

# The Bow and Bromley Institute



**The 1870 street level building at Bow station, as it appeared soon after completion, with the Institute forming the entire upper storey. The public entrance to the hall seems to have been by way of the porch on the right. The double windows above this illuminated the stairway landing, whilst the top pair served a cloak room. A similar porch, partially visible to the left also provided access to the hall, but this was probably intended for performers and guest speakers.**

*Illustrated Times 7th May 1870*

In 1864, a committee of London Tilbury & Southend Railway shareholders suggested that a physical link should be made between their company and the NLR at Bow to enable through running between the two routes. Various discussions followed and an agreement was eventually approved three years later. A Bill was presented to Parliament and, despite early objections from the GER, this was passed, unopposed, on 17th June 1867.

This connection was to take the form of a curve, which would deviate from

the existing route at Bow, then join the LTSR to the west of Bromley. Ideally, the NLR junction would have been located to the south of Bow station, but as this would have cut through the site of the loco works and resulted in demolition, it was decided that it should be positioned further north.

This idea was perhaps more practical, but it meant that the station would have to be enlarged and whereas two platforms had sufficed since opening in 1850, it would now require four faces to serve the new layout.

Access to these would be from a building on the north side of Bow Road and, as this would span above all four lines, it was clearly going to be very large.

Early in 1868, it was suggested that the new building should be given an upper storey and let out for non-railway use to bring in more revenue. It is not known who initially came up with this idea, although it may have been the Company's Land Agent, James Bonny.

The NLR Permanent Way and Estates Committee minutes of 5th February 1868 stated: *"With reference to the reconstruction of Bow Station necessitated by the [widening] works, the Manager suggested that the new station should be designed with the view of providing, independently of the station requirements, accommodation over the building which would be available for letting."* It was duly resolved *"That Mr Matthews [should] prepare plans showing the proposed arrangement."*

Thomas Matthews, soon had these ready and they were submitted to the Directors on 19th February 1868. The minutes of the meeting initially stated *"That the proceedings be approved"*, but the Board seemingly had second thoughts as the original wording was subsequently crossed out and replaced by a new paragraph stating *"That the plans [should be] referred to the Works Committee for consideration and reports"*.

A month later, on 19th March, the Board met again and stated that they were *"Submitted plan and estimate for new station to be constructed at Bow, independently of the station*

*requirements."* Having viewed these it was resolved *"That the subject be deferred. Mr Bonny to report to the next Board Meeting what rental can be obtained from the occupation of the refreshment room and the rooms over the station."*

This seems to be the first mention of the station being provided with a refreshment room, although this was to be located within the building at street level and not on the floor above. By now, Mr Bonny had a prospective tenant in mind for the upper storey, as the Permanent Way and Estates Committee minutes of 29th March recorded that he had received an *"offer on the part of the Bow Working Men's Institution to guarantee an annual payment equal to 6 per-cent on the outlay in respect of the large room to be built over the refreshment bar."* The Committee agreed and resolved *"That it should be recommended to the Board to provide independently of the station buildings, the additional accommodation shown on the plan."*

The Bow Working Men's Institute had been founded two years earlier and the popularity of its activities was such that its original premises were beginning to prove too small. They clearly required something larger and the chance of moving to the new hall above Bow station must have seemed to good to miss.

Work continued on the plans and these were discussed at Board meetings held on both 14th May and 18th June 1868. At the second of these it was stated *"That the plans be approved and referred to the Works Committee to carry out,"*

On 1st July, the *"general plan"* was

submitted to the Permanent Way and Estates Committee but, although this was presumably very basic, Thomas Matthews told them that *"the detail plans [were] sufficiently advanced to admit of tenders being obtained for submission at the next meeting."* The Committee agreed and stated that the tender would be invited *"by public advertisement"*.

Mr Matthews had estimated that the station would cost £20,000 to reconstruct, so the Committee must have been very agreeably surprised when the firm of B. Nightingale offered to undertake the work for £14,557. This was accepted at the meeting of 5th August *"subject to enquiries and satisfactory sureties, failing which the tenders [would] be referred to the Chairman for decision."*

Thomas Matthews was in charge of the rebuilding, but he was also extremely busy on other schemes during this period, including the widening between Dalston and Camden Town, so he probably had little time to undertake detailed work on stations. The company therefore employed the young architect, Edwin Horne, to assist, and Bow was to be his first project. It may have been a daunting task to elaborate on the Engineer's *"general plan"*, but he doubtlessly did a fine job and the finished result was impressive indeed. His design followed the style introduced on the City Extension a few years earlier and perpetuated by Thomas Matthews for his stations at Poplar, Old Ford and Homerton. Bow however was rather more grandiose both in scale and detail and, perhaps

as a result, the contractor decided he no longer wanted to build it. On 20th August 1868, the Board was told that *"The Chairman of the Works Committee reported withdrawal on the part of Mr Nightingale of his tender, £14,557, and acceptance of Francis Hedges £19,400"*. This must have come as a surprise to all concerned at the time, but the revised cost was much closer to Mr Matthews' original estimate of £20,000.

