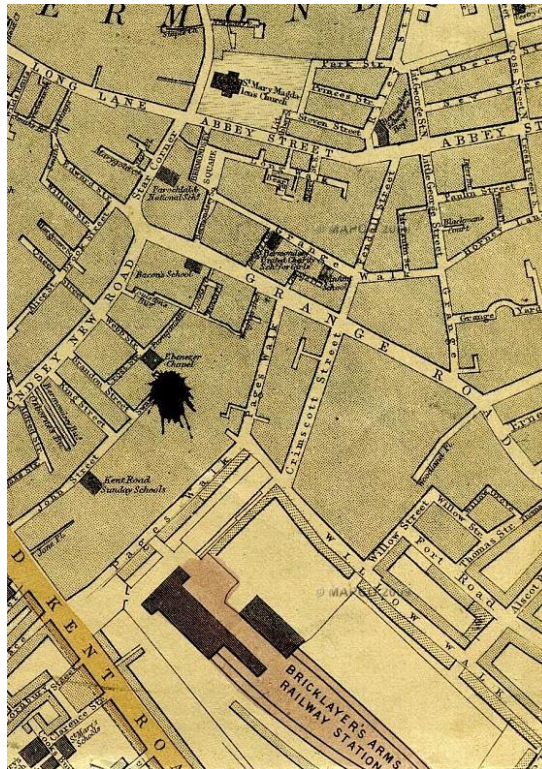


Bermondsey Street Back Stories

Number 18: The Grange – south east of Bermondsey Street

By Jennie Howells
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An 1868 map of the Grange area

The Grange

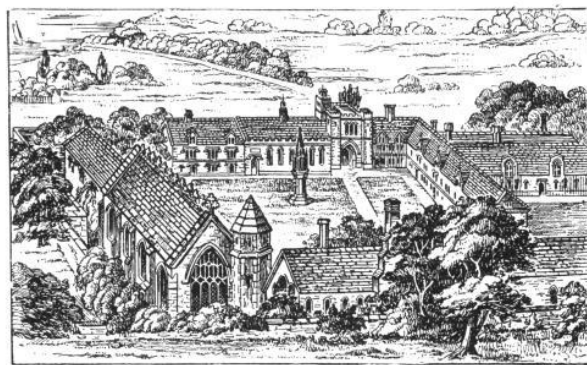
To the south and east of Bermondsey Street lies an area known as The Grange. It takes its name from the grange (farm) of Bermondsey Abbey which dominated the area for 500 years from the 11th to the 16th centuries.

Site of Bermondsey Abbey

The abbey and earlier priory were located at what is now the junction of Tower Bridge Road and Abbey Street. In its prime, the abbey was as big as Westminster Abbey. It was positioned within a walled precinct, with a gatehouse on Bermondsey Street and dormitories, kitchens, workshops, cloisters and other offices.

After the Normans took over in England in 1066, the French Cluniac monastic order was keen to establish itself in England. The Cluniac religious order was founded in Cluny in the 10th century as a reformed version of the Benedictine Order. The four Cluniac monks who arrived in Bermondsey c1089 to found the church and priory of the Holy Saviour were from the Cluniac House at La Charite-sur-Loire in Burgundy. This was a dependency of Cluny responsible for the foundation and so its mother house.

The new Priory owed allegiance to the Abbot of Cluny. Priors were expected to go to the mother house every two years and inspections were held from time to time. This changed in 1381 when Robert Downton, the first Englishman to hold the office of Prior at Bermondsey, achieved independence and raised Bermondsey's status from Priory to Abbey. The first Abbot of Bermondsey in 1399 was John Attilbrugh.



An illustration of Bermondsey Abbey looking east

Bermondsey Abbey suffered flooding and devastation but also greeted royalty, aristocracy and hosted great councils of state. It provided refuge and hospitality and attracted the devotion of pilgrims. The end came in 1538 when under Henry VIII the Abbey was dissolved, the monastic buildings abandoned, the cloisters and living quarters left deserted.

Site of Bermondsey House 1540 – 1820

The monastery and land were acquired by Sir Thomas Pope, the court official responsible for the proceeds of dissolved monasteries (and later, the founder of Trinity College, Oxford). He demolished some of the monastic buildings and incorporated others into an impressive 100-room mansion known as Bermondsey House. The south wall of the Abbey supported the north wall of the house and a garden was laid out in what had been the nave of the abbey.



Sir Thomas Pope and his mansion in Bermondsey

Sir Thomas Pope sold the house on and it was owned by the Radcliffe family, Earls of Sussex, until about 1610. The northern gatehouse of the Abbey was still standing in 1805. The remaining monastic buildings and Bermondsey House fell into disrepair and were finally demolished in the 1820s.

There have been several archaeological investigations of the Abbey site since early finds were reported in 1902. The most recent were by Museum of London Archaeology in the 1980s and 1990s and Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. from 1998-2008. At the request of local people, remains of the south tower of the Abbey are visible under glass in a restaurant on Bermondsey Square. The remains include the beginning of a spiral staircase.



