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Early Town-planning in Greenwich

WITH NOTES ON THE "SHIP" AND "TRAFALGAR" TAVERNS

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AT THE BEGINNING of the 18th century the Royal Palace of Greenwich was hemmed in by a straggling mass of buildings even to its very gates, and on the west side the depth of houses extended from the ancient Friars Road to Church Street, or the High Street as it was sometime named. There was no major road on this side but many mean alleys and courts. Romney Road had already been laid out but it stopped at the Market Place and vehicles journeying to Deptford and London had to turn down Back Lane and thence into Stockwell Street and the High Road. (See map, Plate VII, facing p. 85).

This setting was not suitable for the architectural gem which was to appear in its midst over the next fifty years, and the Commissioners of Greenwich Hospital were destined to spend much money and effort over the next hundred years or more in acquiring land for extending the Hospital grounds to their present boundaries.

The first step was the closing of Friars Road and a portion of Turnpin Lane, in return for which the Commissioners laid out an alternative route about 150 feet to the west. This led from Romney Road to the riverside at Tavern Row. The intervening land was purchased and gradually cleared and new gates were erected on the west side of the Hospital. The situation remained dormant, except for the purchase of more land, until the early 19th century when the first Greenwich Hospital Improvement Bill was drafted. This proposed to acquire land, lay out major roads and generally open up approaches to the Hospital. The first Act was passed in 1831 and resulted in the laying out of Nelson Street, King William Street, Clarence Street (now College Approach), the provision of an alternative footway to Fishers Lane, which was closed for most of its length, and on the east side the widening of Back Lane to form Caroline Street (now Park Row) from Bear Lane (now Old Woolwich Road) to the Crane on the riverside.

* Being papers read before the Society by Mr. Holden in February 1964 and January 1965.

The Grant from the Crown of the land for the site of Greenwich Hospital Infirmary (now Seamen's Hospital) and the old Royal Mews and Stables enabled the extension of the Hospital boundary to its present limits, the gates being once more moved. Further acquisitions on the river front brought about the building of Greenwich Pier and the Ship Hotel, but the Commissioners failed to complete all the purchases planned, and today the middle portion of the pier belongs to the Greater London Council, the remainder being the property of Greenwich Hospital but leased to the Council. The footway in front of the Hospital at that time had been open to the public for many years and still affords a fine view of the river and the Royal Naval College.

All these improvements were carried out as a charge to the Hospital's funds and were of great benefit to the community at large. At the same time they also obliterated much of the old Greenwich waterside and only the title deeds survive in the archives of the Public Record Office today.

These deeds, studied alongside the ordnance survey sheets of today, would however not give a picture of early 18th century Greenwich around the site of the former Greenwich Palace. This is because the parcels of land included were named after the land-owners who sold their properties to the Commissioners. An additional complication is that the boundaries of the various parcels are referred to under the names of adjoining lands. For instance, "Mr. Smith's land near The Dock" would be described as "bounded on the north by the river, on the south by Mr. White's land, on the east by the Dock, and on the west by Mr. Black's land." This means nothing today.

Fortunately, in the Greenwich Estate Office of Greenwich Hospital a large number of old property plans were discovered in 1950 and over a period of fourteen years an up-to-date "Terrier" has been compiled showing how the original lands were developed.

The Old Names. During the compilation of the Terrier a number of tantalising questions were raised. For instance, where were "Stanley's House near the Dock," "The Hospital Coffee House," "Seybey's Dock," "Bugg's Pond," "Fubb's Yacht," "Queen's Head Tap," "The Three Tuns," and "Weston's Academy"? These queries can now be answered. "Stanley's House" was in Stableyard Street, now part of the northwest corner of the Royal Naval College Grounds. The "Hospital Coffee House" was immediately outside the old Friars Road Gate to the Hospital and the site is now covered by a grass tennis court. "Seybey's

