



CAMBERWELL  
FAIR

# RARE DOINGS

The History of Camberwell and its Fair



# THE HISTORY OF CAMBERWELL AND ITS FAIR



LOTTERY FUNDED

## Overview of The Heritage Lottery Funded Project:

Camberwell Fair is first recorded in 1279 and was then held every August until 1855. Originally the Fair was probably held in 'God's Acre', the immediate grounds of St Giles Church. By 1444 it had probably moved out of the church grounds to Church Street, opposite the Cock Pub. By the 18th century it had moved to Camberwell Green. Originally the event ran for three weeks, from 9th August to 1st September (the latter being the feast day of the church's patron saint, St Giles.)

By the 1800s the Fair, with its catchphrase "Rare doings at Camberwell", was only 3 days long - the 19th to 21st August. The village had become more middle class, farming had declined, and the Fair's traditional rural economic functions had eroded; the Fair became more a place of urban pleasures: illicit sex, debauchery, and bizarre circus acts. Our project highlights and questions these changes.

The growing middle class of 18th-19th century Camberwell hated this working class disruption. Their moral outrage led to applications at Bow Street Magistrates Court in the early 19th century for 12 officers to keep the peace at the Fairs of Camberwell and Peckham.

There were several concerted attempts during the early 19th century to shut the Fair down. By 1855, the Fair's days were numbered after a local Committee for the Abolition of Camberwell Fair was set up by leading residents. This project has looked at how the closing down of Camberwell Fair can be seen in the context of a widespread campaign in the 19th Century, to impose social and moral control over the growing working classes.

## What Has This Exciting Project Involved?

1. Working with 10 community volunteers on the heritage of Camberwell Green, the fair, and wider Camberwell.



2. Training sessions with the following:

- Alan Crookham and Jane Ruddell on how to use archives
- Southwark Local History and Library archive.
- Object handling and a display created from ephemera in the Southwark Cuming Collection.



- An introduction and training session to the extensive collections of the London Metropolitan Archives.
- New artwork created in the community with Harriet Hill.
- A partnership with People's Company to create the animated tour.



## With Thanks To:

Francesca Howell and Katherine Sagar from HLF

Andre and all the team at Camberwell Fair.

Maureen Roberts and the team at LMA.

Judy Aitken at the Cuming Collection

Dr Patricia Dark and the team at Southwark history library.

Harriet Hill-artist.

Volunteer Researchers: Sam, Neil, Adriana, Rawlene, Bronwen, Judith, Shelagh, Chris, Sally, John and Jackie.

People's Company actors: Flynn, Rawlene, Jackie, Mina, Shelagh, Kimberly, Sam, Jackie, Massimo and Erina.

Alan Crookham and Jane Ruddell for the training sessions.

Maria for the amazing marketing.

Crossway Church and Southwark Playhouse for training sessions.

Notting Hill Genesis and 2 Inspire Youth programmes.

# ORIGINS OF CAMBERWELL FAIR

The word “fair” is derived from the Latin word “Feria” meaning “festival”; these originated during the Roman Empire, and were held mostly on holy days to give ordinary people a break from their normal lives. Later on, these “Feria” started taking place on Christian holy dates with merchants coming together at Churchyards to sell their merchandise.

In 1066 the English throne was won by William, Duke of Normandy. Evidence suggests that English fairs, essentially temporary markets, were inspired by European custom. The idea certainly caught on - the Crown issued over 1500 charters, granting the rights to towns to hold markets or fairs from 1199 to 1350.

Camberwell Fair had no such recorded charter; it was first recorded in 1279 and was probably held in ‘God’s Acre’ - the grounds of St Giles’ Church, which used the event to raise revenue. At this time, the Lord of Camberwell Manor (in which the Church sat) GILBERT DE CLARE, 7TH EARL OF GLOUCESTER (1243-1295) claimed the right to licence the making of ale and bread in “Camerwelle”. The Earl so named for his fiery coloured hair, and was one of the wealthiest and politically important men in the land - he even married King Edward I’s daughter in 1290.



“The Red Earl”

Originally the Fair ran for three weeks, culminating on 1st September – the feast of St Giles. The Fair probably moved out of church grounds in 1444 (the Archbishop of Canterbury banned fairs in church property) to the corner of Denmark Hill.

Medieval Camberwell had a mill and supported itself from the surrounding fields. Barley was grown and there was a brew-house on what was to become Peckham Road. It supplied the City of London with fresh fruit, vegetables, and milk, and many market gardens grew up in the area. The annual Fair would have given locals an opportunity to buy rarer goods such as spices, wine and meat and perhaps trade in livestock.



Above: A small part of John Roque’s map of 1746 with the oval-shaped hill marked ‘Fox under Hill’ just south the the village of Camberwell.

Even by 1746 as this map by John Roque shows, Camberwell is still a relatively rural area of gardens and fields.

Medieval fairs attracted all sorts: for peasants, they were a break from their monotonous routine, whereas nobles might purchase exotic goods from far afield. Musicians, dancers, jugglers and magicians attended these events to entertain the crowds. There were games, music, dancing, and drinking. Medieval fairs were a cultural occasion as people from different backgrounds exchanged news and ideas. So not unlike our forms of networking today.



A Village Fair (Pieter Breughel the Younger)

This early 15th century painting, *A Village Fair* (Pieter Breughel the Younger), gives a hint of what medieval Camberwellians probably got up to!

