



Places in Brent

Alperton

Grange Museum of Community History and Brent Archive

Alperton is situated in the south of Brent, between Wembley and Ealing.

Early history

Alperton, which is first recorded as "Alprinton", probably started off as 'the farm of Eahlbeort'. It is first recorded in 1199, when it consisted of 12 buildings. There was a wooden bridge over the river Brent by 1432-3. The lords of the manor of Harrow and Ealing were responsible for its upkeep. A concrete and brick bridge was not built until 1874.

There was some enclosure in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the 18th century arable farming declined. The water meadows alongside the Brent were best suited for growing grass and London's horses provided a ready market for hay. Wheat farming further declined due to economic depressions in the first half of the 19th century. Hay farming was at its height in the 1880s.

There were some 60 people living in Alperton in 1661. A blacksmith's shop opened in 1680 and several cottages were built before 1714. The 'Plough' inn was licensed from 1722 and the 'Chequers' from at least 1751. By 1805 there were 21 houses, including 14 farms, but enclosure (in 1817) reduced the number of

farms to four by 1851. At the same time the population grew, from 199 in 1831 to 234 in 1851.

The Grand Junction canal

In 1801 the Grand Junction Canal was cut through Alperton. Its effect on trade was immediate. It created work handling shipments of sand, hay, gravel and coal. By 1851 passenger boats were carrying sightseers on trips to the 'Pleasure Boat' pub. In the medieval and Tudor and Stuart periods the area had been famous for stag hunting. It now became "a celebrated resort for anglers." The coming of the railway to Wembley in 1842 harmed passenger barge traffic, but Alperton's countryside remained a popular place to visit. Postcards featuring "Greetings from Alperton" were readily available around 1900.



Narrow boats and wagons at a wharf on the canal at Alperton around 1923

A brickfield existed by 1800, when it was used in building the Grand Junction. It expanded in the mid-19th century. When the seam of brickclay ran out work continued using imported clay, but operations ceased around 1890.

Henry Haynes ran one of the brickworks. Haynes, the son of a local hay-dealer, owned 70 out of the 100 buildings in Alperton and employed most of its 150 strong workforce. To

accommodate the growing population new cottages were constructed, some of them by Haynes. Haynes also paid for shops, a church and the new Alperton Park Hotel to be built.

Late 19th century Alperton was a grim place. As the most industrialised village in the Wembley area it was famous for disgusting smells coming from shipments of gas lime and dung, a sewage farm, two recycling plants producing manure and three large piggeries. It threatened at one time to become "the dusthole of the Metropolis", but the decline of the brickfields and, perhaps, the creation of Wembley Urban District Council in 1894 led to an improvement by 1896. One Tree Hill recreation ground was procured shortly after 1914. While the pollution was at its worst there were public order problems also. Punch-ups were common among the brickfield labourers. Around 1890 bare-knuckle boxing bouts and cockfights took place on Sundays at Honeypot Lane. Meanwhile, from 1888, Haynes issued a token coinage that effectively robbed his workforce.



Alperton station and High Street between 1910 and the early 1920s

Alperton's churches

There had been a Baptist chapel on the site of the present station from 1828, but there was no Anglican church until a mission tent used at weekly evangelical meetings (held in Honeypot Lane) became a temporary building. In 1904 a separate parish was

created, and in 1912 St. James' Church was consecrated to cater for growing numbers of people moving south from Wealdstone.

20th century development

In the 19th century the nearest station was at Wembley. Trains between Acton Town and South Harrow did not start running until 1903. Perivale-Alperton station (called Alperton from 1910) opened at the same time. The line was electrified, power being supplied by a temporary generating station next to the canal at Alperton until 1905.

The railway encouraged development and Alperton expanded rapidly after the First World War. In 1932 Piccadilly Line trains began running on District track to South Harrow, replacing District trains altogether after the Second World War.

In the early 20th century Alperton became known for mushroom cultivation. There were rubber, fireproofing and motorcycle factories by 1911. By 1920 Ealing Road was continuously built-up from the canal to Wembley. The construction of the North Circular Road (1921-34) encouraged more industry to move in from Park Royal.