With the costings finally settled, the project could now go ahead and a Mr Tester was appointed as the Clerk of Works. Before construction could commence, a temporary station entrance was opened in Avenue Road (now Kitcat Terrace) so that the original building could be demolished to provide a site for its successor.

The contractors worked well and the huge building must have looked magnificent as it rose up from behind the scaffolding and hoardings. Mr Horne had every reason to swell out with pride, but he had little time to bask in glory, as he had five more stations to design and one of these, Islington, was an even larger project than Bow. Francis Hedges could have doubtlessly congratulated his workforce on a splendid job well done, but unfortunately he died at the young age of 48, just before the station was completed.

While construction was under way, the Board Minutes of 30th June 1869 recorded that *"The Secretary reported interviews with the Chairman of the Bow Workingmen's Institute - who are desirous of becoming tenants of the Library and Lecture room over the Bow Station, and requested instructions as to letting the*

rooms as a whole or on an annual tenancy, or retaining them on the Company's hands with a charge for user from time to time as required." It was resolved "That the Secretary be instructed to ascertain and report on what terms the Committee would be prepared to take the rooms on an annual tenancy."

It seems that 'The Bow Working Men's Institute' changed its name to 'The Bow and Bromley Institute' late in 1869, when their horizons were widened "with a view of extending its advantages to all classes of society in the neighbourhood."

On 3rd November 1869, the NLR Permanent Way and Estates Committee were "Read [a] letter from the Provisional Committee of the Bow & Bromley Institute proposing terms as under, for the occupation of the Hall and other rooms now in course of construction at the Bow Station:

1. The rent for the 1st year to be £150 subject thereafter to adjustment.
2. The rooms, if required, to be reserved for use by the Company.
3. The Directors to exercise the right of controlling the purposes for which the rooms be used.
4. Rent to commence from 1st July 1870.
5. Provision for arrangement with station refreshment contractor, to supply refreshments at fixed scale of charges."

It was resolved "That the subject be referred to the Secretary and Land Agent for report."

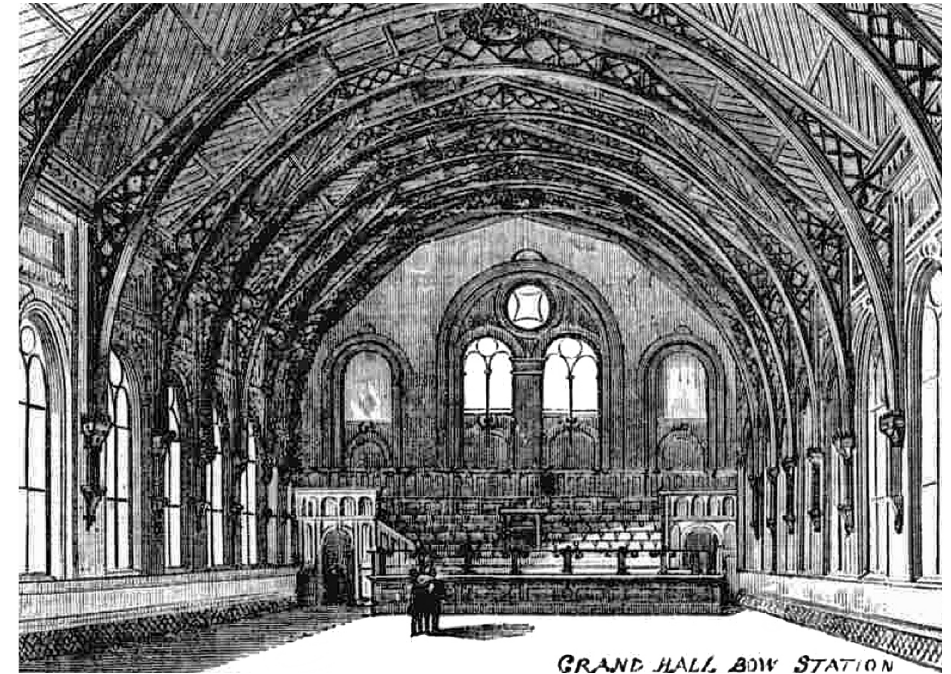
This presumably happened as on 5th January 1870, the same committee were "Read letter from Mr Bonny recommending that this room be let for a period of two years from the 1st July next

to the Bow Working Men's Institution [sic] at £150 per annum, future rent to be thereafter addressed."