## SOURCES:

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- Blanche – pp 312-313
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- <http://www.medievalchronicles.com/medieval-life/medieval-fair/>
- <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol6/pp269-286>
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# CAMBERWELL FAIR: A HISTORY



Image 1 (Image courtesy of Southwark History Library)

(1) From 1279 to 1855 Camberwell Fair was held every August. Originally held in 'God's Acre' in the grounds of St Giles Church (to raise funds for the church). Most likely moved out of the church grounds in 1444, when the Archbishop of Canterbury banned fairs in church property.

(2) Fair moved to Church Street, opposite the Cock Pub (on the corner of Denmark Hill) By the 18th century the Fair had moved to Camberwell Green (see image 1).

(3) Originally the Fair ran for three weeks from 9th August to 1st September (the latter being the feast of the patron saint St Giles). By the 1800s the Fair had a catchphrase of 'Rare doings at Camberwell', it was only 3 days long – from 19th to 21st August.



Image 2 (Image courtesy of Southwark History Library)

(4) The village surrounding the Green had become middle class, farming had declined and with it the Fair's traditional rural economic functions – the Fair became more a place of urban pleasures – with illicit sex, debauchery, drink and food, and bizarre circus acts. See the image of the clown and the conjurer courtesy of the Southwark History Library, *Sideshow and attractions at Camberwell Fair* (Image 2).



Image 3 (Image courtesy of Southwark History Library)

(5) The Fair had food stalls selling oysters, pickled salmon, fried plaice, gingerbread and 'pedlerie' (junk) toys. There were various weird and wonderful exhibitions, performing animals, people with bizarre deformities, plays, merry-go-rounds, shies and more – hawkers, pickpockets, jugglers, performers, magicians – all in all a great sprawling rowdy muddle. See the advertisement for the amazing 'Stone Eater': Image 3 (Courtesy of the London Metropolitan Archives).



Image 4 (Courtesy of the London Metropolitan Archives)

(6) People from all over south London flocked to the event with carts, donkeys and old nags, offering rides with the drivers singing songs or bantering with each other. But the growing middle class of 18-19th Century Camberwell hated this working class disruption, "For these three days the residents of Camberwell were compelled to witness disgusting and demoralizing scenes in which they were powerless to prevent." See the ticket (Image 4) from 1806 giving Richardson a plot of 56 feet to provide entertainments (courtesy of Southwark History Library). See also the image of the

Richardsons (Image 5) on the green (courtesy of Southwark History: *Sideshow and attractions at Camberwell Fair*)

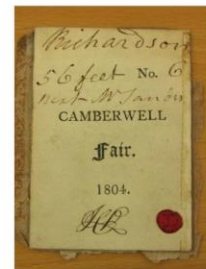


Image 5 (courtesy of Southwark History Library)



Image 6 (courtesy of Southwark History Library)

(7) It's worth noting that Peckham Fair ran for the next three days every year (22nd to 24th August) and was similarly troublesome. Applications were made at Bow Street Magistrates Court in the early 19th century for "12 officers to keep the peace at the Fairs of Camberwell and Peckham, at 5 shillings per day." (the two fairs together were seen by the local authorities and well-to-do as one big 6-day nightmare).

(8) In 1807, a notice was pasted up: "Notice is hereby given that no drinking, booths, unlawful exhibitions or music, will be permitted at Camberwell or Peckham Fairs. That the constables have strict orders to prevent all gaming or seize and carry away all implements used or employed therein, and to apprehend all the offenders, and that no dancing or music will be permitted at public houses, which are required to be closed shut at eleven o'clock at night. By order of the magistrates."

See the image below (image 6) for the frenetic energy of the fair. (courtesy of the Southwark History Library: *Sideshow and attractions at Camberwell Fair*)



Image 7 (courtesy of the Southwark History Library)

(9) There were several attempts during the early 19th century to shut the Fair down. In 1823 a Camberwell Vestry meeting was held to see what authority there was, in the form of an old grant or charter, to hold the Fair. This backfired, as evidence was produced in a Petty Session case to support its right to be held. Another attempt was made in 1825; in 1827 the Vestry managed to ban Peckham Fair for good.

(10) The attempt to shut Camberwell Fair in 1832: "such institutions were intended to be marts for trade and not sources of Dissipation and Riot." The Fair was called a "Universally admitted evil." However, this was not universal as the poor loved it; it was a source of income for many of the poor and working classes, both legally and through crime, and the conning of fairgoers also offered relief from the daily grind of poverty. It was also a place for people to socialise across the class divide as can be seen in the picture below from the Southwark Art collection (Image 7: courtesy of Southwark History Library: a picture of the fair in 1850 by George Sydney Shephard).



Image 8 (courtesy of Southwark History Library)

# THE FACES OF CAMBERWELL

## ACTIVISTS AND ARTISTS, POETS AND RADICALS....

**DR JOHN LETTSOM**  
(1744-1815)

*"One of the most extraordinary men of his day"*. A wealthy Camberwell landowner, Lettsom was the son of a West Indian planter; educated in England, he worked in the West Indies as a medical practitioner.

Renowned for being liberal, philanthropic and a noted abolitionist; Lettsom supported the poor and vulnerable; and was famed for his contributions to charitable institutions.

Grove Hill Villa, his estate at the top of Camberwell Grove was purchased as part of the original Manor of Camberwell-Buckingham. The property stretched from the hill to present Lettsom Street and was home to orchards and kitchen gardens; making use of the natural spring (which is said to be the same that fed the original 'Camber Well' nearby, noted for its healing properties).



