrapped her in cotton wool, she wouldn't have been allowed ... I mean, we didn't have a lot to entertain ourselves, there was only the radio to entertain ourselves ...'*

Jack Milford seems to have taken part in escapades and games of his own, as the following story illustrates: *'I was standing on a street corner one day, I was - I was with the lads of course, and I let a very big spit ... I spit into the wind, I did, and it hung on the front of a postman's shako! He looked at me, and he says, you rotten filthy little swine ... and I used to spend me time playing over the gas works, I got into trouble over that because over the back of me, was a very big cistern where they used to clean the muck out of the water, and one day I saw it was getting a bit high, and I opened the weir up, and let some of the water out - and the bloke caught me, actually ... later on, I got to be a security office, and I was frightened - actually, I was under fourteen when I used to do that - Christ, how am I ever going to get a job as a security officer if I've got a criminal record, but it never did come out, apparently. I probably haven't got a criminal record, but there you are ... but it was always lurking in the back of me mind.*

*'I nearly got meself a criminal record as well, mind you because I filed down some ha'pennies so they fitted a cigarette machine, and I used to get twenty Players and a ha'penny change, for a filed down ha'penny. So I'm doing it one day, down by Leyton station, Leyton Midland station, I'm just putting me ha'penny in the machine, the bloke catches hold of me shoulder, I've bloody got you at last, he said. Ah, Jesus Christ! They take me round to Francis Road police station, and fetch me mother out, me father of course, and it's getting to be midnight by this time, and I'm in dead trouble, they don't know whether they should let me out on bail - I'm only about sixteen - bail on sufferance, or something, to appear at Stratford Magistrates Court on the following couple of days or so. I've got some terrible thoughts what they're going to do to me, mind you. So I nip down to Stratford Magistrates Court, and they had about four bloody magistrates, as far as I can remember, and they said, you've been charged with stealing one packet of cigarettes on a filed down ha'penny, and defacing a coin of the realm. They have a [whisper together] and decide I haven't defaced a coin of the realm, because I hadn't touched the King's head. Unbelievable, isn't it, and I'm only sixteen. So they said, what we're going to do, we're going to bind you over for a term of one year in the care of Mrs Mountain, the Court something-or-other, and you will write to her once a month. That was the hardest job I've ever had in my life, actually ... nothing ever happened, she never checked or anything, but it put the wind up me ...'*

## Friends and Neighbours

Unlike many other people whose memories I recorded, Flo Temple moved to the area as a young married woman during the War, *'I had no friends here at all, they were all away, and do you know, I used to wheel the pram from here to Liverpool Street station, because - you couldn't get a pram on a bus like you can today, they were all big prams, weren't they - I went to Liverpool Street station to get to Lily's [her friend at Woodford] to get the train, and it used to take ages and ages ... and if you got a warning ... air raid warning ...'*

Everyone who endured them has vivid memories of bombing raids. Flo Temple says, *'you couldn't have a light or anything because of the planes flying over, you were a target ... in any case, they had night watchers and they used to come round every street to make sure you'd all had your lights out and all that, because you put everyone else's life in danger ... Nightwatchers were people that volunteered, they were people that couldn't go in the Army, because there was something wrong with them, and they used to walk around the street, and directly a warning went, they used to make sure that everybody got out quick ... we were lucky, we all had air raid shelters put in ... they were supplied by*

*Warner's ... I think it was them, anyway ... they were ugly, but they were under the ground, so you were more or less safe ... but I was even bombed out over there ... I heard a terrible crash, I was so lucky, they demolished the next road, there wasn't any flats there at all -Hibbert Road was absolutely demolished - they put what'sname houses up after for a little while ... prefabs ...'*

Friendships and enmities persisted as the social cement that made things bearable, recalled with gusto fifty years later, 'Although I lived there,' says Flo Temple 'I never used to go in the shelter, I'd go under the table of a night ... I had two elderly people living upstairs at the time, and they say, you're stupid, Florence, you should come in the shelter with us; but they weren't the sort of people that .. I really ever wanted to get friendly with ... they were liberty-takers ... it said in our rent book that the front had to be cleaned every week, and before I even started trying to get some second-hand furniture she came down and said, are you going to be my new neighbour, she said, I can't keep the front clean - she'd been keeping it clean all the time I wasn't there, she said, you'll have to do it, Florence, I can't do it ... and other little things about the garden ... I thought, I've picked the wrong flat - they were all empty, there was only about eight people living down here altogether, so really, it was great .. they evacuated people . They'd all suffered blast damage ... I don't think there was, when I moved over to 95, ten people living down here, everybody evacuated, to Derbyshire ..... where there wasn't any railway or anything like that, you know ....'

*'The only thing is, there were so many restrictions, I mean, you couldn't get an iron unless you were pregnant .. and the only paper you could get was brown paper, there was no wallpaper ... we had nothing in this flat, nothing at all, it was completely empty, no furniture of any description ... there were a few second-hand shops .. we had a kitchen range then, I used to love that, took a bit of work cleaning it, but once it was alight, you got hot water right through the flat, it was a beautiful ... you could put a rice pudding in the oven at five o'clock, and at five past it was ready to eat ... a lot of people moaned about them, but you could put a kettle on the top, anything, you could cook your vegetables ... you saved loads of money ...*

*'People took their furniture with them ... if I leave it here, I'm not going to get any compensation or anything, no insurance or anything ... It was awful ... there was no-one to talk to, there was only my poor old people upstairs, and she suddenly got this bee in her bonnet, she wanted to move, and she moved across Lea Bridge Road. Well, I'm not a nasty person, and when she moved across to Lea Bridge Road, I went across the same day, took the two kids with me, and Mr Kits said to me, she's not well, she's in a downstairs flat now instead of an upstairs flat, he says, so try and pacify her if you can, Flo, so when I walked in, he said, don't take the boys in there, she don't look very good, I went up to the bed, and I said, don't you feel very well, Kit - I used to always call her Kit - so she said no, the people upstairs don't like me, and I felt like saying, you didn't like me, when I first came here. She said, they're nasty people, they've told me what I've got to do and what I've not got to do, and she was eaten up with rheumatism at the time, and I said to Mr Kits, was there anything she wanted?, and I got her errands. Two days after, she died. And before she died, she said, oh Flo, I'm so sorry I left you. I didn't really realise what an angel I had. She said, you kept the boys quiet while I had my little afternoon kip, she said, but here, they wouldn't do anything like that, they're just nasty people ...'*

Flo Temple continues 'Everybody came back from the War in '46. Warner's had done something for you, got all the windows put back in, everything was sorted out. Took a long while, and gradually got things really going, making the places look really nice. That's the only time they ever did anything.'

Jack Milford: *'Me brother was a bit of a villain ... just a fiddling, silly villain, you know ... like working in the shop, and letting some other blokes go in the shop, doing things and stealing - aiding and abetting. He was the nicest bloke you could wish to meet, except that in the end, he was an alcoholic ... he used to hate me for being a security officer ... me elder brother ...*

*'He was a deserter during the War, mind you, me elder brother worked for a timber yard at that time, Jones in Capworth Street ... when Sid gets his call-up papers, his mate Fred, who owned the timber yard, said, look, you don't want to bloody go in the Army, he said, what we'll do is take a flat up in Camden, and when I get called up, I'll come and join you, he says. Meanwhile, we've got a racing system we're doing. Sid used to go all round the country running a racing system he did for this timber yard, and the other bloke didn't get called up, so Sid's left on his own, deserting. And he used to come round all the Army camps and visit us ... my two brothers were great friends. Stan comes home on leave from France he used to sell coffee, and do hair cutting and all that, making a load of money ... he's sitting in Finsbury Park with his deserter brother, and he's got a whacking great roll of notes there, counting up, and up come a detective, and he says to Stan, can I see your leave papers - and while he's talking to Stan, Sid just gets up and walks away.*

*'About two years after the War, they had an amnesty, so me brother thought, oh, that's good, 'cos he's got no ration books or anything, so he answers up to this amnesty. The unit he was supposed to belong to was South Staffs ... they said, you're not really a deserter, you're just a non-reporter ... I think we're going to have to let you go because we've got enough soldiers at the moment. You ought to do two years' soldiering, but we're getting rid of soldiers; you're very lucky ... we're going to let you go.'*

Years later, old emotional wounds still hurt, despite attempts to gloss over them. Joyce and George Russell remembered: *'the downstairs neighbours wouldn't have your coal go through - some people would, but I never had a neighbour that would let anything go through, not anything ... The neighbours were quite nice really. She was a little bit older than me, and she had two children, a boy and a girl, and her husband was a bus inspector, but she was only thirty-eight when she died of cancer. And Warner's were very good, they moved them into another flat, so it gave them a new start. Then the husband married again, and the children went their own way. I never knew what happened to them. Her family had originally come from Whipps Cross and Loughton. The new neighbour was a woman on her own with a daughter ... she was divorced ... it wasn't particularly shocking in those days, about '60, '61, she was here about ten years. Then she moved, her daughter married, and then she remarried and moved to Chingford.*

*'When we first moved in, neighbours were much more friendly, because people had been here a long while, and I remember when we were moving in the lady, Mrs Fitchet and Mrs Hutton, who lived next door, had come in as brides, originally, and they, even the lady downstairs who had not come in as a bride, she got her husband to bring me a tray of tea, and the lady the other side said, do you want any hot water to wash out with, and she boiled some water for me ...'*

George Russell, however, has a rather different view, *'don't paint too rosy a picture of it. My wife was in hospital for over eight months, not one neighbour offered to get me a loaf of bread, milk, or do bugger all, and I had the two boys here. All this crap about all pals together, forget it. It was rubbish down here. We asked an old lady up the road once, you know, one of these dear old cockney ladies, you know, salt of the earth and all that rubbish, would she look after the babe, I was at work, would she look after the babe for half an hour cos her mum was to come round and look after him. She didn't appear. For*

*some reason, she was late ... Joyce was going up the hospital ... no, she was making her husband a cup of tea. This particular area here, as far as I'm concerned, is rubbish.'*

*Joyce: 'Yes, they'd come in as brides. Yes, they'd been here all through the War. All the people along had. The girl downstairs and myself we were the youngest amongst all these people along here, and they lived a long time. But the lady that bought me in the water, by the time I went in hospital, she had died. The others were not so friendly. And it seems the long-term residents stayed 'yes, even during the War. There were people along the road, I'd hear these old ladies going, oh, I remember the so-and-so girls along the road .....*

*Ruth Gimson 'had the same neighbour upstairs from before I was born ... fifty years the same one ... just before we left they started changing the neighbours ... the people beside us were long-staying people too. They all seemed to be ... the lady upstairs she was on her own for a great many years because her husband died. She worked at that factory on the corner of Burwell, I think she was in the cooking and that, in the canteen ... mostly the ones that had lost their husbands were at work .... They were Mrs Ardley, Mr Atwell over the road, Mr Clewer, Hatthorpe, there was the rent man on the corner, he was there years, Wright, Mr Wright, that was the rent man, Hume, lot of them ... these were all long standing, they didn't seem to want to move on, contented to end their days there ...'*

*It seems too that some people had quite a close street identity, but Joyce found 'this was never quite like that. I wonder if that was because there was the school opposite, and that stopped it being such a street. In Sofia Road, there was a street identity, where my mother lived, and we had street parties and things like that, though I lived in Essex with my grandfather for six years during the War. It didn't matter, when I came back, everybody knew me. Still the same. Because my father was the turncock, I used to be known - they didn't always know my name - but I was the Waterman's Daughter, and that was it. And another thing you had, you had a street - Sofia Road was never a very long street, the street in Sofia Road now is half the street, the other half is where the flats are built. But you had a posh end and a not so posh end. Now, my parents lived in the posh end. But there were some people up the not so posh end who were quite respectable, but it was like that ... and it was the same where my husband lived in Primrose Road, I don't know why.*

*Social life was also organised around the workplace. As part of the social life of the Wire Works, recalls Mrs Taylor, there were 'little outings, go to Southend. The men had their outings, and we had ours. They used to go to Kent, to Margate and Hastings. The outings were by coach, and they used to take their beer, men used to have their beer, and they used to do little boxes for everybody with tomato sandwiches in, and we'd be at the side of the road, used to have your stuff at the side of the road. Give you a break like. The men used to have their beer, and we used to have our little drinks and that, and have a sing-song on the coach.*

*When he went on his outing, I used to go down Dartford, cos he used to meet them, and we'd spend the rest of the weekend there, cos it wasn't far, my sister used to live there, she lives in Cornwall now. Works outings were always on a Saturday, and he always used to bring home little presents for my sister, the kids and I, he was very good, my husband. It didn't bother me really [not being able to go out for the day with her husband] because he had his day and I had mine .... he used to be working anyway, the mornings, Saturday mornings he'd be working anyway. There was also a football team that used to play over on the marshes. Dances were held once a month, and 'you'd have little dos as well'.*



The routines of everyday life formed friendships. Irene Cockerton had a particular friend, *'yes, the one on the end, we were very good friends with her, she had a little girl. Next door, she was a young girl, she only lived with her father .. but she was quite a bit younger than us ... we were friendly, of course, neighbours were in those days, you didn't have to bother to shut your doors or windows ... we were all friends along here .. then people in Markmanor Avenue had children who went to the same schools, so we all got to know one another... children grew up, people moved away .. I don't really know very many people along here now ...* [Mrs Cockerton moved out herself not long after this interview, to rural Essex]

## The Church Community

Some people like the Gimsos, brought up in the area, were always very involved with Emmanuel Church, and this formed the social base of their life and relationships. Others, like Shirley Fraser, found in Emmanuel a rich resource, after some disappointing experiences from other churches. *'The churches used to say, don't come back, because the English people didn't want to go to church if there is any black ones in there.... we were in Leyton and we used to go to one down by Hackney Baths, then we change from there and we find one coming down to Clapton ... we go to that, and after we came up here, we found the flat-roofed church - St Mary's? - yes, St Mary's, but when it's time now to get Rodney christen' he said that he didn't want to christen Rodney ... because the two big ones which were Norma and Cleveland, stopped going to Sunday School, and he wouldn't christen them, so, had a neighbour in the street here used to go to - Mrs Skipjack - used to go to that church, and she invited us there, to Emmanuel, and we went there, and we were accepted and the minister was very nice, said we must put our name down, and he would get us to join the church, and so on ... and we still there till now, so all the family now go in there ... they were welcome there ...'*

Apart from the church, most of Mrs Fraser's socialising was done within the African-Caribbean community: *'When my husband was alive, we used to go out, take me to the cinema, parties and so on. Most of our parties was friends socialising ... We only know people at work, by working you get to know people, but not to go anywhere with them, mostly go out with the Africans, yes ... when we move here, it was one lady lived here, she was white, and then Mrs Northover, she was coloured, she moved in two years before me, we were the only two black in this street, until now we have a good set of black people living in this area ... yes, the neighbours, they was all right, and that was another neighbour, she was white, and when I got Dawn, they always come to help me, they were very kind .... always lend a hand ... Prejudice break down a lot now; you still find some of the old ones, you know, mostly on the buses and so on, but you can't take them on, you can't take them on ... and you're happy in church now ... at first you weren't happy in church ... that's the reason why the children go to the church, then suddenly they didn't want to go .... we were almost [the first Afro-Caribbean people] to go [to Emmanuel Church]; after we joined the church, my husband died, he wasn't much of a churchgoer, but for his service at the church, all outside and inside was full, and it was very nice ... some of the members did turn up to the funeral ... didn't go to the ground, but they was at the church ...'*

## HEALTH AND CHILDCARE

*'When I was five I was in the Isolation Hospital at St Anne's, Tottenham I could only see mum through a window, and I used to sit there and write pages to mum, all about what was happening, and it was only all scribble, because I couldn't write ... I could go out and skip in the fresh air, and it was bitter cold, and the nurse said I had to keep on skipping, and mum came out to see me, and I wouldn't stop skipping ... I was dead scared of those nurses.'*

Lily Sims

### Childhood

Brenda Jones: *'I pushed [a friend] down there once, and I ended up with my feet in the back door... and that's how the girl with the hump back got her hump back.'*

Mrs Taylor recalls, *'I had paralysis, I was in and out of hospital all the time, and she couldn't cope with me. So I was there, I said, when I come fifteen, from Shropshire, I was in Oswestry, a place called Oswestry Orthopaedic Hospital, then my mum married again, cos I lost my dad, and married a Londoner, and that' how I come to London. Anyway, as I said, lucky, I suppose, to get jobs, really, cos I'd never been, I thought, because of my disability, I couldn't go to work, so I was at home for two years, I used to help mum with the housework ... and then these three sisters was down the shelters, they said to me, course you can work, there's more worse than you what go to work, oh, I said, never thought - mum used to say, of course, she's a cripple, and they told her off, they told my mum off, they said, she's not a cripple ... they were lovely girls, yes ...'*

Health and children were primary concerns then as now. Mrs Churcher was diagnosed as suffering from malnutrition, but despite this, there was no financial assistance forthcoming; the only *'difference I got when I went to school was a spoonful of malt and cod liver oil, because I was underweight'*, and there were *'quite a lot'* of other children in the same situation *'that was a regular thing in those days, when you got people that were on Assistance, it wasn't Social Security in those days, it was what they called Public Assistance. And my God, if you had a knife and fork more than what you needed, that had to go, and all, you had to go and sell that'*, and an official would come round and *'they'd sort out how much furniture you'd got, how much glassware - well, glassware it wasn't in those days - it was a cup and saucer - you were only allowed to have, being as what there was five of us - if mother had more than five cups and saucers, she was told to go and sell them ...'*

*'I only realised all this was going on when I was that much older and I'd saved up out of me pittance, because when I went out to work, every penny that I earned I had to give my parents, because they had nothing coming in ... you see, once they knew that I was workable, they cut their Assistance down, you see, because I was still living at home, which I would be at fourteen, and you took whatever job you could get in those days ...'*

It seems that the highly structured regime that Mrs Churcher encountered when having her daughter in hospital in 1947 was the same school of thought that had prevailed for many years, because she remembers *'at five years old, I was away, in hospital, in isolation hospital - Dartford; that was at five year old, and I was away for six months'*, and being an Isolation Hospital visitors were not allowed, not even parents.

Mrs Churcher had suffered from health problems from childhood: *'First of all, it was malnutrition, which was understandable .... well, the doctor said it was. Then I had diphtheria twice. Then I had a weak heart. That's stayed with me. And I was foreverlasting having nosebleeds, so really, between the lot of it ... ah, and then I had rheumatic fever. So, really I never had a lot of schooling. I had diphtheria first of all when I was five year old ... [I had malnutrition because] well, there was no food in the house, was there*

Mrs Churcher had diphtheria again aged thirteen, *'there was about four of us in Lea Bridge Road that went down with it. And we landed up at the Isolation Hospital, where the Cleansing place is, where the Dust used to be, where there's tennis courts, well, there used to be a little isolation hospital there, and the only way I could see my parents then was through the windows; they weren't allowed to come in the ward. They'd be out in the street, looking in through the window, and you're in bed. Couldn't do nothing about it, just so you could see someone ... I was only in there about three or four weeks'. The main treatment at that time was 'only rest, really, dear. First of all, when you go in, you get an injection, and then it's rest, and that's all. See, you're isolated from other people, you're only with people that's got the self same thing.*

*'The first time I was really ill with that, then, I mean the second time it wasn't quite so bad, but the first time, I can remember it, me mum saying to me, come on, I'm going to buy you some wellies, but before we do that, I'm going to take you in to see the doctor ... this is in Chatsworth Road. There used to be an old doctor called Doctor Jelly and we went in to see him, and he said to me mother, take her straight home, the ambulance will be waiting for you. And that was the last time I saw my mum for six months.*

*'First of all I went in the Eastern Hospital, at Brooksby's Walk, down there, went in there first, and from there, I went on to Dartford, Kent. I can remember that, because I can remember going through the [Blackwall] tunnel. The most frightening thing going for a child ... you're not told nothing, love, are you, I mean, as a child, you weren't told a thing, you just had to do what they, I mean, you was ill and that's all there was to it. I mean me mother couldn't do nothing, 'cos we was all in one room. Then everything has to be fumigated then ...*

*'When you had a period, I mean ... you had to have a bit of old cloth and wash that out, as well, put it in a drop of salt water and throw all that water away, and wash and dry and do it that way,' but menstruation was 'not something people talked about, not in those days, sex or anything like that, that was never mentioned in the house, not in my father's time, anyhow'. Mrs Churcher didn't know whether modern sanitary napkins were on the market at this time, or what other women used, because she couldn't remember ever talking about it, not even with girlfriends, though 'I suppose we did, but I wasn't really one for girlfriends.'*

Mrs Churcher has one sister still living, and a brother who died many years ago aged sixteen, *'yes, sixteen ... not very pleasant time, you know, you're coming home from work - I was fourteen, he was two years older than me [This friend] moved away, she used to live in Markhouse Road, she moved away, so I just didn't bother any more. But, me brother, when he went, I was fourteen year old, and it was the most tragic time again, for us. Then me dad wasn't all that clever either, because when we had - in those days, they used to have the body home - and they had me brother home in - 69 it was, the house, and he was in what we call a box room, the little room over the top of the stairs, and me brother's in the coffin, and me dad's gone in there in the morning, trying to lift him up, telling him to get out and go to work, and he was dead . So that didn't help him. You know, it was a bit of a tragic time, 'cos he was such a good kid. You feel it even after all these years'*

Mrs Rowland remembers *'having chicken pox or measles ... I had to have an operation on TB glands, I was there for two or three weeks - I was seven - then they sent me to Broadstairs for convalescence, for a couple of weeks ... it was Doctor Hatley, he was in Markhouse Road, opposite St Saviours' Church ... there were words between my dad and him'*.

She doesn't remember the family having health insurance, but *'it was 1/6 to see the doctor; that was Doctor Hatley, then further up the road was Doctor Murphy. I remember my mother taking me to him, cos my legs were aching shocking, and he thought it was on the borders of rheumatic fever, but it didn't turn out to be ...'*

The common experience of ill health could form the bond of lasting friendship, as Mrs Rowland recalls, *'when I was in hospital for the operation, there was a young woman in the bed opposite, and she used to sew - handkerchiefs' edges - and before I came out, she gave me one ... I had that for years ...'*

Lily Sims recalls the illness and death of her father, with the usual attendant family separation: *'My dad was forty-two when he died of a brain tumour ... I was thirteen ... he was in London Hospital, and that was a long trip ... he was forty-two, and mum was thirty-six ... I'd just started school, and I got scarlet fever, then it went to diphtheria, and I know ... I was ill for about eighteen months ... it's a lump out of your life, isn't it? I can remember opening my Christmas sack, and I was in a ward with boys, which to my mind wasn't right at all ... and Father Christmas came round, and I really thought he was the real Father Christmas ... you were so ignorant then, it was lovely ...'*

Mrs Taylor recalls having to continue her shift in the factory despite being unwell: *'Anyway, so one day - I dunno what happened - a forelady, I don't know why, they always used to pick on me, cos my husband said, I was so quiet - had this conveyor belt and used to take it in turns to do the stamping, like. It come to my turn, and I had a bad arm, fibrositis, all up me neck and all down there, and I said to her, can I be excused, I said, today, perhaps I can do it another day? I said to her only my arm's bad, she said, you've got another one, haven't you? So I have to do it in the end. I thought, oh ... you couldn't get away with nothing. So I said, yes, but it's painful. Oh well, she said, if I let you do this, they'll all want to do it. Oh God, weren't they hard in them days, very strict, weren't they? So I had to do it and suffer the pain.'*

Mrs Taylor was coming home from a party at work, *'we used to have a 'do' for New Year's Eve, and Christmas,'* she recalls, *'I gets on the bus, come opposite the Hare and Hounds, in Lea Bridge Road - and there's crowds of people round this turning opposite, and being nosy, I got off the bus to have a look. I didn't know who it was and I didn't know it was an accident, it was such a crowd round there, this is about half past twelve at night, see, I thought, when I look, it's only my friend and her husband, his motorbike had gone up the wall. It was a drunken man had come from across the Hare and Hounds, and he had three women in his car, and one was hanging round his neck, while he was driving ... Anyway, she got compensation, she had all pins in her legs, like, she was like that for ages.'*

Then as now, injury at work was not uncommon, and Mrs Taylor was lucky not to have been more badly hurt when she trapped her fingers in a machine, *'we used to have to clean down before we went to dinner because of the glue, you see. Well, there was such a lot of cardboard dust, I only flicked the duster, never give a thought that the machine was still running, I didn't know the machine ... I shouted to my friend, turn the machine off, will you, I'm not going to put any more through now, because it's nearly dinner time, I*

*said, and it's not worth it, it's going to get hard. Course, with that, me fingers went through the rollers, like, and I'm screaming and I'm going down, and I was calling out for me mum, calling down, down, down, like that, and I couldn't remember much else ... I remember them carrying ... but the quickness of the machine minders - used to do all the mechanical - the machine I was on was an old one, if I'd been on one of the new ones, I'd have lost me hand. But he's quick, he's only on the next machine, he was doing a job there, and he see me, and he undone the taps - the others had nuts on them - but this one, I was lucky really,*

*Anyway, I went to the German Hospital.. which is up Dalston Way ... it was the nearest hospital. Clapton, see, on that route, isn't it. Used to have a nurse in the factory, and she took me in her car. The screams and yells, it was a wonder I didn't go off the road or something, the screams was terrible, they reckon, I was screaming with pain. When I looked at me hand, see me hands looks awful, cos they tried to bandage it up they couldn't do nothing. I was out for three months ...*

## Motherhood

*'I fell for [my daughter] a month after we got married,' said Mrs Churcher 'But we had nothing when we got married. We didn't have a thing when we got married. All he had was his demob money. They advised me to have her away, in hospital, because I suffered from high blood pressure, which I do now, and it worked out, being that he was at work, we had to pay, and it cost us fourteen pounds, and in those days it was a lot of money, because when he first started on the ambulance place, I've got a first wage slip of his - three pound a week, and out of that three pound a week, we had to pay, fourteen pound. I tell you where I used to go and pay it, Leyton Town Hall. You know, in Ruckholt Road, they used to have a housing office there, a rent office, that's where I used to have to go, in there and pay what I could each week. God knows [how long it took to pay off the money] I can't think, dear, I can't think. I say to meself, well, I don't know ... it was 1947 ... I went to Forest Gate hospital to have her ... it was the only hospital I could get in ... there was no other hospital for mothers, Whipps Cross didn't do them in those days. The only other one that I know of now, and never used to be for anybody, that was the Mothers' Home, Salvation Army Mothers' Home in Lower Clapton Road, which was for young girls with illegitimate babies, there ... as far as I know [the unmarried ones went to the Mothers' Home, and the rest went to Forest Gate]*

*'My blood pressure was extremely high, I went in there a week earlier than I should have done, and then they bought Carol off because the blood pressure was getting too high. It was dangerously high - but it was a natural birth. In those days, people usually had their babies at home, me sister did, she had both hers at home. If I'd have had any more children, I would never have been allowed to have one at home because of the blood pressure ... my husband wouldn't have any more children. He wouldn't let me have any more children. And in those days, the husband weren't allowed to know anything, I mean, the night he came up to visit me, I was already in there, as I say, because they took me in, and the legs were like balloons, and he came up to visit me and they wouldn't allow him in, well he went blue murder, and he forced his way. That was before I had the baby, you know.*

*And this attitude was continued on after the birth, for he wasn't able to see his child at first: 'oh no, not like it is these days, no, no, she must have been about seven or eight hours old before he was allowed to come in. So it wasn't a very pleasant time, then I had a ... something poisoning, with blood ... then I was isolated with that ...'*

Even the mother herself was separated from the baby in Mrs Churcher's case: *'I wasn't allowed to feed her, not for three days, I didn't see her, and I was in there fourteen days after she was born. They had the babies in a separate place, in another room altogether, you never had no baby at the side of you ... and the mothers were in the ward, and when it became time for people to breast feed or feed their babies, or nurse their babies, the nurse would fetch it in, in her arms, and then when she thought it was time for you to be on your own, she'd take the baby away, and it'd be in there. And when they come to this business of bonding these days, I don't know what they're talking about. I mean, three days you don't see a baby, you know you've had one, but you don't see it, and you begin to wonder if you're ever seeing something that's caused all the trouble. Where they say these days, you've got to bond with the baby, I just don't get it, 'cos I had to get on with it whether I bonded or not with Carol ....'*

*'You never bathed the baby, the baby, the baby was bathed, and then it was fed, and then it was changed at certain times ... the only time I done that was the day before I came home ... to bath a baby, you'd got a nurse at the side of you showing you what to do. You hadn't even undressed a baby in those terms. It was altogether different when they had them at home, 'cos they looked after them themself ...'*

*'My mother hadn't even seen my baby, and nor had my sister until I came home. There was only one that was allowed to see, and that was my husband. In those days. It was a very strict regime. I mean you just couldn't do what you liked in hospital. No way. The nurse that was looking after me when I was having Carol was an Army nurse, I mean she'd been treating men, for wounds, she didn't know the first thing about having a baby, and neither did I.'*

All in all, very little formal child care advice was to be had, *'you weren't given. It was hit and miss. Your own common sense told you what to do. Mum helped as much as she could. I mean she was at work all day and every day, and as I say, you just got on with it. If you didn't the poor little thing wouldn't have nothing. I mean you knew that the baby had to be fed at a certain time, it had to be cleaned at a certain time, and that's how I managed ... For Mrs Churcher, there was no-one to turn to for advice, 'just me and my husband. We sorted it out ourself ... no friends seemed to be available either, no, when I married my husband, I didn't need any friends. You see, although he was my husband, he was also my friend.'*

## Doctors and Hospitals

Some of the buildings later used as hospitals started out life as workhouses and although the experience of being sent to the workhouse had become folk memory, for my respondents, the medical system was nonetheless quite different from that of the NHS, as Jack Milford recalls: *'the hospital was a different place then. You always had to go and see the almoner. If you went into hospital, almost the first person you saw was the almoner to see how much you could afford. And Langthorne was known as a hospital to go and die in. That was a real workhouse place, and if you went to Langthorne, you knew you'd had your chips, actually. That was it.'*

Harry Burkett spent a large part of his working life in hospital administration, and remembers the coming of the NHS: *'Langthorne was a workhouse. The master was still there, he was the main Supplies Officer. And there was one fellow there, Bill Bailey, who did all our messages, to and from Langthorne/Whipps Cross, and he was one of the inmates; he was a chap that had nobody in the world ... so it was used as a workhouse right up until the Health Service, more or less ... it was an infirmary, people went in there and never came out ... and Whipps Cross Hospital was a workhouse too; people used to*

*have to light fires, that's why it's built like it is, with all those open bridges and things. When they had no-one to look after them ... so the able ones had to light the fires each morning, and help where they could, unless they were infirm, that's why it was so unpleasant, because you were mixed in with all kinds of different people.'*

Bill Bailey never told Harry about his experiences in the workhouse, however: *'no, he was a very silent person ... back at Grossmith's [where Harry started his working life in the office of a perfume and toiletries manufacturers], we had a fellow .. a chap who was good at that particular job, never talked to anyone else, he only knows that, and that's all he knows - if you ask him about anything else ... but he's good for that, because you can rely ... he's got that job, and he knows what he's talking about ... Bill Bailey was one of those kind - he was a messenger ...'*

As far as GPs and dentists were concerned, Jack continues *'you've got a doctor along the Lea Bridge Road, only cost a shilling, and he did as he liked, more or less, he wasn't National Health or any of that sort of thing, just a Shilling Doctor ... he was Doctor Harcourt. This doctor who's over here was still operating then, actually, the one on the corner of Seymour - Doctor Phillips was still operating in those days, but he wasn't a Shilling Doctor as such, cos later on, as I got to be older , you got your National Health, and doctors became free, if you couldn't pay - there were still private doctors. The Shilling Doctors - you know there's a doctor at the moment on the corner of Vicarage, well he was further this way along Lea Bridge Road, towards those shops, used to have a surgery in there - used to row with him, later on I rowed with him when the kids needed. I went over there when the kid was coughing like anything, I said, can you come and see my son, please, he says, well, you can deal with him, can't you, he said, what's happening with him ... you don't need me over there, do you ...?'*

Brenda Jones recalls *'Doctor Burns was the original. Doctor Phillips came afterwards. That was the doctor I went to although the rest of the family went elsewhere, further up. When Doctor Burns died I went with them, further up. There was nothing, there was only the surgery along that little road, a row of houses ... Doctor Burns had been there a long time ... Doctor Phillips became his partner, and in fact, Doctor Phillips' son was also there. By the time the surgery closed down, it was young Doctor Phillips who was there. They were Jewish gentlemen, and Doctor Burns, he was Jewish.'*

Irene Cockerton remembers: *'We used to have to pay to go to the doctor when I was a youngster, it was about three shillings, when I was a child I had an abscess in my ear and I was very ill, and my mother really had to struggle to pay for the doctor .. and the dentist you had to pay.... When I came to live here, our doctor was in like a hut attached to the side of a house, in Lea Bridge Road, opposite Blythe Road one doctor had his surgery in the house itself, the other one was in the hut - Doctor Phillips and Doctor Burn ... he's got a newer surgery further down, it's Doctor Phillips' son; Doctor Burn died, Doctor Phillips continued on his own for a long time, then he retired and his son took over ... I just saw him here when we moved in, and thought, that's the doctor's for here, and didn't bother to look anywhere else. I think there was one up in Markhouse Road ...'*

*'My own grandfather had to go in,'* recalls Harry Burkett, *'he had bronchitis. All I know is, they dreaded that day, when they might have to go, and they knew they wouldn't come out. The period I was there, on the doctoring side, they had a very well known man, a chap named De Largy, he was put in charge of Langthorne, and completely revolutionised the place. He stopped the idea of once you went in you never came out. In fact, he created the idea that you should avoid going in, and if you did go in, you shouldn't be there very long, you should be in your own surroundings. People would say, well, I can't go out, I can't go up the steps of the bus, so he put part of a bus in there so they*

*could practise going up the steps of the bus before they came out: he was very advanced. We still had the bad cases, and the nurses were well qualified ... they used to try to keep them in bed, in cots, shocking really, even when I was there, I heard that some of them had to be treated like that ... even the walls were just brick work, very bare.*

*'Mind you, they had a beautiful dining room at Langthorne. It was very funny, you had a mixture. The accommodation we were in for this office was a committee room, you should see the panelling and the beautiful work, it was no ordinary office, beautiful fireplaces, so the people running the show were living quite well, but the inmates were there waiting to die ...'*



## WORK

*I was doing this French lingerie, French knickers with gorgeous lace on them. The only thing is, if you spoilt anything, you had to pay for it, so I seemed as though I was washing my hands all the time, cos one would come and say, can I have a slice of bread, mum? Well, you just have to stop work. But if you'd have seen some of the work I did . Not for the likes of me, them; although I've got nice nightwear now ... I loved my work then ... I do love lovely things ...*

Flo Temple

### Introduction

Although the range of trades and occupations engaged in by local residents was broad, they fall into several categories: industrial (including homeworking), clerical, shop work (including butchery). The Gas Works Tapes forms a separate unit within this section. More people worked in industrial production than in any other field. I have made extensive use of three or four life stories to illustrate each area.

### Clothing trade

Florence Temple, who came from Hackney, and settled in Blythe Road during the War, recalls her working life in the clothing trade, which employed large numbers of local people both in workshops and as out-workers or home-workers. She recalls, *'I worked at Horne Brothers, in Hackney Road, I used to have a long journey to work - they were tailors, you learned everything ... a sort of apprenticeship. I earned 6/- a week there. I started doing cleaning first, the coats, shirts, whatever they were doing ... I really wanted to get on, I really tried, and I did, I went on every machine .. they had so many floors in this .. shirts, suits, ties, socks, everything a man wore, pyjamas, and they taught me every machine there was, buttonhole machine ... I went on the boxer machine .. it had four needles, and you had to make sure all your cottons and all your bobbins were full up .. if one was to run out, it was no good you carrying on machining.... the shirts, not so much layers, they were sort of folded over, and the far whatsnames used to catch the seam, so that they never really come undone. Then I went on the buttonhole machine, the basting machine ... when it was basted up, all the women used to do was machine it up, all the seams were in place, you know, and I go on so well there...'*

Later, Flo went to another workshop, in Middlesex Street, opposite Liverpool Street station, though Horne's were keen to keep her on, *'I had my apprenticeship papers completed. He was a Jewish man, Harry Goldberg, a real gentleman; his dad was working with him, and his two sisters, his dad used to sit on the table and do all the bespoke work, the hand sewing of the suits, and I had this one machine, his two sisters used to help as well, then he advertised, and we got up to nine machines, and he put me in charge, and he said, you're the forelady now ....'*

And this job continued on until the later stages of the War, *'when the doodlebugs came over, that was when the trouble really, really started... We worked on the Saturday, till one o'clock. On the Sunday - I don't know what made me go up there, I went up there, but when I went in there, they said, don't go down Middlesex Street, Flo. There wasn't a house left in Middlesex Street. That was all the Jewish area. They had every one of them down. It was a nightmare ... this was when I was still working, before I got married. It was really, really awful. The devastation was unbelievable ...'*

Mr Goldberg continued in business however and Flo continued to work for him, *'Oh, I always did work'* she says, *'I always had to do homework, machining, I still worked for*

Goldberg. He used to come - he had a van - he used to come, bring me the work, and whatever I'd done, he'd take back the next day, and he begged George, when the kids were a little bit older, to go back, but George said, no, I think she deserves a little break now, I don't want her going out to work anyway ... I didn't want to go out to work ...'

