

A VISIT TO EASNEYE  
BY  
THE LONDON CITY MISSION  
IN 1882

BY  
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In 1882 The London City Mission chose to visit Easneye Mansion at Stanstead Abbots for their annual day outing. The Mission had been set up in 1835 in the Hoxton area of East London by David Nasmith a young Scotsman who had previously been involved in missionary work in the poor areas of Glasgow. It was an innovative organisation working to support the poorest in society. It was from the start involved in the setting up of "Ragged Schools" and making personal contact with adults in need of support. It carried out its work by employing full time salaried lay-workers who worked very much within the community. It is these lay-workers that formed the bulk of the visitors to Easneye on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1882.

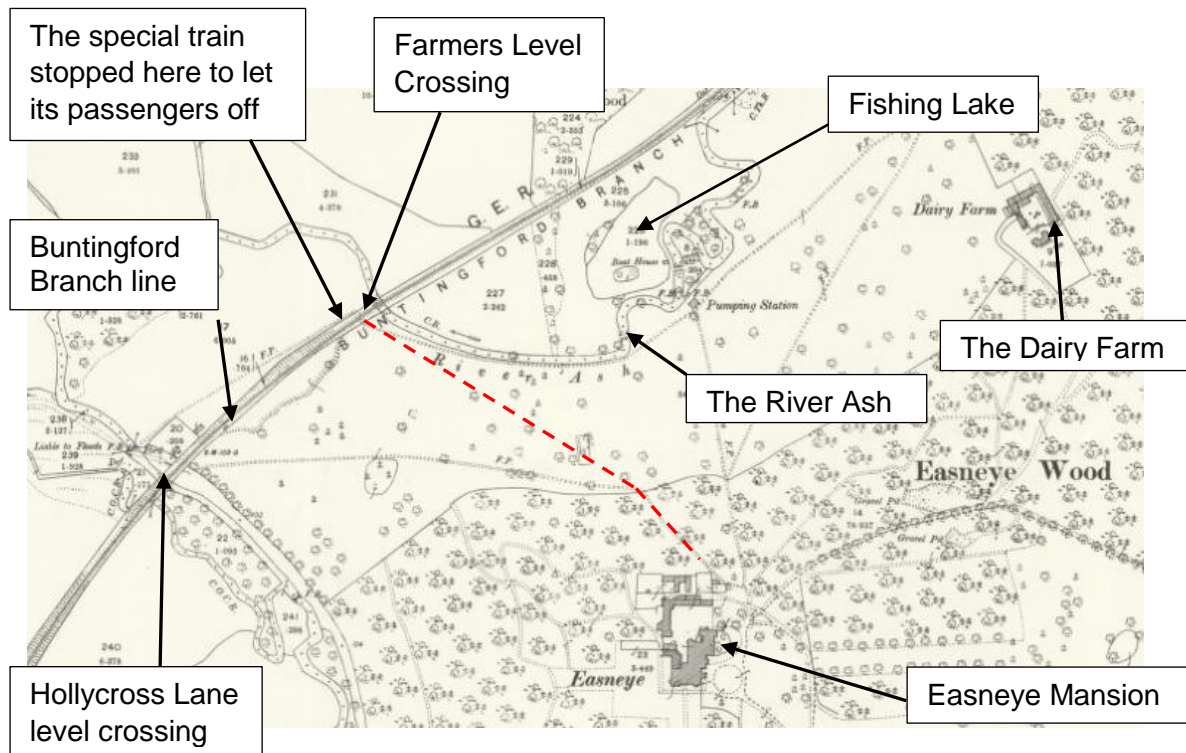


*A 1930s view from an aeroplane looking from the east. The mansion at Easneye is seen in the foreground its circular lawn in front of its main entrance and the valley of the River Lea in the background. The house was surrounded by areas of gardens, lawns and woodland.*

It was around 10 am in the morning that a party of 450 workers from The London City Mission assembled at the Great Eastern Railway's Liverpool Street Station to catch their special excursion train. The train arrived in the valley of the River Ash close to Easneye Mansion at 11.30 am in the middle of a severe thunderstorm. Interestingly the train did not stop at a station on the Buntingford Line but near a footpath and farmers crossing at the closest point to the Mansion.

Although this would be not allowed today this type of arrangement was not uncommon in those days. The four and six wheeled short coaches of the time were fitted with two long footboards one just below the doors and another at axle box height. This made it relatively easy for passengers to leave the train without the need for a platform. Steps were often carried on such trains to assist the less agile passengers to reach track level. One can imagine a rather wet and bedraggled party struggling up the steep valley side on their relatively short walk to the big house at Easneye situated on top of the hill.