Dock" was a small boat dock to the west of the pier. "Bugg's Pond" was a small pond immediately to the north of the old Royal Stables and Barn. It is presumed to have been little more than a cess-pond as it was so close to the stables and had a drain leading from it to the river. "The Queen's Head Tap" was a small beer house forming an annexe to the "Blew Boar" (later renamed the "Ship") at the eastern end of the present pier. "Fubb's Yacht" was another small beerhouse west of the present pier close to the present Greenwich Foot Tunnel. It is said to take its name from a favourite "attachment" of a Georgian monarch. "The Three Tuns" was the final name of the original "Ship" Tavern shortly before its demolition to provide a site for the Chest House of the Hospital in 1803. "Weston's Academy" was traced by the discovery of an old abstract of Title relating to the first Greenwich Hospital School building which preceded that built by James "Athenian" Stuart in another Back Lane (now King William Walk) in 1782. It referred to the old school-house as being "used and enjoyed now or late in the possession of Thomas Weston." The Seamen's Hospital administrative buildings now stand on the site.

The laying out of new roads under the provisions of the above mentioned Act meant the elimination of many old names long known in Greenwich. Nelson Road, King William Walk and College Approach swallowed up such names as Stocks or Rood Lane, Assiter's Yard, Barber's Court, Leach's Alley, Vine Alley, Graham's Passage, Jubilee Court, Nutt's Court, Maiden Row, Teulon's Court and many others too numerous to mention. The Seamen's Hospital West Wing, or the Helpless Ward of the Greenwich Hospital Infirmary as it was formerly called, was built on the ancient Market place and the extension of the Greenwich Hospital grounds westward to the new King William Street, as it was first known, meant that The Dock, Stableyard Street, Friars Road, Whitehorse Alley, Tavern Row, Taylor's Rents, Hunt's Alley, Staggs Court, Cock Court and most of Fisher Lane disappeared. The last remaining short length of Fisher Lane went when the "Cutty Sark" found its concrete refuge. (See Plate XVI, facing p.110)

The new Market erected in 1831 removed the last trace of the old "Swanne House" of Tudor times when Powis' Brewery and its ancillary buildings were demolished. The Deeds of the "Swanne House," with a beautiful seal of Henry VIII, are in the Public Record Office. There were two Back Lanes at the end of the 18th century, both mentioned above; one became the southern half of King William Walk, the other ran from the river to the old gate-

house at the corner of Bear Lane (now Old Woolwich Road). About 1810-12 land to the north east of the Hospital was purchased from Morden College in order to facilitate the widening of this Back Lane and straighten the eastern boundary of the Hospital grounds. Back Lane was then renamed Caroline Street, and later Park Row.

Park Row was called "Teapot Alley" by local inhabitants at one time, after the vendors of cups of tea whose stalls lined the park gates. Brown's Commercial Academy and Moses' Rents were in the area now covered by the houses and gardens at the junction of Park Row with Park Vista. The Commissioner's House "Park Lodge" in Park Vista was sold to the Vicar of St. Alfege in 1866 and is still the Vicarage.

All the old taverns associated with the sea such as the "Ship," "Lord Hood," "Royal George," "Ship Torbay," "Peter Boat," have gone and we now have names redolent of the countryside in "The Cricketers," "The Wheatsheaf," and "The Coach and Horses." Of course "The Spanish Galleon," "Admiral Hardy," and "The Trafalgar Tavern," are still with us but they are little over a century old.

Crown Grants and Private Purchases. The Crown Grants are well known and need not here be described in detail. Apart from the main Grant of land in 1694, which included the Palace of Charles II (now King Charles Quarter), there were the old stables and mews site (now part of the northwest corner of the Royal Naval College grounds) and the site on which the Seamen's Hospital now stands, granted in 1700; the Crane and Wharf at the north end of Park Row in 1788, land in Maze Hill and Park Vista in 1707; and the Queen's House and grounds in 1807 (the Hospital still retains the reversionary interest in this land).

Some of the more interesting private purchases of land are however worth mentioning. "Alesworth's Title" was the famous old "Rose Tavern" in Tavern Row which was purchased and demolished to provide space for Wren's west wing of King Charles Quarter. Adjoining it was the original "Ship Tavern" purchased from Richard Warner, the King's Bargemaster, in 1712. This is not to be confused with the later "Ship" on the river bank, which was originally called the "Blew Boar" and was purchased from one Goodhew in 1830. The "Hospital Coffee House" referred to above was purchased from a Mr. Wise and there is a quaint note in the records which states "the title deeds are wanting." It appears they were delivered by order of William Draper, Treasurer of the Hospital in 1714, to his coachman then attending him at a

Committee meeting at a Dr. Mapletoft's rooms in London. They have not since been seen and the title comprises a receipt for the purchase money signed by the former owner.

