

*The Great Houses of
Leyton and Leytonstone*

Leyton House

and the Walthamstow Slip

by David Ian Chapman

Leyton & Leytonstone Historical Society

Leyton House and the Walthamstow Slip

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Author's Note

I had hoped to be able to refer to a report of an excavation carried out by English Heritage on the site of Leyton House in 1993. It was conducted under the auspices of the Newham Museum Service. This report was held by the Passmore Edwards Museum, but as the museum was closed some years ago I have been unable to see this document.

Leyton House

Of all the great houses of Leyton, the very one named after the village of Low Leyton seems to be the least known, historically speaking, yet it has a rich history. The Leyton historian John Kennedy, writing in 1894, had little to say:

The grounds of Etloe House join those of Leyton House, an old mansion built of red bricks, the characteristic of most Leyton houses of the olden times. The date of the building is uncertain, but it may be presumed that it was built some time early in the eighteenth century, perhaps even earlier¹.

The last house to have occupied the site was known alternatively as Leyton House, Park House² or St Agnes's Orphanage. It stood in Church Road until c1910/3, almost opposite the west end of Capworth Street. The London Electric Wire Co. and Smiths Ltd. occupied the site between the wars until they were closed and ultimately demolished to make way for housing in the early nineteen nineties.

Post Medieval

An excavation of the site, conducted by English Heritage in 1993, dated the site as Post Medieval from 1540. There was evidence of a building and stabling of an earlier residence dating from this date. The later building with which we are concerned was constructed sometime around 1650.

Thomas More

Our story really begins with the birth of Thomas More in 1478, the son of judge Sir John More. Torn between life in a monastic seminary or following his father in the law, the young Thomas chose to serve his country and enter Parliament in 1504. He accompanied King Henry VIII to “the field of the cloth of gold” and in 1518 he was appointed a Privy Counsellor and knighted in 1521. As a favourite of the king he was made Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523 and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1525. Despite his refusal to endorse Henry's plan to divorce Catherine of Aragon, which led to the fall of Thomas Wolsey, he became Lord Chancellor. But his fall from grace would come soon.

¹ John Kennedy *A History of the Parish of Leyton, Essex* Phelp Brothers, Leyton 1894 pp 331.

² Derived from Park Place, that part of Church Lane (or Road), which ran north from Capworth Street.

His disapproval of his King's attitude against the Catholic Church was noted when he refused to attend the wedding of Henry and Anne Boelyn in 1533. Ultimately it was his refusal to sign the Act of Succession in April 1534 which led to his imprisonment in the Tower of London and subsequent trial for treason. On the 6 July 1535, alongside Bishop Fisher, Thomas More was beheaded at the Tower. He became St Thomas in 1935.

St Thomas' son, John More, married Anne Cresacre in 1530 and a son, Thomas, was born shortly afterwards in Chelsea on 8 August 1531. Thomas More settled in Low Leyton in 1582, where he was listed as a recusant for not attending church. Time and time again More, along with his wife, Maria Scrope, whom he had married in 1553, and later his son, Edward, were indicted for refusing to attend the Church of England services. He was imprisoned for a time in 1585, and his indictments continued until his death on 19 August 1606. The punishment for those lawfully convicted of failing to attend church services was severe. For each and every adult over the age of sixteen they had to find sureties of £200 per year. It has been estimated that the cost to the More family until his death would have been £6,500. Yet the records of the Exchequer show that from Thomas More only £305 was confiscated³. Why? Just before his death we have Thomas More writing to "his neighbour", Sir Michael Hicks at Ruckholt, asking Sir Michael to accompany him to see the Bishop of London to mitigate the displeasures he had conceived against him. This is the closest we come to being able to pinpoint his dwelling place.

Thomas and his wife Maria had a large family consisting of eight daughters and four sons, one of whom, Thomas, born 1565 and died 1625, became a priest, having taken holy orders at the English College in Rome.

The indictments made at the Quarter Sessions now continued against Thomas and Maria's son, Cresacre More, who was born 3 July 1572 on their family estates in Barnburgh, Yorkshire (these estates were to be forfeited later). Cresacre More married Elizabeth Gage, the daughter of Thomas Gage and Elizabeth Guldeford, in 1598. The Gage family, like the More, had also been indicted as recusants.

Cresacre and Elizabeth are known to have had three children including one son, Thomas, who married Mary, daughter of Sir Basil Brooke of Madeley, and supported the Royalists during the English Civil War. It is believed he died in 1660 and is buried in Leyton churchyard. There were two daughters: the eldest, Helen, was born 25

³ Notes taken by Fred Temple on the Essex Recusants, held in the Vestry House Museum, Ac. 10075/4.

March 1606 and died in Cambrai, France of smallpox on 17 August 1633, and Bridget, born 1609 and died 1692, becoming the Prioress of the Benedictine nuns in Paris. Helen, better known as Gertrude, was a Benedictine nun, who helped to found the Abbey at Cambrai.

On 31 March 1616, Cresacre More was granted a licence by Act of the Privy Council to leave his confinement and was able to travel to Westminster and further afield to Hertford, Middlesex, Oxford and down to Southampton. On 12 May 1616 the time he was allowed away from Low Leyton was restricted to six months. In 1619, on All Fool's Day, he petitioned to be allowed to travel to more remote places. He appears to have settled in Hertfordshire, although he was still described as "of Leyton" as late as 1629. He died on 26 March 1649.

His son, Thomas More, died in 1660. Following the death of his father a decade earlier their house in Leyton had been cleared of penalties and was then probably sold. These dates would certainly tie in with the demise of the old house and the rebuilding of the second Leyton House.

Lodge

The local historian, Frederick Temple⁴, believed that the family of Thomas Lodge were occupants of the first Leyton House, and they are said to have lived here from 1595 until his death in 1625. Apart from being Catholic, there is nothing to connect the More family with the Lodge family, but it would have made Leyton House a safe haven.

