

A True history of Crouch End  
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# A True History of Crouch End



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by  
Roger Hayman & Brian Price



# CHAPTER ONE



**M**any years ago, the Crouch was a wide sleepy river winding gently through wooded hills and peaceful valleys on its long journey south from the Watford gap to the Thames. On its way, it passed through a quiet vale bounded by meadows, where a small community of shepherds and farmers tended the land and their flocks, occasionally, but unsuccessfully, fishing in the river or hunting for deer or bear in the hills. Evidence of this pastoral existence comes from archeological evidence found at a recent excavation carried out at a site at the bottom of what is now known as Shepherds Hill. Among the many finds between the foundations of rude mud huts were remains of



An old woodcut showing Peasants fishing from the Banks of the River Crouch.

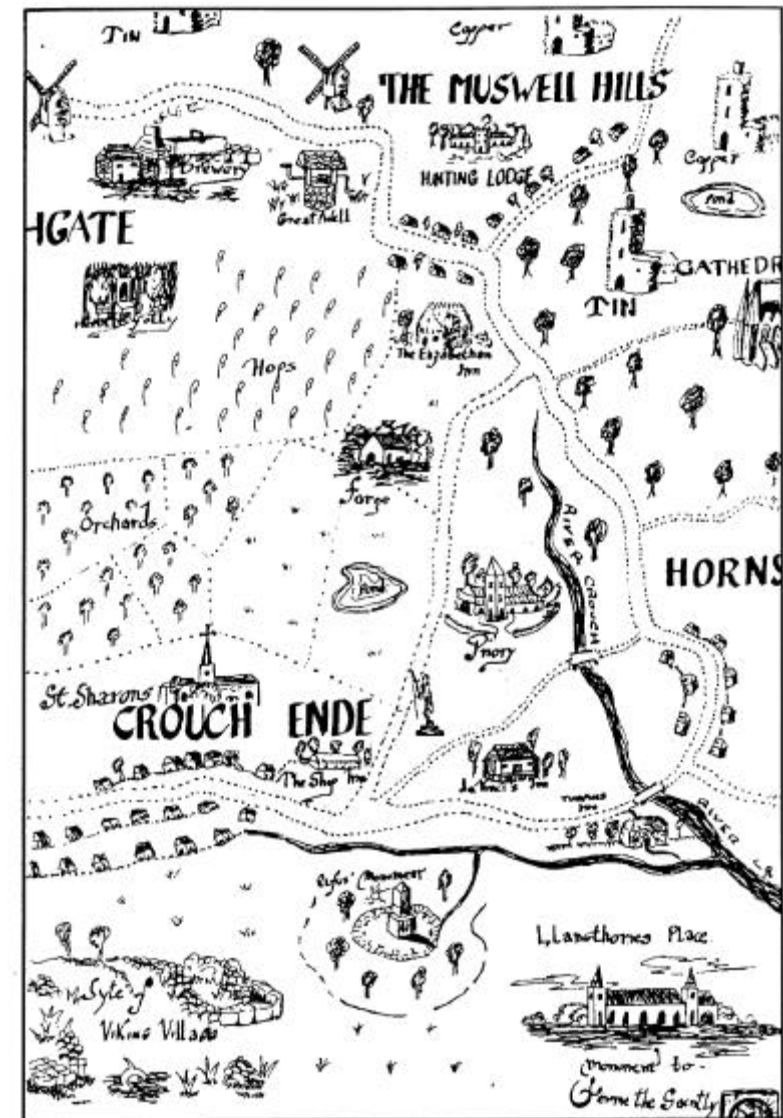
goat, rabbit and longhorn sheep. Although many primitive fish hooks and arrowheads have been found, surprisingly no trace of fish or game has been revealed. This has led to speculation that the river was named after the many fishermen crouched along its banks not catching fish.

Many centuries later, the area became famous - or infamous - as the location of the first recorded gold rush in Britain. A grizzled peasant called Cedric was looking for a stray ram in the Muswell Hills when he discovered several small nuggets of gold in the gravel on the bank of the Crouch. Word of the discovery quickly spread throughout the land, and the vale was suddenly filled with hundreds of prospectors, thieves, pedlars, and vagabonds, lured by the prospect of easy fortune but, alas, to no avail. The gold found by Cedric was revealed to be fillings from the teeth of an ancient monk, slaughtered by one of the many bands of marauding Vikings who frequently raped and pillaged the area in the middle ages. One of the vagrants, called Herold, fell in love with gentle countryside stayed after the rest had departed, and one of his descendants became Lord of the manor, and the first Baron Middlelane. Today his name is still remembered as one of our local streets.

Although the gold rush was quickly relegated to

the realm of folk lore, one discovery, made by an old miner who had travelled many miles from the northern dales, was to have a lasting effect. While prospecting in a dry well, he recognized the tell-tale signs of tin and copper ore and although his story was treated with derision in the local inn, it was remembered by Herold, and was to prove to be of enormous significance in future years. The descendants of Herold guarded the secret jealously at first, smelting just enough ore to make small numbers of tin whistles and other instruments which they sold to passing musicians and tinkers. As the popularity of foxhunting grew in the south, the families hunting horns, made from Muswell copper, became regarded as the best of their kind, and as their fame grew so did the fortunes of the family until they owned not only the Muswell Hills, but the whole of the valley that lay beneath it, and in recognition of the origin of their wealth, adopted the family name of Horne.