On 26th March 1870, the East London Observer published a notice which stated that "The NEW PASSENGER STATION in BOW-ROAD will be OPENED for traffic on SATURDAY NEXT, 26th instant, on and from which, the temporary Station in Avenue-road will be closed. By Order."

Everything went to plan and, on 2nd April 1870, Herapath's Journal reported that the rebuilt station had indeed opened on 26th March and gave this description of the section to be occupied by the Bow and Bromley Institute: "Above the booking offices, waiting and refreshment rooms, is a handsome hall stretching the whole length and breadth of the station, 100 feet in length, 40 feet in width, and 45 feet in height. It is illuminated by two brilliant sun burners in the pointed roof, which is supported by ornamental iron girders and supports. It was built by the railway Company for the Bow and Bromley Institute, and was inaugurated by the Rev. Mr. Driffield, the rector of Bow, and a large number of gentlemen connected with the district assembled in the hall to present a testimonial to Mr. A. Keeble, the respected station-master at Bow Station, who has held that office for 17 years."

An edition of The Engineer published a little later gave a further description: "The room or lecture hall... is amply provided with a commodious orchestra, platform, &c., approached from a retiring room at the back. The seats are so arranged that 1000 persons can be seated with comfort to themselves, but we think that 1500 or 2000 persons could be



**The interior of the Bow and Bromley Institute, looking west, before the seating was added. The stage, or "platform" as it was referred to is at the far end, with orchestra accommodation behind.**  
*Illustrated Times 7th April 1870*

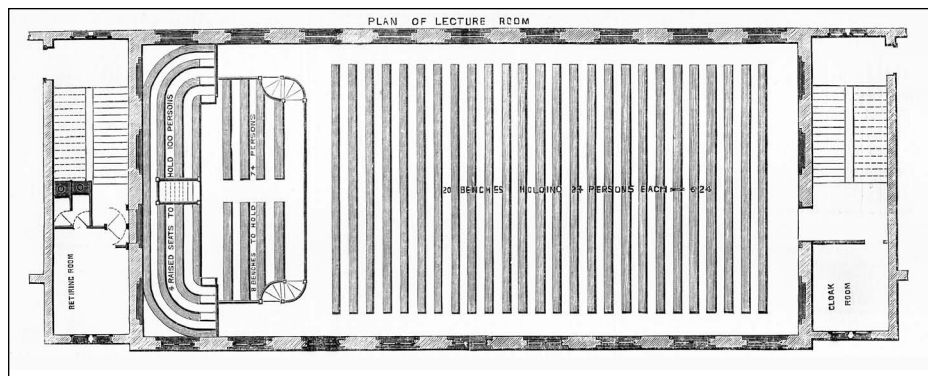
accommodated by another arrangement... The building throughout is of a very substantial character, the floors being fire-proof upon "Phillips'" plan - that is to say, with concrete and iron laths. The roof of the lecture hall is open, and the timbering stained and varnished, and supported by wrought iron arched ribs of a semicircular form. The hall is lighted by sunlights, and heated, as is the building generally, by hot water... The whole of the works have been admirably carried out under the direction of Mr T. Matthews, the company's engineer, and Mr. E. H. Horne, architect, North London Railway."

Audiences accessed the hall by way of a porch at the eastern end of the station frontage. Once inside, they

found the Institute ticket office on the left and a stairway to the right. These stairs led to the upper floor, which had a cloak room to the left of the doorway, which served the auditorium. Inside here were rows of wooden benches, which were each long enough to seat twenty four people. Ahead, on the stage, were eight further benches, arranged in groups of four, either side of a central short aisle, whilst beyond was a flight of steps leading up to more seating. At the back of the stage were double doors leading to the retiring room and a pair of wc cubicles which were presumably intended for performers or speakers. Opposite the retiring room door was the top of a

*with the institute were frequently held, much too small for the increasing number, both of members and patrons, and they were desirous also of forming classes and instigating a reading-room and library. They were unable to do the latter for want of a building suitable for the purpose. However, the North London Railway Company having decided on enlarging their station at Bow, arrangements were made whereby the committee have been enabled to carry out their views..."*

