



## Places in Brent

# Kingsbury

### Grange Museum of Community History and Brent Archive

Kingsbury is situated at the northern edge of Brent, south of Stanmore.

### Early history of Kingsbury



Kingsbury Church around 1780

Kingsbury ('The King's manor') developed between two ancient north-south routes, Watling Street (Edgware Road) and Honeypot Lane. Despite its name it may well predate Saxon times. Bronze age cremation burials are said to have been found near Brent Reservoir and Roman material has been found at St. Andrew's Church and at the junction of Buck Lane and Kingsbury Road. The idea that the church was built on the site of a Roman camp has been totally discredited, and claims that there was a pagan religious site here are unproved, but there is evidence that there

was a large Late Roman villa near Salmon Street. Although in places it resembles Saxon work, the church is post-1066.

The Anglo-Saxons probably first settled in southern Kingsbury. Just before the Norman Conquest Edward the Confessor gave "all the land at Chealchylle (Chalkhill) [and] every third load of fruits growing in the ... forest which lieth towards Kynggesbrig" to Westminster Abbey. At this time much of Kingsbury belonged to Ulward Wit, a Saxon thane. The two manors of "Chingesberie" mentioned in the Domesday Book comprised 1,200 acres. This was not large. Harrow, for example, comprised 13,000 acres. After the Conquest Wit's lands went to the Norman Ernulf de Hesdin, whose estates were broken up when he rebelled against William Rufus and then left the country to join the First Crusade at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Early history of Chalkhill**

Chalkhill is first mentioned in its present form in 1240. It later came into the possession of the Knight's Hospitalers, to whom Kingsbury Church had been appropriated. Freren Manor, just north of the church, was named after them ('Freren' meaning 'brothers'). The Order was suppressed in 1540 and their land given to St. Paul's Cathedral in 1544.

### **From the middle ages to the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

The medieval settlement pattern was scattered. There were habitations at Kingsbury Church, at Kingsbury, at Roe (sometimes spelled 'Row') and Pipers greens and near the Hyde. Pipers Green may have been named after John Lyon, a 15<sup>th</sup> century piper. There was no open-field system and fields were enclosed the moment they were claimed from the forest. Despite its small size the boundaries of the parish were uncertain. Kingsbury was always closely connected with Edgware, especially after Kingsbury and Edgware manors were both granted to All Souls College, Oxford, in 1442.

The parish was heavily affected by the Black Death. 13 deaths are recorded in 1350 "at the time of the pestilence". Houses were

abandoned and the population concentrated in the north of the parish, around Kingsbury Green. Southern Kingsbury shrank from a village to a church and one or two farms. It has never fully recovered. This new settlement pattern remained until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Kingsbury Green grew. Houses were also built at the Hyde as forests were cleared and brigandry along the Edgware Road diminished. There had been 21 tenements in the middle ages. This grew to over 30 in 1597 and 52 in 1664. Thereafter population growth was erratic. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the number of houses hardly changed, but from 1801 to 1851 the population trebled, with the number of houses increasing from 45 to 102, rising to 142 in 1881. There were 140 houses in 1900.

### **Inns and residents**

There were six inns in Kingsbury in 1751. The 'Plough' at Kingsbury Green is first mentioned in 1748. Three inns, the 'Black Horse' and two establishments called the 'Chequers' had disappeared without a trace by 1803. Of the two inns called the 'King's Arms' at the Hyde the name of one survives, but the other, to its south, has gone. The 'Red Lion' existed before 1826, and by 1851 a beershop called the 'Green Man' had appeared at Pipers Green, along with another two premises at the Hyde.

Although most people worked the land, a few wealthy or famous people lived in Kingsbury. John Chalkhill was an Elizabethan poet. From 1771 to 1774 the writer Oliver Goldsmith lived at Hyde Farm, which was visited by his friends Dr. Johnson, James Boswell and Joshua Reynolds. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century each of Kingsbury's hamlets had villas. An old inhabitant, Mr Albert Pidgeon, recalled in 1965 that around 1890 "there were probably about six gentlemen living in Kingsbury, who would be driven by their coachmen, presumably to Hendon station, in the morning ... when their coaches passed us, we schoolkids had to salute them." Children who did not salute were punished by their teachers.



