



Places in Brent

Preston and Uxendon

Grange Museum of Community History and Brent Archive

Preston is situated in eastern Brent, north of Wembley and south of Kingsbury and Kenton.



Preston Road as a rural lane

Early history of Preston

Preston, meaning 'the farm belonging to the priest', began as a small settlement at Preston Green, just southwest of the Lidding or Wealdstone Brook, south of Kenton. It was first mentioned in 1220. The name may come from an estate given to Abbot Stidberht by King Offa of Mercia in 767, but any connection with

the Church had been lost by 1086. Preston was a township by 1231.

Early history of Uxendon

Uxendon, first recorded in a transaction concerning Hugh of "Woxindon" in 1257, was an even smaller settlement on the east bank of the brook and the western slopes of Barn Hill. The first part of the name is the same as that in the name Uxbridge and stems either from the Wixan, a 7th century Anglo-Saxon tribe, or from the Celtic for 'water'. The second part is the Old English for hill. Medieval Uxendon was very small, but in the 14th or 15th centuries some local people, including the Uxendon family, moved south to form another small community at Forty Green, where the Sudbury to Kingsbury road crossed the Lidding at Forty Bridge. This settlement was known as Uxendon Forty, Wembley Forty or Preston Forty. The farm at Forty Green was at first called Pargrave's, and later South Forty Farm. All of these communities were in the parish of Harrow.

Local landowners

By the mid-15th century Preston consisted of two farms and a few cottages. The northern farm belonged to the Lyon family from the late 14th century and is described as being a beautiful building in 1547. It was probably the birthplace of John Lyon (1534-92), a considerable local landowner who founded Harrow School in 1572. After his death the farm was given as an endowment for the upkeep of the school. It was rebuilt around 1700. The southern farm was originally known as Preston Dicket and later as Preston Farm.

Uxendon became a submanor under the authority of Harrow Manor Court. It is first mentioned as a manor in 1373. Richard Brembre, a grocer and Lord Mayor of London, lived at Uxendon. In 1388 he executed 22 prisoners without trial and was later himself executed for this crime.



A postcard of Forty Farm

In 1516 the Bellamy family acquired Uxendon through marriage. They remained staunchly Roman Catholic after the Reformation and sheltered Catholic priests. In 1586 Anthony Babington, a principal conspirator in the Babington plot against Elizabeth I, was arrested on their property.

In 1592 Elizabeth's security services tracked the fugitive Jesuit Robert Southwell to Uxendon. As a result of these arrests the Bellamys suffered considerably in the final years of the 16th century. By 1608 their land was in the hands of the Page family, who had become the leading landowners in the Wembley area.

The Bellamys had already enclosed a small amount of open land. The Pages continued this process throughout the 17th century. In 1655 enclosure of open fields by Richard Page led to changes in the routing of the road east of Preston. This enclosure by the Pages encouraged the general move from arable to meadow in the area in the 18th century. Nonetheless a significant amount of common land remained to be enclosed at the time of the Enclosure Act of 1803.

Preston was small and Uxendon was only a single farm, but both settlements were initially more important than Wembley. This was probably no longer the case by 1547, but despite being overtaken by its neighbour Preston grew during the following

centuries. By 1681 five buildings had been built on Preston Green, including a new farmhouse, Hillside Farm. In 1759 there were nine buildings at Preston, including the 'Horseshoe' inn, which was licensed in 1751.

By 1732 a new farm, Barn Hill Farm, existed on the summit of Barn Hill. It was no longer there by 1850 and had probably gone by the late 18th century, when Richard Page began building a folly on Barn Hill as part of his improvements at Wembley Park. The folly was still standing in 1820. Early in the 19th century Preston House was built on Preston Hill, near four cottages recorded there in 1817. By 1820 the green at Preston had shrunk and the brook was crossed by both a ford and a footbridge.

In 1829 many of the Page family lands, including Uxendon, went to Henry Young (d. 1869), the junior partner of the Page's solicitor. There is good reason to suspect that Young obtained the lands fraudulently. In the decades that followed Young's death numerous persons turned up claiming the 'Page millions', but no-one was successful.

Preston and Uxendon in the 19th century

The district did not change significantly in the 19th century. This was due to an agricultural depression after the Napoleonic Wars and London's growing need for hay; both Uxendon and Forty farms had converted to hay farming by 1852. The depression also led to an outbreak of violence in the area around 1828, when desperate agricultural labourers burnt haystacks and threatened local landowners, including the relatively benevolent Lord Northwick.