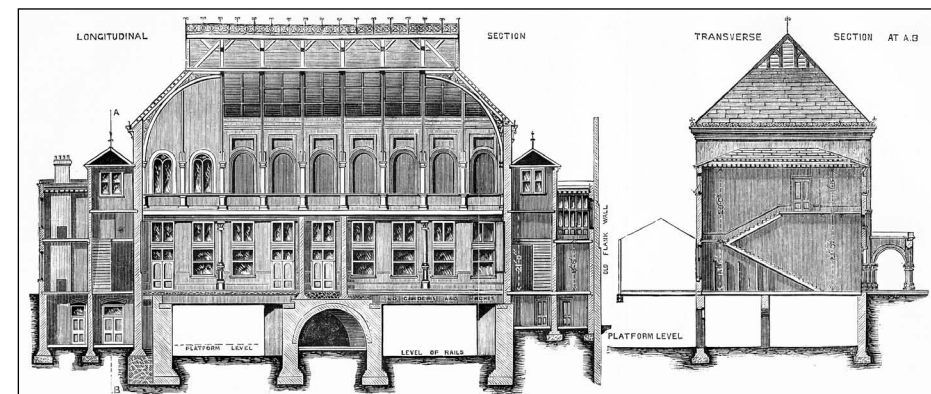
Shortly before taking possession, the organisation launched an appeal for funds and stated *"The Institute is about to occupy the large hall and other rooms which have been prepared for its use at the Bow-station on the North London Railway, the rent having been agreed for three years by gentlemen in the neighbourhood, though there is every reason to expect that it will be self-supporting."*



*The Engineer 2nd September 1870*

The official opening of the hall came on the evening of 20th July 1870 when a "*conversazione*" was held and chaired by the local Member of Parliament, Mr J. D. A. Samuda. An advertisement in the *East London Observer* of 16th July stated that "*Tea and coffee [would] be served at 6.30pm, and the Chair [would] be taken at 7.30.*" A selection of music, directed by W. J Fielding, was to be performed throughout the evening and the admission charge, including refreshments, was either 1 shilling, or 2/6d if a reserved seat was required.

The event was duly reported in the same publication the following week and it was stated that the Institute's purpose was to promote "*useful knowledge and social intercourse among its members by means of a library, reading room, classes, lectures, discussion, popular readings and concerts.*" The piece also mentioned that the hall had cost £590 to fit out and a public appeal had been launched to assist finance the project. It also referred to the NLR and stated that "*of the hundreds of artisans employed on their locomotive*



**The Engineer 2nd September 1870**



works in the vicinity, many were members of the Institute."

Under the heading "Local Notes", *The Tower Hamlets Independent and East End News* stated "The Bow and Bromley Institute has now commenced operations in its new abode in the hall of the North London Railway-station at Bow, the hall, which will seat about 700 people, has cost nearly £500 to fit for the accommodation of the members, and... the committee have appealed to the employers of labour and other residents in the neighbourhood to assist in obtaining the necessary funds. An official statement just issued states that there is every prospect of the institution being self-supporting, and that if the first appeal is responded to, there will be no necessity for the committee to again throw themselves on the liberality of the public. Contributions of books for the library, whether new or old, will, however, always be gratefully received, and a good beginning has been made by the presentation of 1,300 vols. The object of the committee as our readers need scarcely to be informed, is to promote useful knowledge by means of a library, reading-room, classes, lectures, discussions, readings, and concerts, and to enable all classes to join, the rules provide for five classes of members, ranging from one guinea to five shillings per annum. Space will not permit us to dilate on the advantages of such an institution as this; suffice to say that to the artisan, the clerk, and the tradesmen of Bow, all the conveniences of a club are here offered at a cost of little more than a penny a week."

In addition to the cultural aspects of the Institute, the NLR's William Adams "and others" applied for a music and dancing licence in October

1870. This was initially granted, but the authorities subsequently changed their minds and stated that although music would be acceptable, dancing would not.

Music certainly featured in the programme for a number of years, and the Institute regularly advertised in the press, giving details of forthcoming concerts and other activities.

The notable and much admired author, Charles Dickens, died in June 1870 and, a few months later, on 21st November, the Bow and Bromley Institute staged a reading of his famous novel 'A Christmas Carol'. This was described as "A Ghost Story of Christmas" and was presented by Mr. Wieland, billed as being "of the Crystal Palace and Agricultural Hall."