The population grew from 2,468 in 1921 to 6,444 in 1931 and, following further industrial growth after the Second World War, 14,432 in 1951. In 1930 Honeypot Lane was still rural, but by 1933 Alperton was "almost fully developed." A sub-Post Office was opened in 1934, the 'Plough' was rebuilt in 1936 and a London Transport bus garage began operating in June 1939. Schools were created in 1922, 1936 and after the war.

After the Second World War

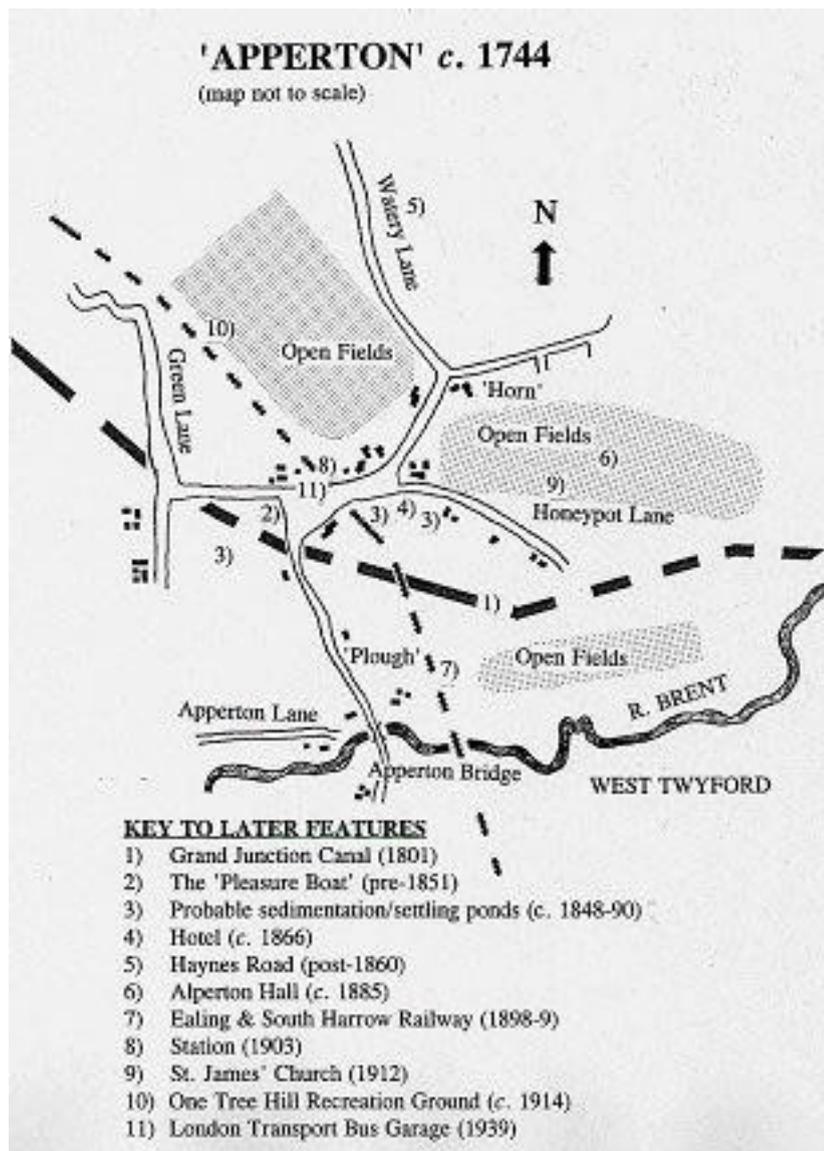
By 1961 the population had declined to 12,804. The property boom that led to the construction of flats in Wembley and Sudbury hardly affected Alperton. More recently the area has been hit by high unemployment. Ealing Road, however, has undergone a renaissance.

In the 1970s Ealing Road was an unimportant 'secondary parade' facing possible demolition. Then East African Asians, mainly Gujaratis, opened shops along Ealing Road. Some sold sarees, tropical vegetables or sweets, but many set up jewellery shops and began crafting 22-carat gold, sometimes in their own homes. The area became an Asian Hatton Garden. Not only have these changes kept the shopping parade alive, but the presence of open-fronted food shops means that Ealing Road feels more like a pre-war shopping street than do many suburban parades.



An Asian shop on Ealing Road, 2001

Photograph courtesy Rashad Mohamed



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