

# Hackney History

VOLUME FOURTEEN

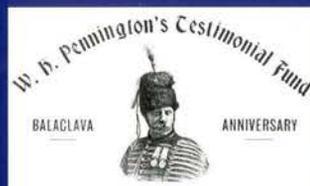
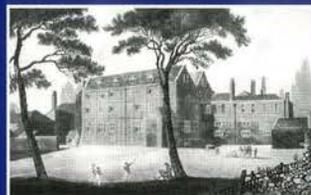
people places



# Hackney *History*

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- W. H. Pennington, star of stage and battlefield
- Quakers in Stoke Newington, from the early 19th century
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- the origins of the Lee Valley Park



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THE FRIENDS OF HACKNEY ARCHIVES

# Hackney History

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### Abbreviations used in this issue

BL	British Library
GHL	Guildhall Library
HAD	Hackney Archives Department
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
TNA	The National Archives
VCH	Victoria County History of Middlesex

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unless otherwise indicated

# Newcome's School



*Joan Hardinges*

### The Salmons' school

The origins of Newcome's Academy, or Hackney School, which stood in Lower Clapton Road opposite what is now the Windsor Castle public house, has long been the subject of conjecture. It was thought that its origins were in a school run by Elizabeth Salmon, a Presbyterian, who taught French, housewifery and polite accomplishments to girls as early as the 1630s.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Salmon, Elizabeth's husband, had a pew built for his scholars in Hackney Church at his own expense and added to this in 1671.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that Thomas and Elizabeth Salmon were jointly running a mixed school. Thomas Salmon died in 1672, and bequeathed his dwelling house with eight acres of land, and three acres in Hackney Marsh, to his wife. This was presumably the large house which he occupied in Clapton in 1658 and probably accommodated Salmon's school.<sup>3</sup> His son Thomas was granted his other 'lands, tenements, etc.' and his dwelling house after his mother's decease.<sup>4</sup> However, Thomas junior acquired the house within a couple of months of his father's death in 1672.<sup>5</sup>

In 1690 the Hackney select vestry granted Benjamin Morland, school master, permission to use the Salmon pew, which had been built at the charge of Captain Salmon, for himself and his family.<sup>6</sup>

By 1691 Thomas Salmon had moved to Meppershall, Bedfordshire, where he was the rector, and would not have been interested in the school in Clapton. In 1693 Benjamin Morland acquired the house.<sup>7</sup> This was probably the property which had a rental value of £70 and on which Morland paid a tax of £14 in 1693.<sup>8</sup> As Benjamin Morland had this house and the Salmon pew, it seems likely that he was a master at Salmon's school and continued the school established by them: Thomas Salmon died in

1706, and bequeathed £100 apiece to his daughters Katherine and Mary, to be paid out of a mortgage which he had on his 'house in Hackney occupied by Benjamin Morland'.<sup>9</sup>

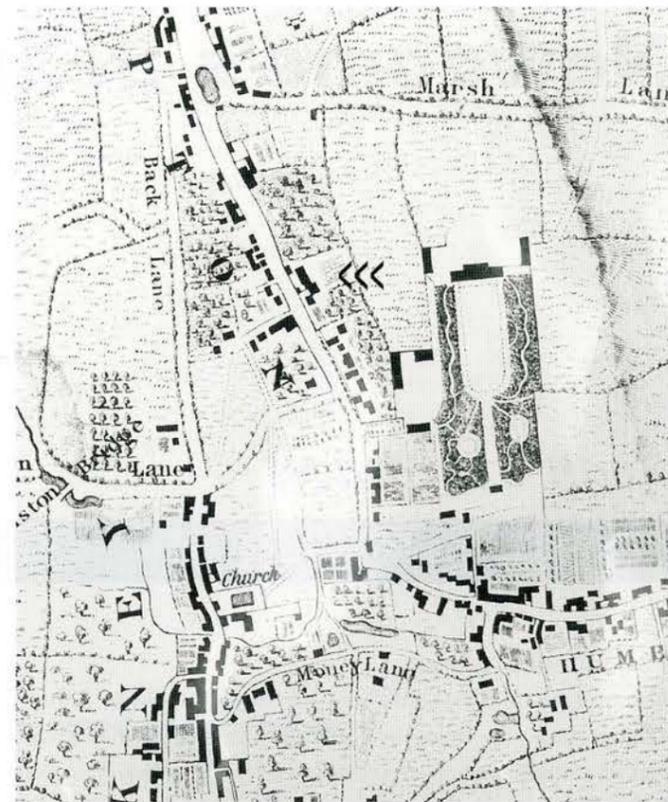
**Newcome's property**

The building which accommodated Newcome's School was not the house which the Salmons and Benjamin Morland had originally occupied. Their house had eight acres of land around the house and three acres in the Marsh, whereas Newcome's house had 'one and a half acres behind the house and three and a half in the Downs'. This house dated from at least 1649, when the copyhold was held by Robert Gore, and remained in the Gore family until 1708.<sup>10</sup> The Gores were Merchant Taylors, and aldermen and liverymen of the City of London.<sup>11</sup> Henry Newcome did not acquire the copyhold until 1743.<sup>12</sup>

Over the intervening years, several parties held moieties of the copyhold, including the Fosters and Aldwinkles, both of whom had interests in Sutton House when it was the Ivey School.<sup>13</sup> Henry Newcome may have had a lease on the house, as in 1720 he insured against fire, for £1,000, his 'brick built dwelling house, with a brew house and other offices thereunto adjoining on the east side of the road in Clapton'.<sup>14</sup> At this time there was no mention of it being a school. The first indication of it being a boarding school and dwelling house is in an insurance policy of 1766.<sup>15</sup> However, we know that this was the same building, as the Hand-in-Hand insurance policies retained the same policy number every time the insurance was renewed on the same property.

Although the school was regarded as one of the best in the country, little documentation has survived regarding its day-to-day running. There are no admission registers, lists of masters, or details of curriculum, fees, etc. The only really

useful surviving document is a list of plays dating from 1729, with the names of those boys who performed the principal parts.<sup>16</sup> Florence Bagust, local historian, attempted to research the school in the 1920s, but could not acquire sufficient information to write an account. Therefore I have



An extract from Rocque's 1745 map, centred on Lower Clapton. Newcome's is shown by triple arrows, west of Hackney House

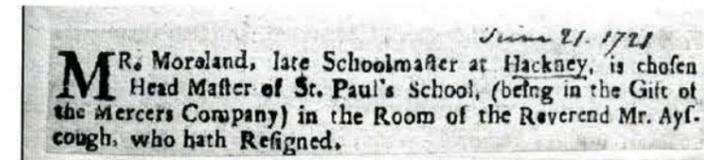
had to rely heavily on 19th century autobiographies and reminiscences of pupils, and the work of Nicholas Hans, originally published in 1951.

**Henry Newcome: headmaster 1721-56**

The first Newcome headmaster was Henry, born in 1689 in Aldenham, Hertfordshire, one of 12 children of the Revd. Peter Newcome, vicar of Hackney, and his wife Ann Hook.<sup>17</sup> Peter Newcome and Benjamin Morland were on friendly terms, and it is believed that Henry attended Morland's School until 1706, when he went to Cambridge, graduating with an M.A. in 1713: after acquiring a law degree

he was known as Dr Newcome. His son and grandson were also referred to as Dr Newcome, but not entitled to the title.

Henry returned to Hackney and became Morland's assistant master. In 1714 he married Morland's daughter Lydia. In 1721 Morland left Hackney to become master of St. Paul's School, and Henry



From Hackney Archives' press cuttings collections, 1721

Newcome took over the school. He may have transferred the school to his house at this time. Henry's wife Lydia died in 1730 at the age of 44, leaving him with a family of six under the age of 15 years. He married again in 1732, to Anne Yalden, and had a further five children.<sup>18</sup>

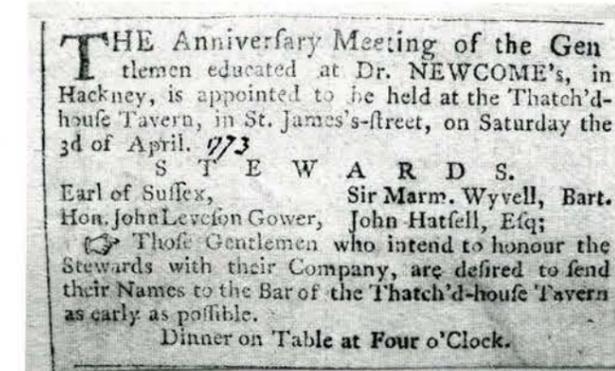
Henry was a good classical scholar and strict disciplinarian. During his headmastership the school, with an enrolment of about 100 pupils, became known as the largest and most fashionable of all 18th century schools. On the edge of the countryside, with its magnificent playing fields in the acre and a half of ground behind, it also had a reputation for being modern and healthy. The curriculum included literature, languages (English,

Latin, Greek, French), history, mathematics and sciences, dancing, drawing, music and physical training. Natural history excursions were undertaken. Football was popular, and cricket was played in the field adjacent to the school.

The age of entrance was from seven to 12 years. Some pupils left at the age of 12 to 14 for Eton, Westminster or other public schools. Those destined for a naval or military career usually left at 15, and those who intended to enter Oxford or Cambridge remained to 16 or 17 years.<sup>19</sup>

**Aristocrats**

Newcome's was a boarding school for the middle and upper middle classes and attracted the sons of prominent Whig families.<sup>20</sup> Lord Charles Cavendish was already impressed with the Newcomes when he entered his son Henry in the school in 1742. He had attended Eton, and one might have expected him to send young Henry there, where most of the English peerage were educated, but he chose Hackney School. (In the same year that Lord Charles entered Henry there he recommended Henry Newcome's son Peter for membership of the Royal Society as one skilled in mathematics and polite literature. Peter became well thought of in the Society and served on its council in 1763 and 1764.) Lord Charles's wife, Lady Ann Grey, was the daughter of the Duke of Kent, and Henry



From the cuttings collection: advertisements in the press were the means of announcing the annual reunion dinner for former pupils of Newcome's, or Hackney, School. These examples date from the 1770s.

and Peter Newcome were friends of the duke's family and dined with them at St. James's Square. While young Henry Cavendish was at the school, Dr Newcome joined Lord Charles and others in participating in Watson's experiments on the conduction of electricity across the Thames. In 1750, a year after Henry left the school, Newcome published his observations on an earthquake felt at his house in Hackney by himself and others in the *Philosophical Transactions*.<sup>21</sup> The friendship between the Cavendishes and the Newcomes continued for many years, and the young Cavendishes were still attending Hackney School and performing in the plays in the 1760s.

Other sons of the peerage who attended the school were the Yorkes: Philip Yorke, soon to be Lord Chancellor and Earl of Hardwicke, sent his son Philip there as early as 1732, and at least 11 members of the family attended between 1736 and 1780. There were also the Fitzroys (dukes of Grafton) in the 1770s and 1780s; the Capels (earls of Essex) in the 1780s and 1790s, and the Greys from the 1750s to the 1790s.<sup>22</sup>

### Theatricals

The school became famous for its theatrical performances. From the list of plays which has survived, it appears that they commenced in 1729, when *Henry IV* and *Macbeth* were performed, followed by *Julius Caesar* and *The Siege of Damascus* in 1730. Over the next nine years only two plays are recorded, namely *Julius Caesar* in 1735 and *Macbeth* in 1739, though plays were performed in most years throughout the 1740s and early 50s.<sup>23</sup> In 1751 Augustus Henry Fitzroy (later Earl of Euston) performed in one of Terence's plays, and his father, the Duke of Grafton, was in the audience. In 1763 David Garrick wrote the epilogue for *Andria*. In 1764, *The Siege of Damascus* was performed, and a great number of the nobility and gentry were present, upwards of a hundred gentlemen's coaches arriving in Clapton for the occasion. The dresses were reported as elegant and the scenes and music very good. George Keate, author, painter and

MACBETH at Hackney School, Thursday, March 29, 1770  
**T**HOSE Ladies and Gentlemen who have Tickets for MACBETH at Mr. NEWCOME's this Evening, are requested to take Notice that on account of the Indisposition of one of the young Gentlemen, who is to perform a principal Character, this Evening's Representation is obliged to be deferred to Monday next the 2d of April, when Tickets delivered for Thursday the 29th of March will be admitted.  
 The Play will be performed on Saturday the 31st of March, unless Notice should be given in the Papers to the contrary.

*The press announcement of a postponed performance, 1770*

friend of Voltaire, wrote many of the prologues and epilogues from 1769 to 1795.<sup>24</sup> Gradually the plays were discontinued and in the 1790s, during the headmastership of Henry's grandson, also called Henry Newcome, speeches were substituted for plays.

In 1756 Dr Newcome died. His will dated 1 August 1753 made money bequests to his sons Peter, Benjamin and Henry, and his three daughters Lydia, Ann and Elizabeth. His eldest son, Peter, benefited the most, in that he inherited 'messuages, farms, lands and premises' in Hadleigh, Suffolk. The house in Clapton was left to Peter provided that he carried on the school; if he did not wish to, it was to go to his son Henry, and after their deaths to Benjamin.<sup>25</sup>

### The brothers Peter and Henry Newcome

Peter, a bachelor, became headmaster of the school for nine years until 1765, when at the age of 50, in accordance with his father's wishes, he assigned the house and school to his brother Henry.<sup>26</sup> Peter then moved to Layham in Suffolk, where he died, a wealthy man, in 1779. Unlike other members of the family, he was not buried in the family vault in Hackney Churchyard, but in the Churchyard at Layham, where there is an altar tomb to him.<sup>27</sup> In his will of 1776 he left property and land in Layham, Hadleigh and Edwardstone in Suffolk to his brother

the Revd. Benjamin Newcome, Dean of Rochester, who predeceased him, the property then going to Benjamin's son Augustus Henry. He made money bequests to other members of the family but did not mention brother Henry, possibly because he had already made the school and house in Clapton over to him.<sup>28</sup>

The house and school had continued to be insured for the same value of £1,000 since 1720, but when Henry Newcome II renewed the policy in 1766 the Hand-in-Hand Insurance Company decided that a fresh survey of the property should take place. It appears from this that the school had been considerably altered over the years. It was larger, and now described as Newcome's boarding school and dwelling house. It was three storeys with a garret, part two storeyed, with a porch and lean-to. There was also a wood-house, a chaise-house, a barn and a cow-house. The value was increased to £2,950 brick, £50 timber. Seven years later, in 1773, when the policy was renewed, the house was three storeys with a one storey porch on piers, a brew-house, hen-house/wood-house, open hay barn, cow-house, stables and coach-houses. The value then increased to £3,100 brick plus £200 timber.<sup>29</sup>

Henry II married Mary Maudsley in 1759. They had nine children between 1760 and 1771.<sup>30</sup> As was the case in his father's day, the family all lived in the school house. His eldest son, Henry III, thought himself too much of a dunce to succeed his father as headmaster, so he joined the navy. He became a captain under Sir Edward Hughes in the East Indies, and made a fortune in the revolutionary war of 1793. He died a bachelor in 1797 at the age of 39 in the East Indies, while captain of the frigate *Orpheus*.<sup>31</sup> So it was Henry II's second son, Richard, who followed in his father's footsteps and became headmaster.

**HACKNEY SCHOOL.**—Mr. NEWCOME wishes to inform his Friends and the Public in general, that HACKNEY SCHOOL will not, according to his former intentions, be discontinued: it will be resigned to the Rev. CHARLES THOMAS HEATHCOTE, M. A. late a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, an Assistant Master at the Charter-house School, and Reader at the Foundling Hospital, who, after Christmas next, will commence as Master of Hackney School.

*Richard Newcome announces a change of plan, December 1802*

### The final years

Although Henry II was no longer headmaster after 1789, he continued to insure the house and school until 1799, when he died at Devonshire Place, Marylebone.<sup>32</sup> On his decease the house and school were assigned to his son Richard, who had succeeded him as headmaster and continued as such until 1803. It appears however that Richard's heart was not in the school.

Stratford Canning, the diplomat, who was a pupil from 1792 to 1794, intimated that Henry had tutored 70 or 80 boys, and by his ability and conduct had given reputation to the school. He described Richard, however, as 'a priggish potentate'; the smaller boys were more or less treated as slaves, and 'many were the logs of fire-wood or kettles of boiling water I had to carry up the dark winding staircase'.<sup>33</sup>

In 1802 Richard decided to retire and close the school. He had two daughters, so there was no son to continue the family tradition of headmasters. However in December of that year he informed his friends and the public in general that the school would not be discontinued after all, and assigned it to the Revd. Charles Heathcote, assistant master at the Charterhouse School and reader at the Foundling Hospital, who commenced as headmaster at the beginning of 1803.<sup>34</sup> Richard moved to Buscott, near Wells, Somerset, but continued to insure the Clapton property until 1818, when the school finally closed.<sup>35</sup>

Sons of the Heathcotes had attended the school and performed in the plays from the 1730s. A Richard Perry, who was educated under the Revd. Heathcote, said that when he first went to the school the Revd. Charles Heathcote's eldest son, who later became incumbent of the Stamford Hill Chapel, was head boy. He also remembered that the walls of the schoolroom were covered with the names of Fitzroys and Cavendishes.<sup>36</sup>

#### Assistant masters

Although with its roll of around 100 boys and a lifespan of nearly a century the school must have had many assistant masters, I have only been able to discover three.

Two of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's brothers, William and George, were masters. William, born in 1758, graduated at Pembroke College, Oxford, then became master at Newcome's until his death, of a putrid fever, in 1780, on the eve of his marriage to a Miss Jane Hart, eldest daughter of a very wealthy druggist in Exeter. Following his death, his brother George, also educated at Pembroke, went to Newcome's as master, and stayed there for 14 years until 1794. He then left and became vicar at Ottery St. Mary, Devon, and married Jane Hart, who had remained faithful to his deceased brother, William. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote letters to his brothers at the school.

A Mr. Sparrow, who appears to have been in poor health, was also a master at the school during this period. It is not known what subjects the Coleridges, or Sparrow, taught.<sup>37</sup>

#### Eminent pupils

Apart from several generations of the Newcome family who graduated at Queens' College, Cambridge, six of whom became fellows or presidents of the college, Newcome's Academy produced many outstanding men, including clergymen, politicians, scientists, military officers and a Lord Mayor of London. Some are noted here.

**Henry Cavendish** was born on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1731 in Nice, France, to Lady Anne Grey, daughter of the Duke of Kent, and Lord Charles Cavendish, son of the second Duke of Devonshire. His mother died when he was two years old and little is known of his early life. In 1742, at the age of 11, he entered Newcome's, where he remained until 1749, when he entered St Peter's College (Peterhouse), Cambridge. He studied there for four years but left without graduating. He was very wealthy but, despite this, dressed in a faded velvet coat and an ancient three cornered cocked hat. He was so shy of women and strangers that he avoided speaking to them. Lord Brougham said that he 'probably uttered fewer words in the course of his life than any man who lived to fourscore years'.

Despite these faults, he became an accomplished scientist. He was credited with the discovery of inflammable air (hydrogen), though this had been studied by others for over a century. He also studied and unravelled the composition of water, was a pioneer in the manipulation of gases, and calculated the mean density of the earth.<sup>38</sup>

**Claudius Stephen Hunter** was born at Beech Hill, near Reading, in 1775. His obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* states that he was educated at 'Mr. Newcome's school at Hackney, then a seminary of much celebrity, patronised by representatives of the noble houses of Grafton, Devonshire and Essex and many other families of consequence and distinction'. He continued his education under a protestant clergyman in Switzerland and at Lincoln's Inn, qualifying as a solicitor. In 1804 he was chosen alderman of Bassishaw Ward and in 1811 Lord Mayor of the City. He revived many of the ancient ceremonies and his pageant was exceptionally magnificent. He was created a baronet in 1812.<sup>39</sup>

**The Hoadly brothers**, Benjamin Hoadly, born in 1705, and John, born in 1711, sons of the Bishop of Winchester, were among the early students at the school. Benjamin left in 1722 for 'Benet' (Corpus



*A view of the school from the east, shortly before its demolition, engraved about 1820 by R. Reeve*

Christi) College Cambridge, so he probably studied during the headmasterships of both Benjamin Moreland and Henry Newcome. He gained a degree in medicine and became physician to the King's household in 1742 and to the Prince of Wales in 1746. John distinguished himself in the part of Phocyas in *The Siege of Damascus* in 1729. The following year he was admitted to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, gained his law degree in 1735, but abandoned this and was appointed Chancellor of Winchester by his father and admitted into orders. He became chaplain to the Prince of Wales and later to the princess dowager, but continued his interest in drama and wrote *The Suspicious Husband*, performed at Covent Garden in 1747.<sup>40</sup>

#### The American connection

Two Newcome pupils on the loyalist side in the American war of independence were Jonathan Sewall and Cornelius Cuyler.

**Jonathan Sewall**, born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1766, was the son of Judge Jonathan Sewall, loyalist attorney-general of Massachusetts. In September 1774 a terrified eight year old Jonathan witnessed the sack by a patriot mob of the family mansion in Cambridge. The Sewalls moved to Boston and a year later arrived in London, where they remained until 1778, then settled in Bristol, where they changed the spelling of their name to Sewell.<sup>41</sup>

Samuel Curwen, American Judge of Admiralty, wrote in his diary in 1777 that he 'rode to Hackney with Judge Sewall to see his son Jonathan at school'. Jonathan appears in a list of plays performed at Hackney School, but no date is given. It was probably *Henry IV Part 1*, which was performed in 1777, and the only play which appears to have been performed during the time he would have been at the school.<sup>42</sup> His performance in a school play impressed Sarah Siddons. He also excelled in music and painting.

On the family's move to Bristol, he attended the Grammar School and, briefly, Brasenose College, Oxford. In 1785 at the age of 22 he left England for New Brunswick where he studied law. He was called to the Bar, but in 1789 moved to Quebec, where he attained high professional positions. He became solicitor-general, attorney general and judge of the court of vice-admiralty. For 30 years from 1808 to 1838 he was chief justice of Lower Canada.<sup>43</sup>

**Cornelius Cuyler** entered Newcome's in 1782, at the age of 13, when Henry Newcome, son of the first Henry Newcome was headmaster. He was the son of Abraham Cuyler, loyalist and last Mayor of New York under the Crown. As his father had lost his office due to his loyalty to Britain, Cornelius was granted a compassionate allowance of £50 a year by the British Government towards the cost of his school fees of £70. Cornelius later became a Captain in the Rifle Corps.<sup>44</sup>

No doubt other loyalists' sons attended Newcome's, as when they arrived in this country they kept in touch and mostly settled in groups. Two American boys who attended the school under the headmastership of the first Henry Newcome, when the school was in its heyday, signed the Declaration of Independence:

**Thomas Nelson**, born Yorktown, Virginia, in 1738 became a pupil at Newcomes in 1752 at the age of 14. He then graduated at Cambridge and returned to America in 1761, living quietly until he became interested in politics. In 1774 and 1775 he became a member of the general convention, signed the declaration in 1776, and was a delegate in the Continental Congress. He became brigadier-general and fought against the British, being thanked by General Washington for his service at Yorktown. He was elected Governor of Virginia in 1781.<sup>45</sup>

**Arthur Middleton**, born in 1743 in South Carolina, attended the school for two years from the age

of 12. He then went on to Westminster and Cambridge, and after obtaining his B.A. degree, travelled in England and Europe. On his return to South Carolina, he married and again travelled in England. Despite his love of the country, however, he supported the Americans in the war. His father was a very wealthy man; support for the British would have jeopardised his fortune, so he and his son became patriots. Arthur was captured by the British at Charleston in 1781 and held prisoner for more than a year. On signing the declaration, he declined a seat in Congress, preferring to retire, but occasionally accepted a seat in the state legislature.<sup>46</sup>

Of the Newcome alumni with American links, **Major John André** may be best known to British readers. John André was born in London in 1750 to Huguenot parents. His father was Antonin André, a merchant, born in Geneva. His mother, Marie Louise Girardot, was born in France and moved to England when young. First the family lived in Throgmorton Street, then Clapton. André was believed to have attended St. Paul's School, though his name does not appear in the admission register. He was at Newcome's in the early 1760s, and played the part of Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>47</sup> He then finished his education at university in his father's home town of Geneva, returning here in 1767 to take up a place in his father's counting-house. He was a charming, handsome man, artistic and musical, and was fluent not only in English but in French, German and Italian. His father died at his house in Clapton in 1769.<sup>48</sup> André was not happy working in the counting-house, as a military life appealed to him, but his limited means prevented him from purchasing a commission in the army.

