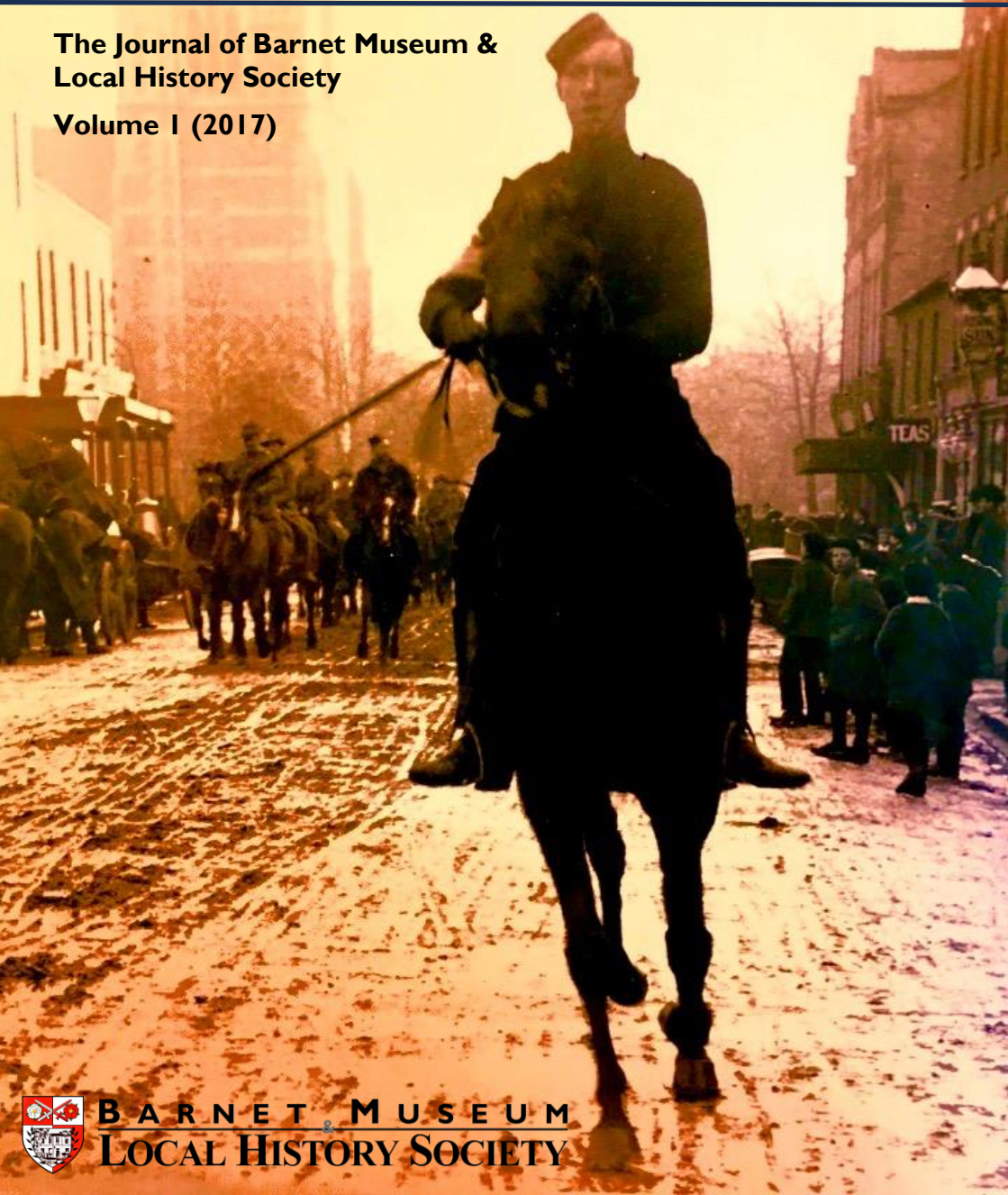


# BARNET HISTORY JOURNAL

The Journal of Barnet Museum &  
Local History Society

Volume I (2017)



**BARNET MUSEUM**  
**LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

# Barnet History Journal

**Volume I (2017)**



*Lady Verulam lays a wreath to the Hertfordshire Regiment (from article p8)*

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*Welcome to the first Barnet History Journal. Produced by Barnet Museum & Local History Society, Barnet History Journal has a variety of articles covering a range of topics relating to the history of Barnet and the surrounding area.*

# **Alleged theft at East Barnet tennis tournament – in 1475!**

Philip Bailey

A document has come to light from The National Archives which outlines the alleged theft of a man's purse during what seems to have been a small tennis tournament held in the street at East Barnet in the year 1475. The victim was John Fynour and the alleged thief William Saunder, although we never find out whether a crime had actually been committed or whether William was guilty or not.

The document is difficult to read in places because of its poor condition, but essentially it seems to describe a small tennis tournament with the prize being a couple of chickens. This is indicated by the statement that William "played in the open street at East Barnet in the county of Hertford with divers [various] of his neighbours at the tennis for a couple of chickens" and that at the same time John "played also at the tennis the same day at the said \_\_\_ of East Barnet within another place [courtyard]". William's neighbours had come the mile and a half from High Barnet where William lived, and John had come all the way from the City of London.

