

## THE WARD OF BREAD STREET

Looking back through the GHA records, I cannot see that we have had a paper on a Ward, and I think it is about time we did. Some time ago, in a weak moment late at night, I undertook to read a paper to a City society on Bread Street and its history, only to find about a month before the date that there really was no history, and so I had to set to work.

On reflection, the various Wards have a good deal in common, and Bread Street's history in many ways might be the history of any other Ward. The general background is the same — a village within a town where people lived and worked. The tasks and skills may vary from Ward to Ward and also from century to century. Each Ward is affected by national changes or national disasters. Each has its quota of famous men. The life of each was altered by the decline of the craft guilds and the centralisation of production, first using water power for manufacture and another form of water — canals — for transport, then using steam to drive machinery and also to move goods by rail. (At this point Bread Street turned to wholesaling textiles.) Railways also meant that the population of the City declined very rapidly, and the number of churches also. Fire took its toll in 1666 and in 1940/41. The Reform Bills of the 1830s made significant changes in local government. So much for the common background.

Bread Street as a Ward has existed from the early 13th Century and in early days it took its name from its Alderman. It has an area of about 10 acres (4 hectares) and the boundaries are, roughly, Cheapside on the north, Bread Street on the east, Cannon Street on the south and St. Paul's Churchyard on the west. It adjoins Cripplegate on the north, Cordwainer on the east, Queenhithe on the south and Farringdon Within on the west. In Stow's time we had five churches, two in Bread Street and three in Friday Street, and a population of about 1,700 (divided into 292 families) at the end of the 17th Century. Today we are a godless lot without a church in the Ward. St. Mildred's (Bread Street) was the last and it was burn down in 1940 in spite of the fact that it adjoined the fire station — as a sidelight, the fire station was practically the only building to escape destruction in the Ward. Now the fire station and the site of the church are being given over to Mammon in the shape of the Credit Lyonnais, aided and abetted by Fred Cleary.

As its name implies, it was famous for bread and was, indeed, the bread market — the authorities, even in the 13th Century, found it easier to control price and quality if sales were restricted to a market in a particular place — the Assize of Bread did this and linked bread prices to grain prices. Foreign bakers could not sell in Bread Street — 'foreign',

of course, in this context means anyone not a freeman of the City. A dishonest baker was sometimes put on a hurdle and drawn through the streets with the offending loaf round his neck. Down near the boundary with Queenhithe, there was a fish market – very active on Fridays and really designed to serve the western end of the City and keep the smell in one place.

The end of the 15th Century saw an important industry introduced – in 1491 a Goldsmith (and Sheriff) Wood built Goldsmiths Row on the south side of Cheapside – where the Bank of England branch office now is. "Ten fair dwelling houses and fourteen shops all in one frame and uniformly four storeys high" is how Stow describes it. Wood gave this to the Goldsmiths "and provided money to lend to the young men having these shops". For the next 130 years or so this was a centre for silverware and during that time the reputation of English craftsmanship in silver stood very high in Europe. This trade was controlled by the Goldsmiths Company, who did their best to keep bankers out. But time defeated the Goldsmiths Company and their hold weakened. The great fire ended the matter. Round the corner, in Old Change, was the King's Exchange – I suppose Pepys, in his earlier days with the Navy, went there on business with his tallies.

During the 16th and early 17th Century in the eastern part of the Ward, the pattern changed again and it became famous for its inns – these, along with the Exchange, had a special importance – they were, in a sense, what we would now call the media: clearing houses for rumour and news, and also meeting places. Dining clubs met in them – indeed, it was in one such club – called the Wednesday Club, which met at an inn in Friday Street – that the discussions took place which led to the founding in 1698 of the Bank of England. Friday Street disappeared when the new Bank office was built in about 1950. Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, Milton and Addison all at various times gathered here to dine. Milton was born in the Ward, his father was a practising scrivener, but most of his writing was done in Cripplegate Without, where he died and is buried in St. Giles.

The Salters Company had its hall here, just off Watling Street, probably until about 1640/1650, at which point they purchased a "great house" in St. Swithin's Lane and moved their hall to it – it was still there in 1939. There may have been some sort of connection originally between the Salters and the fish market, but this is only conjecture.

The Cordwainers had their hall in the Ward – in Distaff Lane – until 1940, when it was burnt and not rebuilt. The Company is still without a hall.