He fell in love with a young woman, Honora Sneyd, but in order to marry her he had to become rich. He strove to achieve this but Honora's feelings cooled, and a broken-hearted André joined the army. He was commissioned in 1771 at the age of 21 and trained in Germany. In 1774 he went to America as lieutenant in the Royal English Fusiliers. He was

involved in the defence of St. John's, and in 1775 was taken prisoner and held for a year, at the end of 1776 being returned to General Howe. He was promoted to the rank of major in 1778 and appointed deputy adjutant-general on the staff of Sir Henry Clinton, Howe's successor and the new British commander-in-chief.

In 1779 the American general Benedict Arnold, Commander of West Point, turned traitor, and offered to surrender the fort to the British for a fee. André was chosen to carry out the negotiations. He dressed in American uniform, but was captured with documents hidden in his boots. He was imprisoned at Tappan, New York, and found guilty of being behind American lines 'under a feigned name and a disguised habit'. On being sentenced to death he sent a plea to Washington asking that he be shot - a gentleman's death - rather than hanged. Most Americans believed that Benedict Arnold should have been the one to die because of his treason. Washington contacted General Clinton, suggesting that he would trade André for Arnold, but the exchange did not take place and André was hanged as a spy at noon on 2 October 1780. After the war a monument was erected to his honour in Westminster Abbey, where, at the request of his two surviving sisters, his remains were brought from America and reburied in 1821. A monument was also erected to him in 1879 on the site of his execution in New York. There are André and Girardot tombs in St John-at-Hackney churchyard.

#### Closure of the school

The school closed in 1818, when the Revd Charles Heathcote became rector of Little Wigborough, Essex, a benefice he held until his death in 1820. The school house and land were advertised to be sold by auction on Friday 18 June 1819. It was described as -

a valuable property consisting of the ancient capital messuage called Hackney School with the modern built dwelling house adjoining, extensive walled garden, yards, playground and out buildings with two closes of pasture land and a paddock.

Another advertisement stated that it was only three and a half miles from the Royal Exchange and commanded beautiful and picturesque views over part of Epping Forest. The property, with a coach house and stabling, was finally sold on 11 October 1819, the materials to be used for building.<sup>49</sup>

**Hackney School, Furniture, and Effects.—By Mr. HOGGART, on the Premises, at Clapton, near Hackney, THIS DAY, at 12, THE whole of the Household Furniture, Linen, and Effects of Hackney School-house; including portraits of the following distinguished characters educated at this establishment, viz. the Dukes of Devonshire and Grafton; Lords Robert Cavendish, George Cavendish, Southampton, Stamford, Dover, and Hardwick; Sir Gilbert Heathcote, Mr. Pelham, &c.; the furniture comprises 61 bedsteads, with feather-beds and bedding complete, chairs, tables, chests of drawers, desks, forms, an 8-day clock, theatrical scenery, and a variety of other articles: in a short time will be sold, the whole of the materials of the school-house and offices, with the dwelling-house adjoining; and upon the ground being cleared, the very valuable estate, comprising about 8 acres, will be sold in small lots, offering one of the most beautiful situations near the metropolis for the erection of villas, unless an offer be made to purchase the whole previously by Private Contract. To be viewed on Saturday previous to the sale; and catalogues had on the premises; and of Mr. Hoggart, 62, Old Broad-street.**

*Sale particulars of the school's furniture and effects*

In 1821 eight acres of the ground were purchased by the London Orphan Asylum for 3500 guineas, and a new, purpose-built school opened in 1826.<sup>50</sup> It became the Salvation Army Congress Hall in 1882. Although most of this building was demolished in 1978, the facade of the imposing chapel and colonnades in the classical style have survived, and can still be seen to-day in Linscott Road.

**Notes**

1. VCH I, 251.
2. HAD, vestry minutes, 1 Oct 1671 (transcript at D/F/TYS/1-5).
3. VCH X, 160.
4. TNA PROB 11/340.
5. LMA M79/LH/046.
6. R. Simpson, *Memorials of St. John at Hackney* (Guildford 1882), III, 86.
7. LMA M79/LH/046.
8. D. Keene, P. Earle and others, *Four Shillings in the Pound Aid 1693-4* (1992).
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# The elusive Pennington: pinning down a forgotten hero



*Sally England*

**Introduction**

Having made the acquaintance of William Pennington (1833-1923) during research for 'Snapshots from the Standard', published in *Hackney History* 12, I became fascinated with this hero of the Crimea who had subsequently carved out such a successful acting career. I wasn't the only one: a number of Friends got in touch offering further information, and a researcher made contact in his quest for Pennington's grave. I was also excited to discover an uncatalogued copy of Pennington's autobiography within the Hackney Archives local studies library.

He has, however, proved a difficult figure to pin down. His peregrinations as sailor, soldier, and actor make tracing him through official records a tricky task, and although he wrote a number of autobiographical accounts they all tend to focus on army or theatrical matters rather than the personal. As the last one was published 17 years before Pennington's death, his final years are poorly documented.

What follows is an attempt to sketch out what can be discovered from various sources about the elusive Mr Pennington in the hope of returning some measure of recognition to Hackney's forgotten hero.

**Early years**

At the very start there is confusion as to where Pennington was born, which I have as yet been unable to resolve. Most of the few biographical accounts available give his birthplace as 'Greenwich, Kent', though I have been unable to trace from where this information originates.<sup>1</sup> The censuses of 1881 and 1901 respectively give 'London, Middlesex' and 'Hackney, Middlesex, London'. A search of Greenwich Record Office has drawn a blank, and as Pennington was born before the introduction of national registration in 1837, there will be no record of his birth to be found at the General Record Office.

Pennington's own biographical writings are of little help in solving the riddle, ignoring his childhood almost completely – 'At this time I can recall no incident worth recording'<sup>2</sup> – and concentrating on a determination, engendered by the works of Captain Marryat and Fenimore Cooper (and against parental wishes) to go to sea. He does however tell us that his father, as well as being a civil servant (a clerk in the Post Office) was 'principal of one of the most highly-reputed private schools in the north of London'.<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed by the obituary for Pennington published in the *Hackney and Stoke Newington Observer* of 4 May 1923, which gives the additional information that the school was located 'at the corner of Shacklewell-lane'.<sup>4</sup>

Albert Pennington (1810-1874) is listed in a street directory for 1845 at 12 Trafalgar Place, Shacklewell Lane, though he is not shown as being there in the 1843 directory, nor does he appear in the 1841 census for Hackney. After 1845, various street directories list Albert Pennington as residing on the south side of Homerton High Street (1847, 1849) and as running a school at the bottom of Stoke Newington Road (1851, 1855) which was presumably that on the corner of Shacklewell Lane, previously listed as being under the charge of a Mr J. U. Harford, gentleman.

The one boyhood anecdote Pennington does give tells of his repeatedly firing a miniature artillery gun at the house of a 'gruff-and-grim'<sup>5</sup> retired army colonel across the road (was this the Major Bender listed as living opposite in a street directory of 1855?). It was past ten in the evening, a ball was in full swing at the colonel's home, and although the immediate neighbours were disturbed enough to shout for the mysterious perpetrator to cease, the colonel and his guests knew nothing of the anonymous attack until a final bullet smashed through the ballroom window and embedded itself in the opposite wall.

The police were called, and the old soldier threatened trial for attempted murder, but the eventual

punishment no doubt seemed equally harsh: the gun was confiscated and all pocket-money also, to pay for the damage. Today Pennington would possibly have been presented with an Asbo. The escapade seems to have been a rather odd teenage attempt to gain the attention of the colonel's young daughter. Apart from a brief reference to his mother, she is the only woman in his personal rather than his professional life who appears in Pennington's memoirs – not even his wife of many years gets a mention.

#### Peripatetic Pennington

Pennington followed three career paths – neatly summed up in the title of his memoirs, *Sea, Camp, and Stage* – that took him away from home and subsequently make him difficult to trace in surviving records. Despite his father's hopes for his son to follow in his footsteps, after a few years' attempt at an educational profession young William eventually succeeded, in 1851, in realising his ambition to see the world by joining the mercantile marine at age 18.

As part of his account of the Crimea included in Mrs Tom Kelly's book *From the Fleet in the Fifties* (1902), Pennington describes this era of his life as

...some two or three years service as a sailor...a five month passage in a ship called the 'Isabella' and [I] subsequently served in two others, respectively the 'Briton' and the 'Reliance'. I had visited Australia, the East Indies, Java and Singapore. I was accustomed to go aloft with the 'Parramatta's' crew [the transport ship to the Crimea] when 'shortening sail'. For this I received the nick-name of 'Sailor Bill' and it stuck to me for some time<sup>6</sup>

It was not, however, always to be a sailor's life for Pennington as in January 1854, against a backdrop of increasing tension in Europe, he joined the army and was soon on his way to war. Although he does not mention it in his autobiography, Pennington enlisted at Portobello Barracks in Dublin on 24 January 1854 (age: 21; height, 5' 9"; trade: none) though why he was in Ireland is not clear. A clue is suggested by the information he does give that his

mother's uncle, a Dr Lloyd, had been Provost of Trinity College Dublin. Perhaps family connections played a part here.

#### On the front line

From Pennington's various autobiographical accounts it is possible to piece together a general chronology of his military career of just under three years' duration. He was involved with the occupation of Bulgaria during 1854 and the Battle of Alma on 20 September, but the most significant event was of course his participation in the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava on 25 October. Pennington never reached the intended target of the Russian guns, being shot through the calf before having his horse killed under him. Rescued and remounted by a sergeant major from the 8th Hussars he engaged in fierce combat with Cossack cavalry until the enemy pursuit halted when they sighted the Heavy Brigade, and Pennington was able to find safety and treatment for his wound.

A letter from Pennington to his father describing the Charge was published in *The Times* in December 1854, a preface by Albert Pennington stating that his son had joined the 11th Hussars 'in a military fit' although he no longer seems to resent the boy's yearning to see active rather than educational service, describing how he had 'passed through all the rough riding and other drills into his troop as a competent soldier, although the extent of his horsemanship before was a pony ride on Blackheath!' Is this also an echo of the mysterious and unsolved Greenwich connection?

As a result of his injury Pennington was hospitalised at Scutari until February 1855, but quickly returned between April and May and remained to become camp cook from June. A year later he was invalided to England where he purchased his discharge at Chatham on 20 September at a cost of £30. His conduct was reported as 'good', and he was entitled to the Crimean medal, with clasps for Alma, Balaclava and Sebastopol, as well as the Turkish medal. Many years later, in September

1897, the two medals along with some jewellery were stolen when Pennington's Stoke Newington home was burgled but the thief later had a crisis of conscience and returned the medals in an unpaid packet along with a note: 'I return your medals. I was very sorry to have taken them, not knowing what they was at the time. They would only have brought me in 4 shillings, so you can send me the money on by return of post...'<sup>7</sup>

#### A stickler for the truth

Throughout the rest of his life, Pennington was always keen to offer an accurate eye-witness account of what he had experienced at Balaclava and correct what he believed to be inaccurate reports. His story is told not only in *Sea, Camp, and Stage* and Mrs Kelly's *From the Fleet in the Fifties* but also in his own *Left of Six Hundred* of 1887, dedicated to Queen Victoria.

His letter to *Notes and Queries*, published on 21 June 1902, bristles with indignation at the perpetration of unsubstantiated stories regarding the Charge and the myth that the order to advance was sounded by a trumpet, blaming 'sheer carelessness and irresponsibility' for 'unworthy misstatements' that had come to be regarded as fact. His own recollection is clear:

With the Light Brigade I heard no trumpet sound that day: but I heard the order of Lord Cardigan, 'The Light Brigade will advance! Walk! March! Trot!' of course taken up by regimental commanders. No word was ever given to increase the pace after the word 'Trot!'<sup>8</sup>

The letter goes on to mention Mr T. H. Roberts, a publisher of Fleet Street, 'whose noble work in rescuing many of the Light Brigade from the ignominy of the poor-house deserves high honour...' Roberts is earlier mentioned in *Sea, Camp and Stage*, when Pennington recalls the instigation in 1875 of an annual dinner for veterans of the Charge, and the effusive encouragement this received at the time from the national press. After quoting from a *Daily Telegraph* leader his bitterness is clear:

It is thirty years since this was written, but despite the enthusiastic furor raised by such admiring eloquence, many of the survivors since that eventful year have only been spared the ignominy of the poorhouse by the practical philanthropy of Mr. T. H. Roberts, proprietor of *Illustrated Bits*, and to those upon his relief roll he is constrained to administer the barest pittance.<sup>9</sup>

He bemoans the fact that only one shilling had recently been subscribed to the Fund, and that Roberts was distributing five, seven and six or even ten shillings out of his own pocket to each survivor.

#### From grease-paint to oil-paint

Although always ready to debunk myths and offer his own experiences of the Charge, Pennington also became involved in the propagation of two of the most celebrated if romanticised representations of the event.

By the time of the 1875 anniversary dinner at Alexandra Palace, Pennington had embarked upon his acting career and was enjoying some considerable success. The celebration included both musical and theatrical entertainments, one of which was Pennington himself – the only survivor ‘practising the elocutionary and histrionic art’ – reciting Lord Tennyson’s ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ both in the afternoon and again during the evening’s banquet.



W. H. Pennington

One of the guests was the artist Lady Elizabeth Butler, for whom Pennington was about to sit for the central figure of the unhorsed Hussar in her canvas ‘Balaclava’, now in Manchester City Gallery. On the day, Butler’s ‘Roll Call’ was displayed, its depiction of pain and suffering possibly intended to highlight the deprived circumstances in which many old soldiers now found themselves. ‘Balaclava’ conveys a similar message in that it depicts the terrible results of battle rather than glorious action. It is no more an accurate description of the event than is Tennyson’s poem, a sentimental staging to tug at the heart-strings and hopefully the consciences of those that saw it.

#### Treading the boards

The lure of the boards seems to have come about as a result of Pennington’s teaching and lecturing following his departure from the army, though the actual mechanics of the transition from a desire to act and actually doing so is not recorded. Reading the autobiographical account of Pennington’s acting career is not an easy endeavour. His dense prose often becomes confused as to names, dates, and places, details are skated over, and there is little humour to be found in the many anecdotes that must have seemed so amusing at the time.

The most interesting incidents are those for

which contrasting or complementary information exists elsewhere, and as such it could be an ultimately rewarding project to compare Pennington’s accounts of performances with surviving reviews. One such example is his own description of the 1878 production of ‘Balaclava’ at the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch, mentioned in *Hackney History* 12. Pennington refers to the drama as being ‘hastily contrived’ and ‘most inadequately mounted’, which seems to endorse the opinion of the *Hackney Gazette* cited in the previous article. However, the statement that ‘not a penny was expended upon the piece’<sup>10</sup> is proved false by the Standard Theatre account book now held by Hackney Archives, which shows there to have been over £14 being spent on the one-off production.

Pennington dismisses the plot, the characterisation and the lack of realisation of the Charge itself, which was effected by the combined use of ‘heavy discharges of artillery and musketry’ interspersed with a narration by George Byrne – the black-marked G. Byrne mentioned in the previous article – given in spasmodic shouts from some sort of elevated podium: not exactly what an audience expecting to see the gallant six hundred charging to their deaths would have found a satisfactory spectacle. Ever the stickler for accuracy, Pennington seems to have been as much upset by the fact that the actors portraying the 17th Lancers were wearing the wrong busbies.

#### A command performance

Pennington’s inability to provide personal detail for his life story is as marked in relation to great events as it is to small, as shown in his account of what was, to him, perhaps the greatest honour of his acting career, but for which he was ‘unable to fix the evening or the week, or indeed the very month, I can only recall that *Hamlet* was on the bill upon the eventful occasion’.<sup>11</sup>

The occasion was the appearance in 1870 of the then Prime Minister William Gladstone, almost unnoticed by both cast and audience, in the stalls

of the Sadler’s Wells theatre. No direct contact was made between the two men that night apart from Gladstone’s ‘quiet but repeated meeting of his hands, inclination of his head, and cheering smile’<sup>12</sup> at Pennington’s portrayal of the Dane, and at the end of the performance the PM disappeared into the night.

But this was only the beginning of Pennington’s association with Gladstone. The following March he was invited to the Prime Minister’s home at 11 Carlton House Terrace where he was assured of the Premier’s high opinion of his portrayal of Hamlet, and informed that word of the enjoyable evening spent at Sadler’s Wells had already been spread amongst friends and acquaintances. As a result, a special matinée performance was scheduled at the Haymarket Theatre for June but Gladstone was unable to attend, though he and a party were able to make a re-arranged date in November for a performance of *King John* at the Royal Alfred Theatre in Church Street, Edgware Road.

Early in 1872 Pennington was on tour in Portsmouth when he received a request from Mr and Mrs Gladstone to give an afternoon recital at Carlton House Terrace during the coming London season. A distinguished audience drawn from the great and the good of society gathered on 7 May, including H.R.H. the Princess Louise – sculptor, artist, and daughter of Queen Victoria. On attending Gladstone the following morning, Pennington learned that the Princess was keen to learn more of his earlier career and as a result wrote a brief sketch, and it was only from this that the Gladstones became aware of Pennington’s presence at Balaclava.

Over the coming years Gladstone continued to follow Pennington’s acting career, attending when duty permitted and on occasion allowing his name to be given as patron. Pennington refers to Gladstone’s good opinion of his abilities as recorded in letters and diaries, though in later life he came to believe that his fellow thespians resented

the Prime Minister's recognition, supposing it to be based on his involvement in the Charge of the Light Brigade rather than on any acting talent. The closing paragraphs of *Sea, Camp, and Stage* are sadly tainted by this bitter, lingering suspicion, and make a disappointing end to the autobiography.

### Back to the blackboard

Despite Pennington's early aversion to following his father's footsteps in the education profession, it was something he came back to at various times in his life, and his final occupation after sea, camp, and stage had run their respective courses. His autobiography tells how, in the later 1880s, dramatic engagements became intermittent enough to demand that another source of regular income be found. Pennington was engaged as a teacher of elocution at a number of schools and colleges, and also as a touring lecturer, speaking on Shakespeare's characters and plays. He appears to have enjoyed considerable success in this field, reporting that his talk on 'Hamlet and his reckless reviewers' at the Church of England Institute in Hull garnered an audience of over one thousand, and on returning to the venue for further visits was on the last lauded by the President who declared that 'no lecture syllabus would be complete without the name of Mr W. H. Pennington, and might he long live to deliver such lectures all over the country.'<sup>13</sup>

Eventually the decision was made that his path now lay in education, and in December 1891 plans were afoot to stage a farewell matinée to mark Pennington's formal retirement from the stage. However, initial promises of support seem to have been subsequently withdrawn in rapid succession, something that must have deeply hurt the aging actor, who speaks of an 'icy chill of disappointment' at the 'change of front' from those he believed he could rely upon.<sup>14</sup>

The show did eventually go ahead at the Avenue Theatre in London's West End, with Pennington himself appearing in the first act of *Richelieu*, but his disappointment with the whole event permeated

his performance, which he describes as 'a spiritless rendering of the patriotic and crafty Cardinal, anxiety and indisposition weighing heavily upon me'.<sup>15</sup> With no budget to advertise the event there had been few bookings, and a heavy storm two hours earlier appeared to persuade many ticket-holders to remain at home. The lack of patronage resulted in there being no remuneration for Pennington at the close of his final treading of the boards he so loved.

### A grand entertainment

The 1891 matinée was not the last attempt to raise funds to assist Pennington in his later years. The final chapter of *Sea, Camp, and Stage* describes how, on 25 October 1900 – the 46th anniversary of the Charge of the Light Brigade – a 'Grand Entertainment' was held at Shoreditch Town Hall, with the aim of collecting towards a testimonial fund for Pennington.

A surviving promotional bill for the event, held by Hackney Archives, reveals that Princess Louise and Gladstone were both patrons, and amongst the 'popular artistes' appearing was Miss Alice Pennington 'by kind permission of R. D'Oyly Carte Esq', implying that the performance bug infected at least one of Pennington's children. A striking portrait shows the man himself in uniform: he did of course recite Tennyson's poem that evening, whilst Alice no doubt brought a sentimental tear to many an eye with her performance of the song 'Daddy'.

Once again there appear to be signs that Pennington's reputation was no longer a happy one in the theatrical world, though whether this was (as he himself believed) because of resentment over Gladstone's patronage, or simply a change in taste, is difficult to tell. He states that the organisers 'invited the co-operation of the profession' but that only two former colleagues responded – the author Edward Rose and the great Sir Henry Irving – although the fact that the latter had done so was unknown to Pennington until a week after the event.



A telegram of support from Irving was delivered to the Town Hall, but one of the organisers stuffed it into a back pocket and forgot about it for several days. On its eventual delivery, Pennington refused to accept any monetary offer from Irving, who had already donated a 'handsome cheque' on the occasion of Pennington's retirement in 1891. It is obvious from his autobiography that Pennington admired Irving greatly and was humbled by the great man's good opinion of his work. It can only be hoped that the lack of interest by others in the acting profession was made up for by Irving's continued support, even if knowledge of it eluded Pennington on the day.<sup>16</sup>

### Family man

As has been previously mentioned, Pennington makes no reference within his autobiography to marriage or family, and from the book itself it would be easy to infer that he remained a bachelor married only to his succession of professions. The 1881 census return for 475 Kingsland Road includes Pennington, his wife and seven children, so a solitary bachelor Pennington most certainly was not!

Mrs Pennington's name appeared something of a puzzle. The 1881 census gives it as 'Ranas E', which seemed strange to say the least. 'Ranas' was not a name I'd ever come across before, and the only other reference I could find to it being Spanish for 'toad'! However cross-checking with the entry for the Pennington family grave on the Abney Park Cemetery website revealed that she was in fact named Frances Emma. As Pennington was a teacher of elocution we can only presume that the error stemmed from a census enumerator's mishearing or rushed handwriting rather than poor pronunciation by the head of the household.

Pennington married Frances Emma Harford in 1857. She was the daughter of the late John Harford, a stationer of 25 Kingsland High Street, and his wife Louisa. Can there be any connection here with the J. U. Harford who ran the school on the corner of Shacklewell Lane before Albert Pennington took over? As yet this is a mystery waiting to be solved. John appears on the 1841 census returns but by 1851 he had died and Louisa (aged 60) and Frances (18) had moved to 13 Kingsland High Street, home of William Hill, a banker's clerk, although both Mr Hill and Louisa, an 'annuitant', are separately described as heads of their respective households.

The Pennington children were Louisa and Florence, both unmarried, aged 22 and 19 respectively; 17 year old Albert employed as a mercantile clerk, Percy aged 15, a telegraph clerk, and school-aged Alice, Harold, Catherine and Amy. There was also a



Princess May Road, no. 84, in 2008

lodger, Elizabeth Keith, aged 60. What relationship, if any, she was to the family is unknown, though it is a tantalising fact that a Lt. Charles Keith had served alongside Pennington in the Light Brigade at Balaclava.

Louisa, unlike her London-bred brothers and sisters, was born in Derby, where Pennington was employed in 1857 as a Post Office clerk. *Sea, Camp and Stage* annoyingly skips the period between the end of Pennington's army career in 1856 and his tentative first steps on the stage in the early 1860s. Between the two dates, as well as working for the Post Office, Pennington was employed in teaching elocution 'at several of the best private schools in the metropolis'. He also found some work giving talks on Shakespeare and 'other English classics' both in London and the provinces.<sup>17</sup>

Pennington can be traced to a number of addresses in Hackney. An 1872 street directory and the 1881 census both note him as living at 475 Kingsland Road – just down the road from his bride-to-be.