The document is in the form of a plea to the Lord Chancellor (Keeper of the Great Seal) by the defendant William Saunder who was being held in the custody of the Sheriffs of London. William had produced in his defence a citation from the court of the Abbot of St. Albans which presumably outlined the events of the day in question as heard in that court. He had also met with John in the City of London where John lived. This was presumably to discuss the issue and plead his innocence, but John had him arrested and detained.

Although the alleged crime had occurred in East Barnet, John seems to have reported that it took place in the parish of St. Sepulchre in the City of London. On the basis of this he had arranged for an inquest to be held there to decide William's guilt. William was convinced that John and his friends seemed to be determined to find him guilty regardless of the facts. He pleads to the Lord Chancellor for him to issue a writ of *Habeas Corpus cum Causa* to the Sheriffs of London. This type of writ would command anyone holding someone in detention to appear before him and show that they had the authority and the cause to hold them or otherwise let them go.

Both men were colliers and seem to have been known to each other, quite possibly being colleagues. It is possible that rather than being a tournament, the matches were played as part of a wager. I do think though that a 'couple

of chickens' would be an odd prize for a wager but a more likely prize for a small competition. Colliers wouldn't be carrying a couple of chickens around with them, but a villager in East Barnet would be able to supply them for a locally-organised competition. I also would favour it being a tournament not least because the tennis was played on a 'holy day', which was probably a public holiday (holiday being literally a 'holy day'). The tournament may have been part of general festivities organised by the villagers of East Barnet to celebrate the holy day.

At the time of this incident, tennis was a much more primitive game than the Lawn Tennis we know today or even than Real Tennis as played indoors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Tennis in medieval times was played with the hand instead of a racket, usually with a glove. Since the men involved here were colliers (charcoal makers or sellers), it is likely that they played in the gloves they used for work. It does indicate that tennis at this time was a working-class game, as supported by the fact that the matches were played in the street.

According to the document William was living in High Barnet in 1475, and so it is likely that he was also living there four years earlier and that he witnessed some of the bloodshed and mayhem of the 1471 Battle of Barnet.

To my knowledge this is the first evidence of sport being played in Barnet and as a tennis tournament it pre-dates Wimbledon by about 400 years. I suspect it is also the first report of a crime being committed in Barnet. It is a shame that crime has always been part of our society, but then again, without this incident having happened we would not have such a fascinating insight into life in medieval Barnet.



*Depiction of medieval tennis in France, c1510, from Vostre's 'Book of Hours' (public domain)*

# Connections with Church Farm Boys' Home and other family memories

Brenda Barrett

I was very interested by the research of the late Barnet Museum archivist, Gillian Gear, into the Boys' Farm Home at Church Farm in East Barnet<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, she had a web page which has attracted a number of comments<sup>2</sup>. I am particularly interested that the comments often sought information about members of the Staples family. I once told Gillian that a member of this family was a distant relative of mine called Eric Staples<sup>3</sup>. Gillian urged me to research this connection. I regret I was too much involved with research in my own discipline to do so. Therefore what I am now going to relate is all hearsay because it was what I learned from another distant relative, known to me as Auntie Dorrie (Dorcas Emmeline Ridgewell although she preferred to be known as DER), who was a cousin of my grandfather.



Eric Staples was DER's uncle, and so I have always known him as 'Uncle'. I know his surname was Staples because he had two sons, Percy and Philip Staples. When they married, Percy and his wife lived in Russell Lane, Whetstone. Uncle as a boy lived in the Church Farm Home. When he left he joined the army, which I believe was frequently the case when the boys became too old for the Home. It is believed he served in Egypt (perhaps in the 1870s because he was known to have a penchant for singing the triumphal march from Verdi's opera, Aida, set in Ancient Egypt; it was first performed in Cairo in 1871). Sadly he was discharged from the army due to poor eyesight. He then returned to the Farm Home and remained there for the rest of his working life. His wife and two sons lived there with him and DER moved in to help look after the boys; perhaps his wife had a job at the Home. When he retired he moved to Bulwer Road in New Barnet. I believe he bought the house and DER went with him as his housekeeper. They lived there till he died in about 1954. He was well over 90 at the time of his death and had been totally blind for some time.

DER spent a good deal of time in the home of my grandfather, Thomas Ridgewell, she being somewhat rootless having fallen out with her mother and having lost her boyfriend in World War One. Thomas Ridgewell had a brush-making business in the erstwhile stable yard attached to his home. He received a degree of fame when the local paper recorded unemployed men gathered outside his factory demanding to know why he was paying overtime. He went out and confronted them saying if anyone was a time served brush maker he would be glad to give him employment. The men marched away.<sup>4</sup> Thomas was an enthusiastic pioneer motorist, and DER would child-mind my mother when my grandparents went driving at the weekends. When my mother married and went to live at my father's butcher's shop, DER, who was employed by Foster Porter & Co, wholesale drapers, in Wood Street London, would turn up at the shop on a Saturday afternoon.

Uncle's death came at a most unfortunate time for DER because Foster Porter had gone into liquidation and so she was not only deprived of her home but also of her job. The Drapers' Home in Hammers Lane Mill Hill came to her aid and she spent the remainder of her long life there.