The history of Stagg's Title has a romantic climax. It was purchased by Greenwich Hospital in 1699 and comprised the "Kings Head" Tavern and adjoining land in Stableyard Street, now part of the Royal Naval College grounds. In 1647 it belonged to Sir Andrew Cogan, a staunch supporter of Charles I. In the following year Parliament ordered the sequestration for treason of the Cogan Estate, at that time valued at "£5,000 and upwards."

In 1651 a Gregory Clements petitioned the House to lease him the "King's Head" for seven years. A special committee surveyed the property and it was agreed to fix a rent of £15 per annum if the proposed lessee would expend £100 on immediate repairs. When Clements went to take possession of the premises the two Cogan daughters, Mary and Martha, obstructed his entry and appealed to the Commonwealth Council to let them remain in possession. This appeal was rejected in 1652 and Gregory Clements was directed to take peaceable possession. In 1655 the daughters petitioned the Lord Protector claiming the Cogan Estate. There is now a long gap in the record until 1668 when Martha married a Charles Chip, gent, and the following year they sold the "Kings Head" to one Hastings. It would, therefore, appear that the daughters eventually regained their property, perhaps with the help of Charles II.

Millington's Title covered the old Crowley House and grounds. It was sold to the Seamen's Hospital Society in 1865 and the London Transport Generating Station now stands on the site.

In the mid-nineteenth century further land on the east of the Hospital was purchased. Some of it in Eastney Street was let on building leases, and the old houses in Park Row (south of Trafalgar Road) and part of Park Vista were demolished and the existing properties were then built. The existence of long leases delayed any further development until the period 1910-1914 when cottages in Norfolk Place, Prospect Place, and others known as Merton's and Nelson's Cottages were demolished. The opportunity was then taken to replan the area, the result being the laying out of a new street (Trenchard Street) and the erection of fifty or so model dwellings in Lower Park Street, Old Woolwich Road and the new Trenchard Street.

Thus ended a period of over 200 years during which many familiar names, long associated with the Greenwich waterside,