The hall and its adjoining rooms were soon much in demand and evening classes, held in connection with the Tower Hamlets Educational Association, were introduced towards the end of 1870. At first, these covered arithmetic, book-keeping, building construction, drawing, elocution, engineering, French and singing. These were soon joined by other subjects including more advanced musical lessons and doubtlessly led to the Institute forming its own choir in 1878 and an orchestra six years later.

At the Institute in October 1872, during a meeting of the Tower Hamlets Educational Association, the well-known philanthropist, Sir Sydney Waterlow, gave a "very excellent and characteristic speech" nostalgically recalling when he used to "walk through the meadows of Old Ford and watch the four horse coaches

pass along the Bow-road." Sir Sydney was born in Crown Street, Finsbury, during 1822, but grew up in Mile End, so he was well placed to describe the area of his childhood. Together with his three brothers, he founded a printing company in 1844, and subsequently produced all the NLR's Edmondson tickets from 1st July 1865 until the end of June 1912. He later became a great advocate of providing better housing for the working people of London and went on to form the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company. "Waterlow Buildings" became a familiar sight around the capital and the man himself received a knighthood in 1867.

On 2nd October 1872, the NLR Permanent Way and Estates

Committee were "Read [a] letter from... the Bow and Bromley Institute submitting design for an organ chamber, which the Committee desire to have built at the platform end of the Hall, and undertaking to pay an increased rental to cover outlay". Thomas Matthews estimated that the necessary alterations would cost £400 and he was instructed to go ahead. In addition it was stated that "Mr Bonny [was] to arrange amount of increased rental to be paid by the Committee of the Institute, to be leased on a rate of 6% per annum interest on the outlay."

Certainly at this time, the Institute was beginning to flourish, with the talks and concerts being well received. A chess club was formed during 1872 and, by then, it was reported that the stock of books held in the library



The street level building at Bow as it appeared in the early years of the twentieth century, with the organ chamber prominent on the left and the name "Bow & Bromley Institute" centred on the frontage above the upper windows.

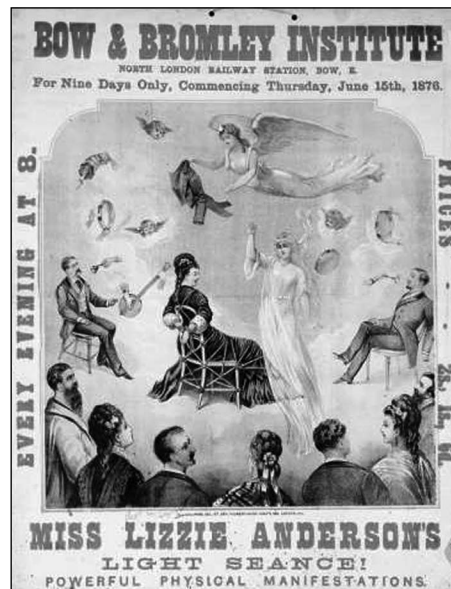
*Commercial postcard / Jim Connor collection*

had grown from 2,000 to 3,000 since the previous year. The library also subscribed to various newspapers and these were made available for reading at their time of publication. It also held copies of professional journals such as *'The Builder'*, *'The Engineer'* and *'The Lancet'* although some, such as *Lloyd's List* proved less popular and were soon dropped.

To finance the organ it was decided to launch a further public appeal, and the necessary amount of £800 was raised by 1873. An order was placed with the Sheffield firm of Messrs Brindley and Foster and the instrument was completed in 1874. The *East End News* of 6th November that year stated that it had been brought into use two days earlier and was provided with two keyboards, a pedal-board and twenty-seven stops.

From then on, organ recitals became a regular feature at the Bow and Bromley Institute and continued to be well attended for many years.

The hall was also used for special functions, including one which was held when the NLR engineer, William Adams, was about to leave the Company for pastures new. The *East London Observer* of 1st November 1872 carried a substantial report on the affair which started: "On Saturday afternoon last, a meeting was held at the Bow and Bromley Institute for the purpose of presenting a testimonial to Mr. W. Adams, on occasion of exchanging from the North London to a similar position on the Great Eastern Railway. The large hall presented quite a festive appearance, being decorated for the occasion with a profusion of bunting, elaborately but



**Handbill of 1876 promoting an evening of "Powerful physical manifestations" at the Bow and Bromley Institute. Some of the illustrations are bizarre to say the least, particularly the disembodied hand playing a banjo!**