Thomas Lodge was born in Plaistow in 1558. His father was Sir Thomas Lodge, Lord Mayor of London, and slave trader, in 1562. The younger Thomas was educated at the Merchant Taylor's School in the City of London, where he was admitted in 1571, before going up to Trinity College, Oxford, where he gained a BA in 1577. He began to study law at Lincoln's Inn but left to return to Oxford where he gained an MA in 1581.

He went on an expedition to the Canary Islands in 1588 and accompanied Thomas Cavendish on a voyage to Brazil and the Straits of Magellan in 1591. It was during the first expedition that he commenced his most well known work *Rosalynde*,

⁴ Frederick Temple, Hon Sec Leyton Antiquarian Society 1928 - 1957.

*composed under a tropical sky as the author sailed with Captain Clark between the Canaries and the Azores*⁵.

Rosalynde was published in London in 1590. It was used by William Shakespeare as the basis for his play, *As you like it*, first performed 1598/1600. In 1596 two of his books are dated as “from my house in Low Laiton”. It was also at this time that Lodge converted to Catholicism, and possibly why he settled in Leyton. Leyton House was to have a strong connection with the Roman Catholic Church, ending its days as St Agnes’s Orphanage.

Thomas Lodge took up medicine and qualified at Avignon in 1600. In early 1606 Lodge left England to escape religious persecution, returning in 1610. He is said to have died of the plague in 1625, and buried in Leyton churchyard,⁶ although there is no evidence for this statement.

Marescoe

The Huguenots were French Protestants who fled France following the Dragonnard Campaign, which began in 1681. Huguenots were being pressured to convert to Catholicism before their religion was outlawed with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Many escaped to The Netherlands or across the channel to England or even further afield to America. In London settlements began in Soho and in and around Threadneedle Street in the City where there were already established churches.

One such French Huguenot family were the brothers Pierre and Charles Marescoe. They left their birthplace, Lille, to settle in London in the 1650s. By 1670 Pierre Marescoe, a master weaver, was then living in Threadneedle Street. He died in 1710. Charles Marescoe, a merchant with interests in the East Indies and the Mediterranean⁷, was living in Leyton with his wife Leonora Lethieullier, whom he had married on 7 July 1658. A daughter, Anne, was born 9 March 1665 in Leyton, and christened the following day. Anne already had several older siblings: Leonora born 13 August 1659 and christened 16 August 1659 at St Dunstan’s in the East and also Jane christened 15 June 1661, Elizabeth born 22 February 1662 and christened 8 March 1662 at St Gabriel, Fenchurch, and Mary, christened on Christmas Day 1664, died 12 May 1672 and buried in St Mary’s Parish Church, Leyton, three days later. In addition to Anne,

⁵ The English Poets, Edmund Gosse, Macmillan & Co, London 1907.

⁶ *Stories of Church Celebrities of the Past*, Wilfred Fentiman, St Mary’s Church, Leyton nd c1963. Fentiman was verger between 1960-1963, but was less reliable than those he accused of being unreliable in his foreword.

⁷ *David Gansel of Leyton Grange and East Donyland Hall* by Randolph Vigne, *Proceedings of the Huguenots Society* Vol XXII no 6, 1982, pp 362

two further brothers were both born and died in Leyton, Charles born 27 May 1668, baptised 16 June 1668 and died 6 May 1669 and buried five days later, and James baptised 16 April 1670 and buried 12 April 1671.

Archaeological evidence has suggested a date of c1650 for the building of the second Leyton House. It has not been possible to trace with any amount of certainty where the Marescoes resided in Leyton. Leyton House was said to have been built for his daughter Anne Marescoe, which would have been before her marriage to David Gansel in 1688. More likely the house was built for Charles and Leonora Marescoe and passed to Anne following the death of her father and the remarriage of her mother to Jacob David on 28 September 1675 at All Hallows, London Wall. For John Strype remarks that:

*His better and more lasting monument is a stately house near Capworth Street in this Parish built by Mr David Gansel, who married one of his daughters*⁸.

David Gansel was responsible for the renovations that took place in the early eighteenth century – see below.

Charles Marescoe, died 9 September 1670 and was buried in St Mary's Parish Church on 16 September 1670, aged just forty years of age⁹.

Gansel

Another Huguenot who left France to ultimately follow the Marescoe's, was David Gansel, who travelled to England in 1684 from Rouen in northern France¹⁰. Anne Marescoe married David Gansel in 13 July 1688 at All Hallows, London Wall. The Gansels' first born son, David, was christened on 25 April 1689, but died shortly afterwards. A second son was also christened David on 15 January 1690 at St. John's Parish Church. The family probably moved from Hackney to Leyton in 1695¹¹. David

⁸ *David Gansel of Leyton Grange and East Donyland Hall* by Randolph Vigne, *Proceedings of the Huguenots Society* Vol XXII no 6, 1982, pp 364

⁹ Information from an incomplete memorial slab situated in the aisle of St Mary's Parish Church. Originally stated that Charles Marescoe, his son Charles and fourth daughter Mary were all buried here. See *Old Leyton Church*, Mary Savell, Church Publishers, Ramsgate nd (c1963). John Stow in his *Survey of London*, corrected by John Strype, in 1720, and revised by William Maitland 1755, also mentioned that James and Elizabeth were recorded on the same stone but this is no longer to be seen.

¹⁰ *David Gansel of Leyton Grange and East Donyland Hall* by Randolph Vigne, *Proceedings of the Huguenots Society* Vol XXII no 6, 1982, pp 361.

¹¹ Leyton Rate Books - all the Parish records still extant are held by the Vestry House Museum. All further references to births/marriages/deaths etc. come from the parish records.

Gansel first appears in the Rate Books from Lady Day¹² 1695, living in a house, almost certainly Leyton House, where it is located under “Capworth Street”, and where he was rated for £16. Robert Harvey, an Old Jewry merchant, left David Gansel a token bequest in 1695 to “*my neighbour Mr Gansel a Frenchman*”¹³.

