

**The following is an extract from the SURVEY OF LONDON"
VOLUME XLVI 2008:**

(2 volumes: "South & East Clerkenwell + Northern Clerkenwell & Pentonville)
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Chapter III: Clerkenwell Green (pps 86-114)

p.92 - "The Green as an open space" by Royal Grant **1599** to Sir John Spencer of Islington, one time Lord Mayor. Passed to Compton family and then Earls & Marquesses of Northampton claimed title throughout **18th and early 19th c.**, a claim challenged (unsuccessfully) on the grounds that it was 'anciently part of the King's highway'

By **1870s** it was owned by The Vestry, subsequently inherited by Vestry's successor bodies, Finsbury Borough Council (from 1900) and London Borough of Islington (since 1965).

1720's: A watch-house, well and pump occupied the centre. For a time there was a whipping in the middle of the enclosure. Watch-house was removed in 1840s, replaced with round paved area with a lamp.

1856: New well sunk and pump erected.

1862: Pump replaced by ornamental cast-iron drinking fountain, a gift of the **Good Samaritan Temperance Society**, based in Saffron Hill, which raised the money from local subscribers.

1878: Decision to enclose central area was defeated by local inhabitants and groups who used the Green.

1870: Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Assoc. provided horse trough near fountain.

1899: International Hygienic Society removed experimental temporary kiosk in front of Sessions House when underground

public conveniences for both sexes were constructed by British Sanitary Works Ltd.

Clerkenwell Green South side:

No.9 - a small house, originally the architect Paxtonhocher Architects (husband and wife) approached by a long passageway through No.8 and then a timber bridge spanning an indoor pool, planned around an atrium, interconnected by a glazed bridge. The building has no windows, light entirely through a retractable roof of stainless steel and high-performance glass.

1908-1928: **No.14A** Upper floors occupied by the Peel Institute, the sports and social club associated with the Friend's Meeting House in Peel Court, St. John's Lane. In mid-1930s a lecture room and smaller meeting room at **14A** were used as an annex to Marx House at **No.37A**. Later Peel Centre moved to Lloyd Baker Street and subsequently to Percy Circus, where it still exists - they hold substantial archival records.

1913 June: fire destroyed **No.11**, used as workshops and stores for Uniform Clothing and Equipment Co. based at **No.5**. Became know as Uniquip and remained at 10-11 until 1990s when converted to offices.

No.15-17: The original 3 storey houses with attics were built in 1706 by William Palmer as part of settlement for his daughters marriage to Joseph Marshall a City stationer.

Clock and watchmakers occupied:

No.17: William & Thomazon Fitter (mid 1740-mid 1760)

No.16: Joseph Bosley (or Boseley) **1730-1748** rear workshops were added to all 3 houses and by late 19th c. were in multi-occupancy by craftsmen and manufacturers. All 3 houses were acquired by Met. Board of Works for Clerkenwell Road improvements, they were not needed. By early 1950s had been partly demolished because of war damage, only ground floors were standing, new 1st floors were added in 1958.

No's.18-19-20 sites were cleared for making of Clerkenwell Road.

No.20: later became Cornwell House, built by Charles Powell (landlord of 2 pubs on Clerkenwell Green - The Jerusalem Tavern, cnr. Of Red Lion Street and the Sessions House Hotel - cnr. Of Turnmill Street). Powell was well known to local magistracy as provider of refreshments when court was in session and undertook he would rebuild on an 'imposing scale' with accommodation and dining and luncheons.

Sessions House Hotel plans were approved in 1878, building completed by April 1880. The hotel closed in 1923 and in 1925 building became spectacle factory, showrooms and offices for General Optical Co. (architect Herbert Wright) and renamed Cornwell House after the owners of the company ET & FU Cornwell. In 1978-79 Cornwell House refitted as craft workshops by LBI for Clerkenwell Green Association.

p.208: Hicks Hall painting Shepherd and Chimneypiece re-installed at Sessions House.

Dec.1920: Last trial at Sessions House, building sold for £26,500 in 1923, original LCC asking price was £35,000 but lower sale price due to expense required to convert it to commercial use. Remained empty for a decade, some alterations carried out before it was again occupied.