*Images all show the Boys Farm Home*

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Boys' Farm Home provided a home for poor boys, where they were taught industrial skills. The school ran from 1860 until 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Gear's Church Farm Boys' Home web page:

<http://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/content/herts-history/places/schools/the-boys-farm-home-church-farm-east-barnet> Or search for Boys Farm Home at <http://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/> (you may have to scroll down the list of results).

<sup>3</sup> I believe his first name was Eric but DER never referred to him by name.

<sup>4</sup> Reported in David Pam's *History of Enfield* Vol.3 at p.61

# Zeppelins over Barnet

Dennis Bird

The first airship shot down in World War One was on 3 September 1916 over Cuffley.

Four weeks later, Barnet was involved with the shooting down of another airship.

In the early hours of 1 October 1916, Zeppelin L-31 was part of a major raid of 11 airships on London.



*Sorting the wreckage from the airship shot down over Cuffley*

British pilot Wulstan Tempest took his tiny biplane to a high altitude in the hopes of crossing their path. His luck was in as he spotted and attacked the L-31 over North London. The stricken Zeppelin limped north as far as Potters Bar where it came down in a gigantic pyramid of flame in Oakmere Park, killing all 15 of the crew. Pilot Tempest got the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) and there is a Tempest Avenue near the Park.

What is the Barnet involvement? On the night of 1 October, a Barnet-based Searchlight Detachment were crewing a specially adapted tram with a searchlight mounted on it. From their position they were able to illuminate the Zeppelin during the course of the engagement, greatly aiding Tempest as he attacked and shot down the airship.

A letter of thanks from the residents of Bedford Avenue provides an interesting insight:

“From: Highlands, Bedford Avenue.

To: The Officer i/c, Searchlight Department, Wembley.

Sir, We have been asked by the residents of Bedford Avenue to write to you and acquaint you with the admiration we feel for the skill which was shown by the men in charge of the Tramway Searchlight stationed in the High Road at the end of the Avenue on the occasion of the Zeppelin raid of the 1<sup>st</sup> inst.



We witnessed the approach of the Zeppelin in our direction and we were greatly impressed with the efficiency which the men in question displayed in keeping their light in touch with the craft, notwithstanding the imminent danger to themselves.

We cannot claim to have any expert knowledge of the methods of aerial defence, but as casual observers, we can record our sincere opinion that the destruction of the Zeppelin and the consequent safety of ourselves and others in the neighbourhood, were in great measure due to those men.

We would like you, if you will, to tell them of our gratitude, and our appreciation of their efforts to ensure our safety.

We are, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Charles Booth”

The top end of Bedford Avenue was a very sensible place to base the searchlight<sup>1</sup>. At the time the Meadway was just a footpath, and there were few trees around Barnet Station, so there would have been a splendid view eastwards towards Enfield and the lower Lee Valley. To the south, Hillside Mansions had yet to be built so there would also have been a panoramic view towards Central London.

It would also appear that the residents of Bedford Avenue were too interested in what was going on to take shelter!



*A Zeppelin in 1932*

#### Acknowledgements

The Herts at War Project [www.hertsatwar.co.uk](http://www.hertsatwar.co.uk)  
Barnet Museum archive

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bedford Avenue is a road off Barnet Hill (A1000), just opposite High Barnet underground station.

# Tragedy and honour for Hertfordshire in World War One

Mike Noronha and Jeff Gale

Many Hertfordshire men served with The Hertfordshire Regiment, a pre-war 'Territorial' unit of part-time soldiers. Before the First World War, the Territorials were rather looked down upon by the men of the Regular Army. At the start of the War in August 1914 the Regular Army was called upon to form the British Expeditionary Force (BEF); they were supported by a small number of Territorial units including the 1st Herts. Over the next few years these ordinary men fought in major actions of the First World War: Ypres, Loos, the Somme and Passchendaele. Through their dedication, professionalism, courage under fire, and provision of essential support and comradeship whilst fighting beside the elite Guards Brigade, the men of Herts earned the respect of the Regular Army, taking the honorary name of the 'Herts Guards' in the process.

On 31<sup>st</sup> July 1917, on the first morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres (also known as the Battle of Passchendaele) the Herts Guards were in a forward position in the St Julien area of Pilckem Ridge attacking a windmill which marked high ground held by the Germans. There had been a period of heavy rain in the area and, as a result, the forces who were to give cover and support to the Herts soldiers became bogged down and unable to reach their positions. Exposed to withering machine-gun fire, the 600-strong Hertfordshire Regiment suffered 459 casualties including all 20 officers (of whom 11, including the Commanding Officer and the Adjutant, were killed). A story tells of a quartermaster coming to the front with the Herts' lunch rations for the day and asking a senior officer, "Sir, I have the supplies for the Herts Regiment, where may I find them?". He was met with the reply, "Sir, the Herts Regiment is no more."