by Alec Holden

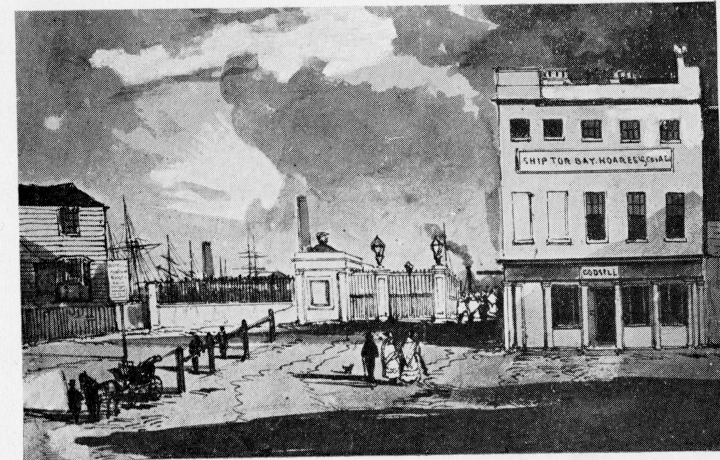


PLATE XV: The Ship Torbay Tavern and Gate to Greenwich Pier, c. 1845



PLATE XVI: Fisher Lane, Greenwich, 1830

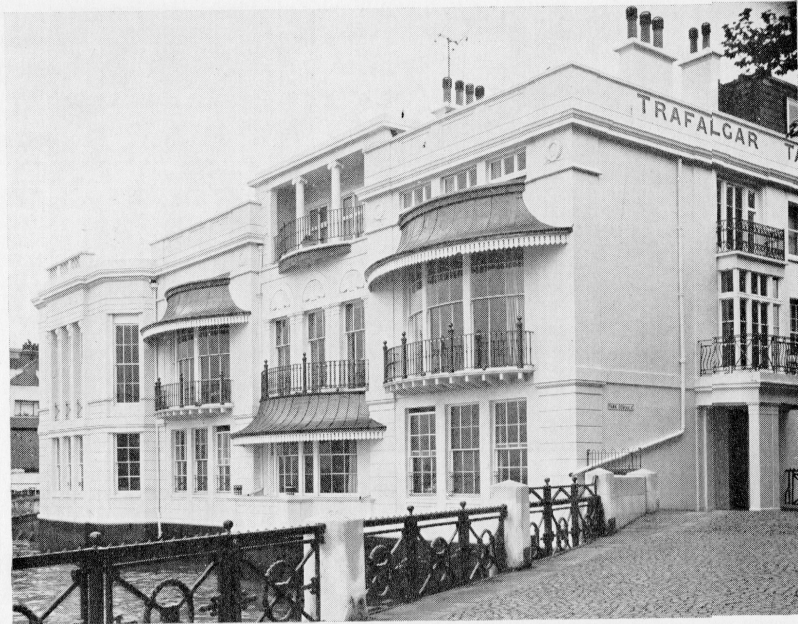


PLATE XVII: The Trafalgar Tavern, Greenwich, 1965

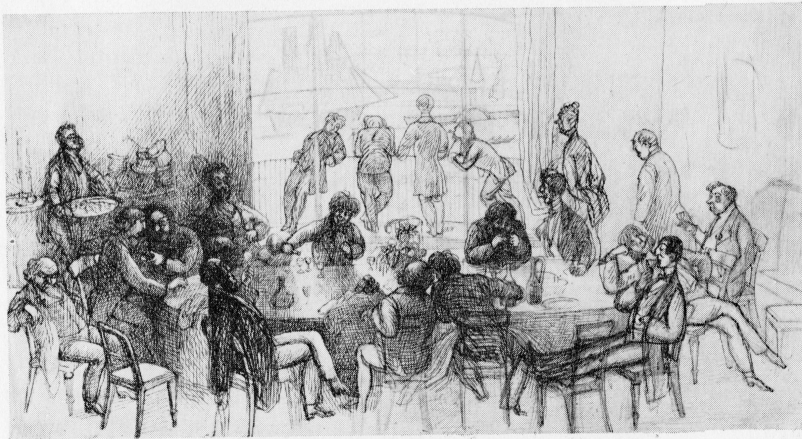


PLATE XVIII: "Taking Port": Trafalgar Tavern, c. 1880
Pen and ink drawing by Richard Doyle
(Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Fry)

disappeared. But the centre piece, on whose behalf all the planning and redevelopment took place, still remains with us a fitting memorial to the Royal Founders, William and Mary, and to the endeavours of all those associated with the building of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich.

THE "SHIP AND "TRAFALGAR" TAVERNS

Many varied accounts of these taverns have appeared from time to time and the following notes, based on documentary evidence in Greenwich Hospital archives, should do much to remove the element of conjecture.

The "Ship" Tavern. There appear to have been two early "Ships" on or near the waterside at Greenwich at one time or other as in the Greenwich Hospital records at the Public Record Office there are two parcels of old deeds relating to a "Ship," in addition to the later "Ship" Hotel.

One parcel commences with Probate of the Will of John Proves of Deptford, dated 23rd November 1579, in which he bequeaths all his lands etc., at East Greenwich to his wife, but the first mention that a "Ship" Tavern is part of the estate is in a Deed of Enfeoffment dated 1st October 1650, and this describes the premises as a tavern but does not give the location. Later however, in 1668, the Treasury by order of the Privy Seal, was authorised to pay £1,255 for the "Ship" Tavern and referred to it as being between a tenement called "Ye Rose" on the east and a tenement belonging to one James Sharp on the west. The "Rose" was obviously the "Rose" Tavern in Tavern Row, a little to the west of King Charles' Palace completed in 1668, which was demolished to provide land for the Palace. The Treasury was somewhat dilatory in paying the purchase money because in 1711, 43 years later, there is another order to pay the £1,255 plus interest amounting to £1,355 9s. 3d.!

