



# The Orchard 3<sup>rd</sup> Auxiliary Military Hospital

Tramway Survey

HER No: TQ57 NW 102

By Francine Hills BA (HONS)

Rachael Hills BA (HONS) MA

Sean Robinson

Bexley Young Archaeologists' Club



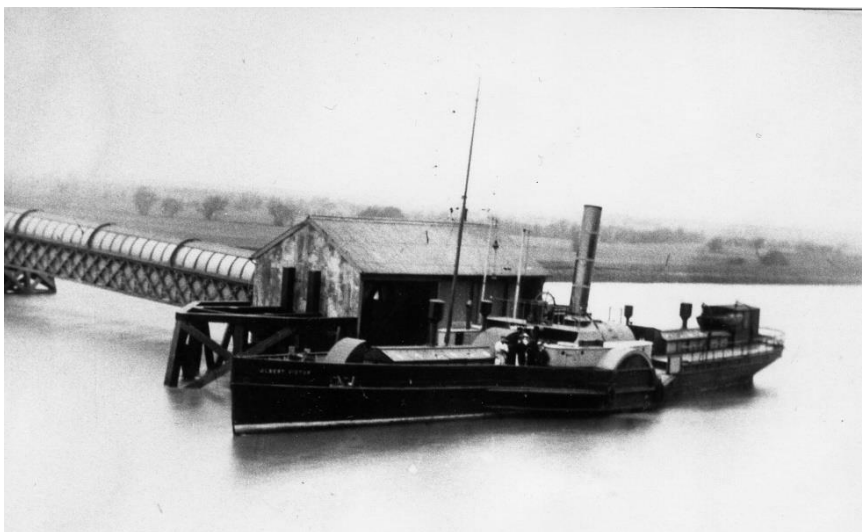
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## The Tramway - History

The tramway was a good example of forward planning by the Metropolitan Asylum Board (MAB). The smallpox ships were full and nearing the end of their useful life. In 1893, a new hospital was planned on the shore, but there were delays in building it. The MAB, however, decided to go ahead with the construction of a horse tramway along a causeway to the new hospital area. This would ensure a smooth journey from the Ambulance Steamer, especially if temporary hospitals needed to be built at short notice.

The River Ambulance Service conveyed the sick from London from North Wharf (Blackwell) and South Wharf (Rotherhithe). They travelled on Ambulance Steamers fitted with accommodation for sick patients and room to bring supplies to the Hospital ships. A pier was built at Long Reach and the tramway started.



Ambulance Steamer Albert Victor moored at the pier, Long Reach.



Patients being transferred to the 'trambulance' c.1915

The contracts for the tramway were awarded to Mr J Dickson of St Albans in 1896, who subcontracted some of the work to Dick, Kerr & Co.

The tramway was a single line of 4ft gauge. A second track was provided at the pier head and at three passing places *en route*.

A smallpox epidemic occurred in the winter of 1901/2 and the temporary 300 bed Long Reach hospital was erected. The patients were transferred in

horse-drawn ambulances but later the MAB purchased two horse-drawn tramcars and changed



their gauge to 4ft before use. The Orchard hospital was also built and connected to the tramway. A temporary car shed was built at the Orchard (see Orchard report for more details) and an additional passing place was also added. After the epidemic gas lighting was installed along the causeway.

In 1903, when Joyce Green opened it was served by branch tramways running past each ward. There was a permanent coach house, replacing the temporary depot at the Orchard. A branch track led to the boiler house and a wet weather terminal added so that patients could be unloaded under cover and transported to the wards under the covered ways (this was the area outside the porter's office), and it was also extended to the gate-porters lodge. The tramway could now be used for the transportation of goods, as during epidemics tradesmen and their vehicles could not enter the hospital. The tramway was now at its maximum extent of 3.4 miles, measured as a single track.

In 1908 the MAB purchased two second-hand tramcars without prior inspection. These proved to be unsuitable, so they designed their own purpose-built models. These were based on the detailed designs submitted by Dr Ricketts (the Medical Superintendent). Dr Ricketts was so pleased with the design he suggested that the Board took out a patent, but this was hardly necessary as horse drawn trambulances were probably unique.

During WW1 the tramway was still in use. The River Ambulances were fewer as some were loaned to the military for war use. The river was used to bring both fever and military patients to Joyce Green. In 1918 1,200 refugees from Russia were transported to Joyce Green for isolation as they had been in contact with smallpox. Only two of them contracted the disease and after a few weeks they were all transported back up to join the other refugees at Earl's Court.

Electric traction was never introduced, the hospital being lit by gas until 1925. In July 1914 a motor tractor was tested. It hauled two trams laden with 23 adults, this was successful but due to the war the idea was dropped as no vehicles could be spared.