The family does not appear in the names index for the 1891 census: where they were at the time is a mystery, however there is a William Henry Pennington listed as living at 13 Sedgewick Street, Homerton, in a street directory of 1895-6. This may well be our man, although the Abney Park Cemetery register entry for Frances' death in December 1896 gives an address of 22 Mountford Road, Dalston. The next firm sighting comes in the 1901 census, which finds Pennington at 84 Princess May Road, Stoke Newington. A widower now but not alone, for his eldest daughter Louisa, now 42, still lived with him, as did his younger son Harold, aged 31. From 1906 he was living at 2 Arnold Road in Tottenham and serving as a Justice of the Peace – something which drew him into the final major event of his life, as explored below. Pennington's last home was at 34 Albion Road, Stoke Newington, where he lived with Harold from 1920 until his death in 1923.



Kingsland Road, no. 475, in 2008

### The Tottenham outrage

In later life Pennington was associated with an incident that generated enormous local and national public interest – the Tottenham outrage of 23 January 1909. Armed with pistols, two Latvian immigrants, Paul Hefeld and Jacob Lepidus, seized the wages delivery at Schnurrman's rubber factory in Tottenham High Road. They were chased by police and public through Tottenham marshes and Walthamstow reservoirs as far as Chingford, commandeering a tram, a milk float and a greengrocer's horse and cart, firing over 400 rounds at their pursuers, injuring seven civilians and 17 police officers, and killing PC William Tyler and ten year old Ralph Joscelyne. Lepidus eventually turned his gun on himself rather than be captured, whilst Hefeld was wounded before being captured in a final shoot-out.

Although there was at the time no restriction on private firearms possession, gun crime was rare in Edwardian England, and the death of both a serving police officer and a child caused incredible shock and horror. The incident had considerable influence upon police and public perception of both immigrants and international left-wing factions, and has been cited as the cause of misguided public anti-Semitism.

Inquests into the outrage took place on Tuesday 26 January 1909 both at Tottenham and Walthamstow, with Pennington elected foreman of the jury at Tottenham. After the bodies were viewed and statements taken, Hefeld was committed for trial for murder, and the inquest adjourned until February. By then, however, Hefeld had died from his injuries and – like his accomplice – had been buried in a pauper's grave.<sup>18</sup>

In his biography Pennington relates that during a performance of *Othello* a drunken sailor heckled him as 'the black devil from hell', presuming that 'his nautical patron' objected to seeing 'a black man assuming despotic authority, and compelling the obedience of whites'.<sup>19</sup> His subsequent comments



Albion Road, no. 34, in 2008

suggest Pennington possessed a liberal outlook on equality, but what did he make of the backlash that followed the outrage? Was he able to condemn the crime and also the racism it engendered? Occurring three years after the publication of the biography, Pennington's thoughts upon and reactions to the event remain as elusive as the man himself.

### A hero's farewell

PC Tyler was buried at Abney Park Cemetery. It was a hero's funeral, with a procession one and a half miles long following the cortège, and an estimated 50,000 people from all walks of life lining the route. One of the cemetery's paths is named after the policeman, as is another after Pennington himself.

William Pennington died in his 91st year at home in Albion Road on 1 May 1923, after suffering a stroke the week before. His funeral took place on 7 May, when he was laid to rest with full military honours, the coffin borne on a gun carriage accompanied by

a firing party from the 13th-18th Hussars marching with arms reversed, three volleys later being fired over the grave. That same week, another local survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade, Major John Wilson of the Scots Greys, was also buried in the same cemetery. Pennington and Wilson were among the very last of the men who lived through the horror of that terrible day in 1854: four years later the final survivor of Balaclava and the Charge, Troop-Sergeant-Major Edwin Hughes of the 13th Light Dragoons, died at his daughter's home in Blackpool, having continued to receive payments from T. H. Roberts' Fund until the money ran out, after which the War Office stepped in to help.

#### Still elusive!

But even in death Pennington seems determined to remain elusive. Last year the Hackney Archives staff spent an afternoon at Abney Park searching for his grave – not an easy task to undertake. We had first consulted the original burial register for May 1923, which stated that Pennington was buried in grave number 054279 located in square K4, but it soon became apparent that this reference was wrong and that the grave is in fact in square J4. Having identified the correct square on the cemetery plan and the location of the grave to the west side of Pennington Walk, we set off.

Abney Park is today a nature reserve and parts of it are very overgrown, making identifying the location of graves extremely difficult. Even working out which was Pennington Walk was not easy – what is shown on the plans as a broad path is in fact a narrow muddy track confined by crumbling, neglected graves and burgeoning undergrowth. Three fruitless traverses of the route later, despair and a desire for machetes was beginning to set in, but then a chance was taken on an almost completely hidden opening amongst the bushes and at last we had found what we were looking for.

Like so many others at Abney Park, Pennington's grave is in a poor state. The grave has subsided and



The Pennington family grave in Abney Park, 2007

the stone leans badly to one side, its inscription having suffered badly from the depredations of the weather. The Abney Park Trust website entry for the grave records the details of the inscription in full. As well as William Henry Pennington himself, buried in the plot are Albert Pennington (Pennington's father, 1810-1874), Margaret Grace (a daughter, 1873-1878), Marion Elizabeth (a daughter aged five weeks, 1878), Walter (a brother, 1846-1884), Margaret (Pennington's mother, of Thirlstane, Tower Hill, Dorking, 1807-1890), and Frances Emma (1832-1896). The large number of names given exceeds the interments usually allowed by cemetery authorities in a single grave, suggesting that later burials were close by rather than in the same spot.

One wrenched ankle and several photographs later we were glad that we'd made the effort to document the site before its information is, perhaps, lost forever. However there was still one thing missing. When Pennington was buried, the

plot already contained the bodies of his parents, wife and brother. As he was last to be interred, his memorial inscription was carved at the bottom of the stone, but the final letters are now buried and hidden from sight, or perhaps already eroded away. William Pennington continued to evade us!

#### Not totally forgotten

Although Pennington's grave is almost lost amongst the undergrowth of Abney Park, he is not totally forgotten, as a number of incidents have shown.

Whilst researching this article I came across an online mention of a scrapbook of Pennington memorabilia that had been sold at auction. Quite by chance the owner of the scrapbook got in touch with Joan Potter of the Friends of Hackney Archives, who passed on his details to me. The owner subsequently visited the Archives and I was able to see the quite splendid collection of cuttings and ephemera that he had purchased, packed full of history waiting to be explored.

Pennington still has his fans amongst military enthusiasts, as contact with the extremely helpful members of the 'Lives of the Light Brigade' website<sup>20</sup> which hosts material from the James Boys archive. And until the founder's retirement last year it was even possible to purchase for £80 a model of Pennington in his Hussar's uniform from 'All the Queen's Men'.

Two very different pieces of recent writing to include Pennington are M. J. Trow's crime novel *Brigade: the further adventures of Lestrade*<sup>21</sup> which opens with an account of the Charge, and Elizabeth Carrick Cawns' doctoral thesis 'The gallant six hundred: performing the Light Brigade into a heroic icon'<sup>22</sup> which includes a critical assessment of Lady Butler's 'Balaclava'.

What is missing, though, is any local recognition of the sailor, soldier, and actor who travelled the world and survived one of the most notorious military disasters, who gained royal acclamation for

his acting, and who finally returned to Hackney to follow the career he spent a lifetime running away from. There is no Pennington Road, Gardens, or School, and his gravestone weathers away. Surely it is time to rescue William Pennington's memory and acknowledge this great Victorian local hero once again.

#### Acknowledgements

I would very much like to thank the following for their valuable help in the preparation of this article: Joan Potter, Mr M.G. Moore, Ernest Glynn, and Roy Mills of the Philip Boys Archive.

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# Quakers in Stoke Newington: the 19th and 20th centuries

Peter Daniels

# 3

This article continues from the article in *Hackney History 8* (2003), and concentrates on members of Stoke Newington meeting. Many were prominent local residents (especially around Church Street), but Clapton, Stamford Hill and Highbury attracted Quakers too.

## Wilmers and Hoares

Late 18th-century Quakers making money in the City began to spend it on 'country' residences in the area. A few also maintained a City residence well into the 19th century.

Not all the membership was wealthy, but they inevitably tend to be the ones who leave most evidence of their lives. Silk merchant John Wilmer (1696-1773) lived first in Church Street<sup>1</sup> but then built a large new house in the High Street (now the Yum Yum restaurant). He was buried in the garden, according to legend with a bell in case he woke up, though 'there is probably but little foundation for it, as Wilmer was too shrewd and sensible a man'.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Hoare (1716-1796) was a banker who in 1744 married Wilmer's niece Grizell Gurnell, and may have built Paradise House, Paradise Row: at least by 1775 he lived there.<sup>3</sup> The next generation of Hoares mostly moved to Hampstead, and some left the Society of Friends, perhaps like Sarah through boredom,<sup>4</sup> but possibly also embarrassment, as the extravagant Jonathan Hoare overreached his finances in building what is now Clissold House, which he had to sell in 1800. Jonathan's sister Grizell (1757-1835) certainly remained in the Society, and in 1812 returned to Paradise House after the death of her husband Wilson Birkbeck,<sup>5</sup> later bringing her second husband William Allen to live there (see *HH 8*).

## The Sewells

In the early 19th century we can see something of less exalted Quaker domestic life from recollections of a famous author's mother. Anna Sewell (1820-1878), author of *Black Beauty*, spent her early childhood in Dalston (Park Road, now Parkholme Road) from 1822 to 1832, and her brother Philip went to Hackney Grammar School. Her mother Mary (1797-1884) wrote children's stories and verses, her earnings being needed as her husband Isaac was an unsuccessful businessman. Mary went in for Quaker philanthropic activities in anti-slavery and prison visiting, as well as introducing the chimney brush to Dalston: 'At that time there was much attention called to the sufferings of little chimney-sweepers, and I found courage to go round the neighbourhood to beg money to purchase one of the brooms now in use'. They moved to Palatine Cottage, the converted coach-house of Palatine House, off what is now Stoke Newington Road. Philip attended a Friends' school in Stoke Newington though Mary does not say who ran it. Anna continued to be educated at home until Mary became too busy with running a small dairy and other household matters: 'There was a good day-school within a mile of our house, and we decided that she should be a day-boarder there'.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately she is also unspecific about this school: we should not assume it was Susanna Corder's (see *HH 8*), or even a Quaker school. Mary was influenced by evangelicalism and left the Society during the 'Beacon Controversy', part of the change taking place in 19th century Quakerism from the 'Quietist' times of the 18th century. In 1836 the Sewells moved to Brighton.

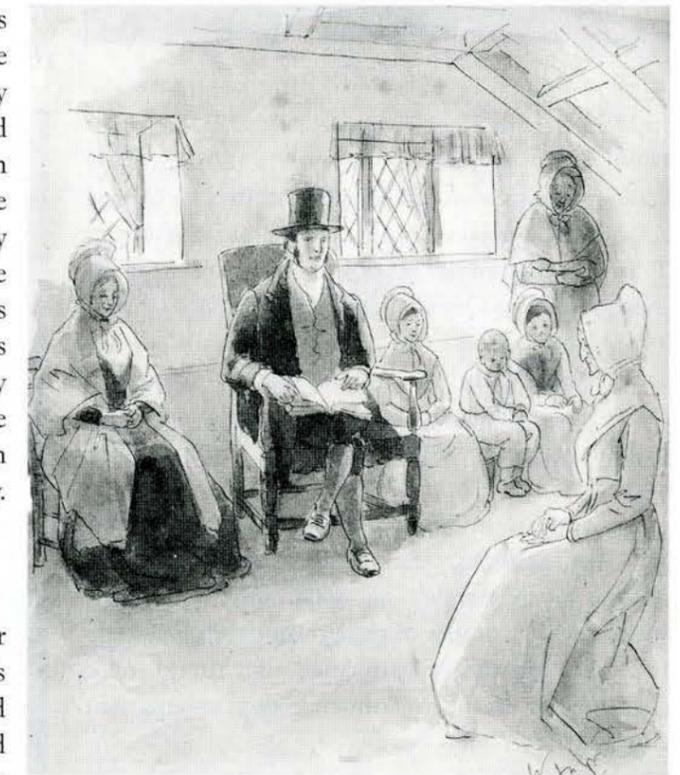
## The Howitts

William and Mary Howitt were also Quaker authors, who moved in 1843 to Clapton. At this time they edited *The People's Journal*, were visited by Hans Christian Andersen and published Elizabeth Gaskell's early stories. They left the Society in 1847, and Clapton in 1848, embarking

on something of an odyssey via spiritualism and Unitarianism to (in Mary's case) Catholicism.<sup>7</sup>

## Quaker foundations

The Sewells and Howitts are birds of passage among Stoke Newington Quakers compared with the families who became established. Edward Harris (1787-1852) and his family were quite literally fundamental to the new meeting begun in 1829, as bricks laid into the building carried the initials IH and EH, said to be for two Harris children, Isabella (b.1822) and Ellen (b.1820);<sup>8</sup> these bricks were saved and re-laid into the new building in 1957. Edward was 'active partner in a large commercial undertaking' in corn factoring. The Harris family had held prayer meetings in the Church Street building formerly used for Quaker meetings, by then Mary Lister's Invalid Asylum (see *HH 8*). In 1824 Edward wrote a prospectus for Susanna Corder's school,<sup>9</sup> evidently as one of its proprietors.



An early 19th century prayer meeting, held in a private home



*The Harris family at home*

In 1850 Isabella Harris married Alfred Tylor (1824-1884), a brassfounder and also a distinguished geologist, who was concerned to promote technical education. Alfred's brother Sir Edward Burnett Tylor became an anthropologist, apparently after meeting fellow-Quaker ethnologist Henry Christy 'on an omnibus in Cuba'. Alfred and Isabella's son Joseph John Tylor (1851-1901) was an engineer in the brassfounding firm, but also an Egyptologist. Isabella Tylor wrote memoirs of her early life, known to the Library at Friends House, but the manuscript is apparently in private hands. She was 'on intimate terms with several members of the royal family', an apparently unquakerly snobbery that others were also prone to, including Elizabeth Fry and William Allen: they found social connections useful for influence in pursuing their concerns.<sup>10</sup>



*Elizabeth Sanderson Hanbury*

William Allen is the central public figure in early 19th century Quaker Stoke Newington, busy with philanthropic activities as well as his pharmaceutical business which became Allen and Hanbury. His second wife, Charlotte, was a Hanbury, and his only child, Mary, married Cornelius Hanbury (1796-1869) but died giving birth to their son William Allen Hanbury. Cornelius was apprenticed to William Allen, and lived with him in Stoke Newington. He and his brother Daniel, born in Stamford Hill, became partners in the firm in 1824. In 1826 Cornelius married Elizabeth Sanderson (1793-1901), and bought Warwick House in Paradise Row.<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth had spent her youth visiting Newgate and other prisons with Elizabeth Fry (who was accompanied by older sister Mary Sanderson on her first visit); she continued prison visiting until moving to Somerset on her husband's retirement in 1857, and lived to 108, still wearing 'plain dress'.<sup>12</sup> William Allen Hanbury did not stay in the family business; Cornelius Hanbury III and family are listed as living at Glebe Place in 1863, but had left the area by 1870.

Christine Majolier Alsop (1805-1879) came from the small French community of Quakers at Congénies near Nîmes. In 1817, when she was 12, William Allen brought her to England for a Quaker education, and she lived with his family (see *HH* 8, where she notably describes a visit by William Wilberforce). Christine returned to France in 1833, but married Robert Alsop at Stoke Newington in 1847. Robert (1803-1876) was a chemist in Chelsea but in 1855 he gave up his business and the Alsops moved to 36 Park Street (now Yoakley Road) near the meeting house, devoting time and energy to various societies for the abolition of slavery, the promotion of temperance, peace, religious freedom and education.

#### A visitor from Canada

In 1860 the Alsops received a notable visitor. Nahneebahwequay (meaning 'upright woman'), also known as Catherine Sutton, was an Ojibway from the north shore of Lake Ontario. She and her family became Methodists in the 1820s; in 1839 she married William Sutton. They farmed at Owen Sound, but after being away from 1852 to 1857, to improve farming on reservations in Michigan, returned to find their land surveyed and offered for sale. She was told Indians could not buy back ceded land; meanwhile, having married a white man and been outside Canada, she was considered ineligible for a share of what was being paid to the tribe. She unsuccessfully petitioned the Canadian legislature for redress, and in 1859 was authorised by the General Indian Council to represent the chiefs and people to the British Government on their lack of civil rights. In New York a group of Quakers paid her passage to England, and arranged for her to meet and stay with the Alsops.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Alsop was active in the Aborigines' Protection Society, and Nahneebahwequay spoke at one of their meetings. The Quaker MP John Bright arranged a meeting with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Duke of Newcastle, and she was received by the Queen on 29 June 1860. The Queen noted in her private journal 'She

No. XII.]

[JANUARY TO DECEMBER 1860,  
INCLUSIVE.

### ABORIGINES' FRIEND, AND THE COLONIAL INTELLIGENCER.



VOL. III.

LONDON:  
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED FOR THE ABORIGINES'  
PROTECTION SOCIETY;  
AND SOLD BY  
W. TWEEDIE 337 STRAND.

speaks English quite well, and is come on behalf of her Tribe to petition against some grievance as regards their land'.<sup>14</sup> Nahneebahwequay wrote to her uncle 'The Queen bowed to me, and said, "I am happy to promise you my aid and protection," and asked me my name'.<sup>15</sup> While staying in Park Street she gave birth to a son, named Alsop Albert Edward. She and her husband were allowed to buy back their land, but nothing was done for the other people she represented. She continued to argue for their rights against the 'wholesale robbery and treachery' of the authorities, but died three years after her return to Canada.<sup>16</sup>

#### Drugs and optics

As well as William, there were other Quaker Allens prominent in Stoke Newington: however, these Allens do not include the builder Matthew Allen whose distinctive domestic architecture made a

significant contribution to the area, although he has been thought to be a Quaker.<sup>17</sup> William Allen's mother Margaret née Stafford (1734-1830) was buried with a stone marked 'The first interment in this Burial Ground'.<sup>18</sup> Her grandson Stafford Allen (1806-1889; son of William's brother Samuel) grew up in Hitchin; in 1830 he came to London to learn the drug business, and founded the Quaker dynasty of Allens in Stoke Newington for the next century. As well as anti-slavery campaigning, he was 'keenly interested in the cause of Peace, for which he was prepared to suffer imprisonment when drawn for the militia'.

Pharmaceuticals and optical instruments were particular local Quaker specialities in the 19th century. The banking Hoares had moved out of the area, although finance was still intimately involved in businesses such as Edward Harris's corn factoring. George William Alexander (1802-1890) was a bill-broker, and devoted time, energy and money to social concerns. Treasurer of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, he accommodated in his home freed slaves and refugees from European conflicts, rebuilding The Willows as 'a refuge for the oppressed';<sup>19</sup> he was one of the founders of the London Chest Hospital, started as a dispensary in Liverpool Street before the hospital was built in Bethnal Green.<sup>20</sup>

Joseph Jackson Lister (1786-1869) developed the microscope, greatly improving the lens to make it practical for science instead of a curiosity.<sup>21</sup> His more famous son Joseph (1827-1912), who moved to Plaistow, was the pioneer of antiseptics.

### The Beck family

The Becks were a quintessential Quaker family in 19th century Stoke Newington. Their origins were not local, but they became involved with the Listers dynastically and professionally in the pharmacy and optical trades. Thomas Barton Beck (1764-1830) was a draper in Dover; he married Elizabeth Lister (1767-1857) sister of Joseph J. Lister. In Dover, she collected seaweed which her brother

examined with his microscope.<sup>22</sup> In a letter she describes accompanying Elizabeth Fry on a visit to Newgate in 1817,<sup>23</sup> though this may be unreliably embroidered in hindsight. In 1822 the family moved to Hitchin, and after her husband's death in 1830 to Lordship Terrace in Stoke Newington – her son's family were by then living in Stamford Hill. She was forgetful, and is said by her grandson William Beck to have popped a baby into a drawer while thinking of something else.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas and Elizabeth's son Richard Low Beck (1792-1854) was apprenticed to a chemist and druggist in London, which brought him contact with his grandfather John Lister (1737-1816) and other London relations. His apprenticeship ended in 1813 and he became assistant to William Allen, but only briefly<sup>25</sup> as his uncle Joseph Jackson Lister needed him at his Tokenhouse Yard business. He married Rachel Lucas of Hitchin in 1822, and by 1829 had moved from the City to Stamford Hill. In the 1837-1850 register of members (Gracechurch Street Monthly Meeting) he is listed as a wine merchant.

Nine of 13 children survived to adulthood. The eldest was William Beck (1823-1907), who became an architect, and knowledgeable about local and Quaker history. He was active in the Bedford Institute in Spitalfields, named after Quaker philanthropist Peter Bedford: 'It was largely his enthusiastic energy that founded the Bedford Institute and Friends mission work in London'.<sup>26</sup> In 1871 the Beck brothers joined the Friends War Victim Relief Committee, providing relief for devastated villages in the Franco-Prussian War: they mostly conducted the 'home' organisation but also visited France. Christine Alsop (herself French) spent two years in France running sewing groups.<sup>27</sup>

William acted as surveyor to Six Weeks Meeting, the body responsible for meeting houses in London. He wrote the indispensable book *The London Friends' Meetings* with T. Frederick Ball,<sup>28</sup>

and instigated the printing of members' lists for the Society, helpful now for tracing individuals and families. He published a family history, *Family Fragments* (1897) and his local history notes were published as the posthumous pamphlet *A Description of Church Street, Stoke Newington*. A bachelor, in 1870 he moved from Finsbury Pavement to Glebe Place to look after the orphaned children of his brother Richard (1827-1866). Richard had entered the firm of James Smith, instrument maker to J. J. Lister, which became Smith and Beck.