By 1703 the house occupied by David Gansel was rated at £36 taking into account improvements made to the building. Further renovations doubled the rateable value to £77 by 1704. It was now a three-storied red-brick building with a front facade of seven bays and a scrolled pediment to the central doorway. The front of the house faced a walled forecourt with wooden entrance gates on the east and two flanking stable blocks.

Gansel became active in the local affairs of Leyton, being an Overseer of the Poor in 1703, although first nominated in 1699, and Constable in 1708. Elected to Churchwarden in 1710, his duties were performed by William Sayer. This may have been due to ill health as he died and was buried at St Mary’s Parish Church on 03 December 1714. In the final year of Gansel’s life that part of his estate which fell into the Walthamstow Slip was rated for £24.

Following his father’s death, Leyton House passed to David Gansel, the younger. He had married Margaret Ward, whose father was William Ward, the proprietor of the Alum Works of Hackney, at St Mary’s Parish Church, Leyton on 4 November 1714. The births of their three children followed in quick succession - William was baptised on 5 October 1715, Anne baptised 1 August 1716, and Charles baptised 23 September 1719, dying in 1734.

Walthamstow Slip

Over the years there has been much speculation regarding that portion of the Parish of Walthamstow that actually lay in Leyton and was known as the “Walthamstow Slip”. It was a portion of land between 80 and 100 yards wide which stretched from the Eagle Pond through Leyton Green, followed Capworth Street and, took in almost the whole of the Leyton House estate, but not the house itself, and then across the Marsh to the River Lea. All the time it lay about ½ mile distant from the Walthamstow boundary.

¹² Lady Day 25 March, one of the quarter days when payment of rates etc fell due.

¹³ *David Gansel of Leyton Grange and East Donyland Hall* by Randolph Vigne, *Proceedings of the Huguenots Society* Vol XXII no 6, 1982, pp 365.

It is not known when or how the Slip came into the possession of Walthamstow Parish. The earliest known date is 1676¹⁴ when “Horestreet and Capworthe”¹⁵ were included in the Walthamstow rates for that year. It is also clearly marked on Forbes’ Map of 1699. Several “theories” have been advanced. One was that the land was given to Walthamstow by the King for having saved the life of someone whom the inhabitants of Leyton refused to assist. Another is that a dead body was found in the marsh which Leyton refused to bury. Finally it was buried by the people of Walthamstow and they claimed the ground over which the body was carried, although they seem to have headed straight for the Eagle Public House.

The Slip did not follow field boundaries nor was there a defined track, apart from a section of Capworth Street. To this day its true meaning is still waiting to be uncovered. There were over a thousand similar cases up and down the country where parts of a Parish have become detached.

In the summer of 2004, during the reconstruction of the “Sixties” Beaumont Estate, part of a Roman Road was uncovered. The piece uncovered was aligned with one of the boundaries of the “Walthamstow Slip“. So was this the old British or Roman track way, crossing over the Lea to the Eagle where it joined the Woodford Road, that was still in the memory back in the seventeenth century? This was in the days before the construction of the Lea Bridge Turnpike in 1777 and in those days the Leyton and Walthamstow Marshes were indivisible with regard to common pasturage.

What is clear is that the main part of Leyton House, when it was rebuilt, lay on the Leyton side of the “Slip” and therefore still rateable to Leyton Parish. The “Walthamstow Slip” was transferred to the Leyton Local Board in three stages, the first being in 1873 and the final stage was in 1885.

Phillips

Towards the end of their stay at Leyton House, the Gansels had begun work on a new house on the site of Leyton Grange¹⁶. The Grange must have been ready for

¹⁴ *Walthamstow Deeds 1584 - 1855* Stephen J Barns, Walthamstow Antiquarian Society Publication # 33, 1935 p29.

¹⁵ At various times it has been known as Capper or Capworth Street. According to Henry Solly, writing in 1893, “*trotting backwards and forwards up Capworth Street (pronounced Capper) and along Hoe Street, both of which were then, for the most part pretty green lanes, and sometimes over Mark-House Common*“. *These Eighty Years*, Henry Solly, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London 1893, Vol 1, pp 54

¹⁶ For the History of The Grange - see *The Grange* Leyton & Leytonstone Historical Society Occasional Publication #6, 2007.

occupation by mid 1720, for on 17 June in the presence of the Court Baron, David Gansel passed the tenancy of the Manor of Leyton, and Leyton House, to John Phillips¹⁷:

All the customary messuage holding together with the gardens, stables, outbuildings etc lying in Capworth Street in Low Leighton and Walthamstow, and one croft of customary land called the Trinning containing by estimation 3 acres lying in Long Marsh and also one croft customary land called Hollman's Croft containing by estimation 3 acres and also one rod of meadow lying in Shortlands and also one acre of land lying in Leighton Marsh and also 3 acres called Stornocks and also one close of land containing by estimation 2 acres lying in Low Leighton in what was formerly called the Marsh and also one close of heriot land containing by estimation one acre lying next to South Marsh with the appurtenances held from the said manor by copy of Court Roll together with all the estate right.

A little under two months later an indenture was made between David and Margaret Gansel and John Phillips for the sale of further land:

In consideration of the summe of £5000 of lawfull money to the said David Gansell, well and truly paid by the said John Phillipps at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents These closes and parcells of freehold ground of the said David Gansell hereafter particulary expressed, sett, laying, and being in Low Leighton and Waltham Stow in County of Essex on one of them, one piece of land containing 5 acres or thereabouts as the same is now laid into and is part of the garden belonging to the capital messuage which the said David Gansell both lately sold and surrendered (with othter copyhold land) unto the said John Phillipps, his heirs and with 5 acres was heretofore an orchard and both abutt on the south to the lands of Mrs Perry.

On the east the highway leading to Waltham Stow. On the west to the common thoroughfare shore. And on the north to the wall in the garden which stands about 7 an 20 foot distant from the south front of the said capital messuage.