An old plan in Greenwich Hospital archives shows this "Ship" purchased by Greenwich Hospital in 1712 from one Warner, the King's Bargemaster. It was on the north side of the road from the Palace to the Market, facing south, and the Chest House was built on the site in 1803. The Chest House was later demolished when the Royal Navy took over the Hospital buildings. Recent excavations have revealed massive brick foundations and footings, presumably of the older and larger tavern. For some unknown reason

this "Ship" was called the "Three Tuns" shortly before its demolition.

L'Estrange in his book "Palace and Hospital" states that the "Ship" issued token money in Charles' I reign, depicting a ship in full sail and inscribed "Ship Tavern 1640." He also refers to the "Lancashire Witches" being confined there in 1664. It must have been this "Ship" he referred to for reasons explained below.

The second parcel of deeds commences with a Deed of Sale dated 15th January 1565, the first of many transactions referring to a "Blew Boar" tavern. Among the names of the many owners over the years are those of Sir Robert Dudley and Henry Earl of Northampton in 1605; Sir Nicholas Stoddard in 1612; and on 4th July 1616 Inigo Jones, with two others, acquired a 1,000 years lease of the property, and sold it on the following day to Thomas Earl of Arundel.

In 1668 one William Smith bequeathed to his wife, Damaris, his "new brick house used as a tavern and alehouse . . . formerly called the "Blew Boar." In 1709 Thomas Goodhew, Merchant, of London, and husband of Margaret, the daughter of Damaris Smith, granted a lease of the "Ship" Tavern, "formerly the dwelling house of the said William Smith." This is the first reference to the change of name of this tavern from "Blew Boar" to "Ship" and could not have been referred to by L'Estrange in his "Palace and Hospital."

In 1718 this "Ship," was acquired by Greenwich Hospital and let on lease to various persons until it was pulled between 1842 and 1849 as part of the riverside improvement scheme authorised by the Greenwich Hospital Improvement Acts 1831 and 1850. It was a brick and timber building with a large bay window supported on piles in the river bed, and situated at the eastern end of the present pier site on the north side of Fisher Lane.

It was undoubtedly one of the first Greenwich taverns to popularise the consumption of whitebait and was advertising their perfection as a meal in 1756. John Timbs refers to the private dinners given here by Sir Robert Preston who, hitherto, had given private parties at his house on Dagenham Reach. Such personages as Mr. George Rose, Secretary of the Treasury, Lord Camden, Lord Farnborough, and later Mr. William Pitt, were said to have dined there annually. There is no doubt these private parties were the forerunners of the more elaborate Ministerial dinners held later in the new "Ship" Hotel.

When the "Ship" Tavern was demolished the nearby "Torbay"

Tavern was renamed the "Ship Torbay," possibly in an endeavour to obtain the trade of the former. The "Torbay" also was purchased by Greenwich Hospital under the Improvement Acts mentioned above, and demolished. (See Plate XV, facing p. 110.)

The "Ship" Hotel. Following the demolition of the "Ship" Tavern and the improvement of the riverside, Philip Hardwick, Architect to Greenwich Hospital, was commissioned to design and build a more capacious and grander building. This he completed between 1853 and 1858. The building might be described as of "Victorian Palladian" style, of no real merit, which is surprising as there were so many classical buildings close by. However, the interior was said to have been extremely comfortable and decorative and no expense was spared in making the hotel fit for its anticipated wealthy clientele. The main dining rooms were named after Nelson, Wellington, Franklin, Bellot and, a very nice gesture, Hardwick the architect himself. There were seven other private rooms and a ball room. The famous brass and china chandeliers (gas burning) in the ball room were designed for the 1851 Exhibition and cost over £300. They were later sold for a few pounds at the subsequent auction of the contents of the hotel.

The food and wines were said to be some of the best in the country and certainly the hotel became very popular with all classes. Tory Ministers, City Companies, Judges, and other notables dined there in private, in addition to attending the more formal annual functions when they travelled in parties by paddle steamer. On one occasion Edward, Prince of Wales, dined there and expressed great satisfaction and pleasure with his meal. The last Tory Ministerial dinner was held in 1894 under the chairmanship of Lord Rosebery. On this occasion the principal dish was not whitebait but the Queen's buck from Windsor Park. The band in attendance was under the baton of Thomas Dibdin, descendant of Charles Dibdin, of seasons fame.

