

Baird & Tatlock

In 1928, the Walthamstow Antiquarian publication - *'More Walthamstow Houses'* told us:

Higham Hill Lodge, Blackhorse Lane

"The present Blackhorse Road and Lane run through a busy hive of industry. There are now countless houses and numerous factories of all kinds, whereas fifty or sixty years ago there were a few large houses, the country seats of City Magnates, who rode or drove daily to their London offices. Then, wide-spreading marshes and smiling fields stretched on either side of a rustic lane, known as Higham Hall Lane, which has now been so widened and made a busy tram-track, that the whole district has been revolutionized.



Some of the old mansions remain and have been converted into factories or institutions, but they look like friends who have seen better times. Despoiled of their gardens and their fields, these old houses stand forlorn amid the new conditions. One such mansion is Higham Hill Lodge, on the south side of Blackhorse Lane. It has been so altered, its environment has been so changed, that it is difficult to realize what it was in its former grandeur — one of the best mansions in Walthamstow built in the early part of the eighteenth century"

Above: *View in Higham Hill, Blackhorse Lane* by A. Roland Knight at Vestry House Museum

Baird & Tatlock Scottish Roots

Hugh Harper Baird was born in Glasgow in 1851. Between 1870-1, he studied the production of laboratory equipment in Germany and recognised the need for a British company to supply every requirement of the laboratory user.

In 1881 he entered into a partnership with John Tatlock, a Chemical Dealer and Scientific, Instrument Maker to make scientific instruments and laboratory equipment and they founded the Baird & Tatlock company in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. At that time he was listed in the Census as a Laboratory Furnisher employing one boy.

The business obviously prospered because, by 1914, the company was operating from premises in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Liverpool. However, although the company continued to trade as Baird & Tatlock, this was without Hugh Baird because in 1889 he set up a new company named Baird & Tatlock at 13-15, Cross Street, Hatton Garden, London. He opened a small warehouse and office and later added a small workshop, to supply laboratory equipment. His aim was to supply the best of everything a laboratory could need.



NOTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned Hugh Harper Baird and John Tatlock carrying on business as Dealers in Pure Chemicals Laboratory Furnishings &c. at No. 14 Cross-street Hatton Garden London and at No. 40 Renfrew-street Glasgow and at No. 10 Drummond-street Edinburgh under the style or firm of Baird and Tatlock has been dissolved by mutual consent as and from the 30th day of April 1896. The said Hugh Harper Baird will continue to carry on business at the above address, in London on his own account under the style or firm of Baird and Tatlock. The said John Tatlock will continue to carry on business, at the above addresses in Glasgow and Edinburgh on his own account under the style or firm of Baird and Tatlock.—Dated fifth day of January 1897. H. HARPER BAIRD.
JOHN TATLOCK.

In 1896, the partnership was dissolved, with Hugh Harper Baird staying in London and John Tatlock in Glasgow. By degrees, Hugh Baird's firm commenced to manufacture apparatus for themselves, and in 1902 took a workshop at Walthamstow,

In 1903, the London company became *Baird & Tatlock (London)*

Ltd. In 1915, the Glasgow firm also took the name of *Baird & Tatlock, Ltd*, spurring a big dispute over who had the rights of using that name. The two firms held the same name until 1925, when the Glasgow company merged with *John J. Griffin & Sons, Ltd* (a London firm of Glasgow origins), and in 1929 began trading under the name of *Griffin & Tatlock Ltd*.

Baird & Tatlock In Walthamstow

In 1902, Hugh Baird (1851-1911) bought an old grand house, Higham Hill Lodge, in Blackhorse Lane and built a factory in the grounds. Business was good and the company

In the aerial below picture c1926, Higham Hill Lodge is the large house in the foreground



continued to expand its base. By 1910, the company had become the official contractor to His Majesty's Government, India and Colonial Offices etc. While the majority of laboratories listed in their 1910 catalogue fitted by them were chemical, bacteriological or pathological, they had also fitted the Physiological Institute, the Pharmacological Laboratory and the Chemical-Physiological Laboratory at University College, London, physiological laboratories at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London and Queen's College, Belfast.

