CLIFFORD'S INN— historical perspective

Mr. Michael F. Moore outlines the history behind our new London office and its environs, including Fetter Lane, home of "pretenders, imposters and vagabonds".

THE PROPERTY takes its name from Robert deClifford to whom the messuage was granted by Edward II in 1310 and whose widow in 1344 let the property to students of the law for £10 annually. Messuage is a word (deriving from old French) meaning mansion; the word inn also signified a mansion and not simply a tavern in those days. The first Inns of Court date back to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, residuary legatees since 1208 of the suppressed Knights Templars, who gave the Outer, Inner and Middle Temples to certain law students who had temporary residence at Thavies Inn (in Holborn). With the growth of the number of law students, Gray's Inn and Lincoln's Inn were added to the Inner and MIddle Temples. Apparently there were also ten Inns of Chancery of which Clifford's Inn was the longest surviving and continued through the reigns of several kings, including Henry VIII (1509-1547) who suppressed the other law schools in the old City. Life at the Inns was not all earnest endeavour. "The Christmasings lasted several days . . . carols were decently performed and minstraylsie after . . . breakfast". In 1794, nine hundred pairs of small dice were found which had dropped through the boards of Inner Temple Hall. Lawyers were disliked by much of the populace and whenever there was a riot the mob would invade and destroy the books and records; during the rebellion of Wat Tyler (died 1381) the Temple suffered in this way and Clifford's Inn continued as an independent school for the study of the law not connected with or subject to the Temple. Another sign of the unpopularity of lawyers was referral to Thavies Inn as "Thieves Inn". These two with Barnard's Inn remain out of the ten Inns of Chancery outside the Temple. Of the others there is little to show.

Fetter Lane in 1934: many variants of the name

'nine hundred pairs of small dice'

Staple Inn was the hostel of the Merchants of (Wool) Staple; its frontage onto Holborn, possibly one of the oldest existing specimens of street architecture, is of the time of James I (1603-1625). I have it on very good authority that the building now has a steel frame.

The Great Fire burned from 2nd to 7th September 1666 and began (near the Monument commemorating it) in a baker's in Pudding Lane and it stopped at Fetter Lane. The judges sat in Clifford's Inn to settle all disputes about property and boundaries.

Clifford's Inn was repainted and beautified between 1720-55 and the gardens were railed and planted with trees early in the same century. We learn that in the 19th century it was let

as chambers, offices, etc. It was demolished in 1934 and rebuilt in 1937 and I am told by Edgar Traylen, a former partner of EM&S, that when he was a newly articled clerk he was sent there then during audit of The Solicitors Benevolent Fund. In 1948, upon being put in charge of the audit of Lamson Engineering Co Limited, I was called to meet the Directors of the holding company at the end of lunch following a Board meeting and the venue was—Clifford's Inn. As we now know the building was refurbished, if not rebuilt, in 1985.

Fetter Lane—There are many variants of the derivation of the name, none of them very complimentary, since we apparently have the choice between "Fewters" meaning "idle people'" or "Faitours" which apparently means "pretender, imposter or vagabond". It seems to have run between gardens beside the Thames and others beside Old Bourne (from which Holborn takes its name) and apparently a resort for the "layabouts" of centuries ago. For more than two centuries both ends of Fetter Lane were used as places of execution. Ben Jonson (1573-1637) an English poet laureate, dramatist and friend of Shakespeare makes Funguso say that he can "borrow forty shillings on his gown in Fetter Lane"; whether from bankers or pawn brokers, both can still be found in nearby Fleet Street.

Who knows of Praisegod Barebones the leather seller and his brother Damned Barebones? Apparently they both lived in the same house at the corner of Fleet Street and Fetter Lane.

We have pedestrian access to our courtyard from neighbouring streets:—

Chancery Lane—This was originally known as Newstraite (or variations of that) and contained a House of Converts which from about 1340 was annexed as the office of the Master of the Rolls and the road renamed Chancery Lane.

These two lanes join:—

Fleet Street—which is very old and can be traced back to the 13th century and once stretched from Ludgate to the Savoye; its western end now is Temple Bar. The last structure of this was rebuilt by Wren in about 1670 but removed in 1870 and later rebuilt at Theobold's Park, Cheshunt. Its place is marked now by a plinth in the middle of the road, There is a movement afoot tho bring this Temple Bar back and re-erect it in St. Paul's Churchyard.