'I continued doing the homeworking for years, but not for the same firm. With him you see, he gave me work, sometimes I couldn't get it done. George hired a machine for me, but what I really needed was a cabinet machine, but all he hired was one of those boxed, you know, and you had to fix it on the table, you know, and every time I had the kids come in to have something to eat, it had to come off, the table, and it was a bloomin' nuisance; then I went in for lots of other things after that, I did lingerie. Oh, it was gorgeous! When it first started, it was a bit expensive, but of course, people bringing in more money ... this lingerie firm was in Shoreditch, but I think they moved to the West End, where the money was ... I continued doing the homeworking.

'Then I found another little place - I'd never done aprons - I done hundreds and hundreds of aprons. Then after the aprons, I done loads of work, George used to help, and the kids used to help as well ... filled the stocking ups, I used to put the top on and stick Father Christmas on the top ... after Christmas finished, you had to find another little job, and just as I was so lucky, plastic came out, but of course it ruined your machine. But I did everything in plastic that you could possibly think of, from babies' bibs, babies' panties, raincoats, everything ... After that, I was a little bit fed up with being stuck indoors. When you're doing home work, sometimes it's an order, you've got to work till one o'clock in the morning ... George paid to have a suppresser put on the machine so it wouldn't disturb anybody ... I'd been machining since I left school at fourteen ...'

Mrs Sims worked as a machinist, and she 'started off training as a dressmaker, just off Piccadilly Circus, when I was fourteen, then the journey got too much - I used to go up by 38 bus 'I used to deliver dresses to various ladies that lived round Oxford Street. I was terrified, I didn't like travelling on the tube, I carried big boxes, which were difficult to carry ... they only delivered direct to the client on special occasions, dresses were normally delivered to the shop, where the client picked it up. One shop was down Shaftesbury Avenue, it was the underwear, we made the negligee and night -dress to go together, in satin .. it was beautiful .. one place was just off of Oxford Street, and it was a big building in flats, I had to take some there, it was all specials ... it was lovely to walk by the shop window and see it there, and think, I put a few stitches in that ... I was supposed to be being trained, but to learn to machine, I had to do it in my time, in my lunch break, and there was a lady machinist there, she used to get furious about it ... but it wore me down and made me ill ...'

Although it was not local work, Lily still only earned what she could have done nearer home, 'I earned ten shillings a week, out of that I had me fares to pay, it worked out that I had about two shillings pocket money, I gave me mum eight, and she paid me fares out of that, so she didn't have much out of it either ... where I worked, in this big house in Gerrard Street, off of Piccadilly, the basement of it was electrical people, then the first floor was like a club thing, then we were the next floor, but we had to share the toilet with these people down below and it was horrible, ... I used to wait till I got home to go to the toilet... then I managed to get this job at the Belmont, clean place, modern, mind the things were mass produced, whereas I'd been doing individuals, but I enjoyed it ...

'Then I got a job at the Co-op in Lea Bridge Road which is next to the mosque now, that was CWS, a factory, dressmaking and the underwear, I was in the dressmaking, a finisher .. I stayed there until the War had been on a little while and the work dropped off ... we all had to do something else for War Work, but by that time it was dropping off,

*because people weren't buying things, and I got a job at Dalston, making paliasses, mosquito nets, kitbags, helmet covers, for the Forces ... When we had to join up, I was already doing my bit, so I stayed where I was'.*

And like most local women in those days, she stopped work when the children were born, but *'I used to do machining at home .. one lot was making doll's clothes, frilly and bits and pieces, making plastic macs, after the War this was, kept very busy, and I used to make their clothes too ...'*

Like many local women, Mrs Irene Cockerton who moved to Bridge Road in 1955, was mainly occupied with bringing up the children. *'I didn't have a job at first, not when the children were young .. as they got older, I used to help in the fish shop'* a business which was started by her father-in-law before the War, with premises first in Stamford Hill, then Dagenham, then in Urswick Road, in Lower Clapton, until it was compulsorily purchased for redevelopment

During the nineteen-sixties Carole Brookes worked in the shoe trade at a job she loved until the birth of her son. When her son was five years old she took up paid work again as an outdoor machinist for a firm making children's play clothes. *'That was Fairy Glens, they were based at the back of Lynmouth Road, Walthamstow, then they moved to Blackhorse Road to the factory units there, but I did that for ten years, on piecework rates; the more you did the more you got paid. I worked there three mornings a week from half past eight till half past eleven, while my son was at nursery. It just fitted in nice with him being at nursery.*

*'You'd go and collect [the material]. I had my own machine, I had an industrial machine. you went down, either on the bus, or if you were fortunate enough to have a car, or a cab, you went down and you picked your work up and you brought it home, and you made them up. I fist of all stared ding nurse's outfits, you'd make a little white pinny and a little hat, and a cape ... I didn't like making doll's clothes, but sometimes you made doll's clothes. I found them a little bit fiddly. After doing children's play clothes, which were like children's wear the little doll's clothes were a little bit fiddly, but if there was nothing else, and you needed the money or you needed to work, then that's what you did.*

*'It was very, very, busy in the summer, from round about the end of November to the end of February, very, very little, because they didn't need anything. You needed to work in the summer to get the shops ready for Christmas, then you'd have to wait until the toy fair which is January to February. It was a national thing as far as I know; it's where you go with all your samples, and you get your orders throughout the year. But my last lot of work that I did was up into 1985, I was making play tents, and these was like three and a half foot long, and you'd have yards and yards of material and you'd think ah, I'm never going to finish these. There as an awful lot of work, because you had a plastic window and net curtains to make, and you'd he to fit that into a square, and you'd have to fit the roof on, then do the sides, and do the bottoms, and make sure you'd got the tapes in the right place to put onto a frame, and you'd have wendy houses, and wigwams ...'*

Homeworking by its nature seems to be an isolated almost clandestine sort of business. Carole seldom saw representatives from the firm: *'occasionally if they were waiting on work and it wasn't your day to go back and you'd got your work finished, they'd ring up and say, oh, can Lennie come and get the work? And you'd meet Lennie at such and such a point, and he'd take the work and he'd give you work ...'* nor other people doing the same work as herself:

*'You all worked in your individual homes. You'd perhaps meet a couple [of other homeworkers] when you took your work in and got your wages, but other than that it was the lady behind the desk and perhaps Lennie if he came and got your work. Other than that, you didn't see anybody else. There were some factory workers, but they weren't machinists, they would pack the work that you took back, and check it, there would be a checker there, and they would pack the work ready to go out.'*

Tax and Insurance, Health and Safety were the responsibility of the individual homeworker: *'Stoppages and that were down to you, I don't know if I was one of the lucky ones or one of the silly ones, but I had an accountant, because I was self-employed, you have to register with the taxman and that, and I had an accountant and just paid him a sum each year to sort my finances out. What other people did, I don't know, because you never got to see anybody. Industrial injury was no concern of the company, I can remember one day putting a needle through my finger, they weren't responsible for you, and just rung up and said, you won't get so much work this week, I've got a couple of hours to spend in Whipps Cross. You just carried on. Because you were working at home, you were responsible for yourself, the factory weren't.'*

Mrs Joyce Fraser moved to England from Guyana in 1961, to join her husband. He had come to England at the suggestion of former workmates at the Coca-Cola plant in Guyana who were already here. The Frasers settled first in Hackney, then in Leyton. Mrs Fraser encountered difficulties from would-be employers, *'even to when we go seeking jobs, we coloured would go and ask for the job and we won't get it, but if a white go after us, they get it, so that used to bring a lot of trouble too'*, though in the dressmaking trade, it seems it was a little easier to get work, *'it was better, but on the other hand we had to start arguing with them and showing them how it is, we came, then the white one got the job and we didn't get it, and time after time, you go seeking for a job, you will find some firms taking on black people, 'cos we came here in this country to work, and we used to do more work than the white ones, so some firms would accept us, they find they gain more from us, and then we had more experience from home, than what they had here, so they find us better workers than the others ... then they ask if we know anyone wants job, and we will bring a friend, and you see, they get more advance with the work.'*

*'I used to work for Daywear, he was just in the High Street, on Church Road, I think it's closed down now .. I worked there a good time, then I start to get Dawn, then I stop off, and I uses to do the indoor sewing ... it was convenient ... we did a lot of different jobs to get through, I alone used to work for the factory, I used to take sewing from them and bring it home during the night, take it back into work and next night I'd do the same thing. After that I got a part-time job at Langthorne Hospital, and I uses to work there, but still taking the sewing from there and doing it in the night, so we worked very, very hard for whatever little we have.'*

## Office Work

Despite the fact that jobs were no easier to come by than they are today, training in how to apply for jobs and interview technique appears to have been non-existent, as Harry Burkett recalls getting his first job at Grossmith's, an old-fashioned perfume manufacturer *'you weren't prepared for interviews, it was awfully difficult - how do you choose your job? I mean, you're offered a job, it's a shot in the dark, and once you're in it, you can't move ... because I was fifteen and a half, and not fourteen, the normal thing in this firm was that they would put a boy on at fourteen and he was the post boy, a terrible job, you'd get all the post coming up about four o'clock in the afternoon ... but because I was fifteen and a*

*half, I was applying for a job as junior clerk ... I got it, but I couldn't use a telephone, it was awful, if I picked up a telephone, I was frightened out of my life ...*

*'I sat at a desk, with another fellow who was with the family behind this firm, and they found him a job, a chap named Dyer. You've heard of Dyers, the ironmongers people? He was part of that family. They just put him in because he was a relation. The name Grossmith, the Grossmiths, started about 1850 or something, they took the attitude, they weren't worried about profits, provided the firm was successful and everyone had a job, they were happy. The result was, when they were offered amalgamation, they never took it....*

*'They made a great impression on me, this firm, though I was very poorly paid. If I'd have been a post boy, it would have been fifteen shillings, but instead of that it was sixteen shillings ... and you got a rise automatically every year of three shillings, regardless of what sort of job you did ... I was very often in a position of having to say, I haven't had a rise this year; we've had a very bad year ... there was somebody on the same job getting far more than me, it was very old fashioned ... no sick pay. The only good thing was, we did have a fortnight's holiday. The people in the factory, near St Paul's they weren't very well paid, and they only got a week's holiday .. to get a fortnight was quite good ... that was paid holiday....*

*'I began to see that I was in a rut, and I started looking for a job, and in those days you daren't tell anyone you were after a job, so you went out in your lunch time, and made an appointment with a firm ... there was only one agency in the City for clerical jobs, that was Coleman's in King Street, near the Guildhall, and in those days, if they got you a job, you didn't get your first week's wages, you had to pay it to them ... but I didn't know whether I was jumping out of the frying pan into the fire ... anyway the War altered things a lot ...'*

*Ruth Gimson was at school until the age of sixteen, when most children started work at fourteen, 'but I didn't take any exams. I went up to Golden Lane, and I worked there for about eighteen months - Golden Lane is round in the Barbican complex ... then I went to Queen's Square, Holborn, to the National Deposit Friendly Society ... never worked locally ... I went to work on the tram ... I had two shillings a day, and that was me fare, and me lunch and I saved some pennies perhaps out of that so on the Friday I should treat myself to a knickerbocker glory ... you could get there direct on one tram, got on at Markhouse Corner and got off at Southampton Row. It was like one of these mail order places, just ordinary general office work. I didn't want industrial work, I'd stayed at school, after all. It was better paid, about fifteen shillings a week, you could get ten bob local, but I paid the difference in fares, and the travelling, used to go early in the morning, catch the workman's - about half past seven'*

*'As a very young man, recalls Jack Milford, he worked for Beck and Pollitzer's 'down on Southwark Wharf; me sister's husband's father was the Union bloke there, and he got me a job at Beck and Pollitzer's - they're still going, actually, they're warehousemen, delivery things and all that, they get stuff off the barges .. I was attached to Southwark Wharf, then fourteen years old, and they said, behave yourself, I want you to wear a white collar and a trilby hat!'*

*'To get up there, you'd get a tram, at that time, for 4d return, if it was a workman's return, as long as it was before half past seven in the morning, to Liverpool Street and return, then walk down through the city and down into Southwark Wharf, actually. I quite liked it.*

*'When I got there, my job then was to - if it was raining, I put a sou'wester on, an oilskin coat, and walk all over the city round their other depots delivering, then round to their*

head office, and that took me all morning ... they supplied the sou'wester. I had my own desk, and it used to face the river, and I used to love to watch the bargemen taking their barges down the river. There used to be one bloke on the barge with a pole, going down with the tide, you know, and behind our warehouse was Appollonairs, the mineral water people, and the boats used to pull up at our dock from Holland bringing the mineral waters in. All dutchmen on it, of course, and they used to come ashore in their clogs; and when their clogs were wearing out, they used to take the leather strap off, and toss them away, and put a new pair of clogs on. They probably only cost pennies, mind you.

'I hated this job, mind you, and I used to spend my time dreaming, sitting on a bloody high stool, looking out this window at the river, you know ... I had to do paperwork, I did some checking, all done by hand, no typewriters, not in our office, I had books to keep ledgers ... used dip in pens. I was fifteen, and never had enough to do - I got paid 10/- a week. I was bored one day, I used to doodle in me lodgers, I was so bloody fed up with it all, until one day the manager came round, he says, for Christ's sake, we want legible writing, we don't want the kind of thing the bloody monks do, he said, you're not writing any of that sort of stuff, I can see you're bloody bored here, I'll have to find you another job,

'So I get sent down the yard where all the bloody horse carts and that used to come in and collect the goods, see, and I had to deal with all those places. It's a five storey warehouse, it is, with all cranes up there. I got to be a real little sod down there, I used to argue with the bloody railway blokes and all that. One day, I really swore at one, he says, you little sod, he says, so I dash up the stairs, I do, and he dashes after me, and I get right up to the fourth floor I do, and I think, there's nowhere to go from here. So I got to one of the openings and there's a crane rope hanging down that touches the ground. I leapt out and caught hold of the crane rope ... It finished up ten feet off the ground, this rope did, and I slid off the end of it onto my arse onto the cobblestones. So I look up at this bloke, he was amazed, up at the opening, and I used the foulest language you can possibly imagine, and I turned round and there was the governor standing behind me - the managing director, actually - and he says, My God, you little blackguard! You little blackguard, he says, using such language. I don't think I want you working for me, and I got the sack for being a little blackguard, actually! It was pretty well [instant dismissal]. It was a pity really, because the bloke I went to work with, he got to be a warehouse manager in the end, whereas me, I was out in the cold again ...'

Harry Burkett meanwhile remained in his clerk's job with Grossmiths until 1941. 'In '41, Christmas, I think it was, two days after Christmas there was a big fire raid on London, in '41 or early '42, went to work in the morning, as per usual, heard rumours you see, and when we got there, everything was in flames, everything was ruined, the whole lot was down, and there were crowds of city workers, all pushing one another around, I even saw flames coming in Ludgate Hill, I remember, then eventually you pushed around and you saw someone you knew from your firm: oh, they're all meeting down So-and-So, they'd say, so we all met outside Midland Bank in Ludgate Hill, still jostle with people, and the Managing Director, who by now was a new man, his name was Dyas, and he's related to that firm has a branch in Ilford now, and they had a series of hardware shops - still flourishing, Dyers' is, in London. Strange to say, the managing director died, the sales manager died, the secretary went ... senile ... and all very near, so this chap Dyers became managing director. He said, well, I'll do my best - imagine the situation, they'd lost everything, all the oils in the factory had gone, the office was gone, there was nothing, and he said, I'm going to look for an office, and he said, as soon as I find one, I'll let you know. Well, I got home, and that was the end of it. Then I got a letter giving me a week's notice. Everyone got a week's notice. Then afterwards, we got a notice saying we were being taken on again, and that they'd found an office in Aldwych. I reported to this office,

*and we were all crowded together in one room .. of course, money and cash was still coming in from all over the country for goods people had had ... then he made an arrangement with Dior, they collaborated with them and started selling their perfumes, till eventually, he found some way he was able to make up our own brands, fulfilling set orders, and that's how he got going again ...*

*'Then he found a factory in Neasden, the old factory of the Royal Sovereign Pencil Company, obviously pencils were finished. When I was free to go back, I was told the offices were in Piccadilly in Nuffield House; went back, and they said, whereas I'd been a normal slogger, pen pusher, make out ledgers and all that sort of things, they said, would you do the wages ... they were very old fashioned; they would only allow the wages to be made up by a person who had long service; in fact, this chap was a director, he was the only person they felt able to trust with money - a most peculiar attitude. The peculiar thing about Grossmith's, there was never anyone around to write a letter, which was ridiculous, really, I mean I worked in Local Government, I had to write me letters; it's true, I never dictated, I hadn't had the experience, but I used to write me letters, give them to typists, and they used to ... but Grossmith's would never dream of that ... the only men who were allowed to write letters were the managers, it was a ridiculous firm ...*

*Well, they had to change that, and they allowed me to do [the books], and I introduced systems - there was now tax, PAYE, and I set up the books, and I had a card system ... I had to go to Piccadilly in the morning, they'd give me the cheque then I had to go by me own with a big bag on the tube to Neasden, go to this factory, then there'd be a couple of men out of the powder room department, they were told to go with me down to the bank to escort me and bring the money back, then I was put in an office somewhere and made up the money into packets, you see....*

*'They had to do something they'd never done before, bring in an outsider, a qualified manager to run this factory, you see, and I got on quite well with him. The things that really got me, each time I had to go back, having done the day's work on me own, not only did I make the money up, I got new systems of employing people.*

*Before that, they had people worked there for years and years, regular hours, week after week. Now, you had to take someone on part-time. afternoons, mornings, full day, and then, this man, this woman wants his P45 today, he's leaving ... or this man we've just taken on ... it was flowing all the time, they'd never experienced anything like it before. Then, when I got back on a Friday, they were saying to me, hello Burk, where've you been? Where have I been?! Ah, I stood it for as long as I could - there was no future for me, and I don't want to work at Neasden, so I had to look for something else.*

*'I worked from '28 to about '41, then went back for about three, so it was about sixteen....I left during 1941, then I went back to them about '46. Then of course the War came to an end .. this firm used to send me £5 a year, to make sure they were keeping me to go back, the perfumery,*

*'The Grossmiths weren't coping with the market. Oriental perfumes were out of date. ladies were going for things like Coty, and New York firms were taking over. The Oriental was a kind of very sickly, much heavier perfume, and it went out of fashion ... Bourgeois were our competitors, "Evening in Paris" they sold; they were in the City in Carter Lane, back of St Paul's. Then there was 4711 cologne ... we did eau de cologne ... the things were quite good that they made, but they didn't advertise anything like some of these big firms like Yardley, and Coty.*

*'Then I answered an advert, Salvation Army Mothers' Hospital in Clapton wanted someone, so I went there. I used to have to stoke them first there .. the hours were awful ... every three weeks you had to do a weekend, all day long, stoking the fire, emptying the bins .. I was there a couple of years, then I found a job at Leytonstone House, the mental hospital, back to a clerical job ...*

*'Leytonstone House used to be a hospital for high grade mentally deficient girls, and I used to have to sit with the steward and work out the wages, but it was run by the London County Council, who were very good, but they had loads of regulations, and this steward spent his time studying them .. so for some reason, he didn't want me sitting in his office .. he used to have quarrels with the Matron who was in the next room .. he was a churchman, it was true ... but people in these jobs where there's lots of regulations, they carp, and he didn't want me in the room, because I was hearing too much, so he bunged me in a back room, doing the same work ...*

*'Then [after the War] I did the wrong thing there, I took on a bookkeeper's job, near London Bridge. They were a forwarding agent, and, oh dear, well, after three months, I had to pack it in .. it was a firm that would make money on anything ...we had people from the Caribbean saying, I've got some 1900 postage stamps, could you sell them and pay them the money for them? They'd send us back these stamps, they'd do anything for money Or they would take on, say Rentokil's debts, Rentokil may have sold someone something in Jamaica,. There was a bill of exchange, this firm would pay the firm, so the firm gets a commission, so Rentokil had no more worry, then this firm had to get this money from these people in Jamaica.*

*'A bill of exchange is "in three months, pay such and such". You wouldn't get the money until that three months is up, but they were getting the money in advance of the term of the bill of exchange. And they had two cash books - and they had a permanent overdraft with Martins' Bank, and the worst part of it was, more invoices came in to pay than you ever had money to pay for, and I was expected to go in every morning to these two, Northern Irish characters, I think they were, and have it in the order which in their mind they were going to pay ... and of course, I used to get them in the wrong order .. I didn't know what their mind was....*

*'It's the only time I've ever been out of work. I was out of work for two or three weeks, and kept looking for hospital jobs, and this one came up at Langthorne, and I applied. We had the Mayor of West Ham on the Panel .. I got the job .. it was much more boring than Grossmith's. But at Langthorne, I was put on stock control, of course it was the beginning of the Health Service, this was in '50 - it had already been going two years, but it was in a bit of a muddle, you see when the Health Service started, Essex was running one bit of it - I don't know what hospitals they ran, and West Ham had Langthorne Hospital and Whipps Cross Hospital .. West Ham were very loose ....*

*'You had two different kinds of people put together in an office. You had people from Essex, who, because they worked in health for Essex, came into ... Hospital Group Number Ten I worked for .. and you had the West Ham people, I don't know how they got their jobs - they were doing wages, mainly, and they didn't get on .....you couldn't talk to anyone....*

*'Yes, the Essex administration was generally a more professional body of people than that of West Ham, they had a better education, and they'd probably been used to doing a better job. Because they happened to be unlucky and be in the Health at the time, they were pushed into the Health Service, and these other people, it was a step up for some of them... now West Ham ran Langthorne, and a hospital is like a colony, you buy food, you*



*buy medical things, all the building apparatus, and you have a tremendous store of things, there's always work going on .. when the Health Service took over, they wanted it all down on paper. I understand that at West Ham, if a chap was told to do a job, he'd just go to the depot there, and say, well, I want a couple of buckets of sand, a bit of cement, and I want this and that, and walk away with it .. well of course that wasn't good enough for the government .. before anything could be issued, they had to sign a paper, a billet doux, and these billet doux used to come in to me every day, and I had a great register, and I had to punch through all these items, and at the end of every period, a month, or whatever it was .. you see, the Regional Board gave the Health Service a lot of money, and from this register, they had to work out how the costs were going and this register would tell you precisely how much sand there was, or how many washers there were, ... and they'd estimate future demand from it, but it was vast, and difficult to get accurate.*

*'There was a Finance Officer, a Deputy, there was a Mr Bustle - always remember his name, he was a nice fellow - these were the top jobs there were some good top people in West Ham as well; there was a chap who came from Essex, I was in his group ... there was an ambitious young man; and was sat next to a fellow who had always got a grudge; and I must have talked to one of the fellows, and it somehow got to the management that I wasn't satisfied with the job - so one day, after two years, they had a reorganisation of the job, and they said, you're going on wages. The rivalry there was even worse ... my future wife was a comptometer operator ...*

*Moved to Wanstead, got a machine to work out income tax ... employed special person to operate the machine ... they delegated four of us to be able to stand in for her when necessary ... I moved to a job in Local Government in Woodford, in the Borough Treasurer's Department doing writs, lots of summaries ... before computers, they had a punch-card system ... I spent the rest of my career there, when Woodford went in with Ilford and became the Borough of Redbridge ...'*

## War Work

For many people, War service found them engaged in some quite different occupation from that which they had followed before, and Harry Burkett was no exception. He is rather unusual however in that, as a Conscientious Objector, he took a different route.

*Grossmith's they thought that was wonderful, so I just had to wait for the due time to leave the LCC, and go to the firm, but things were chaotic in the firm ... [Grossmiths]: At the time I was still under the Tribunal stipulation that I should do social and land work, and after the appeal from doing non-combatant service, which I appealed against, I was stipulated to find social work. No-one supervised us, we were put on our honour to do this. I heard the other day, there were 60,000 Objectors in the Second War, 16,000 in the First. I was at Leytonstone House still under the stipulation, until I got released, like men out of the Forces... the firm wouldn't take me back until they knew I was a free man, sort of thing.*

*'My first Tribunal, we all got turned down ... non-combatative service ... Judge Somebody or Other, had to go to Fulham, it was automatic, then you really had to study your case more, and of course, we had help, there was a chap in Walthamstow .. he was a Councillor, .....?..... having made testimony in front of Judge, and having been turned down, you had to go to a little office in Horseferry Road somewhere with a panel of about four people, and he said, you've got to have a solicitor, because they're going to argue from a legal point of view.*

*'So we had to have a solicitor in our background to support our case ... my father, although he was a real Army man, he came to sponsor me, and I was allowed to do social or ARP work .. it was through Neville Chamberlain really, because he put this clause in the Conscription Act, that people had a right to object, you weren't doing anything wrong, just had to prove that you were genuine.'*

As regards being a CO, Harry recalls *'I didn't have any trouble, it was surprising really .. you can't have a clear conscience about everything ... virtually, I was replacing a man who had gone to the War when I went to Leytonstone House, but what could I do? The steward there wanted to know all the whys and wherefores, but eventually he turned out quite a helpful man, he was churchwarden of St Andrew's Church.'*

*'Anyway, I had to find me own job, so I went down to the Labour Exchange .. the muddle! I was sent down to Latchington in Essex, so I had to get on me bike ... Latchington is near Maldon ... I was a good cyclist then .... in every County, there was an Agricultural Committee, and they oversaw what the farmers were doing ... it's surprising how old fashioned the farming was, there was only one combine harvester going round all of Essex, and they were still threshing the corn with a steam engine, and tractors were hardly heard of ...'*

The young men conscripted to do agricultural work were housed in what Harry told me were known before the War as 'Country clubs', which consisted of *'a corridor, a string of bedrooms, and a kind of a kitchen, and you had your ration book, and mine was registered round here [Walthamstow] , when I got down there, I had to reregister, so I had no rations, but I found that there were a few fellows there already before me, so I fed on their rations for a few days, till I had time to go to the Ration Office for that area.'*

The routine at the 'Country club' was *'first morning seven o'clock, cycle to the farm, you got there, and the Agricultural Committee had their own farm to train people like me .. it wasn't really training, it was a thing to keep you out of the way until a farmer wanted help, then they could go to this lot ... we had to do all our own cooking there ... we were about four or five young fellows, some were COs, but then a week later they brought in a team of really old men, and what they got these old boys on, was they got them out there, shovelling out these tree roots, turning the ground into somewhere they could grow corn, they had these things like pick axes ... we would spend all day hoeing weeds between the corn and the sugar beets ... Later Harry moved to other accommodation, 'I went to a lady at Latchington, and for the best part of our wages, fifteen or sixteen shillings, she would feed you and provide you with a bed ...'*

After about nine months [of agricultural work as a conscript CO in Essex] *'I had an accident with my eye ... we used to have to do stooking, and the straw sticking out went right in my eye ... I used to suffer with dyspepsia a lot - the heavy meals didn't suit me either ... so I came back, and I was living with my mother in Perth Road, and got a hospital porter's job, at Hackney Hospital. That satisfied the conditions ...'*

Mrs Fraser said *'I uses to walk to Langthorne Hospital in the evenings, so I could look after the kids. Eleven o'clock I used to do school work, dinners, and come back in, then go to the hospital work in the evening, then in the night sit down and do the sewing, it was very hard, just to bring up the kids ... no security, nothing.'*

## Industrial

Many people had extensive experience of industrial work. Here, Mrs Churcher tells about her working life: *'Me first job? That was in a balloon factory, making balloons, that was over in Hackney, Clapton, in Lea Bridge Road, you go over the bridge, you know where there's three pubs, there's Prince of Wales, Ship Aground, the British Oak. It was next door to the British Oak that used to be a little factory. They made balloons, first of all, then all of a sudden, they'd got a rush order for making gas masks, that was '37, 1937. Then they stopped that and it closed down.'*

## Laundry work

Many women disliked industrial laundry work. Although it was hard work, employers often provided valuable training. Mrs Churcher continues: *'Then I went to... a laundry, [see domestic washing arrangements and people's experience of using laundries], Connell's, down at the River Lea on the Clapton side. I started work at seven o'clock in the morning, and I didn't finish till nine o'clock at night ... used to walk from Lea Bridge Road just past the station, down Lea Bridge Road, over the bridge into a cut way, and walk the length of the river until I come to Connells's ... that was down towards Springfield Park. I worked there from seven o'clock in the morning till nine o'clock at night, and that was work.'*

*'I was on the colander. That's a big machine. You feed sheets through it. That's the nice part, feeding the sheets through, but when you got to the other end you got all the heat, and you got to do folding there ...'*

The machine had *'big rollers, great big rollers ...'* somewhat like a huge mangle, *'only you had steam going through it, so when you fed, you got the sheet, two of you take it out the bin, you'd straighten it all up, you'd feed it through, right, like that, until it had gone through. Up the other end there'd be two other people, at the hot end, that is, and you'd take it off of there as it's coming through to fold it. And you get a crease in it, and you had to do it all over again. You had to be quite careful - you had a guard in front, but you could easy, if you pushed your fingers under...'*

Notwithstanding the dangerous machinery, Mrs Churcher could recall no accidents, unlike Mrs Taylor and her box factory, see below.

*'Then I got fed up there, I thought no, I can't keep on doing this .. I didn't earn a lot .. if it was ten bob, that was a lot. Then I left there and I went to Hackney Hospital as laundry maid. And I learned the trade right the way through. That was a better job. It was superann'ed, so it was, as I thought, steady. But just ... me dad died, can't remember dates, dates have gone in me mind now, yes, he died and they were changing over, and quite a lot of us got put off Well, they were closing part of the laundry down, it was being sent somewhere else, right, and so I was out of work. So I went down to the Labour place in Hoe Street - can't think of the name - one of those turnings down there, and they sent me down to Burwell Road, round the factory estate, there used to be a sweet place round there called Sopers' and I went there temporary.'*

*'Well, then, in that time, they started conscriptions, didn't they, then I had to be called up.'* The time between receipt of call-up papers and reporting for duty at the workplace was brief, *'... you're off and away. And I was booked to go and be away for three years. They wanted to send me to Wolverhampton, on the munitions, and I thought, God Almighty, what am I going to do there, it means leaving mum on her own, and I said, well, I can't go, and that's all there is to it. She needs someone to be with her. All right, she was working, she'd had to work all her life. And I went back to work, then I had a letter to say they were putting me to Middlesex Hospital laundry down at Colindale, Hendon. I thought, God*

*Almighty, I had to get a train, and I'm not one to go out on my own all that much, not even today I don't.*

*'And I had to go in lodgings. Oh, the lodgings they give me. I went into Kilburn for lodgings, and the place where I had to go, I thought, I'll never stand the life here. Anyhow, went to work the next day, I found me way to the Colindale where this laundry was, and ...*

*'Well, anyhow, went into this laundry and met u with some women doing the work, got on with it, and I thought, I can't go back to that place, cos it was all men, I was the only young girl there, and they were all Irish men, and I thought, I can't go back there, it's no good.*

*'A woman that was working at the side of me, she said, what's the matter, so I said, I can't go back to where I come from, so she said, why, what's it like there, so I said, well, it might be all right, but I said, I'm not used to men, having a lot of men, I mean, me father'd died, me brother'd died, and there was only like me and me mum cos Doris was away. Evacuated. Any'ow, she said to me, oh, go back tonight; I'll see what my mum says, and the next day I went in, and she said, oh, you can come and stay at our place, and that's where I stayed for three years Well, no, I didn't; I stayed there for nearly a year, and I thought, no, I can't keep this up, I don't like it living away and just coming home weekends.*

*'So then I decided that I wouldn't live away from home, I would travel from Lea Bridge Road to Colindale every day, on the tube, which I did .. I used to get up early in the morning. I had to be at work at eight o'clock - I used to be up at half past five in the morning, get ready, and be out to catch the workman's which we used to have years ago, which was cheaper, half past six. And many a night I got out at Liverpool Street station and there's a raid going on. And you think to yourself, oh God Help Us, I've got to get home yet. Then another night I'd get home and it was pitch black with fog, there was nothing running, no buses running, I walked all the way home from Liverpool Street to Lea Bridge Road. Got home, fell in bed, and up again to go out to work the next day. And laundry work, my dear, is not easy. It's a very hard job.'*

The work was the same as at previous one, with the colander machine, but at the hospital, they taught the girls all the steps of professional laundering, which included ironing. *'You had to iron handkerchiefs a certain way, you had matron - in those days, hospitals had matrons, and she had a hat that had all little pleats and you were trained to do that. you were trained to iron a handkerchief perfect. Pillowcases, this would be not ordinary hospital work, that would be the nurses' stuff, the sisters' stuff. Saturday morning you'd go into work. You wouldn't do laundry work, you'd do the whole of the laundry, you'd have to polish the whole of the corridor.'*

In the laundry room, *'you had the big washing machines; and the handwash stuff would be Matron's stuff, and the Sisters', and the undermatron's, not their personal clothes, all their working clothes. All the other work would be hospital bed work, that would be the boilers, you'd got men working on those, then they'd come from there go into like spin dryers, right. You'd go from there, then they'd come in to the laundry part where it would be fed into the rollers, the colanders, and they were years ago, then the other stuff would be ironed, to the ironers. It was the bed stuff that would get boiled, spun, and then steam cleaned through the colanders'*

*'You'd have to all line up when you went in, you never had one job, that you done every day, you see. This is why I say, you were taught. She'd pick out - you used to have a supervisor - she'd pick out a few, and she'd say, I want you to go down the end, and I*

want you to sort all the dirty linen out. Then another one would be put on something else. You see, and this is how it would work, so that you went through the trade, through every mortal thing.' And the girls emerged from this as fully qualified laundresses, who, as well as receiving practical training. 'Two afternoons a week, the young ones what I call the young ones, the eighteen up to twenty, used to go to the Northern Polytechnic at Islington way, and Thursday afternoon you would do cooking. Friday afternoon you'd do First Aid. And you done that, every week. That was at Hackney, till I was conscripted. It was a few years.' There was, however, no academic component to the training, no 'book learning', 'No, no. You never done none of that. You had a test on things, but not writing.' [Joyce Russell's grandmother had an industrial accident with just such a colander machine, see below]

## Factories

'Oh, it was nothing unusual, it was a job and you had to do it. I worked 8 till 6 all the week, and Saturdays, 8 till 12. For fifteen shillings. And the same at my last job. Started at 15 shillings, plus a shilling if you were early every day, then it gradually went up.

Muriel Jones

## The Shoe Trade

Carole Brooks worked in the shoe trade locally during the 1960s and loved it. She lived in Murchison Road, and is the daughter and niece respectively or two of the participants in this project who lived on Lea bridge Road near the Greyhound pub in the 1920s and 1930s. She was born in 1947.