One of the Herts Regiment officers who fell that day was Alexander Richard Milne, a substantive Lieutenant promoted in the field to Captain; he was the Adjutant and kept the regimental diary. Captain Milne was 21 years old when he died and, according to the Census records, had lived in 'Summerhill' on Leecroft Road in Barnet (as a 4-year-old in 1901) and was boarding at Winchester College in 1911. At the outbreak of war, he was a trainee barrister. His father, Frank, was a barrister and his mother was called Alice. He attended St Stephen's Church in Bell's Hill where there is a plaque

commemorating him. He was also a bell ringer in the parish – probably at St John the Baptist’s (Barnet Church).

In the carnage, destruction and mud of Passchendaele Captain Milne’s body was never recovered or formally identified; with many others, he is remembered with an inscription on the Menin Gate at Ypres. His name appears on the Winchester College War Cloister and on the Chipping Barnet War Memorial. Captain Milne and his comrades are now also remembered with a memorial dedicated to the Hertfordshire Regiment at the scene of the St Julien advance. The local Belgian community granted the land and the Herts at War Project raised the funds to erect the memorial. It was formally unveiled on the centenary of the battle – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017 – by Lady Verulam, the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire. Also in attendance was a delegation from the County and dignitaries from the local community. Recalling the former status of Barnet as an historic town in Hertfordshire, Barnet Museum and the St Stephen’s Church community laid a wreath in honour of the fallen and of Captain Milne in particular.



*Mike Noronha of Barnet Museum at the new memorial to the Hertfordshire Regiment (this photograph and that on inside front cover from Mike Noronha)*

# How World War Two bombing changed residential Barnet

Andrew Christie

Barnet Museum has two Bomb Maps on display in the World War II section; these would have originally been on the walls in Council Offices (one is of Barnet UDC, the other is of East Barnet). They have coloured pins showing different types of bombs and ordnance.

In 1940 bombs fell in Wood Street by Barnet Museum, and the top of Bells Hill. Wood Street was restored to near enough its original state. However at Bells Hill the damage was more devastating; the whole area was changed completely.

When looking at the maps it is interesting to see that, apart from these incidents, many bombs fell in purely residential roads. This caused me to look at these roads and how they look today. It is hard to establish where the bombs fell, until you begin to wonder why, for example, some houses are bungalows, and why some are brick built when the next have pebble dash walls. Two cases in point are Cherry Hill and Elton Avenue. At one time, you could get a clue from the surrounding roof top tiles, but time has weathered them and many have been altered over the years. So, if you study the map, have a look at the houses. It's a bit like detective work.



You can also see bomb maps online at <http://bombsight.org/explore/greater-london/barnet/>



*World War Two bomb damage in Bells Hill (above) and Wood Street*

# Emergency water supplies in World War Two

Don Baker

One of the difficulties that some areas experienced at the start of the blitz was a shortage of water to fight fires. In some areas the mains themselves were damaged, in others demand outstripped supply. To meet these shortfalls local authorities were instructed to provide standing supplies of water to be used in such emergencies.

In Barnet the brick built tank was located at the west end of Ravenscroft Park; the space is now occupied by a grassed over area. After the war the height of the surrounding brick wall was reduced making it into a pleasant pond area and finally the brick surrounding wall was removed altogether.

In New Barnet a circular brick tank, some 6 or 7 feet high was built on a bomb site in Victoria Road, between the junction of Margaret Road and Victoria Avenue where seven or eight houses had been demolished after a bomb fell in October 1940.

To feed this tank a surface 9 inch cast iron water pipe was laid from Jack's Lake in Hadley Wood to the tank along the gutters of Park and Victoria Roads. The pipe was only sunk below the road surface when it had to cross the road. The pipe started at the bridge at the southwestern corner of the lake.



*Jack's Lake in Hadley Wood*

There was a large black cast iron water valve by the bridge to control the flow of water. The pipe then travelled alongside the brook on brick built piers to keep the natural flow, into Park Road then up the gutters to Victoria Road where it went underground to continue to the tank along the western side of the road, again going subsurface to cross Margaret Road.

I don't think that the tank was ever used in an emergency. Such tanks were a mecca for children until an accident happened somewhere and a child drowned, whereupon an edict went out that such tanks had to be fenced off to prevent children getting anywhere near them. After this tall wooden posts were put all around the tank and covered with wire-netting.

The tanks were marked with a black area with a white cross and the initial letters 'EWS'.

After the war the tanks and pipelines were quickly recovered, but the valve by the bridge at Jack's Lake stood sentinel for many a decade.

# The mystery of the Ackworth Sampler

Hazel Conway, Barnet Museum textile curator

In the textile collection at Barnet Museum we have a good collection of samplers, pieces of embroidery, usually made by young girls, consisting of the letters of the alphabet, numbers and sometimes motifs such as birds, animals, trees and houses. They are very often signed with the name of the maker, her age on completion of the sampler and either the name of the school she attended or the place in which she lived. They were made partly to teach girls their letters and also as a way for them to practise needlework, from simple cross-stitch in basic samplers to a range of embroidery stitches in more elaborate examples. It was usual for first attempts at a sampler to be made at about the age of five or six. Recently I have been sorting some of the samplers which are in storage and I made an exciting discovery. I found a sampler, carefully packed in bubble wrap, which was embroidered with the words of a poem entitled 'Providence' and beneath this, the words, 'Maria Benington, Ackworth School, 1821'. The lettering is in black silk thread on a cream linen background, surrounded by an octagonal border. At first glance the lettering looks like print, but on closer inspection it is possible to see the tiny perfect stitches. The sampler has been framed with glass on both sides so that the back, which is as neat as the front, may be seen. There are no signs of any finishing off or loose threads!