Joseph Beck (1829-1891), first of the Becks to be born at Stamford Hill, joined his brother Richard in the instrument business. Joseph was an extensive traveller and mountaineer, climbing Mont Blanc and spending time in America. Described by William as 'a warm politician',<sup>29</sup> he held various offices in the City corporation – at his death in 1891 he was chair of the City Lands Committee and 'Chief Commoner', and is remembered for his campaign with John Runtz to save Clissold Park. He lived in Albion Road, at Barton House, named after his grandfather Thomas Barton Beck.<sup>30</sup>

The youngest brother Ernest (1842-?) travelled and climbed Mont Blanc with Joseph, and was also with the Franco-Prussian War Victims group. In 1874 he married Annie Gouldsmith Atkins of Upper Clapton. 'Their married life commenced in the old house at Stamford Hill, but the neighbourhood becoming greatly changed by tram lines and building operations, they moved to Sherborne House, Broxbourne'.<sup>31</sup> This move outwards is indicative of a coming

trend, although Ernest also moved away spiritually, resigning from the Society. Significantly, he continued his father's wine business, and by now the temperance movement made this untypical for Quakers: William Beck himself was a trustee of the 'British Workman' temperance pub in Stoke Newington High Street. This was a project of the Young Men's Committee from 1872 to 1875, when it was handed over to the manager to continue without the Committee's financial subsidy.<sup>32</sup>

### Temperance and mutual instruction

The Young Men's Committee was set up in 1872 to find respectable lodgings for young Quakers arriving from the country, and keep them out of temptation. Part of Devonshire House Monthly Meeting, it was mostly active in Stoke Newington, perhaps as a successor to the Stoke Newington Mutual Instruction Society for 'Young Persons of Stoke Newington and its Vicinity, members of or connected with the Society of Friends'.<sup>33</sup> As well as joint soirées with the Young Women's Committee, which achieved attendances of 300, they held improving lectures such as 'The Second Coming', 'Electromagnetism and the Telephone', and in 1879 a visit by 'W.H. Hillery the "black bishop" from San Francisco'<sup>34</sup> – in fact Bishop of Virginia in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.<sup>35</sup>

Metford Warner frequently hosted these events. As a manufacturing businessman he was not untypically Quaker, but his trade as a 'paper stainer' is unlike the drab Quaker image. The wallpaper firm Jeffrey and Co included Stafford Allen's brother William as a partner; Metford Warner joined in 1866. Inspired by William Morris, he commissioned designs from artists and architects including Walter Crane and William Burges. 'Thanks to Warner's efforts, wallpapers appeared in the Fine Arts Exhibition at the Albert Hall, London, for the first time in 1873. This raised the standards of design in the wallpaper industry' until under



Cartoon self-portraits by Ernest Beck

his proprietorship 'the company became one of the most innovative and successful wallpaper manufacturers in Europe'.<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Warner, who began Warner Fabrics about that time, seems to be a cousin from a 'disowned' branch of the Warners. Metford Warner arrived in Sanford Place in 1868 from Hertfordshire. By 1880 he had moved the other side of Green Lanes to Highbury Park, and by 1910 to Aberdeen Park, where in 1927 Metford and Agnes celebrated their diamond wedding.<sup>37</sup> Metford Warner's son Horace joined the wallpaper business (the Victoria and Albert Museum has a design of his called the Mill Stream Frieze<sup>38</sup>) but he is also known as a photographer. A trustee of the Bedford Institute Association, he took a series of photographs known as the Spitalfields Nippers, which the BIA used for fundraising.<sup>39</sup>

Another notable family were the Foxes, descended not from early Quaker George Fox but from an extensive Cornish family who specialised in surgery and medicine, which the Stoke Newington members mostly continued. Joseph John Fox (1821-1897) was in the area from 1841, living and practising in Church Row until the 1870s when he moved to Lordship Terrace; he formed the Mutual Instruction Society in 1845. At least four sons became doctors: Richard Hingston Fox (1853-1924), Joseph Tregelles Fox (1855-1937), Robert Fortescue Fox (1858-1940) and Charles Allen Fox (b. 1849), who was disowned for unorthodox 'Fritchleyite' Quakerism. Confusingly, the Foxes like other vast dynasties kept using the same names, and from 1855 to 1863 Joseph John's contemporary the insurance underwriter Joseph Hingston Fox (1835-1912) lived in Park Street: they were half third cousins, sharing a great-great-grandfather.<sup>40</sup>

John Howard (1726?-1790), who campaigned for prison reform, was a local resident but not a Quaker. The Howard Association was founded in 1866 for penal reform policy, rather than prison visiting, with backing from Stafford Allen, Joseph John Fox and Robert Alsop, and its paid secretary was another Stoke Newington Quaker, William Tallack. He has been called 'the brain and voice



John Fyfe Stewart

of the movement' though also 'something of an eccentric, and *persona non grata* in some Quaker circles, but his devotion to the cause he served was unquestionable'.<sup>41</sup>

The 1880s, heyday of the Young Men's Committee, also saw the high water mark of Stoke Newington meeting, with the 1888 list showing 346 members. At this time, Louisa Hooper Stewart (see *HH 8*) returned to the area, living from 1874 variously around Rectory Road and Cazenove Road, running her temperance coffee cart in the High Street and her school for travelling show people. Louisa moved to Enfield in 1889, but her stepson John Fyfe Stewart (1845-1908) remained in Clapton. Trained as an engineer, he went to France with the Franco-Prussian War relief effort, was involved with the Bedford Institute and other Quaker bodies, and stood unsuccessfully for parliament as Liberal candidate for Hackney Central. Historian Thomas Kennedy considers he is 'an unsung hero among Quaker "emancipators"', being prime mover of the 1895 Manchester Conference that changed the

direction of British Quakerism to a more liberal and less evangelical religion.<sup>42</sup>

### Education

John Fyfe Stewart's qualities have much to do with his upbringing by Louisa, and her own remarkable education, in which Susanna Corder made such an impression. Education was an essential component of what distinguished the Quakers of the time – especially as, like other dissenters, Quakers had been excluded from Oxford and Cambridge.

A Beck cousin, Mary Elizabeth Beck (1823-1903), was daughter of Thomas (1795-1859) and Susanna of Dover. Her family moved to Lindfield, Sussex (where William Allen had his other home): she was educated there in Greek, Latin, German and 'some science', until at the age of 14 – around 1837 – she attended Sarah Sweetapple's school in Stoke Newington, and became a governess to Quaker households.<sup>43</sup> William Beck in *A Description of Church Street* describes The Laurels, 'a fine square-built mansion' next to the Falcon Tavern being 'the scene of Sarah Sweetapple's rule over the Friends' Girls' School, which had moved there from Fleetwood House after Susanna Corder's death'.<sup>44</sup> William is not helping us untangle the chronology here: Susanna did not in fact die until 1850, but moved to Chelmsford in 1848; Sarah moved to the area from Hitchin in 1834, and moved out to Leominster, Herefordshire, in 1844.<sup>45</sup> Louisa Stewart says 'The school changed at Susanna's retirement, and not for the better, Papa thought'<sup>46</sup> and her chronology puts this at 1832, though she does not say Sarah Sweetapple took over.

The Stoke Newington Ragged School was founded about 1846 on the Common, not by Quakers, but the annual reports show as donors many recognisable Quaker names from the members lists – Allens, Becks, Foxes, Hanburys, Molines, Smees, Tylors. The 1854 report, on the opening of new premises near Sandford Lane, shows a rather different world from the Quaker schools, recounting measures on the old building 'to protect the windows from stones and other missiles'. Parents 'were asked to protect the new building from similar assaults. The promise to do so was unanimously given, and *not one window has been broken*'.<sup>47</sup> Hackney Archives catalogue gives the school records as 'donation by R. Hingston Fox', one of the final trustees when it passed to the London School Board.

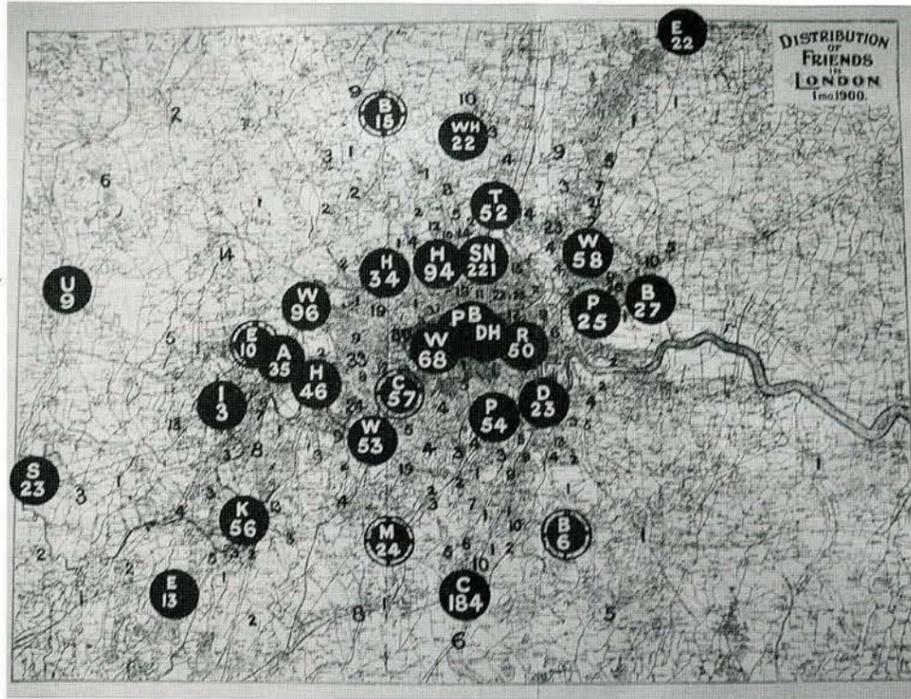
As with many large houses once the grand families had moved out, Paradise House became a school. It had been the home of the Hoares, of Grizell and William Allen, and later of William Henry Tylor, brother of Alfred. One notable feature was its enormous marble bath, possibly built by Tylor. A Quaker boys' school, begun in 1876 with six pupils in Lordship Park, moved there in 1879. Run by John Sharp (1844-1896) whose family ran many schools around the country, it continued at least until 1907.<sup>48</sup>



Paradise House from the south, around 1900

KEY

- A 35 Acton
- B Bunhill Fields
- B 15 Barnet
- B 27 Barking
- B 6 Bromley
- C 184 Croydon
- C 57 Chelsea
- D 23 Deptford
- DH Devonshire House
- E 10 Ealing
- E 13 Esber
- E 22 Epping
- H 34 Hampstead
- H 46 Hammersmith
- H 94 Holloway
- I 3 Isleworth
- K 56 Kingston
- M 24 Mitcham
- P Peel
- P 25 Plaistow
- P 54 Peckham
- R 50 Ratcliff
- S 23 Staines
- SN 221 Stoke Newington
- T 52 Tottenham
- U 9 Uxbridge
- W 53 Wandsworth
- W 58 Wanstead
- W 68 Westminster
- W 96 Willesden
- WH 22 Winchmore Hill



Map showing locations of Quaker meetings in the London area in 1900. The numbers indicate the number of members resident within a mile of the relevant meeting; not all meetings were held every week.

**Quakers abroad**

Stoke Newington had connections with education further afield. Joseph Beck's brilliant eldest son Theodore (1859-1899) was president of the Cambridge Union (now that Quakers could go there), and in India became principal of the Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh, developing a warm friendship with its Muslim founder Sir Syed Ahmed. He died at Simla aged 40, his funeral attended by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon.

There was also specifically Quaker education abroad. Travelling in Palestine, Stafford Allen met Theophilus Waldmeier (1832-1915), a Swiss who came to London and became a Quaker under his and Joseph Hingston Fox's influence. In 1873 Waldmeier founded a Quaker school at Brummana

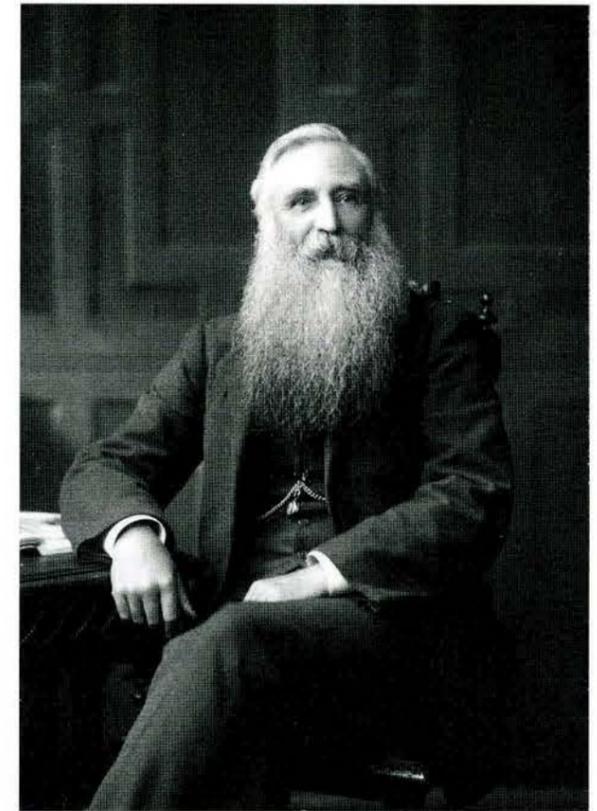
near Beirut, still in existence. He also founded the Lebanon Hospital for the Insane in about 1898. He was a Stoke Newington member though he never lived there; likewise his second wife Fareedy, resident in Lebanon until her death in 1942. Up to 1950 the meeting sent Hospital Sunday collections to the Lebanon Hospital.<sup>49</sup>

Daniel Oliver, a young Scot, married at Stoke Newington in 1895 before going out to Brummana school, having trained at the first Friends Missionary Home, founded in 1893.<sup>50</sup> This training centre at 77 Downs Park Road moved to Birmingham in 1904, but Stoke Newington sent members abroad during the 20th century as Quaker workers in India, China and Madagascar. The nature of Quaker missionary work changed, to become more 'service' than 'mission': in 1918 the Friends Foreign Mission Association merged with the Quaker relief operations and became Friends Service Council.

**Demographic change**

A revealing map, opposite, published in 1900<sup>51</sup> shows the number of members living within a mile radius of each London meeting. Stoke Newington, though already in decline, is by far the largest, with 221. The nearest meeting to the west is Holloway (Mercers Road) with 94; Tottenham has 52. However, it is hard to tell from this how many of those members were regularly attending for worship. William Beck's useful members' lists provide a picture of how the local Quaker presence diminished, starting with his own family. The Becks of Theodore's generation all moved out of the area; none of the women remained locally under married names. After William died in 1907, none of this Beck family appear in the list at all.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, also in 1907, the calm stateliness of the meeting house tended by its caretaker seems untroubled in the contemporary picture below.

One notable Quaker servant of the Society suggests the character of Stoke Newington meeting as the 20th century began. William Frederic Wells (1843-1921), born in West Hackney and educated at Quaker schools in Epping and Tottenham, eventually lived at 79 Lordship Road. Like Edward Harris he was a corn broker, and like Robert Alsop



William Frederic Wells

he retired from business early, devoting his life to the Society, but in Quaker administrative roles rather than the many outside concerns of the Alsops. For 50 continuous years (1871-1921) he was clerk to Devonshire House Monthly Meeting, the administrative body covering Stoke Newington, and for 44 years was clerk to Six Weeks Meeting. He served on at least eight other committees and organisations of the Society, mostly concurrently.

Minutes of the Ministry and Oversight Committee record his death with 'a deep sense of the loss we



The Yoakley Road meeting-house in 1907

have sustained'.<sup>53</sup> Figures in their reports show a decline in actual meeting attendance of some 50 per cent from over 50 in October 1922 to 'about 26' in October 1931; book membership in 1931 is 151.<sup>54</sup> The energy of previous generations was lacking, but Stoke Newington Quakers maintained a piety towards tradition, as shown by the Allen family. Edward Ransome Allen (1841-1916), son of Stafford, entered his father's drug business and served the Society of Friends in various capacities. He married Ellen Watlock of Wandsworth, and their eldest son was Edward Watlock Allen (1867-1946), educated at Paradise House. 'For many years he exercised loving care over Stoke Newington Meeting House and burial ground'.<sup>55</sup>



*The Friends' burial ground, 1907*

When he retired to Bournemouth he called his house 'Digby' after Digby Road (now Crescent) where he had lived – his son John did similarly on moving to Alderley Edge. The Ministry and Oversight Committee's draft report for 1931 shows they attempted not to get too sentimental about the Bournemouth move, deleting 'last link with the palmy days...';<sup>56</sup> though that evidently expressed what was felt.

Some families living elsewhere in London made the journey on Sundays. Paddy Baker (born 1923) recalls travelling from Finchley to Stoke Newington for worship in the 1930s, via train to Finsbury Park, laying bets with other boys about how many bald heads they would see from the balcony.<sup>57</sup>

### World War II and after

During the Second World War the meeting house was used as a base for youth facilities, as so much was destroyed or unavailable. In 1947 this was taken over by the Bedford Institute as a 'neighbourhood centre', although organisationally there were difficulties working out the shared responsibility for premises,<sup>58</sup> and the BIA moved out in 1951.

In the 1947 list there are three residents of the Yoakley almshouses; seven other members resident in Stoke Newington or Hackney; nine elsewhere in north London; 18 in other parts of London; 50 are either elsewhere in Britain or abroad. There was some effort to persuade people to transfer membership to where they lived, and in 1950 there are five in the almshouses; 11 others in Stoke Newington or Hackney; and 12 in other parts of London, as by now for instance the Bakers of Finchley have transferred their membership. 33 are elsewhere – still more than half the 60 members.

In 1950, monthly meeting clerk Eric Sly wrote an article 'Quakerism in Inner London'<sup>59</sup> describing the problem of these meetings as 'dependence upon people travelling to them from the suburbs,

where these folk have established fresh roots, and a corresponding lack of support from the districts where the meetings are held'. Sly had himself moved out from Darville Road to New Southgate in 1934. He faces a typical Quaker dilemma:

Are we to sit in our suburban armchairs and say that the folk in the crowded streets of Bethnal Green or Shoreditch are no concern of ours? ... As a predominantly middle-class body, with a way of worship and an attitude towards life which do not appear to make a popular appeal, we may find it difficult to discover how to speak to the condition of these folk.

He notes that new members have recently joined at Stoke Newington (not lavishly: in 1950 two families came in as another from 1947 went) and affirms the need for smaller meetings to survive.

One person helping to maintain Stoke Newington meeting from outside the area was David Watlock Allen (1905-1984), son of Edward whose service to the premises was noted. Never locally resident after student days, he retained his membership and by 1950 was active in the meeting,<sup>60</sup> although living in Golders Green and later in West Kensington. Michael Thompson (born 1933 in a family maintaining membership while abroad – his father worked for Palestine Railways) was living in Kensington but involved in the life of the meeting.<sup>61</sup> Local residence was not vital for dedicated membership, but some members related to Stoke Newington as a meeting rather than as somewhere they chose to live.

Yet there were local newcomers to the meeting. The late Henry Rose (1933-2003), from a Jewish family living in Wigan House in Clapton, described how aged about 16 or 17 he started coming for worship, held around the stove in the cloakroom, with half a dozen elderly almshouse inhabitants.<sup>62</sup> He became the meeting's librarian during the 1950s.

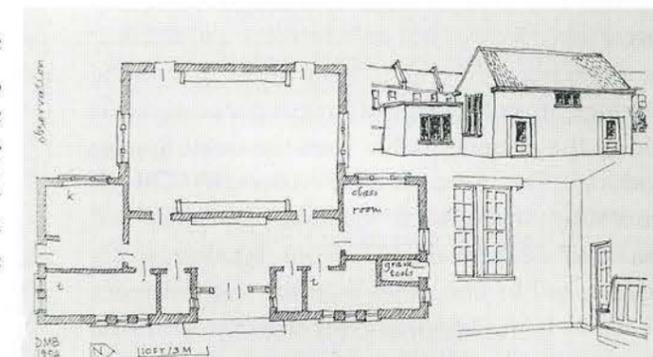
The almshouses were recognised as the key to the meeting continuing. For a time after some

damage to the meeting house in 1941 the meeting was held there, and there was a suggestion to do this again. The premises committee found the old meeting house impossible to maintain, and recommended adaptation of Yoakley Buildings as a highly economical option, while 'erection of a smaller building on the unused part of the burial ground is not felt to be justified or desirable'. They were not thinking of demolishing the old premises, but hoped to sell them to the London County Council 'as they already make some use of them during the week for instructional purposes. If ownership of the present property passed to a public body, future care of the burial ground would be more readily assured.'

The premises committee were ready to negotiate with the Michael Yoakley trustees, but the trustees were unfortunately moving in a different direction, as the Charity Commissioners had agreed to the sale of the almshouse site. Consequently the meeting took the leap of faith they had rejected, to build a new meeting house on the unused land, and without the safety net of a regular group from the almshouses.<sup>63</sup>

### A new meeting house

The old meeting house was demolished in 1957 and replaced by Hubert Lidbetter's simple and practical building. Lidbetter had designed Friends House on Euston Road and many other buildings for the Society, and knew what made a good meeting house, although at least one member



*David Butler's drawings of the new meeting-house, 1957*

criticised it as 'Hampstead Garden Suburb 1925'.<sup>64</sup> Local authority housing was built on the site of the old meeting house and the almshouses; civic dignitaries attended the new building's opening in February 1958.<sup>65</sup>

Without the stability the almshouse residents had provided against natural fluctuations, when some members like Henry Rose moved away for work, and others died, the meeting was left unsustainably disheartened. A particular blow was the loss of the clerk, William Eltham, when his house was compulsorily purchased for the Nightingale Estate and he could afford nowhere else locally.<sup>65</sup> The last meeting was in January 1966, and the building was sold to the Seventh Day Adventists, who met there already on Saturdays. The burial ground remained in the ownership of the Society of Friends but responsibility for upkeep was divided between Hackney Council and the SDA Church, who extended their building in 1991 after arrangements for exhumation of some graves.<sup>66</sup>

### The meeting starts again

During the 1990s it became clear that there were people who lived in the neighbourhood but were attending Quaker meetings in other parts of London. An informal worship group in Hackney met once a month, and from 1997 Quakers took a stall at the Stoke Newington Festival. People expressed interest, but there was still no weekly Quaker meeting, and an opportunity was missed to mark 1998 as 300 years since the first local meeting. Eventually a regular meeting for worship started after the Festival in June 2000, and because the organisers were already involved in existing meetings, Stoke Newington's worship was originally held in the evening, rather than the usual Sunday morning. The Seventh Day Adventist Church generously made their building available, but needed to use the building for some Sundays, so the meeting had to find other premises – consistency (or habit) being important for worship to thrive. They used Clissold Natural Health Centre for about six months until the Church of England's hall in Defoe Road became available in June 2001.

### Notes

Unless otherwise stated, information on residence and membership numbers is from the printed London & Middlesex Quarterly Meeting Members List (1868-1966). Other biographical information if not referenced comes from the 'Dictionary of Quaker Biography' (DQB) typescript files at Friends House Library, compiled from various sources within their collection.

1. F.W. Baxter, 'Paradise Row (Church Street): A corner of old Stoke Newington'; articles from *Hackney & Kingsland Gazette* (March and April 1924) pasted up as continuous columns, in Friends House Library.
2. *Echo and London Evening Chronicle* 3 and 6 April 1915; Charles Wilmer Foster and Joseph J. Green, *History of the Wilmer Family*, privately printed (Leeds, 1888), 183.
3. Zoë Croad, 'Clissold House, Stoke Newington N16' in *Hackney Society Newsletter* 1.5 (Autumn 1989).
4. Croad quotes *Memoirs of Samuel Hoare* by his daughter Sarah and his widow Hannah, ed. F.R. Pryor (1911); Sarah is also quoted in Baxter, 'Paradise Row'.
5. Baxter, 'Paradise Row'.
6. Mary Bayly, *The Life and Letters of Mrs Sewell*, 2nd ed (1889), 61-63.
7. Mary Howitt, *An autobiography: edited by her daughter Margaret Howitt* (1889). The Clapton period is in vol. 2 ch. 1. See also ODNB, and Joy Dunicliff, *Mary Howitt: Another lost Victorian writer* (1992).
8. William Beck, *A Description of Church St, Stoke Newington* (1927), p.13. The initials could actually be Edward and his wife Isabella.
9. Friends House Library Vol. K/6a; quoted in full in A. J. Shirren, *The Chronicles of Fleetwood House* (1951), 159-160.
10. Information on Tylors from ODNB; Baxter suggests plausibly that Isabella's royal connection is through Christine Alsop; her guardian William Allen helped Queen Victoria's father financially.
11. Baxter, 'Paradise Row'.
12. Desmond Chapman-Huston & Ernest C. Cripps, *Through a City Archway: the story of Allen & Hanburys 1715-1954* (1954), 150.
13. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography (DCB); Memorials of Christine Majolier Alsop*, compiled by Martha Braithwaite (1881), 151-2.
14. DCB.
15. *Aborigine's Friend* no. 12 (1860), 155.
16. DCB.
17. e.g. in David Mander, *Look Back, Look Forward: An illustrated history of Stoke Newington* (1997), 74; no Matthew Allen appears in the members' lists.
18. Baxter, 'Paradise Row'; photograph of gravestone (1955) in HAD, print no. P 11454.