The Horne family became famous for the many charitable and magnanimous uses to which it endowed its wealth, none more so than the building of a great cathedral in 1507, an act of such munificence that the king ennobled the family, Sir Josiah Horne becoming the first Baron Middlelane. The first Bishop, Ferme the Saintly, in recognition



A Fragment of an ancient map of the area, discovered in excavations at the bottom of Shepherds Hill in 1993.

of the great gift of the Baron named his Diocese after the old family name and he became known as the Bishop of the See of Horne, latterly corrupted to Hornsey. The Middelane dynasty prospered for many years, until it aligned itself with the wrong side in the civil war, losing not only many of its young men but also all of its titles and much of its land. However, due to the clever subterfuge of hiding large numbers of gold bars in the old mine shafts they retained most of their wealth, and after the Reformation they resumed as Squires of the Manor, building a great house at the southernmost edge of their domain, next to an ancient park. They also built a magnificent hunting lodge at the top of the Muswell Hills, inviting gentry from near and far to hunt deer and peasants in the woods, followed by gargantuan feasts and banquets.

In 1560 a great tragedy befell the family. Sir Archimedes Llangthorn and his eldest son Rufus were fishing in the Muswell Hills when Rufus caught a fish. His father was so surprised at this strange occurrence that he called out that it was the work of the Devil, and dropped dead on the spot. Rufus, deciding that these were bad omens, ran to the hunting lodge where he cast a flaming brand into the foundations, and as the great lodge burnt to the ground, cast himself into the flames

and perished.

His younger brother Thadeus Llangthorne was informed of his inheritance while travelling in Europe, and he returned to the family home in great sadness. Thadeus had travelled widely in Saxony, where he had seen the start of an industrial revolution based on the iron and coal mines, and had spent much time in The Hague consorting with the great Dutch merchants and sea captains. He returned to Hornsey with a great vision - he would re-open the old tin and copper mines, and in order to open a gateway to the sea, he would divert the waters of the Crouch into a vast canal. When this was done, the sleepy hamlet where the River Crouch ended, soon to become a teeming shipping and industrial conurbation and the smuggling capital of the south, became known throughout the world as Crouch End.





# CHAPTER TWO



The industrial revolution came to Crouch End around 1600, when the first great furnaces were built to smelt the ore extracted from the immense web of tunnels and chambers under the Muswell Hills. The resulting ingots were of such high quality and purity that tinsmiths and copper-beaters from all parts of the world set up their factories and workshops on the banks of the Crouch. Many of the family businesses who had their humble beginnings in the valley at this time became giant industrial conglomerates and household names to this day, such as the Ici family from Italy and Barney O'Coulihan from Ireland -better known by the mark he inscribed on all his goods - BOC.

One fly in the ointment of affluence and

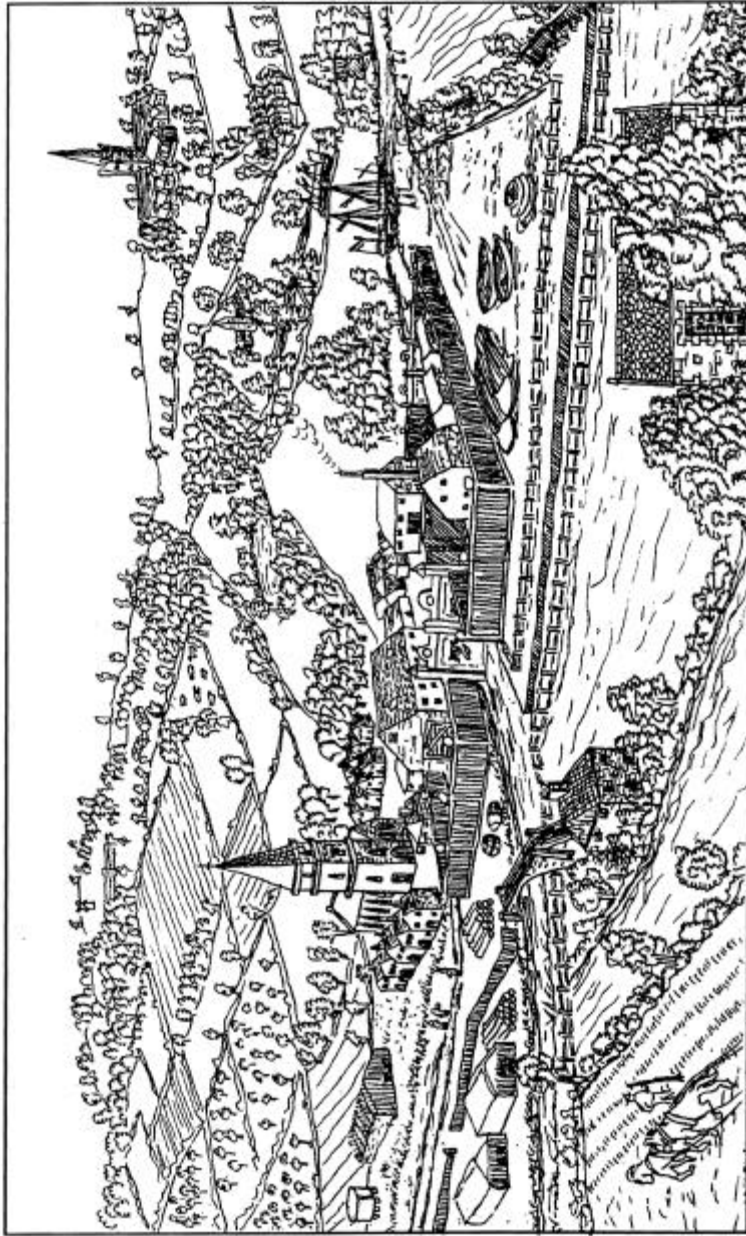
prosperity quickly became apparent - the difficulty in transporting the finished products to the markets of the World, markets who craved with ever increasing intensity for the finely engraved artifacts and patent chamber pots wrought by the master smiths of Crouch End. The road to the North was both difficult and dangerous, with frequent landslips and avalanches, and merchants were frequently beset by evil tribes of robbers and brigands, such as the deadly Mad Marauders of Milton Keynes, while to the South the travellers encountered many toll-gates exacting exorbitant tariffs, and highwaymen always ready to relieve them of their goods and chattels. It is said that the greatest highwayman of them all, Dick Turpin, found the road so profitable that he took up lodgings in a local inn, and the hostelry that occupies the site today still bears his name.