64 people lived in Preston in 1831 and 57 in 1851. In the same year Uxendon Farm housed 13 people and Forty Farm 10, while three more lived at the top of 302-foot high Barn Hill.



The Preston Tea Gardens on Preston Hill,
around 1912

In the mid-19th century Uxendon was the venue for steeplechases and well known for its "sensational water jump", while Forty Farm was famous for horses.

In 1851 the 'Rose & Crown' beerhouse is mentioned at the top of Preston Hill (beerhouses flourished from 1830 to 1869 and were intended to discourage the sale of spirits). It appears to have been part of Hillside Farm, and is never mentioned again. Preston House was leased to various professional men during the 19th century, including a surgeon, a cigar importer and a solicitor. In 1864 two villas replaced the four nearby cottages. Around 1880 Preston House was acquired by George Timms (d. 1899), who turned the grounds into Preston Tea Gardens. The Tea Gardens flourished well into the next century.

Railways and sport

The construction of the Metropolitan Railway in 1880 effectively destroyed Forty Green, although South Forty Farm continued into the 20th century. In 1928 the farm became the headquarters of the Century Sports Ground. The celebrated gunsmiths Holland & Holland had a shooting ground nearby. As Forty Farm Sports

Ground the site of the farm remains green to this day. The Holland & Holland grounds, however, were built over after 1931.

The Metropolitan Railway had no effect on development, even after the opening of Wembley Park station in 1894. In 1896 the suggestion that a station should be built serving Preston was rejected because the local population was so small. Indeed even in the early 20th century the area was entirely rural, and the Wealdstone Brook could be described as "one of the most perfect little streams anywhere, abounding in dace and roach."

By 1900 Uxendon Farm had become a shooting ground (the Lancaster Shooting Club). When the Olympic Games were held in London in 1908 the ground was sufficiently important to be used for Olympic clay pigeon shooting. Pressure from the shooting club, which was a two mile walk from the nearest station, played a part in the opening of Preston Road Halt in May 1908. The station was a halt (a request stop) and initially many trains failed to slow down enough to enable the driver to notice passengers waiting on the platform. Preston Road Halt triggered the first commuter development in the district. Some large Edwardian houses were built along Preston Road after 1910 and Harrow Golf Club opened near the station in 1912. Wembley Golf Club had already existed on the southern slopes of Barn Hill from about 1895. Both these golf courses would disappear under housing between the wars.

The growth of suburbia in Preston

Further development in Preston came after the 1924-5 British Empire Exhibition. Roads in the area were prone to flooding, and the Exhibition led to significant and much needed improvements. Many of the country lanes in the area were however not improved until 1931-2, under Wembley's Town Planning Scheme. Preston Road indeed remained a country lane until the late 1930s, which may account for its considerable charm.



This shopping parade at the junction of East Lane and Preston Road was built between 1926 and 1929

Improved communications brought suburban development. Christ Church College, Oxford, and Harrow School sold their Preston estates in the period 1921-33. Forty Green began being built over as early as 1923-4 and housing spread along Preston Road and Preston Hill in the three years that followed. Shops appeared in 1927-8 and a pub, the 'Preston Park Hotel' (today simply the 'Preston'), was opened in the late 1920s.

Preston Road was converted into a proper station in 1931-2. By now it was certain that the heart of Preston would be to the south of the old green. Many more shops appeared around the station in 1931-3 and 1936-8. Most housing developments occurred in the 1930s. By 1936 Preston was being described as "a high class and rapidly growing residential area with a population of between 6,000 and 7,000 people." A primary school was created to serve this population in 1932 and a secondary school in 1938. In the 1930s many Jewish people, the majority members of the United Synagogue, moved into the Preston area. There is still a strong Jewish presence today.

...and in Uxendon

Some houses had already been built at Uxendon by 1930. Then in 1932 Uxendon Farm, which was in a terrible condition, was

destroyed to make way for the Metropolitan Railway extension from Wembley to Stanmore (later the Bakerloo and today the Jubilee Line). In the years that followed the whole of Uxendon was developed except for Barn Hill Open Space, which had been purchased by the Council from the owners of Preston Farm in 1927.