Ackworth samplers are famous in the embroidery world. They were made by girls attending Ackworth School, a Quaker establishment in Yorkshire, founded in 1779 by Dr. John Fothergill, a physician and prominent member of the Quakers or Society of Friends, to give them their real name. Quakers were set apart from mainstream society at the time, not only by their plain style of dress and puritanical life-style but also in academic life because it was not possible for Nonconformists to obtain a degree from a university. Fothergill set out to devise an education which would not only emphasise the tenets of Quakerism but would also equip pupils for their future in the wider world. As well as instruction in the moral values of their faith, the curriculum at Ackworth covered English language, writing and arithmetic for both sexes; girls also learnt housewifery and 'useful needlework'. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when all clothing and household linen was hand-made, the ability to use a needle was an essential accomplishment for girls, especially for those likely to go into domestic service.

The school catered for families 'not in affluence' with low fees of 8 guineas a year and was run as a community or 'family' with the pupils expected to contribute manual labour. Girls made and repaired the household linen and sewed or knitted items such as baby linen for sale to outsiders. The boys worked on the land and in the garden and learnt trades which could lead to apprenticeships.

Maria Benington's work is an example of a marking sampler, which, as the name implies, consists of lettering only. These samplers are plain, using only black thread on a cream ground and with little decoration other than a border. Also originating from Ackworth are the medallion samplers which are far more elaborate and colourful. These contain motifs such as birds, squirrels and sprays of flowers as well as octagonal shaped medallions, which, together with their unique style of lettering, give them a distinctive appearance.

Pupils generally entered Ackworth at the age of nine or ten and stayed for between one and four years. Maria Benington (1807-1874) left Ackworth at the age of 14 in 1821, the year in which she finished her sampler. With the help of the present archivist at the school and some digging on the Ancestry website I was able to find out a little about Maria's life. She was the eldest daughter of John Benington, a grocer, and his wife, Elizabeth who lived in North Cave, near Hull. She had a younger brother, John (1809-1831) and a sister, Isabel (1811-1901), who both attended Ackworth School. In 1842, at the age of 35, Maria married William Kitching, a widower, also a former pupil of Ackworth. The marriage took place in the Friends' Meeting House in Wakefield, 'according to the usages of the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers'. William, also a grocer and tea dealer, had three sons from his first marriage to Sarah Hopkins; Edward, George and William. It appears that Maria did not have children of her own. Maria died in 1874 at the age of 67; William survived her by 17 years, dying in 1891 at the age of 86. It would seem that William had a successful business as he left a personal estate of £9, 722 12s 4d., a substantial sum of money at the time. William's sons, Edward and George, pre-deceased their father but his third son, William, went on to be a master at Ackworth School. Maria's sister, Isabel, had a long life, dying in 1901 at the age of 91.

The mystery is how Maria's sampler came to be in Barnet Museum! I would very much like to discover the link between Maria's family and Barnet. Perhaps there are Quaker families in the area who might have the answer? If you have any information about the sampler or indeed the Benington or

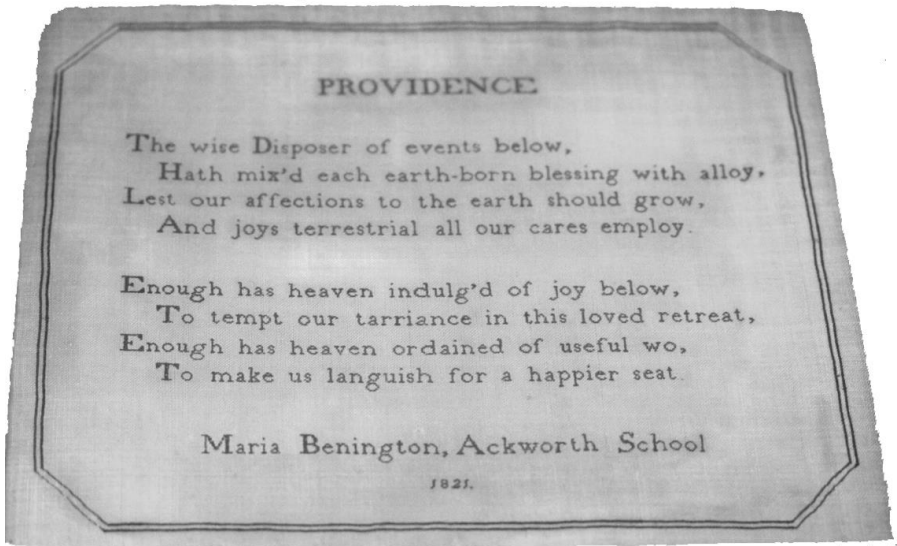


Kitching families, please let us know as we would really like to solve the mystery.

