

Villier Pereira - Black and Asian People in Victorian Bexley

Villier Pereira was born in India in 1868 and lived in a pub in Erith in 1881.

India

In 1571 the Moghul Emperor Akbar allowed the Portuguese to establish a settlement on the banks of the Hugli River in Bengal. This settlement became a centre of Portuguese culture with a considerable population of Indian Catholics, Portuguese and people of mixed Indo-Portuguese blood.

In 1690 Job Charnock of the East India Company took lease of a village called Kolikata and the city of Calcutta was founded. Under Warren Hastings the first governor-general of India the city became the centre of British India.

The Christian Portuguese and Indo-Portuguese from places like Hugli flocked to the city and some were to marry into the British community-giving rise to the Anglo-Indians. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when there was a shortage of manpower many of these Indo-Portuguese men (called Lascars) were recruited into the British Merchant Navy (including the East India Company).

Villier Pereira

Villier Pereira was born in Calcutta in 1868 and was most probably part of the Indo-Portuguese community of the British Settlement. Pereira was probably a cabin boy who had been put ashore at Erith after arriving on a vessel from the East Indies.

The 1881 census shows Villier Pereira as living as a lodger at the Running Horses Public House, 11 High Street, Erith. We know that in 1847 the Running Horses pub at Erith included five bedrooms on the second floor. Villiers was boarding in one of these rooms.

Also living at the pub was Mary Fisher a widow and her four children. There was another lodger at the house - William Martin aged 19. In the 1880's the pub was leased to Crowleys of Croydon. The original

structure now lies under the road, pavement and car park to the northwest of the present structure due to redevelopment work in 1938.

Erith during the 1880s

When Villier Pereira arrived on the Erith shore some time in 1881 he would have witnessed the town at a time of dramatic transformation, as it changed from a small pleasure resort to a major industrial riverside port. Attracted by Erith's close proximity to London and its riverside facilities major heavy engineering manufacturers came to make the town their home. These included the submarine Cable manufacturers Callenders Cables who came to Erith in 1880 and were followed by the Maxim Nordenfelt Gun and Ammunition Company in 1888.

In this period narrow streets such as Cross Street, Crown Street and the High Street amongst others were populated with terraced houses and dominated Erith Town Centre. Although Villier would have been a stranger to Erith he would have lived alongside others who were new to the town such as immigrants from Ireland and migrants from the English countryside who came to Erith to find work.

Research by Cliff Pereira & Simon McKeon

References and further reading

Local Studies & Archive Collection

- 1881 Census Return
- Photographs of Victorian Erith
- OS Maps of Erith, 1865 and 1897
- Celebrating Black and Asian History in Bexley Teacher's Pack