One piece of meadow ground containing 4 acres or thereabouts lying between the common shore and Long Marsh which said shore now parts the garden from the said 4 acres. And also all those 4 acres and lying in a field called the Nine Acres Field abutting on the south and west on the common marsh.

¹⁷ Court Rolls 17 June 1720 Vestry House Museum (L.72.2).

On the east to the Long Marsh and extended in the said Nine Acres Field which is on the east side of the highway leading from the said capital messuage of the church of Low Leighton called by the name of Coppings Down.

All which said lands and premises have thereinbefore mentioned to be hereby bargained and sold are now in the tenure or occupation of the said David Gansell or his under tenants and are situate lying and being in the said Parishes of Low Leighton and Waltham Stow or one of them¹⁸

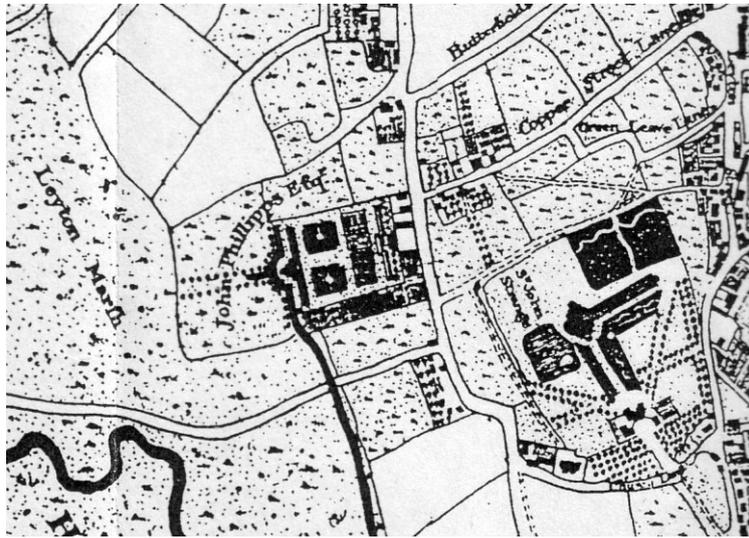
It was on this wall that in 1723 some of the inhabitants of Walthamstow took matters into their own hands:

Certain persons assembled as inhabitants of y^e Parish of Walthamstow and lately taken upon them to remove and throw down a stone y^t was placed by y^e Parishoners of Leyton divers years ago, and there remained, for a mark of y^e antient boundary of y^e said Parish of Leyton, neer y^e dwelling house of John Phillips esq., but on y^e other side of y^e way: And after several attempts to fix a new pretended boundary in different places by making several crosses at several times on y^e brickwall before y^e said house; did at length without y^e least appearances of reason or justice, set a new mark upon y^e said wall: The true bounds there beginning within two feet & a half of y^e end of y^e said wal next y^e Bowling Green, where a markstone is placed, and stretching forth seventy yards and one foot northwards, y^t is to y^e end of y^e said Phillips brewhouse¹⁹.

This was one of several attempts at land grabbing by Walthamstow It was resolved that the old boundary mark would be replaced.

¹⁸ From a deed purchased by Mr Burdon, Leyton Literary Society, and a copy preserved in Rev Robert Bren's grangerised version of John Kennedy's *History of the Parish of Leyton* Phelp Brothers, Leyton 1894 (vol 5 pp 292). Held by the Vestry House Museum.

¹⁹ John Kennedy's *History of the Parish of Leyton*, Essex Phelp Brothers, Leyton 1894 pp 383/4



John Roque's Map of 1741/5

John Phillips appears in the Rate Books from Michaelmas 1720²⁰ through to Michaelmas Day 1755. He was appointed Surveyor of the Highways in 1724, was an Overseer of the Poor in 1731 and Churchwarden in 1734 and 1735. In 1744 John Phillips was appointed as a trustee to the Free School. He also supported the Alms Houses, as in 1747 he gave £6 rent charge from a house in Dover Street, Mayfair²¹.

Jackson

It is believed that John Phillips died around 1756 as Leyton House was left by will to Philip Jackson. Jackson²² had been born in Leyton on 23 May 1715, before moving from Leyton to Rainton Hall at Houghton le Spring, County Durham, where he died 10 October 1792. He was rated for Leyton House for both Lady Day and Michaelmas 1756 but whether he lived here is doubtful as we find that in the following year it was in the hands of John Prestage, who then sold the house to John Story.

Prestage

Apart from paying the rates for Michaelmas 1757, very little is known of John Prestage, a broker. He may have lived at Leyton House only briefly until the house passed back to the More.

Henry More

²⁰ Michaelmas Day 29 September, one of the quarter days when payment of rates etc fell due.

²¹ *A History of Leyton*, an extract from the *Victoria County History of Essex*, pp 66.

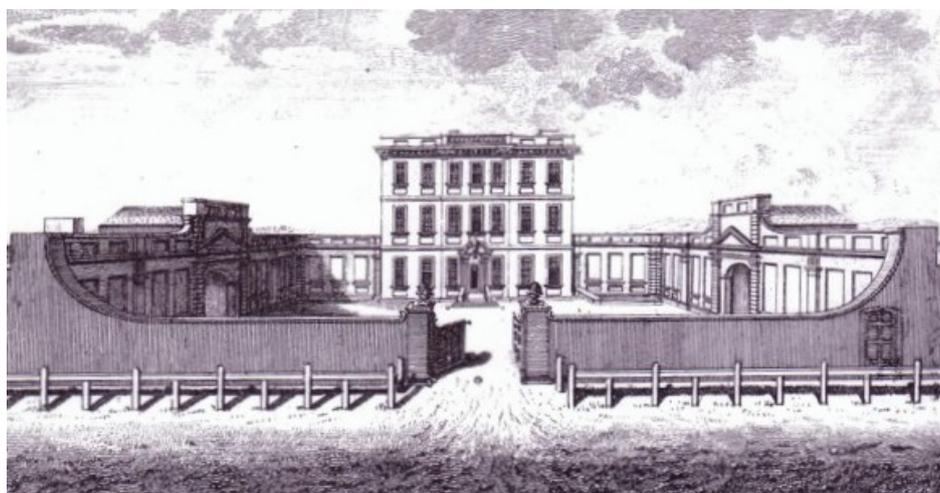
²² His daughter was Elizabeth Jackson, born in Shincliffe, Co Durham 26 April 1760 and she married Gilbert Slater, of Knotts Green House, at St Mary Aldermary, London 29 March 1784. She died 21 January 1797 in Houghton le Spring. A previous owner of Knotts Green House had been Charles Jackson. Any relationship to Phillip Jackson has not been proved.