*tastefully arranged... The tout ensemble of the hall was stirring in the extreme, when completely filled with those whose animated faces and enthusiastic manner beckoned an uncommon interest in the proceedings of the day. A large number of the most influential residents in Bow were present, but the bulk of the audience were railway employees of every grade, apparently determined to vie with one another in showing their regard for their late friend and chief."*

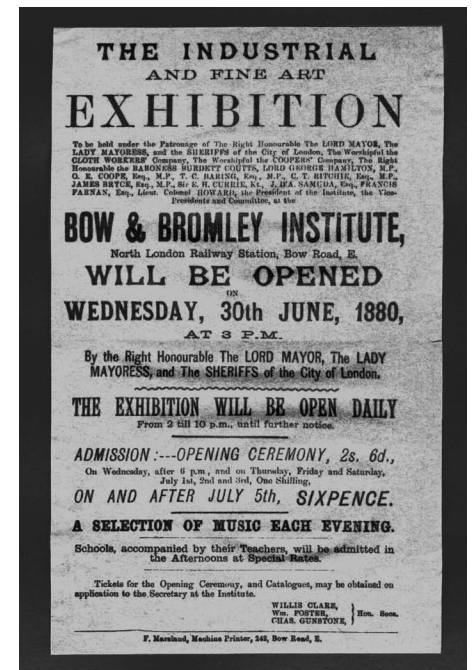
All the time, the Institute's social activities continued to grow, although the chess club ceased meeting for a lengthy period between 1874 and 1885. Nevertheless, other groups fared

better, with the popular Cricket Club starting in 1874, and the Rovers Bicycle Club following three years later. The Hall subsequently hosted The East London Amateur Floriculture Society and the East London Natural History and Microscopical Society amongst other groups.

Public meetings dealing with political subjects also attracted large audiences and invariably these went well, but one of them, held in January 1882, ended up with a riot.

The Liberal Member of Parliament, James Bryce, came to speak on the Irish Coercion Bill and his opinions were clearly far from popular. The *East London Observer* of 28th January stated that "There has been noisy meetings in Tower Hamlets in connection with political addresses but our experience does not recall anything as utterly ruffianly as the proceedings of Tuesday night... Long before the time for commencing the proceedings, the hall of the Institute was crowded, many persons being unable to obtain admission."

The speaker tried to address the audience, but his voice was drowned out by the crowd, who showed their dislike of him in no uncertain terms. As he attempted to answer questions, a large group forced their way from the rear of the hall to the platform, singing the patriotic song 'God Save Ireland' "with vigour". Soon a wholesale free for all was underway and men leapt onto the platform yelling at Bryce and shaking their fists at him. Suddenly, a young woman was carried above the heads of attending journalists and placed onto the stage, where she began screaming at the speaker



**Handbill advertising The Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition, which was held at the Bow and Bromley Institute in the summer of 1880. The original is printed in black on yellow paper.**

*Jim Connor collection*

and calling him a "mean old skunk". Chaos then ruled as footlights were broken, a water bottle was overturned and a section of gas pipe became an improvised weapon.

There were no reports of serious injuries, but the NLR management were far from happy and are understood to have banned political meetings at the Bow and Bromley Institute from then on.

The establishment remained unrivalled in east London until The Peoples' Palace was opened in Mile End Road on 14th May 1887. After this,

its fortunes began to decline, although the organ recitals and concerts remained popular and continued to attract sizeable audiences.

In *The Star* of 21st February 1889, George Bernard Shaw, using the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto" told of a concert which he had recently attended. It was clearly intended to be a lighthearted, humorous piece and started with "Corno" being summoned by his editor to attend a recital of music by Purcell and Handel at Bow. Initially he was unsure and seemingly felt unsafe travelling to his destination. He wrote: "I hastily ran home to get my revolver as a precaution during my hazardous voyage to the East End. Then I dashed away to Broad-street, and asked the booking-clerk whether he knew of a place called Bow. He was evidently a man of extraordinary nerve, for he handed me a ticket without any sign of surprise, as if a voyage to Bow were the most commonplace event possible. A little later the train was rushing through the strangest places: Shoreditch, of which I have read in historical novels; Old Ford, which I supposed to be a character in one of Shakespear's [sic] plays; Homerton, which is somehow associated in my mind with pigeons; and Haggerston, a name perfectly new to me. When I got into the concert room I was perfectly dazzled by the appearance of the orchestra. Nearly all the desks for the second violins were occupied by ladies: beautiful young ladies."