Lettsom's Grove Hill Villa.  
Credit photo: 'London Metropolitan Archives'



Lettsom family portrait.  
Credit photo: 'Wellcome Collection'

**WILLIAM BLAKE**  
(1757-1827)

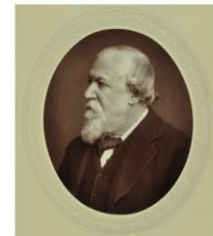
Camberwell Grove was a favourite of the great painter, whilst Peckham Rye inspired his creative development, (at 8 years of age, Blake claimed to have seen the Prophet Ezekiel).

**MARY HAYS**  
(1759-1843)

A novelist, Hays lived in Camberwell from 1807 to 1824. She wrote against the slave trade and attended the Dissenting Academy in Hackney (members of which were active in anti-slavery movements). Considered a radical, her novels were filled with feminist and class hierarchy criticism.

**ROBERT BROWNING**  
(1812-1889)

The famous writer lived in Camberwell until he was 28. He was born in Cottage Green off Wells Way in Camberwell and attended Peckham School.



Robert Browning.  
Credit: 'London Metropolitan Archives'

**JOHN RUSKIN**  
(1819 -1900)

An art critic and social commentator; author, poet and artist, Ruskin is one of our most famous residents - he designed part of a stained-glass window at St Giles Church and Ruskin Park is named after him.



John Ruskin's home in Denmark Hill.  
Credit photo: 'Camberwell through time by John D Beasley'



Dr Harold Moody (1882-1947).  
Credit photo: 'English Heritage'

Ruskin supported art considered avant-garde at the time. He also believed that man achieved humanity through creative labour, not drudgery; and rebelled against 19th century capitalism. He lectured at the Camberwell Working Men's Institute; his talk on *"Work and Play"* in 1865 highlighted how work should be fulfilling and enjoyable. His ideas influenced William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement; Ruskin also helped set up the National Trust, the National Art Collections Fund and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

**HAROLD MOODY**  
(1882-1947)

A doctor and activist, Moody founded the League of Coloured Peoples in 1931, the first Black-led political organisation in England. Born in Jamaica as the son of a pharmacist, Harold came to England to study medicine at King's College. After winning prizes and qualifying as a doctor, he was rejected for the post of medical officer despite being the best qualified candidate. In 1913 Moody started a successful practice in Peckham; and amongst other notable achievements, Moody helped Black people find lodgings and work.

**UNA MARSON**  
(1905-1965)

*"... No more self-hated masquerading as integration. No more rejecting your own Ethiop's child for somebody else's Barbie doll. You are part of a strong African-Caribbean influenced literary tradition. Affirm your right as an individual, a woman and a writer to be both Black and British."*

A writer, anti-racist, feminist and activist, Marson lived in Brunswick Square (now Brunswick Park). Arriving in England in 1932, Marson was the first Black woman programme maker at the BBC. West Indies Calling was her maiden programme; she later founded Caribbean Voices, as the BBC's first Black woman producer. Marson also worked as secretary to the League of Coloured Peoples with Dr Harold Moody. She joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and as Haile Selassie's secretary she joined him at League of Nations in 1936.

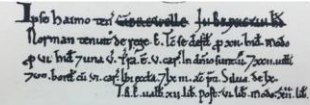
# CAMBERWELL THROUGH THE AGES I

## SAXON CAMBERWELL

**410-1066** As one of the oldest villages in London, a manor is said to have existed (with over 60 acres of meadow land and a church), owned by Haims, Viscount or Count Depute, of Brixton Hundred, or Sheriff of Surrey.

## MEDIEVAL CAMBERWELL

**1086** - Domesday Book mentions 'Cambrewelle' and St Giles Saxon church; owned by Haimo (Sheriff of Surrey), half-brother to King William I.



Extracts from Domesday Book relating to Camberwell. Credit photo 'Ye Parish of Camberwell by William Harnett Blanch'

*The name, Camberwell may derive from the old English Cumerwell or Comberwell ('Well of Britons') referring to the Celtic inhabitants (the 'Welsh' or original Britons, who called themselves Cumbri). Alternative theories suggest the name means 'Cripple Well'.*

**1100s** - William, Earl of Gloucester, natural son of Henry I, possessed a portion of the original Camberwell manor, including Peckham; he gave the church to the monks of Bermondsey, the manor remained in the family until 1350; King John (1167-1216) was known to enjoy hunting around Camberwell.

**1152** - St Giles Church rebuilt in stone by the Lord of the Manor, the Earl of Gloucester.

**1400s** - Manor of Camberwell passed to the Duke of Buckingham and re-named Camberwell-Buckingham, remaining in the family until Edward, Duke of Buckingham was beheaded in 1521 for

treason against Henry VIII. The family home sat at the foot of Camberwell Grove and Grove Lane.

**1583** - After passing through various hands, the manor was purchased by Edmund Bowyer. Bowyer House was built during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I; and after the suppression of religious houses, it was granted to Sir Thomas Wyatt, (beheaded in 1554 for his attempted rebellion, in the first year of Queen Mary's reign). The house was pulled down in 1861, to make way for the railways.



Bowyer House. Credit photo 'Ye Parish of Camberwell by William Harnett Blanch'

## STUART CAMBERWELL

**1615** - Wilson's Grammar School for boys founded by Edward Wilson, the Vicar of St Giles

**1665** - Great Plague - over 100 Camberwell residents died

**1674** - First local Camberwell government and Vestry appointed, (replaced in 1900 by Borough Council).

**1600s** - King Charles I (1600-1649) and King Charles II (1630-1685) enjoyed hunting around Camberwell.

**1709s** - The 'Old House on the Green' on the south side of Camberwell Green is built. Demolished in 1852 to build Wren Road Church, replaced by The Colonnades flats.



