

Bermondsey Street Back Stories

Number 16: Newcomen Street – Short street, Long history

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January 2021



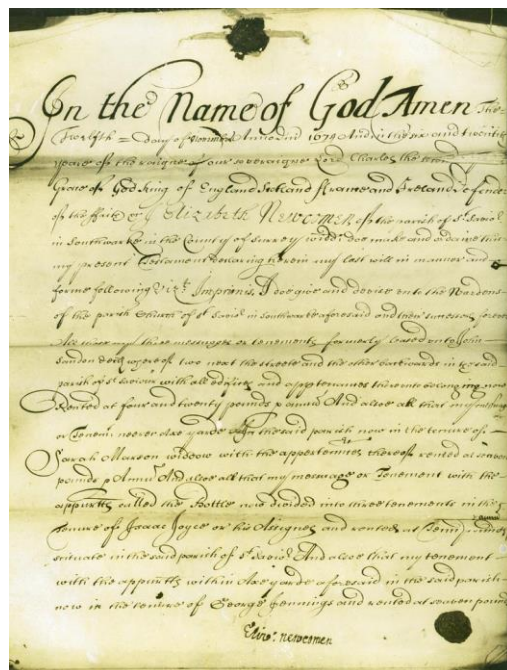
Axe and Bottle Court Sign

It all began in the yard of The Axe Inn

Newcomen Street runs about 250 yards in length from Borough High Street in the west to the junction of Crosby Row in the east and is little wider than it was in the 18th century. Known as King Street from 1774, it was the southern boundary of St Saviour's parish. Its beginnings were as part of the yard of the 16th century Axe Inn, later the Axe & Bottle. The Emerson family had property in Axe Yard. One of its members, William who died in 1575 has a memorial in Southwark Cathedral, with the admirable testimonial '*he lived and died an honest man*'.

New Name in 1879 – Newcomen Street

In 1879, the street was renamed in homage to a charitable 17th century resident, Mrs Elizabeth Newcomen. At her death in 1674, she owned property in Borough High Street, a house and tenement near Axe Yard and a lodging house called the 'Bottle'. In her will, Mrs Newcomen left her property in trust for *'the clothing of poor boys and girls with a suit of linen and woollen once a year...and for teaching them to read and write and cast accounts'*. The boys were to be put into apprenticeship at the age of 14 years. The beneficiary of the trust was her godson, Thomas Lant but when it reverted to the parish, the money was used to establish charity schools for poor boys and girls. For many years, Mrs Newcomen's Day was a recognised annual celebration for the schoolchildren.



Memorial to Mrs Newcomen, in Southwark Cathedral, and her will

Girls' School, training centre

From 1887, the school was for girls and was administered by the Newcomen Foundation, eventually becoming the voluntary-aided Elizabeth Newcomen Secondary Technical School which stood on the corner of Crosby Row. It provided training for careers in catering and nursery nursing until its closure in 1970. It then housed the Newcomen Centre until this was demolished and replaced with a building providing accommodation for Guy's Hospital staff.



corner of Crosby Row

The Newcomen Foundation was amalgamated with another charitable initiative by local resident, John Collett who in 1711 left rents from property in Borough High Street to be

devoted to educational philanthropy. The foundation is now known as the Newcomen Collett Foundation. It continues its work supporting schools and young people.

John Marshall

Another local philanthropist, John Marshall lived in Axe Yard until 1631. He died without an heir and after provision for family and friends, much of his property passed into the hands of trustees of various charities. Thirteen trustees were charged with establishing a new church and churchyard in Southwark. It was to be called Christchurch and it was built in 1671 on land near today's Blackfriars Road. The church was rebuilt in the 18th century and again in 1959 after incendiary damage in WW2.

The Marshall charity currently provides grants for repairs and stipends to some 200 parishes. Its offices are now housed in a modern building but until 1967 they were in the intriguing building, close to the site of Marshall's home, on the northern side of Newcomen Street. Erected in 1853, it is notable for the decorative carved heads which enhance the frontage.



Decorative heads on the north side of the street

New Houses and Axe & Bottle Court

The *Axe & Bottle* and associated land became the subject of speculative redevelopment based on the sale of a variety of leases in the 18th century. New houses were constructed and Axe & Bottle yard adjoined King Street. Look for property marks for Mrs N, and JM which can be seen on the more recent buildings. Not so easy to spot are the two remaining marks at pavement level.



Axe & Bottle Court, Mrs N building mark and pavement marks

Kings Arms pub

A distinctive feature of Newcomen Street is the Kings Arms public house, built in 1890. It proudly displays a large and colourful coat of arms executed in stone and dating from the 18th century. Refixed from an earlier public house of the same name, it was rescued from the arch of the Stonegate at the southern end of the old London Bridge. When put up the original inscription of George II, which was added when the gate was rebuilt in 1728 was altered to George III, with the date of 1760. A panel displays *King Street* and another has the addition '*Kings Arms 1890*'.



The Kings Arms pub and George III coat of arms

Hunt's House

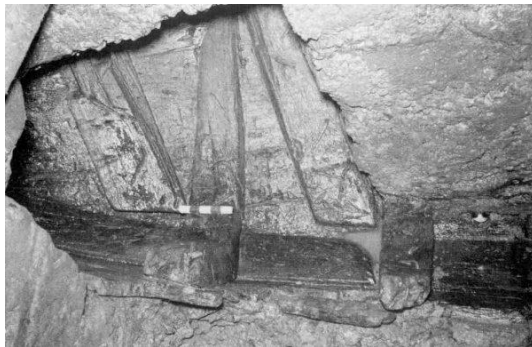
In 1829, William Hunt, a governor of the hospital bequeathed £180,000 for additional accommodation for patients of at least 100 beds. Designed by Rohde Hawkins, construction began in 1852 but it was not until 1871, after clearance of properties in Maze Pond and Newcomen Street, that Hunt's House was completed. In 2000 it was demolished and archaeological investigation showed that the site had been used for cultivation in prehistoric times. Finds from the Roman period of pottery, glass, a jetty and evidence of a nearby shrine show that it remained in use until submerged by flooding before reclamation in later centuries. Hidden in a small green space at the entrance to Guy's Hospital is an architectural remnant inscribed with the Guy's motto *Dare Quam Accipere* which can be translated as *To give rather than to receive*. It is thought to have been retained from the first Hunt's House.



Architectural Remnant

Roman boat and modern sculpture

Beneath the Guys Hospital Cancer Centre at the entrance to Great Maze Pond, lie the carefully protected remains of a Roman sailing barge. The area was one of channels and small islands and the boat may have been abandoned in a backwater in around AD200. Granted scheduled ancient monument status, it is a rare survival in a remarkable state of preservation with iron nails securing oak timbers and frame. Although the boat is hidden from view, almost 5m below ground, a bronze sculpture (2016) by Daniel Silver in front of the Centre pays tribute to its presence. Its theme is that of the journeys made by people both in the present and long ago.



The excavated Roman boat in situ and Daniel Silver's sculpture

Newcomen Street is not just a walk through to Borough High Street. Stop along the way and remember former residents and the charities which thanks to good stewardship continue to support us today.