19. Mentioned by A.J. Shirren in ms notes on Quakers in HAD D/F/SHI/23; also in Baxter, 'Paradise Row'; it later became Kennaway Hall, a Church Missionary Society training centre.
20. Dorothea Mavor, Lady Butterworth, *The Story of a City Hospital 1848-1925* (1925). A ward was named after him.
21. ODNB; extensive article by son Joseph Lister in old DNB.
22. W. Beck *Family Fragments*, 132.
23. Friends House Library, Temp MSS 903/3.
24. W. Beck, *Family Fragments*, 131.
25. W. Beck, *Family Fragments*, 33-34.
26. DQB quotes 'Testimony' in Yearly Meeting Proceedings (1908).
27. William K. Sessions, *They Chose the Star: Quaker war relief work in France 1870-1875*, (York, 1991), 68-71.
28. William Beck and T. Frederick Ball, *The London Friends' Meetings* (1869).
29. W. Beck, *Family Fragments*, 146.
30. W. Beck, *Church Street*, 20.
31. W. Beck *Family Fragments*, 148.
32. Devonshire House Monthly Meeting Young Men's Committee minutes 1872-1888, with separate sequence at back of volume for British Workman business.
33. *Rules of the Stoke Newington Mutual Instruction Society* (1855?) with manuscript amendments; Friends House Library, Box 308.
34. DHMM Young Men's Committee minutes 3 July 1879.
35. J. W. Hood, *Sketch of the Early History of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church with Jubilee Souvenir and Appendix* (1914); <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/hood/hood.htm>
36. Victoria & Albert Museum online catalogue, various entries.
37. Stoke Newington Ministry & Oversight Committee: report on 1927 in minutes vol. 1904-1938.
38. V&A online catalogue.
39. Friends House Library picture collection.
40. Chart in Joseph Foster, *A Revised Genealogical Account of the Various Families Descended from Francis Fox*, privately printed (1872). Other information from DQB.
41. Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (1970), 249-50.
42. Thomas Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920: the transformation of a religious community* (2001), 144-5.
43. Obituary in *Annual Monitor* (1904), 30-41.
44. Beck, *Church Street*, 18.
45. Gracechurch Street Monthly Meeting registers of members.
46. Louisa Hooper Stewart, ed. Evelyn Roberts, *Louisa: memoirs of a Quaker childhood*, 36.
47. Stoke Newington Ragged School, 7th report 1854 (pub. 1855).

48. A history was published in school magazine *The Paradisian* (March and July 1907); Baxter, 'Paradise Row', suggests the bath was by Tylor; he became an Anglican.
49. Stoke Newington Preparative Meeting minutes 14 July 1946.
50. Jowitt, Lettice, *Daniel Oliver and his wife Emily*, (1955), 9.
51. *The Friend*, supplement to 13 July 1900; explanatory text in *Friend* (1900), 456.
52. Checked in the Beck family trees, *Pedigree Register* vol 3 (1913). A Mabel Beck appears until 1915, but with no address after 1909 (Amhurst Road), suggesting the meeting lost contact. She is not apparently connected with the Becks described in this article.
53. Stoke Newington Ministry & Oversight Committee minutes 23 April 1922.
54. At this period local figures do not include members abroad (listed separately for the whole monthly meeting), nor 'attenders not in membership'.
55. Obituary, *Friend* (1946), 150.
56. Draft report for 1931 in Ministry & Oversight Committee minutes.
57. Personal communication.
58. Premises Committee and Preparative Meeting minutes, Bedford Institute Association annual reports, Devonshire House & Tottenham Monthly Meeting (DHTMM) newsletter (1946-1951).
59. *Friend* (1950), 665-6.
60. He served variously as clerk of the meeting, clerk of Premises Committee, and treasurer.
61. Personal communication; DHTMM newsletter (Nov. 1958) on his wedding in Yorkshire: 'for so long a faithful member of the meeting'.
62. Personal communication.
63. Stoke Newington Premises Committee minutes 4 October 1953; Premises minutes 2 May 1954; David Watlock Allen, 'The Passing of a Meeting House', *The Wayfarer* (1956), 85-6.
64. DHTMM newsletter (May 1956).
65. 'Friends have civic guests', *Hackney Gazette*, 26 Feb. 1958; SN Preparative Meeting minutes also contain an unreferenced cutting from a different paper (?*Stoke Newington & Hackney Observer*) with distinct typeface, 'Quakers entertain council at their new meeting house'. Henry Rose is pictured showing plans of the old meeting house to other members.
66. DHTMM newsletter (Nov. 1965).
67. 'Bones dug up from old Quaker graveyard', *Hackney Gazette* (5 May 1989); 'Quakers move graveyards', *Hackney Echo* (10 May 1989).

# 'A dream to keep you happy for a week'

## the Dalston Turkish baths - and two that never happened

# 4

*Malcolm Shifrin*

### Introduction

In today's multicultural society, where mosques - especially those with minarets, ogee windows, or domes - are familiar to anyone living in a town of any significant size, Islamic architecture no longer surprises us. But in 1882 this was not so. Not for another seven years would the Jewish Hungarian orientalist Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner put up the first purpose-built mosque in England at Woking in Surrey.

Of course, drawings or paintings of such buildings abroad would be familiar to some, but only rarely would an English building (the idiosyncratic Brighton Pavilion, for example) have astonished the ordinary passer-by.

It is quite difficult for us nowadays to imagine the effect on a local resident leaving Dalston Junction station, perhaps on the way home from work, on seeing this new building - a Turkish bath - right opposite, in Ashwin Street.

The opening of a Turkish bath in Dalston was not in itself extraordinary: 22 years had already passed since the first such bath had opened in London, and a further four years since the first experimental Victorian Turkish bath had been built in Ireland. But the Dalston Junction Turkish Baths were unusual.

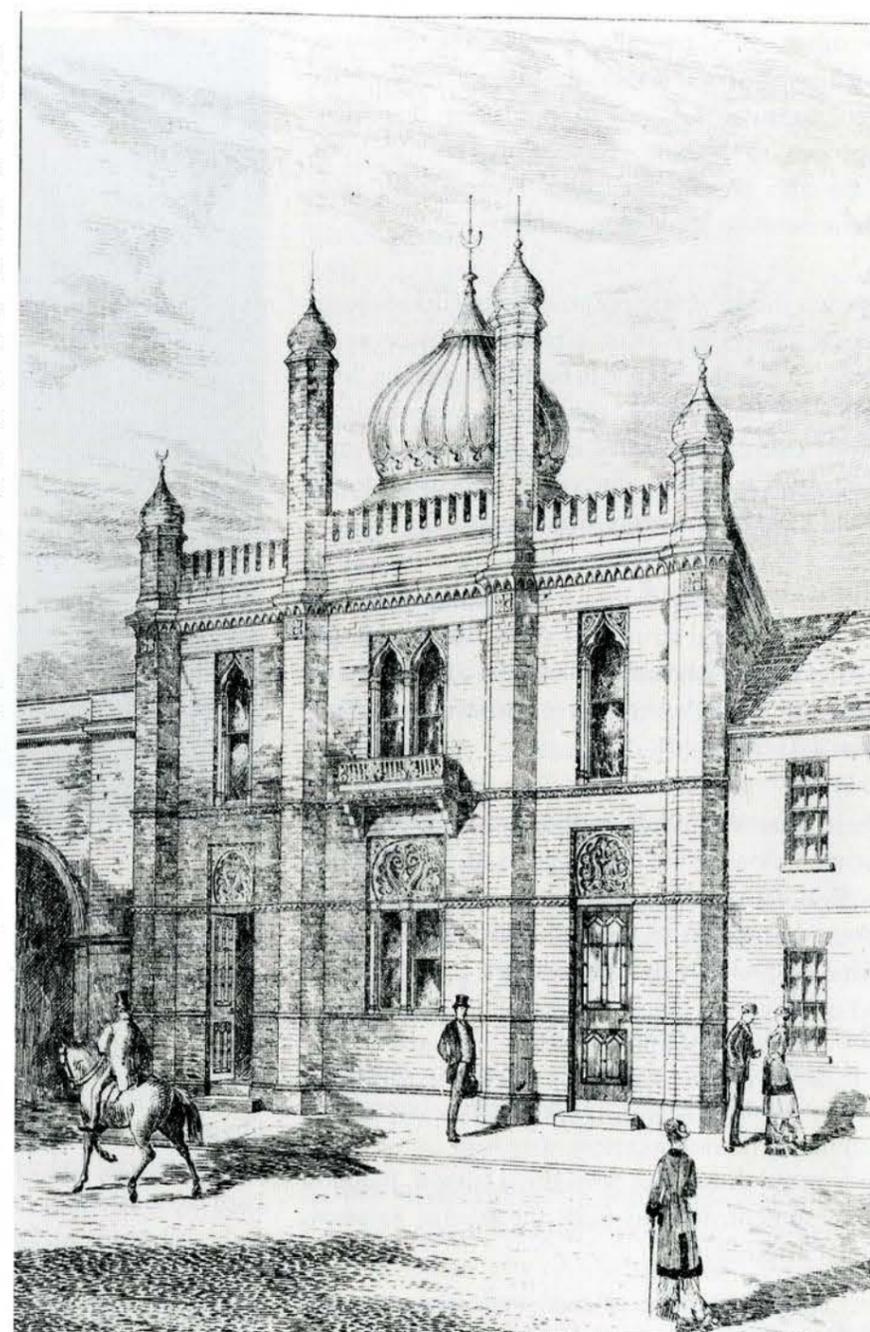


*Shah Jahan mosque, Woking, opened in 1889*

First, it seems that they were the only Turkish baths ever to open in the boroughs of Hackney, Shoreditch or Stoke Newington, although there were, at various periods from 1860 onwards, establishments in all but one of the surrounding boroughs. In the second quarter of the 20th century the councils of both Hackney and Stoke Newington decided to build Turkish baths, but neither project came to fruition.

Second, Dalston Junction was one of a minority of Turkish baths which were purpose-built. Of approximately 600 establishments which I have identified in Victorian Britain (that is, including the whole of Ireland), only 20 per cent were purpose-built. The remainder were located in existing buildings, mainly converted shops, houses, or occasionally even churches.

Third, Dalston Junction was the first of only two Turkish baths in London to have attempted an Islamic style of architecture for the exterior of the building. (The other, dating from 1895 - now a listed building - is currently a restaurant in Bishopsgate Churchyard, near Liverpool Street Station.) Underlining Dalston Junction's importance is that there were only 15 other baths throughout the rest of the British Isles which were



DALSTON JUNCTION TURKISH BATHS. J. HATCHARD SMITH. ARCHT

designed to echo, or mimic, what Victorians often called the Saracenic style of architecture.

At first glance it might seem remarkable that of around 120 buildings specifically designed as Turkish baths, so few appeared outwardly to

be other than typically English contemporary buildings. For a Turkish appearance might have been considered a selling point for this 'new' approach to bathing, at least in the minds of those who saw the Victorian Turkish bath as a quintessentially Turkish institution.

But two thirds of the purpose-built Turkish baths were designed as part of a public baths or wash-house facility. Their style is best described as 'local civic'. All but one of the others were built by private clubs, hydropathic establishments, or small companies, for whom the cost of an 'exotic' design would have been a major disincentive.

However, internal features and decoration cost less than external structures, so the interior design of many establishments followed - to a greater or (more usually) a lesser degree - what was thought of as a Turkish style.

There were also other considerations. During the decade following the introduction of the Victorian Turkish bath in 1856, there was much discussion about the origin of the bath, what it should be called, and what it should look like.

### The Victorian Turkish bath

It is not appropriate here to explore in detail the history of the Victorian Turkish bath, but a brief outline of its development may lead us to better understand how and why the Dalston Junction establishment differed from the Islamic *hammams* which inspired it.

Victorians were able to read travellers' accounts of *hammams*, so educated Europeans were already familiar with them. In Britain they had long been known as 'Turkish' baths, and in France, for example, as *les bains turcs*. Yet this type of hot-air bath was to be found all over the Islamic world, not just in Turkey.

One travel book, *The Pillars of Hercules*, by the Scottish diplomat and sometime MP David



David Urquhart

Urquhart (1805-77), made a significant impact shortly after it was published in 1850. Two chapters<sup>1</sup> described the *hammams* which Urquhart visited twenty years earlier on his travels round Turkey and the Maghreb.

His account was elaborate and flowery in the style of the period, and described the procedure of the bath as a series of acts in a drama, replete with technical terms in Turkish, Arabic, and often also in Latin. For the *hammam* is a descendent of the *thermae* of the Romans.

In essence, Urquhart described a series of increasingly hot rooms, through which bathers progressed until they were sweating profusely. They were then shampooed and massaged before spending a period of rest in a cooling-room in which refreshments such as coffee, sherbet, and the *narghile* (hookah) were available.

With the rise of Christianity, *thermae* were allowed to fall into disuse in the western Roman empire, although they survived in the eastern empire. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 the Roman hot-air baths were adopted, and appropriately adapted, by Islam to meet its ritual cleansing needs before prayer.

The Islamic *hammam* differs from *thermae* in two main respects. Bathers in the *thermae* were naked, and, under some rulers, both sexes bathed together. During and after the sweating process they would cool down in a cold plunge pool. Cleansing would be achieved by scraping the oiled body with a strigil to remove the dirt.

In the Islamic *hammam*, nakedness is strictly taboo, the sexes bathe separately, and there are no plunge pools. Instead, running water is provided within the hot rooms so that bathers can sluice themselves, and the strigil replaced by shampooing and massage given by a *tellak* (bath attendant/masseur).

Urquhart saw the *hammam* as a great cleansing agent at a time when, in Britain, the fear of cholera was still widespread, and only a very small percentage of the population had easy access to running water.

Though no longer an MP in the 1850s, Urquhart was still active in politics, and had views on British foreign policy, often vigorously expressed: he was strongly Turcophile and even more strongly Russophobe. He saw Ottoman Turkey as a counterbalance to an expanding Russian Empire, and organised groups of working men into foreign affairs committees to write letters to the press and to their local MPs in an attempt to persuade the government to modify its pro-Russian policy.<sup>2</sup>

In the matter of cleanliness, he not only saw the Turks as being far superior to the British, but worthy of emulation, arguing in vain that the government should fund inexpensive Turkish baths for the poor.

Early in 1856, Urquhart's book was read by Dr Richard Barter (1802-1870), the Irish physician who opened the first hydropathic establishment in Ireland at St Ann's Hill near Blarney in Co. Cork. Unlike most of the early practitioners of the then



Dr Richard Barter

popular 'cold water cure', Barter also adopted the vapour bath as one of the treatments available to his patients. He later said, 'On reading... Mr Urquhart's *Pillars of Hercules*, I was electrified; and resolved, if possible, to add that institution to my Establishment.'<sup>3</sup>

Immediately discerning the therapeutic possibilities of the hot-air bath, he invited Urquhart to St Ann's, offering him the men, money, and materials necessary to build such a bath. Urquhart stayed with Barter for several months. Together, they experimented with different ways of building a bath, but with only partial success.

At first, Urquhart was primarily interested in the bath as a cleansing agent, while Barter's emphasis, as a physician, was on the bath as a therapeutic agent. Barter soon realised that for the bath to have a curative effect the temperature had to be as high as possible, and that the body is able to tolerate much higher temperatures when the hot air is dry.

Because bathers washed themselves in the hot rooms of the *hammam* (instead of in a separate pool, as in the Roman *thermae*), the air rapidly became humid, and then steamy. Consequently, the temperature of the hot air had to be cooler than

if it was dry, otherwise bathers might have been scalded.

Urquhart was not immediately conscious of how humid the *hammams* in Turkey had been, and later admitted that when *The Pillars of Hercules* was written, he 'had then but most imperfectly apprehended the value of HOT AIR, to which, as distinguished from vapour, the Turkish bath owes its peculiar excellence.'<sup>4</sup>

After Urquhart returned home, Barter sent his architect nephew, Mr Richard Barter, to Rome, to examine the remains of early Roman baths and report back. In building his next hot-air baths, Dr Barter returned to first principles, emphasising their Roman origins and advertising them as 'The Improved Turkish, Or Roman Baths'.

Though Urquhart of course knew the bath dated from the Roman era (or even earlier), he himself had discovered it while in Turkey. Furthermore, it exemplified a living Turkish culture which, if widely adopted, would encourage a positive reassessment of British attitudes to the Turkish people and garner political support for Turkey at the expense of Russia.

While Barter was responsible for the rapid spread of the bath throughout Ireland, Urquhart was prime mover on the mainland. He lectured and wrote about it, promulgating it through his working men's foreign affairs committees and their supportive newspaper *The Free Press*. He encouraged committee members to build Turkish baths in the towns where they lived, in order to help support their families, and to give them more time for political work and a location for their political meetings. At least 35 of the first Victorian Turkish baths in England were started by committee members, whose wives often ran them on women's days.



*The Cambridge Roman Baths*

Once the technology had been mastered, most Victorian Turkish baths aimed at providing as dry an atmosphere as possible. Letters in journals such as *The Lancet*<sup>5</sup> and *The Builder*<sup>6</sup> asked whether they ought not to be called Roman rather than Turkish baths. (In Germany they are still called, more accurately, Irish-Roman baths.)

While in Cambridge, the architect Matthew Digby Wyatt designed a classical portico fronting the grand Roman Baths built for the Roman Bath Co. Ltd.<sup>7</sup> The building survives as a restaurant.

Another architect, W. H. Hay, in a lecture to the Liverpool Architectural Society, admitted that he had designed a Turkish bath in the oriental style at Lochhead Hydro because he had been commissioned to do so. But he would be inclined 'to recommend a thoroughly English style of architecture as decidedly preferable to this.'<sup>8</sup>

In the British Isles today, very few Turkish baths built on the principles developed by Urquhart and Barter remain in use.<sup>9</sup> The term 'Victorian Turkish bath' is used to describe such baths. It encompasses all hot-air baths of this type built between 1856 and the mid 1970s.

### Dalston Junction Turkish Baths

It is not known for certain who was the first owner of the Dalston Junction Turkish Baths, though it may have been Mr H. G. Bell, who was listed as its proprietor in 1884, two years after it opened.<sup>10</sup> Whoever it was must have been financially secure, or have had wealthy backers. And he must surely have worked in, or been connected with another Turkish bath beforehand, to have been able, so expertly, to specify what he wanted.

John Hatchard-Smith, an architect of some stature, was employed to design and supervise the building. He was born in Scotland; his practice, J. Hatchard-Smith & Son, had offices nearby at Moorgate Station Buildings (where he designed the famous Trocadero Restaurant in Shaftesbury Avenue for J. Lyons & Co.), in Epsom (where he modernised Lord Rosebery's house), and Budleigh Salterton, where he had a home.

The construction was undertaken by J. Holland, builders, of Poplar, and the engineering work by Messrs Tylor & Sons, a company of sanitary engineers which had originally been founded in 1768 as a manufacturer of tea urns.<sup>11</sup>

Although the building was so unusual, there seems to have been no mention of its design (or even its opening) in any of the local papers. Nor do there appear to have been any newspaper advertisements announcing its facilities or charges, though there were a few in local directories.<sup>12</sup>

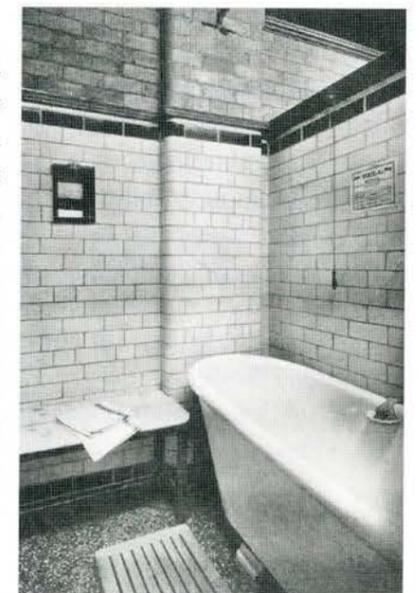
Perhaps the owner thought that the appearance of such a building so close to the railway station was advertisement enough. He was certainly sufficiently confident to specify a relatively large building, possibly influenced by the fact that the population of Hackney parish had risen considerably in the previous two decades, and was still rising. Unfortunately it is not known whether his optimism was justified, as there are no figures to indicate how successful the baths were. And, for

men at least, there was competition in neighbouring Islington at 275 City Road, where Thomas Smith's Turkish baths had opened in 1872 and survived, under his son Robert, until 1941.

Another indication of self-confidence was building separate Turkish baths for men and women. Of around 370 stand-alone Turkish baths built in the British Isles during Victoria's reign, only 100 or so had any facilities for women. Of these, about one third had separate baths for each sex. The norm was for the men's baths to be reserved for women's use at specific times, usually just one or two days per week.

At Dalston Junction Turkish Baths men and women could use the baths simultaneously whenever the baths were open. In practice, it seems that - at least around 1887 - the women's baths were not open all the time. Although the men's baths were open every day from eight o'clock in the morning till ten at night (noon on Sundays), the women's baths were only open from eight o'clock till nine on Mondays and Wednesdays, till five on Fridays, and from five in the afternoon till ten o'clock on Thursdays.<sup>13</sup>

Women and men paid the same admission charges, but since women did not have either a plunge-pool or a smoking-room, they were in effect being charged at a higher rate. A Turkish bath



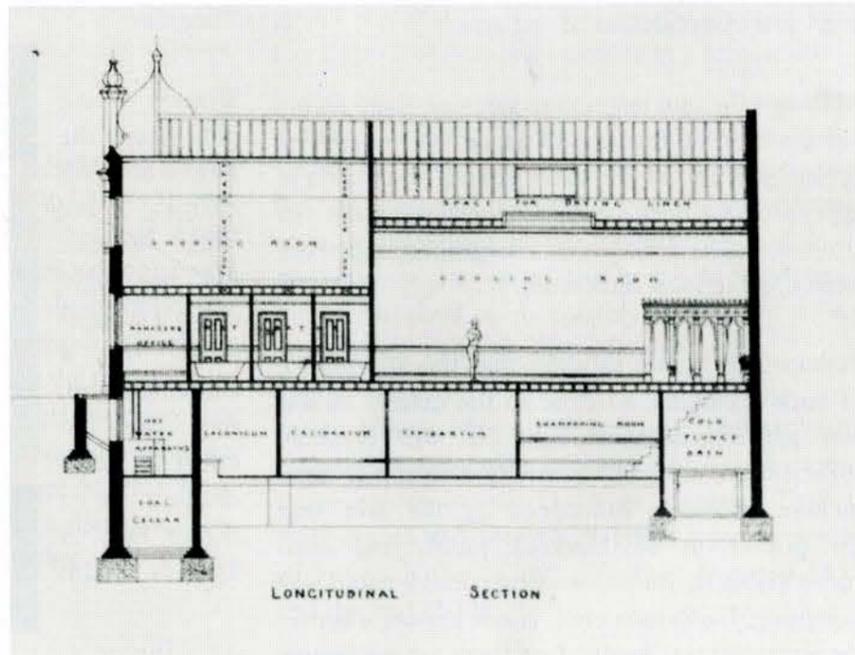
*A municipal slipper bath, in Birmingham*

cost 1/6d (7½p), or 1 shilling (5p) for twelve tickets bought at the same time. All tickets cost 1 shilling after five o'clock on Thursday afternoons.

In addition to Turkish baths, there were also slipper baths for men and women. These were an important facility, since few houses had running water, and then, usually, only to the extent of a single tap.

In other areas of London, as elsewhere, slipper baths were provided by those local authorities which had adopted the Public Baths and Wash-houses Acts of 1846 and 1847. These were enabling acts, which allowed boroughs to borrow money to provide baths, wash-houses and, initially, open-air swimming pools. An 1847 amendment added the provision of vapour baths, and another in 1878 allowed the swimming pools to be covered in.

Authorities could provide baths for all classes, but there had to be twice as many baths for the 'labouring classes' as were provided for all other classes together. Every person over eight years using a 'labouring classes' bath had to be provided with clean water and a towel, and the charge could not exceed 1d for a cold bath or shower, or 2d for a warm bath, shower, or vapour bath. The same prices applied for up to four children using the same water, but having separate towels.