1931: Sessions House building taken over by Avery Weighing Machine & Scale Manufacturers as their HQ's for their 500 clerical staff (known then as Avery House) until firm's departure in 1973. Then stood empty to deteriorate until 1978 when "acquired for restoration and conversion" as a Masonic Conference and Social Centre which opened in 1979.

No.37A - 1738: Marx Memorial Library - Welsh School erected of which hardly anything of original structure survives, body of building undergone successive alterations, perhaps 'outer quoins' survived. Rich in historical associations, long connected with radical and left-wing causes. Lewins Russian language newspaper ISKRA was printed there. MML established in 1933, fresco of Marxist allegory in the library painted in 1935.

Older than the Welsh School House itself are the brick vaulted cellars extending beyond curtilage of site. Was owned by Bedfordshire baronet Sir Rowland Alston, Prince of Wales reputedly contributed to building costs - designed by

James Steer. Last Meeting of Trustees held on 7th September 1772.

After departure of Welsh School lease sold at auction to cheesemonger Roger Meredith, possibly acting on behalf of upholsterer and cabinet-maker Peter Francis Mallet in October 1772. He occupied the building until 1776, then moved to Newcastle House in Clerkenwell Close selling lease in **1778** to local businessman and JP, William Blackborough.

1893: Premises taken by 20th Century Press Ltd. To publish 'Justice', weekly newspaper of Social Democratic Federation and other 'Socialist and advanced literature'. William Morris guaranteed first years rent. Under Editor Harry Quelch the Press expanded into Nos.37 & 38 and took over the whole building in 1908-9. Quelch allowed the presses to be used for Lewins newspaper Iskra (Spark) and 17 issues were printed in 1902-3. Quelch died in 1913, building was in bad condition but the Press remained until 1922.

1924-1939: No.37 was used as Clerkenwell Waste Paper Works. Remainder refurbished in 1924 by Magnani & Valli for short-lived Anglo-Italian Club, which closed in late 1920s.

1933: The Marx Commemoration Committee set up 50 years after his death agreed to create a permanent memorial. A conference decided it should be a Library & Worker's school as nowhere in Britain could workers educate themselves in Marxism. The Clerkenwell Green building was suggested by Harry Quelch's son Tom who was an apprentice at the time of Lewins visit and had become research officer of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers. In October 1933 it was announced a lease had been secured for premises and all necessary building work had been carried out by direct labour. The freehold of the building was bought by Noreen Branson of Labour Research Department and donated on behalf of herself and husband, the artist Clive Bronson. At inaugural opening lecture on 'The Life of Marx' was delivered by Tom Mann, leader of 1889 Dock Strike, a friend of both Marx's daughters, Eleanor and Friedrich Engels.

1964: Marx Memorial Library fight led to defeat of LCC plans and start of Clerkenwell Green as a Conservation Area.

CLERKENWELL GREEN & CLERKS WELL (Farringdon Lane):

p.3: "Its heartland in Clerkenwell Green"...."600 years after the parish was founded but it omits most of the land-area belonging to the historical parish from its twelfth-century beginnings down to 1900".

p.5: The nunnery convent of St. Mary's property (around St. James's) was 10 acres in 1112, included the Clerk's Well.

12th century Clerkenwell two religious houses are the 1st recorded landholders and builders.

Also 10 acres: The **Hospitallers' priory of St. John of Jerusalem** (St. Johns Square) preceded nunnery.

Both founded by Jordan de Bricet(t) a family of Breton origin, endowed by Bricet's fee of Clerkenwell which he held of the bishop of London within manor of Stepney.

p.5-6: "Extra 4 acres between land of nunnery and priory, identifiable with the present Clerkenwell Green came afterwards and more loosely under the nuns' control". A daughter and granddaughter of J. de Bricet became nuns at St. Mary's.

1538-40: "All 3 religious houses were suppressed and expropriated (Charterhouse, St. Johns Priory and St. Mary's convent) and buildings adapted and subdivided, ...Clerkenwell Green as a public open space firms up around this time".