*'I worked in the Arcola Shoe Works in Leyton High Road, which was opposite Abbots Park Road, it's now a reproduction furniture factory. From there I went to Charles Lewis, which was in Church Road, they were shoes, I was in the shoe industry; then I went to a little place in Argall Avenue for about a fortnight, three weeks, then I moved over to Hackney, in Wells Street, that was Delwood shoes, and they were the brothers of the Arcola Works. I stayed there until it was changed over to A and S, until I had my son, so I had five jobs from fifteen to twenty-four.*

*'I wanted to do clothes machining, but all the jobs I went for I just couldn't get, and I saw an advert outside for apprentices, for want of a better phrase, although it wasn't an apprenticeship, that's how it was worded, and it was learning the shoe trade from bottom up. My mum got me the hob, she said, "I've got you a job", "Oh, thank you!", and I started in the January. '63. I left school at Christmas and went straight to work. I think it was beginning of January I started work, straight after the Christmas. It was a cold, bitter, winter day. I got home lunchtime, 'cos I was able to get home, I think you had one and a half hours or something like that, it wasn't far on the bus, tuppence or threepence on the bus. I sat down and had lunch, and I said, "I'm not going back, I don't like it", she said, "you didn't like school", I said, "bo, but I like that even less". I hated school but I would never have any time off, 'cos I was frightened I was going to miss something, there was always something going on at school that you just couldn't miss. I hated it.'*

The working hours [at the Arcola] 'were eight 'til half past five, and I think it was either an hour and a quarter or an hour and a half for lunch, and you'd get a tea break in the morning and afternoon. it was weekly paid, and I think my wages were five pounds. My mum said, that's good, that's a good wage, so-and-so's only getting three and a tanner, or whatever, or three pounds two and six: I hated it, but I went back. And left there when I was eighteen. Oh, it was very good money. You got the same money every week unless

*you did overtime. I wan on an hourly rate, but I can't remember what it was, I know it totalled five pounds, 'cos it was a forty-two hour week.'*

*'Arcola and Selwood Shoes, they also had another company in Wood Street called 'Wispey's', they made little flat shoes, and they always paid over the Union rate, and they did look after their workers. I mean, conditions were not bad, when you listen to other factory workers, with dripping rain, and things like that; on the whole it wasn't' too bad. When you got to dance halls and things like, and you said, oh were do you work, oh, I work at Arcola, 'cor, money's good down there, up at so-and-so, you know, the money's not as good up there but they always paid a couple of bob over the Union rate.'*

*There was an active Union at Arcola, oh yes as you walked through the door, you were given a form, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Trade Industries, and they worked somewhere in Hackney was their place. But everybody joined the Union. You didn't not join the Union. It was there for your benefit. When I had my son, I got a maternity allowance, I think it was about twenty-five bob a week for so many weeks before and so many weeks after the birth. it's money you paid in, and if somebody died in your family, you got some money for a bit of black or whatever. There were no Christmas boxes or anything like that, you just got decent wage. They looked on it that way.'*

*Carole worked on the shop floor, where 'you'd have a chargehand then you'd have a foreman over him. And then, so you'd have the foreman, the chargehand and us, and then above the foreman you would have a floor manager and then above him would have like the directors and the like. We saw them all. Oh yes, the directors would make a point of coming down every day, they would come down and they would ask you how you were getting on and if you had any problems, and if you have, don't see them, go and see somebody else. But they would always come in and say 'good morning' or walk through. it was just part and parcel of what happened, because that was my only job, that's how I thought things were. It's only when you go to other factories that your realise that's not what things are, you didn't get to see the hierarchy when I was at Charles Lewis, or the little - I can't even remember what the little one was called now. In Argall Avenue. Triads? I know it was a poor quality shoe that they made.'*

*The quality of shoe made at Arcola was much better, 'Oh, Russell and Bromley, Dolcis, Saxone as was; it was the upmarket shoe. Later on, most of the shoe firms were taken over by the British Shoe Corporation. That's when, I think, the market dropped, it wasn't so much individual stuff. What happened was, you'd have your team of designers, and they would design shoes and they would go to Dolcis - you had your designers upstairs, and they would do some designs and they would get them made up and the rep would take them round to Dolcis, and they would say, yea or nay to two thousand pairs of this and two thousand pairs of that , and they would come back and you would get the orders. And another factory would go to Dolcis again with a similar range or designs could be very, very close, and then they would see which was the best price. Which was going to be the better quality leather of the cheapest price that they could get.'*

*'But when I worked at Selwoods, the other brother's company at Mare Street, we made shoes for Biba. We made the first Biba boots. Oh ...! And Mary Quant. Mary Quant came down quite a few times, cos then you were right in the Sixties then, with the Op Art, the black on white, at that time I was a machinist, no just on the shop floor, I was actually making the boots and shoes, in fact I've still got a pair of ginger Biba boots, you know, I keep looking, I think I really should throw these away, but I CAN'T, I can't throw them away. They're beyond repair, they're suede and the zips are gone, but I've still got to keep them.'*

Carole gives detailed description of her work:

*You'd be glueing socks into the shoes or making bows, or buckling up, you'd be like finishing off, as they come through from the clicking room where they're cut - they get their skins of leather and they get their metal patterns, that were made in Shernhall Street, Wood Street, Express Knives, and they would, the leather was flat then they'd be cut, an then they'd go to the machinist and they would be stitched together and you'd have a pattern and sample, so you'd know what you were doing, then they would go into the lasting room, where they're fitted onto a wooden last, and they're soled and heeled, then they would come into what was called the shoe room, where they would be finished of, so they would be, if they had a little scratch onto the leather, they would be faked, with a little bit of wax, hot wax, and filled in, you could do wonders, if you knew your job. And it took a long while to learn how to fill that in - make lovely plasterer - then they would go to be sprayed, and once they were sprayed then they would have the socks fitted.*

*'You'd fit the socks, or where the socks had been fitted, some of the glue would go round the sides, so you'd get a piece of crepe, it was spiral of crepe with a piece of cane through the middle , and you would get the glue out, ever so carefully, because you didn't want to touch the very, very, nice calf leather linings. And the socks were leather as well, you'd have a thin skim of leather for the socks, then you'd clean all those up and they'd be buffed up and packed, in lovely tissue paper. Oh! Lovely. And black sued had black tissue paper, and everything else had white tissue. Black suede an black patent always had black tissue paper. Then they'd be boxed up and into the packing room and off into Dolcis. Or Saxone, or Russell and Bromley's.*

*[Then] 'I became a panel trimmer. And that is, if you've got cut-outs on a shoe, the upper leather would be cut out, but the lining wouldn't. Panel trimming was if you had shoes that had the sides cut out, you'd have thin bar, we're talking pointed toes, stiletto heels, and you'd have the front part, and then you'd have a thin bar from the front to the heel quarter, but this section here was cut out, like in sandals, and cut out, so what you'd get, the top would be cut out already, but the lining would - they would need a full lining to last it properly, so that it would keep its shape, and what you'd do, you'd have a knife, and electric knife that was going up and down and you'd cut out the lining, leaving the holes. So that was what they called panel trimming.*

*'But perforation, that would be marked in the clicking room. They would go on with a press, and it would be like little silver dots, or black dots, depending on the colour of the leather and you had the right size die, and you had to cut the patterns out, each cut was done individually, until they progressed on to getting a pattern cut, so that it would come in, and it would be done on a press. But before then, it was done by hand, with a hammer and die. I can remember the elderly people saying, we'd sit there with a hammer and die and cut each one out ... they're probably down there now!*

*'When I went to Selwood's I was able to get onto a programme where I was taught machining and you actually machined all the shoes together, so you machined the upper to the lining. That was an electric machine, and that was piecework. I loved it, I was actually doing what I wanted to do. Although what I wanted to do was clothes machining, I ended up doing shoe machining, and was absolutely brilliant, it was the best thing since sliced bread, to actually make something, as opposed to finishing it off and seeing the end article, it was nice to actually put it all together, and look at it and say , I've just made a pair of shoes, although you didn't do the lasting, you'd got it there ready for them to do. I loved that, I did that until I had my son; nineteen till twenty-four. I loved it.'*

Phyllis Lacon also worked in the shoe trade. *'Went into Chiswick's in Flempton Road when I was fourteen ... shoe factory ... ladies shoes. I went there because it was near my home ... worked from 8 till 6, and Saturday morning ... I earned about twelve shillings a week, I used to get half a crown a week, gave the rest to mum I've been in the shoe trade all my life ... I was in that particular job till I was 21, then I transferred ... my forelady shifted over back to White Hart Lane ... we got on so well, and she lived near me, that I decided to move over to White Hart Lane ... got there on the bus to end of Lea Bridge Road, then to Stamford Hill then to White Hart Lane ... only had half an hour lunch break, we sat at our machines and had our food.*

*'It shut down, and I came back to Argall Avenue and went to the Co-op shoe factory ... Porter's, the paint people were next door .. by that time, I was an experienced flat machinist, completely made the shoe out .. I was at the Co-op for thirteen years, made redundant, went across the road to work .. not very nice, but we went, it was a job.*

*'The Union fought for us to have our wages highered, mostly we were piece work in the end ... I didn't really enjoy my work, but I didn't have the confidence to do anything else ... I'd have liked to have worked in a shop ... we used to get tuppence for doing about twenty-four pairs ... you do the fancy stitching on it, and you actually put the shoe together ... we were given the shoe flat, then it went on to the post machinist after, to run round the top with the lining on ... we were working on the uppers, it was stuck together with the sole in another room, later, the lasting room ...*

*'I got the job through the forelady, I liked her, she was a religious lady, and she was hones, and I liked working with her ... made a big difference to my life ... she got interested in me as a person ... she was quite a lot older than me .... she was a single lady ...we were very close ... she also trained people in the shoe trade, at Cordwainers' College (not me, though), in Well Street.'*

## Wire and cable manufacture

Muriel Jones recalls *'My mother took me there to find this job, it was Copeland and Jenkins, that was in Church Road, they did mica chips, it was batteries and things like that; it was plastic type stuff, an early form of plastic, something like bakelite The factory made the material, rather than making things out of it.*

*'She got into conversation, and she took me to Reliance Cord and Cables in Burwell Road. This was in 1939, I was there all through the War. I didn't get conscripted. You were in a job, we were doing the cable for the war effort, you see. So I was already in war work. I was safe there. I was there from when I was fifteen, I was there eleven years, I had my family, then I went back, and I was there till I was made redundant, for twenty five years service. I was made, there, that was the job I liked. I was sorting mica, at the miconite and insulating works. That was what I was on all the time. Same type of thing at the Miconite and the Mica works. I ended up threading miconite washers on strings. Just that. it was boring.*

*'But it wasn't a very good paying firm at first, the Reliance, the last one I was in. At the Reliance, I first started on the tables, it was cords, for radios, all sorts, and you had to cut them; the cords was cut for you, and you had them back on the table, and you had to cut them at different measurements, you had cardboard measures cut out.'* But Muriel wasn't cutting lengths of cable itself, *'just the bits at the end; you had to cut them different measurements because they had pins put on the end of them to plug into things ... they were sent out to different companies to plug into telephones and things like that. Then there'd be the big cables for the roads and that, but I didn't do those, other people did. I*



*was on the tables, then I went on to examining to see all the ends were all right before they went out. Then they were sent to various companies like Vickers Armstrong, places like that, Air Force. I made my way up to another department; I was on a factory desk, I was known as a desk clerk. I did the clock cards, and I used to do some of the bonus sheets, then I used to give out cable to the machines on reels ... wasn't exactly a chargehand, I had two chargehands over me ... till I was made redundant.*

*There was a trade union, the General and Municipal Workers, and to begin with, about half the workforce were members, 'then in the end, everyone had to be in the Union, they all joined it. It seems not to have been a bad workplace; they had a canteen, for example. 'Yes, it was very good, decent meals, things like that, but I was lucky, because I used to go to my mother for my meals, so I didn't go in the canteen ... you had your tea break, ten minute tea break. They were good conditions, it wasn't a sweat shop, it was a very easy going firm. It was a family run firm, and the owners used to come round the firm, where you worked, see how you were getting on ... I used to panic, cos I didn't like that sort of things, standing over me, but they were very nice, they weren't nasty, they were very easy going even the chargehands didn't stand over you or anything like that. It was noisy, though, because of the machines. There were other rooms that were a little bit quieter, like the test room, where they tested the cords. I was always on the shop floor, I wasn't office as office goes, like.*

*In her first job in Burwell Road, Mrs Taylor 'used to do soldering the ends of the cables; years ago they had plaited telephone cords, do you remember, the old-fashioned ones? I used to do plaiting, that's how I learned to do plaiting, you'd do four, four plaits, and you used to twist them; you had four cords, they were brown, and you twisted them and made plaits of them, and at the end was little prongs, and I used to put the little prongs on. That was a tedious job. I was on that quite a while, yes, I was on that a long while.*

*Mrs Taylor worked eight until six, five days a week, with Saturday overtime, on occasion., 'Used to do Saturdays as well, but I think you used to get extra money for that. Anyway, 1947, I think, when it was snowing, very bad, and there was only, in my department, there was only eight of us that turned up, and the manager, he had a little office, and he had a spyglass, he had all glass along there, you know, he used to sort of look down on everybody, you know, he come down to us, and we thought, oh, we was in bother, like you know, stead of that, he come and praised us up he said, thank you very much, he said, for braving out in this, and it was bad in them days.'*

*But in the factory, 'it wasn't cold, it wasn't too bad really, he was a good boss, he did own it, he was the boss, the owner; when it was the anniversary, I think it was so many years anniversary of the factory, and he had a do for it, but only so many, obviously couldn't invite everybody, so he picked so many from each department, but I was one of the unlucky ones, I didn't get picked, but I wasn't bothered ...*

*It was quite a large concern, 'going by the Wire Works, it was round about the same, round about five hundred, might even been a bit more towards the later years, you know. There were cousins, at the Fingal Works, there were close relations and one or two, but at the Wire Works, there was cousins, aunts, uncles. It was people brought all their relations in, it was like a family. People earned 'about three or four pounds, that's all. That was good money in them days.'*

*Mrs Taylor was evacuated from London to Essex for two and a half years, but when she was eighteen, 'I had to come home, because I had to go to war work, so I was at the Fingal Works, which was the cord and cables, later on, I worked there for seven years... it was up Burwell Road. Like the Wire works, it was, they done similar sort of thing, they*

*done cable and things for the aeroplane and all sorts of things, ships, boats, you know. "Reliance" was the trade name of the company, but it was owned by 'a man named Henry Davis, they started way back in Shoreditch, and they made braids. And the machines, till they went on braiding cord, they did ribbons and things like that, but that was in Shoreditch, way before my time ... and it was still run by the same person ... then it was handed down to the sons when the father died, then to another son, and in the end it went bankrupt ...'*

*In 1958 following a number of different jobs in manufacturing industry, including a box factory and an umbrella maker's Mrs Taylor settled at the Wire Works in Church Road, 'and I was there for seventeen years, and then my husband started work there, he was there for fifteen years.'*

*Mrs Taylor left the industry for several years, returning in 1957 to the Wire Works in Church Road 'and I was there seventeen years till I got put off. I had two or three jobs. First of all they put me up there, they used to have what they called the enamellers, which was the enamelling, you know, what went round the wires and all that ... it goes through a thing ... these used to be little tiny things like that, and you used to have to clean them because the wire had to go through them and they went to the enamel department .. this was in another part ... they used to look like spiders' legs, bits of fluff it was, and little bits of dust, and when you looks at them ... and I was on my side, like this, and I had a bad back like, all through this microscope thing, and in the end, I just couldn't stand any more, I was coming home and laying on the bed, so I said to my mum ...*

*'The enamel things, it was what they used to put the wires through this in the enamel. Don't ask me what they did in there, I don't know. All I know is I used to have to clean these to get the dust out of them. Then they found me another job, and that was about twelve machines, all along, cotton machines, you know. They was in trays of twelve, you used to have to put the trays underneath, then they went down to the bottom where they used to stamp the tops of the reels with the size, right, and other things like, you know, and then they was taken away to another department, see.*

*'I ended up gauging, it was a gauge and you used to have to gauge the wires on reels, used to put our trays under there going down the slope, the belts like; then they got a bit slack, they put me in the rest room ...*

*'Wages had gone up by then, about ten or twelve pounds, I suppose, might even been a bit more than that, although they never did pay very good money at the Wire Works, that was well known for that, very poor money. For years. it was only in the later years that the money went up because they all used to moan about it. Many people went there, I mean, because people were glad of the jobs, because there weren't many jobs left after the war, see, cos the men come back and took all the jobs back, didn't they, so you had to stick to your job ... I don't think they put many [women] off, the only thing I think what it was, they never used to allow married women to work. Nonetheless, Mrs Taylor was a married woman whilst employed at the Wire Works, 'oh yes, it was only the war. Before the war and just after, that the men, everything started getting more modern and all that, and women, you know, if you want the money, I suppose they used to, you know, when their husbands come home, I suppose, they started having children ....*

*'I liked going to work. I didn't like staying at home, because I was at home for two years, and before that I was in a home till I was fifteen. My mother had three children, she couldn't keep me. I had paralysis.*

*'My husband worked there [the Wire Works] fifteen years, he was in the engineers there, in the maintenance, and he used to teach the young lads .. he used to do judo over there ...'* Like most factories, the Wire Works had an active social side, *'we used to play darts. My husband run the dart team over there ... they used to have dances in the canteen ... Christmas and that, they used to have a big raffle, and I used to like Sandeman's Port, and every year, I used to win a bottle, and they used to say, you fixed that .... anyway it was quite a good job at the Wire Works, really .... it was all family, cousins, brothers, sisters ...'*

Mrs Taylor continued the story of the Wire Works, when *'it changed over to optic wires, and everything gradually went, and they put so many off one part of the year, we was right from the March to November, before we got put off, it was terrible, they moved us all, shoved us upstairs, you know, and some of them had only been there two years, and they kept them on, and I'd been there seven years, one woman'd been there forty years, forty-odd years, and we got redundancy, and we got severance money, you know, but these poor devils, because they was fifty-nine, they never got no redundancy, all they got was their severance pay.'*

The shop floor workforce was mixed, male and female, though Mrs Taylor couldn't recall any particular roles allocated specifically to men or to women. The supervisors and foremen, *'they was around all the time. Had to know anything, you went to them. Used to have office, didn't they. Then I worked in this, they give me a job in sample work, I liked that cos I used to have to go all the way over, collect the wires off the drums, and go upstairs, take the wires upstairs, used the phone, . that's how I got used to a phone, cos I was frightened of - nervous of - phones and it was a lovely little job, and used to have .. remember, where they used to do the cottons in Sheffield and all them places, make material, well, they had one of these old fashioned machines, and you had a reel on there, and a big reel going, and you used to have to wind it with your hand, hand wind it like, you just pulled it along and wound it, it was like [a weaving machine] only wooden. I used to have to wind so much off, and weigh it, you know, and take samples up there, then another used to gauge and do all the tests on it, and put them in little bags, and sometimes they used to send them up with somebody. Oh, I got to know everybody, in different departments, you know, I liked that job, and that was what I had when I left there, you know, that was me last job.'*

There weren't any bonuses or presents from the firm at Christmas, *'though when I worked at Fingal Works we did. We used to get bonus ... Christmas. He was very generous, that bloke. used to look forward to that, bit of extra money in our wages ... well, used to give that separate, keep that separate ...'*

*'We used to come home to lunch at my mum's, number 33, have a cup of tea, he didn't like canteen, my husband, and we used to come home here. Hour we used to have, I've told you, with me back, oooh, I used to come home, go and lay on the bed, don't want nothing to eat, I'm tired ... my back was really aching. I asked for a transfer, they gave me one, you know ...'*

And on the day to day round of going to work, Mrs Taylor says, *'I hated being late, I wouldn't lose no time off if I could help it ... as you pushed the card down, it clicked, stamped it, sort of thing. I hated being late.'*

Muriel Jones has vivid memories too of her short time in a jam factory, *'I got that job myself, the jam factory, the same night as I got put off the other firm; I was about fifteen ... I went there about 1933. My mother was fed up with the little money - twelve and sixpence, at the jam factory - because it had dropped from fifteen at the mica factory, see,*

*of course mother wasn't very pleased ... I think it was about fourteen shillings at the miconite. Then when I went to the jam factory I was wiping jam jars down, at first, and putting them on palette boards for the people to take to the place where you put them up to wrap them, by machine. It wasn't very mechanical, it was very primitive ... it was very hard work, hard going ...'*

The umbrella manufacturer for which Mrs Taylor worked was 'Henderson, Henderson's some name like that, it's a little turning off Church Road, I was there about eighteen months, and my hand was hurting so much, I used to do the umbrellas, and stretch, you know, the points what you got at the ends, used to have to do the men's and they were big, and were so hard to pull over, I used to get pains in my hands. The machinist used to do the umbrellas like, you know, put the materials on, right, and you used to have a little trough there, and you'd put them in the trough, and we used to have to stretch these to put on the knobs at the end, stretch the fabric out on the end, it used to make your fingers sore, so painful', because no protective equipment was supplied by the firm. Henderson's moved to Birmingham, and they took married people with them because they had houses went with the job, and I was single, so I ... didn't want to go there anyway ...

*'Then there was Hunts the box factory, up Clapton, you know, where the ice rink is now, and there's a big park, goes right through, see all the big buildings, well, you'd see a big square thing up, you could see it from the bus, Hunts, box makers, carton makers, I worked there seven years.'* In the first job she had there, *'all I used to do was fold the boxes and count them into fifties, and things like that, you know. I couldn't count very well in them days, I often put an odd one in or left one out. Good job they used to check it, isn't it ...'* In her second job at the box factory, however, she worked on a machine.

She got the job through the misfortune of a friend who was involved in a serious accident on Lea Bridge Road and was unable to work for a long time as a consequence. *'I took her job over, feeding the machine, feed the cartons with this glue, right, and you'd get all the dust at the end, and you'd feed them, put them into fifties, got like troughs, and they'd pick em up and put them in this machine, after they'd counted them - well, the machine counted them - then it went further up, and at the end was where they tied it up, tied them up, see, and the machine done it, a special machine ...'*

Following an industrial injury at the box factory, Mrs Taylor was unable to work for three months, but she was unable to claim compensation *'because, you see, I wasn't in the Union, and I asked the blokes, you know, he used to put you off, them sort of things, not put you of work, but, and I had no-one to fight for me, you see, so it just all went, and I didn't get nothing. But they did put me on half pay. When I went back, when I got me first week's wages, they keep so much in hand, don't they, so the next week, right, I only got, I think me money was about five or six pounds them, I only got three pound. And out of that they said that I'd been overpaid. And they'd took so much off. And I ended up with about one pound fifty in me wage packet.'*

[This was in] *oh, about the 1950s, the early '50s, I suppose. I said, I'm going to ask for some of my money, because you used to pay in a club sort of thing, and they used to take it out of your wages, see, and so I went up to see the personnel, and I said, I'd like to have a bit of loan, please, I've got no money to give me mum, I said, but I've still got money in there from before I went. She wasn't going to give it to me ... it was like a loan club, they took it out your wages. So of course, she give it me, eventually, after a struggle. When I went downstairs, the women had had a collection for me, they'd collected three pound for me, you know, out the department. So they said, go and take that back, tell her you don't want it now, and I did! Well her mouth [dropped], she said, but I've just given it to you, you've just pleaded with me to give it to you, I said yes, the women downstairs, I*

said, have had a collection for me so I don't need it now, than you very much. Oh well, she said, you're very lucky, something like that. They never thought I'd take it back, but I did.

*'There were about forty women on the shop floor, in one department. It was a noisy place, yes, well, with machinery and at the end, the men used to work these machines, and they used to have the cardboard, used to go through, and they used to chop it all up, into little bits, I don't know what they used to use it for, that used to be at the end of the machines, you know ... and one morning they asked us to go in early, because they wanted a job out, we had to go in at half past six one morning,' though eight until six were the standard industrial hours at that time 'We come in half past six, and the men didn't know that we was coming in. And they had great big square things, bins, like what they used to put all the tuff in, and half of them were kipping, and when they all popped, they was just like little rabbits, all .. they was having a kip ... cos they'd finished their work, I supposed, and was going home ... and we all went down there, we had the death of laughing, they was all shooting up out of there, because, they were like troughs, really, used to have a little kip; can't blame them.'*

During the War, Mrs Taylor worked on the night shift in her job at the Fingal Works, *'in fact, I had my twenty-first birthday on the corner of Capworth Street, and I asked if I could go home early because, you know, to prepare for me party, they let me go, and I come home at six o'clock, and the buses, had only just come on, like, and prepared for me party on that .. because we was working Friday night to Saturday morning, you see, and it used to be every other week day work, night work, most of the time we was down the shelters, weren't we ... we used to finish at seven, in time for the other shift to come on .. eight till seven ...'*

After the War, Mrs Taylor moved on to the Miconite factory in Church Road. through *'a neighbour over the road [who] had a friend in Radcliffe Road, who worked there. And I left that other factory, like, and I was working there, and the chargehand, she was really nasty with me. The first day I went there - you used to have to wear their overalls - well, the ones she give me, honest, it was right down to the ground and it was you know, horrible thing. I said, I'm not wearing that. She said, you've got to, I said, I'll bring me own, she said, you can't and from that day on, because I was cheeky to her, I suppose, she always had it in for me. Then one day, her office was behind me, like that, you know, so I used to be careful, and I made friends with three sisters down the public air raid shelters, in Church, and they lived in Byron Road. And, two of em worked on my tables up the top end, and the other sister worked downstairs. She come up to me - I wasn't even talking! - and, oh, she's finding fault all the time, and this day, oh it didn't half get on me nerves, I thought, the Old Cow's at me again, I said to the women, pass it up there, and all of a sudden, a hand come over, like that, you know, I never used to swear in them days, but it really got to me, the Old Cow's at me again, and come over and took it.*

*'So we used to go round to what they called the Blue Road, which is in Church Road, and Grove House, into the High Road, they called it the Blue Road, we used to go and have fish and chips, a few chips, or sandwiches, and that, and couple of the women come in and they said, ere, they said, you got to go in the office when you go back, I knew what was going to happen, so I said, oh yes, we've heard that you've got to go in the office, I said, I know what that's about, I said, cos .. anyway, when I get in there, there's her there, Miss Somebody, and the people, the bosses of this factory, like, you know, and they said, we can't have this, and you know, you can't swear that the what's name, an all , blah, blah, blah, like, you know. I was there about eighteen months, and I'm afraid we'll have to give you your cards. Suits me, I said, she was always picking on me anyway. I let em*

*know, in there ... oooh, the face .. she was a sort of a cripple, like, and I thought she'd take pity on me because I was like that.*

*'I had paralysis when I was a little girl ... I had iron up to me head till I was fourteen, so, as I said, I used to think, perhaps her being like that, she used to limp and had a bad, funny leg, like you know, thought she'd feel sorry for me. Instead of that, she done the opposite, and so I left there, right.*

*And the first thing I done with me money, I'd been looking at this coat up Hoe Street, used to be a drapers up there, sold everything in there, it's a furniture shop now, in Hoe Street, just round the corner across the road. I bought me first coat like, you know, and mum come and said, you're early, yeah, she said, what you got there, I said, I bought meself a coat, oh, so she said, how come? I said, oh, I said, I got the sack, she said, what, I got the sack, then I told her, oh well, she said, you're rid of her, aren't you.'*

*Mrs Taylor said the firm paid her a week's wages, plus a week in lieu of notice, which amounted to 'six pounds something.' She was called into the office 'during my dinner hour, and told to finish the week off ... these sisters, the one downstairs tried to get me down there, but they wouldn't wear it ... but she had a friend named Rosie, working at the Fingal Works, see, and I knew her like, and I was talking to her, like, and, oh, she said, I'll ask my friend, she works at the Fingal Works, she said, I thought it was finger biscuits, at first, I said, what, do they make biscuits? You know, you get them finger biscuits ... I was there seven years ...'*

*She worked at one time too in a shirt factory in Lea Bridge Road, 'where the mosque is. I was there for three and a half years, they went broke, so then I went to the school in Church Road, cleaning. The infants school in Church road, in, cleaning the school, after the school, you know, cleaning up the classrooms and all that. I was there seven years, then after that I made up my mind when I was sixty I was going to retire, and that's what I did. I retired at sixty.'*

### Transport: the railways and the buses

*George Temple's working life in the area recommenced after the War when he went on the railway, 'with the railways, he'd be all over the place' says his widow, Flo. 'When he first went on the railway, he was based at Barking he was there a little while, then he went to Stratford. They used to do maintenance work like, pulling the old fashioned fireplaces out and putting the modern ones in, he was more or less a labourer ... on the railways, they used to have a little waiting room where you could sit, and they'd have a little fire; but they were old fashioned, ever so old fashioned ... he was helping make the railway respectable. It was terrible pay, though. He used to come home, half past six, and it wasn't enough money to keep us, because I'd got my other son then ... seven o'clock he used to go out again, and do another little job...*

*'He did several little jobs. First of all, when things got straightened out, he worked in a pub in the evening, the Royston at Chingford. He had a bike. All his life he had a bike. He cycled out to Chingford to earn a few bob there, come home about twelve o'clock at night. Then the next evening job he did, on Sunday morning he used to go back to the railway, very early in the morning, about half past four to five o'clock to light up the boilers. Come back again from there, doing the evening job Saturday and Sunday, then another evening job he did - you know the Walthamstow Stadium.? - well, he used to let the cars in. Then after that, let's face it, he did it for years and years and years, and he always suffered every winter with bronchitis ....'*

Lily Sims' husband worked on the buses after the war, though *'when he was called up, they guaranteed that when they come out of the Forces that they'd have a job, so when he came out, he went back to the butchery, but then he found he wasn't getting much money, so he went on the buses, a conductor, then a driver, but he nearly had a nervous breakdown, so he had to come off that ... he did the run from Royal Forest Hotel to Victoria Station, the old 38 route ... so he went back to being a butcher. He was six years on the buses ...'*

## Butcher's trade

Mr Sims worked in the butchery trade for many years, and this is a full transcript of a tape he made of his memories, in 1985.

*'I started at the London Co-operative Society in Hoe Street, Walthamstow at the age of 14, as a butchers' boys' assistant and errand boy. The wages being 14 ... 13 shillings a week, out of which they stopped 2d as an industrial benefit stamp, at that time.*

*'Work was very hard to get round about 1934 and we were only too glad to get whatever we could. On the face of it, it doesn't seem too bad. But, out of the 12s 10d that was left, I used to give my mother 10s and I had the 2/10d. And I'm sure that she spent much more than ten shillings on me, at that particular time, because we had to supply all our own protective clothing. Which consisted of two white coats and white aprons to wear in the shop when we were working. Plus the fact we had to have a blue apron - a blue and white apron, I should say, and a blue coat, and a leather apron for when we were being taught how to cut up the meat, at that time. And these had to be laundered and we had to pay for our own laundry.*

*'The job consisted of mainly going out early in the morning, getting orders from customers, take them ... the orders back to the shop, get them executed and delivered. And for this we were provided with, what was known as a trade bike, with a small basket in the front. At that particular time I think the bike was as big as I was, if not bigger. We also had to make way and make time for scrubbing the baskets, because they had to be absolutely pure white before we were allowed to go out on the rounds with them.*

*'As our rounds grew and the orders became more frequent the baskets were not big enough to carry the orders, so we used to stick wooden skewers round the edge of the basket and tie string, weave string, in between the skewers so that we could take more orders out on our journey - save coming back to the shops. But this was a bit of a problem, because - time we loaded up we found that we couldn't move the handlebars of the bike, so it all had to be readjusted again. And this lasted for about two years, I suppose, about 1936 they introduced another type of trade bike in which the front wheel was half the size of the back wheel, and the extra length in the basket enabled us to get much more of our orders in one go. But here again, it still was not big enough and we had to revert to putting the skewers all round the basket again.*

*'The only trouble with this bike was, somebody had to hold the seat down while you got on it, otherwise it was so top heavy, you used to upset the lot. Too, the tricky part was getting off of it at the first customer, to make sure that you could hold the seat down, at the same time stop the bike from falling over.*

*'One or two little antidotes (sic) really, I suppose. When we first joined the Co-op the boys used (and the manager also) used to try and put you down a peg. And one of the favourite things was to send you to a private butcher to borrow a 3lb weight - of course, which was non-existent. We didn't have the modern scale as we've got today. We had to*

*weigh everything by weights. And of course, there wasn't a 3lb weight, it was a 2lb and a 1lb weight. But being ignorant at that time we used to go round trying to find a 3lb weight. Weights used were 1lb 2lb, 4lb and 5lb*

*'Also, while we were in that area, another thing they used to do was .. in the fridge we used to have what was called a brine tub full of salt meat, which was extremely cold. And it was the youngest boy's job every morning to clear all the meat out of that, which was a very arduous task. And when you first done it someone would pop their head in and say 'oh, you want to go and get the salt meat gloves, you'll find them over such-and-such place'. And of course, you'd chase round and of course there's no such thing as salt meat gloves.*

*'Our weeks used to start at half past eight on a Monday morning, when our first priority was to get the shop cleaned. And I can remember it vividly - one of my jobs was to clean the marble ... clean the marble slab in the shop window. And this we used to do with a soap called 'Monkey Brand Soap'. Which I don't think is even on the market these days. Then we used to clean the windows with whitening and get that all clear. All the stainless steel hooks on which the meat hung up on had to be emery-clothed and polished. So there was quite a lot of work to do besides running around delivering orders.*

*'The hours of work at that particular time, in 1934 was 48 hours a week. So, as we had a half-day Monday and a half-day Thursday, our longest days were Friday and Saturday when we used to start at 7 o'clock in the morning and finish at 9 o'clock at night - which seemed long hours, even for today.*

*'Also part of our jobs was going to the abattoir in South Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone, to collect sausages, cooked meats - which they used to produce there. I can just faintly remember that beef sausages were 6d a pound and beef chipolatas were 8d - they were little, small sausages. Pork sausages were a shilling a pound and the little pork chipolatas were one and four pence a pound. When you look back over the prices it does amaze you .. of some of the prices. Ox liver 10d and 8d a pound, lambs liver at one and four a pound, shoulders of lamb at 8d and 11d a pound, legs of lamb at a shilling and one and four a pound, it doesn't bear thinking of does it.*

*'And as a young boy I used to love to go to the abattoirs because that was where we could see the meat being slaughtered. I can remember the first time I saw a sheep being killed. It was most upsetting. A man picked it up in his arms, held its head and then put a revolver to its head and shot it. The following time I went up there they were killing pigs. And they used to do this by driving them in a pen. And there used to be one opening form the pen, in which - as the pig went out - its rear leg got caught into a kind of lasso. And the man in the pen used to clip the pig behind the ears with an electric stunner, which used to render the pig unconscious. And then he used to pull it up by its rear leg, and while it was hanging up, used to cuts its throat. And there it used to wait until it had bled to death - so obtaining a white meat. Another time, of course, a when we used to watch the bullocks being killed. This also was a gruesome sight - but somehow, as young boys, we were fascinated.*

*'To give you some idea of the distance we used to travel by trade bike. 'Cause if I started out at 8 o'clock in the morning from Hoe Street, I used to go up First, Second and Third Avenue, then West Avenue into Church Hill. From Church Hill I used to go to tower Hamlets. From Tower Hamlets I used to go down, through Hoe Street into Palmerston Road, into Warner Road Walthamstow, then along Blackhorse Road, into Markhouse Road. From Markhouse Road into Verulam Avenue. From Verulam Avenue into Acacia Road and from Acacia Road I used to make my way to Markhouse corner into Lea Bridge*



*Road. And from Lea Bridge Road I used to go up to Whipps Cross, deliver at Whipps Cross, Shernhall Street, Wood Street, Upper Walthamstow as far as Ulverston Road in Forest Road - then make my way back to the shop. So it was quite a round.'* Mr Sims lived at home with the family. His father was a caretaker of the Co-op Lea Bridge Road site, and had a flat on the premises and Mr Sims organised his round so that he could stop off for a cup of tea, at home, at about 10.30am

Like Mrs Churcher's hospital laundry job [see above] there was a good, solid trade education to be had: *'The other aspects of the job was that, twice a week we had to go to school. One afternoon we used to go to Maryland Street to learn the way that the London Co-operative Society done their book-keeping and their maths. And then, on a Wednesday afternoon we used to go to Spitalfields market ... Smithfields market to learn how to cut meat - the names of the joints and all the diseases.*

*'And this is what I think upsets me more than anything, as I go shopping and look in the butchers' shop. The meat is incorrectly cut and incorrectly labelled. If I may give you an example. On a forequarters of beef there is a shin of beef that should be marked up 'shin of beef, for stewing' There is also two types of stewing beef. One is a cheap cut, which is the sticking, and a better cut is called the clod. From there we come to a piece of meat which is known as a two-bone-steak meat. This comprises of blade-bone steak and chuck steak for braising . But also a very unusual piece of meat which - beef - which we used to call the leg of mutton cut. Now you can see this done-up and is sold off as topside, which comes from a different part of the animal entirely. You then have the fore rib of beef for roasting and then the cheaper cuts of meat such as brisket and flank. Also you have the rump, and the sirloin. These are the most expensive parts of the meat but it's a shame not to see them well displayed and labelled up correctly these days.*

*'Of course accidents were very, very ... very, very few. But there were one or two serious accidents, such as cutting an artery while you are boning out stewing steak. but the biggest accident I had was when a young chap ran in the shop - which he shouldn't have done - and he had a steak knife in his hand. And he stepped on a bit of fat and fell and he cut my calf muscle out, which made me disabled for about seven months. But other than that, it was a great life. We enjoyed ourselves. We had a good time. We liked the work and I think we gave good value for money.*

*'As the lowest of the low in the shop, our job as roundsboys before we went out on the round ... used to have to prepare the offal. Which meant making up the trays of liver, sausages and so forth. This also entailed preparing the sheep's heads, in which - first of all we used to take the eyes out and then we used to cut them in half, and then take the brains out and separate them, all ready for sale. This was known as dressing the sheep's heads. We did this to the bullocks heads and also the pigs' heads. So we had great fun.*

*'Among the trays of offal which we used to prepare in those days was two trays which you don't often see these days. One was called pigs fry - diaphragm of pig core fat, so called - and the other one was chittlings, which were very, very, nice, and were the main course for some people' breakfast. It's the equivalent of tripe in a cow. Tripe being cooked once before it is sold because it is originally green when extracted for the carcass, from the bile. Chittlings are the large intestines of the pig. Ox tongue was very cheap and at Christmas time a popular dish to serve as it was cheap and served a number of people because of the size. This sold extremely well at the Co-op at Christmas, although obviously it was not a seasonal meat.*

*'When you could cut up and prepare a side of beef, and dress an English lamb ready for display, then you knew that you'd passed out as a potential butcher.'*

A great deal of joking went on. For example, Mr Sims would get two pigs trotters and pull his cuffs low down over them, then stand at the counter and ask a customer what he could do for them, with his 'hands' on the counter. Butchers' boys would dry out some chicken feet and then pull the tendons to act as glove puppets and move each of the claws. When Mrs Sims was feeling hard-up one week, her son came along with a parcel from work saying, *'Here you are, that should see you through' It had two sheep's eyes in it.*

*The leather aprons the butchers' boys had to wear was to save young, inexperienced boys from potentially lethal accidents. Breasting a lamb, for example, requires a full curve of the knife along the bone, coming in toward the body. If your knife slipped on the bone, you could slice yourself quite badly. If you severed an artery in the groin, you only had two minutes to live.*

Mr Sims showed several cuts around the wrists, where a knife could easily slip on a bone and cut the butcher. A difficult one was cutting out the vertebrae for stewing steak, as this as an intricate job. Mr Sims had also lost the tip of one of his fingers through an accident.. Meat was bought from markets and priced up wholesale in stones . Prices were often given to the boys in stones and had to be calculated out.

