

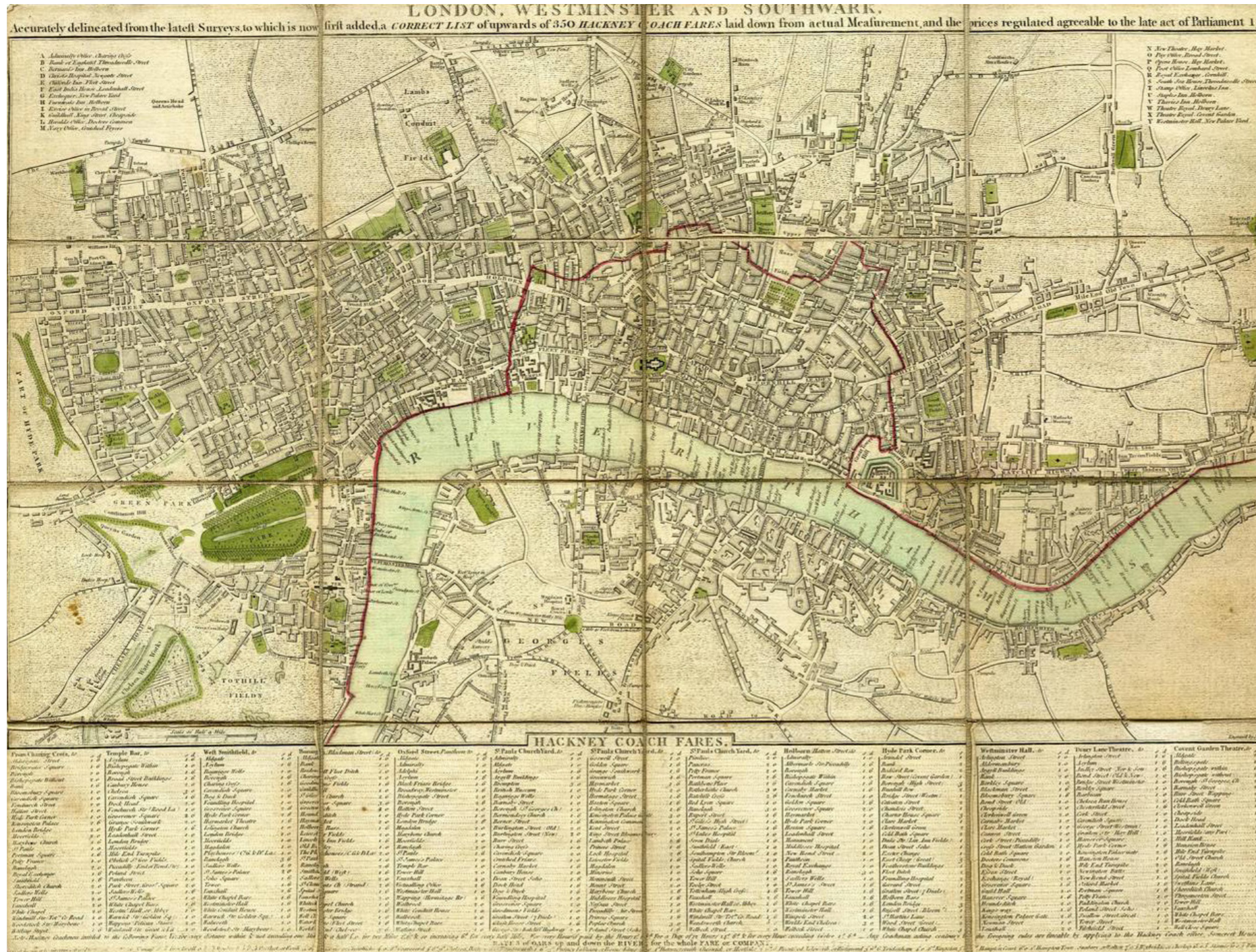
# STREATE'S AHEAD

Dr Ric Berman on the interesting characters he comes across while researching and writing about Freemasonry. None more so than Leonard Streate

One of the joys of researching any subject is putting together disparate pieces of information and, rather like completing a jigsaw puzzle, creating a coherent picture. Masonic history is no different, except that the pieces come in multiple shapes and sizes and involve individuals across a wide range of different contexts: social, political, geographic, and even philosophical. Understanding and explaining that texture or context is essential if one is to bring historical research to life, as is an appreciation of the people involved. For someone like me who has specialised in 18th century history for more than a decade, this can translate into an almost granular awareness of how people interact within their social and business circles, and the probable outcome of those connections, even when private.