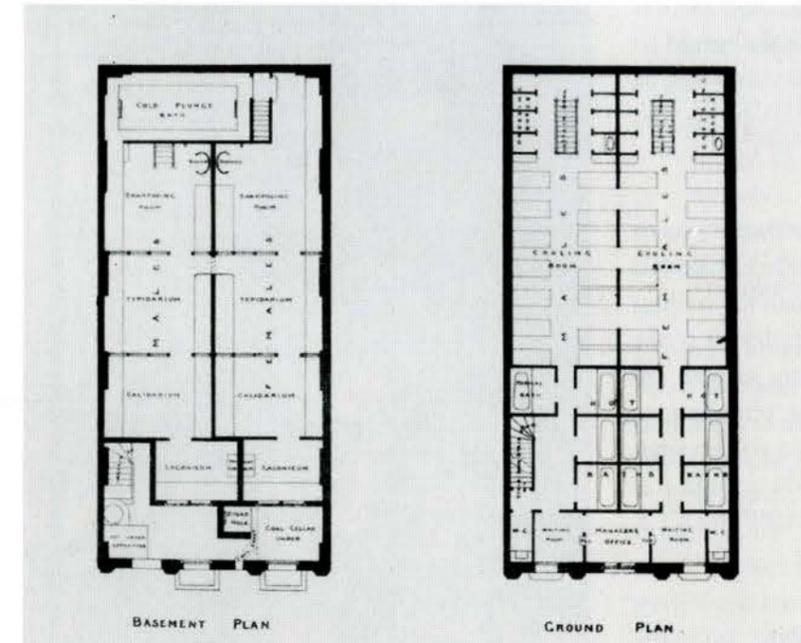


Above and opposite: from Hatchard-Smith's plans for the Dalston baths, 1882

But Hackney only adopted the act in 1891, and its public baths in Lower Clapton Road did not open until 1897. Shoreditch opened its Pitfield Street pool and baths in 1899, and Stoke Newington's Milton Road slipper baths had to wait until 1909.

Even in 1913, only Shoreditch was considered to be making adequate provision, with 167 baths for its estimated population of 111,000 (one bath for every 664 people). By comparison, Hackney provided 106 baths for its population of 223,000 (one for every 2103 people) and Stoke Newington a mere 22 baths for a 51,000 population (one for every 2,318). 'The need for public baths is greatest in densely crowded districts' wrote Agnes Campbell, slating Bethnal Green, Hackney, Lambeth and Stoke Newington for 'small provision in proportion to the demand...'<sup>14</sup>

Dalston Junction Turkish Baths, with its own nine slipper baths, could hardly hope to make much impact on a problem of this magnitude, even in conjunction with other smaller private establishments. More relevant is that the baths were expensive compared with those provided



was dried (probably next to a laundry area), and also a room for the caretaker, who slept on the premises.

Bathers passed through their appropriate front door into a marble tesserae-lined waiting room, where tickets were purchased through a window in the centrally placed ticket-cum-manager's office. From here, a passage led past the slipper baths and toilet to the cooling-room.

The bathrooms, six on the women's side and three on the

elsewhere under the Act, and so were way out of the reach of those most in need of them. In 1885, a warm bath here cost from 5d to 1/- (just over 2p to 5p),<sup>15</sup> with the price varying according to the time of day and, usually, whether soap and towel were provided.

men's, were lined with blue tiles, and a medical bath was available for any male patient if requested by a doctor. This unequal provision of baths was because space had to be found on the men's side for a staircase down to the boiler, coal cellar, and 'hot water apparatus'.

Shortly before the baths opened, which was probably towards the end of January 1882,<sup>16</sup> a short illustrated article - apparently the only one - appeared in *The Builder*.

Each of the two separate 32 x 16 ft. cooling-rooms was 16 ft. high, and each had seven curtained 'dressing boxes' (changing cubicles) and 14 couches for relaxing on after the bath. Unfortunately the final decorative scheme of these rooms is unknown, since *The Builder* was writing before the plaster had completely dried. On days when the women's baths were closed, doors could be opened which enabled the two cooling-rooms to be combined into a much larger one for use by the men, and at the same time could make additional bathrooms available to them - an extremely sensible way of maximizing the use of available space, and one (so far) not found elsewhere.

Externally, the building was faced with red Suffolk bricks, having arches built of the yellow clay-and-chalk bricks known as malms, and the caps, cornices, and cupola moulded in cement. There were separate doors for each sex - men entering on the left and women on the right.

The internal layout of the building was well thought-out. The hot rooms, shampooing rooms and plunge bath were in the basement. The cooling-rooms and slipper baths were on the ground floor, and the smoking-room on a mezzanine floor above the offices and slipper baths. There was a large area over the cooling-room, where bath linen

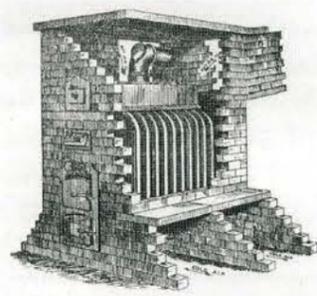
After undressing, bathers went down a short flight of stairs to the hot rooms. These had painted dados, with the walls above being coloured. On each of the longer sides of the hot rooms were marble slabs

on which bathers could recline. The first of the hot-rooms, the *tepidarium*, was reportedly heated to about 100°F (37.8°C); the second, the *calidarium*, to around 120°F (48.9°C) and the hottest room, the *laconicum*, to a maximum of 230°F (110°C).

These temperatures, ascribed in *The Builder*, seem rather unlikely, and their reporter may have misread his notes. It is not that 230°F (more than the boiling point of water) seems wrong in itself; dry air is not the same as vapour and today many saunas are used at higher temperatures. But the temperature of the second room seems too close to the first, and the gap between the two hottest rooms too great. More usual might have been: 140°F (62.8°C), 180°F (82.2°C), and 220°F (104.5°C).

The air was heated by a boiler, probably 'Constantine's Convuluted Stove' (virtually an 'industry standard'), placed as close as possible to the hottest rooms, and at the front of the building so the coal cellar (beneath the boiler room) could be filled by a chute from the pavement outside.

Fresh air would have been drawn into the boiler room through a grille covered with a fine mesh filter.



View of a small Furnace Chamber, with portion of wall broken away to show the "Convuluted" Stove.

It then passed over and around the boiler while being quite separate from the boiler flue. The heated air would then pass along a duct and into the laconicum, continuing through the other hot

rooms, cooling as it went, until it passed out of the building at the other end.

Bathers, after a period of sweating in the hot rooms, were then called to the shampooing room. Here, they lay on a marble slab while the shampooer firmly 'rubbed' (or massaged) the bather's body, before giving it a thorough wash with a fibre-



A needle-douche

brush. Then came a shower in the needle douche after which an attendant took the bather back to the cooling-room where papers and refreshments were available. For male bathers, there was also an optional dip in the cold plunge bath and a visit to the smoking-room.

Mr Bell probably owned the baths for as long as they remained open, and during this time there were two managers: Mr J Howie till around 1885, and then Mr C Norfolk.<sup>17</sup> However, some time after 1888, Bell decided that instead of running the baths directly, he would lease them to Mr Norfolk.<sup>18</sup>

This may have been Norfolk's own suggestion. He seems to have been a capable person, and one with a flair for advertising. During the time he was manager, he produced a double-sided broadsheet which not only publicised the opening hours and

admission charges but, in five rhyming verses, praised the bath as a pick-me-up. In the first verse he likens the Turkish bath to a dream; in the second, he extols its curative properties:

THE DALSTON JUNCTION TURKISH BATHS

I sing the Turkish Bath! a fit, a worthy theme,  
Alike for sage's discourse or for poet's dream.  
A dream it is; yet sage—and real—and true,  
A dream of joy; but not (as most dreams do)  
Eluding fitfully our eager clutch  
E'er half conceived or realised; nor such  
As, after brief enjoyment, leaves the pain  
Of disappointment tingling every vein.  
But one defying fancy's fickle freak  
A dream to keep you happy for a week.  
A week, say you, and then—why then, my friend  
A bath a week—your dream will never end!!!

Ye myriad hosts, whose countless ailments small  
Imbue your lives with bitterness of gall.  
Ye mines of small distempers! never well,  
Yet wanting words in which your ills to tell!  
Essay the Turkish Bath! gain peace, repose;  
Temper your distempers; 'whoa' your woes,  
And ye who let life's petty warps and strains  
Play havoc with your weary, jaded brains!  
A moment pause to ponder and reflect  
How much 'tis due to bodily neglect,  
That ye, grand temples of that grander shrine  
The human intellect, should scarce divine  
The difference 'twixt a mammoth and a mole;  
Or (not to deal in needless hyperbole),  
Deem high as pyramids or deep as wells,  
Such mounds or pools as are but bagatelles.

The last verse is, perhaps, more of a hard-sell indicating the refreshments served and the reading matter available in the cooling-room. Were the first lines also addressed to women bathers? As poetry it may not have won any prizes, but as an advertisement for the baths it was at least mildly amusing:

Ye piteous victims of a too-much married state,  
Bask in this freedom for one blessed hour;  
Throw off the mean indignities of fate  
To don the robes of majesty and power!  
Here, here at least, ye shall in all command:  
Your minions execute what ye dictate;

Or with your own august, despotic hand  
The tasty new-laid egg decapitate;  
Deep draughts of true enjoyment in your coffee quaff:  
Find in chops, charms you never found before.  
O'er Punch's wild vagaries loudly laugh,  
Peruse your Daily, Cornhill, Longman, or  
In misty circles from a fragrant mead  
Weave wondrous visions of health, wealth and power.  
In short, conceive yourself Grand Turk indeed,  
Take pleasure at a plunge and blessings in a shower.<sup>9</sup>

Dalston Junction Turkish Baths had a relatively short life. Just before midnight on 6 May 1890 the building was almost totally destroyed by a fire which broke out in the basement. The fire, which took hold so quickly that the caretaker, sleeping on the premises, had only just time to escape unharmed, was discovered by a constable on point duty who gave the alarm.

Although the roof of an adjoining building was slightly damaged, the fire was contained by the use of 'six engines, three steamers, three manuals, two fire escapes, and two turncocks'.<sup>20</sup> The cause of the fire remains unknown.<sup>21</sup>

The best laid plans ...

After their adoption of the Acts, the provision made in each area differed. Hackney adopted first, in 1891, although the authority specifically rejected the provision of wash-houses. The Central Baths in Lower Clapton Road (now known as Kings Hall Leisure Centre) opened in 1897. Shoreditch followed in 1899 with the Hoxton Baths in Pitfield Street, while Stoke Newington delayed until 1909 before providing slipper baths in Milton Road, and avoided opening a swimming pool in the borough until 1930, when the baths at Clissold Road were opened.

Of the three authorities, only Hackney at that time provided any form of hot-air bath. 27 vapour bath cabinets were installed in the new Central Baths,<sup>22</sup> but there is no mention, in the minutes of their newly appointed Commissioners for Public Baths, of any discussion about whether Turkish baths or vapour baths should be preferred.

Two possible factors may have influenced them: first, that cabinets would initially be cheaper, though possibly more expensive to maintain and keep clean; second, the provision of vapour baths is specifically permitted in the 1847 amending Act - Turkish baths are not mentioned, because none existed prior to 1856. Many councils took advantage of this to excuse their lack of provision.

But some town clerks were prepared to accept that, so far as the intention of the Act was concerned, legal sanction applied to hot-air baths of whatever type. Bradford Corporation installed Turkish baths as early as 1865 without any adverse legal consequences, and many other councils followed suit.<sup>23</sup> Southampton Corporation admitted referring to their baths as vapour baths 'for financial reasons', but within nine months they were openly calling them Turkish baths.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps provincial councils felt safer, being further from the scrutiny of central government. In any event, not until 1905 did a London Council, Camberwell, install Turkish baths. Two sentences in the programme of the opening ceremony are particularly revealing of contemporary attitudes:

A Russian Vapour Bath, which will accommodate nine persons at one time, is provided for the second class bathers.

For the first class bathers there is a Turkish Bath to accommodate fourteen persons at one time, with plunge bath attached.<sup>25</sup>

On 4 December 1935 Hackney Borough Council appointed a sub-committee to consider the reconstruction of the Central Baths which were now showing their age.<sup>26</sup> The sub-committee reported back in September the following year. Their recommendation, which was adopted, was,

that provision should be made for Turkish and Vapour Baths with three hot rooms and accommodation for 60 bathers, together with 20 dressing boxes and 60 lockers, and that foam, radiant heat and sunray treatment accommodation for two bathers and a foot clinic should also be provided.

They also recommended that an open competition should be held for the design of the extension, which should not cost more than £150,000, 'excluding movable furniture' and the additional adjoining land required.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1937 an assessor from the Royal Institute of British Architects awarded first prize to H. John Phillips and Harry Gibberd, from a total of 40 entries.<sup>28</sup> Demolition of the old baths was to be in stages so that there would always be at least one pool available during the rebuilding.<sup>29</sup>

It seemed that at last Hackney was to get the Turkish baths it deserved - but the time was not propitious. Soon the committee was to be more involved in air-raid precautions, emergency water supplies, loss of railings, and blackout. And after the war, a laconic note in the committee minutes of 29 January 1946 stated that,

owing to the entire change of circumstances [the demolition of the Central Baths and their replacement] is not now a practical proposition, and neither will it be for a period of 8-10 years.

Yet less than four months later Stoke Newington Borough Council was including in its five-year capital expenditure programme £70,000 for the provision of Turkish baths, private (ie, slipper) baths and a laundry, to be built as an extension to their Clissold Road baths.<sup>30</sup>

In due course, plans were drawn up for a new swimming pool, 40 private baths and Turkish baths with cubicles for 36 persons, comprising hot rooms, vapour baths, massage room, plunge pool and kitchen.<sup>31</sup>

But all did not run smoothly. There were planning and loan approval difficulties to be overcome. The plans were drastically cut back in order to gain ministry approval for the necessary loans. Yet still approval was not forthcoming. Only after the 1962 Wolfenden Report on Sport and the Community<sup>32</sup>

was it suggested that the council would probably get approval for its scheme if it was submitted again.<sup>33</sup>

But by this time it was apparent that at some stage in an earlier paring of the scheme, the whole Turkish bath suite had been replaced by two Aeratone foam baths.

If Hackney and Stoke Newington had been successful in providing Turkish baths, these would now be ripe for further renewal or replacement. But Turkish baths are now considered (by accountants) to be obsolete and more economically replaced by saunas and prefabricated steam rooms. Yet those familiar with Turkish baths are adamant that the bathing experience of 'taking a Turkish' is quite different, and far superior.

The Victorian Turkish bath is yet another rapidly disappearing part of our cultural heritage.

## Notes

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2. R. Shannon, 'David Urquhart and the Foreign Affairs Committees' in P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from without in early Victorian England* (1974).
3. 'Turkish baths: public meeting in Cork', *The Free Press*, 2 Aug 1856, 1.
4. R. Barter (ed.), *The Turkish bath, with a view to its introduction in the British Dominions: chapters from The Pillars of Hercules by David Urquhart* (1856).
5. G F Bodington, 'The Turkish bath', *The Lancet* 26 Jan 1861.
6. F. Drake, 'The Anglo-Roman or Turkish bath', *Builder* 8 Jun 1861, 388.
7. <http://www.victorianturkishbath.org/6DIRECTORY/AtoZEstab/England/CambJ/1PreludeEng.htm>
8. 'Liverpool Architectural Society', *Building News* 15 Feb 1861, 143-5.
9. <http://www.victorianturkishbath.org/0NOWOPEN/1NOWENGLAND.htm>

10. Kelly's London Suburban Directory.
11. J. Skinner, *Form and fancy: Factories and factory buildings by Wallis, Gilbert & Partners, 1916-1939* (Liverpool, 1997), 43.
12. For example, Kelly's directory of Highbury, 1885.
13. Dalston Junction Turkish Baths (1887), BL Ref. No. 1870.d.1.(262)
14. A. Campbell, *Report on public baths and wash-houses in the United Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1918), 21.
15. Kelly's Directory of Highbury, 1885.
16. 'Dalston Junction Turkish Baths', *Builder* 14 Jan 1882.
17. Kelly's London Suburban Directory, 1884, 1888; Kelly's Directory of London, 1885, 1886, 1887.
18. Kelly's Directory of Stoke Newington, 1890.
19. All five verses can be found at: <http://www.victorianturkishbath.org/3TOPICS/AtoZTopics/TheArts/Verse/VerseEng.htm>
20. 'Destruction of the Dalston Turkish Baths by fire', *Hackney & Kingsland Gazette* 7 May 1890, 3, col. 4.
21. 'Fires', *The Times* 8 May 1890, 5d.
22. A. Campbell, *Report on public baths and wash-houses in the United Kingdom*, Appendix I, 87.
23. R. Metcalfe, *Sanitas sanitatum et omnia sanitas*, 1877.
24. Southampton Baths and Washhouses Committee Minutes, 6 December 1893.
25. Programme of opening ceremony of Turkish Baths at the Old Kent Road Public Baths, 1905.
26. HAD, Hackney Borough Council, Baths Committee Minutes (HBC/BCM), 4 December 1935.
27. HBC/BCM, 9 September 1936.
28. HBC/BCM, 2 June 1937.
29. HBC/BCM, 7 December 1938.
30. HAD, Stoke Newington Borough Council, Public Baths Committee Minutes (SNBC/BCM), 9 May 1946.
31. SNBC/BCM, 5 May 1948.
32. *Sport & the community: the report of the Wolfenden committee on sport* (1960).
33. SNBC/BCM, 6 June 1962.

# The mystery of the Homerton H-O-G

Melvyn Brooks and  
Robert H. Thompson

# 5

Homerton was once a hamlet in the Middlesex parish of Hackney, consisting chiefly of the country residences of opulent merchants and tradesmen connected with the metropolis; and the Independents had an excellent academical institution there.<sup>1</sup> This is now far from the truth, and Homerton recently was memorably characterised as 'where London's Chicago collides with Pooterland'.<sup>2</sup>

The present authors have been collecting information about Hackney for 48 and 42 years respectively. We have long been aware of the Homerton HOG tokens described below, and also of enquiries about them to the Hackney Archives Department in 2001, to the British Association of Numismatic Societies (Philip Mernick) in 2006, and at about the same time to a *Hackney History* contributor.<sup>3</sup> In fact those enquiries turn out to have been from the same individual, but no matter, there could be other enquirers, and it is high time we put on record what we know, and what we do not know, about the tokens of the Homerton HOG. The only published record seems to be the 3<sup>D</sup> piece in Dr Neil Todd's second edition.<sup>4</sup>

In fact the legend is not HOG but H-O-G, which must surely be initials, but of what? **O.G.** might stand for **Old Girls**, but no appropriate institution has been identified. Alternatively, there was in Homerton an Old Gravel-Pit Meeting Place formed in 1714, latterly under the famous Richard Price (1723-1791) who entertained the future US President John Adams, then under the even more famous Joseph Priestley 1791-4, but it was leased to the Congregationalists 1810-72. It reopened in 1874 as the non-denominational Old Gravel Pit mission.<sup>5</sup>

However, the use of the roman numeral IX (see below) suggests a scholastic use, perhaps for a sports team, whereas those denominated 3d., 6d. and 1/- might have been for refreshments. The 'excellent academical institution' mentioned above was Homerton College (1823), which moved in 1892 to the building of the former Cavendish College in Cambridge, where Homerton College remains. Since these unsigned tokens appear to have been struck in the second half of the 19th century, it seemed possible that they should be attributed to Cambridge. In that case, however, one might expect that some specimens could have found their way to the Fitzwilliam Museum, but Dr Martin Allen has kindly interrupted his medieval studies to report that none are held.<sup>6</sup>

So it is reasonable to assume that they do belong to Homerton in Hackney. Beyond that we can only list the types known to us, adding that there are no provenances to help to explain them, and no candidate found in consulting the 560 pages of Charles W. Brabner, *The Borough of Hackney Directory*, 1872. Another suggestion was a supposed Homerton chapter of the Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.), but that motorcycle organization sponsored by Harley-Davidson® was established

## Notes

This article is adapted from *Token Corresponding Society Bulletin* 8 (2004-7), 469-71.

1. *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of England and Wales*, 1843, ii, 412.
2. Sarah Wise, 'Living quarters: Homerton', *The Guardian*, 15 Feb 2001, Space, 21-23.
3. Robert H. Thompson, 'Local public-house tokens and their makers, 1802-1896', *Hackney History* 12 (2006), 13-22.
4. Neil B. Todd, *British & Irish Tokens, Advertising Tickets, Checks, Passes &c., ca. 1830-1920* (Newtonville MA, 1979), 30. Not in 1974 edition.
5. VCH X, 134-5.
6. Martin Allen, personal communication to Robert Thompson, 3 Aug. 2007.
7. www.harley-davidson.com

in 1983 only.<sup>7</sup> We put on record what information we have gathered to avoid others having to repeat what we have done, and we invite records of additional specimens, and information about their issuer and their purpose.

## Homerton H-O-G tokens

All are uniface, in copper or brass, diameter 24mm, with edge grained.

**H-O-G** (curved above)  
**HOMERTON** (curved below)

and in the centre:

[Series A with roman numerals]

A9. **IX**  
R. H. Thompson (brass?)



[Series B with sterling denominations]

B3. **3<sup>D</sup>**  
A. N. Smith, R. H. Thompson  
(copper)  
N. B. Todd (1979, p.30, brass)



B6. **6<sup>D</sup>**  
M. H. Brooks



B12. **1/-**  
P. H. Mernick



# The Lee Valley Regional Park: a historical perspective

*Laurie Elks*

The Lee Valley Regional Park is a wedge of open space stretching from Stratford in East London to the county town of Hertford. It is designated, uniquely, as a regional park for the enjoyment of the citizens of Greater London, Essex and Hertfordshire. By far the greater part of Hackney's open space lies within the park, including Springfield Park, Millfields, Hackney Marshes and the extensive open spaces at Eastway which have now been subsumed into the site for the 2012 Olympic Games.

The regional park was first proposed in Professor Abercrombie's Greater London Plan published in 1945, and took legal form through the Lee Valley Regional Park Act of 1967. Despite its relatively short existence, the park's history has passed through several distinct phases, which this article will seek to explore, which have resonances with the wider *Zeitgeist*. It will also explain the pivotal role of Hackney council, and its former leader Lou Sherman, in bringing the park into being.<sup>1</sup>

## Phase 1 – 1944-5: Abercrombie and the age of idealism

The suburbs of London pressed rapidly outwards in the 1930s. As outer London suburbs such as Enfield and Chingford were becoming rapidly developed with industry and housing, the desirability of creating a Green Belt to set some limit on this growth - and to preserve a connection between Londoners and the surrounding countryside - was widely discussed.

Against this background, a taskforce, chaired by Professor Abercrombie and working through the dark early days of the Second World War, was charged by the Government with creating a blueprint – a Greater London Plan – for a better future city, so that the hollow promises of the 'Homes Fit for Heroes'

campaign that followed the previous war would not be repeated. The remit was wide, ranging from slum clearance and new towns to communications and open spaces. Abercrombie reported as the war approached its end. The spirit of the times stands clear at the conclusion of his personal foreword – 'courage is needed to seize the moment when it arrives and to make a resolute start'.

Abercrombie laid great emphasis on the importance of the Green Belt and the necessity for proper planning powers to make it secure against development. But to this widely anticipated proposal, Abercrombie added the wholly novel proposal of a giant green wedge along the Lee Valley to link the countryside of Essex and Hertfordshire to the slums of the East End. Abercrombie considered that 'the Lee Valley gives the opportunity for a great piece of constructive, preservative and regenerative planning'. He continued:

A series of great reservoirs threads up the valley, extending from Walthamstow to Enfield and though man made they are acquiring a charm of their own as trees grow round them and on their little islands – they are becoming nature reserves for large numbers of birds and the resort of privileged fisherman. These areas are a great open-air lung to the crowded East End – their preservation is essential... Every piece of open land should be welded into a great regional reservation – no open land, whatever its present use – should be built on.

