

Cooks Ferry Inn

This article is for John Knowles, the founder of the Walthamstow Memories site, his co-editor- Daniel Quinn, David Hughes, the Walthamstow music chronicler and all the other music fans who follow and contribute to the site.

In The Beginning.....

Up until about two hundred years ago, the only way to cross the River Lea from Essex to Middlesex, Hertfordshire and London was by the two old bridges that were situated at Bow and Waltham Cross. Other than these, you had to use the various ferries like Jeremy's Ferry at Lea Bridge Road that led to Hackney. The Ferry at Forest Road, Walthamstow that led to Tottenham, Cooks Ferry at Edmonton Marsh that led to Edmonton and Chingford Ferry that led to Enfield.

1734-5

Accounts from the Country mention that very great floods are out from Edmonton about 7 miles from this City, advise that that the Person who keeps Cooks Ferry is obliged to come in a boat, near a mile, to get Provisions for his family who now live in the upper rooms.

Cooks Ferry Inn in 1831



In 1831 the main users of the Inn were the bargemen who carried goods up and down the River Lea, travellers crossing from Middlesex to Essex (Or Essex to Middlesex) and the very many fishermen who fished the waters. These were inspired by the famous 17th century angler – Isaak Walton who wrote the 'Compleat Angler' and spent much of his leisure time fishing the River Lea. Indeed, in the 19th

century there were 1800 anglers who paid one guinea each per year to fish the weirs and waters.

The Cooks Ferry Jazz Club.

The picture below is of Cooks Ferry Inn in 1955



Cooks Ferry Inn was a famous music venue that was situated on the River Lea. Although it was always referred to as Cooks Ferry, Edmonton, it was actually on the Chingford side of the river. I remember it as a scruffy pub with a large hall attached where the bands played. The

club opened sometime in late 1946 or early 1947 and Freddy Randall would play every Sunday night to a packed house. I first went there in the late 1950's as I was a traditional jazz fan and this was one of the few



places where I could go to see live bands playing my kind of music. It was here that I also saw the Alex Welch, Eric Silk, Mick Mulligan, Sandy Brown and Beryl Brydon bands. In the 1960's, after Freddy Randall left, a new band called the Ferry Jazzman became the 'house band.

But times were changing and a new generation were listening to new kinds of music. Interest in traditional jazz faded and this was reflected in dwindling audiences. In 1967 the Cooks Ferry Jazz Club closed and a new era began.

A Showcase for New Bands

Cooks Ferry Inn wasn't big enough to be able to afford to pay for already established successful bands. Instead it became a venue for many up and coming new bands that later became household names. Indeed, this little scruffy north east London music venue featured bands that are a roll call of British musical history in the 60's & 70's. These include: ***Led Zeppelin, Mott the Hoople, Wishbone Ash, Lindisfarne, Hawkwind, Graham Bond Set (With Eric Clapton & Ginger Baker), Cream & Jack Bruce, Jethrow Tull, John Mayall's***

Bluesbreakers, The Faces, Fleetwood Mac, Uriah Heap, The Animals, The Who, Geno Washington & The Ram Jam Band, Georgie Fame, John Lee Hooker, Howling Wolf, Lightnin' Hopkins, Mephis Slim, The Yardbirds, , Rory Gallagher and Humble Pie, Manfred Mann's Earthbirds, Chas 'n' Dave and many many more.

Unfortunately, this isn't a situation that is ever likely to be repeated as there has been a continual decrease in Britain of the number of venues where 'live'



bands can play. Most of the famous Walthamstow musical venues like the Royal Standard at Blackhorse Road & The Plough at Wood Street have closed. Indeed, because of the lack of affordable venues in Britain, my son and his fellow rock musicians, who play in band called ***Strangers***

Know More http://www.strangersknowmore.com/fr_welcome.cfm moved to France some years ago where there is a thriving 'live' music scene

Closure

Cooks Ferry Inn closed in 1973 when there was road widening and bridge works for the North Circular Road. Sadly and almost unbelievably, I can only find one exterior pictures of the place when it was operating. Other than this, all I can offer is the above picture, taken in 1974, that shows where it was,

Bill Bayliss
November 2012

Postscript

Albert Craske continues:

'Cook's Ferry Inn.....'I was a member of the club (I still have my membership card somewhere). I was around 14 at the time and used to catch a bus from Highams Park (Johnny Dankworth's home town) to queue outside the Ferry to be able to get a front row seat..... Does anyone remember 'Mad Mack McComb' the violinist, The Haims brothers, and of course George Melly who famously mentions Cook's Ferry in his autobiography '*Owning Up*' as being a good place to have a 'knee trembler' under the adjacent viaduct arches, 'during the interval'?!'

