

THE WALLINGTON FAMILY



Three generations of the Wallington family worked as stall holders in East Street. The first was John, born in 1910, known as Salty, a nickname earned as a ‘totter’ leading his horse and cart around Walworth selling salt and vinegar.

John Junior was born in 1938 and helped with the family business from an early age. He worked at the Elephant and Castle Horse repository for 6d a day. They would take roundabouts and rocking horse rides around the streets in the evening to give rides to local children. Rides cost 1d a go; if they didn’t have the money two jam jars would be accepted instead, as glass was a scarce commodity. Salty doubled up as a stall holder and an ancillary fairground provider.

Pitches were difficult to get hold of before licensing was introduced. Fights would break out as the stallholders rushed to grab the best sites. The Wallington license was and still is referred to as a Jobs-lines license, which meant that they could sell anything.

During the War, the family home in Orb Street was struck by enemy bombing. Many of the streets around East Street were damaged. It was the end of many stalls and the market shrank, never to return to the size it had reached before 1939.

John Junior went to St John’s School before earning the chance to go to Wilsons Grammar where he met Michael Caine at the schools amateur dramatic society. The two men would later receive honours from The Queen on the same day in 2000.

John helped form the Southwark Association of Street Traders, an organisation seeking to preserve and develop the stallholders’ profession. The Old Age Pensioners’ Trip to Brighton was one outcome. Although 300 were taken on these annual trips, some 3,000 were left behind, such was its popularity. Whilst the others were away, the Lane would be prepared for a ‘proper cockney knees up’ that would go on until the early morning.

The last big party to celebrate the market was held during the centenary celebrations of 1980, when Dame Anna Neagle and the cast of My Fair Lady performed on a makeshift stage in King and Queen Street.

John’s son, Tony, born in 1958 also worked the Wallington Pitch 139/141, but was the last of the generations to operate it. The market once boasted that you could buy anything from a hat pin to an elephant in East Lane, but things are changing and the old ways are passing. One thing that still remains the same is the stallholders’ ability to keep warm – long johns, one pair of socks and many layers on top.

THE WALWORTH SOCIETY



East Street appears on maps of the 1780s as a number of connected streets, including East Lane, Richmond Place and Sion Place. Many residents and traders still refer to it as “The Lane”.

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A SPOTLIGHT ON: EAST STREET, WALWORTH

The Walworth Society aims to preserve the story of Walworth through its historic buildings and the lives of the people within the area.

This pamphlet about East Street is the beginning of a wider piece of work to set up a local heritage trail and produce a book about Walworth’s history. ‘The Lane’ is explored through the stories of a local pub, a Church and the lives of one particular family who worked here.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In the 17th century, the area through which East Street now runs was rural fields and ‘common’ land where people could graze their animals. The area to the north was known as ‘Lock’s Field’ and, in 1878, was described as little more than ‘a dreary swamp’. Conditions obviously improved as, by 1881, it was recorded as a site for gipsies to stay during the winter months. To the south was Walworth Common; a popular point for the farmers of Kent and Surrey to stop overnight before making their journey into the city. People would buy produce directly from these drovers and eventually a market was established.

Most of the land in the area was owned by the Church, but some was eventually sold or leased. By the 1770s, some land near the junction with Old Kent Road (known then simply as The Kent Road) was cultivated as a flower nursery by the Driver family, who were also responsible for commissioning the grand buildings at nearby Surrey Square. A legal document from 1780 describes the sale of the land which led to the creation of East Street as a public highway, connecting Walworth Road with the Kent Road.

By the 1800s London was expanding rapidly. Open fields were built upon and in the 1860s, Walworth Common was developed. The old markets were moved onto the Walworth Road and the vegetable sellers (Costermongers) were joined by an array of other traders.

In 1875 the electric tram ran down Walworth Road bringing to an end the market. After heated negotiations with the traders, the market was split up and moved into the side streets of Westmoreland Road, East Lane and Draper Street. Draper Street was built over in the 1960s by the Elephant and Castle development. The construction of the Aylesbury Estate led to the decline of the Westmoreland Road market; although until recently a small flea market still ran here on Sunday mornings.