The "Ship" Hotel continued to be popular with travellers by paddle steamer to Greenwich until 1908, when the rear part of the building was demolished and thirteen houses built on the site. The main part of the hotel continued in use until 1941 when a German raider contrived to bomb it. The damaged hotel and the houses behind it were sold to the London County Council for the purpose of creating a riverside park, but later the "Cutty Sark" dock was constructed and now a much more beautiful ship (unlicensed of course) stands earthbound in its concrete haven.

At the auction of the contents of the hotel held on 24th to 27th February 1908, the furniture, fittings and stocks of wines and cigars comprised 1,493 lots. The only vintage wine in the sale was a 1834 Port, ten bottles, but there were many choice brandies.

The "Trafalgar" Tavern. The "Trafalgar" is an elegant Regency style building standing on the bank of the Thames to the east of Greenwich Hospital, and was built by Joseph Kay in 1837 on the site of the old "George" Tavern, some of the foundations of which survive today below the "Trafalgar." It was originally intended to enlarge the "George" but this proved impracticable as the riverside elevation was supported on timber piles. The existing foundations of the front wall of the "Trafalgar" are in the river bed, and the floors of some of the wine cellars were of shingle until recently. (See Plates XVII and XVIII, facing p. 111.)

Each dining room commemorated a great naval victory or famous naval officer, and over the door lintols were painted such names as Nelson, Hardy, Hawke, Howe, St. Vincent, Victory, Nile, Trafalgar. The riverside balconies were said to be formed after the style of an old man-o-war galley. Another feature that survived until recently was a live turtle tank where turtles were kept until required for the pot.

This tavern with its many rooms and banqueting halls was noted for its Liberal Ministerial whitebait dinners, the last of which was held in 1883, when Gladstone's Ministers dined together. Whitebait were netted in the river and within an hour or two were skilfully cooked and served at table. John Timbs in his "Club Life of London" mentions the "Trafalgar" whitebait dinners, and the following method of cooking whitebait in the riverside taverns of the 19th century, as related by John Timbs, may be of interest to feminine readers:

"The fish should be dressed within an hour of being caught as they are apt to cling together. They are kept in water from which they are removed by a skimmer as required. They are then thrown upon a layer of flour, contained in a large napkin, in which they are shaken until completely enveloped in flour; they are then put into a colander, and all superfluous flour is removed by sifting. The fish are next thrown into hot lard contained in a copper cauldron or stewpan placed over a charcoal fire. In about two minutes they are removed by a tin skimmer, thrown into a colander to drain, and served up instantly by placing them

on a fish drainer in a dish. The rapidity of the cooking process is of the utmost importance and if it not be attended to, the fish will lose their crispness, and be worthless. At table, lemon juice is squeezed over them and they are seasoned with cayenne pepper; brown bread and butter is substituted for plain bread and they are eaten with iced champagne or punch."

During the whitebait season the "Trafalgar" stables, alas now gone, were crowded with fine horses, while four-in-hand coaches and drags lined Park Row from the river to the park. The wheel has certainly turned full circle because the motor car now occupies the same space.

Immortalised by Dickens in "Our Mutual Friend" it was at the "Trafalgar" that he was feted on his return from his triumphal tour of America in 1842; and it was here that he met Douglas Jerrold for the last time shortly before the latter's death in 1857.