"Corno" was clearly impressed, but was sadly disappointed by the performance stating that "the fair fiddlers rambled from bar to bar with a certain sweet indecision that had a charm of its own, but not exactly what Purcell

and Handel meant."

Despite attracting such well known personalities as George Bernard Shaw, the Institute's fortunes continued to falter and, in 1897 it was agreed that it should merge with its rival. From the following year it became known as "The Bow and Bromley Branch of The Peoples' Palace" and, at the same time it also joined forces with the East London Technical College. It continued to offer evening classes but, as the years progressed it became apparent that potential students preferred the facilities in Mile End Road.

The institute continued into the twentieth century, but by then the writing was clearly on the wall and closure became imminent. Its demise was regretted by those who had once enjoyed the facilities and a letter appeared in the *East London Observer* of 29th October 1910 which stated "However much sentimentalists may regret the extinction of a once favourite centre to which all musical amateurs in London resorted - a home of instruction used by the middle-classes in all the vast region of Greater London - no protest can save the Bow and Bromley Institute alive. It has been "boned"; its best old friends could not recognise it; and the North London Railway Company are "left" with the remains..."

The inevitable closure came the following year and the *East London Observer* of 14th January 1911 included a number of letters from those who continued to hold the Institute in high esteem. Most of these concerned the organ and how much joy the regular recitals had brought to the locality. Among the correspondents was H. E.

Jones who wrote: "I suppose the poor old Organ has been "run off the Road" by the music-halls of Bow, Mile End and Whitechapel etc., and is practically dead for its original aim, but it is pleasant to recall how much delight and instruction it gave for so many years."

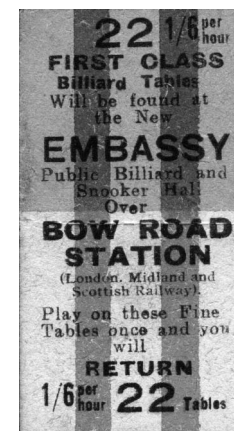
The establishment lingered on for a few more months, but on 15th July 1911, the *East London Observer* stated "We understand that the students at the Bow and Bromley Institute have been informed by the Governors of the East London College that, on the completion of the present session, the classes held at the Institute will be discontinued... East London is, indeed, losing a very valuable educational asset."

Therefore, after four decades, the Institute passed into history and its collection of around 6,000 books were transferred to local libraries. It was

subsequently decided to sell the organ and the *East London Observer* of 16th October 1913 stated: "We are informed that the organ of the Bow & Bromley Institute - a fine instrument, upon which all the most famous organists of Victorian times performed in connexion with the once celebrated Bow Organ Recitals - is now an added attraction to the services of a popular West End place of worship." Unfortunately, research has not yet revealed details of the actual location. Can any member supply further information please?

After closure the premises were leased for a while to the Salvation Army and were also used for storage by George Williams & Co Ltd, wholesale clothiers. before becoming the Embassy Billiard Hall.

During the 1930s, the LMSR staff magazine included a series of articles



**Left and below: An Edmondson ticket advertising the Embassy Billiard Hall. The front is very colourful, with the upper half green, the lower half yellow and the vertical stripes in maroon. Curiously the station name is shown as "Bow Road" instead of "Bow".**



**Above : The eastern end of the street level building at Bow, with a poster promoting the then new Embassy Billiard Hall above the former Institute entrance on the right.**

**C.F. Barnes collection**



Bow station, looking east, after the wording "Billiard Hall" had been added above the upper storey windows, where the legend "Bow & Bromley Institute" had once been displayed. The actual date is unknown, although the rear of the original print has been endorsed "c.1929" in pencil.  
**London Midland & Scottish Railway**

giving a brief history of the NLR. In the first of these the writer, who was shown simply as "E.D." reminisced about the Institute and stated: "Much interest centres around the handsome building in Bow Road which contained, besides the booking hall and certain station offices, a library, reading and class rooms, and a splendid concert hall seating 800. Known as Bow and Bromley Institute, it was the largest and best equipped hall in the East End, and the recognised meeting place for all mass assemblies. "Pepper's Ghost", that wonderful illusion of the nineteenth century, was first produced there, and the still more wonderful "Poole's Myriorama", the first of the moving pictures - and coloured at that!

A fine organ, costing £1,200 [including

building alterations] and built by public subscription, towards which North London railwaymen contributed their share, was erected in the hall. Among the celebrated singers on the platform were Sims Reeves, the famous tenor and Madame Patti. Indeed, the high standard of the entertainments was in keeping with the neighbourhood, which in those days numbered titled people among its residents....