The Old House on the Green painted by J.B. Cuming (1820). Credit 'Camberwell through time by John D Beasley'

## GEORGIAN CAMBERWELL

**1717** - Champion Lodge built for Champion de Crespigny family - boundary wall can still be seen on Love Walk; Land called the 'Vineyard' given to St Giles Church indicating grapes may have grown on the slopes of Camberwell Grove.



Champion Lodge, Camberwell. By James Baker Pyne (1800-1870). Credit photo 'Kelmars Hall'

**1721** - Greencoat School built, facing the Green from the north.

**1745** - John Rocque's map of Camberwell shows Rainbow lane (now Southampton Way); Lamastee Lane (now Wyndham Road); Walnut Tree Grove (now Camberwell Grove).



Camberwell c. 1745 from John Rocque - A map of London and 10 miles around. Credit photo 'The story of Camberwell by Mary Boast'

**1748** - Camberwell Hall built at 45 Grove Lane. used for social activities, including Camberwell Working Men's Institute, whilst it was here that a meeting for the Freedmen's Aid Society. Art

critic John Ruskin lectured here in 1865 and Dickens included it in Sketches by Boz. Now a private residence.

**1769** - Blackfriars Bridge opens linking Camberwell to the city

**1770s** - First Georgian terraced houses built in Camberwell Grove

**1798** - "Camberwell Military Association" formed under Claude Champion de Crespigny, a volunteer group raised to meet the threat of invasion by Napoleon.

## REGENCY & EARLY VICTORIAN CAMBERWELL

**1801** - Census for parish of Camberwell - 7,059 residents

**1810** - Grand Surrey Canal extended to Camberwell

**1819** - Grove Chapel built on Camberwell Grove

**1823** - Failed attempt by Camberwell Vestry to close down Camberwell Fair

**1835** - Horse drawn Omnibus service introduced.

**1841** - Census for parish of Camberwell - 39,868 residents; St Giles Church is destroyed by fire



The ruins of Camberwell Old Church. Credit photo 'Ye Parish of Camberwell by William Harnett Blanch'

**1842** - *Spring Song* (originally *Camberwell Green*) composed by Mendelssohn

**1844** - St Giles Church re-opens (by Sir George Gilbert Scott - architect of St Pancras Hotel & Albert Memorial)

# CAMBERWELL THROUGH THE AGES II



St Giles Church c. 1850.  
Credit photo 'The story of Camberwell by Mary Boast'

**1851** - Horse buses run by transport company, Tillings

**1853** - Rise of early music halls in the back of public houses (Father Redcap was one of the originals)

**1855** - Last Camberwell Fair

**1859** - Camberwell Green opens as public park; The 'First Surrey Rifles' formed, many of which gave their lives in WWI and WWII.



First Surrey Rifles. WWI Greeting Card (1918).  
Credit photo 'London Borough of Lambeth'

## MID VICTORIAN LONDON

**1861** - Census for parish of Camberwell - 71,488 residents; Old Bowyer House demolished (near Castle Mead) to make way for railways

**1862** - Camberwell New Road station opens (Station Rd); Camberwell Gate station opens (John Ruskin St)

**1866** - Denmark Hill station opens

**1876** - Mary Datchelor's school opens

**1870s** - Growth of London's working class population; Horse-powered trams making area more accessible



Horse drawn tram.  
Credit photo 'London Metropolitan Archives'

## LATE VICTORIAN LONDON

**1891** - Census for parish of Camberwell - 235,344 residents; South London Art Gallery and Camberwell Baths built. The area of, what is now known as Burgess Park was very industrialised.

**1894** - Metropole opens as Theatre & Playhouse on junction of Coldharbour Lane / Denmark Hill (later became Camberwell Empire/Odeon).

**1896** - Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts built; Camberwell's own music hall opens - Oriental Palace of Varieties, founded by the famous comedian, Dan Leno (on corner of Denmark Hill/Orpheus Street).

**1899** - Oriental Palace rebuilt as Camberwell Palace, by 1912, the theatre was showing films. Closed in 1956.



Playbill from Camberwell Palace of Varieties c. 1900.  
Credit photo 'The story of Camberwell by Mary Boast'

## EDWARDIAN CAMBERWELL

**1901** - Census for parish of Camberwell - 259,339 residents 1900s - Up to 250 electric-powered trams pass Camberwell Green every hour on 14 different routes

**1902** - Hermit's Cave public house built

**1905** - Lyndhurst Junior School built

**1907** - Ruskin Park established

**1910** - Camberwell Green Peabody Trust flats built

**1913** - King's College Hospital built

## WW1 CAMBERWELL

**1914** - Golden Domes Picture Theatre opens at 28-32 Denmark Hill (later Rex Cinema & Essaldo Cinema)

**1915** - Maudsley Hospital built

**1916** - Camberwell New Rd and Camberwell Gate stations close

**1917** - Zeppelin air raid on Calmington Road (now Burgess Park) kills 12 people.

## PRE-WAR & WWII CAMBERWELL

**1927** - Grove House Tavern rebuilt

**1934** - Camberwell (now Southwark) Town Hall built

**1931** - Camberwell Green is one of 461 London squares given protection under the London Squares Preservation Act 1931.

**1939** - Empire rebuilt as Odeon cinema (by Mather - closed 1975)

**1940** - Camberwell heavily bombed during Blitz; Regal Cinema opens at 254-272 Camberwell Road (bombed same year)

**1943** - Plan for Burgess Park with slum clearances

**1944** - As one of the worst hit areas of London during the war, barrage balloons are a familiar sight, put up to intercept low flying aircraft. Nearly all the houses in Camberwell are damaged during the war, with over 5,600 totally destroyed.



