

Forage Friday: Cloud-tastic Friday 24 April 2020

Welcome to Forage Friday: Cloud-tastic – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Looking up at the sky and one thing we will notice during this period of beautiful weather are the clouds. One thing we will also notice whilst in lock-down is the absolute lack of [contrail line-shaped clouds](#) in the sky. We are so used to seeing contrails produced as planes criss-cross and circle above us. What we are experiencing today comes close to what it would have been like looking at the clouds (more or less!) when Luke Howard was around.

Some of you *may* not know who Luke Howard is. If so, you are in good company, as even the former BBC weatherman Michael Fish admitted to me that he only learnt about him when he had been invited to Bruce Grove and Bruce Castle back in 2002 to unveil a plaque. And very pleased he was too to discover more about him – **Luke Howard FRS, (1772-1864) the Father of Meteorology**, a local Quaker and later member of the Plymouth Brethren at [Brook Street Chapel](#), commemorated on the first [English Heritage plaque in Tottenham](#) at number 7 Bruce Grove as the ‘Namer of Clouds Lived and Died Here.’



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The unveiling of that plaque has led to a long and happy journey as we at Bruce Castle have worked with the Howard family and many, many others to ensure collectively that Luke Howard's name is commemorated and celebrated. The EH

plaque unveiled by Michael Fish and Tony Howard was very much a first step, with also talks at the Museum by North Londoner [Richard Hamblyn](#) (author, and Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London) who had written one of *the* books to read about Luke Howard's work in 2001 – [The Invention of Clouds](#).

One Saturday 20 March 2010, the photograph below was taken.

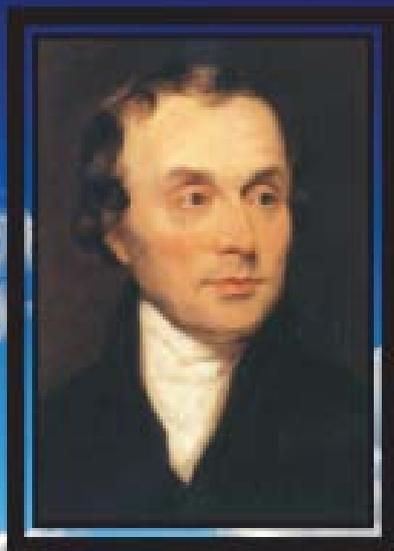


From the collections at Bruce Castle Museum & Archive. © photographer: Nadia Attura, for Haringey Council

The show of hands is in response to '*how many people in this room are related to Luke Howard*'? Quite a number, by the response! Some had travelled far to be there, whilst others had only walked up the road, as they still live locally. It was taken on the day of the exhibition launch at Bruce Castle of '*The Man Who Named the Clouds*'. You can read all about our Luke Howard exhibition and his connections with the local area, from the original panels [here](#).

The Man Who Named the Clouds:

*Luke Howard FRS,
a Tottenham local hero*



Exhibition at Bruce Castle Museum
from Saturday 20th March until Sunday
19th December 2010

Our exhibition was very generously supported by the [Royal Society](#). Their Local Heroes (in science) grant scheme worked with museums such as ours to fund exhibitions and educational events to showcase to visitors the important work of scientists from a local area, whose name had largely been overlooked or forgotten. For us, we had someone in Luke Howard, who really had changed the world and how it views the weather - right on our doorstep in Tottenham. Needless to say, this had been the first exhibition about Luke Howard since the Science Museum had put one on about 40 years previously.

Our exhibition was chosen to open on that date as it happened to be the Saturday nearest to the anniversary that Luke Howard had died in Bruce Grove on 21 March 1864. As all good minds think alike it would seem, Tate Britain also had an event that same day looking at clouds in paintings, inspired by Luke

Howard's cloud classification scheme. Although it had split the cloud-watching experts in two – some were with us, and others at the Tate – it didn't stop it being a day of commemoration and celebration at both places, nor did it stop two enterprising Howard descendants attending both events (thanks to the Victoria Line!).