The Institute was in its prime from the date of its building in 1869 until the opening of the Queen's Hall of the People's Palace in Mile End Road by Queen Victoria in the late 'eighties... The popularity of the Bow and Bromley Institute thence forward steadily declined, and it ultimately fell entirely into

disuse." The latter sentence is rather misleading as the hall had certainly not fallen "entirely into disuse" because it was then popular with those who enjoyed playing billiards!

At a later date, thought to be in the 1940s, the tables were removed and the former Institute premises became a dance hall known as The Bow Palais. It seems that unlike the NLR management of 1882, the LMSR had no qualms about the place being used for political meetings, as a Communist Party rally was held there on 5th December 1943 to "Put Mosley back in jail!" Oswald Mosley had been interred in May 1940, but released three years later. The rally was booked to start at 2.30pm, and those attending were entertained by

Desmond Campbell and the London Workers' Choir.

The following year saw the start of attacks from V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets. Although the Poplar branch suffered badly during the Second World War air raids, Bow station itself did not fare too badly. However, at 12.45am on 25th July 1944, a V1 landed nearby and damaged the buildings. The effects do not seem to have been very serious, but the explosion is thought to have smashed the front windows, including those of the former Institute.

After the war ended, the windows remained boarded-up, but the Palais continued to function and was particularly popular with staff from St. Andrew's Hospital.



The building on 24th July 1946, with the domed section of the former organ chamber removed and the upper storey windows boarded-up.

**H.C. Casserley / Negative in Jim Connor collection**



The building on 9th August 1953, after the Match Tax Testimonial Fountain had been demolished. The 'Bow Palais' nameboard can be seen above the former Institute entrance porch, but the windows in the top storey remain largely boarded-up.

**C. F. Barnes**  
collection



In time, the Palais management decided that the premises needed a facelift, and the hall closed for renovation in 1956. The work was expected to take five months and was almost finished, when a fire broke out in the small hours of Monday 15th October 1956. The incident was covered by an article in *Journal 57*, so details do not need to be repeated here. However, suffice to say that the damage was severe and resulted in the upper storey being demolished. The *East London Advertiser* of 19th October referred to the location as "The Bow Palais", although by this time, the sign above the entrance had been covered by a replacement showing "The Emerald Ballroom". It is not known at present when this change was made, but it may have been in connection with the renovation works which were then under way.

Be that as it may, the sign soon disappeared and the earlier "Bow Palais" again became visible. The surviving part of the building served as a parcels depot into the mid-1960s, but without its

imposing upper storey looked a shadow of its former self. The old Institute entrance porch was demolished soon after the parcels office closed, but the remainder lingered on into 1975. Today, virtually nothing remains of the once splendid building, with the most obvious relic being part of a column which was once part of the western porch. A commemorative plaque, erected by the local authority, is fixed to the adjoining wall and refers to the station, but not the Institute which was once part of it.

The Bow and Bromley Institute was a product of an age when philanthropy was starting to make its mark on the streets of London. As times and fashions changed, its closure became inevitable, but from an architectural point of view it is a great pity that it has disappeared without trace.

**Jim Connor**  
with grateful thanks to  
**David Hanson, Colin Mansell**  
and the late **Peter Bloomfield**  
for assistance.



**Above :** The remains of the street level building at Bow on 13th April 1957, soon after the fire damaged Institute section had been removed. To the right, above the cut-down frontage, can be seen the doorway which once led into the hall from the top of the entrance stairs.  
**Photographer unknown / Jim Connor collection**

**Below :** The frontage in 1962 with the former entrance porch in the right foreground. The nameboard continued to display 'Bow Palais', but it is known that one showing 'Emerald Ballroom' had once been fixed in front of this, possibly for a brief period only. By this time, the jagged brickwork on the two 'tower' sections which had resulted from the upper storey demolition had been tidied up and rendered in cement.

**John Phillips**





**Left :** The former Institute entrance porch at the eastern end of the building, was demolished at an unknown date between June 1965 and April 1966, leaving just the erstwhile supporting columns and the tinned-up door. Above these, the windows which served the stairway landing and the Institute cloakroom had been broken and everything had become very derelict. The windows to the right of the porch previously illuminated a toilet, which was intended for customers using the station refreshment room. This had a width of nearly 42ft and adjoined the west side of the Institute entrance.

**Below :** The western porch falls to the demolition men on 29th October 1975. The doorway to the right of the "danger" sign, once led into the station coal office.

**Both : Jim Connor**