Captain Henry More, of St Anne's, Soho, first rented the property in 1758.

(He) was descended in direct line, by second marriage, from Sir John, father of the celebrated Sir Thomas More²³

An illustration of the house was included in volume IV of the *History of Essex* by a Gentleman. It was briefly described as

a modern construction, about a quarter of mile north-east from the church, adorned with large and delightful gardens, with plantations, walks, groves, mounts, and canals, stocked with fish and fowl. The Seat of Henry More esq., near half a mile west from the church, is most agreeably situated; the house is very elegant, large and handsome²⁴



Leyton House : The Seat of Henry More

This is the only known illustration of the house apart from one taken by G H Hales , the whereabouts of which are now lost (a poor copy has been used for the front cover of this booklet).

Henry More became the Superintendent of the Batteries in Great Britain²⁵. He died and was buried in St Mary's Parish Churchyard on 15 March 1773. The house was marked on Chapman and Andre's map of 1777, where the occupier is shown as Mrs Moore.

Story

²³ John Kennedy's *History of the Parish of Leyton, Essex* Phelps Brothers, Leyton 1894 pp 77

²⁴ *A new and complete history of Essex*, By a Gentleman. (6 vols) Chelmsford, 1770, vol 4, pp 240

²⁵ Details from a newspaper cutting, origin unknown, held in the Vestry House Museum (L.96).

John Story is rated as owning Leyton House from Michaelmas 1765 through to Michaelmas 1785. In 1783 the house was rated for 71 windows. Although John Story lived there only for the last year, as he died, and was buried on 4 April 1786. He was appointed Surveyor of the Highway in 1764/5 and as an Overseer of the Poor in 1774. His widow remained there until Michaelmas 1789 when the property was let to a well-known Leyton family, the Cottons, being first rated on Lady Day 1790.

Cotton

Joseph Cotton had been born in St Albans on 7 March 1745, the son of Dr Nathaniel Cotton and Anne Pembroke. He had eleven brothers and sisters and another three step siblings. He joined the Royal Navy in 1760 at the age of just fifteen. After passing his examination to become a lieutenant, he left the navy to join the East India Company. He commanded an East Indiaman, the *Queen Charlotte*, and made several journeys to the Far East. Having made his fortune in the company's service he retired in 1782.

He married Sarah Harrison, born 12 August 1751, died 2 February 1818, the daughter of John Harrison, a Director of the East India Company, in 1779. Between them they had ten children, several of whom were born at Leyton House, of which Joseph Cotton had become a tenant. A full list of their children are as follows:

Joseph, born 1 November 1780, died January 1828

John, born 1783, died 1860

Sarah, baptised 20 January 1785 at St Botolph without Aldersgate

William, born 12 September 1786 and died Leytonstone 1 December 1866²⁶

Amelia, born 14 January 1789, died Torquay 7 January 1848

Phoebe, baptised 25 November 1789 at St Mary's Woodford

Charlotte, born 1 July 1790, baptised 1 August 1790 at St Mary's, Leyton

Mary, born 2 February 1792, baptised 6 March 1792 at St Mary's, Leyton

Benjamin, born 10 February 1794, baptised 15 March 1794 at St Mary's, Leyton

Louisa Decima, born baptised 3 October 1795 at St Mary's, Leyton

In 1788 Joseph Cotton was elected as an elder brother of Trinity House and in 1803 as Deputy Master of the Trinity House. He remained a Director of the East India Company from 1795 to 1823. And was a Fellow of the Royal Society. The Cottons left Leyton House on 1 June 1803, and moved to Walnut Tree House.

²⁶ William Cotton married Sarah Lane, of The Grange. Became Governor of the Bank of England from 1842 to 1845. He built Wallwood House in Leytonstone. For more information See *An Account of Wallwood from 1200 - 1960* by Frederick Temple, Leyton & Leytonstone Historical Society, 2007.

*Essex – Residence, with 31 Acres of Land, within 5 miles of Town. - By Messrs.
Skinner, Dyke & Co.*

*At Garraway's, on Wednesday, May 4, at 12 o'clock, by order of the Executors of
JOHN STORY, Esq. deceased,*

*A Valuable and very desirable FREEHOLD and COPYHOLD RESIDENCE, situate
at the extremity of Capworth-street, Low Layton; consisting of a commodious Brick
Mansion House, of handsome elevation, with suitable offices, coach-houses and
stabling, fore court, terrace walk, pleasure ground, gardens, and rich meadows,
ornamented by a quantity of valuable timber, refreshed by a Canal, containing in the
whole about 30 acres, lying very compact within a ring fence, and one acre in the
marshes, now in the possession of Joseph Cotton, Esq. who quits on the 1st of June,
when possession may be had.²⁷*

Joseph Cotton died 26 January 1825 and was buried in the family vault on 2 February 1825 in the churchyard of St Mary's Parish Church.

Leyton House was sold by the estate of the late John Story to Isaac Solly, a well-known Walthamstow family.

Solly

According to the Leyton rate Book for 1803, Isaac Solly was rated only for the lands as the house was "under repair". From Lady Day 1804 they were rated for both house and garden, until Lady Day 1829. At this point Hughes Farm²⁸ was sold off separately.