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*Ackworth School* by Elfrida Vipont (London, Lutterworth Press, 1959)



# Barnet and the Second Boer War

*Ken Sutherland-Thomas*

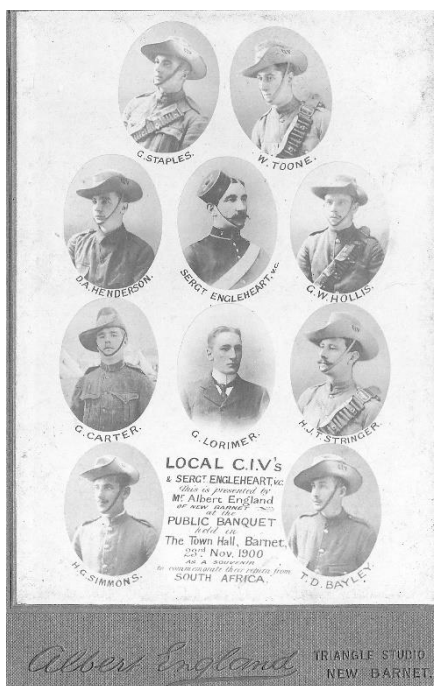
In the late Victorian era, war was thought to be a glorious adventure and in January 1900 Barnet sent off a contingent of men on an expedition to subdue the rebellious Boers in South Africa (which became known as the Second Boer War<sup>1</sup>). Privates F.D. Bayley, G. Carter, H. Stringer, G.E. Staples, H. South and W.G. Toone were all serving with the Barnet Detachment of the 1<sup>st</sup> D.C.O. Middlesex R.V<sup>2</sup>. They were then selected to serve with the City of London Corps and were all, officers and men, given the Freedom of the City of London. Their commanding officer was Major C.J. Hadow of Barnet. These men were all volunteers who were aged between 20 and 30 and enlisted for one year. They were shipped out in three waves on the 'Briton', 'Garth Castle', 'Ariosto', 'Gaul', and 'Kinfauns Castle' between 16 and 21 January, returned home in October 1900 and were then disbanded.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1900 Barnet welcomed the survivors home again with a public banquet at Barnet Town Hall. Barnet Museum holds a copy of a 'Souvenir and Menu' for this event. The menu was roast ribs of beef, roast lamb, pigeon pies, veal and ham pies, roast fowls, roast ducks, York ham, salad and rolls. Dessert was champagne jelly, noyau jelly, macedoine jelly, lemon jelly, strawberry cream, pineapple cream, fruit tarts, cheese, celery and 'dessert'. After the toasts came a musical evening with songs such as 'There's a Land' and 'Obedient to the Call'.



Who were they? At Barnet Museum we have a postcard produced locally at the Triangle Studio, New Barnet. It depicts 'Local C.I.V.s' or City of London Imperial Volunteers: C. Staples; W. Toone; D.A. Henderson; G.W. Hollis; G. Carter; G. Lorimer; H.J.T. Stringer; H.C. Simmons; T.D. Bayley with Sergt. Engleheart V.C. It would seem that, allowing for possible misprints, Bayley, Carter, Staples, Stringer and Toone survived, and Private South either did not or had been unable to attend the photo session. Major

Hadow must have been there as he is described on the 'Souvenir and Menu' as the Vice-Chairman for the evening.<sup>3</sup>



### Christ Church Boer War Memorial

Christ Church in St Albans Road, Barnet, has within its grounds a memorial to eight men from Barnet, former pupils at Christ Church School, who fell during the Second Boer War (1899-1902).

COLYER	CHARLES	King's Royal Rifles
JACKAMAN	FREDERICK	King's Royal Rifles
PHILLIPS	WILLIAM J	King's Royal Rifles
MOORE	JOHN	Royal Scots Greys
ABBOTT	THOMAS W	Bedfordshire Regiment
BLACKWELL	ARTHUR	Bedfordshire Regiment
MEAD	WILLIAM	Bedfordshire Regiment
VENTHAM	EDWIN F	Royal Inniskilling Dragoons

## **Victoria Cross recipients from Barnet**

Private Albert Edward Curtis, who lived in Longmore Avenue in Barnet, was awarded the Victoria Cross for exceptional bravery during fighting at Onderbank Spruit in 1900 during the Second Boer War. After the war he served as a Yeoman Warden at the Tower of London, until retiring and returning to live in Barnet. He is buried at St Stephen's Church in Chipping Barnet.

Sergeant Henry William Engleheart, an old boy of Queen Elizabeth's School (QE Boys), also won the Victoria Cross in March 1900 for gallantly rescuing a fallen comrade.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This conflict is often just referred to as the 'Boer War', but there was also a First Boer War (1880-81).

<sup>2</sup> The initials DCO stand for 'Duke of Cambridge's Own' regiment; RV is 'rifle volunteers'. The regiment included volunteer battalions.

<sup>3</sup> The Museum is carrying out further research into the Boer War; if you have any additional information, including into the men who fought in the conflict, Barnet Museum would be very glad to hear from you (contact details on inside front cover).