WWII bomb damage.  
Credit photo 'Camberwell Borough Council'



Historic photo taken on 6 July 1952, the day after trams ran through Camberwell for the last time.  
Credit photo 'Camberwell through time by John D Beasley'

## POST WAR CAMBERWELL

**1954** - Champion Park estate opened (on site of Ruskin's house)

**1964** - Syd Barrett (later of Pink Floyd) attends Camberwell Art School

**1967** - Pink Floyd first official photo session in Ruskin Park



Pink Floyd's first photoshoot in Ruskin Park.  
Photographer Colin Prime. Credit photo 'Rock Archive'

**1970** - Grand Surrey canal closes; Camberwell Society formed

**1974** - Burgess Park named after Jessie Burgess, the first woman to be Mayor of Camberwell.

**1981** - Camberwell Green and surrounds designated a Conservation Area

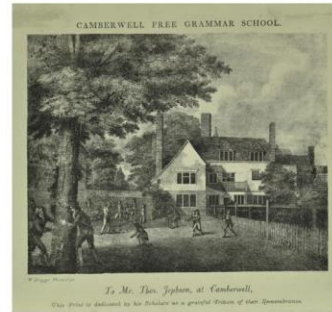
**1984** - Denmark Hill station rebuilt after 1980 fire



# SCHOOL EDUCATION IN CAMBERWELL

In Victorian Britain the desire to curtail the perceived excesses of the working classes found expression not only in banning fairs like the one at Camberwell, but also in the preparation of young people to work reliably in factories and mills. Religion was at the centre of schooling, and schools told parents how they were to support the Christian instruction of their children.

Camberwell had schools for the well-to-do many centuries before the perceived desirability of educating the working classes, a development that was often seen as dangerous by those who feared the empowerment of the common people. *(All Images from the London Metropolitan Archives)*



In 1615, during the reign of James I, Camberwell Free Grammar School was established by the Rev. Edward Wilson, Vicar of Camberwell. It was to become Wilson's School, which is still a boys' grammar school, today, although it is now located in Sutton. Edward Wilson stipulated that the master was to be "chosen out of the founder's kindred before any

others", and to be "sound in religion, body, and mind; gentle, sober, honest, virtuous, discreet, and approved for a good facility in teaching - if such a one may be gotten!"

In 1777, Dr Wanostrocht opened his Academy in the Peckham Road, the King Alfred's School for Boys. It was used by the Royal Naval School before becoming an asylum in 1846.



Camberwell Collegiate School opened in 1835 and closed in 1867. Denmark Hill Grammar School had a shorter span from 1837 to 1865. Both faced competition from other boys' schools, including the independent Dulwich College.

In 1878, a school for girls was established with a long-lost bequest from Mary Datchelor, who died in 1725, leaving money for a school for boys. Mary Datchelor's School closed in 1981, rather than following the policy of the Inner London Education Authority to become co-educational and comprehensive.



In the middle of the 19th century ragged schools were created for destitute children by volunteer teachers, who were mostly women. There was scant provision in Camberwell, which means that the very poorest and destitute children would have been in a workhouse, in prison or on the streets.

The Greencoat and National School - from 1839, St George's Camberwell National School - was built on the site of a school, founded by Henry Cornelisen in 1721 "for the Christian instruction of poor children". National Schools provided elementary education to the children of the poor in accordance with the teaching of the Church of England.

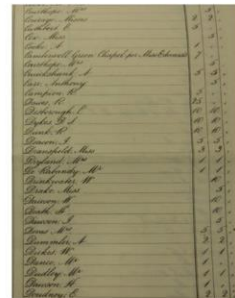


# WHAT LED TO THE ABOLITION OF CAMBERWELL FAIR IN 1855?

Attempts to restrict and abolish London fairs were made throughout the eighteenth century. Campaigners secured measures to restrict Camberwell Fair as early as 1807. In 1827, the Vestry managed to ban Peckham Fair for good. In 1823, "A petty session was held at Union Hall, in Southwark, in order to put down Camberwell fair.. but it nevertheless survived, and was allowed to bring annual annoyance to the district till August, 1855, in which month the Green was encumbered for the last time with these disreputable gatherings". Image painted after the last fair in 1855. (Courtesy of Southwark History Library).



In June 1856 the Committee for the Abolition of Camberwell Fair collected donations totalling £2032 five shillings and three pence. (Image courtesy of Southwark History Library)



Sufficient to purchase the lease of Camberwell Green from the Lords of the Manor. Prior to 18 August 1856, the date on which the fair was to take place, local magistrates granted an order preventing a breach of the peace. It rendered the fair illegal and prohibited it being held in future.

**NATIONAL ISSUES THAT MIGHT HAVE INFLUENCED THE FAIR BEING ABOLISHED:**

**FEAR OF GANG RELATED YOUTH CRIME** - due to a decline in apprenticeships and the disruptive effects of industrialisation on family life after 1800. Crowded fairs provided rich pickings. "Between 1830 and 1860, over half of all defendants tried at the Old Bailey for picking pockets were younger than 20 years of age".

**INCREASING FEAR OF THE MOB BY THE MIDDLE CLASS.** In the decades following the Gordon Riots of 1780, the middle class had "increasingly nervous perceptions of urban mass phenomena" and "anxiety about the authority and power of the crowd".

**INFLUENCE OF THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT.** In 1838, temperance Chartists, working for universal suffrage, saw the campaign against alcohol as a way of proving that working-class people were responsible enough to be granted the vote. However, opposition was strong: the Sale of Beer Act 1854 which restricted Sunday opening hours was repealed, following widespread rioting. There was a concerted campaign to highlight why it was morally dangerous to visit the fair. (Image Courtesy of London Metropolitan Archives).