Freeholders now emerge: "nunnery lands became part of Seckford estate after 1587; Sir John Spencer acquired through his daughter's marriage (1599) what became the larger Northampton estate...many were to remain in possession for next 3 centuries.

p.10: **1780-1800's** land was developed by the Northamptons, Lloyd Bakers and New River Company, Henry Penton, Baynes-Warner, Brewers Company, Sekford and Charterhouse estates on Clerkenwell (old boundaries) increased to peak population in 1881 of 69,076.

1727: Poorhouse built in Coppice Row, until Clerkenwell joined Holborn Poor Law Union in 1869.

1788-92: St. James's Church rebuilt.

1850: The printing trades broke out of their St. Johns Square & Lane enclave before 1850, seeping into Clerkenwell Green until they occupied a third of premises in **1939** and no less than half in **1946**. The nature of Victorian printing in Clerkenwell was miscellaneous, ranging from periodicals like General Booth's War Cry to engravings (copious local presence of artist engravers), maps, books, pamphlets and ephemera. Few premises were linked with the national London-wide daily press except 16 Bowling Green Lane built for the Standard group of newspapers, then based off Fleet Street in Shoe Lane.

Printing was ideal background for Clerkenwells later radical politics of Victorian London where after Spa Fields uproar over the Corn Laws, Chartism, Suffrage and social revolution were debated publicly which led to left-wing parties and newspapers being drawn into the district from William Morris's Social League to the Daily Worker - at the height of their respective influences in the **1880s** and **1950s** both occupied addresses in Farringdon Road, testifying to the band between printing and leftist politics.

1850: Great Northern Railway, Kings Cross Road between Smithfield and Kings Cross rebuilding took place 1860-1864 under City Corporation and railway company, ignoring local interests of 5000 evicted homes (some say 10 times this number), Smithfield Market (1868), new Charterhouse Street (1874) sliced in enclave of Charterhouse Square.

1851: A clause in the Clerkenwell Improvement Act conferred power for completing Farringdon Road upon the City Corporation to build "improved dwellings and lodging houses for the poor", probably the first "parliamentary sanction for any local authority to build such housing". First attempt 1855 failed - Turnmill Street 1864-5 Corporation Buildings, Farringdon Road were erected, countrys 1st Council houses, followed by blocks: Cobden Buildings, Kings Cross Road **1864-5** erected for Stanley Waterlow, his private charitable trust the Improved Industrial Dwellings Co. Also Peabody Trust **1883-4** Pear Tree Court.

1861: Rose Alley had a single water-closet which served all inhabitants, occasionally a stand pipe was turned on for a short time.

1868: Local MP, WTM Torrens sponsored the Artizans Dwelling Act of 1868, he represented Clerkenwell and St. Lukes constituencies in Finsbury.

1869: At this time Clerkenwell Green was owned by The Vestry housed in the Old Watch House in Rosoman Street, site of Finsbury Town Hall. Vestry built its own library in 1890 and Finsbury Town Hall in 1893-9 for its successor Finsbury Council.

1874-8: Clerkenwell Road built.

1884-5: The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes critical of "landlordism and vestry management alike the Commissions report paved the way for change to the advent of the LCC (1889) and the "Housing of the Working Classes" Act (1890) and abolition of the Vestries (1900) which led to the joining of St. Luke's and Clerkenwell into Finsbury, The Finsbury Council did not manage to build housing itself until 1920s.

1887: Post Office chose Middlesex House of Correction site at Mount Pleasant for its new London sorting office, perfectly placed between the City and northern railway termini. It became the district's biggest employer.

1887-92: Rosebery Avenue built. Cowcross Street & Turnmill Street notorious for bear-baiting, cock-fighting, drinking, gambling and prostitution.

1923-4: Farringdon Station rebuilding at 14-16 Farringdon Lane led to rediscovery of ancient Clerk's Well.

RELIGIOUS ORDERS & OTHER INSTITUTES:

1655: **Quaker** Meeting in Peel Court Meeting House (Baptist); **Baptist** Meeting House (1669) in Glasshouse Yard; Spa Fields Chapel (1780s) - Countess Huntingdon connexion); Claremont Chapel (**Congregational**); Spencer Place Chapel (**Baptist**); Chadwell Street Chapel (**Calvinistic** Methodist) - the **free thinking Christians**; St. Johns Square (revival 1720s - Unitarian; Woodbridge Chapel - **Calvinist**); Northampton Tabernacle in Amwell Street - Countess of Huntingdon;

Pentonville Chapel - established church 1787-8, later St. James's Pentonville. St Mark's, Myddelton Square 1825-7 + St. Phillips, Granville Square 1831-2 were government subsidized. Holy Redeemer

1887-95 boldest in architecture ad ritual among Clerkenwells High Church foundations.