It was in the light of these seemingly insurmountable obstacles to the establishment of Crouch End as the industrial heart of Southern England that Thadeus Llangthorn conceived the great plan that was to become his life's work, the Stoke Newington Ship Canal that would, when complete, allow the great ships of the day to travel from Crouch End to the Thames, and from there carry the metallic harvest of the foundries to the

new colonies of the Isle of Wight and Glasgow, and to the exotic lands of Africa and the Orient.

Thadeus realised that the design and construction of the canal was beyond the scope of the journeyman artisans of the day, as simply digging a ditch - however deep and wide - would only let the waters of the Crouch rush even more rapidly to the sea, and that some method of retaining the waters at the correct depth was required. To this end he inaugurated a great contest - a world wide search for a scientific genius who could solve the problem and engrave his name on the greatest architectural feat yet attempted. News of the competition spread to all the corners of the known world, and soon the participants began arriving to survey the land with strange instruments and weird devices. From China the philosopher Cho Min came, with an entourage of slaves and eunuches and a plan to build giant water - wheels to transport the water from the Thames faster than it could flow away, each wheel turned by a hundred slaves. The Italian, Leonardo da Vinci, proposed a scheme where great clouds of steam would be pulled by flying machines and forced to disgorge their load at the source of the canal, but at the end of the allotted time Thadeus was forced to admit that no practical solutions had





A view of the area, showing the Dockyard and the Ship Canal, probably from Highgate Hill

been found, and declared the contest null and void. In desperation, he grasped at the only straw that remained and placed an advertisement in the local journal, to which he received one reply - from Alexander Yale.

Yale was a young Scot who, from humble beginnings, had taught himself natural philosophy and had many inventions and patents to his credit, including the hair-spring haggis trap and the very popular sporran squeezer. Llangthorn immediately took a liking to the young man because of his dry wit and his beautifully squeezed sporran, and appointed him chief architect and overseer. Yale's answer to the problem was both original and simple. He proposed constructing pairs of gates at regular intervals, so cleverly interlocked that as one gate held the water back the other could be opened to admit the ship, then by reversing the process the ship could proceed upstream without the water draining from the canal. With the invention of these mechanisms, which he called "locks" and for which he is still remembered today, construction of the canal could begin, and the first sod was cut by Prince William in 1620.

Work began at once, with thousands of migrant workers flooding into the area to take part in

excavating the immense channel. It was to run from the main docks in what is now Hornsey High Street, down Turnpike Lane, through Tottenham and the Hackney Marshes and then straight to the Thames at Millwall. At three points along its length the channel would be split into two with connecting interlocking gates to allow inbound and outbound vessels to pass one another, and an ancillary channel would run along what is now Tottenham Lane to a vast dry dock complex where the Hornsey Town Hall now stands. As the Drain, as it became affectionately known, became a reality, and a host of shanty towns to accommodate the influx of workers spread through the valley, Squire Thadeus conceived a scheme to replenish his coffers, which were diminishing at a rate proportional to the advance of the channel, or as his workers said “going down the drain”. He built a network of inns and taverns to slake the thirst of his workforce, and then constructed a brewery on the top of the Muswell Hills to brew bitter ale, thence to be sold in the local taverns. The brew, which became known as Hornsey Headache because of the intensity of the ensuing hangover, was extremely popular and every evening the taverns would throng with impending drunks, and at closing time the streets would fill with singing

inebriates staggering home holding their heads in anticipation of the impending hangover.

The success of the Squire’s taverns came to the notice of the Abbot of the local Priory, who was greatly distressed with the danger of eternal damnation to the souls of the drinkers and the total collapse in the sales of his own ale, which the Squire had refused to sell in his taverns. He then sent his monks forth every evening to the taverns, where they preached sobriety and self-denial to the patrons and, with their increasing success, began to affect the profits of the brewery and so put the entire channel project in jeopardy. Thadeus pondered for many days on the problem, and then decided that as most of the countryside was now taken up by housing, his workers needed more recreation space so he had the Priory pulled down and created a park in its place, and banished the monks forever. After the exile life in the taverns returned to normal, but the Squire was outraged to hear that one monk was still to be seen in the area, and that despite all the efforts of his constables, the monk always evaded capture. Perplexed, he consulted his local Gypsy oracle, who after putting herself into a trance by drinking Hornsey Headache, declared that this monk was a lost soul under a spell, doomed for eternity to haunt the

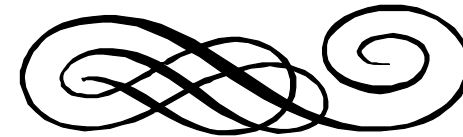
taverns of the valley of Crouch End, haranguing the carousers and praying for their redemption.

The channel took thirty long years to complete, as many unforeseen obstacles and problems had to be overcome, one being the discovery of deposits of salt just under the ground at the first passing point, which caused the abandonment of an entire stretch of channel and its subsequent diversion around the area. Thadeus turned the discovery to his advantage by mining the salt, and some of the tunnels left by his miners are still in use today, taking Victoria line trains from Seven Sisters to Tottenham Hale.

Eventually, however, the completion of the great enterprise was realized, and plans were made for the Grand Opening Ceremony, and the arrival of the first ship to sail to Crouch End, and to fulfil the dreams of the Llangthorn dynasty. The Great Channel would connect their factories directly to the outside world, a world eager to procure the tin and copper wares of the Crouch End industrial empire, and in return fill the warehouses along the Great Channel with precious artifacts from all the continents of the known world.