**WHAT LOCAL ISSUES RESULTED IN THE DEMISE OF THE FAIR?**

**ITS REPUTATION FOR ENCOURAGING UNRULY BEHAVIOUR:** "...an annual fair, almost rivalling in riotousness that at Greenwich". "For the three days of the fair, the residents of Camberwell were compelled to witness disgusting and demoralising scenes which they were powerless to prevent".

**CONCERN ABOUT LOCAL GANG RELATED CRIME:** the Forty Elephants, an all-female crime syndicate based in the Elephant and Castle worked alongside the notorious Elephant and Castle gang and effectively ran the south London underworld. Maggie Hughes, jailed for stealing diamond rings, was a member of the Forty Elephants gang. (Image-Guardian Unlimited)



**CONCERN FOR PUBLIC SAFETY.** In 1807 the Annual Register reported a fire having broken out at the fair in a magician's booth when, "an unlucky boy blew up a sausage-pan". Increased presence and influence of churches in Camberwell. Between 1819 and 1852 four new churches and one new chapel were built in Camberwell, in addition to the first Vestry building, Havil Street, built in 1827.

**INCREASING POPULATION.** Camberwell's population had doubled in the thirty years to 1854. The Vestry was concerned that much local land was now given over to buildings and concluded there was an exponential increase in the need for burial plots required locally.

**CAMBERWELL WAS INCREASINGLY GENTRIFIED** with some notable residents: Thomas Hood, humourist and author, John Ruskin, art critic and watercolourist and Robert Browning, poet all lived locally during the period leading to the fair's demise. Look at the leaflet giving the eight reasons why!

**Other Sources:** Edward Walford, 'Camberwell', in Old and New London: Volume 6 (London, 1878) Ordering the Mob: London's Public Punishments, c. 1783-1868, Matthew Trevor White British Library

# RICH PICKINGS FOR PICKPOCKETS

Camberwell Fair was like a magnet attracting people from all over London eager for a break from the daily monotony of their lives and to have fun. Lively throngs of people from all over London crowded the streets of Camberwell during those summery August days and nights, filling the place with hubbub and laughter.

But where there are crowds, there are criminals and Camberwell Fair promised rich pickings for pickpockets. Most pickpockets were boys, and thought to have progressed through natural talent, via petty theft, to the more skilful art of relieving honest folk of their possessions. It was thought to be especially skilful and boys were believed to have been chosen for their gifts and instructed in the art. Fagin and the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist* was one such story and set around this time. Even these boys' appearance was thought superior to the common criminal.

He was a slim agile lad with a sharp but not vulgar expression, and small features. His hands were of a singular delicacy and beauty. His fingers were very long, and no lady's could have been more taper. A burglar told me that with such a hand he ought to have made his fortune.  
*Henry Mayhew, Morning Chronicle 1850*

**'THE GREAT NUISANCE'**  
The fair was condemned year after year by local residents especially as a destination for criminals. Gangs of pickpockets were caught and convicted regularly...

*"the noise is intolerable"*

*"a scene of terror and unbounded licentiousness"*

*"disgraceful scenes"*

*"a mischievous and dirty crowd"*

*"intolerable nuisance"*

**BELLS WEEKLY MESSENGER**  
August 24th 1854  
**LAMBETH** Camberwell Fair  
A number of young thieves who had been taken up at the late Camberwell Fair, on charges of picking pockets, and who were remanded to give the constables an opportunity of enquiring into their respective characters, were brought before Mr Elliott for final examinations. The ages of the prisoners ranged from 9 to 16 and it was clear that they had come from all parts of the metropolis for the express purpose of picking the pockets of those who attended the fair.....

**LONDON EVENING STANDARD**  
August 21st 1849  
**CAMBERWELL FAIR**—Upwards of a dozen young pickpockets were committed to prison for different periods for the exercise of their art on Sunday night, Saturday and Saturday night.

*"the evils are so many and so great"*

*"females have been grossly insulted"*

*"destructive of good morals"*

*"riot, licentiousness and confusion of the greatest kind"*

*"has been infested by gangs of robbers"*

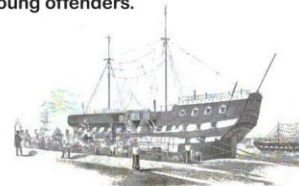
*"much drunkenness and profligacy"*

**WHAT HAPPENED TO THOSE WHO WERE CONVICTED?**

Before 1808, pickpocketing could be punished by death. Given that most were just boys, there was a public backlash against such harsh punishments and the list of crimes punishable by death was reduced, being replaced from 1787 largely by transportation to Australia.

Reactions were mixed, the public seeing it as a humane answer to the problem of juvenile crime, giving the boys a new start in life, with some of the boys themselves sharing that opinion. It was certainly a way of ridding the streets of juvenile criminals.

Youths as young as eight were sentenced to transportation and kept in hulks alongside adult prisoners before being taken to New South Wales and from there to Puer Point in Van Diemen's land, current day Tasmania. They lived in the same atrocious conditions as the men, although, inevitably, they faced additional dangers because of their youth. Around 1825, the Euryalus at Chatham became a hulk solely for young boys. Here the regime was especially severe. Boys aged no more than 14 were kept below deck for 23 hours a day and forced to do manual labour. From 1838, juvenile offenders were increasingly committed instead to the specially constructed juvenile prison, Parkhurst, and in 1843 the Euryalus ceased to be used for young offenders.



