

THE TEMPORARY NAVY OFFICE 1673-1684

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The location of Charles II's Navy Office—the Navy Office of Samuel Pepys and William Hewer—is one of the minor puzzles of London topography. Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1677 showed it on the west side of Mark Lane, just within the parish of St. Olave, Hart Street. Strype's edition (1720) of Stow's *Survey of London* labels this site "the old Navy Office" and puts a neat square new Navy Office into the large irregular space in the angle between Crutched Friars and Seething Lane which in Ogilby's map had been open ground. But the entrance to this office is from the Friars, not the Lane. Harben's invaluable *Dictionary of London* (1918) relies mainly on Strype's but mentions, without locating it, a Navy Office in 1649. The London County Council's *Survey of London* XV pp. 4-6 agrees in the main with Pepys *Diary* in placing it in Seething Lane, rather than Crutched Friars. An enquirer is therefore left to sort out the puzzle as best he can.

As maps earlier than Ogilby and Morgan are based on views, not measured surveys, and as the area was almost wholly spared by the fire of 1666, there are no immediately post-fire admeasurements, and the solution of the problem has to be wholly documentary. Here the result is not merely a fascinating detective story, but, tested link by link, conclusive.

Up to 1630 there had been no permanent Navy Office building, the work being done, as in some other departments of government, in the house of a Commissioner or a senior official. But on 16th March, 1630, the Lords of the Admiralty instructed the Navy Commissioners to take a lease of some seven to eight years of rooms in Mr. Allen's house in Mincing Lane.¹ Their reason was simple. People coming from Portsmouth, Chatham "and other remote places" needed a fixed office to come to, whilst the germ of a regular, royal, navy needed a definite administrative headquarters. The tenure of the office they then leased was extended well beyond the proposed seven years. It survived the departure of the Commissioners to join the King's party during the Civil War² and it was not until June, 1649, that, for economy's sake, the Office was moved to shared quarters in the Victualling Office on the east side of Tower Hill.³ There, increasing work and increasing distaste for the reek of the Victuallers' slaughterhouse soon set the Commissioners looking for pleasanter quarters.⁴ These were found in Seething Lane.

in the town house of the royalist and bankrupted Sir John Wolstenholme (junior). The Council of State sanctioned their purchase⁵ and on 5th July, 1654, for a payment of £2,400, Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell became the freeholder of a capital messuage and garden there.⁶ The Navy Office had gained a permanent headquarters.

This house, part of the former Muscovy House plus the White Horse next to it, lay on the east side of the Lane, some half a dozen doors south of its junction with Crutched Friars. It had no entrance on to the Friars, being separated from it by the houses along the latter's street frontage. Like many of the government departments at that time, it provided both office space and living quarters for the Commissioners and principal officers,⁷ and Pepy's *Diary*⁸ is full of references to his delight at their pleasantness and convenience. But before long, as the work of the Navy continued to grow, there is increasing mention of the need for more space and the desirability of acquiring Sir Richard Ford's house on the southern side of the office. Whether such extra room would have been bought can only be guessed, for in January, 1673, the position was violently altered. On the 29th a fire in Lord Brouncker's rooms spread fast, engulfing the whole building and several of the neighbouring houses.⁹ Others were blown up in order to contain the flames,¹⁰ and the houseless and officeless Navy staff had at once to seek new accommodation. Emergency quarters for the office were found nearby in the newly built Trinity House in Water Lane, Tower Ward,¹¹ and the officers found what accommodation they could for their households, mostly in the immediate neighbourhood.¹² More permanent administrative quarters soon followed. On Monday, 24th February, 1673, the Office reopened in Mark Lane,¹³ there to begin a stay which, though always intended to be temporary, did in fact last for close on eleven years—years which covered the period of the preparation and publication not only of Ogilby's map, but also that of Morden and Lea (1682). For those map-makers, therefore, the house in Mark Lane was the Navy Office. When, late in 1683, it was abandoned, and the office and the Commissioners transferred to Crutched Friars, then the temporary office became what it is in Richard Blome's map in Strype, "the old Navy Office."