In 1939, just before he was called up, he was Senior Roundsboy. *'A roundsboy could expect to get as much as £5-£6 in tips at Christmas. However, the trade was losing so many men to the forces that the boss asked me to stay in the shop and do the trussing and plucking of the Christmas orders. I was allowed to put a box on the counter and keep all those tips to help make up for the loss of the round's tips. I worked a 48 hours' stint that Christmas, plucking and trussing. In the end I couldn't eat my Christmas dinner because my hands were so swollen. And I only got £4 in the tip box.'*

## The Grocery Trade

Mr Walker went to work for Shepherd's, which seems to have been owned by Home and Colonial, aged fourteen. He puts it in its context, *'do you remember the stalls at the Bakers' Arms? Other side from the almshouses, the other side of Hoe Street, going towards Whipps Cross, there were Cox's the butchers, Shepherd's, Gibson's [a general shop]. I just did cleaning, every morning, used to scrub the floor first, used to take exactly an hour, started eight o'clock, then I used to cadge a bucket of water, used to go up to the Home and Colonial' [there was a shoe shop and Gibson's between Shepherd's and the Home and Colonial].*

*'On Monday, I'd go in, scrub the floor, clean the windows, clean the brass edges round the front.'* He also cleaned the three sets of brass scales on the counter. The cleaning material used to last about three or four weeks, before the boss started to complain that the scales weren't very clean, and then he'd let Mr Walker have new cleaning material - probably specially impregnated cloth, of the sort one can still buy. After six months, he was promoted, *'they felt I was going to get somewhere, because I'd been in touch with the scales, walking about behind the counter, but not actually doing any serving. I was given six months to learn where the stuff was, how much it was ...'*

The packaging up of sugar was a regular part of his job. Sugar was delivered six sacks at a time, each sack weighing two hundredweight. *'The sacks came in, and they were dumped in the middle of the shop then I used to have to take them round the back [using a porter's trolley] and I could get two under each part of the bench. I had to get the sugar out of the sack, into a bag, then I used to break it up, either with a scoop and bags, I was*

*allowed to use seven pounds of bags on one bag of sugar. Because I weighed it, it went once, a turn of the scale .. the chap doing it was the Junior, that was one step ahead of me - he used to weigh it, and most of the time I had to learn how to do the closing ... I used to have to finish up with nine sacks of sugar, that's two pound bags. The bagging of the sugar had to be done before Wednesday morning. It came in on the Thursday or the Friday of the week before, but not every week. Luckily for me, the only loose thing ... was sugar ... they didn't sell flour and biscuits.'*

Mr Walker worked as holiday relief in different shops, he sold jams of different varieties, tinned fruit, tea, sugar, cake. The cake was arranged on a stepped construction, and there were six different cakes, at fourpence a pound, currant cake, lemon cake. It came in in paper ... customers could buy it whole. Genoa cake was dearest at eight pence a pound, lemon was fourpence to sixpence a pound, currant sixpence. Shop catered for a mixture of customers, one particular was a man who came in monthly and bought four pounds of tea, which was ordered for him by the manager, *'the tea was actually dustings, really, you used to clean off a bit of bench, used to have to clean it all down, scrub it the night before and let it dry'* and weight it up on the special tea scales the following morning. Staff in the shop were the manager, First Class, Non-Salesman; the Butterman - the shop sold butter and margarine, lard, cheese. These were delivered in slabs, and the quantity required by the customer was cut off the slab - the Junior, then Mr Walker. At the Home and Colonial, however, although the shop itself was smaller, there were two women on the provision counter, the tea and provision counters being separate there

Mr Walker was at Shepherd's for twelve years from age fourteen, must have been twenty-six, so must have been 1937 when he went to be milkman for Hitchman's). Hitchman's were based in Chingford. He changed jobs because it was better money - his starting pay at Shepherd's had been ten shillings, then it rose to eighteen shillings. Shepherd's shop opened at 8.30 and closed at 7.0, no closing for lunch, and neither did any of the other shops. Late night til 8.00 on Saturday and Sunday.

Mr Walker biked to Hitchman's, whose premises were up a narrow lane off Hall Lane. He started work at 5.30. Hitchman's had six horses, they weren't shire horses, rather middle size breed. They were looked after by a special horse man, in addition to which there were two foremen and a yard manager. The horse man told him how to harness and checked he got it on right. *'Animals got to know you. Horses tried it on - try to crush you against wooden partition between their stalls - til you got to know them. First, collar went on, upside down, then it was turned over, then the little saddle on their back.... the horse was got ready and harnessed, and the last thing, after the cart was loaded up, was to get the horse out of the stable and back him into the shafts. The van was loaded with anything up to two hundred pints, and the round consisted of four roads, in Station Road, Chingford area.'*

On one memorable occasion, the horse bolted when he was halfway through the round: *'I was over the road ... when I got down there, I heard such a clatter, it was a cat, an her jumping out of the way, the noise was right under the horse's head so her head went up in the air, and somehow, she went off. Now if you try to catch a galloping horse ... she actually ran down Kings Head Hill, she really did go. I spoke [to a man] and he saw the horse go by at full gallop, and I ran after him. That's as much as I could do. Anyway, he was over halfway to the horse, by the time he'd stopped at the bottom of Drysdale Road where there were six little bungalows. When we did find the horse, she was sort of, she'd tried to top herself on the all of the bungalow [i.e. jump over it], but of course, she couldn't get anywhere, wearing the harness as well.*

*'So, anyway, I had to try to extricate the horse from there. When I got there, the chap had heard the noise and came out of the bungalow, and he brought out some kind of black powder .. she'd caught herself on the nails on the top of the [wall. The man said] "you can't leave her there, she's bleeding pretty badly so [he phoned the depot] and it took nearly two hours to bring a spare horse - he had seven and worked six - over the Mount from Hall Lane.'* He walked the injured horse back, *'and I was about three or four hours late finishing that day. The horse was brought back down to Scott's, the vet, on High Road Leyton, opposite Canterbury Road, and she returned to duty after three or four months. In the two hours waiting for the replacement horse, Mr Walker was trying to continue the round, dragging the cart himself.*

## Domestic Work

Flo Temple said *'I got friendly with a Jewish woman, you know those flats across Lea Bridge Road, where you wait for the bus stops, the flats above the parade of shops, well there was a Yiddisher woman there that was after someone to do her housework for her. Well, I had a go at that. I was really getting on all right, but then she started taking liberties, you know, apart from the housework, I did a little bit of ironing; and her little bit of ironing was about ten shirts, and I hated ironing shirts for my boys and my husband, let alone ... and I did that for a while, but not all that long; there was quite a few little jobs that I did after that, childminding ...'*

Jack Milford is a lifelong resident of the neighbourhood. After getting the sack from Beck and Politzer, he *'got a job as a photographer. I worked in a photographer's darkroom for five years, Williams' Pioneer Studios, in Kingsland High Road ... I grew a head taller than all my brothers and family, and I always put it down to being in the dark like plants are! I did these five years, and of course the job was no good... And then I used to spend times unemployed, of course. I was unemployed for some long time. I mean, you can't imagine the first depression, nothing like this one. I mean, this depression was easy going, even if you was unemployed. But when you were unemployed then, you got some pay from unemployment people, 10/- a week again, so we used to spend all our time over The Island swimming, me and me brother, he was out of work as well, had a lovely time lying in the sun, you know. My sister was working, she wasn't married even ...'*

Harry Burkett's mother *'was put into domestic service and worked for a German, round Islington somewhere, Balls Pond Road, round there. He was very strict, Germans being very clean ... at the beginning of the First World War there were quite a few Germans in London, they used to become bakers, I've heard, and you've got the hospital, haven't you, the German Hospital, quite a famous hospital, by Dalston Lane but built by the side of the railway, not a very good position.'* A Plaque now commemorates the site which has been redeveloped as sheltered housing.

Ruth Gimson's mother, she recalled, had been housekeeper to the vicar of Emmanuel church recalled her parents' work, the rectory was in Lea Bridge Road, where later a cinema - now a bingo hall - was built. Ruth's mother worked for the church, but not in a paid capacity, though *'she did, towards the end, look after a family opposite. The mother died, and there were four sons, it was right opposite and she used to just go over. Before she was married she was cook at a Blind School up in Clapton, so that was more or less what she knew.*

*'My parents were involved in the church, my father was a carpenter, and of course there were always jobs to be done, so he was involved in that way; he didn't work locally, though, but was employed up at Hoxton, he worked until he was eighty up there, I can't*

*think of the name of the firm, but he worked the majority of his life up there, for the same people, apart from the War years, I think they put him off on his eightieth birthday’.*

## The Army

*Harry Burkett’s father’s story is as follows: ‘He was born in 1887, I think it was, my mother was a year younger. They used to pay a penny a week when they went to school: he left school at twelve. I don’t think he was apprenticed til he was fourteen He was apprenticed to a brass founder, conditions were so hard to deal with because of the foreman and what have you, he thought, I can’t go on like this, the only thing to do was to join the Army. He definitely joined the Army under age, at sixteen, and had a desire to go to India - he changed his name as well; he went through the Army as a Clark when his name should have been Burkett. He served under the name Nobby Clark ... people in those days, the Army had the habit of giving people nicknames, if your name was Miller, you were Dusty Miller, or if you were Clark, you were Nobby, for some reason ...*

*‘He signed for seven years, and he picked up on his education; what he did after that, I’ve no idea.. he signed for seven years, and he wanted to go to India. They said, do you know what you’re doing, you know you’ll meet up with all kinds of ex-prisoners and so on, if you go to India, they did their best to persuade him, as a nice young man, as far as they were concerned; it was just before the Boer War when he went, so he wasn’t in the Boer War. He went to Burma as well, he liked Burma, such a lovely country, he said. He brought home lots of their artwork, brass and marble and things ... I don’t know what year he left the Army ...*

*‘Lloyd George brought in conscription, and he was called up again, having been discharged, and he found himself mixing with all kinds of people ... and he was put into the Royal Army Medical Corps ... he was a man who never wanted to go up the ranks in the Army, he was quite happy as an ordinary soldier, he told me; he never wanted responsibility ...’*

## The Building Trade

*‘I believe he continued in the RAMC till 1918 , and the War was finished, and he applied for a job in the Post Office, but having changed his name, the Post Office discovered it, and they wouldn’t employ him ... My father came out of the Army, into the building trade, about 1920, and he worked for a firm in Islington. He was a good workman, but the business changed hands, and the people who inherited the builder’s firm knew nothing about building, they only had it to run as a company to make money, you see. Because my father, as he said, was a careful good worker, they would always send him to where people were particular and they wanted a good job and didn’t want a lot of mess. That’s what he gradually found, that he was being sent to those sort of jobs, but didn’t seem to be getting any recompense for it, he was being criticised, so when he got called up into the War, he sold all his tools and said, I’m never ever going back into the building trade. He applied for a job with the Gas Light and Coke Company as a meter collector, and they took him on. He was based at Hackney, and he worked around Clapton.’*

## Gas Meter Reader

*‘My father was a slot meter collector in the Gas Light and Coke Company. Most people in Clapton had a meter and you put pennies in it for your gas ... every two months the meter was emptied .. it was very heavy to carry ... a motor van would meet in a certain road and all the collectors from that area would meet the motor ... The money had to be bagged up ready for the bank, - had to do that on the job, all these coppers in five shilling bags, brown paper bags. Then they’d get a receipt and go back and finish the day. It was a job*

*where you never had much break, you'd have to be working and doing receipts - they wrote receipts, see, for money received, nothing mechanical, no date stamp; they had to put the meter reading on it and sign it. He used to do that work in the evening before the day, go out with a load of signed receipts. When the prices of gas changed, there's a thing inside the meter where you have to regulate how much gas comes out, so if there was a change, they had to do that in addition to collecting the money; he was paid weekly, probably got about four pound a week.'*

## Police Service

Harry Burkett has a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' awarded to his great grandfather who was a police constable, and he told me something about him. The Certificate itself says *"This is to certify that Joseph Burkett, G Division, joined the Metropolitan Police as constable on the twenty-fifth day of October 1841, and resigned his situation on the fourth day of July 1863. A pension of twenty-nine pounds two shillings and four pence per annum was allowed him on account of his being worn out. His conduct was good". I think you'll find that Peelers were in '23, so it's twenty years after that . I imagine 'G' Division was around Hoxton, but I'm not sure ... And this thing says , "A certificate of good conduct in the police service will not be granted by the Commissioners, first, if the police constable should be dismissed the Service, second, if the police constable should be frequently guilty of misconduct, although of a slight nature ..."*

*'This is my great-granddad. I only know on hearsay, he was a big man, had nine children, would come home each day and as soon as father came into the house, he'd shout out, and all the children would scatter, then he'd empty his pockets. In those days, the police had a very long coat with numerous pockets on the inside, and then he'd unload that with gifts that he'd been given by shopkeepers, taking a special interest in looking after their premises, or something, you see ... that was all I heard from my grandfather.'*

## Tobacconist shop

*'My grandfather worked in this brass foundry, and he continued to work there ... at some point or other, he decided to buy a shop, and he had a little shop which I used to go to, in Shepherdess Walk ... about five years ago, the whole area was cleared ... Islington, near a canal, Regent's canal, is it? It was opposite a pub, this shop. It was a lock-up shop, he just had a shop parlour and a small shop, and he sold cigars and tobacco. It was opposite a pub, so all kinds of people came into his shop. In those days, some old ladies would smoke a clay pipe, and they would come for half a shag. And he sold comics, the leftovers I used to see. In those days, tobacconists had their windows decorated with cardboard scenes. A tobacconist's used to be a most attractive looking window ...'*

## Water Board

Joyce Russell recalls *'My grandfather worked at the Water Board down by the River Lea. He was a painter ... he mixed his own paints, the interiors of the Water Board building were something to be seen, evidently, and the pump engines and that ... he used to go for his lunch at a little cafe along by the synagogue at the top of Lea Bridge Road, and then my grandmother worked, and he met her there. She had worked in a laundry down by the River Lea and she'd caught her hand in the colander machine so she couldn't work there any more, and she'd gone into this cafe, and she was living in digs.'*

## LEA BRIDGE GAS WORKS

The Lea Bridge Gas Works was a small, independent gas works until nationalisation. The site at Seymour Road, Leyton ceased to be staffed in the 1970s. At that time, members of the Industrial Society and the staff of Vestry House Museum interviewed a number of employees and the Managing Director of the company. The picture that emerges is one of paternalistic concern, and sense of family. The 'gas works tapes' archive is stored at Vestry House Museum as part of the Sound Archive collected by members of Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop. Transcripts of the tapes are part of the Vestry House Local History Archive and may be viewed by appointment with museum staff.

Taped interviews are:

David Cleave Cross, Managing Director  
Len Cable, Showroom Manager  
Howard Snell, Gas Fitter  
Michael Harris, Gas Fitter  
Doug Roberts, Gas Fitter  
Harry Holbrook, Gas Fitter  
Miss Barnes, Accounts Clerk  
John Bromhead, Co-Partnership Secretary

The interviews all follow a structured pattern. For pros and cons of this, see discussion.

*[The Works] 'were originally built and controlled by the Stratford Gas Works engineer to supply gas to half Leyton and Walthamstow, Highams Park. I query as to who the company was at the Stratford gas works, whether it was the West Ham District Gas Co or the Stratford Gas Co. Way before my date, the Lea Bridge Works became the Lea Bridge District Gas Co completely responsible for the supply of gas to half Leyton, Walthamstow and Highams Park. Stratford continued to supply half Leyton.*

*'Lea Bridge was controlled by a Board of directors under Mr AN Paten. They appointed Mr Frederick William Cross as Engineer and General Manager in 1896 when the output of gas was only 200 million cubic feet per year. When nationalised in 1948, the output of gas had risen to about fifteen hundred million cubic feet of gas; it was a 750% increase. That's all I know of the original plant.*

*'Mr A N Paten apprenticed my father. It was Mr Paten's father then appointed my father. Then before I began in the Company, in 1903, he retired or died, and this son, Mr A N Paten, became Chairman, and was Chairman right through. The unique part of this company, it increased, between the two of us , 750%..*

### Getting Started

Harry Holbrook, a gas fitter, started at the Lea Bridge Gas Works in 1913 because he knew someone who already worked there. His father worked there too, and had done so since the 1880s as a water gas engineer. *'He worked at a tilted desk and wrote down the make of the gas, how much they'd made, with the Guv'nor standing behind him, telling him he'd done it wrong'*. He didn't want his son to work there – *'the money wasn't very good'* - and knew nothing about his application for the job.

Howard Snell, another gas fitter, joined in 1927 because his father and his uncle both worked there. His father started just after World War I as *'gas fitting and fixing up water heaters, cookers'*. Mr Snell Jnr *'started with a fitter working on ordinary fitting work, mainly*

*lights, and escape work*'. Doug Roberts' uncle was general foreman and he got his nephew, who had formerly and briefly been in the grocery trade, a bricklaying apprenticeship when he was seventeen in March 1928. Michael Harris who started in 1936 *'just heard about it'*.

Doug Roberts found the work so hard at first, *'I was nearly crying'* but *'after being shown one or two things in bricklaying'*, began to get to like it and eventually, *'it was a great treat to be there'*. The apprenticeship lasted for five years, after which he decided to learn something about maintenance, in order to progress in the firm.. Michael Harris' first job was to get the tools together, and he worked with his fitter on automations and refrigerators, Ascot heaters maintenance, and mains water heaters. He became a fitter after three or four years. Harry Holbrook learnt the job very quickly, doing outdoor lamps at first, going with someone to start with, then he did churches, then public houses.

[Harry Holbrook recalls that at St Peter in the Forest there was a plaque on the wall to the daughter of a Mr Sandell, Secretary of the Gas Company, "many, many years ago".]

## The Working Day

Men would get into work at 7.00am, and until 9.00, all the mates would go and do office cleaning. After three or four months Mr Snell was asked to go to High Street and pick up some meters left there on the previous day. *'There was perhaps two, three, well, on one occasion there happened to be four, so you tie the two meters together, one over each shoulder, and one each side of the handlebars, and bring them back to the yard and get back somewhere about half past eight, which would then be time for breakfast ... you take your own breakfast down there into the canteen and they cook it and, eggs, bacon, whatever you want, then that takes up til 9 o'clock... then you're put out with a fitter and just act as a mate. That went on for round about three years'*.

Doug Roberts remembered that he started work at 7.00am, but clocked on before. *'Once the whistle went, you lost an hour and a half pay. You worked till 8.30, had breakfast 8.30 to 9.00, then worked 9-1, 1-2 lunch, 2-5. Hours and breaks were modified later. Tea break of precisely seven minutes.'* He was monitored by Mr Maslin, a stickler, who told the guv'nor everything. One enjoyed work perhaps because you had it. He can remember every morning 8 or 9 men waiting outside the gate [for work]. It was difficult to get into the gas industry, one usually got in through family connections e.g. the Taylors, Hebden's the fitters, three of them. It was very unusual to get an outsider in, but there was a chance of you were a footballer or cricketer. They travelled as far as Ware in closed Bedford-type van supplied along with petrol (1/10 a gallon) by Board.

Mr Holbrook joined the company in 1913, but left in 1914 in response to Lord Kitchener. He returned to Lea Bridge in early 1919, and found his job was still available. He records that he was greeted by the Guv'nor (D.C. Cross) who *'said I was looking healthy!'* He came back onto maintenance, and records that he found relations between staff and workers a bit more amicable than they had been, *'something that wars do. When you was working ordinary, some of the higher ups would say to you "Holbrook!" see, but when the war was on, it was, "hello there, how're you," you see, all that sort of business. When I came out of the Army, it disappeared'*. He started as a special collector, emptying and unjamming meters, wheel changing, i.e. cogs, in meters when price went up, altered meter to restrict flow of gas. Then he was made up to under-inspector (Special branch sic had inspectors and under inspectors) under a Mr Taylor (the Taylor family was also well represented at the Works)



Mr Snell reported that consumers even in those days, phoned through to report gas escapes, *'but nothing like it is today, 'cos there wasn't the amount of gas anyway. We worked Saturday mornings. My particular fitter, I was asked if I would like to work till 7 o'clock every Saturday night, from twelve it would be overtime, on special escape work, which meant not at the yard, calling at High Street showrooms, remaining there till 7 o'clock, and receiving escape jobs over the telephone.'*

He knew a bit more than the average mate when he started, *'because of father passing on bits and pieces'* and he says, *'I was rather anxious to get my tools',* so *'I went to my foreman, asking him if I could have my tools, "I'll see what I can do", went on for a month or so, he said "oh for goodness sake, go and get yourself a kit of tools", and that was it, I started out on my own.'*

*'About 1930-1, the vitreous enamel was introduced, they were old cookers, taken apart, all the parts enamelled, and assembled in our stove shop, and then all cookers on the area, what were to be changed, to be done as piecework. ... I would say that was Mr Cross's idea. I would say we had to change - 10, 15 cookers a day, and also, on the piecework we used to take out a truck with 8 or 10 meters per day, and we had to push that to Highams Park, change the 8 or 10 meters, then my fitter would say, "right, back you go to the yard and take the meters back".'*

Doug Roberts, the bricklayer started work at 7.00 am, and was straight out on the job from the previous day. Gas bricklaying was a perverse sort of occupation, because *'in summer, when it was the nice weather, you were stuck up inside retorts in the dark; in winter, when the plant was all working, you had to find jobs outside, usually on roofs.'* It was very hot in the retort house, cleaning dampers and altering the size of flues, relining furnaces. A proper reline would take just over a week, a patch-up job two or three days.

After bricklaying, Mr Roberts went to a job in the retort houses, as heat controller and retort house foreman. This was seeing things working properly, coal running through in the proper quantity, and that the right amount of gas went into the holder. Six men and a boilerman worked in the retort house when it was fully working. Mr Roberts worked on verticals rather than horizontals, he only worked on the latter to shut them down. The system of heating was more efficient on verticals than on horizontals (see tape for details).

After this job, he went back to bricklaying and was *'brickie foreman for a long time.'* He looked after the four bricklayers, and allocated work. *'You have to remember, in those days, we found the men work. They'd come to you and say "what can I get on with"?'* The work ranged from the lowest - laying stone setts in the road - *'we had months of that, inside the works, extending to the finest archwork that you'd see anywhere ... you were taught the whole job ...'*

The biggest job was setting up the foundations of the Institute; another big one was setting up and constructing the whole of the Bentite plant. *'We bricklayers handled every bit of plant -we were fortunate enough to go there when they built Number Two plant in 1928-29. That necessitated new condensers, new washers, new verifiers, and we worked all the way through - the only thing I never handled was the building of a gas oven. It's amazing that a little company like Lea Bridge could maintain four bricklayers, two carpenters, two painters, all the year round, year after year, and always had plenty of work for them.'*

Mr Roberts saw great changes at the Works during his time. *'I saw the whole station gradually increase in size, and you see the older plant going out. I saw the incline house,*

*not actually pulled down, but transferred. I had all the retorts pulled out, contractors in, they did that, demolished all the retorts .. 1932? - shut down in '29; after that the far end of the retort house was turned into a big garage. Those walls at the bottom of that retort house were over three feet thick, and we had to cut an opening right the way through, lintels in over the top of them, for big lorries to go underneath. And that became a garage. It was challenging, and good experience.'*

When Mr Roberts joined the Works in 1928, *'they were very heavy covered wagons then, using those roads, they wanted a lot of upkeeping, and sometimes, we were putting in new roads, like when put the coke plant in ... about '38 ...'*

Mr Roberts got the job of 'acting yard foreman' in the following way: *'rather strange ... started off one night, we'd been down to mother-in-law's, I came home ten o'clock at night, and when we get home, deputy station engineer, the assistant manager, Mr Grayson, was waiting on my doorstep. "Come on Dougie", he said, "I've been kicking my heels here for hours", I said, "what for, Mr Grayson"? He said, "I want you to come in on night work, take over the yard foreman's job". I said, "but I've never done that job", he said, "well, you're going to do it tonight", he said, "we've got no yard foreman on tonight," he said, "you're the only one has had any skill training", he said, "got your certificates, now's your chance" - mum had to go in and pack me up grub and away we went.*

*'From then on, I was accepted, really, as yard foreman. That didn't please Mr Cross very much. But anyway, we got away with it. Carried on like that for several years as a relief foreman and then one foreman more or less went sick and didn't come back, and I was in, I was called in again and then decided to come to some agreement over wages - I was still getting bricklayers' wages even when I was a foreman, plus something different. It was only on a day to day basis, whereas all the other foremen were weekly paid.*

*'I was getting 7/6 a week extra for doing this job. At that particular time I used to draw my own wages if I was on early morning turn, if I was afternoons, I'd draw me own wages, but night time the afternoon foreman drew my wages. Well, I was getting 7, 6 and a half, 7 shifts, whereas the others drew 3 equal money. The 6 shift week was the lowest ... Basically, the bosses thought he'd been overpaid, tried to make him refund; he stood up to them - Bryce and Cross, and, this was the week before Christmas, Mr Roberts threatened to not come in over Christmas, whereupon they gave in and he got 7/6 extra. The boss suggested about two years later whether I'd like to go back on the building side again. Bloke called Sullivan took over yard foreman's job. This was about 1942'.*

Mr Snell lived in a flat above the High Street showroom, and worked there. He describes a day's work at the showroom, *'that consisted of, up at 7 in the morning, reporting for work, I think we started at 8. Leyton, Bakers Arms, still there. My wife then worked as a cleaner in the showrooms, and myself, I go about my usual day's work, until about 1939... the job was mainly to keep the place clean, and have everything ready for when the staff came in at 9 o'clock, but myself, reporting for duty at the Works in the normal way. Sometimes I would receive a call not from Mr Cross, from Mr Tennan, asking me if I would like to do some work in the showrooms on Sunday morning, such as alter the cookers round, wash the ceiling down, things in general.... the flat was rent free, and electric light was free, my own gas I paid for.'*

Mr Snell earned 17/6 a week when he started and worked a nine hour day, in a forty-eight hour week. When he was a fitter, it was *round about £2 a week*. Wages rose eventually to three or four pounds a week, though *'a fitter's money was the same all the way through, until, really, Nationalisation, then if you became a chargehand ...'*

When Harry Holbrook started in 1913, working hours were 6.30-6.30, with 30 minutes for breakfast and 60 minutes for dinner. Wages were exactly 21 shilling 3 pence farthing a week! but rose in leaps and bounds after that. He also, however, did jobs outside, e.g. as tally-man, gardening in Chingford, doing the filter beds, evenings and weekends. He would finish at Lea Bridge at 6.00 then bike up to Chingford on his moped. In 1967 he was drawing £72 a month pension, and thinks that's marvellous.

On the other hand, he [Mr Cross] *'had got good points. I can remember once, how he would tell you that there was "No Smoking Whatsoever" in working hours, no matter where you were, and we were inside retorts ... not a bit of inflammable material about ... [colleague] Frank Howes was in the bottom of the retort, smoking away - he used to take 30 cigarettes a day in there. we had one signal. If you heard anybody singing "Nellie Dean", you knew the guvnor's about ... "Nellie Dean" we was singing, and there's Mr Cross coming along the road there "Nellie Dean" we was singing it at the top of our voices, Frank didn't take the slightest bit of notice. Another clue was "clay up". I dropped a load of water down to him and said "clay up, Fred! clay up!", "No you silly fool, water" [mimics Mr Cross] He'd got the cigarette in his mouth, and there's Mr Cross looking down at him. "Roberts," he says, "is Howes smoking?" I said, "I shouldn't think so, not down there, sir". "Oh, all right then". That was all right.*

*'I was in the same boat another time, and it was a case of mistaken identity ... he thought he was shouting up to another workman, as he smoked away, but it turned out to be Mr Cross. It was a cold day, but when he realised, he broke out into a cold sweat. He could have lost his job instantly, because smoking was banned absolutely. Mr Cross asked him how many days he'd been on the job, three days, says Dougie, "all right, carry on, but use a little more discretion when you're smoking!" I could have kissed him. It was however somewhat anomalous that contractors were allowed to smoke on the premises!'*

Doug Roberts, who joined the Works in 1928, remembers that F W Cross was Manager and D C Cross was Works Manager at that time. Mr Roberts' uncle had known D C Cross as a boy, *'more or less in the same position as I was to F W Cross, he had to teach D C Cross quite a lot of the routine work of the Works. D C Cross wouldn't be working but he was there to learn the station on behalf of his father who was the manager, he wanted him to carry on ... My uncle Jack, a big, square man, very kind hearted, he'd do anything for anybody. So would D C, actually ... one day he started getting saucy to Uncle Jack, and he said "behave yourself or I'll put you in that tub of clay there!". That was a two hundred gallon tank, "oh, you wouldn't do that, I'll tell my father". Anyway, Jack just got hold of him and dumped him straight in it, "Now go and tell your father that". F W said, "you shouldn't have done that , but it probably taught him a lesson".'*

Harry Holbrook also has an anecdote demonstrating F W Cross's attitude. Harry and F W were of course known to one another. One day, Harry was out on a job and was not wearing the regulation Lea Bridge Gas Works cap with its insignia. It was a wet day, and still raining when F W came along; he stood there asking if Harry worked for Lea Bridge Gas, making a point about the cap badge, *'until he was wet - his clothes were thinner than mine. The Lea Bridge Gas Works uniform was in winter, not in the summer, thick cloth, dark blue, cap lettering sewn with red letters.'*

In 1928 F W was already virtually retired. He was always out shooting, and he always asked for *'old Bob Hills to go out shooting for the day with him. He was a brickie, over 70. He hadn't been with the station long enough to get a pension so he was kept on. And he did his work as well as anyone else.'*

Mr Snell recalls that when he started at the Works in 1927, F W Cross was still there, 'a little old man with a beard, and very nice to talk to ... didn't talk to him much, though 'because nobody was allowed to see him, until the young Mr Cross came in who I thought was very, very, nice, very, very, helpful, very willing to help all he could.'

Mr Snell remembers 'a fishpond on the site of one of the old gas holders at Lea Bridge. The pool was about ten feet deep, and the holder had already been demolished in 1928. The water is the water seal. Gas holders work like this: some gas holders go up and down, concertina fashion, like a telescope. Others would be a spiral. The spiral one has a water seal round the edge and a concrete base, and the concertina type one would have a water base and the water acted as a seal from stopping the gas from coming round the sides, and when the holder was taken down, they would just be left.

'How did fish get in there? No-one will ever know. But in the old days, fitters in their dinner hour used to strip off and go in for a swim, and fish were there then, he's seen them himself. Fish came from everywhere, when he broke bread into the water, up to about twelve inches long. Some of the staff used to go down there, rod and line; what they caught, they took out of one put in another holder that was taken down, also quite deep.

'On one occasion, when the drought was on, a few years ago, one person "no names, no pack drill" was in his van, and a little pool, up by the Rising Sun, I think it's called "The Rising Sun pool", boating pool, was nearly dried up, and fish there were "just waving about, all over the place, so he happened to have a long pairs of waders in the van, so he came back to yard ... for a bucket ... in three journeys, rescued fish.

## The Co-Partnership Scheme

The Works had an employees-share scheme called the Co-Partnership scheme. Doug Roberts recalled that at the time when DC Cross took over from his father, FW Cross, along with other changes of senior personnel, a fraud undertaken by the then Co-Partnership secretary of about £2000 was exposed. The position was then taken by Norman H Davis. This would have been after about 1907. Thereafter, John Bromhead took the position.

*Doug Roberts recalled Pa Cable didn't want to go - wonderful old man. He resembled the old man in the advert for Crusan's Salts: 'What've I done with my Crusans?' So he got named after it. He was the engineering draughtsman who designed the 1899 retort house and the roof truss. 'If you retire me, it will kill me'. In less than six months he was dead. He always looked an old man, even when younger. Couldn't get rid of the Works foreman, though, because not transferable skill - unique to each works.'*

All members of the scheme received the same share, "from guvnor to lowest", although no interest could be drawn out until two and a half years after beginning employment at the Works. 80% of the workforce withdrew interest although the shares themselves could not be withdrawn. Harry Holbrook drew his interest to help to support his family and he thought the co-Partnership scheme was 'a marvellous idea'.

'D C Cross recalled The Co-Partnership was Paten's pet idea, he was very keen on Co-partnership and gave them so much stock every year out of the profits. And there was a spirit of co-partnership, and we used to have co-partnership meetings, of which I took the Chairmanship of it. We never had a quarrel. I can't remember what was discussed, how we spent the time! Used to have short agenda, tell them what we were doing.'

Mr Snell thought that shareholding altered the way people felt towards the firm, *'it held you to your job; and provided you were a good boy, it was a real safe job. We were very surprised when we knew the Co-Partnership scheme was going to be finished with.* Mr Snell said that shares were allotted according to age, and one could draw interest on the shares every quarter or half year, *I left my money in, and at the end, it worked out I got about £300. We were asked what we'd like to do, and everybody decided to have their shares sold and the money would be given to us, which myself I put straight into the Post Office.'*

Michael Harris said he left his money in in a lump sum, and received £125 on final withdrawal. The Union negotiated things so that they drew £9+ every year for fifteen years, when the Co-Partnership scheme was coming to an end, *'to compensate us for what we were losing, because every year we used to get shares allotted to us, then we used to get dividend on these shares ... when the fifteen years finished, that was that.'* Mr Harris, like all the other interviewees thought the scheme had been a good idea, and the scheme should have made people more careful with wastage of materials etc - he is ambivalent as to whether or not it did, though.

Miss Barnes thought the Co-Partnership Scheme *'very good. You had so many shares allocated, then they went on gradually, and when it was wound up, at Nationalisation, you got a block in British Gas.'* Interest was still being paid in 1967. One was allowed to take money out during employment, *'but I didn't very often,'* one occasion being when she got into arrears with her Income Tax and drew some money from the Partnership then. Some people made regular withdrawals, as part of their wages or salary. But most left their money in. A lump sum from the Co-Partnership was available before Nationalisation, whereupon one lost access to the money; felt hard-done by because it wasn't a personal thing any more. pride, personal interest in consumer etc went with Nationalisation. Fair amount of contact with consumers. Had regular people with paying problems, those who were genuine and those who weren't.

Len Cable on Co-Partnership scheme: Every year one was allotted a small sum of money, in addition to salary, not allowed to draw it out, this applied to staff and also fitters, inspectors, yardmen, but it did not apply to the executive - Cleave Cross didn't participate, nor his assistant, nor Mr Winslow the Distribution engineer. The sum allotted was based on salary on sliding scale. At Nationalisation the Scheme was discontinued. Mr Cable drew out £80-100. The Co-Partnership Scheme had been the brainchild of Arthur Matthew Paton, a barrister, Lea Bridge Gas Company Chairman. Could only draw out if you pleaded extreme need - only one person ever succeeded. Those who retired before Nationalisation could draw it out. Did co-P spur people on? -No.

John Bromhead was the Co-Partnership Secretary, and he started work at Lea Bridge Gas Company on 1 February 1915, via the headmaster at St Saviour's School. He had an interview on the Wednesday with D C Cross, to start Monday at 5/- a week (Could this be D C Cross in 1915?) Mr Bromhead was fourteen years old. The job was office boy, he took copies of hand-written letter with carbon; posted ; filing ; not much of a job, but a fully established one. Then the junior clerk left to go to World War I, and he put himself forward into a position where he supervised the office boy!; he got about a shilling or 1/6 a week more. He only received 4/11 the first Friday, instead of 5/-. He asked why, and was told the penny deduction was for the London Blind - but he insisted they shouldn't until he gave permission. He signed the form though. He describes on tape the slot office and the tall desks with flaps to them.