**EDWARD DOUGHTY**  
I live in Brunswick-crescent, Cold Harbour-lane, Camberwell. On the 18th of August I was at Camberwell fair, and used my handkerchief—I put it into my pocket—I soon after found the prisoner's hand in my pocket—I caught hold of it—the handkerchief was in his hand, inside the pocket—he tugged his hand out, and ran away—I did not pull his hand out, I put my hand outside my pocket, and felt his hand—he pulled it out, and the handkerchief with it, and ran away with it—I followed, and missed him two or three minutes, and caught him down by Richardson's show—I said, "You have stolen my handkerchief"—he said, "I have not," and I found it in his pocket—this is it—(examining one.)

**RICHARD GOLDINO**  
(Police-constable V 117.) I saw the prisoner at the fair in the morning, and in the afternoon, about five o'clock, I saw him with the prosecutor's handkerchief in his hand—he dropped it as the prosecutor states. (Property produced and sworn to) Prisoner. I did not start away from home before three o'clock—I was looking at one of the shows, and saw the handkerchief on the ground

**FREDERICK HISLOP BROWN**  
I went to Camberwell fair on the 18th of August—I had two shirt pins and a chain in a scarf round my neck—I met Mr. Chappell, and a person named Boyd, whom I knew—I was walking down the fair between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, and met the prisoner—my friend told me he had taken my pins—I turned and took hold of the prisoner—he shook hands with me, and said he was a gentleman, I was one, and we would go out of the fair, and settle it—I have never seen my pins since.

**JOSEPH THOMPSON**  
(police-constable F 39.) I was at the fair in plain clothes. I saw Last feel the prosecutor's pocket several times, then Mills came up, the prisoners nudged each other; they went close to the prosecutor, and looked down at his coat; then Mills took the handkerchief out in a small compass, and put it to his own face—I took him with it.**MILL'S DEFENCE:** It was hanging half-way out of his pocket, I took, hold of it, and was going to give it him; I did not see this other boy at all.

**FREDERICK MILLS**, 20 years old  
**WILLIAM LAST**, 18 years old  
Took a handkerchief worth 1s 6d from Thomas Wright Leggett on 18th August 1840. Both were transported for ten years and Frederick died in Perth in 1844.

**JOHN HAZELL**, 12 years old  
In August 1838, he took a handkerchief worth 5 shillings from Edward Bidwell. Imprisoned for three months.

**WILLIAM TAYLOR**  
32 years old  
Took two breast pins and a chain worth 20 shillings from Frederick Hislop Brown. Transported to Van Diemen's land (Tasmania) for ten years, but only after committing a burglary. He married Mary Trihy in Hobart at the age of 44...

**JAMES HINKLEY**, 12 years old  
In August 1840, he took a handkerchief worth 3 shillings from Edward Doughty and was transported.

## HOW TO PICK POCKETS

1. Pickpocketing needs patience and practice.
2. Best place for pickpocketing is in a crowd, like a market or fair.
3. Identify a target or 'mark'; don't choose people who stand out from the crowd.
4. Find out where they keep their valuables by watching; people touch to check.
5. Be stealthy and blend in. Don't look suspicious.
6. Distraction is key eg 'bump and lift' or staging and argument; you might like to work with a partner. People are particularly distracted at fairs and markets.
7. Once distracted, you can 'dip' and 'lift' the item...

## HOW TO AVOID BEING PICKPOCKETED

1. Be particularly alert in crowds.
2. Blend in with the crowd; try not to stand out or look like a tourist.
3. Be aware of being distracted, even 'kindly help' or 'take my photo'; remember a pickpocket is an expert in the art of diversion
4. Keep valuables in front and not back pockets.
5. Don't touch or fiddle with your pocket where you carry your valuables.
6. Backpacks are vulnerable; latched and zipped bags are vulnerable, too.
7. Invest in a split ring and swivel clip.

## SOURCES:

- <https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/>
- Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., actual testimony from The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913 [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0, 24 March 2012

# CAMBERWELL GREEN WW1- YMCA HUT



Like many places throughout the British Empire, the First World War had a tremendous impact on the Camberwell area. Many families would have their husbands, sons and fathers away fighting, but sometimes the war and its terrible consequences were brought far closer to home.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) had been founded in 1844 and was part of the muscular Christianity movement so prevalent in the nineteenth century. It had provided tented canteens for the territorial army since the turn of the century but when war was declared in August 1914, its support of the war effort grew exponentially with the creation of hundreds of YMCA "huts" both at home and abroad. All across the many theatres of operations, in this World War, troops would find refuge when they saw the red triangle sign, indicating a YMCA centre.



Troops relaxing outside YMCA hut. Old Father Redcap pub in background. Image Courtesy of Imperial War Museum © IWM (Q 28735)

The purpose of the huts was to provide a comfortable and homely space in which troops could relax and try to forget the horrors of the battlefield for a short time. They could buy good wholesome food, cigarettes, tea or perhaps read a book or even play billiards, chess or draughts.

The YMCA also worked with organisations like the Workers Education Association and the forerunner of the Royal Army Education Corps to put on lectures for the men. In line with their Christian ethos, the types of entertainment and distractions provided were no doubt an attempt to divert the men away from the temptations of alcohol and "loose women" when they were away from the front. Troops were even encouraged to sign a temperance pledge.



Image Courtesy of YMCA archive at the Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, photographed by Neil Crossfield 14th August 2018

How well this strategy worked when Camberwell Green was but a short tram ride away from the flesh pots of the West End is unknown, but records later show that the YMCA were paying for medical experts to visit the front line to warn the troops about the dangers of venereal diseases.