Isaac Solly was born in either 1769 or 1771 into a strong family of Protestant Dissenters at their London house in St Mary Axe. His parents were Isaac Solly, born 1725 and died 1802²⁹, and Elizabeth Neal. As a Merchant and a Director of the Million Bank and the Royal Exchange Assurance of 2 Jeffrys' Square, St Mary Axe, he was engaged in trading in timber with the Baltic countries. He was also Chairman of the London Dock Company. During the Napoleonic Wars³⁰ he had a contract to supply Polish or Prussian oak plank and Russian hemp to His Majesty's dockyards. The family were regular supporters of the Marsh Street Old Meeting House in Walthamstow. On 14 October 1795 an Indenture of Lease³¹ conveyed Marsh Street

²⁷ Unknown newspaper advertisement, 1803, held by Vestry House Museum. (L72.2)

²⁸ For many years this was the main endowment for the Alms Houses by the Parish Church. And sometimes known as Hemstall Green Farm. Hemstall Green was approximately where Lea Bridge Road today crosses the Dagenham Brook

²⁹ Buried in St Mary's Parish Churchyard, Walthamstow.

³⁰ Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815, ended with the Battle of Waterloo and the defeat of Napoleon.

³¹ *Walthamstow Deeds 1584-1855*, Stephen Barns, Walthamstow Antiquarian Society 1935 #33 pp

Old Meeting House by the elder Isaac Solly to the care of a group of local business men, including his sons Isaac and Richard.

Issac Solly married Mary Harrison at St Martin Orgar³² on 27 July 1795. Of their ten children, two became very well-known. Charlotte, born 1803, died 1871, married her first husband, Wiliam Speir, a medical practitioner of Calcutta, in 1835. She wrote a couple of books on old India and held a lifelong interest in this part of the British Empire. Her second marriage was to James Manning in 1857. She joined the committee who were instrumental in opening a university college for women, Charlotte becoming the first Mistress of Girton College, then situated at Hitchin. Her younger brother, Henry born 1813, died 1903, became the founder of the Working Mens' Club. One family yet they were concerned in two of the major advances in British Society.

Towards the end of his long life, Henry Solly, wrote his autobiography, published in 1893. He recalls his grandmother, Elizabeth Solly in 1818:

I can just recollect old Mrs Solly as a stately and rather severe old lady, attired in a magnificent yellow silk brocade, as she appeared at Leyton House on the Christmas Day when I was just five years old³³

. . . . the first Christmas Day I can remember, when I was just six years old, and which recalls memories of the bright glow of the fire that evening in the dining room, of all the happy faces of bothers and sisters, father and mother, and domestic servants; of the lights in the large hall, and how one of my brothers caught me up, swung me on to his shoulder and went capering round the hall and dining-room to my infinite delight. And then came the grand event of the evening – an exhibition of the Magic Lantern, which all the servants were invited³⁴

Of his visits during the school holidays he mentions spending:

a few days' visit to Leyton, for popping at field-fares and skating³⁵

23.

³² St Martin Orgar of Martin Lane was damaged during the Great Fire of London in 1666, and not rebuilt. A portion of the church which escaped the fire was used as a French Protestant Church.

³³ *These Eighty Years*, Henry Solly, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London 1893, Vol 1, pp 3.

³⁴ *These Eighty Years*, Henry Solly, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London 1893, Vol 1, pp 31.

³⁵ *These Eighty Years*, Henry Solly, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London 1893, Vol 1, pp 119.

He goes on to mention a long period of leisure spent in Leyton:

Some time during the month of October 1835, I left the Counting House in Leadenhall Street on a furlough of three or four months, came down to Leyton House on a beautiful day, walking through the fair Leyton meadows (miscalled marshes) by the banks of the Lea³⁶

Isaac Solly became an Overseer of the Poor in 1815/6 and a churchwarden in 1825. He was declared bankrupt in 1837 and the family soon left Leyton House, as they were last rated until Michaelmas 1838, when they sold up and moved to Southgate. Isaac died at his son's house in Chestnut Walk, Leyton, and was buried at Stansted in 1853. Mary Solly died the following year.

A last word from Henry Solly:

My father and mother, all their married lives, had taken great pleasure in a view of the setting sun, especially from the flat lofty roof of the house at Leyton, whence we had an extensive prospect as far as Shooters Hill in one direction and Hampstead Heath in another³⁷

Sidney

According to the Terrier accompanying the Tithe Map of 1839 the new owner/occupier was James Sidney. By September 1840, the rates were taken over by Thomas Sidney who had been born in Stafford on 5 January 1805, the son of William and Ann Sidney, a woollen draper, and educated at Stafford Grammar School. He had established himself as a tea importer and merchant on Ludgate Hill by 1838. He became a City Counsellor for Farringdon Ward in 1843/4, and shortly afterwards in 1844, as Alderman of Billingsgate, a position he held for 36 years. Thomas Sidney had married Sarah Hall in Ranton, near Stafford, on 11 January 1831. According to the Leyton Rate Books he was rated at Leyton House from September 1840 until October 1853 for the house, stabling, offices, pleasure ground, garden and land exclusive of that part covered by the Walthamstow Slip. By April 1856 part of the land and farm buildings were occupied by Thomas Rumbel. The Sidneys left Leyton House in April 1856 although Alderman Sidney retained ownership until 1880.

It is interesting to see the composition of the household, taken from the details of the first census included a record of the occupants taken in 1841:

³⁶ *These Eighty Years*, Henry Solly, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London 1893, Vol 1, pp 224.

³⁷ *These Eighty Years*, Henry Solly, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London 1893, Vol 2, pp 622.

Thomas Sidney	35-40	
Sarah Sidney	30-35	
James Perkins	30-35	Servant
Susan Perkins	30-35	Servant
Hannah Green	30-35	Servant
Phoebe Franklin	20-25	Servant
Elizabeth Grunnock	15-20	Servant
Thomas Grunnock	Age 11	
Harriet Hold	20-25	Servant

From 1847 to 1852 Alderman Sidney was a Conservative Member of Parliament for his home town of Stafford. However, he lost the election of 1852 for Leeds and 1857 for Worcester. Despite a further defeat as a Liberal in Stafford in 1859, he was elected the following year and held his seat until retirement in 1865.

