



Places in Brent

Twyford and Park Royal

Grange Museum of Community History and Brent Archive

Park Royal is situated in the south of Brent, southeast of Alperton and southwest of Stonebridge and Harlesden.

Early history

Twyford is listed as 'Tveverde' in the Domesday survey of 1086. The name means '(place by a) double ford'. Sir John Elrington was "lord of the place of Twyford" in 1474. His manor house was probably Lower Place Farm beside Barrett's Green on Acton Lane.

There was a chapel at West Twyford by 1181. Initially there was not enough money to support the rector. It was called St. Mary's by 1300.

There were 10 inhabited houses by 1250, but during the later middle ages the village was heavily depopulated, enabling the lords of the manor of West Twyford to enclose all the land. Over the centuries the manor changed hands many times.

The population of Twyford was so small that in the 15th century the chapel was held by a vicar of Islington and from the 16th century by priests from Perivale. By 1593 the manor house was

the only habitation in West Twyford and the church had become a private chapel.

West Twyford manor house was partially demolished around 1715. The chapel was rebuilt around 1712, becoming "a rather basic Georgian preaching box." Fragments of a medieval stone window found in the west wall suggest that the medieval church may have been larger than the 18th century building, which seated about 40 people. In the late 18th century there was only one service a month, though services were weekly in the early 19th century.

By the 17th century West Twyford's local affairs were administered by the parish officers of Willesden. The Poor Law, a major part of a vestry's duties, hardly mattered as there was no population. The manor only hired servants for 12 months at a time, thus ensuring that employees never had any rights. West Twyford was seen as being separate from Willesden by 1801. From the ecclesiastical point of view it was a parish.

Twyford 'Abbey'



'Gothick' details at Twyford Abbey

By 1800 there was a cottage east of Lower Place Green in East Twyford. In 1801 the construction of the Grand Junction Canal placed an artificial barrier between Lower Place and Ruckhold

farms. In that year the only buildings at West Twyford were the manor house and a few structures connected with farming. Then in 1806 the manor house was sold to Thomas Willan, a stagecoach proprietor. Willan engaged the architect William Atkinson to design an extensive 'Gothick' mansion around the original house. In order to create this medieval fantasy, Willan and Atkinson filled in the house's genuine medieval moat and altered the church. In keeping with the spirit of the age Willan gave his house a romantic pseudo-monastic association, calling it 'Twyford Abbey'. In 1816 Twyford Abbey was described as "striking and extremely fine." As there was nothing else there the name Twyford Abbey was eventually applied to the whole of West Twyford. The parish did not revert to being called West Twyford until 1913.

By 1821 a small house, Canal Cottage, had been built on the canal east of West Twyford Farm. A few more houses appeared later. In 1801 the population of West Twyford parish had been eight people. This rose to 43 in 1831, but then fell back to 18 in 1861. Despite its falling population, West Twyford became a civil parish in 1857.

The railways and the growth of Twyford

In 1837 the London & Birmingham Railway was built through East Twyford, destroying some cottages. A former beerhouse where Acton Lane crossed the canal became the 'Grand Junction and Railway Inn' (today the 'Grand Junction Arms') in 1861. Thereafter Twyford began to grow, mainly because of the influence of nearby Willesden Junction station, opened in 1866.

By 1881 West Twyford's population had risen to 75. In 1879 the United Land Company bought land by the canal in East Twyford and built a little triangular complex of terraces (Disraeli and Steele roads). The Good Shepherd Mission Church opened in Disraeli Road in 1890. Lower Place School followed in 1915 and shortly afterwards a children's home was built near Steele Road. Lower Place was a poor area. In 1908 it was described as having many families in "need and distress."

In 1894 Willesden (including East Twyford) became an Urban District. At the same time the civil parish of West Twyford became a detached part of Greenford Urban District.

By the end of the 19th century a farm in Acton had become known as Lower Place Farm and the original Lower Place Farm had changed its name to Grange Farm. A large house, called the 'Grange', was built nearby. In 1897 Willesden Urban District built a workhouse and infirmary in the locality.