As the first ship sailed slowly into the dock, the multitude who had gathered and the rows of invited royalty and noted celebrities cheered to the

echo, and as the gangplank touched the ground a magnificent firework display illuminated the sky, and the noise of the exploding rockets was heard for many miles. Unfortunately, one rocket deviated from its course and fell directly onto the brewery, which was immediately engulfed by giant flames, a spectacle which was considered by most to be the crowning glory of the occasion, although one or two of the older denizens of the valley muttered darkly about the Abbot's revenge.





## CHAPTER THREE



The first ship, the name of which is still a mystery, was chartered by Josiah Weston, a member of a long established merchant family with warehouses in Bristol and The Isle of Man. A resourceful businessman, he erected warehouses all along the west side of the Channel, and soon all the imported merchandise passed through one or other of Josiah's repositories and all the merchants and peddlers, who flocked to Crouch End from all parts of south and east of England, marvelled at the beauty and quality of the wares. The storehouses overflowed with fine silks and pottery from Cathay, spices and strange fruits from the Indies, and exotic animal skins from

Africa. With the great wealth accrued from his business, Josiah built a mansion in many acres of landscaped parkland to the south of his warehouses, in the area now known as Weston Park. The mansion was held by all who saw it to be the grandest and most beautiful house in the area, even surpassing that of Sir Thadeus himself - an accomplishment looked upon with ire and envy by the Squire.

Sir Thadeus immediately set about planning a new house which would surpass the Weston mansion in every respect, with thirty stories, two hundred bedrooms, and a great tower in the form of a silver teapot. He was dissuaded from this both by his wife, who liked the cosy ambience of the old house, and by his son Ralph, who proposed a new scheme which would exceed anything the Westons had achieved, and re-assert Sir Thadeus' position as the foremost citizen of Crouch End. Ralph, who had studied the natural philosophies under Alexander Lock and travelled to the great universities of Potsdam and Kiel, persuaded his Father to inaugurate a University of Alchemy and Rhetoric, and work began at once on a building of suitable size and grandeur on the site at the top of the Muswell Hills. News of the university was spread throughout the world by the ships travelling

down the Great Channel, and when they returned many brought with them eminent sages and mystic diviners, all desiring to study at the university. Many significant discoveries were made as the imprecise science of alchemy - thought by many to be close to sorcery - changed slowly to the modern concept of chemistry, and the debates between philosophers from many different countries and cultures did much to advance the enlightenment of the renaissance, then slowly radiating throughout the civilised world.

Josiah Weston was beset with envy at the success of the University. He hated Sir Thadeus deeply, as the Squire had thwarted many of his schemes - one such being the purchase of several silver mines in the Muswell Hills. He had bid for the mines through an agent, so that none would know of his intentions, but the Squire had learnt of the plan from one of his many spies and when Josiah inspected his acquisitions, he found them to be totally exhausted, and full of nothing but useless clay. He applied himself with even greater energy to his import business, and one day, while walking through the docks, he noticed some of the merchants from the Indies cooking their food on an open fire. Intrigued by the delightful aroma of the spices, he asked the merchants if he could share in



their repast, and was so taken by the unique flavour of the food that he set up an eating house to introduce the Indian food to the people of Crouch End. The eating house was so successful that more and more were opened, and soon every other shop along the lane was an Indian eating house, a



tradition which is still continued to this day.

As Josiah's wealth increased daily, so did his envy of Sir Thadeus, and he could never devise a strategy to outdo the University. Then, one day, he commissioned an artist to paint a portrait of his daughter Sharon. Although Sharon was

sweet-tempered and intelligent, she was not beautiful, and the artist, in search of inspiration, wandered up to the Muswell Hills, where he stumbled on the Weston's exhausted silver mines. He quickly realised that the clay, thought to be useless, was actually composed of rare earths and ochres, and from the samples he brought back he distilled colours of such brilliance and purity that the ensuing portrait of Sharon became regarded as a masterpiece. Famous painters came from all parts of Europe to try the new colours, and Josiah, seeing at last an opportunity to rival the University of Sir Thadeus, founded Hornsey College of Art, which soon became the foremost Academy of it's kind in the western world. It was now the turn of Sir Thadeus to feel the bitter pangs of envy, as the world's early love affair with science was waning, and painting and the descriptive arts were assuming the greater importance. Worse was to follow, as Ralph, his son, on seeing the portrait of Sharon fell deeply in love with her, and despite the disparity between the painting and reality they eloped, leaving both families to mourn their loss.

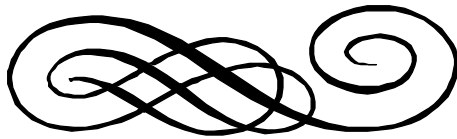
Distraught, Sir Thadeus hurried to his laboratory in the bowels of the University, where he was determined to discover some great secret which would restore the eminence of the



University to it's former glory. No-one knows what really happened that day, but it may be surmised that the Squire, in attempting some experiment far beyond his understanding of the new science, produced some compound which burst into flame,



and the ensuing inferno was not only the end of the University, but the sad end of Sir Thadeus Llangthorne.



## CHAPTER FOUR



**R**alph Llangthorne heard of his Father's death while on his honeymoon in Great Yarmouth, and immediately returned to London with the lovely Sharon. Both families welcomed the young couple with open arms, and after the funeral it was decided that as the households had been united by the marriage, so the business concerns should be combined to form the largest manufacturing and shipping company in English history.

As trade along the Channel increased, it became obvious that the normal ocean-going ships of the day were ill-suited to the intricacies of navigation required to negotiate the locks and conduits of the

Channel, and it was decided that a new type of ship was necessary. A committee of local traders and sea captains was convened, and after many days of heated discussion, it was determined that the first ship to be constructed should be a three-masted clinker-built sloop, quarter-rigged fore and aft with three main decks.

As lack of space precluded the use of slipways, the ships were constructed in the dry dock where Hornsey Town Hall now stands, and the land from the dock up to Crouch Hill used for storing and ageing Oak and Ash lumber from the forests of the Muswell Hills.

