

London Borough of Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre

Info Byte Sheet No. 24

History of Catford

Catford was the ford (across the River Ravensbourne) where there were wild cats. In 1745 there were a few houses at Catford Bridge, and separate hamlets at Perry Hill and Rushey Green.

Southend was a small village right at the south end of the parish of Lewisham. It consisted of two mills, a few houses and a couple of public houses, near the junction of Southend Lane and Bromley Road. It is now considered part of Catford.



There were two mills at Southend, and one at Catford Bridge. They were all powered by the River Ravensbourne, though steam power was also used in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century the Lower Mill at Southend was used by the How family for making high quality cutlery. The millpond of the Lower Mill is now the pool by Homebase.

In 1857 the Mid Kent railway line was built, with a station at Catford Bridge. This encouraged the building of houses in the area, since it offered transport to the City of London. However, large-scale development did not take place until the end of the century, when trams offered another means of transport.

Lewisham's Town Hall is in Catford. The first Town Hall was built in 1875 and enlarged in 1901. The extension containing the Lewisham Theatre was added in 1932. In the 1960s the old part of the Town Hall was replaced by the Civic Suite and the new eastern section. Laurence House, which offers additional accommodation for Council staff, was built in 1992 on the former site of St Laurence's church.

Tommy Steele, the singer and entertainer, grew up in Bermondsey but in 1957 he bought a house for his family in Catford. He himself lived there until 1960. The comedian Ben Elton was born in Catford.

Address: 199-201 Lewisham High Street London SE13 6LG

Tel: 020 8297 0682 Fax: 020 8297 1169

Email: local.studies@lewisham.gov.uk