The Abercrombie Report stands close in time to the Beveridge Report, published in 1942, which served as the basis for the Welfare State reforms of the Attlee Government; and the Butler Education Act of 1944, which was designed to open up secondary education to women and the working class and act as a fount of upward social mobility. Of these times, A. J. P. Taylor wrote:

The governing classes were on their best behaviour, from conviction as well as calculation. It was difficult to realise in a time of national inspiration and unity that this inspiration and unity would ever fade. The British people had risen without fuss, to unparalleled heights of sacrifice and resolution. They deserved a reward.<sup>2</sup>

Much of this heady programme of reform was realised following the landslide Labour victory in 1945. Beveridge's plans were largely implemented, including the National Health Service, founded in 1948. As for Abercrombie, although not all of his plans were implemented, the Green Belt was protected by the planning powers he advocated, by virtue of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. The Lee Valley proposals, however, remained dormant during the 1950s, during which time many encroachments were made upon open space of the valley, particularly by industrial development. This situation might well have continued but for the wily and far-sighted initiative of Lou Sherman, one of the giants of post-war Hackney history. His vision and foresight lie at the centre of the next two phases of the park's history.

## Phase 2 – 1961-4: The Civic Trust and the age of futurism

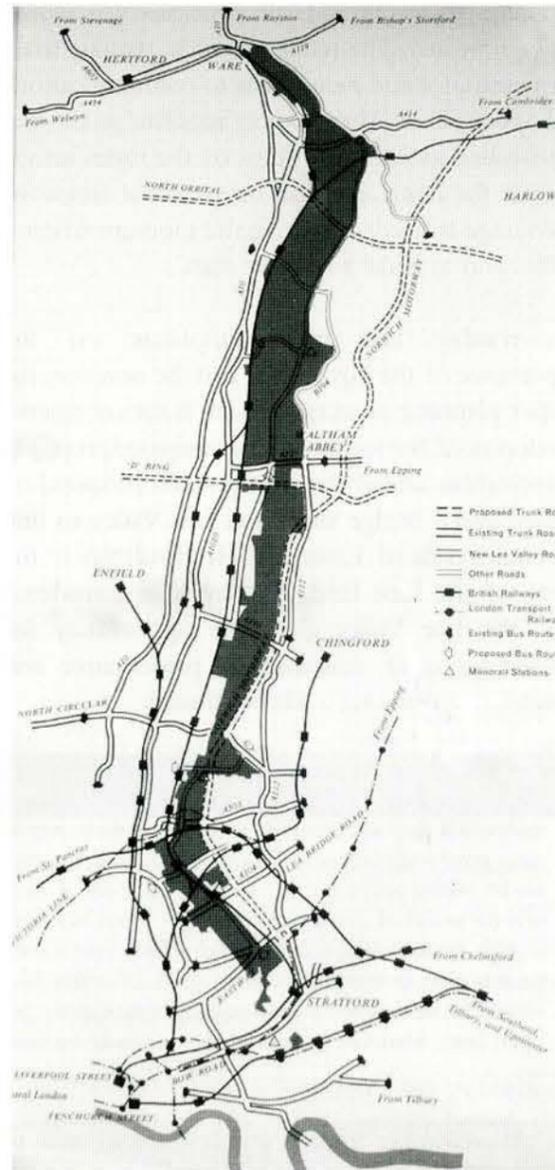
It was in 1961 that Lou Sherman, then mayor of Hackney, working hand-in-glove with the town clerk, L. G. (Len) Huddy, sought to translate the concept of the Lee Valley park into practical politics. The history is concisely recounted in a handbook of Hackney issued by the council in 1973:

[Abercrombie's] idea lay dormant until 1961 when interest was revived. The then Mayor of Hackney, Alderman Lou Sherman, O.B.E.<sup>3</sup>, J.P., invited representatives of several authorities to join him in a trip along the River Lee and to consider what could be done for the area. Interest mounted and the Civic Trust was commissioned to broadly appraise the potential of the River and its adjoining lands as a recreational park. In 1964, their report, 'The Lee Valley Regional Park' was accepted by the local authorities and under the chairmanship of H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, the scheme was launched.

This bare account makes the process of securing acceptance of the park seem far more straightforward than it was. Lou Sherman saw clearly that a regional park was desirable, but implementation would rely on finding a means of spreading the cost of paying for it, there being relatively little that a poor borough such as Hackney could do on its own. A boat was hired in August 1961 to reveal both the state of

the river and its potential for development to civic dignitaries from nearby riparian boroughs. Having excited interest in this way, Sherman and his town clerk thereafter proceeded gingerly. A letter went from Huddy on 30 November 1961 to the town clerks of West Ham, Leyton, Walthamstow and Tottenham regarding the 'possibility of a scheme of improvement for the Hackney Marshes' and the 'preparation of a long term scheme for the whole of the area which remains available for use as open spaces'. Recognising the sensitivity of local councils to encroachment upon their legal powers, Huddy's letter recognised the primacy of existing development plan proposals of the different authorities, adding that 'Alderman Sherman believes that within these limits a scheme of improvement should be possible'. Huddy was also in the meantime sounding out the county councils of Middlesex and Essex about their becoming involved.

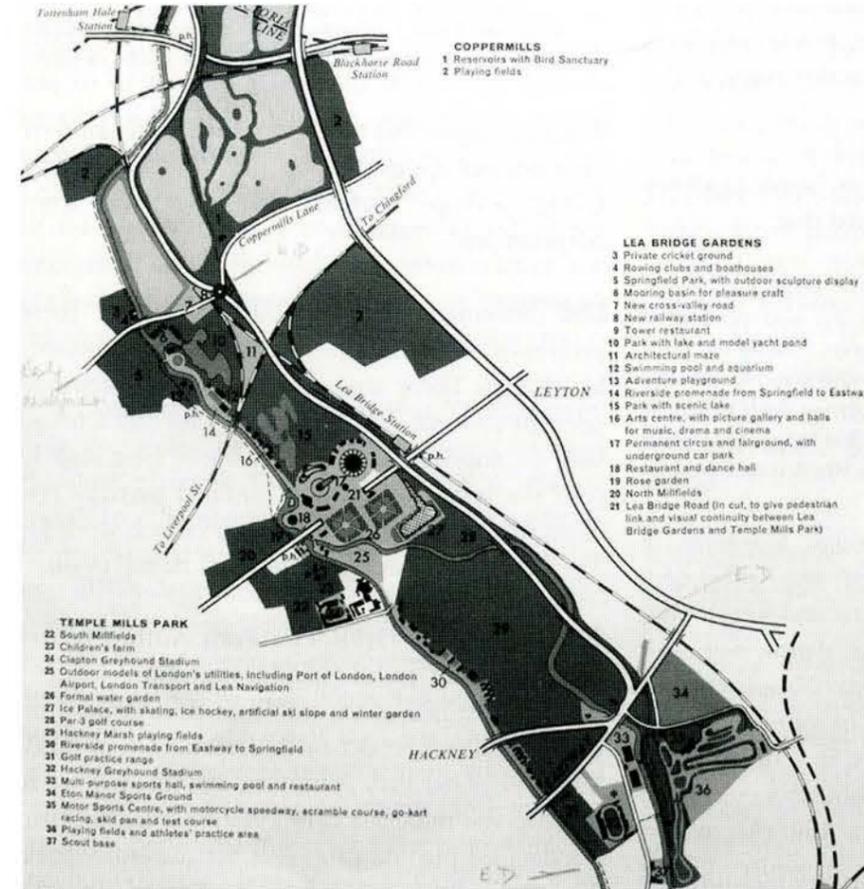
By 1963 these councils (of which Middlesex was shortly to become extinct) had indeed come on board, as had the councils of Enfield and Edmonton. The accession of these authorities was an important step in widening the project beyond what might have been seen as a cabal of inner London Labour councils. In April 1963 representatives from all these authorities were invited by Huddy to a meeting at Hackney Town Hall to consider the next steps, the proposals now being for a scheme for a 12 mile stretch of the valley extending from Hackney to Waltham Abbey. Huddy circulated a paper proposing the commissioning of a report which 'could possibly be carried out by engaging a firm of consultants or even endeavouring to interest an influential body like the Civic Trust'. An approach to the Civic Trust was approved. The Trust agreed to the preparation of a report covering a still larger area – from Roydon in Essex to the River Thames – at a cost of £2000, to be shared between the London County Council (now also on board), Middlesex, Essex and the riparian boroughs. By the time the Civic Trust study had got under way, Hertfordshire County Council



The Civic Trust's proposed park area and transport links

and the local authorities at Chingford, Cheshunt, Hoddesdon, Epping and Ware had also come on board. Lou Sherman's project of broadening the base of interest and spreading the cost had been brilliantly accomplished.

The Civic Trust report was prepared in 1964, at a time when there was an expectation among sections of what would now be called the 'chattering classes'



The detailed land uses proposed for the Hackney area of the park

that the forces of science and technology could be harnessed both to galvanise the British economy and to create a future leisured era. The normally conservation-minded Civic Trust – in an episode which it would perhaps rather forget – put itself briefly at the forefront of this futurist credo. The analysis that led to the Civic Trust's report *A Lea Valley Regional Park* also generated a companion think-piece in the *Architects' Journal* called 'The Fourth Wave', later published by the Civic Trust as *The Challenge of Leisure*.

The basic assumptions were stated in an address by H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh to the National Playing Fields Association, quoted in the Trust's report:

We are on the threshold of the age of leisure ... The queues for playing fields are getting longer; the pressure

on sports and recreation clubs of all sorts is increasing. Swimming clubs and sailing clubs are getting crowded ... we have to concentrate on providing facilities of the right sort and in the right place and properly organised... I think that ratepayers will begin to look to the Local Authorities to provide these facilities in the same way that they look to them to provide water, sewerage and street lighting.

The Trust assumed that demand for leisure would grow at an accelerating rate. The most purple statements of expectations are in *The Challenge of Leisure*, which forecast a trebling - at the minimum - of 'the demand for active leisure' by 2000. This was a worthy challenge for the planning system:

Already the weekend multitudes are congesting our roads, fouling our downs and commons with litter and soiling our lay-bys; their chalets and caravans threaten all parts of our coast, their cars and motorboats echo in quiet valleys and lakes. Yet the very leisure that brings this onslaught could permit the widening of life, of human pleasure and achievement, which the Greeks understood and which 'generous-hearted men have dreamed of for generations'. Can we enhance the lives of our people without ruining the island they live upon? This is the new acute challenge to architects and planners.

The Trust's specific proposals for the Lee Valley were described as a 'broad conception', not a detailed scheme. In brief, the expectation was that the Valley would be packed with facilities to meet the demand for active leisure. At Stratford (on what is now the main Olympic site) the plan was to realise Joan Littlewood's dream of a 'Fun Palace'; at Old Ford Lock a boating club and a vehicle test circuit; and at Eastway a multi-sports

centre with facilities, inter alia, for soccer, rugger, hockey, lacrosse, cricket, tennis, bowls and lawn games, together with a golf practice range and a motor sports centre.

Moving northwards from Eastway, beside Hackney Marshes, the Civic Trust proposed that:

Alongside the tree-lined river front<sup>5</sup> would run a paved promenade with seats, cafes, pubs and restaurants capturing the spirit of the sea-front ...Along the river, water-buses with gay awnings would play. Behind the promenade, the great sward of playing fields would be softened by the planting of trees and hedgerows to give a sense of intimacy and enclosure which is now lacking.

And moving on to 'Lea Bridge Gardens', a new riverside pleasure garden was proposed, incorporating a permanent circus and fairground, a large circular restaurant and dance hall; and northwards an Arts Centre with pavilions for music, drama, cinema and painting. 'The whole complex could rival the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen'. Across the road, the old pump houses would form a museum of industry, whilst Millfields would house a children's farm and rose garden. Going further north, there is more of the same including a 'Serpentine Lake' upon Walthamstow Marshes, and so on up to Stanstead Abbots and Ware in distant Hertfordshire.

This was a conscious modernisation of the concept of the pleasure gardens of Vauxhall or Ranelagh, with the distinction that the leisure facilities for the privileged few would now be at the disposal of the prosperous many, with ever more time to spend on enjoyments. The conception in that sense was generous and it was also unmistakably modern. As Leslie Lane, Director of the Civic Trust, put it in an address to the Royal Society:

In the Lea Valley Park...there is an opportunity...to give infinite pleasure by devising all manner of novel forms of 'going for rides' and at the same time develop, experimentally novel forms of transport.<sup>6</sup>

As for implementation, the report considered it

abundantly clear [that] a unified agency of some kind is essential. Local Government Authorities in the area are numerous; a pooling of their resources will be needed.

The suggestion was made to create 'some kind of organisation sponsored by the local authorities, taking perhaps a form like the new town corporations'.

Lou Sherman enthusiastically endorsed these proposals,<sup>7</sup> which represented a major step towards his dream. There was now a clear, modern and relevant concept of a Lee Valley park and a broad base of support. However, it was a long step to turn the broad conception outlined by the Civic Trust into a workable scheme, and much work for Sherman and his energetic town clerk still to do.

### Phase 3 – 1964-77(?): The Park Authority Act and the era of public implementation

As things turned out, it was only three years from the Civic Trust report to the creation of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, and just two more years to the publication in 1969 of a master plan – a detailed plan of proposals for the entire park. The overriding feature of this period was the sublime confidence of all concerned that there was an effective, top-downwards public sector solution to the 'challenge of leisure'; and also the will and the wherewithal (up to a point) to make things happen. The directions were set at a time when the public sector – for instance – still took the lead in providing new housing, and presided over a vast expansion of university education. It was a period when it was still considered axiomatic – even by the Duke of Edinburgh – that public authorities were the obvious bodies to provide all manner of public goods. It was the Indian summer of the post-war political 'Butskellite' consensus for public welfare – later to be rudely shattered by Mrs Thatcher.

But back to 1964. Len Huddy convened a conference at Hackney Town Hall to receive a work-in-progress report from the Civic Trust, and then a further two-day conference – at the 'Triples' engine house owned by the Metropolitan Water

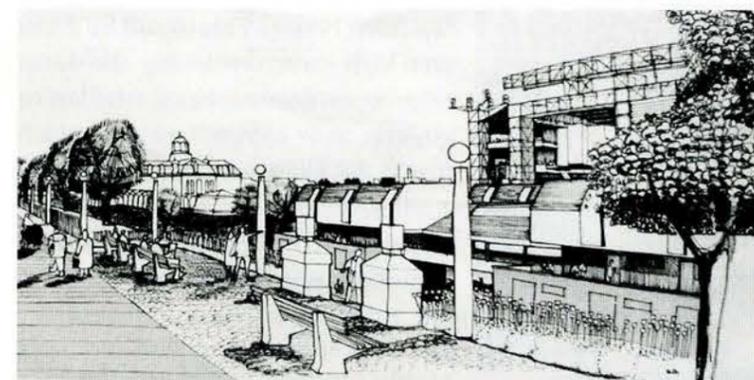
Board at Lea Bridge, now sadly demolished – to welcome its publication. This latter conference was to be a grand affair with an opening address by the Duke of Edinburgh, with those present including the Minister of Local Government, the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, and representatives of numerous statutory undertakers as well as the interested local authorities. The second day of the conference was reserved for a business meeting of the local authorities after the flummery was over.

The Duke opened by revealing that he often overflew the valley by helicopter, famously opining that 'the place on the whole is a pretty average mess'. In commending the Civic Trust proposals, he emphasised that putting the Lee Valley scheme into effect depended on local authorities working together through an organisation 'with the necessary executive authority' – exactly what Lou Sherman hoped to hear. There followed a speech by Leslie Lane, Director of the Civic Trust, putting the cost of the scheme at £30 million, which could be spread over 10 years, not much more than the recently opened M1 motorway! The event attracted much favourable press interest.

By this time, external events had provided a lucky break for Sherman and Huddy. The London Government Act 1963 created the Greater London Council as a strategic authority for Greater London, taking in the whole of the Lee Valley out as far as the Green Belt. The Council was created

as a shadow authority in 1964, taking full powers in April 1965. New, dynamic, Labour-controlled and utterly confident of its strategic mission, the GLC was ideally placed to pick up the Lee Valley park baton. A further conference was called in February 1965, and a motion was moved by Bill Fiske – first chairman of the GLC – and seconded by Hackney's Alderman Sherman, to promote a private Parliamentary bill for the creation of a park authority. It was also proposed to create a provisional joint committee, under the auspices of the GLC, to lay the ground so that the new park authority would hit the ground running in due course.

Reading between the lines, it is clear that all was not entirely sweetness and light at this conference. Funding for the authority would be provided by a precept of up to a penny rate in the counties of Greater London, Essex and Herts. Membership of the authority was proposed to be evenly divided between the GLC and the London riparian authorities on the one hand; and Herts and Essex and the rural riparian authorities on the other – notwithstanding that the bulk of funding would come from the GLC. A proposal to double the voting representation of London councils (which would also have raised the voting weight of Labour-controlled constituent authorities) was, following debate, not proceeded with. Further, an Essex representative, Alderman Millard, considered that the proposed penny rate would be 'disproportionately high', stating that 'the proportion of Essex people who would use the regional park are relatively small and the county council could not accept a firm financial commitment'. After being assured that the proposed penny rate represented a maximum rate of expenditure that 'was unlikely to be reached for some years', Alderman Millard agreed not to press an amendment to the motion,

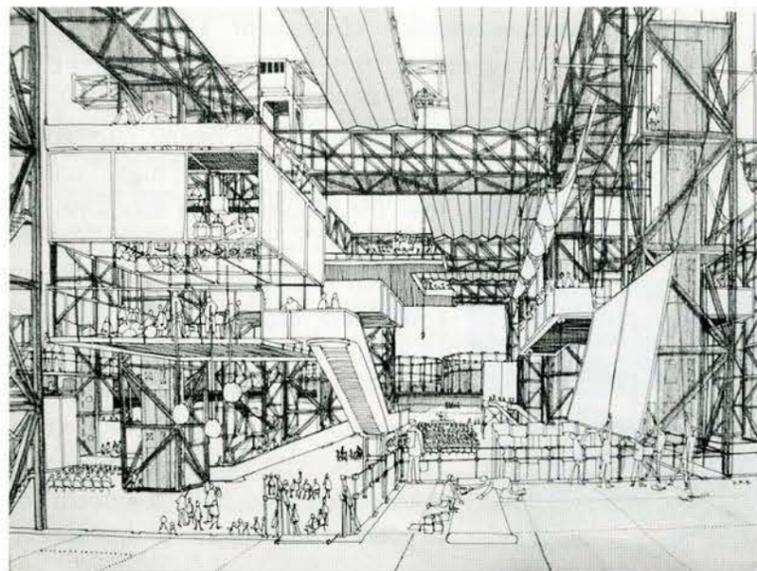


*A vision for Mill Meads: the pumping station is in the distance and the proposed 'Fun Palace' to the right*

on the understanding that his concerns would be considered by the provisional joint committee.

The penny rate was the 'elephant in the room', and was intensely concerning to Lou Sherman. The ambitious proposals could only be achieved by spreading the load between ratepayers ranging from Kingston and Richmond in south-west London to Harwich and Clacton in Essex – many of whom would never hear of the park, let alone use it. Sherman knew that his dream could only be achieved if sceptics like Alderman Millard could be kept onside whilst institutional momentum towards enabling legislation was maintained.

As 1965 progressed, the provisional committee busied itself in preparing legislation, working up detailed proposals, and negotiating to buy up strategic landholdings to be vested in the new park authority. A report from officers to the committee in November 1965 set out proposals for the Hackney area that leave the reader astonished at what was considered to be achievable – and affordable. By way of example, the triangular area at Eastway that is now known as Wick Woodland was proposed for a Japanese garden, an English 18th century garden, a landing stage, restaurant and car park.



Inside the 'Fun Palace'

There were to be major sports centres at Eastway and Lea Bridge, motor cycling scrambling at Bully Fen and much else besides. The Lee Valley project had by then become, as it has remained, an officer-led phenomenon, with elected councils liable to be swept along by the juggernaut they had been persuaded to create.

Lou Sherman's name appears little in the minutes of the proceedings of the provisional joint committee, but he remained a sage figure, guiding the committee behind the scenes. One scheme proposed by officers, egged on by the British Motorcycle Federation, was for a motor cycle scrambling facility at Bully Fen near Eastway. The site was just inside Hackney, but objections came in from nearby Newham and Waltham Forest, the latter proposing that 'motor cycles could more easily reach a rural site for a scramble than cycles'. The minutes record that Lou Sherman considered that it would be 'unfortunate' for the park authority to accept so early in its life a scheme opposed by two constituent councils, and proposed that officers take those proposals no further. The site subsequently became a cycle/BMX track (before being subsumed into the Olympic Games site) and the vital element of harmony was maintained.

There was also much discussion at this time of Joan Littlewood's proposal for a 'Fun Palace', variously proposed to be sited at Millmeads in Newham, Bully Fen in Hackney or Lea Bridge in Waltham Forest. This would be a 150 feet high structure taking the form of an open framework of steel lattice girders and towers, within which would be slung complete auditoria, studios, workshops and restaurants. A report to the provisional joint committee noted that:

The form and nature of such enclosures, together with their position, would be varied by mechanical means including an overhead

gantry crane ... Variation of access and public movement would be achievable by variable travelators, ramps, walkways, stairs and variable escalators.

It would seem that the futuristic conception of the Civic Trust was being harnessed to the bureaucratic ambition of a young and confident public authority.

Meanwhile, the Essex representative, in a manner reminiscent of Peter Simple's fictional character Alderman Foodbotham, continued to press on the provisional joint committee the unwisdom of vast financial commitments. He insisted that it be placed on record that Essex County Council wished that the power to draw a precept of a penny rate 'be qualified by the need to obtain its consent so far as a precept on Essex of more than one third of a penny rate was concerned'. An equally parsimonious attitude was exhibited by the corporation of the London Borough of Ealing, which entered a formal objection to the Lee Valley Regional Park Bill as it came before Parliament in 1966. The objection stated that:

The Corporation consider that it is unlikely that the inhabitants of the London Borough of Ealing will derive any benefit from the park commensurate with an annual payment of a rate of one penny in the pound, which amounts to £92,500 [in the region of £2 million at present values] for the borough.

An amendment to the Bill was sought to avoid the imposition of this burden on Ealing. The objection went to the heart of Lou Sherman's concept of spreading the load, and the corporation was prevailed upon to withdraw its objection. Other objections to the Bill were also overcome, and the Lee Valley Regional Park Act received royal assent in December 1966, with the new authority coming into being on 1 January 1967. Hackney's first representative on the Authority was Martin Ottolangui, a future leader of the Council.

The general power and duty of the new authority was expressed thus:

To develop, improve, preserve and manage or to arrange for the development, improvement, preservation and management of the Park as a place for the enjoyment of leisure, recreation, sport, games or amusements or any similar activity, for the preservation of nature reserves and for the provision and enjoyment of entertainments of any kind.

Notwithstanding the oft-repeated reservations of Essex, the new authority had the power to draw a rate of up to one penny from the Counties of Essex, Hertfordshire and Greater London (the latter raising the money by a precept on the London boroughs) and the expectation was that the transformative plans for the Lee Valley would be complete within 12 to 15 years.<sup>8</sup> To the modern reader, this represented an astonishing rate of progress in securing assent for what would now be seen as a vast public expenditure project.

The park authority was not bestowed with power to grant itself planning permission; this remained with the local authorities. However, the authority was required by section 14(1) of the Act to produce within two years 'a plan showing proposals for the future development of the park' which local authorities were required to include in their own development plans by virtue of section 14(2). The park authority also had to be consulted upon planning proposals brought by third parties within the area of the park, and local authorities had to 'take into account' the authority's views in dealing with such applications. The planning provisions were workable provided that park authority and local authorities were in harmony, but caused serious potential for mischance – as later developments showed – if they started to pull in different directions.

