

“Coal, O! Coal, O!” An Interesting Discovery in Charlton Village, by Jim Marrett

As well as being a member of The Charlton Society, I'm also a long-serving President of the Woolwich And District Antiquarian Society, a brother society to The Charlton Society. In January 2020 Richard Buchanan, our Newsletter Editor, emailed me two pictures he had taken in Charlton village and asked if I had seen the subjects before. One showed numbers 43 and 45 The village and indeed I recognised them as 43 has a distinctive Regency wrought iron porch, but the steps below up to the door have been removed leaving the porch looking sadly stranded. The second showed a cast iron coal hole plate in the pavement outside number 45 and this was for me the most interesting picture. In the metal casting was the name Lloyd & Son Woolwich together with a fleur-de-lis or Prince of Wales feathers pattern. For those with little experience of the household use of coal, I would just explain that when coal was delivered by horse and cart or later by lorry in 1cwt sacks, it would be tipped down a hole in the pavement near the front of the house. A coal plate normally covered this hole to prevent accidents to passing pedestrians, also being air-tight it would prevent sparks from hob nailed iron shod shoes igniting coal dust in the cellar below. The coal hole was connected by a chute to the coal cellar in the house basement. The clean air act largely ended the use of raw coal, though my parents continued to use refined smokeless coal for heating up to the 1960's but our coal went into a galvanised iron bunker at the side of the house.

The houses and coal hole plate in Charlton Village are quite close to the bus stop for Woolwich and Bexleyheath bound passengers. I have often waited at that bus stop, but somehow missed seeing the plate, even though I must have walked over it many times. I often advise people who are looking for old buildings, to look up. At street level buildings are often changed while higher up old features may remain. I now know that looking down is also just as important.

The Lloyd & Son coal hole plate is a real beauty and I set about seeing what was known about it. I have a booklet "The Village Old Charlton" by Sally Jenkinson published 1984. On page 16 Sally has a line drawing and written description of numbers 43 & 45, but no mention of the coal hole plate outside 45, so she must have missed it. This started me thinking that perhaps the Charlton Village Lloyd & Son plate was not recorded anywhere.

I rushed off to Charlton Village to check it and take some more pictures. I also carefully examined all the pavements in the village but found no other Lloyd & Son coal hole plates. There must have been more Lloyd Plates made and sold, the main cost is making a wooden pattern and once you have that many iron copies can be manufactured by sand casting. If you discover other Lloyd plates please let me know. Just opposite in the Village, the terrace of four late Victorian houses numbers 46 to 52 all have coal hole plates. They are ornately cast but carry no written manufacturer's names but are worth a look. The coal plates are in the front gardens, just before the splendid Portland stone steps, so on private land. The coal plate for house number 46 is in the alley way at the side so is easier to see. Sally Jenkinson in her booklet already mentioned, records these coal plates, with a drawing, on page 20. By the houses near the top of Charlton Church Lane I discovered the remains of coal holes, now filled in and their plates missing. The nearest named plate remaining was down towards Charlton Station. The plate is just opposite the English Heritage blue plaque to the writer Ettore Schmitz alias Italo Svevo. It is a Hayward's of Borough London patent self-locking plate and these are quite commonly seen as they were the last to be made. I should just remind you here that if anyone knows of another Lloyd & Son Woolwich coal hole plate, please let me know. I have put my 'phone number and email below. If you are really keen on coal hole plate spotting, a good place to start is Bloomsbury in particular Gordon Square where the York stone paving is studded with them. Places closer to home in Greenwich are Croom's Hill and Gloucester Circus.

My next task was to see if the Charlton Society knew about the Lloyd Woolwich plate, as they are the fount of all knowledge concerning Charlton. I emailed Pauline Langley, Pauline as well as being a Woolwich Antiquarian Councillor is also on the Charlton Society Committee and has her finger on the pulse of Charlton matters. Pauline replied that she had no knowledge of the Lloyd

Woolwich plate, but gave me Carol Kenna's email as Carol is Chairperson of the Charlton Society. I would like to think that my motive was a good and honest one, of two friendly brother societies working together to share this knowledge. However the darker side of my character was also there, a bit closer to brother rivalry and I thought what fun it would be if the Woolwich Antiquarians had discovered something the Charlton Society didn't know about. I soon got an email back from Carol, thanking me for the information and saying they did not know about the Lloyd Woolwich plate. I hope I can be forgiven for rejoicing just a little bit at the Woolwich Antiquarians getting one over the Charlton Society.

I well remember the Lloyd & Son shop in Wellington Street Woolwich. The building is still there, now with the name Christ College London. Lloyd's was on the Town Hall side of Wellington Street the last Edwardian building before the Woolwich Polytechnic 1962 extension building that wraps itself around Wellington and Polytechnic Streets. In the Royal Greenwich plan for the Poly Island site, they want to see the buildings on the corner of Wellington and Thomas Streets, including Lloyd's, retained and restored, together with a the rest of the Poly site buildings while the 1962 Poly extension could be demolished.

Lloyd and Son shop, was a bit like the Two Ronnies sketch four candles or is it fork handles, you had to ask for most things though they did have some stock on open display. There were all sorts of tools and other manly stuff and great smells to be savoured in Lloyd's. Tar and turps, paint and freshly sawn timber. One time they had some reconditioned second-hand garden lawn rollers out on the pavement, I guess dating back to the 1920's and my Dad decided to buy one. It has a cast iron plaque with the name Lloyd & Son Ltd Woolwich & Erith, Lloyd's may have bought it in from somewhere, or it may have been made at their Erith works, Erith was then a large manufacturing area. At first all the family had a go at dragging it up and down the lawn. It did a good job but was heavy work and soon the Lloyd's roller was left in a neglected corner of our back garden. When I was clearing my father's house, I decided to take it up to my place on Shooters Hill. Today it sits in a neglected corner of my back garden, still unused but with happy memories attached to it. Every autumn I cut back the thorn bush around it and once again the Lloyd & Son Woolwich & Erith plaque is displayed. With the rise of the large DIY stores Lloyd's could not complete, the secret of selling being to let the customers get their hands on the goods. I think Lloyd & Son went out of business late last century.

My other Lloyd and Son artefact is a silver-plated pickle fork that I found in a job lot of flatware at Greenwich Auctions. I'm pleased to say no one else was interested in the lot, so I got it cheap. The other knives and forks I was not interested in, but the pickle fork was great as it was stamped Lloyd & Sons Woolwich. I would be most interested if anyone has any other Lloyd & Son items, so please let me know if you have.

I thank Richard Buchanan for spotting the Lloyd plate and bringing it to my attention, Carol Kenna and The Charlton Society for publishing this article. I remind you of my search for other Lloyd & Son coal hole plates or other Lloyd artefacts, so keep your eyes open please and turn out your cutlery boxes to see what you find.

Jim Marrett 020-8856-9561

jimmarrett774@btinternet.com

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