In 1924/5 motor traction was again tried. A Talbot motor ambulance was used successfully and two more ordered. The speeds were kept low and the tram brakemen had to alight at corners and lean against the tram to help it round. Unlike the horses it didn't have the same sideways pull at corners.

The River Ambulance Service was disbanded in 1932, by this time it was cheaper to send patients to the hospitals via land ambulance. From its opening in 1893 to its closure it had transported more than 45,000 patients. From 1932 the tram was used only as an internal link between the hospitals. It was last used in 1936 and the track lifted in 1943 during the wartime drive for scrap metal.

### The Tramway - Survey

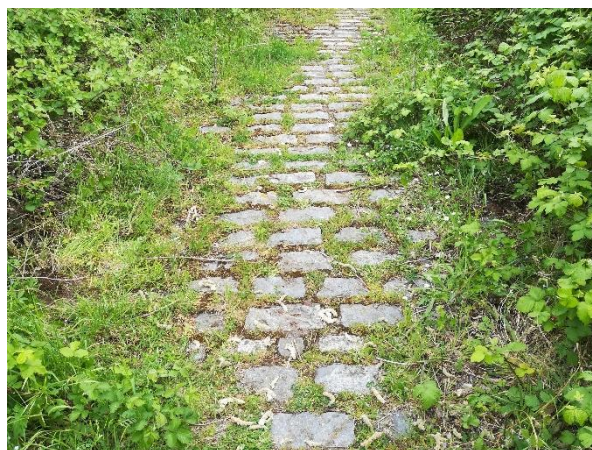
In April 2018, Bexley Young Archaeologists' Club recorded the remaining sections of tramway.

The site of the old Joyce Green Hospital is now The Bridge housing estate. The causeway is still visible past the Orchard hospital site to the river Thames. There is now modern tarmac over the most of the original cobbled surface.



*Recording the causeway.*

Still visible along the causeway were sections of the original fencing, the gates to the Long Reach Hospital and sections of cobbles.

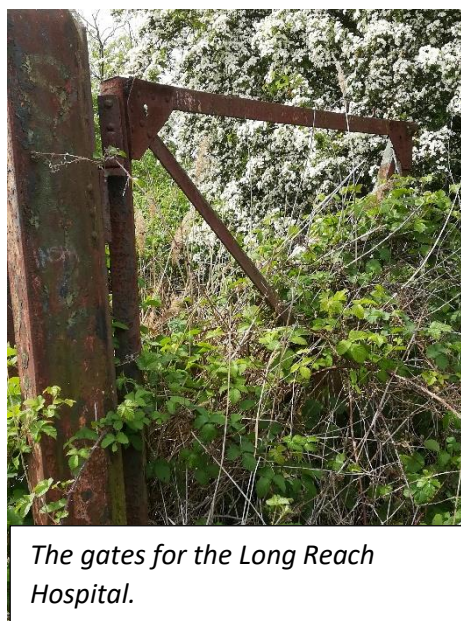


*The original cobbled surface still visible at the river end of the causeway.*



*Section of original fencing.*

Today the remaining causeway is 912.5 metres long, from the Binnie Road entrance to the river end (where it was too overgrown to follow) and is 6.75m wide. At approximately 91 metres the tramway would have run into the Orchard hospital.