At the beginning of the Co-Partnership Scheme, Mr Bromhead was offered a vacancy in charge of wages when someone left, and the Co-partnership secretary job went with this

particular job. The first co-Partnership Secretary ran off, that's why they wrote to John on holiday and asked him to take over. No-one knew what happened. He gives a description of duties and qualifications for Co-partnership. No-one ever failed to get a good report from supervisor - that's what it was like in those days.

There was always a big draw out of interest - most people did this. The most important effect of the scheme was that people took an interest in their job. Admin of the scheme was via meetings about welfare of employees, with the exception of wages. Wages were a Union matter. There was a Welfare and Distress Fund. Henry Coe OBE was his Senior. There was also someone called Charlie Hills

Office hours were nine till five, sometimes more when balancing, but they just worked on, without extra pay, because they were keen to do the job well. Mr Davis was the accountant. Our reward was the good opinion of Davis, there was a different atmosphere.

F W Cross was still at the Works when Mr Bromhead started, and he remembers F W as *'a gentleman. If you get any trouble, you go to them, they'd see it was all right. No trouble at all. I got ticked off many a time, but, get it out, finished with.'*

## Health and Safety

In regard to safety, Bromhead says that the Safety Officer was responsible for seeing all machinery guarded properly. *'We never had any - one fatal accident, I can only remember one ... chap walked, I think from down at the water gas plant ... it's too long ago to remember. We had first aid men on duty all day.'* There was an ambulance man, too, Dick French *'he used to have these little odd jobs to do, cleaning, perhaps the ... but I must admit, not much, but he was always on duty. Management satisfied that if anything happened, he was there. He did well.'*

*'But Dick French was one of the biggest fiddlers we had there,'* said Mr Snell. *'He got this ambulance job and he didn't have much else work. He ran the ambulance station. The building was still there at the time of recording of this tape. That house, was Winslow's residence. When he was replaced by Tennant, Tennant lived elsewhere. Behind the lab and round the front line of wall with back door, now the ambulance room, was gardens there.'*

*'Miss Barnes was First Aider for women. After the house was taken over for officers during the War, a dedicated first aid room was established. Mr Cross as Assistant Engineer, lived on premises, but when he retired his successor wasn't resident - not a nice place to live, so gradually house taken over for offices.'*

Injuries and accidents are recalled quite phlegmatically. Harry Holbrook recalls an accident in about 1942, from which he still bears the mark (a dent in the forehead). He was doing plate rates? on a wire wheel, cleaning gunge off them, only a dozen out of 200, when he was bashed on the head by one slipping. It happened inside the depot. Went to Walthamstow Hospital, not cleaned, went septic in 3 days. If he had claimed, it occurred to him, he might have got the sack. He only recovered owing to the care of his own doctor.

Doug Roberts said *'I had two drops down the retort. The first one - you're in a flue, on a cradle, suspended with rope belts. What chance have you got if anything goes wrong? You've just got to go ... [one day] the knots came undone on the blocks, and they just [fell] straight down. Fortunately - I was very small - and old Fred Taylor, massive great chap he was, he got me out of there; the cradle was smashed, me head was damaged and so forth, and he carried me over that ambulance room, in his arms, just like a child.'*

*'Later, I had another fall in the retorts. This time the overhead beams that travelled along, they came off the hopper, came down through the hopper and course, Dougie went down again, but this time I didn't hit the bottom, I got pulled up with a jerk, and that did more damage to me than the previous one, put me on the club. The cradle had bent where it hit me; sudden jerk, tore me back muscles, that did.'*

On return to work, Cross had him in the office, *'"Roberts", he said, 'to fall down the retort once is acceptable", he said, "but to fall down twice" he said, "is absolute negligence on your part". Amazing that he made me responsible. I don't know! But that was his attitude. I was a silly fool to be dropped down the retort twice.'*

John Bromhead recalls that when Co-Partnership started, Union was involved too, but doesn't think it was when he was first Co-Partnership Secretary. Bromhead has no idea how unionised the Works were before the War, because there was never any trouble to bring unions in about. This changed with Nationalisation and labour relations under the North Thames Gas Board. Things settled without Union prior to that, e.g. protective clothing for drains men. Purifier 'used to muck about with the oxide, terrible stuff'.

On the whole, the Trades Union wasn't particularly strong, but it negotiated benefits, hours, pay and so on.

Mr Snell and his wife lived in the flat above the showroom, and *'one night we went to bed, about two o'clock in the morning, we hear knocking on the window - three stories high, "fire service, will you get out of bed and come and help p us, we want to get into the showrooms, ... went downstairs, opened the showrooms door, and there's about four of them waiting there with their hoses, and they didn't ask if they could come in, straight the way through and out at the back and it appeared that a shop two doors away was well alight, and it was their only means of getting into the back way, by taking their hoses through the showroom and out the back way. Unfortunately, one person died in the fire, and her sister was seriously injured. That lasted all night. After everything was out, the fire was out, cleared away, the firemen just sat down, we made them a nice cup of tea, and - it was too late to go to bed - when I rang through to Mr Tennan in the morning and explained it, "I'm sorry, I will be late", "don't worry , come in when you can".'*

*'F W Cross lived in Merton Road, the house went with the job. D C , however, wouldn't live there when he took over, so he bought his own house in Prospect Hill. In 1931, he spent twelve months underpinning the house. He extended the garage later to fit a large car, too. He undertook the levelling of the Bowling Green every year, too. It was a championship green the best in Essex.'*

When Doug Roberts started at the Works, Foden steam lorries were used entirely for deliveries, five tonners. *'They delivered 100 cwt sacks. Two men called Smith, and Charlie Day were the drivers. No-one else drove. They got in half an hour earlier than everyone else to light the boiler fire in them, while the loading was done. All the loading was done outside the retort house where it was dumped in a heap. Deliveries were made all over Walthamstow. It was one of them that knocked the column down at Wanstead. Everything in the station was painted olive green and lettered up right across the front. Front of these steam lorries was like an ordinary railway engine is today [1978].'*

Doug didn't spend all his working life at Lea Bridge, but after he passed his City and Guilds and Institute of Gas Engineers exams at East Ham Technical College, he was advised by his teacher to move to a works at Southend where they had a new retort. But D C Cross wouldn't let him go. Another job came up at Beckton, the cream of stations.

Cross blocked that too. The Deputy Station Engineer, Grayson, helped him by showing him the labs, Grayson went to Romford to rebuild it, after the War. Doug thought he'd go with him. But Doug had to leave Lea Bridge, then go to Grayson to ask him for a job, which, then as now, was a big risk. So, he left, went bricking on his own, then applied with his certificate into Westminster. The certificates were well regarded, and he was made engineer.

Interestingly, the interviewer then asked 'why was D C so opposed to people rising up?' at which Doug asked for the tape to be turned off. A colleague, Mr Thomas, now appears on the tape for the first time, with the opinion that he thought D C wouldn't allow promotion on staff side; and also because he didn't want to see Co-Partnership money go out, unless you left the industry altogether.

The Southend works belonged to the Gas Light and Coke Company, and Cross and probably therefore the workers too, were very anti them, especially the two main lady shareholders. The Gas Light and Coke Co was *'an ogre to smaller companies, like the LCC was to smaller councils.'* There's an anecdote at this point about difficulties at Poplar. Hatred of Gas Light by boss at Poplar stemmed from war damage compensation handed out the week before Nationalisation. Nationalisation was effectively a take-over by Gas Light, who then took the lot. The boss at Poplar hated Doug because he thought he'd come from Gas Light. They became good colleagues when it eventually emerged that Doug had come from Lea Bridge. Doug was running Lea Bridge and another station as Clerk of Works.

Michael Harris started at the Works in 1936. His work in the showroom started at 8.00am, servicing showroom heaters, for about an hour, then he would go out on the district. He serviced about seven heaters a day. The Lea Bridge Gas Company seems to have had a good relationship with the Ascot water heater company. The latter were *'very good to us, used to take us up to their showrooms at High Holborn, take us out to lunch, dinner, make a lot of fuss of us, and we used to get instruction up there, see; we fitted other types of water heater too, but of course you'd recommend Ascot, because they treated you well.'*

To begin with, Michael Harris lived in Hornsey, but, according to [his daughter? - a female voice] *'he couldn't go back and forth from Hornsey Road to Lea Bridge, so we got a flat in Lea Bridge, right opposite the gas works, you could see the holders from our back garden, see.'* Michael Harris continues, *Mr Cross 'put a word in for us, see, with Warners. It was definitely better than the previous place. We'd been living in two rooms. We paid 10/9.'* This flat had one of the standard Warner configurations of two bedrooms, small sitting room, dining room, didn't have bathroom; kitchen. The used an old tin bath and filled it up from the ascot, though ascots weren't supposed to be used for that. One of the 'perks' of working for Lea Bridge Gas Company was that they got the ascot through the Works. And *'you was allowed 20% off everything - we had our first wash boiler that way, we get something off it even now if we purchase something.'*

## Social Activities at the Works

John Bromhead was General Secretary of the Sports club, whose members organised children's parties, pensioners' "dos". He said they "used to run the whole lot, but it got too much, so the club was split up into indoor sports, dance, social club, badminton, tennis, though not football or cricket" The monthly meeting was attended by representatives of the different sections. The Engineer/Manager was Chairman; there were also a Treasurer and a Secretary. The club was a thriving concern, Mr Bromhead recalls that four billiard tables were bought through social club: "we furnished that Institute", whose facilities were heavily used after work - eventually Truman's put in a bar. The Institute was open every night; dances were particularly popular up until a few years before he left, after



Nationalisation, when “it dropped off a bit”. Miss Barnes, too, recalls that before Nationalisation, children’s parties were held every year, organised and run by the Social Committee which was made up of representatives from both Works and Offices. Each activity had its own committee, e.g. tennis committee, cricket; representatives from these went onto Social Committee, and “Management had nothing to do with this at all”.

It was generally believed that sport was important to the Management, and that people were recruited because they were good sportsmen. Bromhead rebuts this: *‘I’ve heard that, and I’ve heard it before. It’s not true. It was, perhaps isolated cases, a co-incidence, that’s all .. definitely not ... no! It might have made a difference, like “There’s a vacancy for a stoker or something”, “oh yes, I know someone, ... [conspiratorially] he’s a good footballer. Well, it might have made a difference, but not definitely to join because he played sport. No, wrong idea, wrong idea; definitely the wrong idea. Len Cable also was ambivalent – “I reserve judgement” - on whether football ability got you a job or not.’*

Mr Cable remembers the social life of the Company as being very good, the Institute was built during his time. He said it had a splendid dance floor, stage, amateur dramatics, dances, “dos”, and that there were two tennis courts, and one or two football pitches. D C Cross was *‘a very fine tennis player, County standard ... he sometimes gave a game to my friend Stanley Hand ... because Stanley was also a very good player, but not as good as Cleave Cross.’*

Harry Holbrook recalls going to a show “somewhere in Blackhorse Lane, opposite St Andrews Road, a dinner and variety show”, provided by the Company out of Co-partnership funds. Children’s entertainment, like Punch and Judy shows and clowns were also paid for by Co-Partnership money, he thinks, and concurs with everyone else that Co-Partnership was “a marvellous thing”

Miss Barnes, the accounts clerk, and the only woman interviewed by the Industrial Society team, has more to say about the social side than anyone else: She emphasises that Works and office staff received equal treatment in that everyone paid a nominal amount for teas etc. She recalls that the sports ground lay on the eastern side of the Works site, where football, cricket and bowls were available for the men. There was a weatherboard pavilion to the east of the tennis courts. Indoor activities and sports took place at the Welfare Institute, upstairs was billiards and table-tennis, downstairs a big hall for dramatics, later made into canteen; and upstairs a separate canteen for office staff, so office staff and others were kept separate during office hours. Despite this, The Works canteen was run by the Welfare Institute, the other was for the office. Mr Cross always brought down a bottle of wine for the Xmas dinner. The canteen of the Welfare Institute was only open during lunch and breaks.

## Amateur dramatics

One of the first amateur dramatic productions was a play for children, for children’s parties, then concentrated more on ‘humorous plays’, gradually progressed from things like “Rising Generation” up to “Linden Tree”. They had to limit themselves to one stage set, because stage so small. Works carpenter built sets to begin with. Others helped with artistic side. Much of the costume had to be by themselves, though they had a Wardrobe Mistress. They had an outside producer, ‘Billy Brandon, in the laboratory, a friend of his, Mr Smith’. Rehearsals were one night a week for two-three months.

The War stopped it all. Started in 1933, because sports things used mainly by men; Amateur Dramatics first time works and office staff got together. Before that, office staff had no social side to work; after the beginning of AmDram, they joined in other activities too, so it was an ice-breaker. There were board games, etc, e.g. chess, too. Badminton,

then later table-tennis matches. Some sports and indoor sports got going again after the War, but not AmDram.

There was an annual dinner for entire staff, originally first thing that Works and Office went to. Several at Corner House in London - got there under own steam; and at a premises in Blackhorse Road. There was a Pensioners' Party, and a children's Party, annually. One or two things started again after the War, but stopped at Nationalisation. There were outings, too.

## The Second World War

The effect of World War II was that work increased, routines changed, and the Works lost some bricklayers to outside work, such as the Fire Brigade. John Bromhead recalls that women began to be employed, *'that made a difference of course, you've got to train the ladies to do the men's jobs ... it was extra work, because of the training. [mainly as clerks] and they were paid less than the men had been getting - they were young girls, had to be trained. Couldn't expect them to get the same pay, could you? They were well paid, afterwards, when they got to know the job. Got to take over some of the senior jobs in the end. They had to, didn't they?'*

On the Declaration of War, Bromhead recalls *'I took my wife down to Tooting on the Saturday, War was declared on the Sunday, I came home there, there was a note in the door, "Report at once to the Works". I went down there and I was there a month without coming home.'* He was in charge of organising all the ARP (Air Raid Precautions), and there were rotas in sections of 3, 4 or 5 sections.

The yard had its own Home Guard, the officer in charge asked Mr Snell to call out the Home Guard, *'I'd previously been out and bought a brand new coat, supplied, by the way, by the Board of Lea Bridge Gas Company. I brought them in, two at a time, just in case anything should happen, anyone should get into the Works, the Home Guard was there to deal with them. By the time he'd finished, his coat was full of water inside, all the seams had gone, brand new Belstaff? coat, all the seams had gone. it didn't matter, I notified Mr Cross, he said "take it back and go and get another one".'*

In 1939 Harry Holbrook was aged about 42. He thought that the effect of the Second World War on Works and the job was that women came in to do light jobs. Cleaning offices had always been done by women, now they were also doing things like coke shifting.

## Fire!

By 1939, Harry was in the spray shop, and every other day on fire service. When the papermill opposite the Works' gates caught light, it nearly burned to the ground, because the rule was that he was not allowed to attend any fire if it was outside the works without first seeking permission from his superior; though the fire could have easily been dealt with from the Gas Works' own yard.

There is one incident recalled by all the interviewees, when Number Six holder got incendiaries on it. Mr Snell's is the most detailed and graphic account of incendiary damage, and this incident in particular: *'One night, while we were asleep, a load of incendiary bombs had fallen onto the Works, so we were all called out .. one underneath a two hundred gallon oil tank, I ... went underneath to get it out.... [there were incendiaries] all the way along the railway line as well, which we also put out. A few nights later we had one on Number Six holder ... caught light ... not as dangerous as one*

would imagine. To see a large gas holder with a flame twenty or thirty foot out the top, you'd think the whole lot was going to blow up, but the whole art of the job was to get the flame out and the only way we done that was myself, my job was, to go round the yard, and we had barrels with about a foot of clay in the bottom, scattered all round the yard. So my job was to get the barrels to the bottom of the holder, while others were going up the holder to get the clay; the clay would come out in one piece .. Mr Smith, Mr Arthur Smith was up the top of the holder, and they tried with a sheet of iron to cut the flame off, but with no ... The whole job was to throw the clay and get it directly over the hole, which would completely cut the gas off - a man would be about nine to ten feet away, because the heat was terrific - no protective clothing. Mr Smith actually put the fire out, with four or five attempts. No damage - just one hole in the middle of the holder, which was repaired soon after by putting a plate in the top end. I think that patch is still there!

*'There was too much gas, and where it made the hole, build up, with wet sacks, keeping water on it all the time, then plonk a sack on top - this one chap got all the praise for it, the BEM' (Holbrook's account). Michael Harris recalls 'one night we had a bomber come over, dropped a bomb straight through Number Six holder, set light to it, but it never exploded, cos provided you kept the pressure up it wouldn't explode, cos there's no mixture of air and gas, and then immediately after that the 'all clear' went, otherwise I think the place would have been bombed to blazes? Repairs to Number Six holder were done by people in the Works, and they had to get up on the roof and bag it out like with clay and one thing and another and eventually they managed to get it out.'*

There was no shortage of fitters during the War, and men weren't really doing a lot more work, according to Michael Harris, because most of the work was repair work, and very little installation. According to Mr Snell, a lot of men were called up, and exemptions only granted to those engaged in urgent repair work, either gas or water. Water went into the gas pipes rather than vice versa, because pressure was stronger. On one occasion, Mr Snell recalls, there was quite a large bomb at Whipps Cross, and he worked for two days and two nights without a break, with two small pumps sucking water out of gas mains, *'I had my wife coming down, "there's your lunch, there's your supper, there's your tea, when are you coming home?" things got quieter in the night. Then I was asked to come in to the Stoke repair plant, but I refused, saying "I would like a little recreation".'*

That was in the middle of 1942, then I received my calling up papers on the nineteenth of December and joined the Royal Engineers and remained there till 1945. His job at the Gas Works was reserved for him, however, upon his return. *'Our money was made up, we were paid, your wife was paid your full week's money all the time you in the Army. Towards the end of the War we were asked if we could come out under Class B, if you did, you would lose most of your gratuity money, from the Army, but if you stayed till the end of your time, then you would get your full money. But myself - Mr Cross wrote and asked me if I would come out on Class B, that I did, so I lost most of my gratuity.'*

Michael Harris was part of a gas repair party during World War II, *'if there was any trouble, we had to go round, cut off the meters, and that gas, and if the bomb had broke a water main as well, it would fill up the gas mains, you have to go round empty the meters of water and one thing another. And you won't believe it, but people laugh about water coming out of gas, it did actually come out of gas pipes..' Anecdote: Farmilo Road, two elderly people, they were killed, not actually killed but they were .. they died .. I think it was a flying bomb ..... and it sort of ... suffocated them ... they weren't touched in the body*

At the outbreak, Mr Snell *'was called in to Mr Cross, and he said to me "would it be all right if I can hold you back, and I also understand you've got a motorcycle and sidecar", which I'd purchased only on the Friday before war was declared, so I agreed to stay back*

*and he said "would you mind becoming a dispatch rider for the firm". I said, "yes", he said "after pay on Friday night" which was then at our Walthamstow showroom, "I'd like you, take your wife with you if you like, go for a nice ride round to all the public telephone boxes on Lea Bridge area, and put out the little gas light -" - they were all on 'click' then, and they lit up as soon as it got dark ... I was the first dispatch rider on Lea Bridge and I think the Metropolitan Water Board took someone soon after.'*

*'During the War, there were quite a number of air-raids,' recalls Miss Barnes. There was a shelter, on the North west corner of the office, but staff 'got tired of going down there' so they had a spotter on a gas holder: 'as soon as the spotter saw anything, the staff went down the corridor and sat there - one girl had her earrings blown off by blast!!' The worst incident was on a Sunday lunchtime, when a bomb fell on Hunt's, the box manufacturer opposite. There was just one member of staff on duty, a telephonist, fortunately. On Monday, the office was 'swimming with water, and paperwork and glass all over the place.' The staff, however, saved the machines and removed them into the Institute. 'Mr Cross always used to say to us "It's all right, if anything happens to the holders, they won't blow up". Another time, there were incendiaries all over the Works, Arthur Smith, Darkie Smith [he was an Inspector] he won the George Cross for that, put them out on the holder.' ? Were on the spot to deal with the effects of ruptured gas pipes. The loft of the office premises was called "Annie's Room", though Annie had never existed. One morning a smoking incendiary was found - the gas works had been targeted, though no-one was ever hurt at the Works during the War.*

## Bomb disposal

Mr Snell has an anecdote about an incident when the same stick of bombs that bombed just by Lea Bridge Station also did Stoke Newington. He went up with a mate to see if his wife was OK, on the way back, there was an unexploded bomb at Lea Bridge:

*'There was a small box fitted over the top of the headlamp with a little bulb inside, which was cut out in front with an RP/G which meant Repair Party/Gas, and anywhere that I went, the police got to know who I was, and they knew we would be one of the first on the job and if the place was cordoned off, they used to see my motorcycle come along ... and open the cordon and let me through .. got nearer the job than I really wanted .. on one occasion, I said, "where is the bomb?", and the warden said, "you're standing on the bloody thing. Did you move? Quick!"*

*'After that, working on the district, I was asked to report back with my motorcycle as soon as the warning went ... sometimes it would be eight or ten calls a day, and I would be paid half a crown a call. This was getting a little bit too much, I think, for Mr Cross, and my wages were getting a little bit too big! So Mr Cross decided that night work would be better. So I started down there eight o'clock at night till eight in the morning. We took over a small room in the Institute - gas fire and camp beds, and made ourselves comfortable when necessity arose. On a 'busy' night, then you wouldn't get much sleep at all: that seven nights a week, and the hob actually consisted .. we had a control room in the office, and when a call was received at the control room of a bomb falling on the area, they would immediately come over and tell me .. go to area concerned immediately and report back what damage had been done. If necessary, if I thought the job required the services of the service layers, I would then proceed to their addresses, carrying one on the pillion seat, one in the sidecar, and tools, if there was any room, and get them to the job as quickly as possible.*

*'On once occasion, in Colchester Road, Leyton, the only person there was the air-raid warden; I found a small bomb had dropped on some premises, and damaged the house*

*also trapping a family in the cellar, and gas there was getting into the cellar ... Within minutes a demolition party arrived ... I got a pick and shovel, one or two men, got the paving stone up, found where the service went in, cut through with a hack saw, put a lump of clay in the end and got things under control. The family in the house here, I could see, a little bit ... partly gassed ... I put somebody from the demolition squad in charge for ten minutes to keep things going while I immediately came back to the yard, asked for Mr French our First Aid man who had gas equipment, put him in the sidecar, back to the job within ten minutes, and while I was doing that they were making a hole to get the people out no lives were lost, everything was OK.'*

On another occasion, 'a man was blasted out his flat [in the Whipps Cross area], still in his armchair, reading the paper. He got up, walked two hundred yards up the road and collapsed.' Another time, 'one of the service layers was overcome with gas. In those days, it was a glass of milk or lemonade, then run them up and down the road till he come to a bit, then back to work again.'

I [Mr Snell] 'came back May 1946, and returned to work. I was asked if I'd go with another fitter as Rehabilitation to bring you up, from what you'd missed during the War, to bring you up to scratch. We were put onto a factory job in Blackhorse Lane, and we were doing four inch, two inch, pipework, which lasted for six to eight months.... fitting up gas appliances to a factory for canteen work, boilers, everything to run the whole factory. A reconversion job. After that, you're in the swing again, and then I went on to the District again.'

There was a great deal of war damage work, as well as new housing, so there was 'a lot of carcassing to be done - that's putting new pipes in new houses a lot of work to do with services layers. On some occasions we were asked to go with the service layer, disconnect the meter, and attend to all the inside part, while the service layers were relaying the service. Once they'd done that, we'd fix the meter, test up inside, test their service that had been put in.'

Harry Holbrook said his father was 'terrible for drink,' and Harry had to go out and find him when he was drunk. But there was never any trouble at the Works over drink.

## In the Showroom

Len Cable, in contrast to the other men interviewed, worked as a salesperson from 1928 when he was just twenty-one until 1967 when he was sixty years old. Before Nationalisation, Lea Bridge was a small independent company, but it was absorbed into the Gas Light and Coke Company and renamed North Thames Gas Board. The Company's first showroom was in High Street, Walthamstow, the second at Highams Park, the third at the Bakers' Arms.

Before 1928, Mr Cable worked as a rental clerk in a City insurance office, at 63-64 Chancery Lane. 'In retrospect, the worst thing I did', but at the time, salary scales at the insurance company were bad, and Mr Cable got 'exactly £20 per annum more at Gas.' His annual salary was £168, which was considered to be 'not bad' at that time. He worked there for two or three years, until the rental office closed, and he moved to Lea Bridge where the rental department was completely mechanised with Burroughs machines. Then, he says, he was 'replaced by ladies operating machines' therefore came out into the general office as a counter clerk, and started selling things 'off my own bat; I did reasonably well at that and I was appointed as second in command at High Street Walthamstow showrooms. That was up to the War ... no, before the war, I left High Street to open up Bakers' Arms showrooms, then I went into the Air Force in 1942.' Up till 1942,

he had been classed as being in a 'reserved occupation' *'that was a farce! I can understand why engineers and fitters were reserved occupations, but not showroom people - it was nonsense. The supply of appliances began to dry up PDQ at the beginning of the War. I remember going into some place in Walthamstow - they wanted to send me down the mines. Materials were required for armaments. There was nothing to sell, after a very short while; but still plenty of enquiries about accounts and so on.'*

The showroom was in two parts, the entrance and the main showroom, then down a flight of steps to the lower showroom and cashier. The second part was part office and part tea room. There probably wasn't a ladies' toilet.

All the stock was displayed. Lea Bridge was the main stores from which stock was drawn, until after Nationalisation, when Stratford became the main depot. Delivery to the customer was always arranged by the showroom who *'would make up a job ticket. That would go down to Works, they'd make up another batch of papers, and one would go to the stores with the name and address of the customer and the delivery date'*. The Company also had its own garage and fleet of vans at Lea Bridge which ferried the appliance to the consumer/customers' houses.

Most of the Borough of Leyton was supplied by the Gas Light and Coke Company: areas adjoining one another, but not in competition, *'we had strictly defined limits Sometimes if we did sell anything by mistake, if it were a borderline case, for instance, then we would pass all the papers over to the Gas Light and Coke Company, purely as a matter of courtesy,'* and the latter would follow up from there, and vice versa.

Mr Cable was in the Air Force for four years, and finished as a Flight Lieutenant Equipment Officer. On demob in '46 he had six weeks' leave from the Air Force he went over to Dublin for a fortnight's holiday, came back and straight to High Street showrooms, succeeding Percy Bushell who had been exempt on health grounds. Supplies gradually built up again.

North Thames systems were much more involved than those of Lea Bridge, and it took a while to reorientate one's ideas. He found no problems with the workforce at Nationalisation, *'it was duck or no dinner, my dear, it was a government edict, a fait accompli. One or two of us, including myself, frankly we didn't like the idea of loss of identity ... He was there for some years, then quite frankly, I got absolutely fed up with showroom work ... I loathed the idea of working all day Saturdays .. then I went on the district as a representative. I started at Lea Bridge under training, then I went to Ilford, Forest Gate, etc Then I went to Stoke Newington as the Clean Air Representative; from there, Camden Town three years, as senior rep. Retired about six weeks after sixtieth birthday.'*

Work as a rental clerk entailed entering up into *'huge, great rental books, as we called them, the ledgers from the meter readers' sheets, working it all out and preparing the account ready to go out.'* The man in charge of the rental department was a good friend of Mr Cable's, Hector Hardcastle. Two other colleagues were Walter Le Creme, also a good friend, and Stanley Hand. Stanley Hand's father was Company Secretary, who retired just before the War. He started to write a history of the Lea Bridge Gas Works, but unfortunately he died. The person immediately under him was Albert King, who was also a friend. *'Before we moved to Lea Bridge',* a Mr Norman Davis joined as a chartered accountant, and when Hand retired, Davis took his job, and became local manager at Lea Bridge.

On office mechanisation, Mr Cable became Complaints Clerk. He had to *'transcribe them and make out the necessary forms for fitters and inspectors'*. The department dealt with much more than complaints, indeed *'every aspect of enquiries on the commercial side, not the gas distribution side'*. These were quite separate, but interlocked, and people were very conscious of 'The Great Divide'.

Mr Cable was responsible for selling *'the bulk of the 250 tarted up old cookers, [which] the powers thought should be sold for £2-£3 a time'*. This launched his sales career. Gas cookers were not made by the Gas Company, but by specialist manufactures, Radiation, Mains, Flavel, so the Gas Company was the middle man.

The High Street showrooms were set up before 1928, and Mr Cable spent about eighteen years there as number two, from the early '30s or late '20s. *'There was a negligible lighting trade, though they did a roaring trade in gas mantels and gas brackets, but it petered out. Fitters were run from Lea Bridge Road, not the showroom.'*

Showroom work hours were basically 9-7, 9-5.15 after Nationalisation. The showroom closed for lunch 1-2. The 'extra' quarter of an hour over and beyond the 9-5 was compensated for by giving staff a day off per month. The High Street showroom was staffed by a manager, two cashiers, three or four assistants, at the Bakers Arms it was just Mr Cable and an assistant, and they worked a schedule 38 hour week.

In the late 1930s Mr Cable earned about £250 pa, when he returned from the Air Force, it was £480 pa, owing to promotion, and a general salary rate increase. The Air Force salary was about £800 plus £100 wife allowance. But Lea Bridge gave his wife £100 pa during his Air Force service. Lea Bridge wages and salaries weren't as good as those at Gas Light and Coke, Mr Cable earned about £100 less pa than he would have done at Gas Light and Coke. Nevertheless, *'I fought very hard to achieve parity with comparable showrooms, and over 2-3 years, he achieved it, by fighting jolly hard, and fighting dear old Cleave Cross. Tremendous amount of admiration for him, but of course in those days, if they could penny pinch, they would. There was no NALGO or Union until Nationalisation, really, it was the British Gas Staff Association but quite frankly it was pretty useless.'* He paid a monthly subscription but the Association *'lacked muscle'*. There was no internal organisation to support him in his endeavours to get better salaries. His campaign was *'on my Jack; I tried to enlist the support of the Gas Staff Association but they were quite hopeless. Oh no, I paddled my own canoe'*. Jobs were scarce, though, so his negotiating position was not good, *'If you had a job, you more or less clung to it with both hands and your eyebrows, my dear.'*

Mr Cable spent a lot of time in a makeshift office several days a month, doing administration, stock, records, the rest of the time he was on the shop floor. *'There were very few comebacks because I was reasonably good at my job'*, but if he was away sick, *'it was a nightmare coming back'*. Mr Cable regarded himself as a good, caring manager. There was far more discipline then, *'and rightly so'*; he made a point of knowing staff well, their backgrounds and personal problems, families etc - the family aspect was very important in Lea Bridge. Len Cable's father had been draughtsman there (and is referred to elsewhere as 'Pa Cable'). Pa Cable worked at Lea Bridge for about thirty years. He was Clerk of Works at different places around the country though, before joining Lea Bridge. He drew the plans for gasholders, etc, and worked closely with other men, for example with Doug Roberts (see above).

The only female interviewee was Miss Barnes, who worked in the Accounts department from September 1929 until 1967, a total of twenty-seven years. Before then, there had never been women in Accounts. When she was employed, they were putting machines in,

and that was women's work, though men were in charge of the department. Before machines, big hand ledgers were used, and these were done by men. In November they were sent to another office to learn accounting machines. There was a trial period of a month, then she started properly in January 1930. They were using Burroughs machines, special gas accounting machines.

The Secretary of the Company was Mr N H Davis, and there was much direct contact with him, his office was just round the corner. He was well liked. They used a colour coding system for enquiries - Mr Davis brought in this system, it was more efficient than the previous one. Mr Davis dealt largely with Accounts, though there was a manager for the General office, too *'I suppose they would have been on a par, Mr Draper was in charge of the General Office.'* Each had their own typist/secretary. Mr D C Cross was Manager, and D C Cross's father had just retired when Miss Barnes started, and kept popping, and she found them *'all very nice people.'* Although Miss Barnes got on well with D C Cross, the interviewer mentions that other people found him *'extremely difficult at times'*. Miss Barnes refused to be drawn on this one. She was of the view, too, that the Company was very advanced in its accounting methods. The staff posed for a publicity photograph for Burroughs advertising material.

Once the meter reader had finished reading, we'd finished billing, then there were two or three days aside for balancing at the end of each month. When War came, they went over to three month balancing. Miss Barnes became head of the office during the War, but had to give up and let men come back afterwards. Miss Barnes agrees with the interviewer that *it was mean.*

Miss Barnes didn't find the work dull, she was operating three different systems, a month on and a month off. It was cash machines and checking to start with. People didn't stay on one job indefinitely, because it was a strain to keep the same type of work going. The hours were originally 8.45 to 5.15, with fifteen minutes break in the morning and the afternoon, taken in the last few years not in the canteen but in the office, and work began at nine o'clock rather than 8.45. The accounts staff worked Saturday mornings, first one in three, then after the War, Saturday working stopped altogether. The lunch break was then shortened, and the working day ended at 5.00 rather than 5.15. They were not required to do overtime to balance, *'I stuck out for that'* but every four years or so, when doing new sheets, each person did several hours' overtime for two or three weeks. Staff didn't do overtime *'because we got the work done.'* There was more overtime after the War, because it *'got more confusing.'*

Miss Barnes fought through the Union to get office windows - after the War it was NALGO, in the beginning, there was no Union, and *of course, we were very poorly paid, really.* They couldn't join NALGO till Nationalisation, *'but it was the Institute of ... something to do with gas employees, and as soon as we joined that, the wages started going up - towards the end of the War.'* Miss Barnes got £1 a week, and a rise of 2/6 a year?

## Nationalisation

After the War conditions changed little until the Nationalisation of the gas industry in 1954. Lea Bridge was acknowledged as more efficient than the Gas Light and Coke Company, but because it was one of the smaller companies, "Gas Light" systems were installed instead of Lea Bridge ones; they used different accounts systems, for example and that's when it was felt that things started going wrong. The atmosphere and people changed, because the Manager and Secretary were *"moved on, or moved out, and we were controlled from Ilford, where the Gas Light offices were"*.



Miss Barnes remembers Len Cable and Len Cable's father. She remembers Mr Cable Senior as a *'funny old man,'* he was the Company draughtsman. There was family continuity of employment, but more with men than women, because women had to leave if they married. This changed during the War because of the labour shortage. More women came into the General Office during the War, all women bar about three. Family tradition to follow into the firm was stronger on the shop floor than on the office side. Mr White was Manager of Accounts, and he came back to the same job after the War , though *'I had to prod him quite a lot of times;'* and this meant more responsibility for Miss Barnes. She respected Mr Davis more than Mr White. Mr Le Creme wasn't *'one to assert his authority at all.'* He wasn't allowed to go to War. Miss Barnes was one of the first women managers.

According to Harry Holbrook, Nationalisation *'made people's lives a misery'* because of regimentation. It made a difference to the job only after a time it seemed not to have any fun in it any more. Before Nationalisation, he felt independent and known personally. The atmosphere changed . Michael Harris recalls that Nationalisation changed his job to the extent that *'work study came round with to check our time, how long it took to do different jobs and one thing and another ... they were going to work out a bonus scheme, but it never materialised.'* Although he professed loyalty to the old firm, he said he felt *not a terrible lot really,* upon Nationalisation, *'I mean, Lea Bridge wasn't the same after Nationalisation. Fitters didn't seem to take that interest so much.'* Mr Snell recalled that before Nationalisation, *'there was one foreman with so many fitters, and one senior foreman over the lot. With Nationalisation, it was one foreman had to have an assistant, then they had to have a chargehand. Instead of one foreman doing the job all the lot, it became that the foreman had a chargehand, and a clerk, and I thought then, it was taking three men to do one man's job .. then the office staff, of course, there was more and more office staff, more and more paperwork, then everything became one ...'*

John Bromhead recalls the winding up of the Co-Partnership Scheme: *'each co-partner was allowed five years' average allocation, then it closed. You were then either entitled to serial stock ... and sell it together with your uninvested amount of money, and the dividend interest paid out in lump sum. It was paid by the Board. You were given the option of having stock in your own name, or drawing it out in a cash cheque. Half the silly so and sos had the stock transferred to them ... the nominal value was £302 something capital ... at the present moment it's worth about 37%'* Other companies, such as Hornsey and the North Middlesex, had similar schemes.

Transcript of Interview with D C Cross, Managing Director of Lea Bridge Gas Works.  
Aged about 92 when interviewed in 1978.