Kingsbury Manor in 1971

In 1893 Field Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford, who had recently returned from India, came to live at Grove Park. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Forces in Ireland two years later. During the Boer War Roberts (commonly known as 'Bobs') was very popular for ending the tide of British defeats (in one of which his only son had been killed), but he was totally flummoxed by the guerrilla warfare that followed this achievement. While the Boer War was still going on he came back to Britain to take up the post of Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, which he held until 1904. He spent his retirement calling for compulsory military service and died in November 1914, while visiting Indian troops at the front. Unfortunately Grove Park was demolished after the Second World War.

A large Kingsbury house that survives is Kingsbury Manor, which was built for the Duchess of Sutherland in 1899. She had recently married the MP for Islington and the house was probably built because of Kingsbury's proximity to North London. It was renamed Kingsbury Manor in 1929 and is now a home for the

elderly belonging to the London Borough of Brent. In the 1920s the television pioneer John Logie Baird received the first television pictures from the continent in the coach house there.

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

In 1835 work was completed on the Kingsbury Reservoir. Largely because of the efforts of the landlord of 'The Old Welsh Harp' inn, the area around the reservoir became a pleasure garden from 1860 to 1885. Horse races attracted "thousands of the scum of London" until racing was banned from London's hinterland in 1878. London's first greyhound race was held here in 1876. A Midland Railway station served day-trippers from 1870 to 1903. As late as 1930 Kingsbury was famous for pleasant days out in unspoilt countryside. In reality however the picturesque farmland concealed considerable rural poverty.

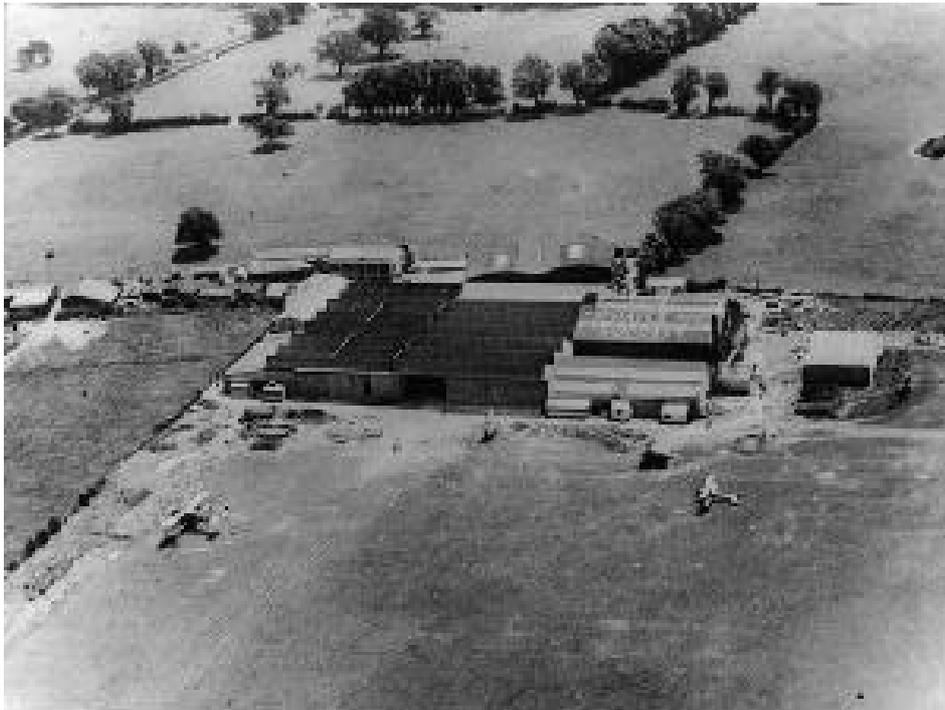
Hay and animal farming predominated in Kingsbury. By 1838 97% of land was under grass. At certain times of year large numbers of itinerant agricultural labourers came from Ireland to work in the area. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were stud farms at Roe Green and Kingsbury House. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the decline in hay farming hit local farmers. Seasonal unemployment, high rents and short leases kept buildings in poor repair. The area was prone to flooding (especially after the construction of the reservoir, which failed disastrously in January 1841) and sewerage was appalling, although Kingsbury did have piped water from about 1872. The small population meant that the Council (Wembley Urban District from 1894 to 1900, then Kingsbury Urban District from 1900 to 1934) could not raise enough money to improve things. Personality clashes added to these problems.

