

The history of Newington Green

The area around Newington Green was once part of the Manor of Newington Barrow, which in the thirteenth century was in the possession of Alice de Barowe. It included the two ancient settlements of Newington Green and Kingsland. Both originally had a green, but the one at Kingsland was completely built over by the end of the nineteenth century. Newington Green, however, eventually became common land and is now preserved as a London Square.

In the fifteenth century Newington Green was a forest clearing. However, by the middle of that century a number of prosperous people built houses around the Green, attracted by the rural surroundings only a short journey from London and Westminster. A large house, known as the Bishop's Palace, was built in the sixteenth century on the north-east corner of the Green (see fig. 1). The Palace is thought to have been owned by the Earl of Northumberland, having been given to him by Henry VIII; the building stood until the late eighteenth century.

In 1611 William Halliday, a wealthy Alderman of the City of London, bought a 44 acre estate to the south of Newington Green and built a large three storey house which was later inherited by Henry Mildmay. Mildmay House, as it became called, later became nos. 9 & 10 Newington Green (see fig. 12); it was used as a boarding school in the early nineteenth century and in 1885 it became a nurse's home. Another old house on the west side of the Green was replaced in 1658 by a terraced row of four houses, nos. 52-55 Newington Green. These are the oldest terraced houses still surviving in England and were restored in the late 1990s with the aid of an English Heritage grant (see fig. 2).

Fig. 1 The Bishop's Palace, in the late eighteenth century



Fig. 2 Nos. 52-55 Newington Green

Around the 1660s the area around Newington Green became a haven for non-conformist preachers and teachers, who had become social outcasts under the repressive laws of James II. After the Act of Uniformity in 1662, about 2,000 clergymen from across the country were banished from the church and many went to the Newington Green area to worship in secret. Several academies were set up to educate those refused entry to Oxford and Cambridge for religious reasons. Both Daniel Defoe and Samuel Wesley were educated at Charles Morton's Academy (1667-1696). Charles Morton emigrated to America in 1686 and became the first Vice-President of Harvard University. Defoe married a girl from the area and lived in the locality for many years.

After the Toleration Act of 1689, under William III, non-conformists were able to worship openly and in 1708 a Presbyterian Chapel (later to become Unitarian) was built on the north side of the Green. It still stands, and is the oldest non-conformist church in the Britain still in use for worship. Dr [Richard Price](#), a philosopher, mathematician and economist was a minister of the Chapel in the late eighteenth century (see fig. 7). He was a friend to several prominent American revolutionaries including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, David Hume and Tom Paine - several of whom visited him on the Green - and his writings in favour of the French and American Revolutions prompted Edmund Burke to write his Reflections on the Revolution in France arguing in favour of the monarchy.



Fig. 3 The north side of Newington Green, pen & ink, c1790. R Smiles

Fig. 4 Watercolour of the north side of Newington Green, 1824



Fig. 5 Watercolour of the south side of Newington Green, 1824



Fig. 6 The north side of Newington Green, watercolour, 1844. F N Shepherd

Mary Wollstonecraft, the writer of the seminal work, "Vindication of the rights of Women" and mother to Mary Shelley, was another famous resident of Newington Green (see fig. 9). She ran a girl's school in the area from 1784 until 1786 despite having little formal education herself. [Samuel Rogers](#), the poet and wit, lived in the area from 1763 until 1793 and the poetess [Leatitia Barbauld](#) moved to the area of the Green in 1802 (see fig. 8). Edgar Allen Poe (see fig. 10) also went to school nearby. He wrote of the green in 1817-20 as being "a misty-looking village of England with gigantic and gnarled trees... deeply shadowed avenues... and a thousand shrubberies!"

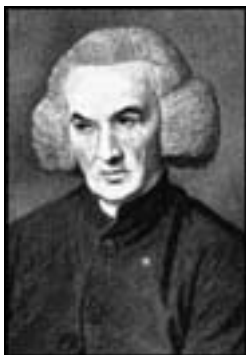


Fig. 7 Richard Price (1723-91)

Fig. 8 Anna Leatitia Barbauld (1743-1825)

Fig. 9 Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97)

Fig. 10 Edgar Allen Poe

In the late seventeenth century a number of public houses were opened in the area, supplementing the houses that surrounded the Green. The sites of a number of these public houses are still occupied today by pubs of the same names.

At the end of the eighteenth century Newington Green was still largely surrounded by farmland. This changed rapidly in the nineteenth century: the Mildmay Estate, to the south of the Green, was leased for building and in the 1840s and 1850s Mildmay Park, Mildmay Grove and Mildmay Street were built. Starting in 1860 new streets were laid out to the west of Newington Green Road. In 1862 Beresford Road and Grosvenor Avenue were built over the brickfields. Saint Jude's Church was built in 1858 in King Henry's Walk, complemented by a Wesleyan Chapel in Mildmay Park in 1862. The Mildmay Conference Hall, pioneered and inspired by William Pennefather (the vicar of Saint Jude's), was opened in 1869. Streets to the north of the Green, east of Albion Road were laid about around 1855-58; those to the west of Albion Road being laid out in the 1870s. The School Board of London built the Matthias Road Board School in 1884, later renamed the Newington Green Primary School.

The development of the areas surrounding the Green with housing was aided by the growth of public transport. Short-stage coaches ran between Newington Green and London as early as the eighteenth century, and horse buses were running in the late 1830s. The North London Railway came through in 1848, with stations on Newington Green Road, Kingsland High Street and (later) Mildmay Park. Horse drawn trams began in 1871.



Fig. 11 The east side of Newington Green in 1879, showing nos. 52-55 and the house later owned by the poet Samuel Rogers



Fig. 12 The south side of Newington Green, 1879. Mildmay House is the white building to the centre of the picture.

Many of the buildings to the Green itself were renewed in the Victorian period, for example with the construction of new terraces of shops to the west of the Green. This culminated in the construction of the exuberant Newington Green Mansions, on the corner with Green Lanes, in 1892. This development replaced Monte Cristo House, a large Georgian Mansion with extensive gardens: the contrast between this and the bustling commercial building which replaced it is indicative of the change from isolated settlement to busy urban centre, which Newington Green underwent in the nineteenth century (see figs. 13 & 14).



Fig. 13 The rear of Monte Cristo House from part of its rear garden in 1889.



Fig. 14 Newington Green Mansions replaced Monte Cristo House in 1892.

This photograph was taken c1925.

The area around Newington Green was heavily damaged by bombing during the Second World War. Newington Green School was partially knocked down, and 22 people were killed when a bomb fell on Poet's Road. The site (where Masefield Court is today) was later used as a prisoner of war camp. During the 1950s a large amount of council housing

was constructed in areas surrounding the Green, some of it, like Kerridge Court, on bomb damaged site. Others were built on demolished sites, like Hathersage Court that replaced the Memorial Hospital and the old Mildmay Mansion. Extensive council estates continued to be built in the 1960s.

Like much of north-east London, Newington Green entered into a period of slow decline towards the end of the twentieth century. With the increase in vehicular traffic the Green itself became more isolated from the buildings around it; however, following the work of Newington Green Action Group, a recent initiative from LBI to restore the Green, linked with a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme, part funded by English Heritage, will hopefully restore the Green to the attractive open space it once was.

3.3 Historical Maps



Fig. 15 1741 map, John Roche