## THE ENVIRONS OF EASNEYE



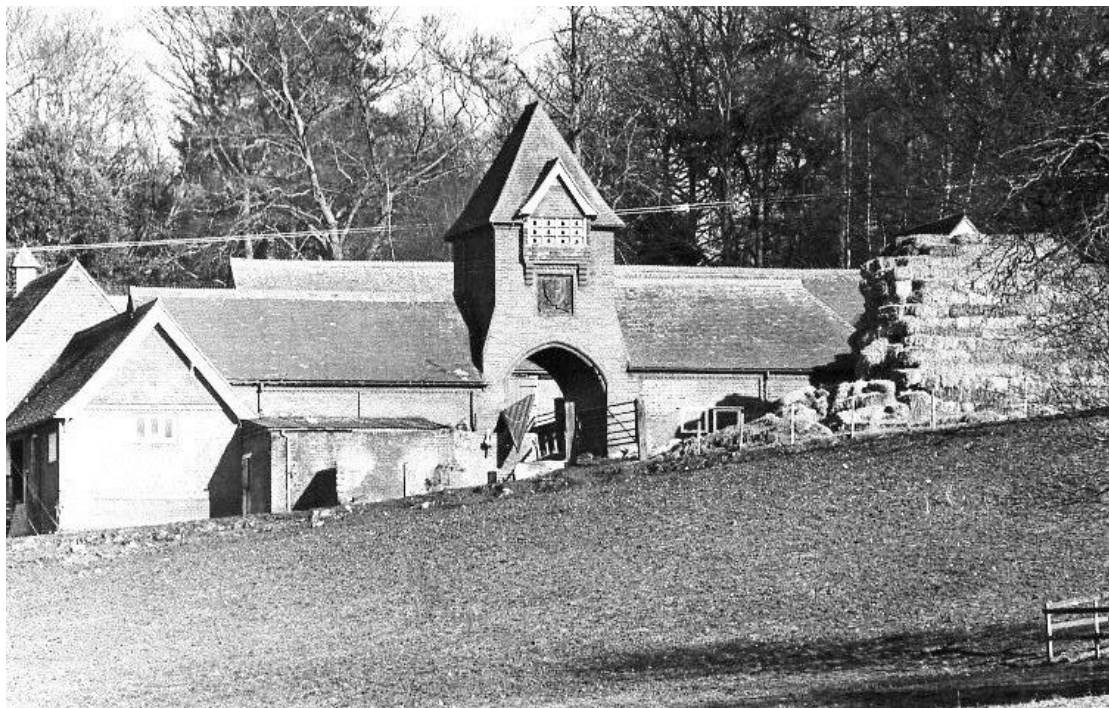
*The red dashed line shows the route taken by the London City Mission visitors, as they scurried up the slope as the thunderstorm began to abate, on their way to Easneye.*

Once the party had reached the top of the hill the rain had stopped and for a little while they gathered together on the lawn. Mr Thomas Fowell Buxton addressed the assembled missionaries and after welcoming them to his estate he explained the arrangements for the day including, given the inclement weather, alternative wet weather arrangements. The 450 large group then dispersed to enjoy various activities for the rest of the morning. These included cricket, football, boating on the River Lea, bathing in the River Ash and a large number going fishing. However given the variability of the weather on the day the majority decided to stay near the house walking around the gardens and venturing into the woodland nearby. Mr Buxton had in fact given permission, for those who wanted to venture into the gardens, to pick whatever fruit they wished to eat. The rain returned at times and those close by took refuge in the main house. In order to make the most of them being driven indoors the Miss Buxtons gave guided tours of the house pointing out a multitude of interesting features. It was recorded that the fine views over the surrounding countryside to be had at the top of the house were very much appreciated.

During the morning one group of the visitors took advantage of a special guided tour of the Dairy Farm on the Easneye estate. This purpose built farm was a much visited location when first opened with many people coming to see the latest in efficient dairy farming.

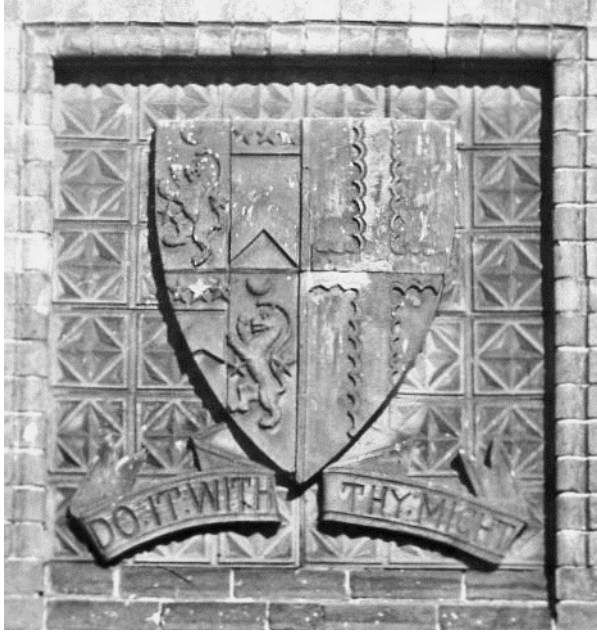


A view of the Dairy Farm taken in 1975 from down in the valley of the River Ash. The cows were just being let back out into the field presumably just after being milked. The valley slope in this picture gives some idea of the steep uphill walk the visitors in 1882 had in the wind and rain of a dying thunderstorm. Easneye Mansion lies within the wood to the right of the picture. Little in this view has changed since the visit by the London City Mission in 1882.