The Royal Agricultural Show and the creation of Park Royal

By 1901 Waxlow Road had been built west of Acton Lane, between the canal and the railway. A power station built here started operating in 1903. Meanwhile the Royal Agricultural Society had bought land from the Twyford Abbey estate. The Society planned to make Twyford the show's permanent home and Coronation Road was built to provide access to the show ground. A Great Western Railway (GWR) station called Park Royal, and a London & North Western Railway station called Royal Show Ground, both opened to serve the site in time for the first permanent show, which was held in 1903. In the same year the Metropolitan District Railway opened a line (now the Piccadilly Line) to South Harrow. A station, Park Royal and Twyford Abbey, was built on Twyford Abbey Road to the west of the show ground. The GWR line was extended to Greenford in 1904. In the same year a halt (an unmanned station) was opened at North Acton.

The 1903 Royal Agricultural Show was opened by the Prince of Wales. The site was called Park Royal in his honour. The 'Plumes' tavern, sited by the east gate, was opened in August 1904. The Society had spent at least £70,000 on the site and its development. To recoup some of this money they sub-let part of the show ground. One of their principal tenants was Queen's Park Rangers (QPR) football club.

Basing the Royal Agricultural Show near London was a failure. The show went back to travelling around the country. This forced

QPR to move to the brand-new Park Royal Stadium, built by the GWR and conveniently situated next to Park Royal station. They played there from 1907-08 until 1915, when the ground was commandeered by the Army.



The gateway to the Royal Agricultural Show grounds, built in 1903

The Alexian Brothers at Twyford Abbey

In 1902 the Roman Catholic Alexian Brothers bought Twyford Abbey and turned it into a nursing home. St. Mary's was disused at this time, but re-opened for weekly services in 1907. The Alexian Brothers enlarged and changed the house several times. The nursing home closed in 1988 and as a result the Abbey now appears neglected.

Industry before and during the First World War

In the late 19th century a few factories had been set up in northern Acton near the canal and Willesden Junction. Aircraft were being built here even before the First World War and there was an aerodrome east of Masons Green Lane. In East Twyford some industry appeared on Waxlow Road in the early 20th century. This included the McVitie & Price biscuit factory, which was founded in 1902. Although West Twyford remained largely undeveloped the GWR sidings designed to serve the Royal Agricultural Show did

attract some firms to the area. There was also a GWR generating station next to Park Royal station.

Agricultural patterns changed, with the district becoming a centre for mushroom farming by 1907. Mushrooms played a part in the local economy until the late 1920s, with new farms appearing after the First World War. In 1902 West Twyford's population was about 80. It had risen to 126 by 1911 and 130 in 1923.

During the First World War part of Park Royal became a large horse compound for the Royal Army Service Corps. Some prisoners-of-war were also held there. Munitions factories appeared on the site, and on Park Royal Road and Victoria Road in Acton. One munitions factory at Park Royal employed 7,000 workers, mainly women. The district was bombed in 1917.

Industry after the First World War

When the war ended much of the Park Royal site became derelict. Some of the wartime industry was however adapted for civilian use. Cumberland Avenue had not existed before the war. By 1919 several large engineering factories were located here. There were 40 businesses on the Park Royal estate in 1920. More industry came to Waxlow Road in the decades that followed, including the Heinz factory in 1925.

Nearby railways, the opening of Western Avenue and the building of the North Circular Road along Twyford's northern border (1934-5) made the area highly suitable for the import of raw materials and the export of goods, while good public transport links with urbanised Willesden provided the workforce. By 1932 there were 73 factories, employing 13,400 and manufacturing foodstuffs, electrical equipment, paper and machinery. By this date the factories at North Acton had connected with those at Park Royal. The estate was becoming the largest industrial zone in southern England.

Most local farms sold off their land for development in the 1930s. Grange Farm, for example, became a sports ground in 1935.

Apart from West Twyford Farm (owned by the Alexian Brothers), the district's only connection with country matters was the Farm Ice Creamery Company, which produced 150,000 packets of ice cream a day in summer 1937.



A tanker lorry outside the Guinness brewery in the 1950s

Other isolated buildings, such as a small Baptist mission hall south of the canal, also succumbed to the growth of industry. There were however a number of green spaces in Park Royal, giving the impression of a 'garden factory'. By 1939, despite the Depression, there were at least 256 firms in Park Royal alone, some making consumer goods like fountain pens and radio sets, others making capital goods like lorries or electric motors. The largest and most impressive factory constructed in this period was the Guinness Brewery. It was built between 1933 and 1936 to designs by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who also designed Bankside power station, now Tate Modern.

The North Circular stimulated housing as well as industry and significant parts of West Twyford became residential. Guinness, which also offered excellent social and sports facilities to its employees, built houses for brewery workers.