*Barnet Boer War soldiers riding down Barnet High Street*

# The Jesus Hospital Almshouses

Yasmine Webb

It has been said that Barnet Town has almost the largest number of almshouses in all of London, and of this I have no doubt. There are 56 houses in total in the Jesus Hospital group alone. And on discovering the presence of the enthralling Jesus Hospital almshouse cottages in Wood Street, I immediately wondered about their history, and the benefits that Barnet residents had gained by their presence.

## James Ravenscroft

The original Jesus Hospital, now referred to as 'The Hospital', was six houses built in a row for 'six poor ancient women (widow or maids)' over fifty years old. It was built in 1672 and officially endowed in 1679 by James Ravenscroft, a lawyer and merchant. He was born in 1595, probably in London, graduated with a B.A. from Jesus College, Cambridge (from which the name Jesus Hospital is derived) and was called to the Bar in 1626.

James and his father Thomas owned several properties, including in London, Huntingdonshire and Essex, as well as in the Barnet area. James is believed to have died at Fold Farm or ffould Park, Hadley in 1680, where he spent most of his later life. His father's remarkably ornate and rich tomb lies in St John the Baptist Church in Chipping Barnet, in a separate chapel built in 1632. James and other family members were also buried there.



James's significance in Barnet is seen in the naming of Ravenscroft Park in Wood Street (next to Union Street), and a school in Mays Lane (which was renamed The Totteridge Academy in 2011).

In 1678, 10.75 acres of Bethnal Green land was given by James Ravenscroft to the Jesus Hospital, and this gift was enlarged over time through judicious management of the estate and care of its inhabitants by elected trustees (known as 'Visitors') over generations. In the nineteenth century this was

leased out and the land, which eventually had 358 properties built on it, brought in large sums of money to the charity. From 1863 onwards the income was increased by the receipts of ground rents. The surplus paid for other building work, including the 1875 St John the Baptist Church enlargement, the building of a cemetery in Bells Hill in 1895 and the attached St Stephen's Church in 1896, and St Mark's Church in Barnet Vale in 1899.

The Visitors' work increased greatly with managing the Bethnal Green land, maintaining thirty Almshouses and granting pensions. In the 1930s, for the first time a Vice-Chairman was appointed, Mr Lancelot Hasluck (1932-37). He had endowed his own almshouses in 1931 in East Barnet.

By the mid twentieth century the Visitors decided to sell the Bethnal Green estate, which was increasingly costing money in maintenance and repairs. In 1970 they were able to take advantage of a move by the Greater London Council towards acquiring a large chunk of Bethnal Green land. It was sold in 1980. In 1981, the Visitors purchased £255,000 worth of offices and shops in Whetstone that attracted rental income, and the rest of the money acquired from the sale of the Bethnal Green estate was invested. The extra income from these investments enabled the Visitors to extend the charity's domains. A few more residential properties were bought in the 1980s (74 a & b Wood Street after 1982 and 65-69 Union Street in 1983), and they were rented out. These are soon to revert to almshouse status.



## Jesus Hospital

Architecturally the original Jesus Hospital Almshouses are distinct in design, and of charming appearance. They are set back a little from Wood Street, with a large flowered lawn in front. Today only the central archway in the front, gable and the gate piers with the carved over stones with 'JR' and '1679' on them are original. Above the centre archway is a stone plaque with a pediment erected in 1964 as a replica of the 300-year-old original lettering which was so weather worn that it had become illegible. The Latin inscription translates as:

*'To God the Greatest & the Best. This little hospice will remain a place of safety, a permanent memorial of thankfulness to God & of Love for the needy, established by James Ravenscroft, gentleman, and Mary his wife in the year of man's salvation, 1672. May the blessed one Bless it. May it be blessed by those blessed by it'.*

The front lawn was once covered by a pond, until complaints were made in 1862 by Chipping Barnet residents that drains from the almshouses were discharged into the ponds in front causing a nuisance. The proprietor of the adjoining premises named Mr. Coe (hence Coe's Alley) gave consent for a new drain to be carried through his garden connecting to a recently constructed Union Street sewer. The pond was filled in with remnants from the redevelopment of St John the Baptist Parish Church (the work having been paid for by money given by the Jesus Hospital charity).

Front iron railings in front of the almshouses were removed in 1943 for manufacture of armaments for the war, and never replaced by the government. The almshouses were restored in 1887 and modern facilities added in the twentieth century. All the older almshouses hold Grade II status under the conservation of buildings regulations.

A long time ago there used to be a 'Poore Box' outside the almshouses 'to the intent that persons charitably minded may put such Almes therein as God shall move them unto'.

## Ravenscroft Almshouses in Potters Lane and Grasvenor Avenue

In 1927 the Jesus Hospital Charity bought land in Potters Lane and it was decided to erect twelve almshouses. Mr. O.P. Milne was the architect, and a tender was accepted from Messrs. Pettingall & Clark. The cottages were completed in 1929. Eight women residing in Chipping Barnet and four from East Barnet were chosen. The cottages sit in a very quiet road and are set in extensive grounds. Grouped in a semi-circular configuration and linked

by arches, they look as if staged in a fairy tale, so splendidly fine and isolated. The garden seats were bought with money left by George Howard Jobbins a local builder, councillor and former Visitor who lived around the corner.



