

Bermondsey Street Back Stories

Number 19: Long Lane

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A view of Long Lane

Long Lane, long in length and in history

Long Lane is one of the oldest thoroughfares in Southwark. It was the link between the Priory of St Saviour (Bermondsey Abbey) which stood on today's Bermondsey Square and the church of St George the Martyr on Borough High Street. Its origins stretch even further back. There have been finds of ditches and pottery from the Roman period along its way. Already by the 1430s, it was known as Long Lane and partly built up. The formerly open land was being developed into tanning yards.

A mix of elegance and humiliation

Although this was an important route over the centuries, it was not always attractive! In the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a 'ducking stool' for public display and humiliation of recalcitrant citizens – frequently women. It was the site of the parish 'cage' and stocks for miscreants in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century an offensive slaughterhouse occupied a site next to a bakery. By the early 20th century, it was a street of poor, mostly overcrowded houses and the noxious leather industry. Yet it was also graced by some elegant 18th century homes.



Numbers 146-148 Long Lane (I) and the original fire surround and mantelpiece

Numbers 146-8 Long Lane

This surviving pair of Grade II listed semi-detached houses of 1732 faced the artisan tanyards on the northern side of Long Lane. The original interior of one of the houses is embellished with a fire surround and mantelpiece showing scenes and carving which proudly celebrated its owner's business - the leather trade.



Modern use for an early 18th century home

Number 89 Long Lane

Although much altered, this is the last that remains of a row of eight houses built in the early 18th century.



Railing made of WW2 stretchers

WW2 stretcher railings

Evidence of more recent history can still be seen in the stretcher railings between the gardens and roadside on social housing estates. The stretchers were used in wartime by the Civil Defence. A simple but ingenious design ensured that they could be carried by bearers or set on the ground. After the conflict when many became surplus to requirements, they were used to replace the original railings that had been requisitioned to support the war effort. There are some in Long Lane near Staple Street.



The impressive entrance to the previous Hepburn & Gale building and an old advertisement

Barrow Hepburn & Gale

A map of 1799 shows a site on Long Lane called Mr Hepburn's tanyard. Nearby is a robust Victorian building of the 1870s with elaborate brickwork and cast iron pilasters. Above the entrance door is a reminder of one of the largest and most successful of Bermondsey's many leather businesses. Founded by John Hepburn in 1760, the firm established three tanneries on land beside Long Lane. Hepburn and Gale were one of the largest of Bermondsey's many leather processing firms. By the 1920s, three firms, Samuel Barrow of the Grange Tannery, Hepburn and Gale of Long Lane and the Royal Oak Tannery of Royal Oak Yard on Bermondsey Street, had amalgamated to form Barrow, Hepburn & Gale.

The firm had a tradition of manufacturing high quality leather goods. The most traditional of these were the famous red despatch boxes used by the government and royal household and the Maundy Money purses distributed by the Queen each year. The tannery and factory were heavily bombed in WW2.



External and internal views of the building that was the Hand and Marigold pub

The Marigold

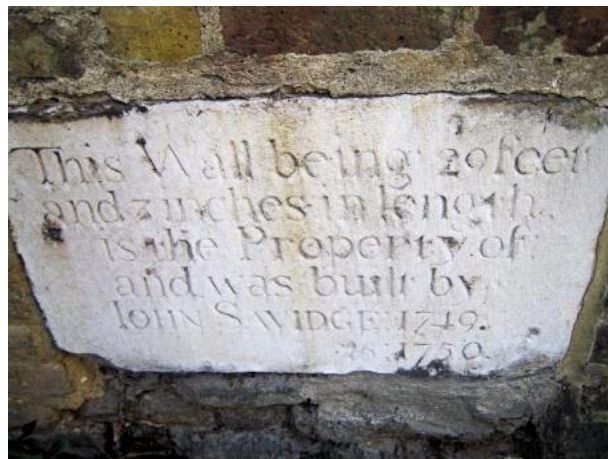
Formerly the Hand and Marigold, this historic public house was on the corner of Bermondsey Street and Cluny Place just south of Long Lane. Described as 'a liquor shop and public house with stabling', records date it from at least 1793. The current building, much altered over the years and now under conversion, has a colourful and decorative tiled façade.



Simon the Tanner pub, Long Lane

Simon the Tanner

Dating from the early 19th century, the earlier name for this public house refers to the biblical story of Simon the Tanner of Joppa. A tanner is a worker in the leather trade – but it was also the popular name for an old sixpence (6d). During his pioneering investigation of the lives of working and street people journalist Henry Mayhew visited Bermondsey in 1851. He met up with a tanner who had ‘taken the pledge’ to give up drink. He told him *‘I used to say when I walked past ‘Simon the Tanner’- Simon, you’ll get no more tanners out of me...but I found I couldn’t work without a reasonable allowance of beer, so I gave up teetotalling’*. In 2013, after a period of closure, Simon the Tanner re-opened. The freehold of the Grade II listed building was bought by the United St Saviour’s Charity which supports local people and provides sheltered housing in Southwark.



