

# GEORGE BOWLES OF WANSTEAD

*The rich man who  
was beloved*

**O**NE of the things which brightens the path of a local historian is the appearance of an exceptional inhabitant. In his time no one reflected more honour upon himself, or was more beloved, than George Bowles of Wanstead.

The family fortune had been laid in the manufacture of glass, and Humphrey Bowles, father of George, sought a residence in Woodford which was two or so miles from Wanstead.

After the birth of his first three children he moved to Wanstead and purchased for £10,000 one of the largest mansions in the village, with extensive grounds, called Wanstead Grove.

The house dated from the end of the seventeenth century and stood at the top of a gentle slope covered with grass and woods, with a curious long lake called the "canal" running across it. Beyond were fields and the winding River Roding.

On his father's death George became owner not only of the Wanstead estate but of one at Burford, Salop.

By nature he was sensitive, and he had a great appreciation of art, and yet he was a simple man. He early patronized the artist Angelica Kauffman, of whom he purchased nearly fifty pictures of various sizes. Other treasures at "The Grove," as it was called locally, consisted of miniatures by Cosway and the Plimers, and enamels by Bone.

He never married, and he lavished the love

*by J. Elsdon Tuffs*

*A.R.Hist.S.*

and care that might have been bestowed upon children on his pursuit of the refined and upon his neighbours.

The upkeep of the grounds cost in the region of £1,000 per annum, and in addition he spent lavishly on entertaining at various times, for he was High Sheriff of Essex in 1785. On these occasions his sister, Rebecca, Lady Northwick, was his hostess.

Local affairs were his constant concern, and besides his presence at vestry meetings he was a frequent visitor at Wanstead House, owned by Sir James Tylney-Long, lord of the manor.

With Sir James he took a leading part in the proposals for a new church, and made a considerable contribution to its funds. This project, which came to fruition while he was churchwarden in 1790, was very dear to his heart, and nearly all the inhabitants followed his example and contributed in varying degrees to the cost. This fact is recorded in



a tablet affixed to the outside wall of the east end of the church.

Nor was he slow in protesting when the ancient common of the villagers, Wanstead Flats, was threatened with enclosure. This he did in the face of the then lord of the manor, the Hon. William Tylney-Long-Pole-Wellesley, nephew of the first Duke of Wellington and hereditary warden of Waltham Forest, who saw profit to himself in the proposed act.

On his death in 1817 the entire village mourned his passing, for he had been as much patron of the village as the lord of the manor himself.

He was buried in the family vault in the churchyard, but on the wall above the north gallery of the parish church is a monument to his memory, by Chantrey, consisting of his bust above a lady weeping.

It is impossible to read the inscription without being deeply moved. It says of him that his "amiable temper and benevolence of mind made him beloved by everyone. His constant cheerfulness proved a conscience free from all guile. His many bequests to charitable institutions afford a proof how much he felt for the distresses of his fellow creatures, and from that feeling he always encouraged the merit of living artists, of whose works he possessed many specimens.

"This church will bear witness how indefatigable he was in forwarding whatever he considered promoted the cause of religion or was for the advantage of his neighbour. His many virtues endeared him to all. Those who knew him best loved him most, nor will he cease to be regretted till memory shall be no more."

*"Wanstead Grove," the home of  
George Bowles. Reproduced from  
an old print.*

