



## Razafy, A Malagasy Noblewoman Buried In Walthamstow

### *The Marsh Street New Meeting House, Schools & Burial Ground*

In the eighteenth century, Christians who didn't belong to the established Church of England were called non-conformists. Until the Repeal of the Test & Corporation Acts in 1828, like Roman Catholics, they were restricted from many spheres of public life and were ineligible for many forms of public educational and social benefits. These restrictions often meant that they couldn't be buried in Church of England grave yards.

In 1787, Congregational non-conformists in Walthamstow, opened the Marsh Street New Meeting House on a site on the south side of Marsh Street. Marsh Street ran from Church Hill to the marsh area by the River Lea and in 1872 it was renamed as High Street.

Because there were often difficulties with the established Church of England about the burial of non-conformists, part of the site became a burial ground. The Meeting House was very close to where Manzie's is in the High Street and the small burial ground was at the rear. This early non-conformist Meeting House was associated closely with the London Missionary Society and in 1837, in nearby Grove House, they established the Walthamstow School for the Daughters of Missionaries. In 1842 they opened a similar but smaller School for the Sons of Missionaries that was situated at the rear of the Meeting House. At this time the area contained the Meeting House and burial ground together with two associated schools. This situation is commemorated by the present day Mission Grove (Formerly Mission Street) that runs parallel with the High Street from Palmerston to Blackhorse Road.

### ***Madagascar & The Christian Missionaries***

Madagascar is the fourth biggest Island in the world and is situated in the Indian Ocean opposite Mozambique in the south eastern coast of Africa. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was a monarchy that ruled with the support of an aristocracy of a number of noble families. From 1818, missionary envoys from the London Missionary Society began arriving in the country and established schools. They transcribed the Malagasy language, translated the Bible, and introduced a variety of new technologies to the island. Among the converts to Christianity were a number of members of the Malagasy aristocracy. At first the missionaries were welcomed by the monarch, King Radama and his wife Ranavalona. They enjoyed the benefit of the new technologies which included munitions and arms manufacture. However, Radama died in 1828 and his wife, Ranavalona succeeded to the throne.

### ***Queen Ranavalona the Cruel (1782-1861)***

She was 40 years old when she became Queen and ruled with the support of advisors drawn from the aristocratic noble families. She had a succession of Chief ministers who were also her consorts. In order to secure and maintain her position, she set about killing all potential claimants to the throne. This included many members of her own family.



### ***Banning Christianity***

It wasn't long before she became concerned about the growing power of the foreigners and the number of members of the aristocracy who had become Christians. Her response, in 1835, was to forbid the practice of Christianity by her subjects and to make it a capital offence. She also decreed that all foreigners should leave the country except for those who were contributing to the technological advancement of her country. As a result, the majority of London Society missionaries were forced to leave the country. In order to enforce her ban on Christianity, she sought out all known Malagasy Christians, tortured them and put them to death in many horrible ways.

### ***The Six Exiles***

In 1838, as a result of the Queen's persecution of the Malagasy Christians a group of them aided by missionaries fled the country. These were two women: Rafaravavy (English name – Mary), Razafy (English Name –Sarah) and four men: Adrianomanana (English Name – Simeon), Rosoamaka (English Name – Joseph), Ratsarahomba (English Name- David) and Adrianisa (English name – David).

They were all members of the Malagasy aristocracy and had all fallen foul of Queen Ranavalona. In 1837, Rafaravavy's brother and father held high rank in the army and she had been sentenced to a term of punitive enslavement for her refusal to give up her Christian beliefs. She had fled and had been sheltered by Razafy, who was a young married woman. They were all on the Queen's proscribed list and they determined to flee the country and go into exile.

### ***Walthamstow***

In December 1838, accompanied by missionary called David Johns, the six exiles sailed from Cape Town to England. They were all married and had left their families behind. After they arrived they went to live in Walthamstow. Mrs Johns looked after the two women and gave them lessons. The four men lived at the British & Foreign School in the village which they attended in order to improve their English and acquire general knowledge.

They were paraded around London and attended a meeting London Missionary Society meeting at Exeter Hall in the Strand. There, dressed in their white robes, they were introduced to an audience of three thousand people in order to raise support for Madagascan Christians

## ***Razafy , A Malagasy Noblewoman Dies on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1840***

In 1840 Razafy became ill. Apparently she did not have a healthy disposition and the news from Madagascar of the death of many of her Christian friends caused her to become depressed. She died on Boxing Day 1840 and was buried in the Marsh Street Meeting House Burial ground on the 31<sup>st</sup> December. The Church Missionary Register for 1841 records: '*A place in the family vault of John Hale Esq. having been most kindly offered, her remains were placed there after an appropriate and affecting Service in Marsh Street Chapel. A large concourse attended and much sympathy and interest was expressed* '

## **Aftermath**

### ***The Burial Ground***

Waltham Forest Council cleared the burial ground in c1971. As far as I can see into the fenced off area, where the burial ground was situated – it is a mess.

### ***The Walthamstow Schools for the Sons & Daughters Of Missionaries***

The Boys school was founded in 1842 and by 1852 it only had a small number of pupils, was in bad need of repair and suffered from a lack of funds. It was relocated to Stockwell and in 1912 to Eltham College. The Girls school flourished and grew. In 1872 it was relocated to Sevenoaks, Kent and was called Walthamstow Hall in remembrance of its origin. Today it is a very successful independent school that operates on two sites. <http://www.walthamstow-hall.co.uk/>

*Marsh Street* was renamed as *High Street*, Walthamstow in 1872 and the *London Missionary Society* is remembered by the name of *Mission Grove*.

*Queen Ranavalona* lived to be nearly 80 years old and died in her bed.

Bill Bayliss  
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If you want to learn more about Madagascar, cruel Queen Ranavalona, the Missionaries and the Malagasy Christians:

<http://www.cambridge.org/aus/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=9780521518277&ss=exc>

[http://www20.us.archive.org/stream/madagascaritsmar00jlkp/madagascaritsmar00jlkp\\_djvu.txt](http://www20.us.archive.org/stream/madagascaritsmar00jlkp/madagascaritsmar00jlkp_djvu.txt)

<http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/george-cousins/gleanings-from-many-fields-ala/page-8-gleanings-from-many-fields-ala.shtml>