At this point I want to say a few words about Admiral Phillip, who became the first Governor of New South Wales when New South Wales

was Australia. Born in the Ward in 1738, he joined the Navy in 1755 – aged 17 – and retired on half pay as a captain in 1761: Swift promotion indeed, but perhaps not all that unusual in those days. I have often felt that the British over the years have the knack of putting the right man in the right place. Nelson, Wellington, Churchill are all examples, and there are many others at all levels. Phillip is another. He retired on half pay in 1761, he was seconded to the Portuguese Navy for three years as a post captain and, from 1766, he farmed at Lyndhurst in Hampshire for twelve years. In 1787 – aged 49 – he was sent out to Australia in command of eleven ships, the total combined tonnage being about 4,000. Here he was entirely on his own with a set of strange and new problems. It was, indeed, only his farming experience which enabled the colony to survive and that with great difficulty and on meagre rations which Phillip shared with the rest. He spent four years in Sydney before being invalided home. In 1832 Lord Wakefield of Hythe, who was then Alderman of the Ward, arranged for a memorial to be erected to Phillip in St. Mildred's. After the destruction of that church in 1941, the Admiral's bust and two plaques were rescued and refurbished and repaired, and subsequently, largely through the efforts of Johnny Walker, were re-erected on the wall of Gateway House and unveiled by the Australian High Commissioner in 1968. At the moment, due to repairs to the building, the memorial is being stored. Admiral Phillip – in Australia he is always known as Governor Phillip – stayed in the Navy until 1806 and achieved steady promotion. He then retired to Bath. Each year the High Commissioner and the Agents General go to Bath to honour his memory. In fact, he is honoured and remembered by Australia more than by his own country.

I want now to consider for a few moments the effects of the industrial revolution. Until 1750, perhaps until 1775, the craft guilds were important; so too, were the merchant guilds. After 1750 the means of production altered and so did the place. Adam Smith 'The Wealth of Nations' and modern manufacturing was born. The City as a whole changed, and Bread Street with it. Banking, Insurance, broking in all its forms, came in. London, which in those days meant the City, gradually became what Cobbett called "the Great Wen", manufacturing nothing and consuming a great deal, whilst it carried out its paper credit transactions which so few people – least of all Cobbett – understood. Bread Street was not a banking area and it turned very largely to the textile trade. By the 1930s this was not so prosperous as it had been, but it remained the mainstay of activity until 1940 when, as I have said, practically the whole Ward was destroyed. It was fifteen years before a serious start was made on rebuilding. Now the Ward is substantially complete. There is not a single textile firm in the Ward. The Bank of England occupy a very large site of about 3½ acres. In addition, we have Spillers, the Financial Times, Singer & Friedlander, two large firms of stockbrokers and, until lately, Brooke

Bond and Wiggins Teape. Shortly we are to have the Credit Lyonnais. Curiously, we have no open spaces or gardens, save for a small patch of grass by Gateway House. Architecturally we range from neo-Georgian to the concrete box – without any really outstanding buildings.

I should like to end with a few remarks about railways and electoral reform. Looking back, one can see that both happened at about the same time. The 1832 Reform Bill extended the franchise from Liverymen to inhabitant householders or occupiers of premises which were worth £10 per annum or more. Liverymen remained on the electoral roll until 1918, but they had to live within seven miles (later this distance was increased to 25 miles) of the City, so after the passing of the Great Reform Bill the influence Liverymen decreased because many more people could vote without being Liverymen. As the railways encouraged people to move out, so Liverymen tended to become less important as voters. Even so, the coming of the railways and the decrease in population made a decline in the political influence of the City inevitable, although it managed to have one MP until 1948. In the 1830s the Corporation was a political body, although at that time local government politics were not so highly organised as now. You may ask why I say that the Corporation was political – I have in my hand a little book entitled "The Corporation Annual" – published only twice. Mine is the 1837 edition, which is a skit on the Wardmotes. In it there are many references to the wicked Tories – from which one presumes that the City kept its Whig sympathies – and this was, you must remember, a time of radical reform and a good deal of unrest. The Chartist risings, which affected the whole of Europe, were still ten years ahead in the future, but the stirrings were already apparent, if subdued.

To conclude, I should like to read to you the report of the Bread Street Wardmote of 1836:

John Lainson, Esq., Alderman

Mr. Mathie, Deputy  
Mr. Blackmore  
Mr. Wm. Lawrence  
Mr. Maughan  
Mr. Craclow  
Mr. Lawrence