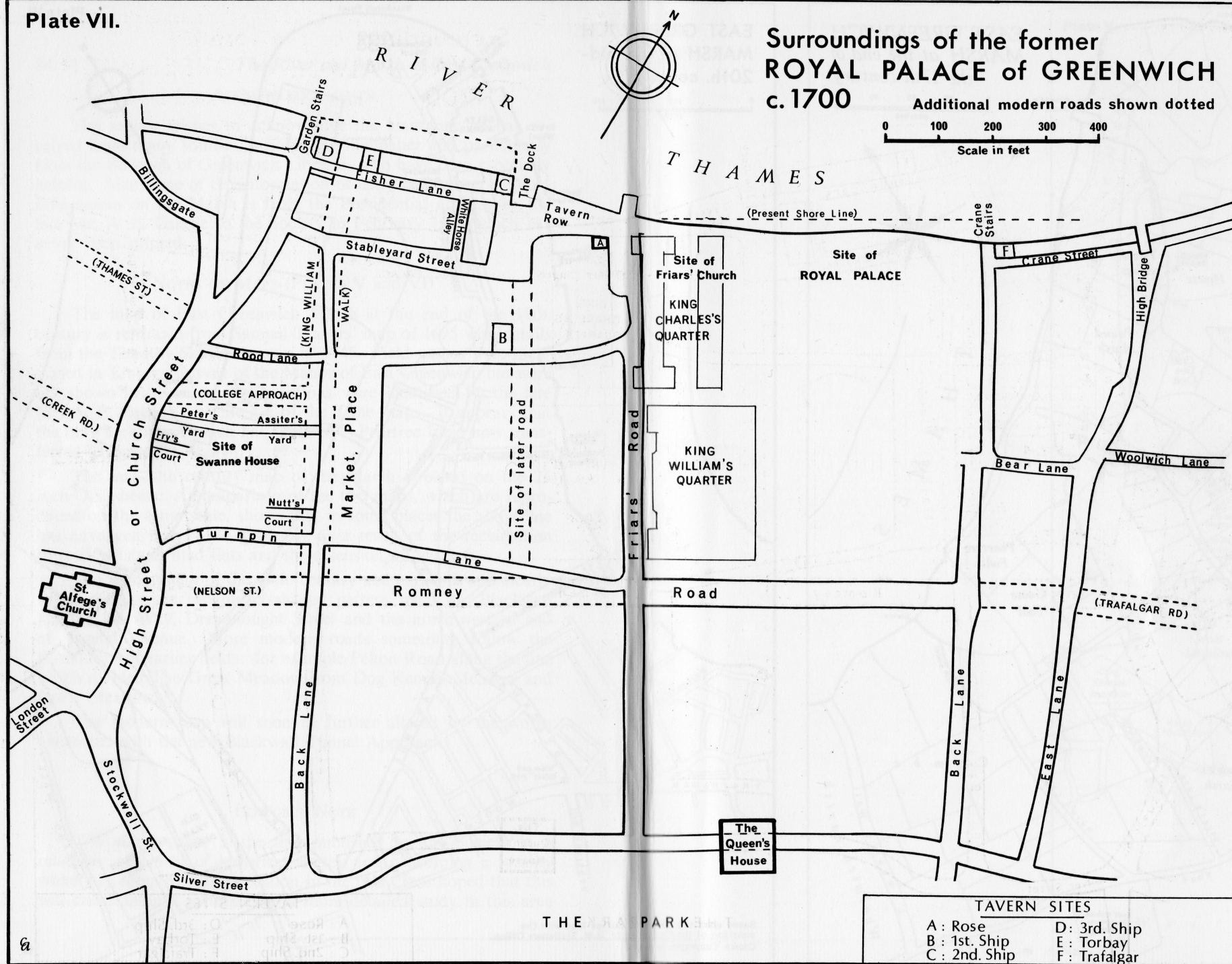
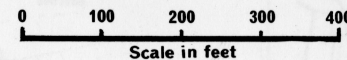
The "Trafalgar" ceased to be an hotel in 1890 and has since passed through many phases, being in turn the Royal Alfred Aged Merchant Seamen's Institution, a working men's club, and a block of flats. It has now been restored as nearly as possible to its former 19th century elegance; the old dining rooms and bars have been revived and the present lessees have spared no pains or money in restoring it as a first class restaurant and hostelry. Whitebait are no longer caught in the Thames as they have fled to purer waters but no doubt other substitutes will be found.

The following extract from the "Kentish Mercury" of 4th April 1890, when the "Trafalgar" was closing as an hotel, will be of nostalgic interest to some readers: "There are few of us of middle age who do not know something of the enjoyment of the exquisite dinners that were served in its public and private rooms of a balmy summer evening as the breezes from the Thames on the spring tide brought the refreshing flavour of sea salt." Whatever else the tide brings up today it is certainly not the flavour of sea salt!

Plate VII.

Surroundings of the former ROYAL PALACE of GREENWICH c.1700

Additional modern roads shown dotted



TAVERN SITES

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| A : Rose | D : 3rd. Ship |
| B : 1st. Ship | E : Torbay |
| C : 2nd. Ship | F : Trafalgar |