The first chief executive, and the dominating figure of the authority in its early years, was a solicitor named Leonard Johnes, who hastened to draw up the park authority's required plan of proposals. The master plan was published in 1969 and represents a reworking of the Civic Trust vision;

the 'broad conception' of the Civic Trust having been updated to become a working blueprint of an actual authority, with important financial and legal powers.

The master plan retained the unmistakably modernist slant of the Civic Trust blueprint, but shorn of many of its more outlandish – but also its most creative – elements. At the heart of the plan was a proposal for a series of 'major recreational centres' to be linked by a four lane, dual-carriageway 'park road'. The park road was itself proposed as a major recreational attraction. A feasibility study commissioned from engineers Sir William Halcrow and Partners noted that

for the average Londoner, a 'pleasant drive' is hard to find with a long struggle on congested roads at the beginning and end of his journey.

A dedicated road through the open space of the park was a solution to this problem, and it was suggested that the road could contain elevated stretches so that leisure motorists could look over the high embankments on to the park's reservoirs'. The plan stated that 'after careful consideration' it had been decided not to have provision for a separate cycle track, although cyclists would be free to use the park road and contiguous tracks.

In Hackney, the major development proposal was at Eastway, incorporating much of the current Olympic site. Proposals included a cycle centre, playing fields and youth club; an entertainments centre containing 'for example' restaurants, bars, exhibition galleries, a cinema or 'cinerama', dance floors and film recording studios; a park information centre with a museum and library of sport; and a garden and horticultural centre at the south west corner of Hackney marsh, with 'perhaps Chinese, Persian and Mogul Gardens, an aviary and aquarium, woodlands and walks along water courses'. This somewhat extravagant vision most nearly replicated the Civic Trust's vision. Proposals for

other recreational centres were more prosaic but also more workable – that at Lea Bridge included a sports and social centre, riding establishment, simulated ski slope, pitch and putt course, rock climbing wall and adventure playground.

The master plan had the clear and cardinal virtue that it presented a programme for action on the part of an authority with an unswerving determination to get things done and belief in its powers to effect improvement. The first years of the authority were the years of greatest momentum, which saw the construction of major recreation centres at Picketts Lock and Broxbourne; and within the lower stretch of the river, the horse riding and pitch-and-putt facilities at Lea Bridge; the marina at Spring Hill; and the cycle track and sports centre at Eastway. This was a great deal less than the master plan had portended, but it did represent the significant degree of momentum required if the park was to emerge as a recognisable entity within an acceptable scale of time.



Old Ford Lock 'where enthusiasts could tinker with their boats, cycles and cars'

On the debit side, the master plan took an unduly 'developmental' perspective – the park authority's role being seen to acquire land and develop facilities with little or no thought of partnership with local authorities or voluntary bodies. The master plan lacked developed ideas for the improvement of the

spaces between the major recreational centres it proposed. It also lacked any convincing ecological proposals; one of its proposed nature reserves, for instance, was shown in an area devoid of any ornithological or natural interest. There also seemed to be a view, possibly derived from the Civic Trust analysis, that the future lay exclusively with the pursuit of 'active leisure'. This was nicely caught in a *Sunday Times* article from June 1971:

We shall do more with our leisure in the future if the Park Authority has read the signs right. The Sunday afternoon walk will give way to experiments in canoeing or archery or even riding. Class differences in the way people spend their spare time will disappear. They will have to. There will be no room for separate development.

It was arguable, indeed, that Abercrombie's vision of a 'great regional reservation' had been turned on its head.

Whilst all of these debits were essentially matters of choice for the authority, there were other problems which were more intractable. On the financial side, although the objections of Essex County Council to the penny rate had been overborne, the park authority (with heavy representation from rural, and predominantly Conservative, authorities) very quickly recognised that a precept of around one third of the legal maximum represented the limits of the politically acceptable, thereby greatly slowing the momentum of development. Another problem (which was inherent in Lou Sherman's proposal for spreading the financial load) was that a regional park was required in principle to provide regional leisure facilities. There was to be an enduring tension (which persists to this day) between the requirement to provide regional justification for the park's proposals and the ineluctable fact that the local communities would be most affected by them.

#### Phase 4 – 1978(?) to 1985(?) – the era of conflict

It is hard to identify a precise moment when the park authority moved from its trajectory of smooth

momentum to involuntary stasis. What is clear from contemporary press coverage is that during the 1970s the authority rapidly dissipated the goodwill so carefully built up under the guidance of Lou Sherman. By way of example, an article in the *Hertfordshire Mercury* from 1973 reported on plans to create a 'Children's Paradise' at Dobbs Weir, north of Broxbourne. This would feature, inter alia, a fairy castle, Niagara-type falls, a mock up of a New Orleans steamer and a California miners' settlement. In response to the complaint that the local council had not been consulted, Mr Johnes was reported as commenting 'Any discussion which may be taking place is private at the moment. The Authority will comment later.' This typified the approach of the authority, which took pride in acting at the vanguard of public demand rather than being bogged down in old-fashioned consultation.

There were two persistent thorns in the park authority's flesh. The Lee Valley Anglers' Association had been hostile to the park *ab initio* (and had been a formal objector to the Parliamentary bill). Press coverage refers to the anglers' objection to the park's selling off concessions to private consortia. Defending the park authority's actions, its chairman, Arthur Wicks, was revealingly quoted as saying that anglers were objecting to the authority's 'intrusion into a private world they had enjoyed for countless years'. In Tottenham Marshes, the park authority had planned a 65 thousand-seat stadium to be shared between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur, but was forced to abandon this idea when both clubs disavowed any interest in it. The Tottenham Community Project, led by Bob Hart, persistently criticised the authority for the lack of any satisfactory plans for the improvement of this area, which had been much used by local people in the past.

From 1978, as the country hunkered down towards the 'winter of discontent' a series of developments launched the park into the era of conflict.

First, the park authority failed to carry a planning application to develop a squash centre at the old Great Universal Stores sports ground at Spring Hill in Clapton, following a campaign by local people objecting to building up this open space. The park authority later 'gave up' on the development of this site, leasing it to Hackney council which in turn sub-leased it to a club called Hackney Rugby Club but apparently having limited connection with Hackney.

More significantly from the authority's perspective, in the following year Broxbourne council considered its proposal to create a 2000-metre rowing course by joining together a series of pits created by disused gravel workings between Cheshunt and Broxbourne. During the 1970s the authority had been actively buying up land to facilitate this proposal. As the park authority noted in its 1976-77 annual report:

In the meantime, the area offers walkers and naturalists some very pleasant territory. Bowyer's Water, at Cheshunt, is a 45-acre gravel pit lake leased by the Authority; a long established angling club fishes from its shores.

Such interim – and essentially local – uses would make way in due course for a new regional, or in this case national, facility. The park authority's proposals were open to objection partly on the ground that a national rowing centre had been opened at Nottingham, reducing the justification for the authority's initiative. Equally, conservationists, walkers and birdwatchers – practitioners of outmoded 'passive' leisure – were less willing to make way for the hard-edged new facilities proposed by the park authority. In 1979, Broxbourne council gave a consent to the rowing centre that was so hedged with conditions that the park authority deferred *sine die* (and has not subsequently revived) its proposals. In the wake of this decision a group called the Lee Valley Conservation Group, which was formed from a series of conservation groups including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, issued a pamphlet in 1980 which pressed for the proper management of the Cheshunt/

Fishers Green area in the light of its exceptional ornithological interest.

Second, the Lee Valley Association (LVA) was formed, initially by Bob Hart, John Trevelyan (then assistant secretary of the Ramblers' Association) and myself. As a Hackney resident I had noted how little had been done to achieve Abercrombie's proposal for a 'great regional reservation' and – posing as a teacher – I enquired of the park authority whether there was a press cuttings file which I could consult for a schools project.<sup>10</sup> This file (since apparently lost) showed that along the length of the park there were numerous individuals, organisations and councils all aggrieved by the park authority's arrogant approach, but unaware of each other's activities. This file provided a ready-made database to establish an environmental pressure group. The LVA held its first public meeting at Tottenham in 1979, resolving to form a series of sub-groups in different parts of the park. We were able to persuade Lou Sherman (who could see as clearly as any that the park authority had lost its way) to be the LVA's president, whilst Colonel H. R. R. Prior – a former park authority member who had represented Ware District Council – became its first chairman. We were also permitted to affiliate to the Civic Trust. The LVA during its short life encountered formidable problems of co-ordination and strategy, but it undoubtedly created a counterweight to the park authority, which had hitherto claimed a monopoly of discourse as to how the destiny of a regional park should be determined.

Third – and perhaps more shattering than the Broxbourne debacle – was the establishment of the Save the Marshes campaign, which fought and eventually defeated the park authority's proposals to extract gravel from the Walthamstow Marshes and create a sailing centre in its wake. Most of the major figures in Save the Marshes, including its chairman, Mike Knowles, and its secretary, Jane Nash, lived in Clapton. The campaign proclaimed simply that 'the marshes have been stolen systematically from

the people'<sup>11</sup> and brought to bear community-based campaigning methods for which the park authority was quite unprepared. This campaign held a series of packed public meetings (including one particularly memorable event at Chats Palace addressed by David Bellamy), and documented a persuasive case that the marshes – so close to the centre of London – were of exceptional ecological interest, something that was apparently unknown to and unsuspected by the park authority. In February 1980 the minerals sub-committee of the GLC refused permission for gravel extraction from the marshes, a decision recommended by the two neighbouring boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest.<sup>12</sup> The marshes were subsequently designated as a site of special scientific interest. This had been the park authority's flagship development proposal after the failure of the Broxbourne rowing proposal. Insult followed injury when, in the same year, a proposal for a motor-cycle scrambling facility at Tottenham marshes, supported by the park authority, was also rejected. These setbacks called into question whether the park authority's plans for the park were now achievable.

The LVA lacked the organisational focus of the Save the Marshes campaign, but provided a persistent critique of the park authority's proposals and found support among some of the authority's own members, although some of the Conservative 'country' members persisted in regarding the LVA's activists as unruly oiks. The LVA's pamphlets *The Lee Valley: Time for a re-think* and *Freedom to Wander* provided the most comprehensive critique of the park authority's policies. The LVA identified the master plan as a key problem. The master plan claimed statutory authority as the blueprint for the development of the park, but experience showed that the plans were neither affordable nor desirable. Meanwhile, in a neat sleight of hand, the authority claimed it was keeping its master plan under review – something that it was required by the Park Act to do – so that any new plans it came up with had the same imprimatur of authority as the original

master plan itself. Mr Johnes had no time for the critics of the park authority, stating in an article that:

The emergence of groups of interested people critical of some of the Authority's ideas has shown that many people do not fully understand the original intention of Parliament that the development of the Park should be on a 'regional' basis in the general interests of the south-east of England more than providing another method of satisfying local need.<sup>13</sup>

The park authority challenged the LVA, if it disliked the master plan, to produce a better blueprint of its own. The LVA's response was to call for the park authority itself to conduct a fundamental re-think of its plans:

We think that...the Park Authority should use its resources now to conduct a separate review, both because its legislative duty is to do so and, more importantly, because the Park Authority must work to plans which are affordable and realistic in the 1980s – and not pretend to follow plans for major centres; park roads and so on which in their present form stand little chance of securing public support and less chance of ever getting paid for.<sup>14</sup>

In 1980 Mr Johnes retired as director of the park authority and was replaced by Tom Limna, a more emollient figure. Mr Limna was present in 1981 when the LVA staged a cruise up the river for local authority dignitaries, in the park authority's own vessel the 'Pride of Lee', to mark the 20th anniversary of Lou Sherman's cruise; a reception was laid on at the Spring Hill Rowing Club with copious quantities of Lee Valley elderflower champagne.

The park authority announced in the same year that it would indeed conduct a fundamental review of its master plan, although Mr Limna earnestly assured me that this would have happened irrespective of the efforts of LVA which had actually made this decision more difficult – a proposition that will probably never be either established or refuted. We will return to this review in the final section.

There were other significant conflictual problems for the park authority at this time, including a serious falling-out with the GLC after Ken Livingstone's election to its leadership in 1981. Livingstone and Tony Banks took public issue with the park authority's authoritarian style; and the conservative majority in the authority extracted vengeance by breaking with convention that the GLC nominate its chairman, installing Conservatives as both chair and vice-chair of the authority. Whilst the park could (and did) continue to exercise its power to draw a precept from the GLC, it was scarcely desirable that the authority should endure such an icy relationship with its largest stakeholder. It also suffered skirmishes with several constituent authorities about the order of precedence between its master plan and the local authorities' own development plans. A major setback occurred in 1980, when the Secretary of State agreed to Haringey council's proposal that the Harris Lebus sports ground at Tottenham Hale be taken out of the park and used for industrial purposes.

In short, it would seem that the park authority's political capital had been all but exhausted in a few short years, and the future path for the development of the park was extremely unclear.

#### Phase 5 – 1986(?) to the present: the era of pragmatism

After lengthy consultation, the revised park plan was adopted by the authority in 1986. In summarising its future strategy the authority stated that it was 'concerned to provide a balanced programme of formal and informal leisure development'. It noted that the authority 'has a clear duty to provide sporting facilities' and that consultation had 'demonstrated both the need and opportunity for sports facilities in certain parts of the Park'. At the same time it stated that 'The Park offers major opportunities for landscape regeneration, and proposals for environmental improvements form a major part of the new park Plan ... many [of which] will ... [increase] the attractiveness of the Park for informal public access.'

The park road, of which less than a mile had been built, was jettisoned on the basis that 'The concept might have been valid in 1969, but it is now acknowledged to be inappropriate.' In its place there were plans for improvements to the Lee Navigation towpath (mostly implemented) and for a valley-long 'park path' (much still unrealised). Major environmental improvements took place, particularly in the lovely area of disused gravel pits at Fishers Green to the north of Waltham Abbey. The park authority became less secretive, and began to publicise its meetings and agendas. It also recruited a team of (mostly bearded) park rangers, who organised public walks and interpretation events, as the LVA had pressed it to do.

In Hackney, the park authority (after much cajoling from the LVA and other conservation groups) agreed to acquire the disused Middlesex filter beds to create a nature reserve, which was (and remains) a retreat that is both beautiful and ecologically valuable. Subsequently it has created a companion nature reserve across the river in the Essex beds, where it has also opened an interpretation centre called The Waterworks. The natural environment has clearly become part of the park's agenda.

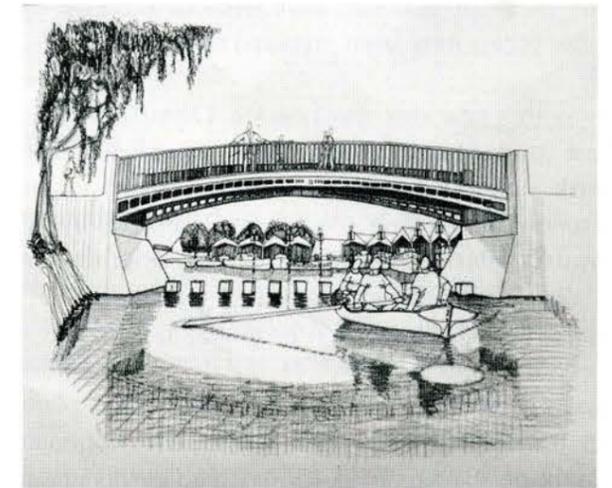
At the same time the 'developmentalist' urge was not, and could not be, laid aside if the park authority was to justify its regional financial base. Indeed, the abolition of the GLC exposed the park to direct – and uncomfortable – interface with distant London boroughs such as Bromley, who questioned why they had to pay money to fund facilities in north-east London. The new plan therefore proposed regional sporting facilities such as a motorcycle centre at Rammey Marsh in Enfield, a water sports centre at the giant King George V Reservoir and (unspecified) 'intensive leisure' use at Tottenham Marsh. All in all the approach was scrupulously balanced. This was also true of a further updated park plan adopted by the park authority in 2000.

In brief, the heroic (but bull-headed) era of the 70s and the conflictual era of the 80s were to give way to a more balanced, pragmatic period. However there were a number of flies in this ointment.

First, the days when the park could even contemplate drawing its 'penny rate' had long since gone. The older leisure facilities such as Picketts Lock were losing money; and the new environmental initiatives were largely non revenue-generating. This meant that if the park authority were to build any of its recreational facilities it would be dependent increasingly upon other, better-endowed public bodies paying for them. A prototype for this kind of development was the Ice Centre at Lea Bridge, opened in 1984 and constructed with major financial support from the Sports Council. The price to be paid was that the centre was (and still is) closed to the public for several hours each day and reserved for training purposes.

Second, the park authority was aiming at a moving target. Its leisure centre at Picketts Lock, with a wave machine and other exciting attractions, had been ahead of its time when opened in 1973, but was now replicated by more modern centres provided by local authorities. Over the last 20 years the park authority has suffered the somewhat humiliating closure of many of its front-line facilities, including the original Picketts Lock centre, demolished in 2004. In September 2008 the Broxbourne leisure centre also closed, having been deemed too expensive to keep up to modern standards.

Third, there remained the problem of securing public acceptance and planning approval for whatever proposals the park authority came up with. For example, in 1990 it issued a document on a 'leisure development opportunity' at Lea Bridge Road on land owned by the authority to the east of the Ice Centre. The document referred to a deficiency identified by the Sports Council in the provision of indoor sports facilities – particularly tennis – as well as 'the recent upsurge and interest in



*'Boating at the north of Lea Bridge Gardens'*

10-pin bowling, indoor cricket, indoor bowls...and many others'. The authority stated that it 'wished to see intensive leisure development on this land and invited developers to submit their proposals'. These proposals were poorly received, and were not proceeded with.

This then has become the era of pragmatism, in which the park authority has embraced the broadest possible palette for its development proposals going forward, and has increasingly embraced a partnership approach, which in practice means adopting proposals that others are willing to pay for. At Picketts Lock, it seemed at one stage that the park authority had hit the jackpot with a proposal for a national athletics stadium, incorporating a 43 thousand-seat stadium as well as indoor and warm-up tracks, the whole to be the venue for the 2005 World Athletics Championship. The bulk of the projected £100 million cost was to be met by the Sports Council, now re-named Sport England. In 2001 it was announced that the project had been abandoned by the Government on cost grounds. In its place came a more modest scheme, the Lee Valley Athletics Centre, built at a cost of £16 million, mostly provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's capital modernisation fund, and by Sport England, with major support via the National Lottery. This is a valuable facility,

but its shape and size have been determined by what others have been prepared to pay for.

Into this new mix the London Olympic Games has provided a potent new ingredient. The park authority has been largely by-passed in the process of creating the Olympic project, but it owns a substantial part of the Olympic site. In a draft document setting out *A Vision for 2017*<sup>15</sup> the authority states that its intention is 'to play a central role in the legacy of the Park'; to 'explore and promote design solutions and business plans in partnership with the Olympic Development Authority'; and to 'help deliver a high quality urban park at the heart of the Lower Lee Valley and extend the Lee Valley Regional Park to the Thames'. The park is also to be the site of the Olympics white water canoe slalom event at Broxbourne, described 'as the only brand new venue being built outside the Olympic Park'.

This draft statement of its vision states that 'By 2017 the Lee Valley Regional Park will be a world class destination combining the best of open space, conservation and sporting excellence' - a statement that shows some dangers of replicating the hubris that caused the park authority so much difficulty in earlier days. It also aims to 'deliver sports and leisure opportunities at all levels to support the Government's agenda of a more active lifestyle' - a vision which conjures up the spectre of 'active leisure' by Government diktat, an intriguing updating of the futurist credo of the 1960s.

It may well be the case that the park authority's wheel has come full circle, and that the lessons of the past will need to be learned anew. Lou Sherman's creation may yet go through further interesting stages of development.

## Notes

1. The main documentary source for this article has been the files preserved by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority which extensively document the prehistory of the authority, and includes the minutes of the proceedings of the provisional joint committee established by the GLC as a precursor to the authority. I have been greatly aided in my interpretation of these documents by many discussions with the late Sir Lou Sherman. I have also consulted my own archives of the Lee Valley Association which are to be deposited with Hackney Archives Department in the future.
2. *English History 1914-1945* (1965).
3. Lou Sherman was subsequently knighted.
4. But note that the spelling 'Lee' is also used, especially in legislation, including that establishing the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority.
5. In fact, it is clear that the Civic Trust was referring to the Lee Navigation, which runs on the west side of Hackney Marshes; not the River Lee itself which runs on the east side and is not navigable.
6. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, July 1965.
7. This comment is based upon personal conversations and also an article by Lou Sherman, 'The Lee Valley Regional Park', in *Essays in Local Government Enterprise* (ed. Ellis Hillman, 1967).
8. This timescale for completion was provided in the park authority's master plan, published in 1969.
9. This suggestion was in the preliminary engineering study; the master plan limited itself to the proposition that the park road should be 'aligned to high ground' in some of its northern stretches.
10. Mr Johnes later told me that this file would have been withheld if the true reason for my interest had been known.
11. *Walthamstow Marshes: Our Countryside Under Threat* (Save the Marshes Campaign, 1981).
12. This refusal was later upheld on appeal to the Secretary of State.
13. *Water Space*, the journal of the Water Space Amenity Commission, Spring 1980.
14. *The Lee Valley: Time for a Re-think*.
15. The 'vision document' was published as a working draft, and at the time of writing is on the park authority's website at [http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/en/content/cms/about\\_us/about\\_the\\_authority/publications/publications.aspx](http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/en/content/cms/about_us/about_the_authority/publications/publications.aspx)

## Contributors

**Dr Melvyn Brooks** and **Robert H. Thompson** contributed articles about the David Alves Rebello collection of coins and tokens to *Hackney History* 3. Melvyn, who lives in Israel, has an extensive collection of books, postcards and ephemera concerning Hackney. Robert, who retired as librarian at Homerton after 37 years in Hackney libraries, has written widely and authoritatively about coins and tokens. His article about Hackney public house tokens appeared in volume 12.

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**Laurie Elks** has lived in Hackney since 1972. He is a trustee of Hackney Historic Buildings Trust, for whom he takes the lead in the care and conservation of St Augustine's Tower. In his capacity as a former member of the Criminal Cases Review Commission he has recently published *Righting Miscarriages of Justice? Ten Years of the Criminal Cases Review Commission*.

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## The Friends of Hackney Archives

The Friends, an independent charity run by volunteers, was formed in 1985 to support the work of Hackney Archives and act as a focus for local history in Hackney, Stoke Newington and Shoreditch. Through the donations fund the Friends have purchased a wide range of archive and printed material for the local history collection, including manuscripts, estate records, playscripts, pictures and printed books, and, notably, two important collections of theatre posters.

Membership is £10 per year (£20 for overseas members). Members receive the regular newsletter *The Hackney Terrier* and the annual journal *Hackney History*. Other meetings are arranged from time to time.

Enquiries can be addressed to the Friends of Hackney Archives c/o Hackney Archives Department, 43 de Beauvoir Road N1 5SQ, telephone (020) 7241 2886, email [archives@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:archives@hackney.gov.uk).

## Our other publications

Some back numbers of *Hackney History* are still in print at £4.00 each. A list of these and their contents is available on request.

Bill Hall's videos - *Stoke Newington* (DVD format, 2008); *Church Street: the narrow way* (about the old centre of Hackney) and *Four Hackney Houses* (about Brooke House, Balmes House, Shacklewell manor house, and Barbers Barn) - are £6.95 each. The latter two have been newly re-issued in DVD format in 2008.

*Discover Stoke Newington* by David Mander and Isobel Watson is newly available at £4.95. The Friends also publish *Under Hackney: the Archaeological Story* by Keith Sugden and Kieron Tyler (£4.95) and the leaflets *Discover De Beauvoir Town* and *Historic Hackney: a walk from Hackney Central Station* (£1 each).

Please check the website ([www.hackney.gov.uk/archives](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/archives)) or contact Hackney Archives Department as above for availability and postage.