This permanent, new Navy Office, designed by Wren and built by Joseph Ward,¹⁴ include the whole site of Cromwell's purchase, plus the site of the other half of Muscovy House, plus, to ensure a more workable lay-out, land specially acquired from the Carpenters' Company. It was this last which allowed re-orientation, with a main entrance from the Friars instead of from Seething Lane, another change which has

often brought confusion to the topographer. But, to return to the temporary office in Mark Lane, there the Commissioners were more than fortunate. In the city of London, conversion of residential property to business uses has a long and usually costly history. In Mark Lane, the Navy found the work already done for it. Like Muscovy House, the new quarters had once been the town house and garden of a great merchant family, in this case the Baynings.¹⁵ When the male line of that family became extinct at the death in 1638 of the second Viscount Bayning the property had been let on lease. The freehold remained with various members of the family, but the house itself was "developed." Early in the 1660's the western part of the site, which stretched as far as Mincing Lane, had two houses built on it, fronting on to that Lane. At the Restoration, the lessee of the whole was John Bland, merchant.¹⁶ To Pepys, whom he knew and knew well, he was a trader interested in Spain and Tangier. Probably, like most of the London merchants, he sought profit wherever it offered, for his will¹⁷ shows him as owner of a house in Tangier valuable enough for it to be seized by the governor for the King's use and of interests in Virginia great enough for him to despatch his wife there to help to look after them. But, in the case of his lease in Mark Lane, profit came to him by chance. When the Great Fire sent the rents of all unscathed houses soaring to unprecedented heights, the Baynings' great house was left, damaged but habitable, on the verge of the ruins. It was clearly a prize for somebody—primarily somebody interested in the Pool and in sea-borne trade. From the Temple to the Tower, all the water-front had been destroyed. The Custom House was burnt out and the Customs Farmers were in dire need of premises. They were obvious potential clients, clients for whom a mansion, barely two hundred yards up the hill behind their wharf, would be a god-send to be taken with all speed. Agreement was quickly reached. Bland was abroad, but his undertenant, Richard Middleton, merchant, agreed with the Farmers for a premium of £300 and a rent of £300 p.a.¹⁸ The Farmers paid for all necessary repairs and for the cost of conversion,¹⁹ and hastened to move in, to remain there until the Custom House was rebuilt, probably early in 1671.

By then the picture had changed. Rents were down and Bland, with at least three law suits on his hands, had still to rebuild the two houses in Mincing Lane. New-built properties in the city were hard to let and the prospects for his large, elderly house were far from good. For him, therefore, the fire in the Navy Office was an undisguised blessing. His premises were near and obviously suitable. The Navy Commissioners were equally anxious, moving in well before agreement was

reached and £100 promised for the half year starting at Ladyday 1673.²⁰ A dozen years of bickering were about to begin.

The causes of the disputes were many. Bland had let only parts of the house, was anxious for a definite lease instead of half-yearly or yearly tenancies, unwilling to do repairs and not over-accommodating about the use of the garden and the apportionment of dues and taxes. The Crown was a bad payer, as concerned as Bland to get all it could, and reluctant until the last minute to every extension of the letting. Which was most at fault, it is impossible to determine,²¹ but the Navy Treasurer's declared accounts show that the original rent of £200 p.a. was later reduced to £160 p.a. before being raised to £260 and that much of this, if paid at all, remained for years uncleared in his books.²² Bland himself died in 1680, leaving, as joint executor with his wife, his "choicest friend", Thomas Povey, one of the Masters of Requests. Povey, he believed, best understood his affairs "which have in them some intricacies and difficulties". Whether the house in Mark Lane was included in that category is not explicitly stated, but it patently was so in fact. The Navy Commissioners left at Michaelmas, 1683, possibly without due notice and with disputes over repairs still unsettled. For the six winter months it stood forlorn and empty, the sum due to Povey and Sarah Bland still uncleared in the Treasurer's books. In March, 1685, she was petitioning the King for compensation, sanctioned by the Crown but unpaid by the Navy Board—£100 for damage done there during the Board's tenure, £100 for the time left untenanted in order to do the repairs.²³ It was not until January, 1686, that the Crown gave the necessary order, not until later in that year that the money was paid.²⁴ Pepys had declared himself "fain to admire the knowledge and experience of Mrs. Bland, who I think as good a merchant as her husband." Probably his verdict was shrewd. Probably she took no great pleasure in the results of the Navy Office's tenancy of the house in Mark Lane. But she and her husband live on, partly because of that tenancy. The Judges in the Fire Court could declare that "they will not Ravell into, or Intermedle with the proceedings in the Exchequer, or any agreements made between the said Mr. Bland and the said Farmers" but it would be churlish for the student of London's topography not to be grateful to the Blands. Together they solve one at least of his problems.