### **Schools and churches**

Local children had access to schools. The curate had kept a school in 1530, and one is recorded in 1819. In 1870 the British (later Board) School was set up at the Hyde, becoming a senior mixed school in 1922. Roman Catholic children, presumably the

offspring of the Irish agricultural labourers, had a school from 1865.

In 1884 the concentration of population in northern Kingsbury, especially at the Hyde, where tall buildings nicknamed 'windjammers' ("the ugliest thing in rural Middlesex") crept west along Kingsbury Road, led to the consecration of a new parish church (Holy Innocents). Following protests old St. Andrew's remained open as part of a new parish, Neasden-cum-Kingsbury. There was little building along Edgware Road itself because of inadequate sewerage and public transport. The road was so bad that although trams used it from 1904, buses were not introduced until 1920.



The De Havilland aerodrome at Stag Lane, 1925

### **Industry and population growth**

Proximity to Hendon aerodrome led to the development of an aircraft industry in northeast Kingsbury during the First World War. Many of the workers were women. There were also three aerodromes in Kingsbury itself.

20 houses had already been constructed at Stag Lane in 1909-10 and at the end of the war Roe Green Village was built for aircraft workers by the architect Frank Baines. After the war an artificial limb factory was set up near Hay Lane.

The aircraft industry, and the 1924-5 British Empire Exhibition, led to better roads. These opened Kingsbury up to development. About 100 people had lived in medieval Kingsbury. In 1911 there were 821. Another 1,000 people settled during the First World War.

In 1919 the Metropolitan Railway Company Estates Ltd bought up most of the Chalkhill estate and built large detached houses and bungalows there. Then, from 1921 to 1931, Kingsbury experienced the largest population increase of any district in north London, from 1,856 to 16,636 (a rise of 796%). The most interesting inter-war houses are those designed by local architect Ernest Trobridge at Stag and Buck lanes.



A Trobridge house on Buck Lane

More light industry came into the area as well, for example Frigidaire, which opened offices and showrooms in Kingsbury in 1926. Kingsbury station opened in 1932 and Queensbury in 1934. Queensbury is not a Saxon name, but the result of a competition organised by an estate agent. The location of Kingsbury station shifted the centre of modern Kingsbury significantly to the west. From 1931 to 1933 1,000 houses a year were built in the area, many by special companies set up simply to develop Kingsbury. Kingsbury Green effectively disappeared. Churches, schools, social clubs and modern shops followed the houses, the shops largely concentrating around the Underground station.

Even in southern Kingsbury the population grew to such an extent that a new church was needed. New St. Andrew's, an important Victorian building, was moved there from Wells Street, north of Oxford Street in central London. The 'new' church was given its own parish, separating it from Neasden.

### **Wembley Borough, then Brent**

In 1934, Kingsbury Urban District was re-amalgamated with Wembley. This was unpopular, but overall people preferred to join Wembley rather than Willesden. Between 1935 and 1940 Wembley built an impressive new town hall on Forty Lane in what had been Kingsbury. In 1939 an open-air swimming pool was opened, and in 1940 a public library. By 1945 there were few large areas left to develop. In 1951 the population had grown to 41,905, though it declined somewhat thereafter owing to emigration to New Towns.