A good example of this is a figure I first came across 12 years ago: Leonard Streate. Like many men in the 18th century, Streate's name was written phonetically, and the different spellings include 'Streat' and 'Streete', which can make identification problematic. It took me more than two days before I could pin down this chap, and I only succeeded by cross-checking his relationships with other figures within the same circles.

Streate was a member of the Horn Tavern Lodge in Westminster, No. 4, and a lawyer and barrister, a member of the Middle Temple. He was also a senior magistrate, first appointed to the bench in 1719. He was elected to chair the Westminster bench in 1722 and was re-elected in 1725 and 1727, on the last occasion 'unanimously chose'



Martin Folkes, drawn and engraved by William Hogarth

(the *London Evening Post*, 16 December 1727). Anecdotally, a masonic colleague from the Horn Tavern, William Cowper, the Secretary of the Grand Lodge of England, chaired the bench in 1723-4, and 1726-7. Both were appointed to the Commission of Bankrupts, an enviable position that could be quite lucrative; it was used as a sinecure by the government to reward political loyalty.

Streate was well-connected within London, including masonically. His wife, Gratiana, was the daughter of Sir Charles Cox, a wealthy brewer and investor, and MP for Southwark, where Streate was Steward of the Borough Court. Cox was a leading member of the lodge at the Bedford Head

in Covent Garden, where Martin Folkes presided. Folkes, a Vice President of The Royal Society under Sir Isaac Newton and then Sir Hans Sloane, was appointed Deputy Grand Master by the Duke of Richmond in 1724. He was elected President of The Royal Society on Sloane's retirement.

Streate had very little bearing on my historical research until a few months ago when I was researching my most recent book *The Grand Lodge of England & Colonial America: America's Grand Masters*, the first analysis of those endorsed by the Grand Lodge of England to act as Provincial Grand Masters in Britain's American colonies. When looking into the history of Colonel Daniel Coxe Jr,



Map of London's streets in the late 18th century, when Leonard Streate was a member of the Horn Tavern Lodge

the first man to be made a Provincial Grand Master in America, I was delighted to find a previously unknown and unexplored link to Streate, who was employed by Coxe and his father, Dr Daniel Coxe, as their London attorney and agent. The Coxe family were among the largest landowners in America, owning hundreds of thousands of acres in New Jersey, on Long Island, and in New York and Connecticut. Coxe Sr also held the title to 'Carolana', which comprised North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana, albeit ownership of most of that territory was contested by the French and Spanish.

Colonel Coxe was a member of the lodge at the Devil Tavern within Temple Bar, No. 8, in the 1729 Grand Register. But his appointment as PGM of New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania in June 1729 was probably a function of Streate's influence on his behalf. The power within Grand Lodge lay less with the figurehead of the Grand Master and more with the Deputy Grand Master who, in 1728 and 1729 was Nathaniel Blackerby. Streate and Blackerby were members of the Horn Tavern Lodge and of the Westminster magistrates' bench. Following Cowper's resignation as chair in 1727 and with Blackerby nominated as his successor, Streate agreed to stand in for Blackerby when he chose to defer his appointment. Streate also acted as Blackerby's financial guarantor in connection with his position as Treasurer of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches (*Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers*: 29 June 1731).

Streate suffered ill health towards the end of 1728 and died shortly thereafter. His obituary was published in the *Daily Post* on 27 January 1729 and referred to him as 'an excellent magistrate, using no mean artifices to draw business, never making Justice a Trade', meaning that he had not used the position for financial gain, something common among many magistrates who shared in the fines levied from the bench.

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