Unlike the regulated market which serves the shoppers on East Street today, the original traders did not have allocated plots for their stalls. At 8am, a policeman blew a whistle and traders would rush to claim the best pitches, with shop owners on the Lane claiming the patches outside their front doors. This ended in 1927 when the licensing system was introduced.

Many local men were called up in The Second World War and the market declined. In 1948 it was described as “a drab, dead thing, infinitely remote from the cockney tradition”. Thankfully the market survived and evolved. As the population of the area has diversified so have the goods on offer and, along with the traditional fresh fruit and vegetables, you can now find a vibrant mix of Caribbean food, ethnic clothing, CD’s and household goods.



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The East Street Mission began in 1859 when John Dunn, a member of Spurgeon’s Tabernacle, started a Sunday school class in a loft over a cowshed in East Street.

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

The East Street Mission began in 1859 when John Dunn, a member of Spurgeon’s Tabernacle, started a Sunday school class in a loft over a cowshed in East Street. He borrowed two benches and, with two candlesticks for lighting, four ragged urchins were invited in from the streets. It became known as Richmond Street Mission and Schools.

Charles Spurgeon opened new premises for the mission in 1875 which catered for over 650 children. By 1892 there were 76 teachers and workers and 1080 scholars on its registers. Larger premises were needed and the current building was erected in 1896. Richmond Street disappeared during slum clearances, and the church became known as the East Street Baptist Mission.

Roy Joslin was Pastor of the East Lane Mission Church from 1963–85; it was under his leadership that the church expanded and played a leading role in the area. The former vicarage of St Peter’s Church at 177 East Street was acquired for use as the Manse. The Mission went on to buy two additional properties next door to the Manse and established a youth group called the 179 Club.

As its role in the community grew, it was agreed that the church should become independent from the Tabernacle, and the East Street Baptist Church was formerly constituted during a Service of Recognition on 18th October 1969.

The Mission’s growing influence in the area came at a time of great change. The Aylesbury Estate was under construction and many residential areas changed into dense blocks of flats. Writing in the church newsletter in 1971 Joslin said: “It is time to move our gaze from bricks and mortar and focus our attention on the real work of the church.”

During this time the Council offered to sell a strip of land at the side of the Mission to the Church at a nominal rate. Work on the east wing extension began in March 1973 and included provision of a book kiosk called the Good News Corner; the choice of name seemed unfortunate when it later became the scene of at least two major traffic accidents.

THE MASON’S ARMS

The Mason’s Arms is a survivor. Although many of the houses and tenements that once surrounded it have long gone, the pub remains.

A pub called The Mason’s Arms can be traced back in this location as far as 1807, but its origins may lie further back in the later 18th century. The current building was constructed in 1899 and is situated on the corner of East Street and a small alley, once known as Townley Street. The pub originally housed a large public bar, a number of smaller private bars, domestic quarters and stabling to its rear. The masons of the pub’s name are honoured by carvings of the tools of their trade – a mallet and a compass – on the two pilasters on the building’s frontage. Over the years the interior of the pub has been remodelled. In 1955 the last private bar and saloon bar were knocked together creating a larger space, with a small stage.

George Shepherd, landlord in 1899, was one of many to seek to create a lively local pub with music and entertainment on offer, as well as ale. It was a popular meeting point and, in their book ‘Walworth Through Time’ Mark Baxter and Darren Lock describe a group of female customers gathering at the pub for a ‘Beano’ (day trip) to Hastings in the 1950s. The Mason’s had a less glamorous part in local history, as the first pub in the area to have strippers perform on stage in the mid 1970s. The pub also appears in Frankie Fraser’s autobiography, where he describes visiting it for a friend’s birthday. Some licensees and punters also fell foul of the law; illicit off-licence sales were the norm for many pubs and in June 1919 the then landlord James Clare was fined £5 at Lambeth Court for “selling rum 40.5 degrees under proof”.

The Mason’s Arms fell on harder times more recently, closing temporarily in late 2011 – it has yet to re-open.



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