

CHARLIE BROWN'S ROUNDABOUT - 1938 - 1982
by John Lovell

Members of the younger generation do not remember Charlie Brown's Roundabout or Ted's Cafe.



Ted's Transport Cafe (on the left) and Charlie Brown's (on the right)

How did the Charlie Brown's roundabout, one of London's busiest intersections, get its unusual name? It was a very familiar landmark for East Enders driving back from Essex, and anyone taking the M11 up to Harlow/Stansted will have passed over it.

The roundabout was named after a larger than life Limehouse man, who was famous in the 19th century. But, how did the bland and featureless junction come to be connected with one of the East End's most colourful characters? The story began in the 1890s when Charlie Brown, a former boxer, took over the ownership of the Railway Tavern in Limehouse. The pub stood on the corner of Garford Street and the East India Dock Road and was a popular watering hole with the seamen and dockers who made up most of Limehouse's population at the time. Even among his noisy and outspoken clientele - many of whom were colourful characters with tales to tell - Charlie managed to stand out. In fact, he was such a loud and extrovert landlord that he managed to stamp his personality on the pub itself.

As Charlie's reputation grew, so did the contents of the pub. Sailors would return from their travels with mementoes from every corner of the globe and bring them back to a delighted guvnor, who would hang them on the wall of the tavern. As the collection grew, its fame spread throughout the capital. People would make the trip down to infamous Limehouse, which in the early 1900s was synonymous with Chinatown, white slaving and opium dens, just to view his map of the world.

In June 1932, the same year that Woodford Historical Society was formed, Charlie Brown died and the 'uncrowned king of Limehouse' was laid in state in the pub that had been his palace. 16,000 people went to Bow Cemetery to say goodbye to Charlie - his funeral procession was fit for a king!

Charlie Brown's legacy was a lucrative one, and both his children ran pubs. His daughter Esther kept the existing hostelry, while Charlie Brown Junior was the landlord of the Blue Posts, directly opposite the Railway Hotel. Both of them erected signs saying that their pubs were the genuine 'Charlie Brown's.'

In 1938 Charlie Junior gave up on the East End to move to leafier Woodford, taking the name with him, of course. The new 'Charlie Brown's' lay at the end of the Southend to London road which was to become the A127.



Charlie Brown's' in the days of the Borough of Wanstead and Woodford. On the right of the picture the pub sign, a detailed 'model' of a fairground roundabout can be clearly seen.

But in 1972 the road that had given the pub its reason for being also became the cause of its demise, when the road intersection was extended and the pub was demolished.

Young Charlie had salvaged many of the famous mementoes from his dad's pub, and legend has it they subsequently passed on to the Greyhound pub in Harlow, though there is no trace of them today. The original pub sign, a funfair roundabout on a pole, disappeared many years before the pub was finally demolished. A replica was commissioned and that disappeared days before the demolition contractors arrived. Ind Coope the brewery do not know of its whereabouts, there has been no trace of it in auction catalogues and the whereabouts of this piece of nostalgic historic memorabilia remains a mystery.

Today, our only reminder is the name of a traffic black spot on the fringes of London.