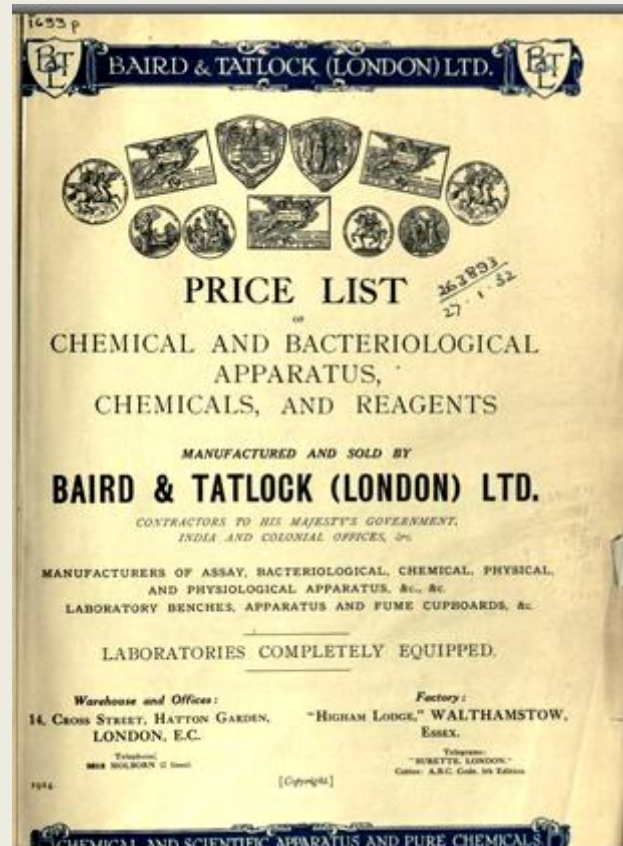
They published a separate list for physiological apparatus that covered blood and urine testing apparatus as well as microtomes and dissecting sets for histological work. They manufactured assay, bacteriological, chemical, physical and psychological apparatus etc and laboratory benches, apparatus and fume cupboards.

Hugh Baird, the Managing Director died age 60 years in 1911. The new company managing Director in 1912 was his son Douglas Heriot Baird who was already a company director.

When he died, Hugh Baird left £31,241-18s-4d which is equivalent to £3,209,315-70p today.

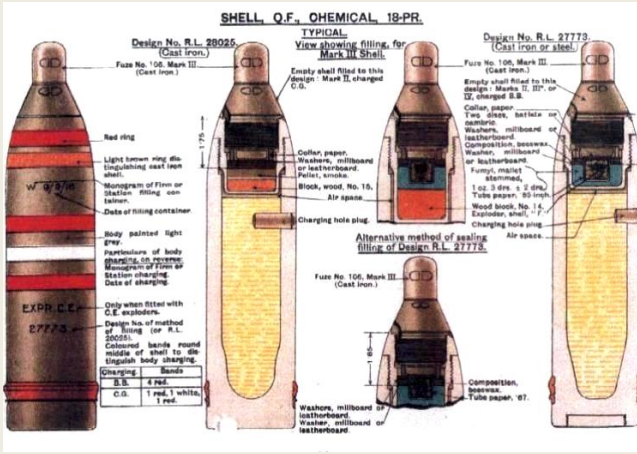
Douglas Heriot Baird (1888-1940)

As the son of a successful business man, Douglas Baird had the best possible education, He attended the Charterhouse public school), London University and Karlsruhe University in Germany. The latter, then as now, was one of the largest and most prestigious research and education institutions in Germany known for its high quality of research work around the world. In recognition of his war work he was awarded the C.B.E. After the war he was heavily involved in the development and organization of British chemical ware companies.



WWI Munitions Manufacture

Douglas, obviously inherited his father's business acumen and continued to develop and



expand the business at the beginning of WWI he was approached by the government and asked to build a factory to provide a charging station for mustard gas filled shells. (It wasn't only the Germans who waged chemical warfare!) Although apparently reluctant to do this, the factory was designed and built at the Walthamstow site in 1915 in three weeks. An unfortunate outcome of

this situation was that Douglas suffered ill health as a result of gas inhalation.

The Walthamstow Canaries

The actual filling of the shells was a simple process but very dangerous work and was mainly done by unskilled women workers. One of the problems was that of toxic jaundice resulting from TNT poisoning which, apart from many fatalities resulting from this condition, turned their faces a bright yellow colour. This earned them the nick-name "canaries".

Duroglass Ltd

Up until the beginning of WWI, *Baird's* had imported the specialist laboratory glass, used in the business, from Germany. It was now imperative to obtain an alternative source and *Duroglass*, a specialist glass making company, was created on the Walthamstow site. It closed in 1926, but reopened in 1932 to produce lighting glassware and, later, television components. The firm ceased about 1965, when the premises were taken over by Industrial Glass Co. Ltd., which itself ceased by 1968.

Originally *Baird & Tatlock* had bought in many of the specialist items used in the business. The experience with *Duroglass*, that supplied specialist bespoke glass to *Baird's* at favourable rates and also traded successfully and profitably on the open market, was the forerunner for the founding and acquisition of other specialist companies.

Hopkin & Williams

This was a chemical company that, among other activities, specialised in photographic and fine chemicals. In an exhibition at the British Industries in 1922 they were listed Exhibitors for: the Manufacturer of Fine Chemicals; Guaranteed Chemical Re-agents; Radio-Active Substances; Meso-Thorium; Uranium Salts; Sodium Uranate; Barium Sulphate for X-ray Diagnosis.

They were a natural 'fit' for Baird & Tatlock's business and in 1929, they merged and both were operating from 16, Cross Street, Hatton Garden and Douglas Baird became the Managing Director.

The WWII Mobile Laboratories

In WWII Baird & Tatlock manufactured a number of specially designed and fully equipped mobile laboratories that were used in the many theatres of war.