*Mr A N Paten apprenticed my father. It was Mr Paten's father then appointed my father. Then before I began in the Company, in 1903, he retired or died, and his son, Mr A N Paten, became Chairman, and was Chairman right through. He was chairman of about five different companies in and around London and he was on the Board of the Commercial Gas Co. He treated us very well, and he had a great respect for my father, and as I became manager and assistant engineer, then as he was getting on, my father was nearly to retirement, they offered him retirement and to be a member of the Board. And I had to take over. But my father said, I think, I hadn't had quite sufficient experience to take over completely, because he thought he ought to have been supervised, under supervision, for a couple of years, and then join the Board.*

*Well, it went for about four years, this ... I wasn't in complete control, although he only came down two mornings a week – he didn't do much – he was officially General Manager. Then one of the Directors came on to me, they said, you're being restricted by your father, you're not able to do thing on your own, why doesn't he come and join the Board and give it all up? And my father said, "I can't ask to join the Board, I'm waiting for Mr Paten to ask me again and say, could I join the Board, see?" They said, well, this Director, Mr Burton, said, Mr Paten has got so much respect for your father, he's not going to ask him to retire, he's just waiting for him. So I went straight away that same night to see my father, and I said, they're waiting for you to retire and come onto the Board. Oh, he said, I'm waiting for them to ask me! And with that, he immediately sat down and wrote and told Mr Paten that I was willing to take on the Engineer and General Manager's job, and so I did, and he went onto the Board until he died.*

*Amazing because after about ten years, the Works were out of date – too small – so he, soon after father took over, he started building a new Works and then that began to get too small, then between us we did a second Works, and then after he retired I had to build a third Works which I was completely responsible for. The same premises, just extended each time going out a little further*

### *The Second Works 1915*

*Yes, you see, new vertical retorts, that was a north country system of manufacturing gas and no company in London or around London had taken on vertical retorts. And father was very keen on it, see, and I was modern, and I was keen on that type of manufacturing retorts, and he had to persuade Paten, all his Works, the Gas Light and Coke Company, they wouldn't touch vertical retorts, and they were horizontal works, and they had, Beckton had fifteen huge retort houses, they wouldn't take on this new system.*

*The vertical retorts were not completely successful to start with – teething troubles. We were very keen to adopt them, and we hadn't got any horizontal then, we'd got the inclines, but these inclines were out of date, and there were no inclines on any London Works, we were quite unique in the incline retorts. So the Board said to father, Mr Paten said, I'll pass this, and give you leave to build those vertical retorts, but your job will depend on it. If it's a complete failure, I'm afraid you've had it. Because we don't believe in the vertical retorts, and none of my ... Gas Light and Coke Company, he was very much in touch with them, who were all horizontal people, he said, it's on your head, go ahead, if you recommend 'em, but we don't approve of 'em. And we had tremendous trouble to start with, they played us up.*

*Yes, the flow of coal wasn't ... the coke was hanging up and ... the retorts ... the flow of coke didn't go down, it had to be poked up from the bottom a tremendous lot. And the retorts failed, they had to be renewed rather quickly, but we had most marvellous foreman who stuck at it and we made them work, and in the end they were making gas cheaper than horizontal, and took up a very much smaller space. That was it, see ...*

*By the time father retired, they were working reasonably well. Then when I had the job of making the new Works, I decided to go on for these vertical retorts, as it was my responsibility, as Works Manager, I had to get them to work, see? And I corrected the faults of these retorts, and I persuaded the Board to let me put up another set of retorts, a much easier task than when he had undertaken his first major innovations, because by then we were making gas cheaper than the Gas Light and Coke Co or any other gas company in London, we were the cheapest, Walthamstow was the cheapest price of gas in the whole of London. I knew what the problems were, I'd studied this very carefully from other experiences from other Works around London and round England and I made a lot of alterations to the system ... we were probably working the vertical retorts better than any other part of England.*

What modifications were required to stop the coke sticking up?

*Buying the proper coal. It took a different class coal to the horizontal retorts, horizontal retorts took Northumberland coal, a mixture of dust and coal; whereas I only had nuts, you see, I adopted nuts, and that worked all right, you see, and we got into a system where the new retorts worked splendidly, and I increased them. We only put up four to start with, and before I'd finished I'd increased it to six, and we were increasing all the time. The gas had to be purified and between us we built three sets of purifiers. And then in the end I had one of the most modern Works in the country.*

*When we were taken over by the Gas Light and Coke Company, they offered me retirement at sixty-two years of age. I said, No, I've got a boy at Arundel, and I couldn't afford to keep him at public school on a retirement rate, so I said, I want to go on until I'm sixty-five, you see. And I'd trained assistants, Lea Bridge was looked upon as one of the best training gas works' in the country. Therefore I had some brilliant young assistants, and they all got manager's jobs, and when we were Nationalised, the assistant I had didn't want to work under the Gas Light, he another job up at Nottingham. And he finished up, a brilliant young feller, finished up with a salary when he retired, about four times more than I got! The Gas Light, when I wanted an assistant, they sent me down their man that they'd got standing by to be their Chief Engineer, to act as assistant to me, and he was only with me six months when he went back to the Gas Light as Chief Engineer, and that feller has told me several times – he's died now – he told me several times that the uniqueness of the gas works at Lea Bridge, he learned more there, than he had learnt ... and this was the most wonderful six months of his career.*

*With father and son working together in that way, and we had the full control of the Board, always, the sympathy of the Board, they never queried anything either of us did, they accepted everything that I recommended, you see, with the result, we finished up making the cheapest gas in the whole of London. It was an efficient Works.*

*About the time D C Cross joined [c1907?] the staff of Lea Bridge Gas Works, the Walthamstow Borough Gas Board had set up their own electricity generating station. The Works used to be by Hoe Street Station, Mr Cross recalls that there was very severe competition with them, and I was up against a very severe problem, because we got, we had 85-90% of all the cooking load, of Walthamstow and Highams Park. But the Council came along - we were only using black cookers – and the Council came along offering*

*beautiful enamelled cookers at a very cheap rate, at a practically free charge, and any houses they built they would only put in electricity, and I was up against this very, very, strict competition with cooking.*

*Well then, I got over it temporarily by finding a firm that would - I took these gas cookers to pieces, brought them in, and sent them away to be enamelled. Therefore we put enamelled cookers in, but they were the old black type that had no insulation - they were just simply black cookers, whereas all the cookers that you could buy were all insulated, like the modern cookers.*

*Therefore, while I stopped the rot, I wasn't up to date, and then, eventually, I had to change over, and bought a cheap insulated cooker and fitted that, and when I got these old enamelled ones back I just put them on the scrap heap and broke them up. This was after the First World War, between the two wars.*

*I was never connected with the Metropolitan Water Board. It was artesian wells, from the day I started right till I retired; there was always though a sealed connection, if my well failed or anything, the engine failed or well went dry, I could break the seal and I'd take the water and have to pay the water rate. See , I had very cheap water. I see by my notes, I started with only forty feet of water when father first went there, and in the end we were down to 370, so it was a basin, so many people taking water out by artesian*

*Before World War One, gas was used more for lighting and not for heating or cooking and the metering system was on the basis of how many lights the householder possessed. When father first went there, and took over, we did a tremendous amount of lighting. Warners built nearly half the houses in Walthamstow, didn't they. They adopted gas, and Warners had gas lighting, so we had in the beginning the dominance of gas lighting. Electricity of course became the thing to have in lighting, though my period of control, I didn't worry about gas lighting. I just simply went for gas fires, refrigerators, by the time I retired, we'd got back to 90% of the cooking. Then I think Walthamstow gave up their electricity, didn't they?*

### **The Third Works**

*The lighting at the Lea Bridge Gas Works itself was gas, until the building of the Third Works 'then I put in an electric generator to help us with the retort house, and several years later I joined up with the Leyton electricity people and connected with them so if we failed, I could take electricity; after that, I adopted electric lighting once I'd got my own generator in. Ours was direct current, not alternative current.*

*We were making cheap gas because we were very fortunate in the increase of population of Walthamstow, Leyton and Highams Park and increase in output of gas so phenomenal that I was able to modernise all the time. If we'd been stuck, like my father's First Works, like that, we shouldn't have made so much cheap gas.*

*Cross and his team learned from the experience of other Works, and adapted their techniques to the particular circumstances of Lea Bridge. For years we didn't have electricity until we made our own – didn't adopt the modern methods of working. I improvised and put in my own. Father put in a hydraulic machine. In the incline retort house, all the coal had to be taken to the top there. Instead of putting in electric lifts we put these hydraulic lifts in, you see, and they were used for moving coal trucks – everything was hydraulic instead of electric. Hydraulics were done by a steam engine, using our own coke, for making steam.*

*Then the water gas plant, I had a method for dealing with coke. I had a tamper system going all the way around the Works – we were putting in our own modern ideas all the way through, I wasn't adopting common practice; I'd crib ideas and learn from other people's failures; we had no research works or anything like that, like the gas company had Watson House, and all that.*

*My father, the last thing he did was to build a new gasometer. Then I put in a drying ... we dried the gas ... made the ingredients for TNT, explosives, and I put my own sulphate of ammonia plant in. They all made profits. I worked with a minimum of staff. I just had one assistant, and one draughtsman, a very clever man, and I was very, very, fortunate in getting such good assistants, men who became general manager of other Works after leaving me. I suppose they lived on my knowledge.*

*We went through World War One – it didn't interfere with the increase of gas at all. It slowed up my father building his Second Works, but when the war was over, we'd got the Second Works built. Then, before the Second World War, I built my Third Works, I had the advantage of cheap materials. I never had to spend high money on plant. The vertical retorts were made by West's of Manchester, West's put them in, they thought I was rather finicky. We were always building, always expanding. I never got caught up, always ahead.*

## Industrial and Community Relations

*We had the [1926 General] Strike at our Works, but we'd got a very big stock of coal ... and bits of surplus up my sleeves ... we never put in what the actual stock of coal was, and as a result, when other gas works ran out of coal, we never ran out at all. I was never allowed ever to build up that little bit of surplus again. The Directors, they called me in, they said, you shouldn't do that again, you made false reports, returns, you see. I used to say that I'd used a little more coal than I actually did. It affected our results, but at any rate we were sufficiently efficient never to have our results to be criticised compared to any other Works that the Directors saw. We were more efficient in fact than we claimed to be.*

*Another great point in my life that I was thankful for, and that is, I never had any Union trouble. I never recognised any Union. I found out that some of the men had joined the Union and there was a Shop Steward. It was the General Union of Transport Workers, and the shop steward they had for the Works was an exceptional man of common sense, and if there was the least bit of difficulty, he used to come and talk to me, and put the difficulty – well if it was something I could get over, I used to do it, you see.*

*I'll tell you a little bit of a story, if you don't mind. During the Second World War we had German prisoners came and worked on the Works, and I utilised them for changing [privet?] fires which is a dirty, filthy dirty, job and I used to get them to do it. They took their time over it; they didn't do it as quickly as our men, but I got hold of the German people once, at one time, and I said, you see, we weren't allowed to pay them, they were just simply sent to use without payment and I said, I'll give you all a bonus if you do this at a very much faster time. The Germans thought there was a catch in it, see, and they wouldn't at first agree, but apparently they consulted the shop steward of the Works, the Union Shop Steward, and asked his advice, and he said, if the Guv'nor has offered you that money – he's never done anything to cheat anybody – you accept it, he's never done anything in any way, cutting anybody down, he's always given everybody a fair bonus. Now you accept that and I can tell you, if he's offered that to you, it's a fair price. And they accepted it. I took advantage of snooping, I used to ride round to the Gas Light and Coke*

*Company to find out what rates they were paying, the Union rates they were paying the men for different jobs and I gave them the Union rate, so they never had any reason to complain that they weren't getting the correct money for the job.*

*Now that was the spirit of the Works. Well of course when I joined the gas Light and Coke Company or when they were taken over, of course the gas Light and Coke Company were very much in the Union ... but I never had any Union trouble from the time I joined to the time ... forty-nine years, which was amazing, wasn't it?*

Why was the Welfare Institute built in the 1930s?

*That was from the social point of view, we built them a dance floor, billiard room with billiard table there, and gave them subsidised dinners, very well patronised, staff used to go up in the billiard rooms a lot, the men didn't mostly for the staff. And also, I should say, 70% of the staff had their meal in this Institute.*

Did you provide any housing?

*Never did anything like that at all.*

What were your relations like with the people who lived in Clementina Road, and the streets around? Did they ever complain?

*Never had a complaint. I used to make certain never to put any plant anywhere near them. I built workshops, or things like workshops, next to the walls of the ... nothing that made any smoke or smell or anything. Works all along the road, I just simply had a long workshop.*

*Fleming Road, there, I had the opportunity of buying a piece of land there, quite a big piece of land, which we used as a sports ground, and they used to have football and cricket there, and they built a bowling green on another side to the houses. So it was sports ground, bowling green, workshops, nothing in any way offensive to the population. Now the bowling green, you see, actually it was seeded, not turfed, and we actually got into a national magazine once as an ideal bowling green, and there was this foreman, marvellous foreman, he had wonderful control over the men ...*

*I tell you another thing I did which added to the efficiency of the Works: I engaged every man myself. I never allowed the foreman or anybody else to engage a man, right from the time I became assistant to my father. I engaged the men myself. Therefore, I was running a cricket and a football team, and I engaged footballers and cricketers, in one case in the cricket, I had a Lancashire County player who had fallen out with Lancashire County, and I engaged him, and with his help, when a matting wicket, before the War, when a matting wicket came in, we were playing at Lords in the final.*

*And I had several footballers pinched by professional clubs, they were so good. You see, there was always that spirit, instead of thinking of their own problems and all that, they were thinking of sport all the time. I can remember I put them on the incline retort house painting the roof ceiling there. I can remember so well going in there, the whole lot of them singing at the top of their voices ... there was a spirit there ... selected men, or men who were recommended to me .. when we were taken over by the Gas Light, quite a number of the men were given senior jobs by the Gas Light and Coke Company, they found they were so good and efficient.*

What sort of qualities did you look for in your men?

*They were recommended. I never went to the Labour Exchange; people were sent because they were jolly good footballers or cricketers, and just on my own judgement. Decent type of man, and not a drunken old gas worker. I had a superior type of man. Harford, foreman, if a man was shirking, he'd let him have good old cockney language, and he used to tell him off. He used to know exactly what a man could do, and he did it ...*

*I never went to the Board except for any large plant, you see, retort house plant ... I had to get authority to spend an amount of money, otherwise I simply gave the order to get on with it. I got picked men for these jobs. They did it so much cheaper than outside people.*

Were there any particular 'characters' from the Works?

*Man named Davy ... only trouble I had with men in my life ... there was a very, very good works fitter. One day, he was doing a job, I just made, as a joke, I jut pulled his leg, see, and foreman came in to me the next day, this man had asked for his cards to leave – name of Goldsten. I sent for the fitter and said, what's this mean, that you want to leave? And he said, you pulled my leg on certain things, and he said, you've never done that in your life before, I rather took offence at it, I thought you were meaning it ... that taught me a lesson, and I never pulled anyone else's leg, and we were just simply, just pals ... oh, I buttered him up, and he stayed on for years, until he died ... I never pulled anyone else's leg, and never swore at a man, never swore at a man in my life ... all the best of friends, men said, it was the happiest Works they'd ever worked in. They were picked men, you see, not troublesome*

...

*During the Second War we got damage – gas holder completely wrecked, another one, an incendiary bomb on a very tall gasometer, set a hole about three inches diameter and the gas caught alight and there was a huge flame, and I went up, climbed up to the top of the holder, it's the middle of the night. I got on top to see what we could do. I took one of my good fitters, and this flame lit up the whole Works, an enemy plane circling round all the time, and I was on the top of this holder, expecting something else to drop, it was one of the worst times I have ever experienced. This man, we'd got sandbags up there – then he managed to put an iron plate there and sandbag it down and stow the flame ... I was scared stiff being up on top of this, with this plane circling round, expecting another one down there.*

## PART THREE

### History, geography and topography

#### Definition of geographical area

The Gateway area is in north west Leyton. It comprises part of the ancient parishes of both Leyton and Walthamstow. The current boundary runs West/East from the River Lea, across the industrial estates to North of Lea Bridge Road, crossing Dagenham Brook and meeting Markhouse Road opposite Boundary Road. The area is virtually identical with the present Emmanuel Parish boundary with the addition of Markmanor Avenue, Verulam Road, Samantha Road, that part of Markhouse Road, to the north west, and Marconi road, Marsh Lane, three small roads, and Ive Farm Lane, and that part of Church Road, to the south east. The Gateway area comprises parts of Walthamstow, Low Hall and Mark manors. The manor of Mark in Leyton and Walthamstow, which probably originated in about 1224, lay on both sides of the parish boundary or 'mearch' between the common marsh and Hoe Street.

#### Topography

Leyton rises from the marshland of the Lea valley to over 100ft at Whipps Cross. Between the alluvial marshes and the forest are terraces of valley gravel overlying brick earth. Three principal watercourses run through the parish as a whole, but the one affecting the Gateway area is the Dagenham Brook which flows from Higham Hill in Walthamstow and divides marsh from upland. North of Marsh Lane it was joined by a tributary, the Shortlands Sewer, also flowing from Walthamstow, but further to the West. This formed the boundary between the inclosed marsh and lammass lands and is now incorporated in the flood relief channel flowing directly to the Lea.

The first definite record of settlement is found in the Domesday Book. Settlement was mainly in the centre and south of Leyton at 'Laduna' (Hollywell, now Holloway Down). In the fourteenth century there is a record of a hamlet at 'Leyton atte Stone'. After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Leyton became a fashionable country place where Londoners built country mansions surrounded by parkland but it is not until the eighteenth century that the parish is shown on detailed maps for the first time. By then, Wallwood and Whitings Grove, principal woodlands in Leyton, had already been cleared. The Gateway area, however, was still marshland until the 1860s.

### The Ancient Manors

#### Leyton

In 1086 most of the manor of Leyton belonged to Robert son of Corbutio. In 1599 it was in the possession of Oliver Cromwell who first leased it as "Leyton Grange" to Edward Ryder, a London haberdasher, for twenty years, to 1619. The manor was split up, sold and leased in parcels to various local families. Sometime after 1783 the manor was consolidated again in the ownership of the Pardoe family who were still lords of the manor in 1966. From 1783 John Pardoe's red brick house on the north side of Capworth Street, with grounds stretching back to Lea Bridge Road, became Leyton Manor House. It may have been built to replace an older one in about 1758 by Anthony Andre. It burned down in 1884

#### Walthamstow

The families who owned most of Walthamstow Manor were de Tony, Ros and Maynard. In 1639 Charles Maynard, auditor of the Exchequer bought the manor, which remained part of the holdings of that family until the death of Lady Warwick in 1938. Lady Warwick's



Field is mentioned by a number of people in their oral testimony, as a piece of rough land in our area, on the west side of Lea Bridge Road.

## Low Hall

Low Hall manor, part of which falls within the boundary of the gateway project, was also a holding of the Earls of Warwick from the fourteenth century until 1550 when the tenant, Ralph Sadler was granted Low Hall at a rent of £10. In 1560 Sadler sold the manor to Thomas Argall and his wife Margaret and it remained in the Argall family until the early eighteenth century when it was sold to Samuel Bosanquet whose family still held it in 1926.

## The manor of Mark

In the late fifteenth century both the manor house and the entire manor were called Mark House, because it was at Mark House that one of its boundary posts was set up. The manor was owned by St Helen's Priory, Bishopsgate; from 1544 to 1637 by the Withypool and Lytham families. In 1637 the estate appears to have been broken up and sold, but in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century the manor was in the ownership of the Gansell family who sold it with the manor of Leyton. to John Pardoe in 1783.

Mark House itself which existed in 1524 at least, stood astride the boundary on the west side of Markhouse Road near present day Markmanor Avenue. In 1649 it was sold separately from the manor to Thomas Rose. In the early eighteenth century the house belonged to Samuel Winder, and by the late eighteenth century it was an old and dilapidated brick farmhouse. By 1775 the half of it in Leyton had fallen down. In 1803 Hibbert House was built on land adjoining the field in which the ruined manor house lay.

The "Gateway" regeneration area is in north west Leyton – **see map**. It comprises parts of the ancient parishes of Leyton and Walthamstow. Leyton rises from the marshland of the Lea valley to over 100ft at Whipps Cross. Between the alluvial marshes and the forest are terraces of valley gravel overlying brick earth. Three principal watercourses run through the parish as a whole, but the one affecting the "Gateway" area is the Dagenham Brook which flows from Higham Hill in Walthamstow and divides marsh from upland. North of Marsh Lane I as joined by a tributary, the Shortlands Sewer, also flowing from Walthamstow, but further to the west. This formed the boundary between the inclosed marsh and lammas lands and is now incorporated in the flood relief channel flowing directly to the Lea – **see map**.

## Historical development of Leyton

- Domesday Book records settlement, mainly in the centre and south of Leyton at "Laduna" (Hollywell, now Holloway Down).
- By the fourteenth century, there is a hamlet at "Leyton atte Stone".
- After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Leyton became a fashionable country place where wealthy Londoners built mansions surrounded by parkland.

In the eighteenth century the parish is shown on detailed maps for the first time.

### 1. Livelihoods

#### Agriculture and Horticulture

After 1066 the value of manors increased, owing to forest clearance, only a small part of the newly-cleared land in Walthamstow manor being farmed as open field. By 1699, there were three open arable fields totalling 215 acres. They were Higham Hill common (104 acres), Buryfield, known as Church Common (27 acres) and the area which lay east of Markhouse Lane on the Leyton boundary named in 1369 as Markdown, and later known

as Broomfield or Markhouse Common (84 acres). They all survived to the mid nineteenth century. In 1599 the manor of Leyton was said to contain 200 acres of arable, 260 acres of meadow and 420 acres of pasture, totalling 880 acres.

Leyton's produce helped supply London. In 1387 the chancellor Thomas Arundel had the parish assigned to him for his 'livery', because he owned no lordships or towns nearby, in 1401 it was held for life by the king's son, Thomas, and by 1612 it was stated that market people travelled across the Leyton marshes four days a week to London via Lockbridge and Hackney (see page ten below).

In 1775 there were three nurserymen and eight market gardeners, in 1796 nurseries occupied twenty-five acres, and 200 arable acres were usually cropped with potatoes. By 1843 when private gardens occupied 148 acres in the parish, most of the larger householders also owned many acres of meadow land beyond their grounds. However, in the south and east of the parish, arable still predominated but grassland gradually increased here - Ruckholt, Warren, Wallwood farms - until, by 1843, there were 912 acres of grass: 605 acres arable.

This was the heyday of horticulture and market gardening. In 1839 potatoes, turnips, green peas, green clover, and tares were being grown for London consumption and as green manure crops and all the marshland and two-thirds of the upland grass were being mown, sometimes twice, for hay. A watercress grower is mentioned in 1863 and 1882. The Holloway Down nursery was sold to the Victoria Land and Settlement Company (see page twenty-five below, "housing") Pamplin's nursery at Black Marsh Farm, Lea Bridge was given up soon after 1870. Finlay Fraser's nursery, Lea Bridge Road, and the American nursery of Protheroe and Morris in Leytonstone High Road flourished until the early 1890s.

Wallwood, Ruckholt, and Warren farms were the main farms in Leyton - in 1843, Ruckholt Farm, with Warren comprised over 200 acres, Wallwood Farm over 100 acres, and seven others between 40 acres and 70 acres. As farms were sold for suburban development, cow keepers replaced farmers, supplying milk to the new population. One was listed in 1870, two in 1872, and by 1882 there were fourteen. By 1905 the numbers were reduced to a handful. Only one cow keeper was listed in Walthamstow from 1839 to 1859. The heyday for cow keeping and dairying was between 1866 and 1906 some when 46 dairymen were listed, three of them being cow keepers, but by 1912 number had dropped off dramatically to a single cow keeper, as the acreage available for pasturing the beasts declined.

John Hitchman and Sons is a good example of the trend. In the mid nineteenth century he leased and later bought Wadham Lodge farm. In the 1880s he began retailing milk, and from 1886 also leased Clay Street or Chestnuts farm. In 1918 the firm of John Hitchman and Sons, dairymen and cow keepers, was bought out by D A Davies, a partner in the firm of Davies and Williams in Walthamstow since the early nineteenth century. The firms were amalgamated as Hitchman's Dairies Ltd, based on Green Pond farm, Higham Hill Road, where cows were still being kept in 1926. In 1938 a large modern dairy for processing milk was opened on Walthamstow Avenue. In 1968, Hitchman's, a member of the Unigate group, had branch dairies in South Chingford, Walthamstow and Leytonstone.

Charles Burrell is also notable for his farming and business abilities. He was a cattle and sheep salesman supplying Smithfield Market, who farmed Low Hall's 228 acres from at least 1837 until 1863. Burrell was the second largest farmer/businessman in the area, second only to Francis Wragg the owner of the coaching business who farmed 312 acres which included Clay Street and the Elms Farms. Burrell equipped Low Hall farm with a

bullock house, cattle yards, pounds for sorting sheep and stock, and a slaughterhouse. The land itself, however, belonged to Samuel Bosanquet whose agent considered that the farm's proximity to London increased its value to Burrell by 50%, and that his rent of £2 10/- an acre could not possibly have been met from common farm produce.

A far sighted local board bought Low Hall in 1875-7 for sewage disposal purposes; and later the district council farmed it profitably for many years, mainly with cash crops. There were watercress beds at Low Hall in the late nineteenth century, but by 1907 the area required for filtration had grown until only 36 acres remained for cropping. Even by the late nineteenth century there were hop fields near Boundary Road.

## Trade and Manufacturing

In 1278 the Templars had a water mill in Leyton which was later used for milling other products, for example powder, leather, rape seed, smalt, the manufacture of brass kettles and tin and latten plates, sheet lead - the latter still in operation in 1814. Therefore there was continuous milling use in the area from 1278, falling into disuse in the nineteenth century, with some periods of non use. In 1835 the Leyton premises were acquired by the East London Waterworks Company. The mills, which were principally of wood, spanned the stream adjoining The White Hart in Hackney, and were pulled down in 1854.

From the seventeenth century in Ruckholt Manor and Walthamstow Slip, brick earth was dug under the manorial house. Brewhouses existed in Leytonstone and also, later, in Leyton. Temple Mills seems to have been the first industrial development area.

From the eighteenth century Leyton's wealthy residents employed so many servants and small tradesmen that the church couldn't hold them all. In 1811 the families supported by trade, manufacture or handicraft exceeded in number those supported by agriculture. This is in advance of the national statistics, which didn't reach a 50/50 mark until 1851 according to the census of that year. In 1831 servants formed 11% of the population.

## Industry

The growing local industry at that time was the building trade, absorbing 10% of Leyton's occupied males by 1891, in the building boom of speculative housing by the big land companies. Although no "obnoxious trades" ever got a hold in Leyton, and in 1879 no factory of any size existed, modern industry has developed here especially in the Lea Bridge Road and Church Road areas and in the neighbourhood of the two High Roads, often occupying disused buildings, like mission halls and schools, and the National Schools in Leyton High Road.

By 1902 four factories employed more than forty 'hands'. These were E.R. Alexander and Sons, printers; A.G. Martin, bootmaker; Shenstone and Company Ltd., piano makers; London Electric Wire Company. A small, early firm, R Spurden Rutt, built organs. The development of the gas industry in our area is well documented in the oral archive. In 1932 there were still comparatively few factories but the manufacture of clothing, the engineering trade and toolmaking, and the manufacture of packaging materials and soft drinks had all spread. By 1957 over twenty firms were in clothing production.

As a result of the increase in local industry 1921-51, the number of people working in Leyton increased by 40% even though the occupied resident population declined. The Temple Mills marshalling yards, dry cleaning and laundry, and motor vehicle services had all grown. By 1961 more workers were employed in service industry than on production. Some people worked away from the area, many worked quite locally, and married women were often home workers.

After 1934, industrial settlement was encouraged in the southwest of the borough by the Council's promotion of Lea Bridge factory estate at Low Hall. In 1967 the Waltham Forest Council planned to enlarge the Lea Bridge factory estate alongside Staffa Road and Argall Avenue. The factory estates were designed to resite firms displaced by redevelopment.

Since the Second World War, and especially since the formation of the London Borough of Waltham Forest in the 1960s, the role of government planning and regulations has been increasingly pronounced and powerful in the development of the area as the main industrial location

## 2. The Marshes

The marshes stretched from Walthamstow to Temple Mills Lane, bounded to the west by the River Lea, and to the East by the Dagenham Brook, (the Dagenham Brook only came to be so named in the late nineteenth century, from the Dagenham Commissioners' sewer) and included nearly 60 acres of Hackney marsh, between the Waterworks river and the Lea. Commissioners of sewers were the overseers of marshes and their drainage.

The marshes were first drained in medieval times, and from 1604 Leyton level was taxed by the Commissioners of Sewers for Thames-side from West Ham to Mucking. In 1747 a map was made of the level which distinguished between open and inclosed marsh. Surveys of 1818 and 1850 were based upon it. In Leyton the level comprised some 451 acres of which 184 were open in 1747 and 181 in 1850, a loss of only three acres to inclosure in nearly one hundred years. In 1748 it was suggested that the uplands which drained into the common sewer on the east might also be liable to tax, but no enlargement of the level followed.

The level's acreage rate, or tax, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was usually only a few pence, compared the shillings or even pounds paid by the Thames-side levels. This was because there were no walls or banks to maintain. The commissioners' concern was to keep drainage channels flowing, in particular the Dagenham brook. This was often blocked, for example in 1696, twenty out of twenty-two orders were to cut, drag and scour, and the other two to repair marsh footbridges, which the commissioners also supervised. The marshes were always liable to flood with excessive and Spring tides. There were many complaints in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the millers at Temple Mills for penning up the water at such times, flooding the marshes, instead of pulling up the flood gates.

In the mid nineteenth century the character of the marsh began to change as effluent from new housing in both Walthamstow and Leyton drained into the marsh. As building spread after 1850 lengths of ditch which caused local offence were bricked over or piped. Most of Moor ditch (Markhouse Common) which joined Dagenham Brook was piped in the 1880s. At that time Walthamstow's sewage drained into ditches and watercourse which flowed either into the Phillebrook at Tinkers Bridge or into the Dagenham brook on the marsh, and so through Leyton to the Lea.

In 1859 Leyton's first complaint of fouling of the Phillebrook was dismissed on the grounds that the drainage was 'following the ancient course; In 1868 the south-east corner of the parish was constituted a 'special drainage district'. In 1875-7 under pressure from the Dagenham commissioners of sewers, the Lee conservancy and the Leyton local board secured an injunction restraining Walthamstow from passing sewage into the Dagenham brook. As a result, Walthamstow local board bought Low Hall farm and built outfall works.

From 1870 both the Commissioners and the Lea Conservancy Board complained repeatedly to the Leyton vestry and local board. By 1883 the commissioners were satisfied with the local board's schemes for sewage disposal. The Board had created new sewage disposal works and in 1883 the Commissioners authorised their connection to the Dagenham brook for discharge to the Waterworks river, subject to satisfactory reports on the treated effluent. Complaints that untreated sewage was entering the brook from Walthamstow persisted up to 1895 but pressure from both marsh juries and from the commissioners, the Lee conservancy and the Leyton local board and district council, eventually ended the nuisance. There was continuous friction between the boroughs of Leyton and Walthamstow until in the 1920s both reached accommodation and both were connected to the LCC system.

In 1938 the Lea Conservancy Catchment Board developed a plan to alleviate flooding in the Lea valley. The Waterworks river which flowed alongside Quartermile Lane in 1950, was filled in by 1952.. The Dagenham Brook was diverted under the railway to the Lea. Work on the Leyton section of the flood relief channel, diverting the old Shortlands sewer to an outfall at The Friends, was completed in the late 1950s and the rest soon after. It is only in the last twenty years or so, as we gain a wider ecological awareness, that land drainage has been regarded as anything other than entirely beneficial.

In the Middle Ages, the whole Walthamstow marshland was probably open. As early as 1480 some inclosure had taken place, and by 1537-8 seven tenants were paying rents for Leyton manor demesne. Some of the marshland however, continued to be held in common as an integral part of Leyton farming until the late nineteenth century. The field names of 1840 imply open fields, though by then Leyton's open arable fields had gone. By 1747, all of Ruckholt marsh had been inclosed, leaving only 184/451 acres of open marshland, all in Leyton manor.

Walthamstow marsh is the name given to the area from Fleetmouth to the Leyton boundary, between the Lea and the Dagenham Brook and the meadows bordering the east bank of the brook. In 1747 it comprised 809 acres, of which 149 acres were open and 660 inclosed. In 1850 144 acres were still open. Probably cultivation was more concentrated on the western side of the manor near the River Lea, much of it of already inclosed marsh; forest to the east of the marshes was later cleared for farming. From the sixteenth century grassland appears to have predominated and to have been carefully preserved, as in Leyton.

The strips on the surviving open marsh, or lammas land, are shown on the tithe map of 1843. Wooden posts marked the boundaries of the plots which were occupied by individual from April to August, when they were thrown open. Leyton's inhabitants intercommoned with Walthamstow, the northern portion of the Leyton Marshes being known as Walthamstow Common mead. In the seventeenth century the Leyton cattle were usually turned in on Lammas Day (1 August) and probably remained until Lady Day (25 March). After the alteration of the calendar in 1752, apparently Leyton continued to turn in the cattle on 1 August (New Lammas Day), not, as in Walthamstow, on Old Lammas Day (13 August). But the marshes were closed, as in Walthamstow, on Old Lady Day (6 April). Grazing rights were considered in 1876 to belong to the inhabitants generally, without regard to holdings.

The hay crop belonged to the several occupiers of the plots, and had to be gathered before Lammas Day (13th August), because from Lammas Day to Lady Day (6th April), the marsh was thrown open to pasture an unlimited number of horses and cows (but not sheep). After the calendar adjustment of 1752, the old dates were retained by the

commoners. A general meeting of parishioners could delay the mowing and gathering of the hay if the marsh were flooded due to heavy rain, as in 1663, 1709 and 1713.

In 1765-7 it was customary for each of the three common arable fields of Walthamstow, Low Hall and Markhouse to lie fallow in turn. They were divided into individually owned strips; an estate sold in 1795 included 27 acres of arable land in 16 parcels in the three common fields. But the whole parish had the right to pasture horses, cows and sheep all the year round on the fallow land. In 1800 all three fields were cropped by parish resolution because of the scarcity of corn. In later years the Higham Hill and Church commons were usually thrown open together, alternating with Markhouse Common.

In 1837 it was thought that inclosure of the common field strips belonging to Low Hall farm would increase the value of the land, which nonetheless was useful for growing turnips and other green crops. In 1843 the three common fields comprised some 111 strips, two-thirds of them about of one acre. When they were finally inclosed by an award of 1850 they were estimated as 198 acres. The Walthamstow and Leyton marshes were originally regarded as common to both parishes. This was still the position in 1861 but by 1873 a fence had apparently been erected on the parish boundary.

The level had its own jurisdiction. The commissioners for sewers appointed a collector and 'expenditor'. There was also a manorial marsh bailiff or reeve. The marsh reeve (hayward, bailiff, or marshal) was a manorial officer, often the inhabitants' nominee, and apparently appointed for life. In 1754 the inhabitants forwarded their nomination to the lords of both manors, but later the office was always associated with Leyton manor. In 1876 the reeve occupied the lord's cottage at the marsh gate in Marsh Lane, Walthamstow.

One of the reeve's duties was to mark the beasts, the fees, formerly paid to the lord of that manor were by 1876 kept by the reeve himself. He was also responsible for upholding the bylaws such as that in force between 1677 and 1684 which forbade the pasturing of all 'dry' Welsh beasts except those which had wintered in the preceding winter. This may have been intended to preserve the meads from use as a temporary pasture for beasts being driven to the London market from other places. By the nineteenth century this was still an issue, because doubt was expressed as to whether all the inhabitants of the parish, or ratepayers only, were entitled to turn out their beasts, and in 1869 the manorial jury protested at a growing practice of putting bullocks on the lammas lands.

To protect owners living in Hackney, the Lea Bridge Turnpike Act of 1757 exempted from tolls their carts driven across the bridge to collect hay from Leyton, and their horses and cattle driven across to pasture. In 1766 the vestry protested to the lords of the manors that grants of herbage and waste were causing hardship to the poor. Nonetheless this period sees the beginning of the gradual erosion by consent of common rights in the marshland.

When the Northern and Eastern Railway Company (NERC) acquired part of the marsh in 1838-9, the company had to build a cattle way under the line. 5/28 of the land taken at that time was lammas land. In 1841 the commoners decided to use their compensation money to pay the parish share of the cost of building the Union workhouse. In 1841 the lammas rights were extinguished over 25 acres in the common marsh because the land was needed by the NERC and in 1854 another seventeen acres were needed by the East London Waterworks Company (ELWC). The lammas lands were thus reduced to 100 acres.