Bermondsey Abbey archaeological dig 2000 looking west from Tower Bridge Road

Grange Walk

Grange Walk led from a gate at the south east corner of the Abbey precinct to the Abbey's farm. The gate partly remains in the colourful old gabled houses Numbers 5,6 & 7 Grange Walk. Two iron gate hooks and a sign 'The Gatehouse' can be seen on Number 7.



Number 7 Grange Walk

The area to the south and east of the abbey was all open farmland. An illustration of 1812 shows a large farmhouse owned in the late 18th century by the Rolls family of Rolls-Royce fame. Rents and tithes paid to the Abbey in grain were stored in a barn here and the Abbey also owned corn mills for grinding grain into flour. Many buildings partially survived.



A fete at Bermondsey c1570 by Joris Hoefnagel

Number 67 Grange Walk

This is an early 18th century house with a panelled door, overlight and re-used medieval beams and stonework. It was extended to the rear in 1840 and has a 'ghost sign' on the side referring to the firm of E Spaul, wholesale glass, earthenware and sundriesmen. It is now residential.



Number 67 Grange Walk

Bacon's School – Grange Road

In 1703 Josiah Bacon, a wealthy local leather merchant left a bequest, together with an annuity of £150 for the establishment of a Free School for around 50 boys to learn writing and arithmetic. The school on Grange Road opened in 1718.



Bacon's School building in the 18th century (left) and its 19th century replacement (right)

It was moved to temporary accommodation in 1880 during rebuilding. The foundation stone for the current building by local architect Joseph Gale was laid in 1890 by Col. Samuel Bevington. It is now used for professional education. In the 1950s a young lad called Tommy Hicks overcame childhood illness to gain a place. He wrote a school play and attempted a novel – but went on to succeed in show business as Tommy Steele. The school is now an Academy and occupies a new building in Rotherhithe.

Bermondsey United Charity School for Girls.

In the same tradition, The Bermondsey United Charity School for Girls was at 15 Grange Walk. The Grade II listed building from 1830 became a youth centre and is now residential.

Curtis Street - *Rus in Urbe*

Curtis Street is named after one of London's first botanic gardens. It was created in 1770 by pioneering apothecary and entomologist, William Curtis. His office was in Gracechurch Street within walking distance of his small plot in Bermondsey. Curtis was interested in indigenous plants and their medicinal properties. He set up a 'teaching garden' with plants labelled and classified using the now standard Linnaeus system. Curtis established other botanic gardens in Lambeth and Brompton and published a major work, the six-volume *Flora Londinensis* which was devoted to urban nature. In 1787, he founded the exquisitely illustrated *Botanical Magazine* which survives today under the title *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*.



William Curtis and his Botanical Magazine

Alaska Building - Grange Road (was C W Martin & Sons Ltd)

In front of the striking Art Deco building at 61 Grange Road is an original stone archway with a carving of a seal. This was the entry to the factory owned by C W Martin & Sons Ltd. for nearly 100 years. Employing many workers in fur, it dealt principally in sealskins from Antarctica, Alaska and Canada. In the Victorian era, sealskin products were fashionable and much in demand.



The original factory entrance

The original 1869 Alaska factory was taken over by Charles Martin and Emil Teichmann in 1873. By 1880 it was Martin's alone and after his death in 1889 family members continued as directors with incorporation in 1911. The seal trade declined and Martin's diversified into furs, fur cleaning and re-conditioning. They dyed bearskins for the Brigade of Guards and cleaned Queen Mary's coronation robe in 1937. A second factory was opened in nearby Page's Walk in 1927.



The 1932 factory building now sporting its residential name, Alaska

The main factory was rebuilt in 1932 to the design of Wallis, Gilbert & Partners creators of the iconic Firestone and Hoover factories. There was post-WW2 restoration after a serious fire and bomb damage. Martin's factory workers made a significant contribution to the war effort in WW2. 450,000 sheepskins were prepared for flying suits and coats for the R.A.F. and Winston Churchill was photographed wearing a Martin's sealskin hat.

Martin's amalgamated with George Rice Ltd. and became Martin Rice Ltd. When the firm left Bermondsey, the elegant building was converted into flats. The sign is ALASKA instead of MARTIN'S, but the site remains a significant part of the area's industrial history, with the rather sad seal to record its former purpose.