Post-war Preston

By 1951 Preston's population had risen to 12,408, although it declined somewhat thereafter. Post-war housing was built north and east of Preston Road and a number of prefabs, a temporary solution to homelessness, stood at Tenterden Close, Woodcock Hill, until the late 1960s. Proposals for an Anglican church at Preston had been published in 1936, but the war intervened and the Church of the Ascension was not consecrated until 1957. Preston was a parish from 1951. In 1947 another place of worship, a Liberal synagogue, was built on Preston Road.



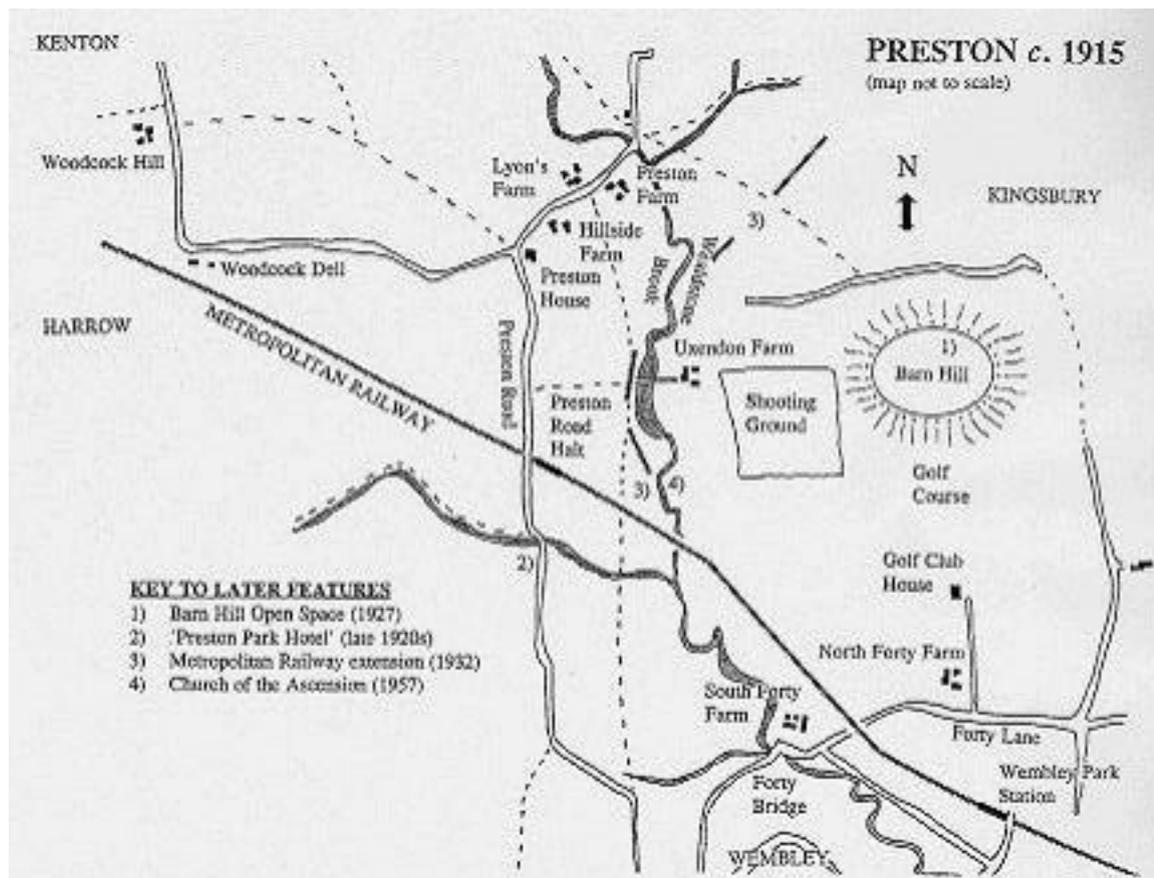
Brent North Labour Party protesting against transport cuts outside Preston Road Underground station, probably in the 1970s

By the early 1960s all of Preston's old buildings had been lost. Lyon's Farm was demolished in 1960, despite earlier plans to preserve it. A "very creditable" council estate was built on the site, but its loss is still regrettable. Hillside farmhouse went in 1961 and Preston House was demolished in 1962-3. Both of these buildings were replaced by blocks of flats. Despite these

losses Preston is a pleasant and prosperous-looking place that has retained its original atmosphere to a much greater extent than many better known suburbs, notably Neasden. Walking down Preston Road it is easy to understand why people moved out to such places between the wars.



Children playing in Barn Hill Open Space



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