Mr. Davison  
Mr. Lainson  
Mr. Holmes  
Mr. Bridge  
Mr. Kipling  
Mr. Cope

"In most Wards, "Precinct Meetings," (as they are called), previous to St. Thomas's Day, are deemed vulgar and unfashionable; the worthy electors being of opinion, and justly so, that it is municipally unconstitutional of any set of men to decide for them, who shall or shall not represent them in the City Parliament. In this Ward, however, the custom is never departed from, much to the profit and delight of mine hostess of the Red Lion, Basing Lane, where the junta assemble. The speeches delivered on this occasion, it is much to be regretted, will be

lost to the public; the reporter who attended, on entering the room, being requested by Mr. R. Thompson, the chairman, to retire; the meeting, he said, was a strictly private one, and he would be hanged if he allowed any stranger to be present while they talked over the business of the evening; but before you "cut your stick", added the president, you may as well do as we do, and wet your whistle with a tankard of four-penny ale. The reporter declined the honour, and begged to assure the generous chairman and every gentleman present, that they need not be under any apprehension of being hanged, for they had already a drop too much; whereupon a pewter pot was flung at his head with much force, from which, however, he happily escaped; but the formidable missile came in contact with the os frontis of a bystander, and inflicted a wound so serious and alarming, that it was deemed necessary to call in the professional aid of Mr. Edinborough; the patient was conveyed home in a state of insensibility; and the meeting resumed their proceedings with closed doors.

The retirement of William Williams, Esq., MP, occasioned a vacancy, and two Candidates, Mr. Blackmore and Mr. Arnold, appeared in the field to contest the honour of succeeding that gentleman: at the close of the poll, the eleven old members, and Mr. Blackmore, were elected.

Mr. Deputy Mathie returned thanks very briefly, and expressed his sincere regret that Mr. Williams had retired from representing the Ward, that gentleman having done so much towards breaking down the strong holds of the Tories, and exposing their corruption, and iniquitous practices; and he, the Deputy, would follow his example, and do all in his power to further liberal and enlightened principles.

Mr. Martin Blackmore, the newly elected member, rose, and was received with loud cheers. The respected gentleman said, he would abstain from the common-place phraseology conveniently adopted by some, who like himself, when first invested with the responsible trust of a representative; of expressing his "heartfelt thanks for the honour," that this was the "happiest hour of his life," and other similar set sentences, more easily expressed than meant; but he would at once say, that as the constituency had deemed him eligible to be one of their members, he should go to the Court of Common Council, and do his duty fearlessly and independently, — (cheers) — so that when he again appeared before them, he need not, indeed he would not, supplicate them for their suffrages, but stand upon his merits, and upon them alone. (Renewed cheering).

Mr. Lainson: Gentlemen — hem! gentlemen — (hear, hear) — gentlemen, I thank you — indeed I do. (Cheers.)

Messrs. Bridge, Maughan, Davison, etc., severally addressed the electors;

the latter gentleman very angrily complained, that not a tythe of his speech at the former Wardmote had been reported in the Corporation Annual: of its accuracy he had not a word to say. (Hear, hear).

The two Lawrences, Messrs. Craclow, Kipling and Cope, vied with each other in the brevity of their orations, which called forth a remark from Mr. Harrild, that when he represented the Ward, he always entertained his constituents with a long speech, the only return he could render for their favours, and to make up for his silence during his year of office.

Mr. Holmes returned thanks, and would take advantage of the opportunity left him by his colleagues, to say a word or two upon a subject the meeting should be acquainted with, but which those who had spoken before, seemed to have studiously avoided; he meant the progress of Reform in the City. (Hear.) He was not now "cribbed, cabined, and confined," as Pope said, within the narrow limits of an apothecary's shop: thank God, he could look abroad beyond the range of empty boxes that formerly contracted his view. His practice, which extended to the utmost verge of the Ward, brought him in daily contact with men of all classes, and he could assure the Wardmote, that amongst the generality of his patients, even amongst those he encountered in lanes and alleys, the utmost desire prevailed for moving onwards — (cheers) — yes, he could assure the Wardmote, that so far from the spirit of Reform languishing, he met hourly instances of its increasing health and vigour. A reaction had been talked of, but he understood a reaction to be an effort of bodily power to throw off disease; in such a way, he was happy to announce, Reform had exhibited Reaction. A good constitution might labour long in a state of incapacity, and at length rally, at the most desperate and unexpected juncture, to free itself from the ills that weighed it down. (Hear, hear). Symptoms were now apparent everywhere of dislike to sinecures, church-rates, taxes, and imposts of all kinds, and already, sickened as the public stomach was, it was only necessary to assist its loathings with easy emetics, to unburthen it of those unnatural incumbrances that impeded its freedom, and hindered its performance of those offices it was designed for. The public stomach was like the individual stomach; to be active and healthy, it must be unoppressed; and loathing in the one, was like loathing in the other; its function might be checked by unwholesome treatment; but the latter carried to an excess was sure, if infirmity and natural decay had not taken place, to end in a total rejection of matters offensive, and in a radical cure. Such was the result he looked for, and under proper treatment, not the regiment or practice of ignorant empiries, he knew that the whole construction could and would be renovated. (Hear, hear). Once more, he thanked them for their confidence, and in what they had entrusted him, neither lancet, purge, or clyster, should be neglected: so help him --! (Vehement cheering).