The dry dock itself was one hundred yards long and fifty yards wide, and its deepest point was thirty yards below the level of the surrounding land. Massive gates at the East end held back the water of the slip canal, and steam driven pumps worked day and night to maintain the dry conditions necessary for unhindered toil and exertion. The south and west sides of the dock were lined with long, low sheds where the carpenters, shipwrights and sailmakers worked, and the whole of the shipyard surrounded by an iron fence twenty feet high, with two massive gates of wrought iron twenty feet across, each embellished with a crest of Crouch End and topped with images of mythical

sea creatures.

The dockyard and the harbour prospered for many years, and the shipwrights of Crouch End became famous not only for their skill and craftsmanship, but for the vast amounts of bitter beer they would consume in the taverns around the shipyard. On Friday and Saturday nights, when the consumption of Hornsey Headache was at its greatest, they would form small groups and visit the sailor's and docker's taverns along the Channel, invariably and inevitably ending in fights and brawls along the banks, with a wet ending for many of the participants. The problem reached such proportions that a company of special constables was formed to keep the peace, and a new barracks, courthouse and jail built on the site of the old University at the top of the Muswell Hills, and on any Monday morning it was not unusual for the constables to parade several hundred miscreants before the infamous Hanging Judge, Byron Bardswell. Bardswell, known as the Hanging Judge from his habit of hanging round bars in the sailors quarter, dealt fairly but firmly with the offenders, usually sentencing them to two or three days in jail, although those fished out of the Channel received an extra two days to get over their cold.

The absence of so many of the yard workers, from either enforced residency in jail, broken limbs from fighting, or simply extended hangovers, had a serious effect on the productivity of the shipyard. The management, in an effort to return to normal working and profitability, introduced draconian measures to eliminate absenteeism, including loss of pay, instant dismissal, and public flogging, and for some time this proved effective, as the workers turned their backs on the taverns in fear of their jobs or their skins. A small group of shipwrights, however, deeply deplored the oppressive nature of the regime which they felt was at odds with the new social climate of independence and freedom which marked the middle years of the eighteenth century, and so they called a meeting of all the workers and formed the Hornsey Shipwrights Association, which became famous as the first trade union in Britain.

The committee of the H.S.A. worked tirelessly to mitigate the oppressive regime of the yard owners by peaceful means, but at every turn they were thwarted or simply ignored by the management. On one occasion they organised a mass rally to Parliament to present their case, but Sir Ralph, who not only owned the shipyard but the Hornsey Brewery, countered by cutting the price of

Hornsey Headache in half on the day of the march, and a sympathetic article in the local Journal was mysteriously withdrawn at the last moment, with the editor later seen riding through Crouch End on a new and expensive horse. Finally, at one of the regular H.S.A. meetings, which were held in a room above a local tavern and were well known for their long and acrimonious discussions lasting well into the night, it was decided to apply the only sanction left open to them, and by a unanimous show of hands, declared a strike.

The strike began with a workers rally outside the gates of the shipyard, and a group were dispatched to blockade the Channel at one of the great locks on the northern edge of the Tottenham Marshes, still known today as Picketts Lock. The closing of the Channel had an immediate effect, with all industry and commerce grinding to a halt, and the striking workers were soon joined by hundreds of miners, sailors and dockers to form an unruly, but good tempered mob. Sir Ralph, who was also the local magistrate, decided that firm action was needed to restore order and to this end issued a warrant for the arrest of the H.S.A. committee. A platoon of special constables detained the seven leaders of the strike at the shipyard gates, and marched them up the hill to the

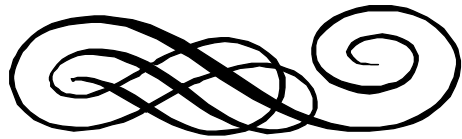


The Armourial Crest of Crouch End, granted by  
Royal Patent in 1587

courthouse to appear before Judge Bardswell, charged with disturbing the peace and interfering with the due and legal passage of ships along the Great Channel. The seven - known to history as the Muswell Hill Martyrs - spoke long and eloquently in their defence, but the evidence against them was incontrovertible, and to the consternation of the mob the seven were found guilty. In sentencing the martyrs, Judge Bardswell declared that he found the usual punishment for these offences, deportation to the colony of Australia, was too lenient for the magnitude of the crimes, and to the dismay of the families and friends of the accused, exiled the seven to Campden Town.

News of the dreadful fate of their leaders spread swiftly through ranks of the strikers and supporters, and as one they marched up the hill to the courthouse. Sir Ralph and Judge Bardswell, on seeing the rioters approaching and deciding that the rule of law could best be furthered by a hasty retreat, slipped out of the building with the constables by a back door, leaving the mob to storm the courthouse unopposed. They quickly released all the prisoners, and in a final act of defiance, burnt the entire edifice to the ground. As Sir Ralph prepared the cast his final card and call in the army to quell the rioters, news began to spread like

wildfire up the Channel - news of an event which was once more to turn the history of Crouch End - the first appearance of shoals of freshwater herring swarming up the Channel in their millions to spawn.



## CHAPTER FIVE



**T**he appearance of vast shoals of freshwater herring in the Channel was to lead to a new era of prosperity for the community of Crouch End. At first the population fell into a great orgy of eating and drinking with even the youngest children chasing and catching the herring, or as they came to be known the “silver darlings”, but after a few days problems began to appear. The fish proved to be highly intelligent, quickly learning to leap over or dive under nets, and this, combined with the hereditary reluctance of Crouch Enders to catch them led to a growing unease among the local populace.

