



A Ramble around Shoreditch

HOW OUR ANCESTORS WERE INVOLVED IN THE FURNITURE
INDUSTRY

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EFHS Rambling 2 March 28th 2025

These rambles are a new venture for the East Family History Society, aimed at providing opportunities for members to meet informally and to encourage more people to join the Society.

This ramble was centred on the Hoxton / Shoreditch area of London, just outside the city walls to the north-east. Some of our members have ancestors there and many of these ancestors worked in the furniture industry. Using both Ancestry and FindMyPast websites, I was able to ascertain where individuals and families with the surname East lived and extract information about occupations. With a list of people employed in the furniture trade, I was able to see whether we had those people on our Big Tree and add more detail to it.

The challenge for me was to make a walking route through an area that I had never visited. Fortunately, the Hackney Society had published a self-guided walk on the Shoreditch and Hoxton area; I adapted this to make a walk that would go past some of the areas where East families had lived, taking in some of the churches where East families may have worshipped.

Thus it was that 4 people met at Liverpool Street on the morning of March 28th. A fifth member was unable to join us for the walk but joined us later at the Museum of the Home (formerly Geffrye Museum). The weather forecast predicted rain during the morning but fortunately it proved to be a warm and sunny day.

The area around Hoxton and South Shoreditch is one of the best-preserved examples of the Victorian manufacturing industries and, because it is within a conservation area, many of the more modern buildings have been designed to complement to the existing Victorian buildings. Many of the furniture showrooms and the workshops survived the bombing raids of WW1 and WW2. Unfortunately, we were unable to gain access to it. Also in this corner of the square was the house where Dr. Parkinson who categorized the symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

We were pleased to find the house of William James East, Gillian McCorry's ancestor, in Hoxton Square. This is featured at the beginning of this article.

We also found a furniture showroom in Curtain Street, which would have been similar to the ones employing members of the East family.

in one corner of Hoxton Square we found the house where Dr. Parkinson, who categorized the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, lived.

Some of the group had come to look at the churches in the area. We were overjoyed to find St. Monica's Church in Hoxton Square. This Catholic Church, designed by E.W.

Pugin, was completed in 1866. It is a rare example of Pugin using wood and is known as the furniture makers' church. The stained glass windows were damaged during WW2

and replaced in 1951. However, it was a restoration project in 2013 that discovered the Victorian frescos on the walls and ceiling. It really is a beautiful church.

We also visited Shoreditch St. Leonard's Church, but the church itself was no longer open. This is the church made famous by the nursery rhyme, Oranges and Lemons. The graves in the churchyard have been moved and the area is now a community space where we watched a couple playing chess.

From there we walked along the Kingsland Road to the museum, set in the grounds of the Geffrye Almshouses. The museum is now renamed The Museum of the Home. Not only does it show features of homes through the ages, but some exhibits challenged one's thinking about what makes a home by showing information from residents of the area.

It was a short bus ride back to Liverpool Street and a train ride on the Elizabeth Line back home.

EAST FAMILIES AND THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN SOUTH SHOREDITCH

It was the advent of the railway and the move towards ready-made furniture that promoted the furniture industry in Shoreditch, and the trade flourished from 1860 to 1945. Until 1860, bespoke furniture was made within the City of London but cheaper rents and access to railway lines meant that it was more cost effective to move the trade to the East End.

Most workshops employed fewer than eight workers and many domestic houses, like the one shown on the front page of this article, were converted to workshops.

CABINET MAKERS used various woodworking skills to make cabinets. They were responsible for the conception and production of the piece of furniture. The Arts and Crafts movement in the mid nineteenth century fostered a market for bespoke pieces of furniture.

Name	Known to EFHS		Lived in	Other Family Members
William James (1830 -	Ancestor of Gillian McCorry		1861 King Street 1871 Hoxton Square 1901 Hows Street	Jane (1835-) William John (1853) Arthur James (1856) Minnie J (1859) Maryann (1861) Albert W (1864) Alfred G (1869)

Albert W	Son of William James		1921 Herbert St	
Alfred George (1869-	Son of William James		1901 Hows Street	Annie (1869) Edward (1892) Florence (1897) Minnie (1899) William (1904) Alfred G (1906)
Frederick (1866-1943)	Son of William James		1901 Hows Street 1911 Mansfield Street	Rose (1867) Arthur F (1893) Ada (1896) Elsie (1898) Edith Rose (1902) Amy C (1905)
William John (1877- 1917)	Son of William James		1921 Broke Road	Susannah (1876) William J (1902) Harold E (1905) Susannah D (1906)
Benjamin (1788-1868)	Ancestor of David East		1841 Pearson Street 1851 Bowling Green Lane 1868 Ipswich Road	Mary (1801) James (1816) William (1821) Mary (1826) Emma (1831) Ellen (1839)
John (1821)	Linked to David East		1851 Queen Street	Harriet (1825) John (1850)
John (1850)	Son of John (1821) Linked to David East		1881 Ipswich Rd	Jessie (1848) Ernest J (1874) Albert (1877) Maud (1881)
John (1827)	No		1861 Dunston St	Eliza Wright (1810)
William (1853)	No		1881 Crondall St	Amelia (1855) William (1877) Minnie (1879) Arthur (1881)

FRENCH POLISHING was developed in the nineteenth century for use on mahogany and other fine woods. Shellac dissolved in alcohol was applied to the furniture in layers using a soft pad.

Name	Known to EFHS	Lived in	Other family members
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Arthur Frederick (1881-1960)	William James' grandson	1911 Sellansfield St 1921 20 Loanda St 1939 20 Loanda St	Rose Maud (1882) Arthur F (1906) Arthur C (1908) George E (1910) Amelia (1912) Winifred (1916)
Alfred	Son of William James	1851 Leonard St	
Henry (1858)	Ancestor of Robin East 133	1871 West Street 1881 Long Street 1891 Coronet St 1901 Louisa St	Rosannah (1861) Ann (1879) Henry (1882) Agnes (1884) Alice (1888) Ellen (1900)
Henry (1860)	Yes	1881 Falkirk St	
James (1825)	No	1851 Mary Ann Place	Jane (1827) James G (1850)
Joseph (1822)	No	Workhouse	
Samuel (1828)	No	1861 Cumberland St	Margaret (1820)
William (1816)	No	1851 Leonard St	
William (1817)	No	1851 Marshes Court	Martha (1823) William (1842) George (1846) Ellen (1850)

OTHER FURNITURE RELATED TRADES

Name	Trade	Known to EFHS	Lived in	Other family members
William (1845)	Sawyer	No		Eliza (1834) Anne R (1875)
William (1845)	Chairmaker	No	Berniles Buildings	Charlotte (1846) Elizabeth (1867) William (1870) Henry (1873)
Francis (1812-1887)	Carpenter	Ancestor of Pam Pearce	1851 Elizabeth Place 1865 125 Kingsland Road 1871 131 Kingsland Road 1881 Gillevue Road	Susannah (1816) Sophia (1840) Susannah (1842) Harriet (1845) Francis (1848)
John (1811)	Timber Merchant	Maybe -on David East's	1871 Pownall Road	Sarah (1823) John (1851)

		tree as John (1821)		Alice (1863)
Henry (1858)	Carpenter	No	1891 Buttesland St 1911 Herbert St 1921 Bookham St	Agnes A (1865)

There are many East families yet to be discovered. If you have links to any of the above families, please let me know.

Meanwhile, please consider joining us for our next ramble around Monks Risborough (date yet to be agreed). There is no obligation to do the walk but do join us for lunch or tea!