Mr. Arnold, the unsuccessful candidate, nothing daunted at his signal defeat, presented his manly person to the meeting, and thus harangued them:

Gentlemen, — And so it didn't suit you to have me; there you was wrong; though I say it; for I was, you must know, brought up in the public line; — (“Hear!” from Mr. Coulter) — and, therefore, a more fit man there can't be; more so than Mr. Blackmore, or any of you, to judge whether there is too much guzzling going on in the Corporation; and, let me tell you, if there was a little more toping in the Ward, it would be the better for some of us. I don't speak for myself (cheers) — but for my poor neighbour, the widow Emery, and her poor fatherless babes. Gentlemen, I shan't trouble you to listen to me any longer; but this I tell you, I shall try my luck another year, and if you won't have me, you won't, and there's an end on't.

Mr. Churchwarden Fell and Mr. Harrild rose together. There being loud calls for Mr. Fell, the latter gentleman gave way.

Mr. Fell regretted he could not address the meeting in the eloquent strain of a preceding speaker, whose physical and mental powers he knew not which most to admire and envy; and he could not but congratulate the Ward on having a person of Mr. Holmes's talent and political principles to represent them in the Court, to which he had that day been returned a member — (hear, hear!) — and no man, he would venture to say, was better qualified than that honourable gentleman, to heal the diseases of the City state, and restore it to vigorous health; and if the consummate skill of such men was not speedily adopted, the municipal body would, in his (Mr. Fell's) opinion, most assuredly die of repletion. (Loud cheers.) Mr. Fell continued to say, that when the Ward did him the honour of appointing him to the lucrative and responsible office of Collector of the Consolidated Rate, he was not present to express his acknowledgements for the high, but undeserved compliment then paid him; on relinquishing that important trust, he could not do less than assure his kind friends, that he felt much flattered by the unsolicited appointment; but confident was he, that it was intended as an earnest of some further mark of their favour; whatever that favour might be, coming from their hands, he should highly prize it; for to be associated with the worthy Alderman and his man Friday, the deputy, would, on the nicest calculation, raise him, (Mr. Fell) in the estimation of his fellow citizens, full one and a quarter per cent. The respected gentleman sat down amidst thunders of applause.

Mr. Coulter, and several others, in appearance equally respectable, rose at the same time, all, seemingly, with the determined purpose of doing the civil thing to Mr. Alderman Lainson; that is, to move a resolution of thanks; and, after much contest, Mr. Coulter was declared to be in possession of the Chair, who, after clearing his pipes, thus began:

May it please your worship, and you, gentlemen of the Ward, — I am so unaccustomed to shew my face and speak in a public-house, — (Laughter, and "Hear!" from Mr. Arnold) — I should say, in a public place like this, with so many eyes upon me, that I begin to wish I had kept in the background, and not have appeared before you. You are not to suppose I am going to propose a vote of thanks, as they call it, to the Alderman. No such thing. My business is to say, what a big shame it is, that the inhabitants of the Ward give the collectors of rates so much trouble to get the money, when called upon; for my part, I always make it a rule never to allow a second application for any Ward dues; and I would advise others to follow my example. (Oh! oh!) This is all I have to say, gentlemen.

Mr. Legg and Mr. Shuttleworth rose; the former first caught the eye of the Alderman.

Gentlemen, said Mr. Legg, I much regret my friend, Mr. Coulter, did not perform the pleasing duty which now devolves upon me, — that of assuring our esteemed Alderman, whom we all love, that he has this day, as he has upon all public occasions, acquitted himself with ability and impartiality; at the same time I admit this, I must declare my belief, that had my friend, Mr. Shuttleworth, been chosen to preside over us, instead of your present Chairman, he would, in a more signal manner, have deserved our commendation; for whoever has the pleasure of being acquainted with that gentleman, must have observed, the great interest he takes in every thing connected with the Ward; and of his ever-watchful and vigilant eye to detect abuses wherever they exist. I now beg leave to move, that a resolution of thanks be presented to Mr. Alderman Lainson, at the same time regretting, that the object of it is not my esteemed friend Mr. Shuttleworth.

Dr. Buckland seconded the motion, which, it is needless to say, was put and carried; and the Alderman expressed his acknowledgement — in a speech more eloquent than any of his on record. It was of greater length than the long staff of Mr. Hammond, the beadle."

H.M.F.