*Potters Lane almshouses*

The Potters Lane project was so successful that plans were laid for a development in Grasvenor Avenue. Along with land purchased from the Leathersellers for Barnet playing fields, Barnet Council had acquired adjoining land designated for private housing. (This had been farmland, which was used in September each year as the site of Barnet Fair.) Just over one acre of this land was acquired by the Jesus Hospital in September 1930.

Twelve cottages were completed in 1934. The architect was Miss J.E. Townsend of Grays Inn Road and the local builder employed was H.E. Winskell & Co. Nine ladies were accepted from Chipping Barnet and three from East Barnet. These almshouses are secluded cottages which cannot be seen from the road as they are at a lower level. They are beautifully designed examples of contemporary architecture.

Five more almshouses were erected, three in Potters Lane and two in Grasvenor Avenue in 1950.

### **Ravenscroft Lodge**

In October 1970 an explosion in Union Street made uninhabitable three terraced cottages (numbered 33-37), which stood behind the Jesus Hospital. In 1975 the Jesus Hospital charity obtained possession of these cottages, and built the Lodge. The ground level became office accommodation and a communal room was built in 1976-8. This is used for social occasions and



by Visitors for business meetings. Above, three flats to be used as almshouses were designed by local architect Mr R.E. Barnes of Barnet, and Challen & Cross were appointed to draw up plans. Mr C.P. Roberts & Co. Ltd's tender was accepted and the flats were finished in 1978, although today only two almshouses stand above Ravenscroft Lodge, with the space enlarged, as the third was deemed too small for use. They are painted white with plant balconies fronting them.

Two alabaster busts of James Ravenscroft and wife Mary (commissioned by their son George, and attributed to Thomas Burman), were removed from their initial site set in the wall of 66 Wood Street (an original Jesus Hospital almshouse) and were placed in the communal room. James Ravenscroft's bust was moulded when he was 73 and Mary's was modelled at the age of 65. She died aged 86 in 1689, living 6 years beyond the death of her son George. Smaller copies of the two busts were installed in the Ravenscroft Chapel at Chipping Barnet Church as noted by the Rector in 1910.

### **Further almshouses added from other benefactors**

Other almshouses set up by local benefactors have become part of the Jesus Hospital group in the twentieth century. Garrets was transferred in 1949, Paggitts in 1984, and Wilbrahams in 2011.

### **Ravenscroft link at Felsted School**

A Mr. F.W. Jefferies (Visitor from 1973 to 1992) visited Felsted School in Essex where there is a link with the Ravenscroft family. An old Felstedean called Lt. Colonel D.C. Philpott, a bachelor who was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Punjab Cavalry, bequeathed his property to the school. He was a descendent of the Ravenscrofts, and his bequest included family portraits in oil. The earliest is of Thomas Ravenscroft, James's father, who died in 1630. It is said to have been painted in 1710.<sup>1</sup> The work includes a small shield bearing the Ravenscroft arms in a form identical to those that appear in the east window of Ravenscroft Chapel in Chipping Barnet Church and in Tudor Hall, formerly occupied by Queen Elizabeth's grammar school, of which Thomas was a governor for 20 years.

### **Architect R.E. Barnes and Jesus Hospital**

The architect R.E. Barnes carried out work on several of the Jesus Hospital almshouses. Together with building the Ravenscroft Lodge in the 1970s he

prepared plans for major upgrading of Garrett almshouses in 1981 and built the two Mary Ravenscroft cottages at 88-90 Wood Street adjoining Garrett's which were occupied in May 1983. In 1990 Barnes prepared plans to rebuild the rear extensions of 62-72 Wood Street and in 1979 new wrought iron gates specially designed by him were installed in the Wood St. gardens. The work of Mr. Barnes was held in high esteem.

### **What qualifies you to apply for a cottage?**

Any lady over 50 years old who lives within a specific area in Barnet town is eligible, although others from further afield have been accepted. Applicants must genuinely need to move and be unable to afford to rent private housing. The ladies need to be able to live independently without a debilitating illness. No pets are allowed and no overnight guests. There is a small charge called a maintenance cost and a payment for utilities, but in relation to commercial housing these costs are exceedingly low. The ages of residents range from the early 50's to the 90's. Accommodation in the almshouses was originally free but, in more recent times, all the almshouse inhabitants have been charged.

I find it very inspiring that these almshouses, built as they were out of generosity and goodwill for the citizens of Barnet., should still benefit a number of ladies today.

### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Written on the painting: '1710 or a little later' (information from Christopher Dawkins, Archivist, Felsted School, Essex).

*Photographs in this article taken by the author (including on facing page)*

# Barnet History Journal

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All images are from Barnet Museum's collection, unless otherwise stated.

Front cover illustration: Barnet Boer War soldiers riding down Barnet High Street

Back cover illustration: Boys' Farm Home, East Barnet

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*Ravenscroft Almshouses in Potters Lane (from article on opposite page)*

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*Barnet History Journal* has been produced in memory of Dr Gillian Gear BEM (1943-2015), a long-standing volunteer and driving force behind Barnet Museum for many years, and a good friend to many at the Museum. As the editor of *Herts Past and Present Journal* and Barnet Museum's newsletter, she would have taken a lead in producing this Journal.