

**LONDON STREET NAMES; THEIR
ORIGIN, SIGNIFICATION, AND
HISTORIC VALUE; WITH DIVERS
NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649754588

London Street Names; Their Origin, Signification, and Historic Value; With Divers Notes and Observations by F. H. Habben

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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F. H. HABBEN

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London Street Names

*THEIR ORIGIN, SIGNIFICATION, AND HISTORIC
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OBSERVATIONS*

BY

F. H. HABBEN, B.A.

"If it be a question of words and names, look ye to it" (Gallos, the
judicious Deputy of Achaia).—ACTS xviii. 15.

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1896

LONDON STREET NAMES.



PRELIMINARY.

“THE happiness of London,” said the oracular Dr Johnson, whom we still reverence as “the great lexicographer,” notwithstanding his inevitable supersession by the lapse of time—“The happiness of London is not to be conceived but by those who have been in it!” And again: “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford”; to which the astute Boswell, ever ready to assume the rôle of an easygoing philosopher, adds his own comment as follows: “The truth is, that by those who, from sagacity, attention, and experience, have learnt the full advantage of London, its pre-eminence over every other place,

not only for variety of enjoyment, but for comfort, will be felt with a philosophical exultation." With all of which sage observations we cannot but agree. To some, London presents itself as the centre of legislation, of legal administration, of commerce, or finance; to others, as that of literature, science, or the various forms of art, according to the special department of human interest for which they may happen to have a predilection. To all it is a source of happiness and satisfaction. I conjecture, however, that, to the majority of my readers, as to myself, it is the grand arena in which is carried on a daily struggle for "bread and cheese"; and as we journey to and fro and in and out in the invigorating pursuit of this symbolical commodity—*plurimi*, not *rari*, *nantes in gurgite vasto*—we cannot but meditate occasionally, when we stop to breathe, upon the past and present of our illustrious city. The outward and visible witnesses of the past are fast disappearing before an apparently illimitable development and improvement. In one sense it is a cause of regret, in another it is a source of congratulation, to observe how surely, year after year, vestiges of Old London are being removed to make room for wider streets or nobler build-

ings; and the ordinary observer, not being one of those who poke and prowl about into every nook and corner with an irrepressible antiquarian spirit and enthusiasm, comes rapidly to the conclusion that of the past little but its churches (which are steadily decreasing in number) and its street names (which are at any time subject to change) remains. To the archæologist and student of civil or city history, London affords an extremely happy hunting-ground—unequaled in richness and fertility; and the humble explorer may learn much even by a consideration of the facts and circumstances embodied in the good old names of our good old streets—names which so far have endured like monuments—*monumenta ære perenniora*—of the eventful past.

It is satisfactory to observe that, in many instances, the memory of worthy citizens has been perpetuated by the streets which bear their names. We could indeed have wished that this conservative energy had been more at work in both ancient and modern days, and that so many illustrious men were not absent in name from our midst. We look round, and seek in vain for the street corner commemorating Stow, the funda-

mental historian of London, citizen of Threadneedle Street and Aldgate; or Chaucer, the father of our poetry, born by the Wall Brook, whilom Comptroller of the Petty Customs of the Port, and another denizen of Aldgate; or De Foe, born in Fore Street, and a resident in Cornhill, where also the unrecorded Gray first saw the light; or Hogarth, pre-eminently a painter of London life and manners; or many other good and gifted men, notably amongst our mayors and aldermen, who helped to make London morally, socially, and politically what it is. How much might later times, restlessly eager to rebuild and reconstruct, have done to supply this deficiency, and have not done it! Some of our names of modern application have been most arbitrarily and fancifully assigned, with an utter disregard of all consideration and consequences, and are therefore entirely without meaning, so far as historical, topographical, or any other reasonable connection is concerned. Such names, where they are not over-reduplicated, as, from apparent poverty of elective ability, they frequently are, may serve as a beacon for the prosaic postman or wandering wayfarer, but fulfil no higher object, and thus a blessed oppor-

tunity has been lost. They have been chosen on the same *lucus a non lucendo* principle as that which determines some suburban residents to affix to their villas titles which have either no meaning at all as house names, or no reference whatever to any perceptible characteristics, moral or physical, of their respective dwellings. A species of loyalty, mistaken and confusing, is responsible for many of the Kings, Queens, and Princes streets, and others of the like vague and indefinite kind, entirely innocent of any associations with royalty beyond the name, and for the George, William, King William, Victoria, Queen Victoria, etc., streets, serving to mark eras with some uncertainty and much inconvenience.¹ Others again are simply a record of the vanity of obscure individuals, who aspired to be remembered by posterity through the medium of bricks

¹ Mr Augustus C. Hare, in his "Walks in London," states that the number of streets, etc., bearing the name of King is 95; of Queen, 99; Princes, 78; George, 109; John, 119; Charles, 91; James, 87; Thomas, 52; Henry, 47; Alfred, 54; William, 88; Elizabeth, 57; Church, 151; Union, 129; New, 166; York, 127; Gloucester, 87; Brunswick, 76, etc. His numbers must, I am sure, include the widest metropolitan and suburban area, and I have not thought it necessary to undertake their confirmation by actual counting.

and mortar, making to themselves a kind of tombstone with the posthumous recognition of their virtues omitted. To have had, in lieu of these, such names as would daily have reminded us of illustrious men and useful citizens, would have been a distinct gain. It would to some extent have honoured those whose names were thus perpetuated, and certainly would honour the thoroughfares to which their names were given. Grub Street (who was Grub, or Grobbe, as his infamous name appeared in 1307?) has been wisely, if only for euphonious reasons, changed to Milton Street, to which is allied Butler Street; but why, as an instance of inappropriate change, did Petticoat Lane (the English form, I presume, of *petit court*, the little short lane) become Middlesex Street—a county name assigned to an unimportant thoroughfare, which might have been endowed with a title recalling the memory of some great and worthy man, and therefore honourable, dignified, and justifiable?

But to return to our more ancient and time-honoured thoroughfares, we find names eloquent with local history, speaking of associations and allusions which it behoves every Londoner worthy