A brisk walk up the slope and this picture was taken, showing more detail of the Dairy Farm notable for many years for its large stack of bales. The square above the archway is the family crest of the Buxton family. Above the crest is a small dovecote neatly framed architecturally by its own small gable end. The farm was designed by Alfred Waterhouse and was completed in 1868 and was in operation before the Mansion was completed. Today the buildings are still in use and cows can still be found grazing the slopes of the Ash Valley.





The Dairy Farm boasts this impressive depiction of the Buxton family crest. Made of terracotta it is embedded in the brickwork above the arched entrance to the farmyard.

The family motto of

“DO IT WITH THY MIGHT”

is believed have come over from Normandy with the family in 1066. It is derived from the Bible, Ecclesiastes 9:10 and is an indication of the religious leanings of the Buxton Family, for whom the buildings were erected.

A 1902 VIEW OF THE EASNEYE DAIRY FARM



A picture dating from 1902 shows the Dairy Farm and the farmer's house associated with it. This home like other Easneye Estate workers houses built by Waterhouse makes a spacious and comfortable family home. An indication that the Buxton family clearly intended to look after their workforce. One wonders if the chickens in the foreground belonged to the occupants of the house in order to provide themselves with a supply of eggs and occasional Sunday lunches. Today both the farm and adjacent dairy are both grade II listed buildings.

At the end of the mornings activities everybody returned to the main house for luncheon at 1pm. This was held in a large tent set up on the lawn at the front of the house. The meal provided for the guests saw considerable quantities of veal, lamb and beef joints consumed with gusto, along with abundant vegetables and sweets to follow. One interesting fact that comes down to us from that day in 1882 is that 2,000 bottles of ginger bear were purchased to be imbibed at the luncheon with only a few left unopened at the end.

#### A 1930 VIEW OF THE FRONT OF EASNEYE MANSION



*Thomas Fowell Buxton his wife Rachel and their family moved into this mansion at Easneye in the spring of 1869. This view of the front of Easneye shows where the tent for the 1882 luncheon is reported to have been erected. The picture dates from 1930 and shows to good effect the unaltered red brick edifice designed by the Quaker architect Alfred Waterhouse with its many stepped gables and chimneys.*

The improved weather after lunch saw the visitors soon leave the luncheon tent and take up their preferred leisure activity. The fishing down on the lake in the valley of the River Ash was particularly successful in the afternoon with plentiful Dace and Roach caught. Many took advantage of the more predictable weather to walk further away from the house to enjoy the fields and woods of the estate. The sun even coming out to dry the now quite wet ground and grass, making it all that much more enjoyable than the morning had been. The visitors were able to spend about three hours of the afternoon in this leisurely way before returning to the tent for their tea at 5.30 pm.

After the meal was over the refreshed visitors were addressed firstly by Mr Buxton as host for the day and then by a Mr Joseph Hoare. This was followed by an amusing and entertaining speech by the Rev. R. C. Billings of Spitalfields and then an informative one by the Rev. J. Harrison of Camden Town. The final speech was given by Captain Chapman.



It is worth noting that apart from being a religious family the Buxtons at Easneye had other connections to East London. Indeed Thomas and Rachel had spent the first two years of their married life living at 91 Brick Lane, Spitalfields, the Director's House of the Black Eagle Brewery. This having been once jointly owned by the Truman, Hanbury and Buxton families. It had been Thomas Buxton's father Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton who had been made a partner and given near sole responsibility for improving the business and its day to day running. In 1847 the family had moved to a family house in Leytonstone. Thomas commuting to the brewery by private carriage until the railway opened to Leytonstone in 1856. The move to Easneye in the 1869 may well have been encouraged by their relations in the Hanbury family who lived at Poles Hall [Hanbury Manor] just north of Ware.

After the last speech Mr Buxton presented each of his guests with a copy of a book about his father with the title "Life of Sir T. Fowell Buxton". His father had from early in his life worked at the Black Eagle Brewery becoming in time a partner and sole owner of the business. Although most remembered for his work when an MP as an anti-slavery campaigner he was also involved in prison reform and creating the foundations of animal welfare which led directly to the formation of the RSPCA. Most relevant to the visitors in 1882 was the fact he had also been strongly supportive of mission work.

### THE WEST FRONTAGE OF EASNEYE DATING FROM AROUND 1904



As 7 pm approached the party made its way through the woods back down into the valley of the River Ash. In the valley close to where the railway bridged the river their train was waiting for them. They were soon heading along the Buntingford Line towards St. Margarets and then on via Broxbourne to Liverpool Street. It is reported that those who attended this 1882 outing of the London City Mission regarded it as one the most memorable and enjoyable of such annual events.