The old Squire, Sir Ralph, had passed away quietly in his sleep at a great age, and the mantle of his responsibilities had passed to his half-brother Sir Simeon Llangthorne. The new Squire, with the memory of the recent riots fresh in his mind, decided that immediate action had to be taken. He called upon the lovely Sharon's brother Harold, then a young subaltern in the army engineering corps, to devise a solution to the problem and after a few weeks of studying the habits of the shoals, he conceived a plan which would not only save the fledgling fishing industry from premature demise, but return Crouch End to the apex of engineering development.

Harold had noticed that at the first sign of a fishing net, rod, or even the sound of a fisherman's booted step the shoal would, as one, retreat to one of the great locks, where they would hide in the murky depths until one of scouts they sent out reported - by what means Harold could never discover - that the coast was clear. He started the construction of huge iron gates covered with fine mesh, and when they were completed he installed them at a point in the Channel just upstream of the first lock, at what is now Turnpike Lane. The gates were mounted on sliding gimbals and raised clear of the water by two steam engines, and when a

shoal had ventured upstream to feed or spawn the gates were released, crashing into the Channel and fulfilling the dual purpose of not only trapping the fish, but stunning them to such an extent that even the Crouch End fishermen had little difficulty in catching them.

As well as being extremely efficient, the gates were also a great wonder to all who saw them and soon not only locals, but people from all over London would come to see the gates being closed, and as fame of the spectacle spread even further afield, the area became known as Herring Gate, soon corrupted to Harringey.

With the arrival of the herring, a new chapter of prosperity opened for the people of Crouch End. With their traditional zeal and enthusiasm they designed and built new factories and warehouses for smoking, salting, and bottling herrings, and soon the reputation of the delicacy spread throughout Britain. The industry progressed steadily for several years until the innovation in pickling technology, which was to make the name of Crouch End famous once again throughout the world, was discovered.

It was a humble fisherman called Sliding Jake who first stumbled upon the mysterious formula. It was Jake's habit to visit the local tavern for a flagon



The Herringgate closes!

of the Bishop's ale on his way home with his catch. On this fateful night, however, Barney the landlord had just cracked open a kilderkin of Old Walter's, a fearsome brew noted both for the adverse effect on the imbiber's balance and the vehemence of the ensuing hangover. On leaving the hostelry he eventually found his way home, but instead of going into his kitchen and popping the fish into the cooking pot, he staggered into his boat shed and dropped his catch into a vat of the acid he used to remove barnacles from the bottom of his longboat. He awoke the next morning in the corner of the shed and, his mind still befuddled by Old Walter's revenge, he went to what he thought was his cooking pot for his morning repast. As soon as the first piece of herring had passed his lips his head miraculously cleared, and he immediately knew he had made a momentous discovery. The acid had completely dissolved the bones of the fish, which in their turn had neutralized the acid, leaving the flesh sweet and tender with a peculiar salty taste and undoubted medicinal properties. He conveyed his findings to the Squire, and from this inauspicious beginning the great Crouch End pickling industry began.

Sir Simeon quickly realised the potential of the discovery, and installed Jake as the first Head



Foreman-pickler in Crouch End. Within a year the largest pickling works in the world had been constructed on top of the Muswell Hills where the ruins of the old courthouse had been. The surrounding area thronged with factories manufacturing acid, glass jars and fermenting vats, and once again the great ships plied the Channel, taking Crouch End Herrings - now delicately flavoured with native herbs found only in the wilder reaches of the Muswell Hills - to all parts of the known world.

The area once more became a centre for cosmopolitan trade, and the streets and taverns teemed with Captains and crews of all races and religions. Strange tongues were heard in all corners of the borough, some even stranger after a few flagons the Bishops, but even these years, the most prosperous in all its annals, Crouch End was not free from tragedy.

In the spring of 1801, a great storm developed in the Bay of Biscay. Moving swiftly northwards, it increased rapidly in ferocity, driving all before it. It struck the South Coast of England with such force, that many of populace - taken without warning or premonition - lost their lives, and a great damage was done to both ships and buildings.

The denizens of Crouch End were not, however,

taken completely by surprise. A few weeks earlier a group of Travelling People had set up their camp on a traditional site at the foot of the Muswell Hills, as they and their forefathers had done every Spring for centuries. Although they now wandered the length and breadth of Britain following a traditional route from fair to fair, an old legend spoke of this place as their ancestral home, and the locals always looked forward to their arrival as a sign that Winter was gone, and Summer was not far away.

Among the many arcane skills practised by the Travellers was that of Pessomancy, or the foretelling of the future by casting a set of ancient fish bones which had been handed down through the families for generations. It was by this method that one of their number, whose name was not recorded, divined the nature and timing of the storm and conveyed his fears to the Harbourmaster, Rafael Rowley.

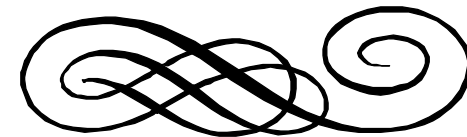
Although a relatively young man for such an important post, Rowley's family had lived in Crouch End for many years, and he had heard - and believed - numerous stories about the prophecies of the travellers. He therefore took the warning seriously, and had the Town Crier broadcast a general alert to the population. Soon

all the dwellings, factories and warehouses were secured and shuttered, and local ships were tied up with many ropes, and weighed down with bags of sand.

The Captains of the three sea-going cargo ships which were in the Channel at that time refused to heed the warnings of the Harbourmaster. They preferred, as they said, “to trust in their own knowledge and experience of the signs of the weather than the ramblings of heathens”, an error which was to lead to their demise. The storm crossed the River Thames at the exact moment of the highest neap tide of the year, causing a great bore of water many feet high to be pushed by the wind along the Channel at a frightening speed. Harbourmaster Rowley had ordered all the lock gates to be opened to prevent damage, and the masters of the ships, seeing the advantage of both a high tide and a clear run through the Channel, set sail together.