The granite marker recording the Quaker burial ground and the carved boundary wall marker

Long Lane Burial Ground 1697-1855

At the eastern end of Long Lane is a children’s playground and garden. This is the site of a Quaker Burial Ground, purchased in 1697 for £120. In contrast to the medieval and Tudor grandeur of Bermondsey Abbey and House which had stood close by, the meetings of Dissenter groups were housed in modest chapels, halls and sometimes private rooms. The Quakers or Society of Friends was a Protestant non-conformist movement formed in

England by George Fox in the 1650s. The nickname 'Quakers' was originally derogatory but became acceptable by the Friends themselves. They were known for their pacifism, plain speaking and early opposition to slavery. Over the course of time, coffins from other disused Friends' burial grounds were re-interred there.

Remnants of a Quaker Meeting House are believed to remain near the surviving entrance gates on Long Lane. Several gravestones, mostly illegible stand around the remaining walls. The perimeter wall of 1697 with some later rebuilding is evidence of its original use. A stone tablet commemorating its ownership by John Savidge 1749-50 is still visible. A granite slab records the purchase of the ground by the Society of Friends with a date of 1697 and the date of its closure by Bermondsey Borough Council in 1855.



Wild's Rents, then and now

Wild's Rents

This was one of the first recorded streets in the area. It appears on maps in the early 18th century but was sometimes also marked as Miles Rents. Its origins are unclear, but it probably refers to a landlord or freeholder named Wild. *Rents* was a term used to describe properties which had been subdivided and rented out to poorer people. Sadly they often became slums with sometimes two families living in one room.

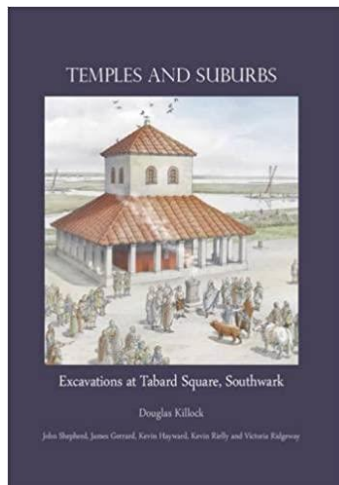


19th century Crosby Row (l) the Whitesmiths Arms before conversion and the modern Baden Place

Crosby Row

Just off Long Lane to the north is Crosby Row. It is named after Brass Crosby who also has a dedicated obelisk located in St George's Circus. Crosby came from his birthplace in Stockton to practise as a lawyer in London. In 1770 he became Lord Mayor and is remembered for championing the freedom of the press. His radical actions led to the publication of parliamentary debate, later in the form of Hansard. The houses at Numbers 25-27 were built between 1770 and 1780. At the northern end of the street was a chapel and Meeting House

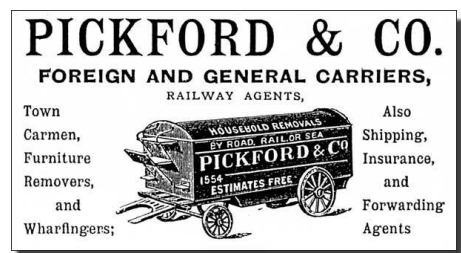
erected in 1764 for John Wesley, the celebrated Methodist preacher. In 1809 the chapel moved to a site in Long Lane until it was closed. More recently, well-designed new developments have joined the mix, including Baden Place, a mix of commercial and residential space.



A report on the archaeological excavations and a view of the recent development

Tabard Square (Empire Square) 34-70 Long Lane

Remarkable discoveries were made at Tabard Square (now known as Empire Square). An archaeological investigation revealed the site. It was in a strategic location close to the main route to the crossing point to the main Roman settlement on the north bank of the Thames. It was of major significance and included the remains of two Romano-Celtic temples, bases of plinths, altars and columns in a precinct of the 2nd century. There was further building and modification in the 4th century.



2000 year old ointment, early 19th century clay pipes and an old Pickford's advertisement

Among the many exciting finds were a stone tablet with the earliest known reference to Londoners and a pot of ointment, probably a cosmetic still bearing finger marks from its last user 2000 years ago. The site was later taken up with industrial and craft activity, tanning, clay tobacco pipe manufacture and more recently Pickford's Goods Yard.