Luke Howard FRS. From the collections at Bruce Castle Museum & Archive



From the collections at Bruce Castle Museum & Archive. © photographer: Nadia Attura, for Haringey Council

Disappointing as it was that we could not have [Gavin Pretor-Pinney](#) of the [Cloud Appreciation Society](#) there (my invitation three months previously was pipped at the post by the Tate's invitation – but although not able to make it, he now knew about Tottenham's connection with Luke Howard), we still had a great representation of cloud-appreciators amongst us: local [Quakers](#) and Brook Street Chapel Brethren (who were so helpful in sharing their own records and original collections), residents, teachers and community groups, the Royal Meteorological Society (who kindly loaned two watercolours and their original painting by Opie of Luke Howard; their collection of original watercolours are looked after by the Science Museum), the Royal Society (of course) and Imperial College London's research academics working in [Atmospheric Physics](#) – who very generously helped by creating a new film specifically for our exhibition.

Two versions of the film were created – one for schools, the other for general visitors. You can see the film [here](#), which explains the formation of different clouds, as well as hear from Oliver Howard talking about his great-great-great grandfather.

Thanks to the scientists from Imperial College, we were also able to pilot a weather-station with activities for local schoolchildren as part of our Museum workshops about Luke Howard and the weather. Much fun was had measuring the speed of the wind, pretending to be a real weather forecaster on TV and carrying out simple and fun experiments such as creating a [cloud in a bottle](#). Those that remember the Olympic Torch Day at Bruce Castle in 2012, will also remember that the weather-station returned to wow us with more high-tech weather inspired activities and experiments.



One of two original watercolours by Luke Howard as he studied the clouds, often from his Tottenham home.
Courtesy and © The Royal Meteorological Society



The second of two original watercolours by Luke Howard as he studied the clouds, often from his Tottenham home.

Courtesy and © The Royal Meteorological Society

The extended family of descendants of Luke Howard were also generous in lending rare weather books and historical items of interest once owned by Luke for the exhibition. These were exhibited alongside a number of items from Bruce Castle Museum and Haringey Archive's own collections. One of the star exhibits borrowed from the family was the original '*Barometographia*' by Luke Howard – an astounding published record of weather-watching, with much carried out in Tottenham, from the early 19th century. You can look up weather charts and work out what the weather was like in Tottenham on specific dates. A very large volume, with beautiful images – although tricky to display due to its size - it was a wonderful addition to our exhibition. Published in 1847, Luke compiled annual recordings of the weather between his two homes – one in Tottenham and the other his summer home in Yorkshire, as well as commenting on the weather throughout the world.

Here's a sample of his wonderment as he records the sight of a meteor in Tottenham in 1819:

'Tottenham on Nov. 18, at about ten minutes past five ... a brilliant meteor appeared in the west: it was first seen descending with a slow and steady motion towards the north. It showed much larger than the planet Venus – a yellow flame rather drawn out behind, and burning quietly without sparks. When the combustion ceased there remained a matter faintly luminous, which gradually became extinct as it passed below the westernmost stars of Ursa Major. The twilight was pretty strong in the southwest at the time.'

We are very grateful to the Howard family for sharing their heritage with us. When looking at the Howard family gathered together at our exhibition launch, they are of course not only the descendants of Luke Howard, but also Mariabella Howard (1770 -1852). We are mindful of the work of local historian and Friend of Bruce

Castle, [Sylvia Collicott](#) who, during the 1980s along with previous curator Rachel Hasted at Bruce Castle, ensured that the contribution of weather-watching in Tottenham also remembered Mariabella's significant contribution. They always referenced her in publications and talks at the time, long before the internet (*'Lost Houses of Haringey'*, 1986). They remind us of the letter written by Mariabella to Luke in 1813, when he was away in Pontefract:

"I intend to do my best respecting the rain gauge and thermometer. The barometer I have already attended to. We have had very changeable weather, third day very fine and lightning in the night; yesterday very wet, fine this morning, now very wet."

Their diligent work together was produced over a number of years and published in the *'Climate of London'*, first in 1818 and again in 1833. You can read more about the Tottenham weather, that meteor in 1819 and the flowering of horse-chestnuts at Tottenham Green by following the link [here](#).