George Welsh recalls many other famous rock names that appeared there too:

'During the mid 60's I would visit Cook's Ferry Inn at least once a week where I saw bands such as The Graham Bond Organisation, The Who, The Animals, Alexis Korner, Spencer Davies and so on. Graham Bond was there almost every week and he played jazz and R&B on a Hammond organ, his bass player was Jack Bruce and the drummer was Ginger Baker, both of whom went on to form The Cream with Eric Clapton. In those days those days I used to smoke. The only place in a bus was on top and a couple of time I rode sitting next to Ginger Baker and we talked about music (don't ask me why he travelled by bus, I don't know).'

'Cook's Ferry Inn was normally quite "roomy" except when The Animals played there and we were stacked like sardines. Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce used to play with Graham Bond and I saw them many times at the Cook's Ferry Inn, I used to get there fairly early and many a time saw all three of them lugging a Hammond organ from the back of their van.'.....

Rob Keit - Morecambe, Lancs (n North East London)

I grew up during the sixties in my birthplace Walthamstow, London E.17. I was eight years old in 1965 but grew up fast having four older sisters who each had their likes and lifestyles but were all very keen on the music and trends that were happening at that time. I was only one step behind them, always playing their records, wanting to be wherever they were and listening to the radio with them. My biggest memory sneaking down to the Cooks Ferry Inn at Edmonton to sit outside and listen to the bands that were playing there, knowing that my sisters were in there having a great old time and I couldn't. Used to hear Geno Washington and the Ram Jam Band and Georgie Fame play there regularly. The Motown and Soul nights they had there sounded pretty awesome too, I think that is why Motown/Stax soul is still my favourite music.....

http://www.tftw.org.uk/obituaries/john_entwistle.htm



As a young Mod Boy, circa 1964, I witnessed Pete Townsend on lead guitar, Roger Daltrey on vocals, John Entwistle on bass guitar and the late Keith Moon on drums (soon after they had changed their name from The High Numbers to The Who) at the Club Noreik in Tottenham and at the Cooks Ferry Inn in Edmonton.

Picture left – Mods at Cooks Ferry Inn in 1968

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<http://www.classicrockmagazine.com/news/appy-days-the-mick-box-column-no-18/> (Mick Box column)

“Another great venue like this was the Cooks Ferry Inn, in Edmonton. This became my old musical hunting ground, as it wasn’t far from where I lived in Walthamstow, which is in the East End of London. I saw so many amazing bands there, like Led Zeppelin, Ten Years After, Mott The Hoople, Mogul Thrash, Wishbone Ash, Lindisfarne, Hawkwind, Graham Bond and many more. Playing there pretty regularly were the Alan Bown Set with Jess Roden on vocals. I loved his voice, and it is a shame he did not go on to greater success. I know after he left the Alan Bown Set he formed the Jess Roden Band and then Bronco, but I kind of lost touch after that. They were fantastic, though, and brought the house down every time they played there.

It was either 1968 or 1969 when Led Zeppelin performed at the Cooks Ferry Inn. I sat cross-legged in front of John Bonham’s huge bass drum that night. What a special night that was too; I came away buzzing and to be honest, I have never needed an excuse to have a drink, but that night I needed one to calm down after that. I was talking about it for weeks after. These were very exciting times, and I was also playing these venues too, so I got to know them on every level. I feel blessed to have been lucky enough to have witnessed this all first hand, because there was so much creativity going on, and every week, on most days, there was always something happening.”

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http://www.tftw.org.uk/obituaries/john_lee_hooker.htm A warm spring evening in 1964, a queue forming from the entrance of the Cooks Ferry Inn stretching back from where the steps led down from the North Circular Road joining the footpath which ran alongside the River Lea. During this brief mid sixties period there can be little doubt that the Cooks Ferry, Edmonton was the premier blues venue in north London. Howlin’ Wolf, Lightnin’ Hopkins,

Memphis Slim and Screamin' Jay Hawkins all performed at the venue during this period along with the man to whom we pay tribute – John Lee Hooker.

Thirty-seven years ago but I can remember the moment as clearly as if it was yesterday. Standing in the queue patiently waiting for the doors to be flung open, this 18 year old mod boy chatting to his mates heard a wag call out from behind, "It's not every day you see John Lee Hooker walking along the River Lea!" Sure enough, there he was, sauntering along the pathway towards us, guitar case in hand in the company of, I guess, the tour promoter. As he approached, the queue disintegrated, gathering around him to shake his hand, have autographs signed and the like, a smile stretched across his face. Dressed in a black 'near' zoot suit he looked both cool and totally relaxed

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*Below image from Friends Reunited*

