

HISTORICAL NOTES

Lesnes Abbey

Oloiness Manor is in the Domesday Book, held by William the Conqueror's half-brother Bishop Odo. Later Henry II gave it to Richard de Luci, Chief Justice of England, who is said to have founded the Augustinian Abbey in 1178 in penance for his part in the murder of Thomas a Becket.

The monks drained the marshes near the river where Thamesmead now stands and maintained the river walls. This cost much and the Abbey was always poor. It was dissolved and destroyed by Wolsey in 1524. The woods of the Abbey still abound in spring daffodils. **Be sure to visit the Information Centre! Lesnes.**

Plumstead - St. Nicholas Church

Built in the 12th century. Most parishioners were drowned in a great flood in 1236. In the 1800's the Rector abandoned the "mists and marshes" (taking the silver with him!) and moved up the hill to a church on Plumstead Common. The silver has only been returned recently! The flagstaff was a navigational aid to Thames shipping. The church was damaged by an explosion at the Arsenal in 1907 and by a V2ocket in 1945.

Southern Outfall Sewer

Sewage dominates the history of the region, as long as London has poured it into the Thames. This 19th century sewer carries mostly by gravity but also uses the largest steam engine in the world at it's pumping station! It receives 135 million gallons of sewage per day. On the skyline is the new incinerator (not yet active) which will take the sewage which currently goes out into the North sea. Together with others it is likely to pose new health problems (asthma etc.).

The Arsenal

In 1667, after the Restoration, Prince Rupert fortified "the Warren" (south bank of the Thames, east from Woolwich, where Thamesmead now stands). It was used for military stores brought from Deptford and later (in 1695) as the Royal Laboratory, for making gun-powder and fireworks. In 1717 a brass foundry was added, to make cannons for the government.

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The Arsenal continued

There was a rapid expansion. By the 1914/18 war the Arsenal had a work-force of 75,000 men, 120 miles of rail track and 160 locomotives! The area was covered with "Jumps" - underground magazines for the storage of explosives, with big walls and moats (Tump 53 is opposite St. Paul's church). They have now been turned into parks but chemical contamination is still a problem.

Thamesmead

The idea was planned in 1965 to house 60,000 on the marshland vacated when the Arsenal closed in 1968. It was to include shopping areas and industry. The plan was of "deck" type, block-built buildings, lifted above potential floods. The original scheme proved impossible and even undesirable.

Thamesmead South was built in 1969. Thousands of families were dumped there, long before accessible shops. Thamesmead Central (which is not central) – the “shopping centre” – was an empty ditch until 1988/89. There were many reasons for delay. Builders on site could not keep up with prefabricated material, money was a constant problem, fashions changed as urban formal “grids” gave way to 1970’s ideas of more human low-rise housing (which is also more expensive). Thamesmead North and Central were built in the 1980’s. The town is now run by an incorporated company.

Notes: Jill Hall (Dec 97)

GEATIAN GLENDINING DEC '97

Useful bus routes to the area:

122 from Crystal Palace
177 from Peckham
178/180 from Lewisham
401 from Bexley Heath
96 from Dartford