



## Places in Brent

# Kenton

Grange Museum of Community History and Brent Archive



Woodcock Dell farm, Kenton, 1901

Kenton is situated in the northwest of Brent, bordering on Harrow.

### Early History

Kenton ('the farm of the sons of Coena') probably began as a Saxon settlement in a forest clearing. It was near a prehistoric track, the modern Honeypot Lane. 'Keninton', as it was then known, is first mentioned in 1231. Rumours that a chantry chapel was founded there in the 14<sup>th</sup> century are false.

The modern spelling of Kenton is first recorded in 1596, by which time the Page family were important landowners. The North family were also well known in the area. They acquired Harrow Manor in 1545. In 1630 these estates were obtained by the Rushout family, who acquired the barony of Northwick in 1797. In 1912 the land passed to Captain E.G. Spencer-Churchill.

Enclosure in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries encouraged changes in land holding. New farms appeared in the area until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1721 Kenton consisted of a house, seven cottages and a blacksmith's shop. The 'Plough' inn was certainly in existence by 1751. No major highways went through the village, although by 1759 there were local roads to Kingsbury, Preston and Edgware. These roads were in very poor repair.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> century**

A great deal of the local land was owned by the Graham family, but they were in serious decline by 1800. In the 1850s a Scottish family, the Loudons, leased local farms and improved them by using Scottish farming methods, while the Grimwade family produced some of the earliest dried milk at Sheepcote Farm. The milk was supplied in large quantities to troops in the Crimea and met with the approval of Florence Nightingale.

In 1837 the London & Birmingham Railway was constructed through the lands of Sheepcote Farm, but as no station was built the railway had little effect on the area. In 1831 the population of Kenton was 83, in 1841 it was 99 and in 1859 it was 109. Most of these people had jobs connected with agriculture.

In 1852 the village consisted of Kenton Farm (demolished 1965/6), four houses, 11 cottages, the 'Plough', the smithy and the National School. A beershop opened in 1873. In 1880 the

Metropolitan Railway was extended through southwestern Kenton, but again no station was built.

### **Kenton becomes a suburb**

In 1905 Harrow School Trust acquired 192 acres of Sheepcote Farm to prevent development near the school. This became a golf course in 1907. The owner of the rest of the land, Captain Spencer-Churchill, intended to develop it as a high-class estate, Northwick Park. The focal point of this new development was to be a tennis and social club. Spencer-Churchill's idea was probably inspired by the knowledge that the London & North Western Railway was planning to build two new stations nearby. These stations opened in 1912.



Woodcock Hill, Kenton, in the heyday of London suburbia

The first suburban buildings south of Kenton Road were railway cottages. Three roads of Spencer-Churchill's estate were built before 1914, but no houses. During the First World War anti-aircraft positions were set up off Kenton Road at Churchill Avenue and near the present Mayfield Avenue. After the war Spencer-Churchill's extravagant plans were watered down, the land was

split up and less expensive houses were built, many by a building firm called Costin's.



Kenton shopping centre decorated for the Coronation of George VI, 1937

### **Between the wars**

Northwick Park Metropolitan Line station opened in 1923. This and the 1924-5 British Empire Exhibition further encouraged suburban growth. Between 1921 and 1933 Christ Church College sold off the estates it owned in the area, and other landowners did the same. Most houses were built by private builders, not by large firms. The shopping centre began to develop from 1924 and a distinctive row of small coal merchants' shops serving new residents appeared next to the station between 1927 and 1930. Meanwhile, from 1925 to 1933, the route Kenton Road followed between the 'Plough' and Woodcock Hill was drastically changed.

Although in 1933, when South Kenton station was opened, Preston and Kenton "still [retained] some of their rural charms," by 1938 all trace of the original village had vanished. Kenton's population rose from 268 in 1921 to 6,171 in 1931. In 1933 the

'Rest' public house was rebuilt as the largest pub in Middlesex and in 1935 the 'village' got its own Odeon cinema (it was demolished in 1961).

The new suburb was divided between local authorities. From 1934 the southern part was in Wembley Urban District (from 1937 Wembley Borough), while the northern part was in Harrow Urban District. In 1936 the Council bought the 192-acre Northwick Park Estate for use as an open space.

### **Churches and schools**

As the community grew churches and schools were built to serve it. In 1927 a new parish of Kenton was formed from several old parishes. Various non-conformist churches opened from 1929 and a Roman Catholic church in 1932.

During the 1930s numbers of Jewish people moved into Kenton. A synagogue was built at Kenton Park Avenue in 1948 and another at Shaftesbury Avenue 10 years later. Meanwhile the Palaestra, built in 1923 as the social centre at the heart of Spencer-Churchill's original plan, became a Masonic Centre in 1953.

Harrow School had provided 'school dames' to teach local children as early as 1660, but the first true schools in Kenton were Kenton Lodge and an infants' school. In 1841 Kenton Lodge had 13 students. A National School opened in 1852. Kenton College, a private school, was set up in 1927 and ran until 1957. More schools opened in the 1930s and the 1950s.

### **Post-war Kenton**

Kenton continued to grow after the war. By 1951 the population was 27,680. It has since declined slightly.

As we have seen, in 1936 the Council had acquired the land bought by Harrow School in 1905. Northwick Park Golf Club's facilities there were demolished in the 1950s. In 1959 Harrow



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