In local affairs he was appointed Overseer of the Poor in 1849, but was exempted. He was also a churchwarden in 1852/3.

By the time of the 1851 census the family had been joined by the Rev Moon:

Thomas Sidney	Married	46	Alderman & Tea Merchant	Staffordshire
Sarah Sidney	Wife	42		Norton
Ellen Sidney	Daughter	19		Leeds
Edward Moon	Minister	26	Clergyman	London
Sarah Heath	Servant	29	Cook	Kirtenton
Emma Russell	Servant	26	Housemaid	Woolwich
Eliza Sevain	Servant	23	Housemaid	Bognor
William Robertson	Servant	22	Footman	Scotland

Ellen and Edward were to be married 3 July 1851 at the Parish Church.

Alderman Sidney became Lord Mayor of London in 1853, only to be followed in 1854 by Sir Francis Graham Moon, the father of his son-in-law, Rev Edward Graham Moon. Nice to keep these things in the family.



His wife, Sarah Sidney, died at Sunbury 27 February 1857 and is commemorated, as the “Wife of Thomas Sidney late of Leyton House” by a memorial in the north aisle of St Mary’s Parish Church. Shortly before her death they left Leyton for Bowes Manor, Southgate in 1855. Alderman Sidney continued to live at Southgate until his death on 10 March 1889 at St Leonards-on-Sea. He is buried in St Michael’s at Bowes.

Morris

The last private occupants of Leyton House were the family of William Morris. As a poet, writer and artist he would become world famous as a member of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. William Morris had been born over the boundary in Walthamstow at Elm House on 24 March 1834. His father, a City discount broker, died relatively young at Woodford Hall in 1847. His widow, and William’s mother, Emma Morris, nee Skelton, born 24 May 1805, returned to Walthamstow, Water House³⁸ in Forest Road, and remained there until 1856. Emma Morris is first rated at Leyton House in April 1856 and resided there until July 1871.

William Morris was educated at Marlborough College and then at Exeter College, Oxford. He met Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Philip Webb who became part of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and in 1861 they founded Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

In 1860 William Morris’ sister, Isabella, married Arthur Hamilton Gilmore at St Mary’s Parish Church in Leyton. We know that during his lifetime he visited his mother and sister at Leyton House. But he was not there for the census of 1861:

Emma Morris	Widow	54	Proprietess of Copper Mines & Fundholder	Worcester
Harriett Morris	Daughter	28	Proprietess of Copper Mines & Fundholder	London
Hugh H Morris	Son	23	Proprietor of Copper Mines & Fundholder	Walthamstow
Henry Worrall	Servant	28	Butler	Hoby, Leics.
Henry Gregory	Servant	15	Page	Plymouth
Rebecca Corkell	Servant	34	Housemaid	Wanstead
Harriett Corkell	Servant	31	Housemaid	Wanstead
Catherine Rogers	Servant	29	Ladies maid	Kennington

³⁸ Water House in Lloyd’s Park. The house now houses the William Morris Gallery.

Amelia Stork Servant 22 House servant Lambeth

During this period her famous son was living at the Red House³⁹, in Bexleyheath with his wife, Jane Burden. In his later life Morris became one of the key figures in early British Socialism.

William Morris dined with his mother on several occasions and stayed at Leyton House, until Saturday, in May 1868. Just prior to Emma Morris' departure the census for 1871 was taken:

Emma Morris	Widow	65	Annuitant & Landowner	Worcester
Harriett Morris	Daughter	38	Proprietess of Copper Mines & Fundholder	London
Henry Worrall	Servant	38	Butler	Worcester
Rebecca Cocket	Servant	34	Housemaid	London
Catherine Rogers	Servant	38	Ladies maid	Hoby
Anne Carless	Servant	33	Cook	Woolthorpe
Roselind Waller	Servant	18	Housemaid	New Kent Rd
Emma Smith	Servant	15	Kitchen Maid	Kent
Peter Andrew	Servant	15	Page	Leyton
Jonathan Stamer	Servant	27	Gardener	Wixoe

In July 1871 Emma Morris left Leyton House.

St Agnes's Orphanage

The neighbouring property, Etloe House, had been leased to the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, as a country house. As there was no Catholic Church in Leyton until 1897, services had been held in the Chapel of St Agnes School and Orphanage which had taken over Etloe House after Cardinal Wiseman had moved out. With new owners taking over Etloe House, the Orphanage was re-established at Leyton House in 1874, then renamed Park House. By 1882 it was known as St Agnes Roman Catholic "Poor School", a mixed school with an average attendance of 150 pupils, and orphanage, under Sister Mary Burns. Sister Burns was replaced by Sister Josephine Murphy in 1888. The orphanage finally closed when new premises opened in Vicarage Road in 1900, although its listing in Kelly's Post Office Directory was not removed from the 1901/02 edition.

London Wire Works

³⁹ Designed by his friend Philip Webb.

The London Electric Wire Co. Ltd., had been established a year earlier in 1899, and occupied the land south of Leyton House. The company merged around 1912 with Leytonstone firm of Thomas Smith's wire works and became known as the London Electric Wire Co. & Smith's Ltd. In 1921, the company manufacturing electric cables, wire, and flex, employed over thirteen hundred workers. By the sixties it was Leyton's largest employer, and reputed to be the largest manufacturer of insulated wire in the whole of Europe.