1858: British Horological Institute founded, based in Northampton Square.

1894-98: Northampton Gardens given to public in wake of investigations of Royal Commission on the Housing of Working Classes (Captain Thompson) Metropolitan Public Gardens Association designed by the associations' landscape gardener. Northampton Institute, St. John Street, now City University taught metal-working trades and technical training which was needed by watchmakers locally.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

1861: 129,000 residents - to 1901 x 101,000; 1939 x 55,000, yet a year earlier total number of employed in productive industry in borough was 66,556, more than 20,000 over the next most industrialized London borough made up by commuters still working but no longer living in the borough due to schemes to encourage them to the outskirts of London. (*Personal observation: the publisher seems to ignore that this was beginning of WWII when many families were evacuated or left London for safety reasons, the 'new towns' actually were not built until after the war which led to decentralization*).

1904: Breakdown of workers: metals 3204; paper & printing 10,015; food, drink and tobacco 6021; clothing 3979. Only in clothing did women outnumber men 6-1. In 1934 over four fifths of London's shops specializing in plating were in Clerkenwell, small units employing between 10-15 persons.

1945: The people and fabric of Clerkenwell were reduced to their lowest point. In 1951 Finsbury's population plunged to 35,343, war damage everywhere but now LCC had 'planning powers' and their brief was to reduce 'industrial congestion'.

1947: Finsbury still had the highest of its land devoted to industry of any London borough, 106 out of its 587 acres in total (18%), the LCC wanted to reduce this to 26 acres in 1951.

Finsbury Council filled the gap by building housing as part of the 'welfare state' era for the rest of its existence until 1965. Once amalgamated with Islington Borough Council the northern two thirds of the borough (Angel northwards) got the lions share of attention.

Booths Distillery, Britton Street/Turnmill, redevelopped in 1971 & 1977, one of the areas largest and oldest industrial concentrations (1770s). Because of war damage a large new plant was built on its northern site facing Clerkenwell Road. It's southern sector was broken in 3 parts facing Turnmill Street for offices, still rare in Clerkenwell in 1970s. Relaxed planning laws lead to new office buildings for Yorke Rosenberg Mandell (YRM) previously on City's western edge. Other architect/design firms followed (into old buildings rather than new). In 1979 Alan Baxter moved to 14-16 Cowcross Street. By 1988 architects Campbell Zogolovitch Wilkinson Gough took over warehouse in Bowling Green Lane when Thatcher changed 'planning use classes' followed by a flood of designers using all available properties south of Angel, culminating in 2003 when giant Building Design Partnership moved into Brewhouse Yard. It is claimed that there are more design firms in Clerkenwell than anywhere else in Europe, now including design, advertising, and other media-dependent trades close to printing, a continuing trend of previous workshop, engraving and printing traditions.

1970: Clerkenwell Green Associated founded to protect local skills against demolitions, leading to the 1974 regeneration of the Clerkenwell Workshops.

1987: 500 young people were Craft workers.

1993: A survey identified 165 craft enterprises in the central area, ²/₃rds sole traders + 98 jewellers, silversmiths including engraving and electroplating. By 2002-4 the fringe movement took over the last cold-stores and metal dealers shut down and conversions were to offices, apartments, student hostels and hotels-catering for 25-40

year olds. This was partly due to LBI bringing in 'mixed uses' planning for every site.

Other historical publications:

- a) Pink's "History of Clerkenwell" 1965 + 1880 (2nd edition)
... "the largest Victorian local history of any district of London"
- b) Pre-modern industrial history is Chris Elmers, a leading scholar on Clerkenwell (npublished).
- c) Arnold Bennett's "Riceyman Steps"
- d) Peter Ackroyd's "Clerkenwell Tales"