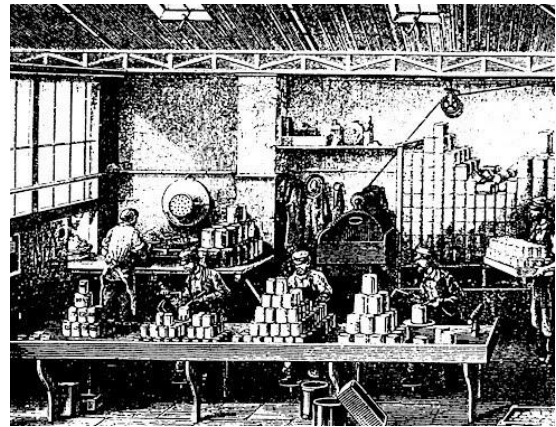


Crosse & Blackwell Label

Crosse & Blackwell – Crimscott Street

West & Wyatt, a provisions business, was established in 18th century Soho. In 1830, it was bought by two enterprising apprentices, Edmund Crosse and Thomas Blackwell. As Crosse & Blackwell, the firm flourished and bought up tin manufacturer Donkin, Hall & Gamble. Tinning was a process developed by Bermondsey man, Bryan Donkin at his Fort Road works.

He was an engineer and innovator and without him we might not have had tins of baked beans. Early tins were large and opened with a hammer and chisel – it was not until years later that the tin opener arrived!



Bryan Donkin, an early tin and an illustration of a canning factory

By 1871, the sons of the founders were running Crosse & Blackwell with factories in London and Ireland. In 1920 the business combined with the sauce and pickle firm of Elizabeth Lazenby based in Grange Road and Crimscott Street. Many well-known foodstuffs were produced – but Branston pickle was a favourite. Production began in Branston, Burton-on-Trent in 1922 but was soon moved to Crimscott Street.



Publicity for a Lazenby sauce (left) and 1950s Branston Pickle (right)

In WW2, the Bermondsey works manufactured huge quantities of products for service and civilian consumption. Staple items were sent to the Forces and millions of water sterilisation tablets were supplied. The factory survived six direct hits from bombs and still gave shelter to the general public. Despite reductions in staff, production rose by 20%.

The firm was a pioneer in scientific food processing and its analytic laboratories and quality control department were based in Bermondsey. The Crosse & Blackwell company and brand were bought by international companies and the Crimscott Street factory closed in 1969.

Site of Bricklayers Arms station - Pages Walk

Bricklayers Arms station was opened in 1844 as an alternative to the London & Greenwich Railway station at London Bridge. It closed to passengers in 1852 and became mainly a goods terminus until 1981. One of the few remaining original railway buildings with its row of arches is on the corner of Pages Walk and Willow Walk.



The 19th century station building (left) and the old stable buildings as they are today

Bermondsey Square Antiques Market

The lively Friday morning market in Bermondsey Square has its origins in the Metropolitan Cattle Market at Smithfield. This moved to Islington in the 1850s and became the Caledonian Market. On non-market days, empty cattle pens were used to sell bric-a-brac and second hand items.



Three Caledonian markets, original at King's Cross, 1950s new at Bermondsey Square, and now

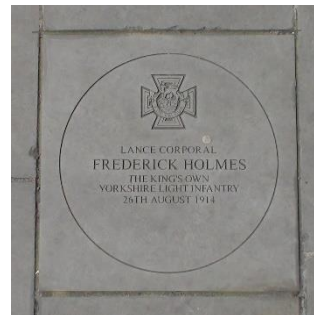
The market closed during WW2 and post-war, the site was wanted for social housing, so the market moved to Bermondsey Square. The New Caledonian Market was re-established there and included the previous markets on Bermondsey Street and Tower Bridge Road. It was opened on Bermondsey Square by popular film star, Valerie Hobson in 1950. In the 1960s the market began to specialise in antiques and collectables. It operated on Friday mornings and was busy with locals, dealers and tourists. For many years, it was a 'marché ouvert' (open market). This legal term allowed for goods to be sold between the hours of sunset and sunrise 'no questions asked'.

After a notorious theft of paintings, an Act of Parliament of 1994 put an end to this practice - although the legend lingered on. Trade declined until the site was marked for re-development. Faithful stallholders, determined to keep the market going, formed the Bermondsey Antiques Traders Association and maintained business through all the archaeological investigations and construction work. The market is open on Fridays 6am-2pm and has an additional covered area and food stalls.

Two WW1 Heroes

Frederick William Holmes

Opposite the churchyard on Abbey Street, a pavement plaque commemorates Lance Corporal Frederick Holmes. He was born at Number 23 in 1889, and was one of the first recipients of the Victoria Cross in 1914. Under heavy fire, he had carried a badly wounded man on his back for two miles to safety. He then returned to his battalion to assist another wounded comrade. He also fought in WW2 and died at the age of 80 in 1969, in Australia.



Frederick Holmes in uniform and his pavement plaque

Albert Mackenzie

Able Seaman Albert MacKenzie received his Victoria Cross on St George's Day in 1918. He had volunteered for a very risky naval operation and fought gallantly against enemy troops in the harbour at Zeebrugge despite sustaining severe injuries himself. Although he survived the hostilities he succumbed to influenza 6 months after receiving the award. Dedicated in 2015, the memorial at Tower Bridge Road was designed and cast locally at Surrey Docks Farm by artist and blacksmith Kevin Boys.



Albert Mackenzie and his memorial sculpture