These included: US Army Petroleum Testing Laboratory; British Army Petroleum Testing Laboratory; British Army Petroleum Testing Laboratory (Tropical Model); Admiralty Mobile Instrument Workshop; Department of Scientific and Industrial Research [DSIR], Building Research Mobile Laboratory; National Physical Laboratory, Mobile Acoustics Laboratory; Mobile Pest Infestation Laboratory.



Above: A WWII fully equipped mobile laboratory

Post WWII

Now starts the all too familiar pattern for many successful Walthamstow based companies. A process where they get swallowed up by larger national companies who, in turn, get gobbled up by even bigger multi-national companies. A process that continues until the original company is completely lost. As the old poem says:

*Big fleas have little fleas,
Upon their backs to bite 'em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas,
and so, ad infinitum.*

*And the great fleas themselves, in turn
Have greater fleas to go on;
Whiles those again have greater stil.
And greater still and so on.*

In 1959, the company was taken over by Derbyshire Stone Company. In 1961 Derbyshire Stone raised funds. via a rights issue, to meet needs for expansion of Baird and Tatlock.

Later, Derbyshire Stone was taken over by the Tarmac Group and in 1969 sold Baird & Tatlock to to G. D. Searle and Co., U.S.A. (A company focusing on life sciences, specifically pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and animal health)

In 1979, Baird & Tatlock had some 600 employees in the Walthamstow factory complex.

American company. G D Searle sold Baird & Tatlock to the Merck Company in 1978. The Merck Company is a a German chemical and pharmaceutical company headquartered in Darmstadt, with around 40,000 employees in around 70 countries. Merck was founded in 1668 and is the world's oldest operating chemical and pharmaceutical company



The Merck Group acquired the British Drug House Group group in 1973 and in 1987, a host of British instrument and apparatus companies merged under the name of 'Baird & Tatlock', which were then integrated with BDH Ltd. However, the company name was not changed until 1990 when all the businesses were consolidated as Merck Ltd.

Webb Industrial Site

The area of the works is now part of the Webb Industrial Estate. A garage occupies what was the site of the Higham Hill lodge



The existing site is described by a recent Council proposed development document thus:

"Webb's Industrial Estate is currently an underutilised site with a poor physical appearance. As a brownfield site close to Blackhorse Station, opportunities exist for intensification that can secure regeneration benefits.

Predominantly it is used for container and scaffolding storage, with some small industrial units to the western side; including the manufacture of buckles and clothing trimmings.

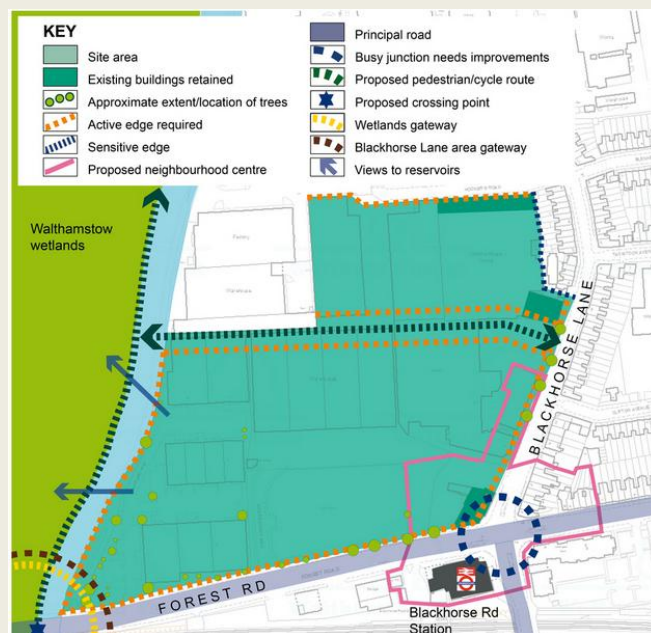
The site is currently largely used for storage purposes, with a large open area and a limited number of small, predominantly 1 storey industrial units on site. 1-3 storey commercial and industrial uses are located mainly to the northern and western aspects of the site, with some additional industrial units immediately to the east. Residential is also a common use in the area, in the form of Victorian terraced housing to the south along Blenheim Road, and contemporary medium density schemes to the north-east such as Papermill Place" (Former Bowater Scott site)

The Future ?

The estate is part of a large area along Blackhorse Lane going down to the River Lea that is scheduled for development and links to the Walthamstow wetlands development.. The Council document goes on to tell us

"The estate backs onto Blackhorse Road and as such is potentially easily accessible from the tube and overground station (less than 450 metres away)..

(In) 2011– Outline consent (Given for mixed use development including 235 residential units (83 x 1 bed, 104 x 2 bed, 40



x 3 bed, 8 x 4 bed), 786m² of B1 Artisan Workshops, 1099m² of retail space (A1/A2/A3), highways alterations, an energy centre, and creation of new public realm works, landscaping and car parking.”

Bill Bayliss

February 2015

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