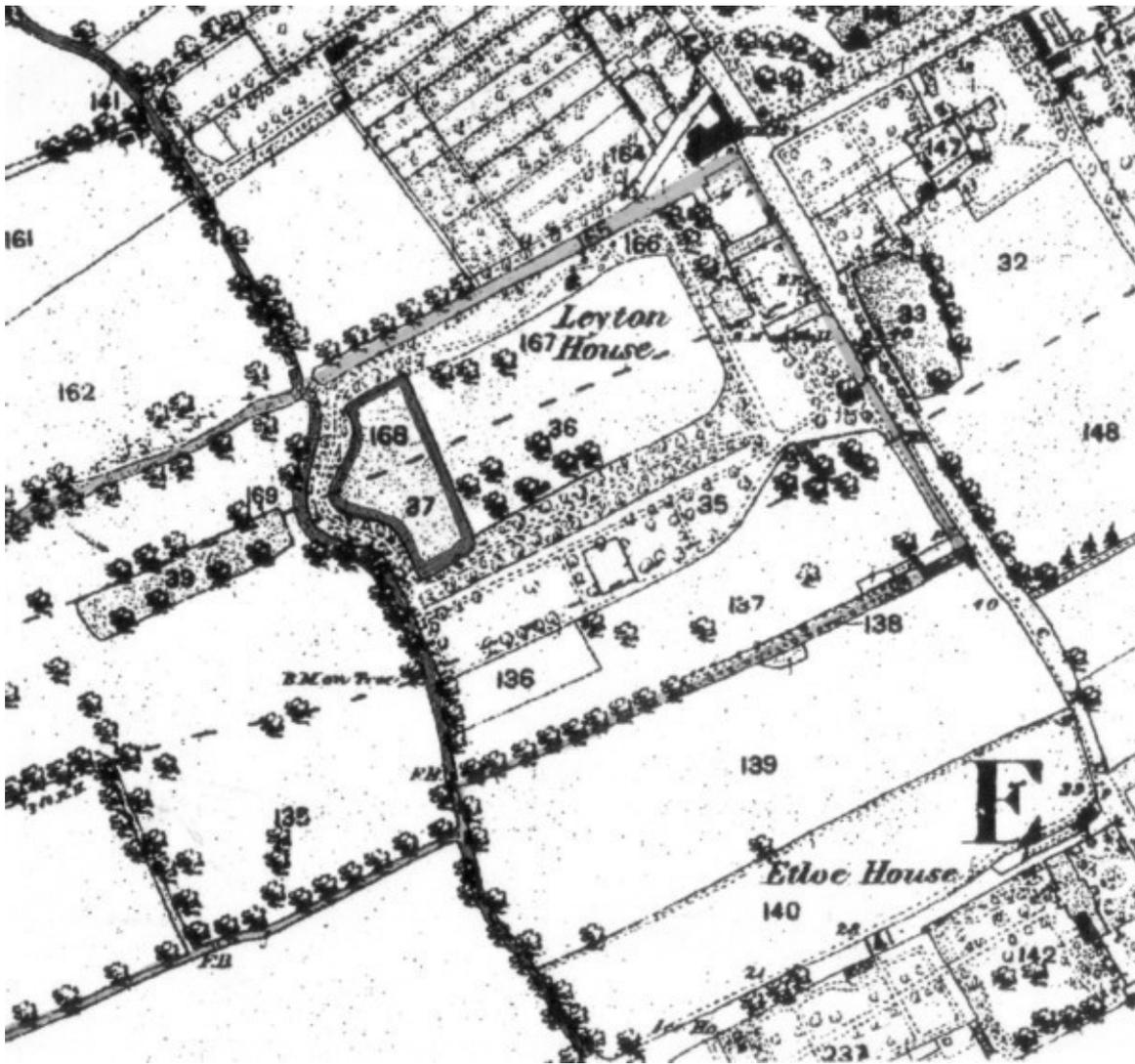
Leyton House was demolished just prior to 1913. The high brick wall which obscured a view of the front of the old house from Church Road was still there in my lifetime. If you were lucky you could see over the wall from the top of a passing trolleybus. If I remember accurately there was a square of lawn just in front of where the old house stood. The old entrance with its stone gate posts was certainly there in 1933. Even today there is still part of the old wall, how old is anyone's guess, opposite the end of Capworth Street. Reference to the Ordnance Survey Map, on page 17, you will notice the track which ran down the side of Leyton House and on to the Marsh. The accompanying photograph shows part of wall as of June 2007. Just a week prior to this photograph being taken part of wall nearest Church Road collapsed onto a car awaiting repair.



**A view of the front entrance to Leyton House
Looking towards Church Road, c1933**



The last remains of Leyton House



Detail from the Ordnance Survey Map of 1861

The main road running north to south is Church Lane (now Church Road), although the part extending beyond Capworth Street was known as Park Place. Beyond the house lay the terrace walk and then the ornamental pleasure grounds, which led to the large pond (the dotted lines indicating the width of the Walthamstow Slip),

The walk at the top of the main lawn would have been the Shrubbery Walk, whilst the opposite would have been the Elm-Tree Walk.

The main estate (marked in orange) was divided from the rest of the meadows by the Dagenham Brook. The brook was apparently rerouted, as can be seen from the above map, when landscaping the grounds. The grounds extended from the Dagenham Brook into the Marsh, to just beyond the far side of the where the railway tracks run today.

Illustrations

The illustrations marked with an asterisk * are by arrangement with Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest. We are very grateful to the Museum's staff for all the help they gave whilst this publication was being compiled.

Front cover : Leyton House from Church Road, taken from a photograph by G H Hales which was published in Rev F W Wilkinson's *A History of Leyton*, 1897 . The only known photograph of Leyton House. Whereabouts of the original unknown.

Page 10 : Detail from John Roque's Map of 1741/5.

Page 11 and rear cover : An engraving by Bland of *The Seat of Henry More Esq at Low Layton, Essex* taken from *A new and complete history of Essex*, By a Gentleman.*

Page 16 : Memorial to Sarah Sidney Wife of Thomas Sidney late of Leyton House in the north aisle of St Mary's Parish Church (photograph by David Boote)

Page 19 : Photograph of the entrance gates to Leyton House, looking towards Church Road, circa 1933.*

Page 20 : Photograph June 2007 of the remaining part of the wall from the Leyton House Estate, taken by David Ian Chapman.

Page 21 : Detail from Ordnance Survey Map of 1861.