The Inclosure Commissioners agreed that the compensation negotiated for lammas land taken by the ELWC should be invested on behalf of the Leyton and Leytonstone national schools. In 1868 a commoners' committee negotiated away a further twenty-five acres to the ELWC and in the 1870s another ten acres was taken by the Great Eastern Railway Company. This all totalled 55 acres. The compensation for both losses was invested, and in 1884 the stock was handed over to the local board, sold, and James Lane recreation ground bought in 1885 with the proceeds.

By 1890, commoners were agitating for the marsh to be preserved as an open space. In 1890, the waterworks company, assuming that they could, if necessary, take powers to compel the sale of lammas rights over a further six acres bought by them, laid rails to their new filter beds, crossing a bridle path, and put up fences. The commoners refused to sell their rights. On Lammas Day 1892, when the company had failed to remove the rails and fence, the people of Leyton, led by a member of the local board tore them up. The company took proceedings against the commoners who retaliated by appointing a Lammas Lands Defence Committee to oppose the parliamentary bill promoted by the company. Compromise was reached in 1893 and confirmed by 1894 East London Waterworks Act. The company withdrew all claim to inclose any part of the marsh, stayed its proceedings and paid all costs, with £100 to improve the bridleway. In return, the rails were allowed to stay.

By 1893 over 65 acres of lammas land had been bought and dislammased and only 111 acres remained. The commoners' committee campaigned ceaselessly, but there was little economic value in the commoners' rights. Under the Leyton U.D.C. Act 1904, the council was empowered to acquire the remaining lammas lands as open spaces and recreation grounds, provided the commoners accepted extinguishment of their rights. This was agreed at a thinly attended meeting in early 1905. The last compensation claims were settled by 1909. In 1920, a small balance of funds held by surviving members of the commoners' committee was handed to the urban district council to endow a prize for schoolchildren. In the south-west of the parish lammas rights survived to the 1930s, by which time no-one was claiming them, so in 1938 the land was bought by the borough council, lammas rights duly extinguished, and preserved as an open space.

On Lammas Day, August 1st 1929, a plaque was erected on the front of "The Cottage" in Marsh Lane, Leyton (the premises now of Eton Manor Athletic Club) to the memory of the campaign. The plaque is black, with gold inlay lettering and reads

In Commemoration of Lammas Day 1894  
When the people of Leyton  
led by  
C.C. Musgrave, H. Humphreys, and E.C. Pittam  
asserted the commoners rights  
and successfully resisted  
the attempted encroachment upon these lands  
This tablet was erected with the permission of the  
Corporation of Leyton  
By the Borough of Leyton Ratepayers Association  
and was unveiled by  
Mr E.C. Pittam  
on Lammas Day August 1st 1929

Roads and lanes

Several lanes led eastwards off the Leyton High road:

- Wide Street, mentioned in 1537, ran along the north side of Knotts Green. It continued as the Broad Lane to Whipps Cross. It was later called Chestnut Walk and is now the northern end of Lea Bridge Road. Broad Lane existed in 1454 and is named in 1649. It is described as 'the walk with trees' in 1726, and the chestnuts planted before 1814 and cut down in the 1930s are commemorated by the pub for many years known as "The Chestnuts", now renamed.
- Westward from Knotts Green, Butterfield Lane, known as Welstreet in 1537 and 1645, sometimes also called Wide or Wilde Street, led to Markhouse Lane which was mentioned in 1601 and described in 1630 as a 'chase lane'.
- Wide or Wilde Street continued westward to Hemstall or Hemstead Green, where a bridge crossed Dagenham Brook. Vestiges of the green remained in 1777 on either side of the new Lea Bridge Road, which crossed it. This is now the junction of Hibbert Rd with Lea Bridge Road Inclosure from it can be traced on the tithe map. Hughes Farm, sometimes called Hemstall Green Farm, lay south of the lane.
- Leyton Green was known in about 1760 as King's End, and was the village part of Walthamstow Slip.
- In 1742 Blackhouse Lane (Blackhorse Lane) led south across Marsh Street into Markhouse Lane to Leyton and was part of principal North-South route. Blackhorse Lane was a 'coach lane' by 1690 and Markhouse Lane was widened in 1773.
- Water Lane led south from Marsh Street across the marshes to Lockbridge in Leyton.

## Crossing the river

The present crossing place of the river at Lea Bridge was known as Lockbridge as early as 1486-7, when the river was still tidal at Leyton, as it apparently was until at least the sixteenth century and foot and horse traffic were crossing to Hackney by Lockbridge and by the adjoining ford to Clapton. This was the busiest crossing, though there was another at Temple Mills leading to Homerton and Hackney Wick. In 1551 it is reported that Lockbridge was broken down and that Lord Wentworth, lord of the manor of Hackney, ought to repair it sufficiently for foot traffic, and in 1594 it is described as being among "the most useful bridges in Middlesex".

In 1646, the ford was still called Lockbridge. A wooden causeway led from Blackbridge (which crossed the Shortlands Sewer west of Hemstall Green) over the marsh to Lockbridge. This causeway was built or repaired by Sir George Monoux (d 1544) and repaired again by Lady Laxton probably about 1580 when it was reported in ruins. When it was again dangerously decayed in 1611-13 no one undertook repairs and the county also disclaimed responsibility for them and by 1694 only ruins remained. These were still visible in the nineteenth century. Lockbridge was replaced by a ferry known as Hackney or Jeremy's Ferry. This, and a smaller one, Smith's Ferry a little to the north, are shown on maps of 1747-8. Both ferries belonged to the lord of the manor of Hackney.

The maps show two tracks to Jeremy's Ferry. One, Water Lane, led south from Marsh Street, Walthamstow, joined on the way by another lane from Low Hall. Water Lane crossed Walthamstow Marsh. Traces of it remained in the nineteenth century. The second track, from Leyton, led north-west from the bottom of Marsh Lane across Leyton Marsh. No way to the ferry is shown from Hemstall Green, so there wasn't even a track from Hemstall Green to the Lea where now Lea Bridge Road runs. The track must have fallen into disuse with the collapse of Lockbridge.

Under the terms of the Lea Bridge Turnpike Act 1757 the old route by Hemstall Green and Blackbridge was however restored. Thus a link was made to the Middlesex and Essex



Turnpike Road at the Eagle Pond, Snaresbrook, so road traffic could journey easily to Clapton. Jeremy's Ferry was closed and the nearby ford destroyed. Lea Bridge was built, with a road across the marsh by Hemstall Green to Markhouse Lane; and Butterfield Lane and Broad Lane were widened.

The Ferry House Inn, described as ancient in 1757 probably dated from the collapse of Lockbridge about 1612-30 and the subsequent opening of Jeremy's Ferry. It was later known as the Horse and Groom, and was demolished in the 1850s when the filter beds were built.

In 1821 the bridge was replaced by an iron one. On cessation of the turnpike trusts in 1871 the Essex half of the bridge was adopted by the county. Marks Bridge crossed the Dagenham Brook west of Mark House; there was a crossing at Temple Mills and a Leyton Bridge until 1698. By 1742 a ferry called Morris's, later High Hill (1868) was operating from Hackney across to Walthamstow Common marshes. It still existed in 1947. For a full treatment of Lea Bridge Road and the Turnpike Trust, see the book by Tonkins of the same name.

### 3. Great Houses and Their Occupants

After the Restoration in 1660, Leyton became a 'pretty retiring place'. Most of the large residences were situated on the high ground in the centre and north of the parish with a particular concentration in Low Leyton. By 1970, only three of these great houses survived, namely Essex Hall, Grove House, and Etloe House, the latter in our Gateway area on Church Road

The original great house on the site of the present Etloe House was called Godsalves, occupied in 1547 by Sir John Godsalf. It was a large quadrangular building surrounded by a high wall and moat. By the eighteenth century it was derelict. A bowling green was built, occupying part of the site of Godsalves and probably using materials quarried from Godsalves. The site was inherited in about 1756 by Edward Rowe Mores, antiquary and printer who built on it Etloe House in about 1760. By 1796, it was known as Etloe Place and described as 'whimsical'

Cardinal Wiseman lived there from 1856 until his death in 1865. It was then privately owned for about 40 years; from about 1908 it was occupied by St Pelagia's Home, provided originally for destitute, and later for 'mentally defective', girls, run by Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. It is now owner-occupier sheltered housing for the elderly.

There was also another building in our area which could rightly be described as 'ancient' This was Ive Farm, which lay to the south of Etloe House and was a two -storeyed brick house probably built in the late seventeenth century. It survived, much altered but retaining its original staircase, until the 1940s. Council housing was built on the land; the houses were temporary prefabs, but are now being renovated.

### 4. The Development of Local Government

The details of the development of local government may seem a digression but in fact it is crucial to the story as the main duties of local government seem to have been the administration of poor relief and highways maintenance, both of which are integral to the area. I will concentrate mainly on the poor of Leyton in this respect as in my view it is most profoundly affected by industry and road development. I am concentrating on Leyton because Leyton's parish records go back to 1618, whereas those of Walthamstow are less complete.

The main agent of local government was the vestry, who appointed the parish officers. These were two overseers of the poor, two surveyors of highways, beadle, parish clerk, sexton, workhouse master, churchwarden and a constable. It was usual for two or more offices to be held by the same person, a man.

Before 1721, Leyton and Leytonstone each seem to have had their own overseer of the poor. By 1775 it was usual for the beadle to act as an extra overseer, and in 1787 the Leyton and Leytonstone overseers are described as first and second overseer; the senior overseer is mentioned later. In 1801 the duties were divided between church beadle and out beadle to deal with all out business, especially investigation of newcomers. From 1821, the office of assistant overseer superseded that of out beadle. The parish clerk is first mentioned in 1623. In 1653 he was elected by the vestry, but later clerks were nominated and appointed by the vicar. The parish clerk was first paid a salary in 1802.

Until 1681 the Leyton vestry met every year in Easter week; from 1681 another meeting was held soon after Easter to nominate pensioners, inspect accounts and make the rate. From 1698 they met twice yearly as the poor rate was having to be made twice a year at that time. Although there were small attendances, (from 1639 it was between five and eleven people, presumably men, most of those present were influential and wealthy. In the seventeenth century, substantial parishioners chaired. From 1664-95 this was usually lord of the manor of Ruckholt or another magistrate, or the vicar when these were not present. It is recorded that a refreshment allowance of 40/- was paid twice a year in 1712, and in 1723 this was halved.

In Walthamstow, in the eighteenth century at any rate, the select vestry, comprising the vicar or curate, the churchwardens and 17 parishioners, was co-optative, and dealt with the whole business of the church and parish. Meetings were called by the vicar or curate; a quorum of 10 including the minister and churchwardens was required for a full vestry. In 1624 the vicar, a churchwarden, and the inhabitants of Walthamstow successfully petitioned the bishop of London to establish a select vestry to avoid disorder at church meetings and although no record of its work survives it still existed in 1706. By 1710 the parish had reverted to an open vestry.

This open vestry met regularly in Easter week and in December, or September after 1767, with frequent but irregular meetings at other times as business required. Sometimes it met in the church, but after 1730 usually in the vestry room in the workhouse, with adjournments to the Chequers or Nag's Head. The vicar normally took the chair. Attendances before 1725 varied from two to eighteen, but were usually below ten. After 1782 they were sometime as high as thirty-six; in 1805 116 people were present to elect a beadle, although the average attendance from 1800 to 1820 was sixteen. After 1819 the parish did not appoint a select vestry but continued with its long term practice of appointing committees from time to time as the need to do so arose.

In Leyton, from 1668 all the vicars except John Dubordieu (1738-54) attended regularly. From 1695, Sir William Hicks ceased to attend, the vicar, John Strype took the chair, and after that, the vicar usually presided, and in his absence a parish officer. A select vestry existed 1819-23.

The rateable value of the parish rose steadily from £2,005 in 1679 to £8.038 in 1826. Churchwardens' and poor rates, normally separated, were made together as a united rate from 1779 until 1826. Constables rates were made occasionally but these were normally included in some other rate. The highway rate was made up of fines for not performing statute labour - evidence from a 1761 case makes this clear. When the surveyor spent

more than he collected, the deficiency was made up from a special rate or from the poor or churchwardens' rate.

Parish offices customarily served in turn, the order being determined by the "antiquity" of each house, though experienced substitutes often used. There were customarily a junior and a senior churchwarden, and in 1760 the vestry ruled that the latter should do the business. From 1847 to 1853 the vicar of St Mary's, Leyton, began to nominate a third; the vestry objected and the system reverted to election of two wardens by vestry. From 1874 when E.J. Brewster (1873-80) claimed his right to nominate, the parish had a vicar's (or high) and people's (or low) warden.

In Leyton, the Easter meeting was held in the church, but other meetings usually took place in public houses, or, from 1715 in a coffee house, and from 1742, in the workhouse. Churchwardens and overseers were elected regularly at Easter. The surveyors were nominated separately, later in the year, The vestry only rarely appointed a constable. Parishioners were often reluctant to serve as officers, some people choosing to pay fines, rising from £10 in 1711 to £45 in 1820, for exemption for life. Fines were paid by 5 out of 8 nominated in 1777. In 1780 the vestry complained that some of those elected employed unsuitable substitutes.

In Walthamstow two churchwardens were chosen, both by the parishioners. One was usually re-elected the following year, becoming 'head' or 'senior' warden. Two overseers were appointed, dividing the year between them. In 1809 the vestry complained that people in office for only six months could not become competent in their duties.

Since the late 1540s the parish clerk had been entitled to an annual pension under the will of G Monoux, and by 1724 he also received a salary from the vestry. From 1749 a salaried vestry clerk was also employed. This new office was soon more important than that of parish clerk itself. The duties of Richard Banks, appointed vestry clerk in the parish reorganisation of 1779-80 included making the rate books and collecting the parish rates and rents. Two or more of the offices of vestry clerk, parish clerk, workhouse master, beadle, constable and assistant overseer were sometimes combined.

## The Poor

### Leyton

In 1709 there were 21 poor families in Leyton, by 1789 there were 111 and the office of beadle was created in 1718 'to deal with inmates, vagrants and uncertificated newcomers'; the workhouse master, or beadle, often acted as assistant or extra overseer of the poor, but from 1820 a full-time paid assistant overseer was employed. The overseers were little more than rate collectors, most of the casual relief being ordered by the churchwardens and paid on their rate. The Leyton vestry also maintained eight endowed almshouses for poor people, as well as funds for free bread. There was also ample wealth to tap in hard times as in 1789 when £63 was subscribed.

The vestry also supported the victims of bereavement, sickness, accident, disablement and lunacy by paying rents, doctors' bills, and the charges of London hospitals. They released debtors from prison, redeemed personal possessions from pawn and once gave a man a loan to help him to 'traffic in old iron'. From 1771 they employed a regular apothecary who became a salaried official from 1780. From 1795 there were two. From 1797, the poor were inoculated at expense of parish. In 1798 a dispensary was established at the workhouse. From 1798 a parish midwife was employed; two by 1826.

Trouble was taken to find suitable trades for workhouse children, especially disabled ones. They usually went for a trial period to the master, before being bound, and the beadle had to visit all apprentices from time to time to report on their treatment. From the 1770s a number went to Middlesex silk-weavers, from 1802 to Barking fishermen

By 1813 poverty was still increasing so the vestry launched a small carding and spinning scheme to give employ the poor some employment, but the scheme was insufficient to meet the need. From 1817, the poor were set to carting gravel without horses. From a contemporary press report it seems that some parishioners thought this degrading, but it continued at least until 1819,

By 1766 Irish people are recorded as living in the parish, and by 1815, 'Irish Lane', now Langthorne Road was named. There was much sickness due to overcrowding especially in Irish lodging houses. Irish people made up a disproportionate number of the poor: in February 1819 it is reported that thirty one out of the thirty eight people carting gravel were Irish. The same year, the general vestry threatened to review the assessments of farmers if they continued the practice of only employing their immigrant workers on a seasonal rather than an annual basis.

Expenditure on poverty relief peaked in 1818, so in 1819 a select vestry was set up. Four years later they reported that although prices had been falling, wages had been reduced proportionately, and the failure of the farmer of Ruckholt in 1822-3 had thrown a number of labourers out of work. By 1831 there was less work available on the land than there had been in 1811, which may be explained by the gradual increase in grassland over arable; a slight decrease in the population in 1831 was attributed to unemployed families leaving the parish.

Strict rules kept the rate [local tax] down, and in 1826 a scaled means test was introduced. Workhouse inmates picked oakum and from 1797 stripped feathers and spun flax, and were allowed part of their earnings. A few went out of the house to work. Between 1797-1836 there were seldom fewer than 30 in the house. In 1801 there were 53.

A workhouse existed in Leyton from at least the middle of the eighteenth century. Until 1761 it was run by a workhouse committee, and a salaried master and mistress employed there. From 1775 meticulous accounts were kept, from which we learn that local tradesmen usually served house in rotation until 1816, when the vestry set up competitive tendering. The workhouse was closed in 1836 and demolished in 1842, though the separate workroom, retained as a vestry room, survived until 1938.

## Walthamstow

From 1705-1732 the poor rate in Walthamstow was about 8d, raising about £87, but in the 1720s the number of pensioners or "regular poor" (who from 1697 had to wear badges) increased from the usual dozen or so to more than twenty, and by 1737 there were 31, 13 of them children. The churchwardens' casual expenses also rose so the vestry decided to build a workhouse, which was opened in 1742. Despite this, the poor rate did not fall, and from 1759, the vestry met monthly to deal with the necessary administration.

A beadle was first appointed in 1739, some twenty one years later than in Leyton, to deal with strangers, vagrants and beggars. He soon became the messenger and servant of the vestry and its officers, and from 1742 was a uniformed official, although the duties of the post were not detailed until 1779.

When exceptional distress followed a bad harvest in 1800 and corn was scarce, a general meeting of inhabitants decided to cultivate the sixty-eight acres of Markhouse common field. The owners and occupiers undertook to pay the overseers 10/- an acre for bread for the poor as soon as the corn was harvested. The inhabitants also resolved to supply the poor with potatoes and cured herrings at a reduced price.

## Crime and Punishment

There were two constables, one each for Leyton and Leytonstone, from 1637 the vestry always chose the Leyton constable, and the Leytonstone constable from 1651 to 1657, and occasionally after that with the consent of the lord of the manor of Ruckholt or by his appointment. From 1733 the vestry elected both constables.

The parish repaired the Leyton whipping post in 1651, and built a new one in 1756. In 1690 a brick watchhouse was built next to the vicarage and near the stocks; it was pulled down in 1740. New stocks were built in 1756 and in 1774 they were removed from the vicarage and put beside the newly-built cage. This was a wealthy neighbourhood, so to discourage housebreakers the vestry paid rewards to informers. In the early nineteenth century they hired night patrols in winter, armed with rattles and swords, to protect both residents and churchyard. In 1821 the Hackney watch were rewarded for apprehending a grave-robber. From 1840, Leyton, as part of the Central criminal court district, was included in the Metropolitan Police District.

In Walthamstow in 1765 a watch-house or cage was built against the workhouse east wall, which remained until 1912. From 1819 to 1831 a police committee supported by subscription employed armed night patrols in winter. They were augmented by day patrols during the unrest of 1830-1. Between 1831 and 33 the Walthamstow vestry implemented the Lighting and Watching Act (1830) (30 years before Leyton did so), appointing inspectors who levied a rate and employed a sergeant and squad of constables. In 1833 the police committee was revived which raised a voluntary rate and hired patrols until 1835, when the vestry adopted the Lighting and Watching Act (1833) for watching only, in the parish south of Clay Street and Hagger Lane. The small police force then employed was disbanded in 1840.

## Municipal Parks and Open Spaces

In 1850 parts of Higham Hill and Mark House commons were enclosed and under the agreement, gravel pits there were allotted to the parish surveyors for road maintenance. Six acres on Markhouse Common were set aside for the labouring poor, which have been more recently known as Queen's Road allotments. In the 1890s the gravel pits were exhausted so the local board fenced and levelled them for recreation and in 1906 the Selborne Road, Higham Hill and Queen's Road grounds were laid out by the unemployed under local distress relief schemes. 8.5 acres adjoining Low Hall Farm were also laid out and opened in 1910 as St James' Park.

Under the Walthamstow Corporation Act 1934 the corporation bought about 100 acres of the remaining lammas land for recreation. A disused sewage tank at Low Hall Farm was opened as a swimming bath in the summers of 1889 and 1890. The High Street baths adjoining the library opened in 1900.

In 1893 after Plaistow and Highgate hospitals refused to accept any more Walthamstow smallpox patients so temporary isolation arrangements were made at Low Hall farm. A municipal smallpox hospital was established at Low Hall farm in 1929; it was closed in 1940 after being damaged by incendiary bombs.

## Highway building and maintenance

### Leyton

There were two surveyors of highways, one each for Leyton and Leytonstone, until the turnpike trustees took over Leytonstone High Road in 1722 (this of course predates Lea Bridge Turnpike). A paid surveyor was appointed continuously from 1767. In 1832 Leyton was reported to be the only parish in the neighbourhood with a salaried surveyor.

At least as early as the seventeenth century, road maintenance was one of the chief responsibilities of local government and in Leyton in 1624, 1642 and 1668 parishioners who defaulted either in provision of labour or carts were presented at quarter sessions. In 1734 there were 13 householders who between them owed seventy days' statute labour. The vestry agreed with the Middlesex and Essex turnpike surveyor to settle the £31/10 due from the parish by sending the teams of 13 householders to work on the turnpike. A day's work was worth 9/-

By the late nineteenth century, however, the streets taken over by the Highway Authority from the vestry were in a bad state. Between 1874 and 1893 the mileage of maintained roads increased from 20 to 45 and money was borrowed to pay for the works. In 1884 Frog Row was pulled down to widen Leyton High Road and in 1894 the board took compulsory power to widen Leyton High Road and Holloway Road.

### Walthamstow

From the late 16th century road maintenance was done by statute labour. Defaulters were frequently presented at quarter sessions between 1601 and 1662 and in 1647 no fewer than 46 cart days and 231 days' labour were lost through default. In 1760 the vestry advised the new surveyors to insist on local dignitaries paying their full due for their carriages, and to prosecute those who refused to pay their share for the highways. This suggests that by then a money payment was replacing statute labour.

Up to 1766 two substantial householders were elected annually by the vestry as unpaid surveyors. From 1767 to 1825 a paid surveyor was appointed annually, then the vestry reverted to the old system. In 1780 the assistant surveyor was ordered to employ the poor on the roads whenever possible, and statute labour was still the basis of Walthamstow's highway maintenance in 1796. Exceptionally large payments for pauper labour were made in 1828-30 during the construction of Woodford New Road. From 1835, under the terms of the General Highway Act, the vestry remained responsible for parish roads not maintained by turnpike trustees.

The 1870s, 1880s and 1890s saw the urbanisation and industrialisation of the area, and the concomitant development and professionalisation of a system of local government still recognisable today, along with the growth of ideas about democracy and its expression. The Highways Board seems to have been an embryonic form of modern local government. The range of its work gradually widened until in 1866, under the Sanitary Act its work was taken over by the West Ham guardians; the vestry's powers were however restored by an 1868 Act. In 1868 also, a government inspector, looking into complaints against the vestry as sewer authority urged the formation of a local board. But the vestry hung on to its power. There were attempts to discredit the board, accusing it of spending too much on official dinners VCH mentions (p.298) a printed poster about this.

The vestry continued to fight a rearguard action against reform. In 1867 they successfully opposed a proposal to include the parish in a highway district under the Highways Act 1862. The Public Health Act 1872 threatened to transfer the parishes sewerage and sanitary powers to the unpopular West Ham guardians so the vestry at last petitioned for

the appointment of a local board, and in 1873 the urban sanitary district was constituted. This was divided into wards, and its membership augmented as urban growth continued, along with a professionalisation of staff.

In 1882 a turning point was reached when William Dawson, a professional civil engineer was appointed. The rate collector received a commission until 1885; in 1886 he became a salaried official, and a second rate collector appointed. In 1890 the board stopped paying commission for assistance with private street improvements, and by 1894 the direct engagement of staff was being considered. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1894 the local board was replaced by an urban district council.

Ratepayers' associations became active from 1879. The press were being admitted to the board's meetings by 1878. In 1887 malpractices in tendering for road contracts exposed by the press were investigated and two contractors who admitted operating a 'knockout' were debarred from tendering.

## Housing

Leyton and Leytonstone remained rural until the mid nineteenth century when the railways to London were developed. Lea Bridge Station opened in 1840, followed by other mass transport systems and the expansion of jobs especially in railways, in London and neighbouring districts e.g. West Ham, so suburban dormitories of clerks and workmen grew up.

The main land development companies in Leyton were the Freehold Land Society and the British Land Company, as well as the Warner land development company. No Victorian or Edwardian mansions were built in the area as it ceased to have a rural feel, and by 1909-11, the Council was trying to restore the ambience of 'leafy Leyton' by putting unemployed men to work planting thousands of street trees. The land in our Gateway area was some of the last in Leyton and Leytonstone to be developed, in the first decade of the twentieth century. Yellow brick two storey terraces were built, and shops along main thoroughfares. The Carnegie Library was built in 1906. Little building took place between wars, although Emmanuel Church was built 1934-5 to serve the needs of people living in the mainly Warner Estate developments.

Beyond the fringe of all this speculative development a 'bungalow town' of sixty-nine shacks, with wells and earth closets, and a wooden mission hall, sprung up in the 1880s at Lea Bridge Gardens, west of Lea Bridge Station. The occupants reared ducks and grew vegetables. It was demolished in the 1930s, and the land is now industrial. The photographic archive at Vestry House Museum has excellent material about this settlement.

In 1871 there were 1,768 houses in the parish of Leyton. Steady building in 1870s, accelerated in 1879-80 with builders routinely contravening the building by-laws which had come into force in 1877. On his appointment, Dawson inspected every house being built, and charged 32 builders by name with contraventions. He was supported by the board in the serving of notices, and if necessary, legal proceedings. A deputation of builders was rebuffed by the board, and within a year or two most of them had come into line or left the area.

In 1909 the Leyton Urban District Council (LUDC) adopted the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act, 1899 and from then until 1927 430 applications were dealt with and £143,486 advanced to purchasers. In 1915-16 about 1,300 houses were damaged or wrecked by bombing, and after the war the council took the first steps to provide municipal housing.

The rate of road building in the LUDC's area did not slacken until 1904, and by 1907 it was responsible for the upkeep of sixty-six miles of road, including ten miles of main road. Electricity and gas supplies and public transport developed, changing the face of the neighbourhood. As far back as 1853 the South Essex Gaslight and Coke Company had built the Lea Bridge Gas Works. An Act of 1904 strengthened Council powers, including the fields of energy and transport as well as enabling the acquisition of the remaining lammas lands. By this time, there seems to have arisen some opposition to the loss of common land in the borough, and the Lammas Lands Defence Committee was formed.

In 1834 the East London Waterworks Company had moved its intake works from Old Ford to Lea Bridge and in 1852 and 1853 it was empowered to construct filter beds there. From 1853 Leyton was included in the area within which the East London Waterworks Company was empowered to supply water. By 1878 its mains served the whole district although an inadequate supply led to complaints, and in 1884, forty wells were still in use. The ELWC disclaimed responsibility for water supply outside the metropolitan area but the council won its case and in 1898 Leyton was brought within the limits within which the company was legally bound to maintain a constant supply. By 1914 every house in Leyton had a piped supply from the local board, who also started local 'dust' (i.e. refuse) collection; pressed sludge was sold as manure after 1909. The Walthamstow local board inaugurated domestic refuse collection in 1874 under contract. The work was taken over by the surveyor's department in 1891, and a refuse and sludge destructor built at Low Hall farm in 1904. Refuse disposal extensions were opened in 1937.

The Lighting and Watching Act 1833 was adopted in Leyton in 1863 and gas was used until conversion to electricity took place between 1901 and 1908. From 1909 to 1948 the local authority supplied electricity for lamps.

Cathall Road baths was opened in 1902, Leyton baths in 1934. In 1905, an open air swimming pool at Whipps Cross was dug using unemployed labour, and improved by the same method in 1932, and in 1937 into modern open air swimming pool, called (1966) Whipps Cross Lido.

## Health

In 1840 the West Ham Union Workhouse was built in Langthorne Road, and enlarged in 1865, 1883, 1897-8, 1913 and 1930. After the First World War it became known as The Central Home for the chronic sick, the aged and the infirm Under the terms of the Local Government Act 1930 it was administered by West Ham. In 1948 as part of the National Health Service, it was transferred to the Leytonstone group of the NE regional hospital board.

1889 was a turning point. Before 1889 in Walthamstow and Leyton the only hospital care was that provided in the workhouse infirmary; the local board sent infectious cases to Plaistow or to London hospitals. When the London hospitals refused to accept any more a few beds were set up as a temporary arrangement at Ruckholt Farmhouse then from 1891, in cottages at the sewage works. During this time, abortive discussions went on with neighbouring authorities for a joint scheme.

In 1889 too, the West Ham guardians bought Forest House and its forty-four acres of grounds at Whipps Cross. An infirmary was built in the grounds and opened in 1903 for the treatment of acute medical and surgical cases. After the First World War it became known by its present name of Whipps Cross Hospital. Leyton also had a share in the Leyton, Walthamstow and Wanstead Children's and General Voluntary Hospital (the Connaught). In 1896 an iron hospital with 48 beds was erected on another part of the sewage works site, in Auckland Road which later enlarged to 94 beds served until 1939.



## 5. Religion

Following the Protestant Settlement of 1689, St Mary's was the only place of Anglican worship in Leyton until 1749. Leyton vicarage was always a poor one, in 1703 the basic value was still only £30, the same as in 1661. John Dubordieu estimated that in 1738-9, his first year as vicar, he received about £94 from all sources including contributions. By 1831, however, the gross income had increased to £554. This may be owing to the multiplication of fees from a growing population but mainly by enhanced value of small tithes which were commuted to a money payment in 1834 for £394 plus 1/- per head of cattle turned out on tithable lammas lands. In 1682 the vicar's glebe equalled two separate half-acres in the common marsh; in 1843 the total was 3r. 27p.

A vicarage house existed in 1537, though it was 'ruinous' in 1650. In the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century, patronage seems to have been neglected and the parish badly served. From 1561-1617 there were three vacancies and several poor incumbents. Thereafter, the religious upheaval of the Civil War period resonates at St Mary's as elsewhere.

The Puritan Samuel Keme seems to have served unofficially from at least 1639 though he is still described as vicar in 1643. He was chaplain and captain of a troop of horse from 1641. It is not known exactly when he relinquished the living, although Samuel Toxey is described as vicar in 1644. Hugh Williams, a sequestered minister from Norfolk unofficially lived in Leyton from 1647, and may have conducted services. By 1650, Jeremiah Levitt was commended as an able and godly minister who was filling the position by order of the Committee for Plundered Ministers. He died in 1651.

The church was partly rebuilt under the incumbency of Philip Anderton. This is a rare example of building under the Commonwealth. In 1661, however, Anderton was indicted as vicar for refusing to preach or use the Book of Common Prayer, and was ejected in 1662. John Cox was apparently elected minister or preacher in his place by the inhabitants. In the vestry minutes, he calls himself vicar, but he was never formally inducted or instituted..

John Strype was the incumbent in about 1669. He was chosen minister by the votes of sixty-two inhabitants who undertook to subscribe annually to augment his income provided he continued to preach twice on Sundays. He was supported financially by Sir William Hicks (£8), two well known Puritans Lawrence Moyer (£3) and Daniel Andrews (£3) and John Tabraham, (4/-), who may have been a Baptist. There is evidence that Strype was licensed by the Bishop of London in 1674 but never inducted or instituted. He paid £140/216 of the cost. of building the new vicarage in 1677/8. John Strype was an historian.

With the appointment of John Dubordieu whose incumbency was from 1738 until 1754, vicars were appointed in the usual way. Separate lecturers/assistant curates or master of the free school or both, were chosen by the parishioners until the mid eighteenth century.

From the late 16th century parish life in Walthamstow was similarly unstable. The income of the vicarage was sequestered by the bishop until 1644. About 1649 the Committee for Plundered Ministers appointed John Wood to supply the cure. His unpopularity provoked a riotous demonstration in the church and most of the parishioners refused to attend his services. In 1650 the parish was in 'great distraction' and Wood's ability in question. In 1669 there was another disruption to parish life when Andrew Casse, incumbent from 1666 to 1679 'an unhappy and obnoxious person' suddenly abandoned the parish one Sunday morning and never returned. For ten years the cure was sequestered, during

which time a parish dispute reignited and culminated in a brawl in 1730 when the rector with his servants tried forcibly to occupy the patron's pew in the chancel.

St Mary's was the only place of Anglican worship in Leyton until 1749 when a chapel was opened in Leytonstone which in 1845 became the separate parish of St John the Baptist, Leytonstone. Then with the accelerating increase in population, mission churches opened up. After 1870 there was a great burst of church building including St Saviour, built 1874.

In the Gateway area, the church of Emmanuel, Lea Bridge Road. originated about 1902 with mission services held in Sybourn Street school in connection with All Saints, Capworth Street. In 1906 a temporary brick church was built at the junction of Lea Bridge Road and Hitcham Road on land given by Sir Courtenay Warner. Warner also gave a piece of land in Bloxhall Road for the Bloxhall Institute, a mission built in 1912 by Emmanuel in collaboration with All Saints church. About 1920 Emmanuel became a mission district. In 1934-5 the permanent church was built beside the temporary one, with aid from local masonic lodges and a separate parish was formed in 1935. The Bloxhall institute closed about 1956 and was sold in 1959. Emmanuel Church is still a place of worship.

## Roman Catholicism

There were few known Roman Catholic families in Leyton. In Walthamstow, the Hale family lived at Moons in the sixteenth century. The More family, descendants of Sir Thomas More lived here, but were confirmed in the Anglican tradition in 1650. There were others to 1629, but by 1676 there were no papists in the area. By 1766 however there were many Irish papists, and in 1810 many of the lower classes were said to be Irish papists. St Patrick's Cemetery was opened in 1861, and Etloe House leased in 1856 as a country house for Cardinal Wiseman, the first Roman Catholic Cardinal of Westminster. There was, however, no Roman Catholic Church in Leyton until 1897.

## Protestant nonconformity

Protestant nonconformity was slow to gain ground in Leyton. Presbyterians were the first nonconformists to be licensed in 1672. In 1676 there appear to have been eight nonconformists in Leyton, and by 1748 there were several large properties in Leytonstone occupied by dissenters. By 1778 there were many Presbyterians, Baptists and one family of Quakers..

In 1763, Mary Bosanquet (1739-1815), daughter of Samuel Bosanquet of Forest House, held Wesleyan Methodist meetings in her house at the bottom of Davies Lane, Leytonstone despite rowdy local hostility. Wesley, preached there in 1764, 1766 and 1767. The Leytonstone society dwindled when Mary Bosanquet left the area in 1768, but by 1777 field preachers were attracting large congregations, causing alarm in the vestry, which ordered the constables to report them to the magistrates. William Pocock, whose wife was a staunch Methodist, came to live in Leyton in 1786 and the family then took a leading part in establishing Methodism here.

Over the following century, Methodism thrived, and in 1889 The Lighthouse, Markhouse Road was opened. Captain King of the Bullard King line of steamers, who was already associated with Free Methodist churches in West Ham, helped to provide the present site and gave an iron hall. The permanent church was opened in 1893. It was the best attended nonconformist church in Walthamstow in 1903. The Lighthouse became known for its missionary and social activities, drawing its members from the working classes of the district.

In 1908 there was a Unitarian church in Lea Bridge Road. By 1968 the premises were a furniture store. In 1937 a shop in Lea Bridge Road was taken for N E London Jehovah's Witnesses, registered Kingdom Hall 1938-63. There was a Congregational mission at Etloe Hall, which closed in 1901. From the 1870s to the 1890s there was mission activity by Baptists, the London City Mission and the Salvation Army which were evangelical and non-sectarian.

The Leyton Citadel Corps of the Salvation Army was formed in 1883 and met at Etloe Mission Hall until 1886, despite being ridiculed by the press, and in 1908 the Second Leyton Corps was formed, which met in a wooden hall in Lea Bridge Road; a larger iron hall with a brick front was added soon after 1918. The building was badly damaged in the Second World War, but the Corps seems to have continued to expand, building a permanent hall in 1959. This burned down in 1964, and the Corps was disbanded.

## 6. Schooling

### Leyton Free School

In 1698 Robert Ozler, left £300 to build a free school for seven children from Leyton and seven from Walthamstow, together with £12 a year to pay a master to teach reading and writing. The school was to be built within seven years, but by 1705 no school had been built, so Ozler's executors agreed with the vestry to pay the £12 to Mr Philips, the master of a private school, to whom several free scholars were sent. Nathaniel Tench had left £10 to the poor and this was used towards the conversion of the building.

