

THE BUSSEY BUILDING

George Bussey

BUSSEY, George Gibson (1829-89) was born at Ripon in Yorkshire, and spent his early career apprenticed to a saddler in Richmond, Yorkshire. In 1851 he moved to London, where he became fascinated with the shop windows in the city, and studied them to see what goods were in demand. He soon knew the market, made the goods and sold them. From a small beginning he succeeded in building up a large and successful business. His ingenuity, ability, integrity and perseverance served him in good stead.

He first appeared in the London directories in 1855 when he was classified as a gun case maker at 173 High Holborn. The following year he moved to Arthur Street, St Giles, where he took out his first patent for an improved method of holding and carrying cartridges. He stayed there until 1859 when he moved to 154A High Holborn and 485 New Oxford Street. Adjacent to, perhaps connecting, these two premises, was a narrow alley called Dunn's Passage where he installed his first factory. It was from "Dunn's Passage Factory" that he applied for his second patent for cartridge carriers.

In 1864 George Bussey began to trade as a company and to advertise the manufacture of gun wadding and cartridges. He apparently abandoned Dunn's Passage and, after a brief appearance at 482 Oxford Street, made a final move to Peckham. Directories do not record the move until 1870 when his firm was described as "Firearms, Ammunition & Shooting Tackle Manufacturers" at the Museum Works, Rye Lane, Peckham. The Museum of Firearms was built in 1867. The

Ordnance Survey Map of 1868 shows the Museum building with a rifle range at the rear extending along the side of the railway embankment for 150 yards.

In 1876 George Bussey patented two designs for roller skates and also an air pistol. The directory entry for 1876 lists George Bussey & Co as "Leather Goods Manufacturers" at No. 63 (renumbered 133 in the 1890s) Rye Lane sharing the premises with a skating rink under the proprietorship of George Bussey. The Museum of Firearms was never perhaps a great success, but George Bussey launched out mainly as a manufacturer of athletic goods of various descriptions at a time when lawn tennis was coming into fashion. He soon made a considerable reputation as a manufacturer of lawn tennis rackets and balls. He was also a manufacturer of cricket bats, balls and stumps as well as footballs and other leather goods. His name and fame became known far and wide - in all countries in which English was spoken. In 1887 George Bussey was known as the largest manufacturer of athletic goods in London. In that year the South London Press published an article which referred to the factory which still exists on the land behind 133 Rye Lane.

George Bussey was a great patron of the Patent Office. He was a resident of Peckham for a good number of years and was an ardent supporter of the Liberal Party. He supported recognised local charities such as the Peckham Pension Society and Mr Downton's Soup Kitchen. He died at his beautiful residence at Ryde on the Isle of Wight on 13 October 1889.