In 1965 Conservative Wembley and Labour Willesden combined to form the London Borough of Brent. Even before this occurred a plan had been devised to build a high-density council estate at Chalkhill to help move people out of overcrowded Willesden. Chalkhill House, a 17<sup>th</sup> century building in Forty Lane, had been demolished in 1963. The suburban houses of the Chalkhill estate were now also destroyed, some of them after compulsory purchase. The scheme was highly

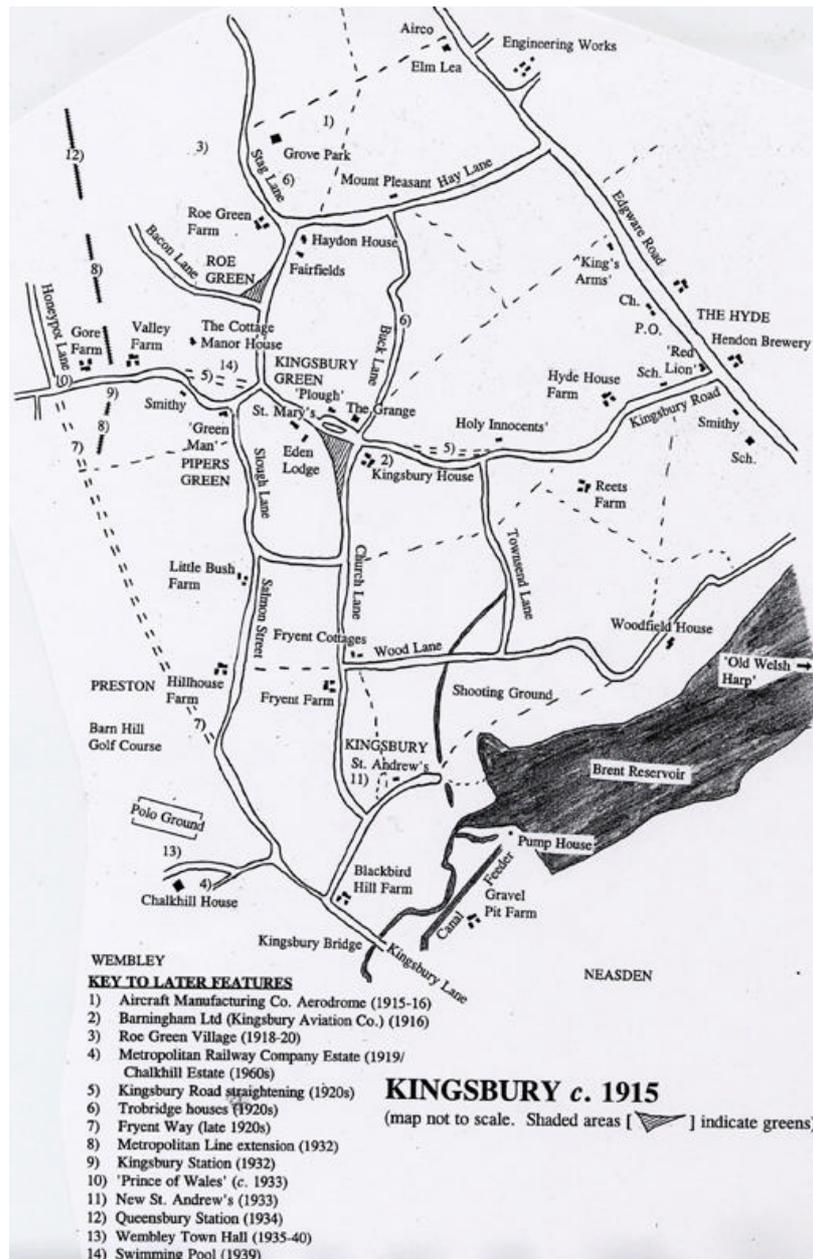
unpopular with Conservative Wembley councillors and the new Borough of Brent was therefore born amid considerable political bitterness.



The new Chalkhill Estate, 1970

Like all such high-density projects the Chalkhill Estate, built between 1966 and 1970, was not a great success. Several of the tower blocks there have now been demolished. The construction of a large Asda superstore has also played a significant role in improving the area.

In the 1960s and 1970s a number of Asian people who had fled East Africa came to Kingsbury. Some of them contributed to the area almost immediately by buying up local shops that would otherwise have closed. In 1984 the open land bordering Fryent Way, which had been purchased by Middlesex County Council in 1935 and had remained as farmland until the early 1970s, became Fryent Open Space.



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