Image Courtesy of YMCA Archive at the Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham. Image reference YMCA/K/1/10/75 Green Book 9 (London)

The YMCA also supplied stationery and encouraged the troops to write letters home. This was provided free of charge and was an extremely important part of their work. By 1918 some 930 million pieces of stationery had been sent out by YMCA HQ for distribution amongst those serving.

The huts were provided by private donations, or as in the case of the one on Camberwell Green, by public subscription. The YMCA organised "Hut Weeks" to pay for the building and furnishing the huts. The image below shows a large sign advertising the appeal in Camberwell and eventually a total of £3,792 was raised.



Image Courtesy of YMCA Archive at the Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham. Image reference YMCA/K/1/10/81 Green Book 9 (London)



Image from postcard sold to raise funds for YMCA hut. Photographed by Neil Crossfield 15th August 2018

Built by J. Mc Manus Ltd, it was opened on Empire Day, 24th May 1917, by various dignitaries including the Countess of Lansborough, the Countess of Wilton and the Mayor of Camberwell, Thomas Coombs. Run by a Miss Marjorie Butter, the hut had a billiard room, reading rooms and 150 beds for those staying overnight.

Many injured troops from a nearby military hospital would visit the hut to attend concerts and use its facilities. The hut was visited by the Queen of Roumania, (now Romania) Queen Victoria's granddaughter. After the war the hut was sold to the Camberwell Corporation for £1250 and used as a labour exchange until January 1921 when it was destroyed in a suspicious fire.

# CAMBERWELL FAIR, RESURRECTED

In 1907 'Ye Olde Camberwell Fayre' was resurrected, in a far more sedate manner than that which had been closed down for licentious behaviour 50 years earlier. Opened by the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Strathern, the committee was formed of church officials and prominent Camberwell Citizens, with patronage by members of the aristocracy. Displayed goods such as embroidery, sweets and ecclesiastical costumes were offered from various churches, the Freemasons and King's hospital, and the entertainment programme contained such amusements as recitations, magic shows and musical concerts, with fencing displays and spanish castanet performances on offer. The cinematograph, still a relative novelty, was projected. In a whimsical reminder of the original fair, a pillory and stocks was erected, with gentlemen assuming the guise of beggars.

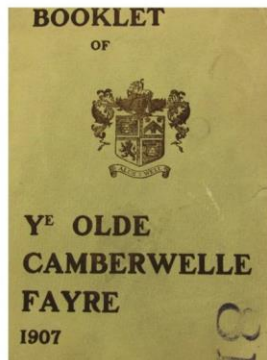


Image 1: (courtesy of Southwark History Library)

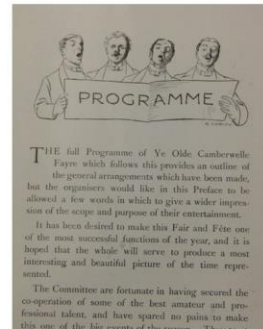


Image 2: (courtesy of Southwark History Library)

In 1933 and 1934, once more the Fair was promoted as a fundraiser for King's College Hospital (no NHS in those days!), the Mayor's Children's Holiday Fund and Concert Artistes Charities. With 25,000 people in attendance in 1933, £700 was raised for the hospital.

The Fair spread throughout the environs of Camberwell and residents and shopkeepers joined in with gusto, shopkeepers even competing in a window dressing competition! A Queen of the Carnival was chosen, with 4 maids assigned to attend her. On crowning Doris Chamberlain, the Union Castle Steamship Company made immediate arrangements "to give her a royal tour of one of their beautiful liners, when affairs of state permit". To the accompaniment of the bands from the Salvation Army and the First Surrey Rifles, the Carnival procession wound up Denmark Hill and back to Camberwell, with all kinds of vehicles on display, such as decorated bicycles and milk floats, with an entry for 'mother's and decorated prams (no babies'.



Image 3: (Courtesy of Southwark History Library)

In 1953 a fundraising effort recreated the Fair in the lecture hall of the Congregational church in Wren Road, where the Green was brought to life using cardboard trees and painted backdrops and where tea was served by waitresses dressed in 19th century costume at tables adjacent to the 'old well'.

In 1956 a full fair was once more held from 25th May to 1st June. The programme was extensive. There was an Old Tyme ball, a jazz and skiffle concert, a ball room dancing championship, a 'stars of the future' talent concert, concert parties and an interborough swimming gala, where Camberwell's first Channel aspirant, Barry G. Woodward, made a personal appearance. Honor Oak CC staged a cricket match, Herne Hill held a gymkhana and (being the 50's) naturally there was a Baby Show for the Borough's bonniest babies. We have been unable to ascertain whether any aspiring politicians turned up to kiss their heads.



Image 4 (courtesy of Southwark History Library)

It would then appear that Camberwell had no fun until 2015 when Andre Marmot decided to harness "the amazing energy of Camberwell, which buzzes 24 hours with a variety of cultures and social-ethnic groups". Using High Street Challenge funding, local businesses and residents came together in a celebration of modern Camberwell and have done so since, with the Fair occurring each summer, with music and food and pop-ups on the green.



Image 5 (Dawn Penn performing at Camberwell Fair, courtesy of Camberwell Fair)

The organisers admit to learning the importance of engaging the whole of the local community and building deep links to ensure that, while all the people of the surrounding areas know it is their Fair, it is about more than just one day. How are they doing? Take a look around....



Image 6 (photo courtesy of Camberwell Fair)



CAMBERWELL  
FAIR 2018



#RAREDOINGS