The school finally opened in 1710 in a thatched cottage, with Philips as master, rules drawn up by the trustees restricting free places to boys and allowing the master to take private pupils. In 1764 a larger school was built by subscription and rebuilt after a fire in 1779, the cost being met largely from poor rates of Leyton and Walthamstow parishes. The master then agreed to take ten boys from each parish, reduced again to seven in 1800.

In 1791 a schoolroom was built for a Sunday school in the yard of the Free School. From 1794 this room was used also for a girls' school of industry for 30 girls and supported by subscription. In 1797-1801 the mistress of the girls school was being paid for stockings and linen supplied to the workhouse. A house was built for the mistress in 1815, and by 1834 the mistress was paying £5 5s rent to the Free School master for the girls' school and house.

By 1808 the Free School had fallen into disrepute, with only two free scholars. The master, who was running a private girls' boarding school was arrested for debt in 1810. Under his successor, the school recovered. In 1813 Wm. Bosanquet left £200 in trust to buy books, pens and stationery. By 1818 all the free places were occupied

### Leyton National School

In 1816 Samuel Bosanquet leased a corner of Lawyers' Field in James Lane to trustees to be used for a school, which was established in 1819 and the following year had 136 pupils. This level of attendance was maintained until 1833 after which the role fell until by 1846-7 there were only 81 pupils. At that time the master's and mistresses salaries were £75 and £55 respectively. In 1846 the school was demolished and the trustees joined with those of Leyton National School to build a new, mixed one on the same site. The old school, by The Three Blackbirds inn in Leyton High Road, is shown on the 1843 tithe map.

From 1854 the National school and the Ozler school (Leyton Free School) had a share of the income from the commoners' compensation from the waterworks company. By 1863 there were 140 boys and girls; 90 Infants were housed in a nearby wooden building. Fees were graded 1d to 4d a week, and by 1874 there were no free scholars, but attendance was increasing rapidly. Improvements were made, notably in the 1880s by virtue of Hibbert family legacies, though in the 1890s further enlargement left trustees in debt, so in 1900 they transferred the school to the school board. The buildings still exist as factories, with possible future use as part of a new police station.

## Board schools

The 1870 Education Act began the era of free compulsory elementary education. It set up school boards, covering all areas of the country. The Leyton School Board was responsible for sixteen elementary schools in Leyton, the two in the Gateway area being Church Mead Junior Mixed and Infants Schools and Lea Bridge Primary School. Church Mead opened in 1877 for 540 pupils and by 1891 its roll had doubled. Lea Bridge opened in 1892 as a mixed school and was very small. Only 157 children were attending in 1898. In 1919 it had room for 286, in 1932 it became an Infants School only.

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Junior Mixed and Infants Schools have their origin in St Agnes Roman Catholic 'poor school' which was established about 1874 at Leyton House (renamed Park House) In 1882 it was a mixed school combined with an orphanage, at Etloe House. The present school was opened in 1900 and the orphanage closed soon after. The upper floor of the new school was used as a temporary chapel until 1904.

St Saviour's Junior and Infants' School, Markhouse Road, originated in 1842 when St James' National School was built on the north side of St James' church, a new school was built in 1874 in Markhouse Lane by public subscription, with increases and developments thereafter. Low Hall Lane nursery school, opened by the Walthamstow UDC in 1929, is said to be one of the first in the country.

## Academies

In the mid eighteenth century academies began to be set up before which schooling was often provided by the Church. Good records exist for Leytonstone Academy, a boys' boarding school which was started in 1765 by John Coulthist in a house called Andrews in Leytonstone High Road. In 1785 the school was taken over by William Emblin, when he transferred his own school from Bow to Leyton. Hebrew, classical, and modern languages, history geography, navigation and merchants' accounts, were taught by the 'most lenient methods'. Emblin died in 1802, and was succeeded by a professor from a royal military college in France (in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars). In 1812 the boarding fees were 30 guineas a year. Though reinforced in 1819 by the pupils from Bath House academy, Muswell Hill, the school closed in 1821. The building, after 1821 known as Royal Lodge, was burned down in 1878. It was rebuilt and converted into the Rex cinema about 1928.

A boarding school at the Assembly House, Forest Place, Leytonstone, is shown on a map of 1777, and is also mentioned in 1798. The schools run there by William and Georgiana Morris, listed in directories from 1839 to 1863, followed by the Misses Medlicott and Norris from 1867 to 1874, were probably in the new Assembly House.

From 1867 the number of private school in the parish listed in directories rose only from 3 to 5, but by 1870 there were 12. The demand for schooling created by the population growth of the 1870s is shown by the existence in 1876 of a school 3, Maria Cottages attended by 88 children aged from three to thirteen years, where 'there was not sitting and barely standing room and the utmost disorder prevailed. The heyday of the private

schools came with the demographic peak of the 1880s. By 1882 there were twenty-three private schools although many of them were short lived. By 1906, with increasing public provision for education, the number had fallen to twelve, in 1914 there were fifteen, by 1926 only eight. Most of these schools were in Leytonstone

## 7. The Lea Bridge Turnpike

From Tonkin, G.S. The Lea Bridge Turnpike and The Wragg Stage coaches.

In the eighteenth century the dome of St Paul's, six miles away, could be seen from several points in Walthamstow. Thus there was a visual connection between the town and London. The increasing need to be physically connected via transport networks, and the consequent infill of housing, paradoxically, has obscured if not broken, that connection.

Before the building of the Lea Bridge turnpike road, by Act of Parliament of 1757, opened to travellers from 13 May 1758, a traveller from Walthamstow to London would go down Hoe Street, High Street, Leyton, to Stratford, thence joining the Great Essex Road from Chelmsford and Romford which crossed the Lea at Bow Bridge, thence via Mile End to Aldgate.

Perhaps the general route of the [later?] Great Essex Road was the one travelled by the Essex rebels during the Revolt of 1381, when they left Chelmsford on 11 June and reached Mile End by the 12th and subsequently sacked and burned John of Gaunt's palace of the Savoy. However, the Great Essex Road and its Leytonstone and Woodford branches became turnpike roads in 1724 under the care of the Middlesex and Essex Trust.

By an act of 1555 individual parishes bore the main responsibility for the upkeep of roads. The vestry had a duty to organise the adults of the parish on a rota basis to repair the roads by giving their labour, their horses and wagons, and road mending material. A member of the vestry had to be appointed annually to act as surveyor of the highways. These duties were enforced by the justices. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was the more frequent use of wagons, carriages and carts plus the movement of livestock which destroyed the roads' surfaces.

Turnpike Trusts were organised to improve the system of main roads in England, and apart from a premature attempt in 1663 by the Counties of Herts., Cambs. and Hunts, the first act of parliament setting up such a trust was passed in 1706.

Although there are references in the vestry records of Chingford, Walthamstow and Leyton, there was no main road with heavy traffic through any of these parishes. It was in the eighteenth century when various wealthy families with business interests in the city of London had settled in the district that the need for a better route developed.

Until the Lea Bridge and Road were built, there was no way of getting from one side of the Lea to the other between Bow Bridge and Waltham Abbey other than by the foot ferry, and there was no road to Jeremy's Ferry, only footpaths across Mill Field in Hackney and from Coppermill Lane in Walthamstow and Syborne's Corner [Markhouse Corner?] in Leyton across the marshes. According to John Roque's map of 1741-5, Markhouse Lane and Church Lane, Leyton were the same as they are today, and present-day Lea Bridge road from Markhouse Road to the Bakers' Arms was called Butterfield Lane.

The Act appointed 57 trustees with powers to build road, bridge etc. and associated structures. The ford way and Jeremy's Ferry were to be destroyed and the Lord of the

manor of Hackney, Francis John Tyssen, was to be paid £150 per annum in recompense. No other ferry could be established within half a mile of the new bridge. Trustees to enter into agreements with landowners to recompense them for land taken for the bridge and road; disputes to go before Sheriff of county and jury of 12 or 14. Two houses were protected from possible damage or purchase - they were on each side of the Clapton entrance to the new road and belonged to Jeremy Marlow and John Lidderdale.

The first meeting of the trustees was to take place on 7th June 1757, to "proceed to the execution of the Act". Subsequent Acts of 1778, 1799 and 1820. In 1827 the Lea Bridge Trust was one of those taken over by the Metropolis Roads Commission and controlled by them until 1872, when it was freed of tolls and handed to local control.

The turnpike is clearly marked on Chapman & Andre's Map of Essex (1777) which was surveyed in 1775-6, together with tollhouse and milestones at the four, five and six miles measured from Shoreditch Church.

The inaugural meeting of the Trust was, by order, held at the Kings Arms Tavern in Cornhill, thereafter, meetings could be held at any place any five trustees thought "convenient and necessary". They were held at the Chequers public house in Marsh Street (now High Street). Some special meetings were held at city coffee houses, though the Annual General Meeting was held at the Chequers. Normally about ten members attended.

The trustees employed a clerk, a surveyor and two toll collectors. Thomas Crisp was clerk (in succession to John Coe, parish clerk of Walthamstow) from 25th August 1783 to 1800. Francis Sandles was surveyor at the time. Richard James became surveyor in 1789, and clerk as well in 1800, filling both posts until 1823. Francis Pett was clerk 1823-1825, then Taswell Thompson took over until in 1826 "An Act for consolidating the trusts of the several Turnpike Roads in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis, North of the River Thames" was passed.

At the meeting on 28th December 1807, it was resolved that the tolls be auctioned on the following 15th February at the Chequers. This was to be advertised in the Chelmsford and County Chronicle, and notice be posted on the Toll Gate and on the market crosses at Waltham and Epping and in Smithfield Market. This gives an indication of the constituency of the road at that time. The renting out of tolls, in this case to "Joseph Blandy of Andover in Hampshire, Farmer, at the sum or rent of £1,250 per annum for three years from 31st March next", was common practice on turnpikes at this time, but a departure from the usual practice of the Lea Bridge turnpike. The tolls were again auctioned on 4th February 1811, as Blandy, had failed to pay his rent instalments when they fell due. They were taken up by Lewis Levy and George Brown again for three years, on the sum of £1,380.

Lewis Levy (1786-1856) was the greatest toll-farmer in Britain. George Brown was one of his chief associates in London. On 10th August 1812, however, they claimed that under the terms of an Act of that year, the lease of the tolls was null and void, so they were to be auctioned again on 14th September. Despite a revision of the toll rates, at the auction of 28th September 1812, no bidders had appeared, so the tolls were taken in hand again by the Trustees and Benjamin Lawrence was appointed Toll Collector on a weekly wage.

In November 1812 a protracted legal dispute began which the trustees eventually lost. Apparently Mr William Holbrook had taken over "land lately occupied as a Nursery by Richard Siborn" and the ownership of the ditch between his property and the road was disputed by him. The trustees prosecuted him for trespass. On 27th February 1813,

lawyers ... met at the site and several people were questioned as to the state of the area before the turnpike road was made - events of fifty-five years previously. Holbrook refused to come to the meeting. What lay behind the dispute was that Holbrook wanted to bridge the ditch and build houses along the road. Perhaps this is the first attempt at ribbon development? It seems too, that the land and ditch in question were actually on the line of an old lane before the turnpike road was constructed [I have come across no other reference to this lane] so technically the soil belonged to the Lord of the Manor. It was finally decided in Holbrook's favour at Chelmsford Assizes by 23rd August 1813. The trustees paid costs of £112.

On 25th September 1814, the trustees gave the surveyor permission to plant three or more chestnut trees in that part of Lea Bridge Road between Shernhall Street and Whipps Cross known as Chestnut Walk, to replace those that had died; and also to plant twelve or more elm or sycamore trees on the north side of the road between the third and fourth milestone, i.e. across the marshes.

On 24th February 1817, an estimate was to be obtained for rebuilding the footbridge opposite Shortlands .. presumably this was a wooden bridge for people, across a stream where the road forded it. [Shortlands sewer?] On 28th April 1817 the trustees were to meet on the turnpike road to see the state of the eight arches. This was apparently a section of road carried over a water course on the marsh, and there are frequent references in the minutes to this eight arches section. It was probably that section near the present-day Hare and Hounds public house.

On 26th May 1817, an agreement was reached with Edward Warner (one of the trustees) for him to cover a ditch between the road and his property and erect a fence.. On 26th October 1818, it was "ordered that a Hand Post be put up at the cross road near Mr E Warner's directing to Marsh Street and to Leyton". It was erected at what is now the Markhouse Road and Church Road intersection, in those days hedge-lined lanes.

In 1819, a sub-committee was formed of the chairman William Mathew Raikes, William Greaves and Thomas Solly, with the power to employ a competent surveyor or engineer to examine and report, for the wooden bridge, which had stood for sixty-two years, now appeared to be in danger of collapse. I wonder what relations were like between the trustees and their own surveyor, and the consultant and the in-house man?. The second Lea Bridge was financed by Bonds at 5%. The first stone was laid by the chairman on 5th June 1820, who, with twenty-nine trustees, made £100 loans to the Trust. The new bridge was opened on 25th March 1821. A temporary bridge had had to be erected during the works.

In 1826 The Metropolis Roads Commission was formed because these main roads all led to the River Thames i.e. the centre of London and the traffic on them was extensive. To consolidate control would lessen the costs of maintenance and repair, would make toll collection more convenient to the public, and would enable roads to be improved.

So sixty-three years of voluntary effort by the gentlemen of Walthamstow and Leyton came to an end. Some of these gentlemen were:

Edward Forster of Hale End (1730-1812), banker and antiquary. He married Susanna Furney from Somerset and settled in Walthamstow in 1764. He was a member of the Mercer's Company, a director of the London Docks, governor of the Royal Exchange, and for thirty years a governor of the Russia Company. He was a lover of nature and his leisure hours were spent in drawing and writing about scenery, natural subjects, and

antiquities. He died in his home in Hoe Street and his passing is noted in the minutes of the Trust.

Forster was the chairman before William Mathew Raikes, the nephew of Robert Raikes, founder of Sunday Schools, who had been chairman of the Trust since 22nd January 1810. Locally, he was a Chief Forester of Epping Forest and a trustee of various charities. He lived at The Elms in Coppermill Lane (the grounds of which are now [1974] occupied by the National Playing Fields Association). He bought the property in 1798 after the death of Anthony Todd, Secretary of the Post Office, 1762-98, who lived there and was one of the original trustees of the Lea Bridge Turnpike.

Throughout the history of the turnpike road, a number of different Acts were passed and the tolls changed. Under the new Act, Trusts were taken over on 1st January 1827, a Board was set up consisting of forty named persons and the M.P.s for the Cities of London and Westminster and the County of Middlesex. The Lea Bridge tolls were to continue as in the Act of 1820, Samuel Tyssen of Narborough hall, Norfolk, was to continue to receive his £150 annuity on the rights of Jeremy's Ferry, and no bridges were to be built or ferries operated within half a mile of Lea Bridge. On 24th October 1826, following the presentation of the toll table an returns by the Daniel Midldred, one of the trustees on behalf of the Lea bridge Trustees, it was decided to abolish s from 31st December 1826 the half-penny toll on Sundays on foot passengers over lea bridge. The tolls were subsequently let by auction on 29th December 1826 to Lewis levy, who had leased them once before in 1811.

James McAdam (1786-1852), third son of John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836) was appointed General Surveyor to the Roads commission. In his first report of 25th March 1827, he describes the Lea Bridge Road as having a gravel surface [on a clay subsoil]; the part near the Lea Bridge lately had been repaired with broken flints, which makes the surface draw less heavily in wet weather than the gravel surface. The road was better drained than any other round the metropolis, having "deep ditches on either side, with proper openings under the footpaths to allow the water to pass off". The road was watered, and the footpaths repaired by the Commission, but was "neither watched nor lighted by the Commission". Basically, the road was in very good condition, and was the third cheapest to run out of all the Commission's roads.

The Trustees of the River Lea Navigation gave reduced carriage charges for flint and gravel from Rye Common in Hertfordshire. The present Woodford New Road from its junction with Snaresbrook Road to Woodford Green was surveyed by 1827, and powers to construct it given under an Act of 1829. On 26th March 1829, McAdam had reported that neighbouring parishes would supply gravel on advantageous terms and labour by men on parish relief, so the Board authorised work to begin - before the Royal Assent to the Act on 19th June 1829. The New Road was opened in May or June 1830.

Lea Bridge Road was now being repaired with flints and gravel from Hertfordshire at the bridge end; and gravel from Epping Forest at the other. Material was applied in thin layers, which the traffic would then compress and so add to the surface. Consequently there was no need for animals to have to drag carriages through a deep mass of loose materials.

By 1833 the £150 annuity to the Tyssen family for the rights of Jeremy's Ferry was ended by a payment of a lump sum of £3,700, representing over 24 years; payments.

McAdam had grandiose road building plans, but the Commission would not commit the expenditure, perhaps because railways were beginning to be constructed. The construction of the line up the Lea Valley took traffic away from the Lea Bridge, Middlesex



and Essex, Epping and Ongar, and Herts. and Essex Turnpike Road (i.e. the modern A11). The Railway Act (1836) made the bridging of the road over the railway at any intersection incumbent upon the railway. The construction details were insisted upon by the roads commissioners and included walls and fencing "effectually to shut out from the view of the traffic on the Turnpike Road the passing of engines and carriages on the Railway".

"The wonderfully detailed Plan and Section of the Northern and Eastern Railway by Robert Stephenson, Engineer, 1843, on a scale of 1 inch = 2 chains, shows the bridge constructed to carry Lea Bridge Road, with the arches for the slopes and one opening over the double track railway. The Greyhound Inn and the two houses nearest the overflow channel on the west side were in existence then and what is now Lammas Road led to a level crossing parallel to the bridge and to a gravel pit where the factories are now."

"Edward Warner and Isaac Solly occupied land to the south of the bridge and James Holbrook to the north. The station building was on the bridge (it was destroyed by fire in 1949) with steps leading to the platforms. "

"Between 1840-1870, horse buses from Walthamstow brought passenger to the trains to and from the City - several morning and evening services only.

Toll receipts fell continually during the 1840s. In 1849, no one would lease the tolls on the Hackney and Lea Bridge Roads, so the commissioners once again employed their own toll collectors. In 1853, Henry Browse' post of Inspector was combined with that of General Surveyor and he reported that owing to the advent of omnibus services, "a gate has been erected near the Eight arch bridge on the Lea Bridge Road", probably this was near the Hare and Hounds pub.

From c1850 onwards, urban development took place along Lea Bridge Road.

In the Autumn of 1853 the South London Gas Company laid a main pipe along the footpath from their works by Lea Bridge Station to Sybourn's Corner. Another gas main was laid along the road from Clapton Gate to Lea Bridge by the Imperial Gas Company in 1855. The South Essex Gas company laid main pipes along the footpaths to Walthamstow and Leyton and houses erected on the west side of the road on Alderman Copeland's estate (i.e. from Hoe Street to Poplars Road and Copeland road). The road was widened three feet here.

In 1854 the East London Waterworks company had completed a new bridge to carry the Lea Bridge Road over the new aqueduct authorised under the Act of 1852-3. Both bridge and plaque survive [in 1974]. In 1855 the East London Waterworks Company were rapidly completing their pumping and filter works in Lea Bridge Road [superseded in the early 1970s by the Racecourse Works in Walthamstow]. The commissioners allowed the Waterworks Company to fill in the ditch between the road and their works and sold to them the toll house garden for the entrance to the works by the bridge. [Still in use in 1974]

In 1857 toll receipts were down as traffic had been taken by the Woodford Railway (Leyton - Leytonstone - Loughton: modern Central Line At this time too, the Clapton toll gate was removed as well and in its place at the entrance lot Lea Bridge Road the Hackney Board of Works erected an obelisk with lamps.

On 29th October 1857, a great flood occurred and the road was heavily damaged between the river and the railway.

After the Wanstead Orphan Asylum Committee enclosed the Eagle Pond in 1859, the commissioners had to move their water pump to the road side. The summer was long and dry,; wells for watering road surface dried up. In the 1860s, omnibus and manure traffic increased, necessitating more and more repairs. Although drains were laid along the south side of the road in place of the open ditches, a severe storm in 1861 caused the Eagle Pond to overflow and a portion of the road was swept away.

The annual reports refer to the continued building of new estates along the road [not Lea Bridge Road?], and consequently a great increase in toll evasion, because traffic could travel on the New Road, then the Lea Bridge Road as far as Markhouse Road without coming to a toll gate. From 1867, because the manure traffic (presumably from London stables to Essex farmlands), the road was repaired with granite chippings, as far as the six mile post by 1871. In 1871 the G.P.O. erected telegraph posts by the side of the road from Clapton to Walthamstow.

The last committee meeting took place on 12th August 1873, when the Walthamstow Vestry was replaced by the Walthamstow Local Board; similarly in Leyton. In 1888 Lea bridge Road passed out of local control when it became a county road under the Local Government Act of 1888. In 1883 there had been an abortive attempt at public transport when a horse tram line was laid from Lea Bridge to Whipps Cross. In 1889, however, a successful tramway was opened and extended to the Rising Sun, and in 1892, across Lea Bridge to Clapton. Public transport developed as technology improved. Flooding continued until the last major one in 1946-7, after which flood prevention schemes have proved effective.

The Lea Bridge Road and the New Road were transferred to the control of the Hackney, Leyton and Walthamstow Highway Boards. The Board for Walthamstow had been set up on 14th November 1862, and among its members were Francis Wragg, the coach and carriage master, Ebenezer Clarke, the printer and John Budd, the merchant of Wood Street. So, by the 1860s, the roughly speaking "middle classes" had taken over the running of affairs from the City men who resided in the area previously and who had been instrumental in the passing of the first Lea Bridge Turnpike Act and the subsequent bridge and road developments.

The trustees of the Lea Bridge and Road Turnpike on their appointment or election to office each paid £100 for a Trust Bond at 4%. This capitalised the works, and the first charge on the toll income was therefore the £150 annuity to Francis Tyssen and his heirs, and the interest on the Bonds. It seems that capital was not raised in any other way, so the road was definitely a locally controlled concern. The tolls were leased from 1808 to 1812, but after this time there were no lessees, because the rents agreed seem to have been more than the takings.

It seems also that like many other Trusts, the Lea Bridge could pay its way on daily income and expense, but that the original capital loaned could never have been repaid; although by the time the metropolis turnpikes were taken over by the M.R.C. in 1827, there had been some reduction in the debt. Turnpikes were never built primarily as speculative profit-making enterprises, but while yielding a profit to investors, were really intended to bring relief to parish rates and produce a better road system. As the economy continued to expand in the nineteenth century, the turnpike system became old-fashioned and inefficient as a system of road maintenance, and were gradually wound up (the last being that in Anglesey in 1895).

## The Wragg Coach Service

The origins of the business are unknown, though it is thought that the premises in Marsh Street (present 192-201 High Street) had belonged to the father of one Joseph Schooling. Schooling Jnr moved there in 1731 on the death of his father. Joseph Schooling had obviously run his coach services to the City via Stratford, though the year he sold the business the Lea Bridge Turnpike had been opened. The Wraggs therefore were able to route their vehicles along the turnpike and through Hackney to the City.

The house was occupied by a Mr Harland for a year, then in 1759 Francis Wragg moved in. Four generations of Wragg ran a service for gentlemen with daily business in the city until the coming of the railway to Hoe Street in 1879. The earliest record of times of coach service, in 1825, refers to nine return journeys per day to Walthamstow. Services ran from the Nags Head, and Chequers, to the Green Dragon, Bishopsgate Street. W.G. Cruchley's Environs of London map of 1828 shows a mail coach route along Lea Bridge Road to Snaresbrook, but it is not known whether this was a Post office service or whether Wragg's coaches carried the mail.

All Wragg's coaches were licensed as short-stage coaches on which seats were booked in advance though the coaches were picking up passengers along their route. Until 1832 they were not allowed to pick up or set down (except at the terminus) within the limits of the 17th Century City Bills of Mortality area where only Hackney carriages plied for hire. Operating costs were high, not only cost of horses and carriages, but government taxes. There was a modest licence fee, but in 1804 a Government mileage duty was imposed which varied according to the number of inside seats in the coach whether occupied or not.

When Lea Bridge Station was opened in 1840, Robert Wragg and another Walthamstow man, Billy Saunders, started to operate two horse omnibuses (enclosed carriages with a door at the rear and sideways seats for up to twenty-two people) to the station from Walthamstow. By the early 1850s there was only one coach operating, and this was [probably?] the one paid for on subscription by twenty local coach service users. The last reference to a service is contained in Ebenezer Clarke's "Walthamstow" (1861) where only omnibuses are mentioned, meeting some of the trains at Lea Bridge. Francis Wragg's last omnibus must have run in 1870 when the railway was built and opened from Lea Bridge Station to Hoe Street in May of that year. He continued to hire out frys and chaises until 1880 when he retired to "Fairmount" in Church Hill. Church Hill seems to have been a desirable area indeed. D.C. Cross, Managing Director of the Lea Bridge Gas Works had a home there quite a few years later.

The first Francis Wragg, (1713-82) already resident in Walthamstow and running the coach business, married Elizabeth Watts of West Ham in 1759. He was overseer of the poor 1770-71, ale conner for Toni Manor 1772-73 and churchwarden 1775-77. He was illiterate. In 1761 he was paid 13/6 for taking a soldier to Chelsea in his coach, (one of many occasions during the Wragg dynasty). The business was sold on the death of Francis Wragg, and his nephew Francis (1747-1795) took it over. He also died without issue, on 8th April 1795, and ordered that the business be sold to pay for legacies. He owned copyhold lands and tenements in Wickham St Paul, Essex, but lived at the Marsh Street premises. He was churchwarden 1792-94 and ale conner for Toni manor in 1787.

In the case of both Francis Wraggs, they held public positions in the parish only briefly; perhaps this was more or less honorary?

Robert Wragg (1776-1861) who was the nephew of the second Francis, and succeeded him, was a substantial property holder and businessman (corndealer and farmer) apart

from the coach business. His parents lived at Castle Hedingham, Essex. Robert lived first in Clay Street (now Forest Road) then in Marsh Street in the original premises used by Joseph Schooling. Overseer of the Poor 1822-23 Churchwarden 1829-31.

Coe's map of 1822 (compiled by the son of the Coe who was clerk to the Lea Bridge Trust), shows that Robert Wragg was occupier of Clay Street Farm (later Chestnut Farm, site of the present Town Hall), of fields at Higham Hill, in Marsh Street and on the marshes, and as owner of cottages at Chapel End, and in Wood Street. Both Robert and his son Francis supplied horses to the Lea Bridge Trust for team work on the road.

Robert Wragg's eldest son Francis (1806-1891) succeeded to the coach business in which he had worked with his father. He farmed the Clay Street farm, and had livery stables, and the coaches, in 1848. By 1862 he was described as "omnibus owner at Church End and farmer". This was when he occupied the new Nag's Head premises in Orford Road, built in 1859. In 1850 he had left Marsh Street and moved into the old Nag's Head opposite the church. He too had many civic posts in his long life. In 1861 he was the last parish surveyor of the highways elected under the Act of 1555. In his obituary notice in the Walthamstow Guardian of 5th December 1891, it was said of him "of all the members of that family none was more popular and none did so much for the welfare and advancement of the town ... Frank of speech, urbane of manner, generous of deed, and energetic in advancing everything that he considered to be for the advancement of the best interests of the town".

Thomas Moxon, artist lived at Lea Hall, Leyton, and the picture of Wragg's stage coach made by him c1838 is at Leyton Library [according to Tonkin]

## PART FOUR

### Postscript

History may be no more than misremembered details from which a new story is uncovered, discovered, or emerges of its own accord. Oral history is myth, an impossible ideal in so far as it can record in any objective, definite sense. Seeking after truth, journey and destination can only be that which is shared, a reconciliation of old definitions, old dichotomies, old enmities. In undertaking this work, I was surprised at people's sense of place here, where I found only industrial noise and brokenness, a place of failure and dereliction, a place of wrecked dreams.

Perhaps I saw "the folk" as a repository of wisdom, some archaic truth, or in some fascistic way I sought to fit lives, theirs and mine, to some false criteria: urban regeneration, national curriculum, the good old days; or "tell me your truth, share your truth with me, and make me whole". And so I fed my own half-thought-through myth into the questions I asked, sometimes intrusive, blundering, naïve. I think I got good results. But history it ain't. Whose authentic voice has been recorded here? Completion is the acknowledgement of loss, a recognition of incompleteness, a sort of giving up, a surrender. Nostalgia for what might have been has a place here only as part of the myth

The purpose of the study remains undefined. A *tristesse*, a loss for that which could never be achieved: the arrest of time, through the capturing of my interviewees. They were, even then (1997-8) already old. Since then, they have aged even more. And the Gas Works interviews, already a quarter of a century has flowed since the tapes were made.

The Lea was the boundary of kingdoms when marauders made camp in the dark, sailing up river to burn the cathedral town, and the red sky was glimpsed from here. And in those days there was a track, a causeway over the marsh. The wind howls and blusters round all sides; condensation buds and drips and slides reluctantly down the window bars to an electronic hum of kitchen equipment. Why do we come here, move on, get stuck, or choose to stay?

The Lea, these days, is straitened, corsetted; the road itself no longer a pleasant open roll but itself weed-choked. The road gathers images in clusters, which in return create and breathe out more. They haunt this marginal place. Is reconciliation possible? Boys and young men, some middle-aged fathers, left from here: their names hang on the Memorial. Who knows them, who reads them now? Our War Memorials will go to their graves with us. Our Memorials too shall crumble into dust.

A child crawls among innocent machines, on the pavement in the dark and rain, and the traffic stinks by. Sometimes there's a wisp of faded flowers, tattered cellophane tied to a lamppost, a hidden memorial. We cannot now unpick the choices, unweave the fabric to discover how things were. The road with its acolytes and its whores both links us to and divides us from our past, it winds through and binds together the material of our lives.

In this Regeneration Area, we are flotsam on a roaring tide, and we have come full circle from the track to Jeremy's Ferry and the building of the turnpike road. We travel faster and faster to capture memories before the mudslide hits. We take evading action in the weed.

This work is my testimony too. It would never have been undertaken if I had lived somewhere else. It's a gateway without a gate, attached to no fence or wall. Education

has loosed me, freed me yet tied me with obligations. The project took its own shape, that of "work". Work is the engine of people's lives: it is valued and it is public. Our work is who we are. Industrial work formed the landscape as the earlier work of agriculture and settlement was dictated by the nature of the land. Work both divides and binds.

And as this work's developed, I've had to learn to let my child go. I became too involved with her, loved her too much. Now she must find her own way in the world. Most of the work was undertaken in 1997-8. "Now" became 2000, then 2002. I feel so incomplete. I have not done my best by her. I've used my girl for my own selfish ends.

The task has been like that of knitting a sweater, the back goes on and on for ever, until "shaping", cast off for the sleeves, an immediate reduction in the monumental task, a burden lifted. The shaping's difficult, it requires more concentration. Or, like an old, blind, confused person or a wilful child, being dressed to go outside, I have found the turning, the ending, I struggle into the sleeve.

Imperfect, I did what I could, with what resources I could muster at the time. Love and goodwill were there. I hope these are manifest.

Norma Crooks

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## APPENDIX

### Notes from Hatley, Annie R, 'Across the Years: Walthamstow memories (1953)

P.30 In Markhouse Lane were one or two large houses, in one of which lived Mr Tite, the coal merchant, and beyond lay part of Markhouse Common, partly cultivated and known then as the cabbage fields [this would be the turn of the century] On part of the Common horses grazed, and the memory of this is kept green by one townsman who was bitten on the shoulder by one of the horses in his boyhood.

Old Common Gate was a favourite rendezvous by Queen's Road. It was very countrified right up to Lea Bridge Road, with a few larger houses and Frazer's Nursery. On the right [i.e. walking down Markhouse Lane from St James'] cornfields stretched out to Low Hall Lane.

A Mr Foster, who had much to do with building St Saviour's Church, and his neighbour, named Hibbert, had good wells just inside the garden hedge. neighbours from the cottages were allowed to help themselves to the well water, as there was no other water supply available nearby. The sites of the wells were marked by large paving stones in the middle of the path in front of each house.

P 37 [Informant's mother married in 1858] The little house in Markhouse Lane had the advantage of overlooking the road with a few passers-by and, across the way, fields as far as the eye could reach.

P. 37 We came to Walthamstow in April 1881, when I was five years old and remember bumping along the Lea Bridge Road in the furniture cart, a leather strap at the side of the cart having broken on the bridge over the Lea. The road at that time was full of ruts and holes and not many houses along it. The Bakers' Arms cross-roads were very pretty, at three corners were large houses standing back and paths leading up to the front entrances lined with trees and bushes, and one having a glass conservatory right along the path. Turning into Hoe Street was like entering a country road, the trees meeting overhead where Grove Road runs into Hoe Street and again about where Priory Avenue comes in.

P 41 I have walked in the middle of the River Lea a long way towards Tottenham when it has been frozen over ...

P 41 I lived at No 25 St Mary's Road ... from 1881 to 1941.... mother remembered the time when Lea Bridge Station on the old Great Eastern main line to East Anglia was the nearest station to Walthamstow and people had to walk across fields to get to St James' Street.

P 44 ... later, omnibuses to Woodford began to link up with the railway at Lea Bridge and with the coaches which went through Stratford and Whitechapel. Mr Gilbert Houghton, born Wood Street 1852, remembers 'horseback, the phaeton and "shanks' pony" were useful; most of us young people trudged it to Lea Bridge or Leyton and never considered it a hardship - it was a most health-giving exercise ... working men mostly walked all the way to London or, if fortunate, got a ride in one of Turner and Budd's vans, which made the journey daily to fetch our provisions.'

P 72 In the winter of 1893 the Lea was frozen over 'to the bed;', and there were coffee stalls, baked chestnut cans and 'three card trick' men at lea Bridge. As the marshes had previously flooded by the river there was a fine expanse for skating.

## Temple Mills Wasteland

This is a description, written in 1989, of Temple Mills Wasteland:

This extensive site ... must be one of the largest expanses of this type of habitat, so representative of derelict urban scenery, close to the centre of London ... Major tracts of such vegetation are becoming a rare occurrence ... Wasteland is of interest in showing how nature responds to the lack of human interference on former industrial or urban areas. It can also harbour important populations of plants and animals, especially birds and insects, as well as providing a colourful display of flowers, particularly in the summer and autumn ...

... One of the first colonists is fleabane, and the majority of the ... vegetation in the south-eastern part of the railway sidings is comprised of this. Further north and west the vegetation is more mature. Most of the railway tracks have been taken up here, and the ground is covered in grassland and young bushes. Barren fescue, a grass typical of dry, open positions, is abundant, while michaelmas daisy and rose-bay willow-herb create a more colourful display.

Other species to be seen here, all of which are typical components of this type of habitat, are yellow toadflax, bracken, bramble, Oxford ragwort, golden-rod, yarrow, creeping and spear thistle, common St John's wort and soapwort. The air is pervaded by a thick, sweet smell near patches of rocket when this is bearing its yellow cruciform flowers ... young plants of mullein grow in a few spots. This plant has silvery leaves with long hairs, reminiscent of the ears of the rabbits that graze on this site. Amongst this vegetation is a scattering of willow and birch saplings, reaching to about three metres high. Buddleia ... is surprisingly rare here, only a very few bushes so far having established themselves.

A low bank links the old marshalling yards to the adjacent playing fields to the north. The soil near the bank is more fertile and the vegetation is denser, typically with a tangle of bramble, hawthorn and elder beneath a few windswept young sycamore, birch and willow, with a lone ash sapling along the north-western sidings. Well-fenced land near the gasometers by Clementina Road is included within this site. The habitat here is of a similar nature to that on the sidings, with open grassland between scattered small birches.

There is no access to this site, but an excellent view over it can be obtained from a public footbridge near the gas works, which is part of a footpath connecting Lea Bridge Road at Lammas Road to Marsh Lane. Plans are being drawn up to redevelop the area, but it is hoped that some of the nature conservation interest can be retained, although the essential character of the place must inevitably be lost.

## Dagenham Brook

This pleasant stretch (about 750 metres) of the Brook offers a valuable opportunity to enjoy nature in a part of the Borough highly deficient in such resources. Unfortunately, despite the existence of an adequate footpath, it does not appear to be particularly well used by walkers. The northern part of the site is bordered by the sports fields of Leyton marshes and building development but further south more 'natural' feel is created by the adjacent disused railways marshalling yards ....

The Brook itself is narrow and free-flowing and suffers from a small quantity of dumping. Aquatic vegetation appears minimal, partly because of shading from bankside vegetation

but also perhaps due to pollution as the Brook and its tributaries drain several industrial estates.

A belt of trees, mainly sycamore with elder and poplar, follows the Brook, supporting good numbers of common birds, including greenfinches. the lush ground vegetation includes rank grasses such as cock's-foot and couch with bramble, cow parsley, mugwort and yarrow all frequent. A small, though attractive, clump of common reed grows on damp part of the bank, near the southern end of the site.

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