NOTES

Naval administration, which centred on the Navy Office, is excellently described in M. Oppenheim, *The Administration of the Royal Navy . . . 1509-1660*, and John Ehrman, *The Navy in the War of William III, 1689-1697*, but the gap between them has been less well covered and this subject apparently not at all.

The references below are, unless shown otherwise, to documents in the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London, with the exception of those cited as Add.Ms. These are the Additional Manuscripts in the British Museum. Where no folio is given, the Ms. is not folioid.

- 1 Add.Ms. 9295 f. 178. 2 Add.Ms. 9305 f. 47. 3 Add.Ms. 9300 f. 137.
- 4 S.P. 18/41 f. 145. 5 S.P. 25/75 pp. 124, 234.
- 6 Port of London Authority, Deeds, T.W. Reg. 1^a p. 28.
- 7 The Treasurer excepted. He, at this time, had both in the former house of Sir Thomas Allen in Broad Street (Add.Ms. 36,782 f. 21^r).
- 8 As there are many well-indexed editions, to save space here, the references are not given.
- 9 Admiralty 106/2887. This volume is not folio'd but the entries are chronological.
- 10 Add.Ms. 5101 (23) and (24). 11 Admiralty 106/2887 *passim*.
- 12 They were later granted £80 p.a. each to cover the rents they had to pay (Admiralty 2/1747 p. 13) with, in addition, the cost of removal (A.O.I. 1713/113 no folio).
- 13 Admiralty 106/2887.
- 14 For a detailed account of its acquisition and building *vide* Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research.
- 15 Alderman Paul Bayning, grocer, the first viscount, had been its most notable member. The house was still referred to as the Bayning's house, in the 1660's (Calendar of Treasury Books 1660-67 p. 728).
- 16 Add.Ms. 5099 (12). Bland's lease was until Ladyday 1672 and thence for the life of Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford, up to a maximum of 41 additional years.
- 17 Prerogative Court of Canterbury, *Bath*, 76.
- 18 Add.Ms. 5100 (45). This, and the Ms. in footnote 16 *supra*, very clearly set out the tenancies and the negotiations.
- 19 They later claimed for and were allowed them by the Crown. (P.R.O./32/43 p. 92). 20 A.O.I. 1713/112 f. 17.
- 21 For examples, see Admiralty 106/2888 (1674) pp. 66, 93, 159, and *passim* thereafter, and (1675) p. 77.
- 22 See A.O.I. 1714/119 ff. 29^v, 35, 42^v, 46 where the amounts total £880.
- 23 Ind. 4617 p. 53 24 T.61/4 p. 123 and A.O.I. 1717/125.

MIDDLESEX MANORIAL RECORDS

MIDDLESEX COUNTY RECORD OFFICE

1, Queen Anne's Gate Buildings, Dartmouth Street, Westminster, S.W.1

Supplementary List of Manorial Records

Deposited during 1955/7

Parish: HAMPTON. Honour and Manor: HAMPTON COURT.

Court Minute Books (View of Frankpledge and Court Baron) 1709-51,
1796-1806, 1846-57, 3 vols.

Parish: HILLINGDON. Manor: COLHAM.

Particular of the Manor (copy) 1686-1700.

Parish: SUNBURY. Manor: *SUNBURY.

Court Bks. (View of Frankpledge and Court Baron) with

Index.	1676/7-1924	9 vols.
Survey Books.	1749/50, 1790	2 vols.
Book of Customs.	N/D. (18th C.)	1 vol.
Plans.	1722/49 & 1820	(2)
Register of Conveyances.	1850-70.	1 vol.

(with Teddington & Walton-on-Thames).

* A collection of deeds and papers is associated with these records.