They had only sailed for a few minutes when they were hit, first by the tidal wave, then by the storm, and destroyed so completely that the only recognisable debris found after the wind had subsided were the compasses of the three ships. These were taken to the tavern which stood alongside the Channel, mounted side by side on a

piece of driftwood recovered from the wreckage, and inscribed with a warning to all seafarers. The tavern became known as ‘The Three Compasses’ and although the original mascot was lost when a new building was erected on the site, it still bears the name today.





## CHAPTER SIX



**I**n 1810, the Council of Municipal Burgers decided that a monument to the prosperity and prominence of Crouch End was required - something which would stand forever, and exemplify the spirit of Crouch End for generations to come. The main ideas they considered were a giant mechanical herring, a bronze statue of a fisherman crouched over a river, and a replica of a locally built Lugger which on the hour would set its sails and tack into the wind, thus telling the hour and the wind direction at the same time. Unable to agree on a decision, they took the problem to the Squire. Sir Simeon, after catching

the whiff of the Bishop's ale on their breath (the meetings were invariably held at the Herringbone Arms), decided that although the basic idea of a monument was a worthy one, the proffered recommendations were somewhat less than practical, and sent the Burgers back to the tavern to resume their meeting.

The thought of a lasting monument continued to haunt Sir Simeon, and eventually he came to the conclusion that the only fitting testament would be a stone clock tower, emblazoned with the arms of the borough on each of its four faces. He tabled his proposal at the next meeting of the Municipal Burgers, and after two rounds of voting and three rounds of ale it was carried unanimously.

Sir Simeon was appointed Chief Executor of the project, and he travelled throughout the country visiting the leading clock-makers of the day, but none of the submitted plans met with his vision of a fitting edifice to the life force of the area. Eventually, through his extensive European trade network, he was approached by a representative of an old-established Swiss firm, who presented a design which fired his imagination. The tower was to be carved from solid rock hewn from a local Alp, and fitted with the finest Swiss clock movements known to the modern world.

The transportation of the tower from Switzerland and its subsequent erection were a major challenge to the engineering skills of the day, so Sir Simeon once again turned to his Son-in-law Harold - architect of the great Herring Gates - to oversee the operation. The construction of the tower itself took five years, but when complete it was loaded with great effort onto four specially constructed barges and floated down the Rhine to Antwerp.

The barges were then spliced together to form a sea-going platform, which was towed across the North Sea by three of Crouch End's most experienced captains and, after many battles with the storms and tides, arrived safely in the Thames at the entrance to the Channel. It was here that the ingenuity of the team was first challenged, as the sea-going platform was too wide to fit between the banks, and another solution to the transport of the tower had to be found.

The answer devised by Harold was simple but ingenious, and worthy of comparison with all the innovations for which Crouch End was famous. He arranged for three pairs of massive bladders to be inflated underneath the tower which, when the barges were dismantled, allowed it to float easily in the water, and be towed upstream without incident

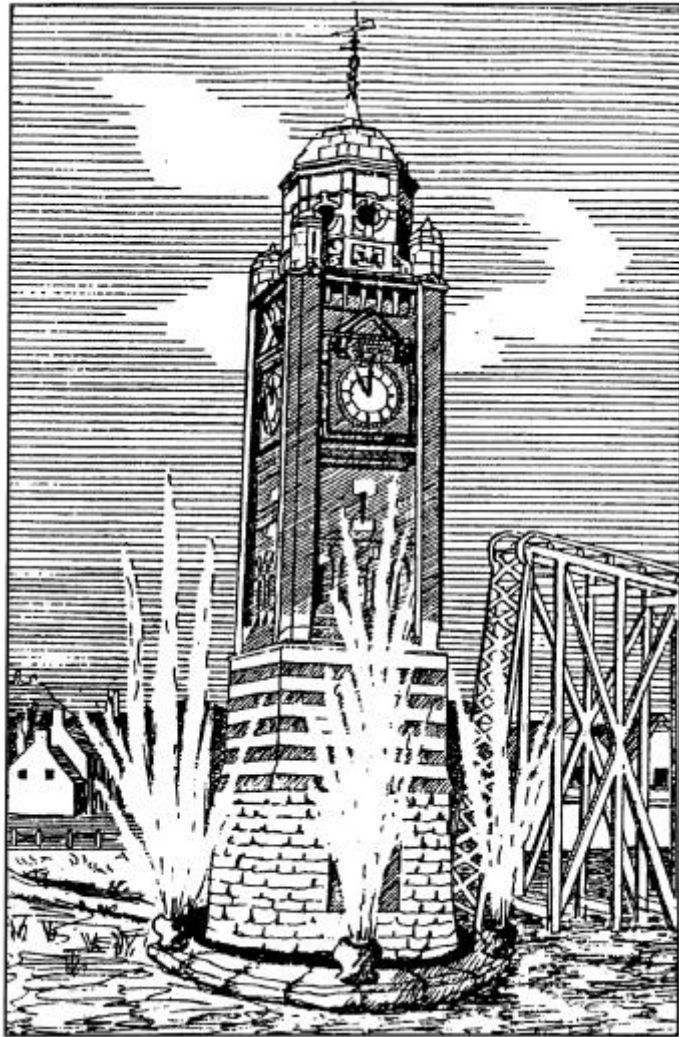
by teams of packhorses working in rotation.