The view eastwards alongside Clifford's Inn, 1934

Before the Great Fire, Fleet Street was badly paved and the houses, mostly timber, were built higgledy piggledy; it led to the old Fleet River. This is now covered-in beneath New Bridge Street and Farringdon Street but in the reign of Henry VIII was navigable "up to Holborn Bridge". Fleet Street bankers are among the oldest in London of whom one of the earliest was Sir Thomas Gresham (1519-1579). Others names include Richard Blanchard and Francis Child who made banking a business and "had running cashes in Charles II's time"; as did James Hoare at the Golden Bottle—the old Leathern Bottle—who had started as a goldsmith. Goslings "kept shop" at The Three Squirrels over against St. Dunstans in 1673-74. Incidentally, the

Looking south-west: the building no longer exists

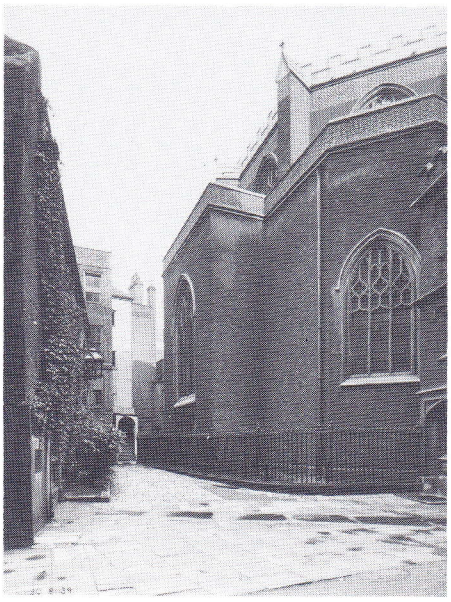
Clifford's Inn in history continued from previous page

clock on that church "with its two savages who strike the quarters upon two bells" was, in 1867, ". . . . now at Lord Hertford's in the Regent's Park", and:

Holborn—The stream or brook from which this street takes its name was a tributary of the Fleet River—the street was levelled-out by the building of Holborn Viaduct, opened in 1869 "to avoid the steep ascents of Holborn and Snow Hill. This must have been of enormous relief to the horse traffic at that time, particularly if taking the gradient and curve of Snow Hill even as it is today; there are numerous steep lanes on the east side of Farringdon Road around here, much used nowadays by taxi drivers taking short cuts.

In retrospect what of our former addresses?.

New Broad Street—First mention which can be found is in 1732 in a part of the City referred to as Petty France, named for the Frenchmen dwelling there (although not the only part of London so named). Even Old Broad Street is a comparatively new name; the remains of a Roman pavement have been found there and it is thought that in earlier centuries it was part of either Throgmorton or Threadneedle Streets. A large area stretching to Bishopsgate and beyond was part of the old Bethlehem Hospital, founded in 1247 as a Priory of Canons with brethren and sisters and prior to 1409 used as "an hospital for distracted people", indication of the compassion of the founders of what, later known as Old Bedlam, was synonym for "a mad house".



General view looking north-east: whither Damned Barebones?

Chiswell Street—Here to the north of London Wall were for a long time open swampy spaces. Queen Elizabeth I made a proclamation forbidding new buildings 'where none had existed in the memory of man", because extension of the City was calculated "to encourage the increase of beggars and the plague, a dearth of victuals, an increase of artisans more than could live together and the impoverishing of other cities;" also a "lack of air and room to shoot." Accordingly, Finsbury Fields were great archery grounds and the only buildings were the dwellings of bowyers, fletchers and stringers in the place since called Grub Street, now Milton Street. Beyond that northward the fields were studded with archery marks and targets; the longest distance was nineteen score (i.e. 380) yards, Here also was the muster ground for the train-bands of London formed at the threatened Spanish invasion. In 1537 Henry VIII granted his Charter to the Honourable Artillery Company as the Fraternity or Guild of Artillery of Long Bows, Cross Bows and Hand Guns. Until 1642 it trained with the Tower gunners in the area of Spitalfields but from that date moved to the present premises off City Road, north of Chiswell Street. The derivation of the latter name is not clear. One earlier name in the 13th century was Everardeswelle Strete and it was the Northern boundary of land and houses in the parish of St. Giles-without Cripplegate. Possibly these were the urban sprawl which the proclamation of Elizabeth I inveighed against and which apparently continued for another four hundred years, leading to establishment of the Metropolitan Green Belt.

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