Mariabella Howard. Kindly shared from the collection of Richard Lloyd

The couple seemed to work well together. Mariabella is fondly remembered by her grand-daughter who wrote of her early memories, recalling the domestic life of the Howards, later living at 7 Bruce Grove:

"She certainly was not emotional – a sort of steady calm seemed to brood over her whole being, entirely unlike my Grandfather's more fanciful and excitable nature. I imagine that in early life this had been even more marked, as he had

toned down with age into slow quiet ways. She must have always been prudent, precise and slow. Her handwriting wonderfully neat, and all things were kept with order and nicety, though I used to wonder how such an exemplary person could manage to strew the floor in front of the dressing-table with such a perfect sending of pins. She used to let us now and then come in and pick them up, but she did not like any frivolous remarks on the subject, though she did occasionally smile herself at 'my harvest of pins on the floor.

She was quite amusingly precise in her views of what was becoming for women, and would have been horror-stricken at the advance women of the present day..... I believe she considered it most improper for us to hold any lengthened speech even with elderly and respectable male visitors to the house! ...

Almost every evening my Grandfather read aloud to my Grandmother, as she sat at her little worktable .. and made large caps. The picture is so engraved upon my memory that I can call it up at will, and see her grave almost puzzled face as she stuck pins here and needles there, or looked up over her tortoise-shell spectacles to ask her question, while I can hear distinctly my Grandfather's rather mumbling voice going through 'James S. Buckingham's Travels', or some such book."

It must be said that the Howard family made remarkable contributions to world science whilst living in Tottenham. Take a look at the website [Lord's Meade Budget](#), the branch of the family descended from Luke and Mariabella via their son John Eliot Howard, another exceptional Tottenham scientist. You will see that as a family they have been keeping in touch with one another over several generations. As the website says:

'The site is provided by the current generation of their descendants to help maintain cousinly links amongst ourselves, and to provide a point of contact for others with an interest in our family history. For over a hundred years, a "Budget" (i.e. a folder) of letters has circulated around representatives of each branch of the family - a process which continued until recently, but which has now been mostly replaced by email communication among those members of the family who wish to take part.'

Quite an undertaking perhaps – but how great to be in touch like this, and it seems to really work! Descendants have been invigorated collectively to track down the gravestones for Luke and Mariabella Howard, known to be buried at [The Friends' Meeting House at Winchmore Hill](#), but no one knew where. Thanks to Rachael Macdonald, Chair of the [Friends of Bruce Castle](#), she rediscovered it by chance and the stone was reinstated by the family. The full story, which was televised by the BBC's 'Songs of Praise', is shared by Richard Lloyd, a descendant of Luke Howard and the official family historian, and kindly shared on the [Summerhill Road website](#).

Inspired by Luke, clouds, our exhibition and the wealth of archives, collections, art and poetry, some local historians and the community have gone on to remember him still, by setting up a local group and website called [Tottenham](#)

[Clouds](#), created and led by Margaret Burr and Noel Treacy. The website is a fantastic resource, bringing together resources, contacts, research, projects and work from the past and the present - all in one place. They and others have also gone on to champion a [Cloud Garden](#) just down the road in Bruce Grove.



Artists have also been inspired in the locality by the clouds and Luke Howard - with artist Natasha Vicars' deckchair installation in 2014, a portrait of [Tottenham in Clouds](#) presented at the Canalogy Festival and at the [V&A's Tottenham Takeover](#); and more recently, [Sky Puddles](#), a site-specific installation by Carolina Khouri, in the courtyard of the Bernie Grant Arts Centre.

Luke Howard was celebrated locally on the 150th anniversary of his death in 2014 with the Tottenham Ploughman's [CloudFest](#) food and drink event, dedicated to clouds and Luke Howard, at the Bruce Grove Youth Centre. On this occasion too, local cheesemakers Wildes Cheese produced a cheese in his name - [the Howard](#) (Blue, not Blue).

With all this stimuli, we hope you might like to do a bit of cloud-watching as well - just like Luke and Mariabella. Attached are some of our own Activities to help get you started - our cloud quiz is good for all ages!

Have fun and enjoy the weather this weekend. Stay healthy, stay safe and stay at home. Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

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