The last, and most spectacular, stage in this strange journey was that from the Channel down what is now Tottenham Lane to the tower's final position, where a great cavity had been prepared to receive it. Harold had constructed a railway from the bank to the foundations, and its design was a wonder to all who saw it. It rose in elevation - gradually at first, then steeper and steeper until at its summit the height was greater than that of the tower - then descended almost vertically to end in the prepared foundations. Multitudes of onlookers from all over London and even further afield had gathered to see the final journey of the tower from the Channel to its resting place. Many bets were placed and taken on the outcome of the operation, as many doubted that the tower could be raised to the top of the track, and if it did get there surely it would be smashed to pieces as it fell from the zenith into the hole. They had reckoned without the fertile imagination of the young engineer. A pressure pipe many miles long had been laid from the highest point of the River Crouch to provide the kinetic energy to propel the tower along the track. It moved slowly at first, but soon gathered pace, only to slow again as it reached the top. There it slowed almost to a standstill and the waiting crowd

held its breath, but Harold's calculations had been exact, and the tower almost imperceptibly slewed over and began its drop into its foundations. As it inched slowly into the vertical section, it was automatically clamped to hydraulic rams which steadily lowered the great mass, the displaced water from the rams being ejected from ten nozzles placed in a circle around the site. Each of the nozzles projected a fountain of water a hundred feet into the air, and the watching crowd, undaunted by the torrential soaking they received, cheered to the echo as the Clock Tower settled majestically into its foundations.

The Clock Tower is, of course still standing in its original site today, and although in a mindless act of municipal vandalism the facia was recarved in 1896, a faint outline of the original Crouch End coat of arms is just discernible on the north face in certain lighting conditions.

The summer of 1831 was particularly hot and sunny, notable both for the excellence of the ale, said to surpass even that of 1799, and the Spring spawning of the Freshwater Herring, which exceeded all records in recent memory. The abundance of the catch - and the quantity of the Bishops Ale quaffed in the taverns - led to an air of enthusiasm and optimism verging on euphoria.

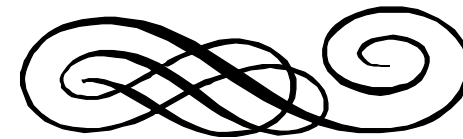


A local artist's impression of the setting of the Clock Tower, showing the loading ramp and the Water spouts from the hydraulic brakes.

Against this background of plenty and merriment, however, a few of the Burghers were filled with a strange foreboding. To these prescient few, who presumably included a romantic dalliance with a handsome Traveller among their ancestry, some of the stories told by the handful of old miners who still worked the shafts and tunnels under the Muswell Hills had a nagging consistency, and above all the ring of truth. The miners told of hearing low - almost human - moans and groans echoing around the passages, and on occasions feeling regular vibrations like the footsteps of some great beast through the walls and floors of the lower levels. The tales invoked much hilarity in the tap-rooms of the taverns, and many a pleasant summer evening was spent listening to them, but as the miners were famous for their tall tales and strange stories of the dark places in the workings, none of the listeners took them seriously. The rumours, however, persisted and the level of the disturbances increased to the point where the groans could be clearly heard in the town on quiet evenings, but still the general populace took no notice, although Mothers would tell their naughty children that if they did not behave, the “Hobgoblin of the Mines” would come out at night and swallow them up.

The first portent of the onset of disaster occurred at Two O'clock on the afternoon of the Twenty-second of August. At the exact moment of high tide the great Herring Gates were, as usual, closed, but to the consternation of the waiting fishermen, not a single fish - stunned or otherwise - could be found. Their puzzlement was further enhanced by the report of the Captain of a local ketch who arrived at the gates on the high tide. He told of encountering a huge shoal of Herring swimming downstream at a speed so great that at times his ketch was actually forced backwards against the wind and tide. The fishermen had, however, only a few moments to reflect upon the desertion of the shoal when the earth beneath them shook with such violence that the Herring Gates broke loose from their foundations and, with a ponderous grace, fell slowly into the channel. In the mines under the Muswell hills, the vast honeycomb of tunnels had crumpled under the oppressive weight of overlying rock and buildings and had catastrophically collapsed, causing the River Crouch - which had for centuries been the fountainhead all the prosperity of Crouch End - to fall down a newly formed chasm into the bowels of the earth, never to reappear. Every building in the area was reduced to rubble save the Clock Tower

and the Pickling Factory, the tower because it was carved from solid stone, and the factory because of the excellence of its architecture. Unfortunately, although the superstructure of the factory withstood the force of the earthquake, in the basement a huge vat of pickling acid was toppled by the tremors, and its corrosive contents engulfed a stack of barrel timbers which, soaked in pitch as was the custom, immediately ignited, and the factory - both symbol and foundation of the prosperity of Crouch End in latter days - was enveloped in flame and burnt to the ground.





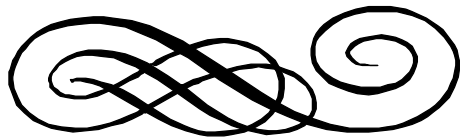


# EPILOGUE



**A**fter the earthquake, everything which had made Crouch End what it was had gone. The great Channel was dry, the mines in the Muswell hills had collapsed, and the shoals of herring no longer swam into what is now Hornsey High Street. The Municipal Burgers and the Squire used the monies accumulated over the centuries to clear the rubble, most of which was used to fill the empty Channel, although some was held back to seal the old mines in the Muswell Hills, and so prevent any repetition of the tragedy. Eventually, as the rubble was cleared and the workers moved on to employment elsewhere, the area returned once more to gentle farmland, and the folk who remained to a pastoral existence.

The area once more became notable in 1858 when it was decided to build a “Palace of the People” - a rival to the Crystal Palace - on the site in the Muswell Hills formerly occupied by the Pickling Factory and many other major buildings in former years. After many delays the Palace was opened to the public in 1873, and many thousands travelled to see the opening ceremony performed by Queen Victoria. It was also watched by a band of Travelling People who were camped - as was their time-honoured custom - in the fields below the new Palace, and as they sat round their campfire certain elders of the tribe - reputed to be descendants of the original fishermen of the River Crouch - shook their heads sadly and remembered the curse of the ancient Bishop of Ferme.



*Authors' Note:*

*This manuscript has been carefully scrutinised by a prominent local historian, who has declared it to be totally inaccurate. We would, however, like to apologise for any accuracies which may have been inadvertently included.*

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