*The gates for the Long Reach Hospital.*

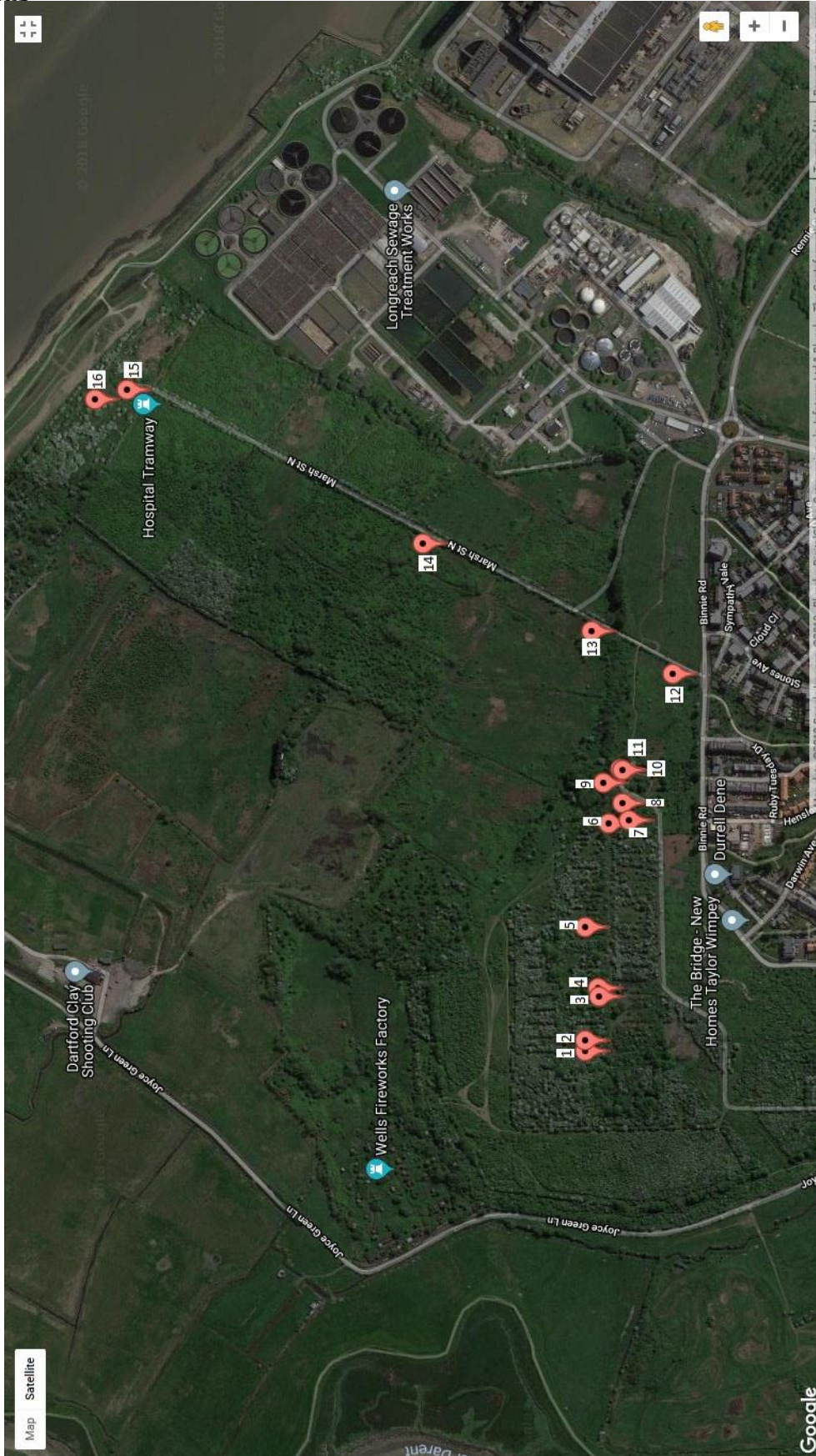


Figure 1 Satellite image of Orchard Hospital and Long Reach Causeway with GPS markers



### List of GPS Markers (accurate to within 10m)

- 1) Western turning circle of Orchard Hospital tramway. (Lat: 51.46572 Long: 0.21971)
- 2) Western passing point of Orchard Hospital tramway. (Lat: 51.4657 Long: 0.21992)
- 3) Base of Ward Block (Building F) (Lat: 51.46553 Long: 0.22081)
- 4) Building G (Lat: 51.46569 Long: 0.22096)
- 5) Central passing point of Orchard Hospital tramway. (Lat: 51.4657 Long: 0.22191)
- 6) Boiler House (Building H). (Lat: 51.4652 Long: 0.22435)
- 7) Workshop (Building D). (Lat: 51.46516 Long: 0.22434)
- 8) Building C. (Lat: 51.46524 Long: 0.22468)
- 9) Tram Shed (Building E). (Lat: 51.46549 Long: 0.22500)
- 10) Telephone/Telegraph pole associated with Building A. (Lat: 51.46524 Long: 0.22534)
- 11) Building A. (Lat: 51.46526 Long: 0.22538)
- 12) Southern end of surviving Long Reach Causeway near Binnie Road. (Lat: 51.46441 Long: 0.22722)
- 13) Treeline on line of original E-W tramway to Orchard Hospital. (Lat: 51.46562 Long: 0.22813)
- 14) Passing place on Long Reach Causeway. (Lat: 51.46775 Long: 0.22981)
- 15) Long Reach Gates. (Lat: 51.47152 Long: 0.23293)
- 16) End of accessible causeway. (Lat: 51.47188 Long: 0.23265)

For more information about the markers on the Orchard Hospital site see the Orchard Hospital Report.

Bexley Young Archaeologists' Report by Sean Robinson



I was part of a group that measured the tram lines along the causeway and we took turns in measuring it. I have really enjoyed cataloguing the hospital site and have found it very interesting.

In this picture we are comparing our notes of what we had found with the other group.

Bibliography

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