The population of West Twyford grew from 130 in 1923 to 311 in 1931 and 2,995 in 1951. Public transport improved, with Park Royal station moving to Western Avenue in 1931. Meanwhile Park Royal Hospital (the old Willesden Infirmary) became the Central Middlesex Hospital in 1931.



Willesden Infirmary, now the Central Middlesex Hospital

Local government evolved to take into account the changing nature of the area. Ealing had been a borough since 1901. In 1926 it absorbed Greenford, including West Twyford. In 1934 West Twyford was transferred to the new Borough of Willesden, but popular protests forced most of it to be returned to Ealing in 1935.

During the Second World War the factories again shifted to war production and suffered frequent air raids. After the war the Central Line was extended from North Acton to West Ruislip. Brentham Halt station was replaced by Hanger Lane, at the junction of Hanger Lane and Western Avenue.

Industrial decline

The 1950s and 1960s initially saw further prosperity. At its peak, in the 1960s, Park Royal was employing 45,430 people. In 1958 a new church was built at West Twyford, incorporating the original one as a Lady Chapel. In the 1960s Willesden replaced

"obsolete" housing at Lower Place with industry from Stonebridge, which was being redeveloped as a wholly residential area.

Unfortunately the British economy had been in decline for some time. Now the effects began to be felt in northwest London, and Park Royal was particularly vulnerable. The comparatively narrow roads were unsuitable for large lorries, there were few car parks despite growing car ownership and the estate had no shops, few pubs and minimal social facilities, encouraging skilled workers to find work elsewhere.

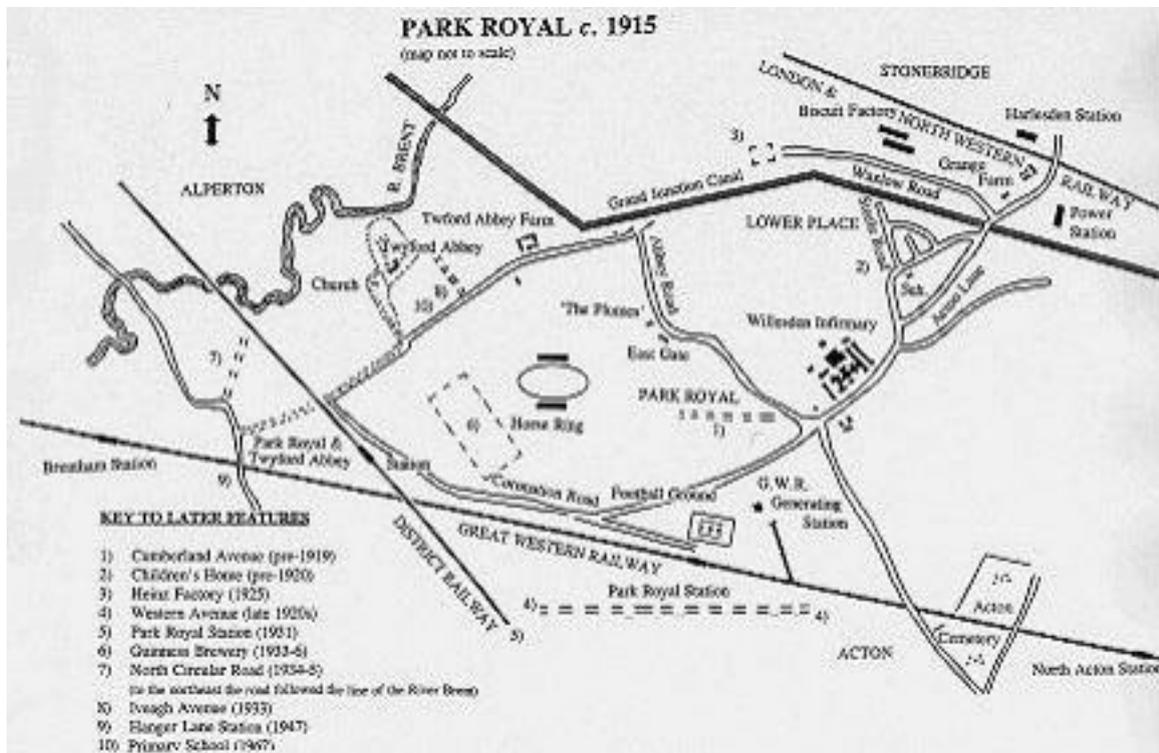
Thousands of jobs were lost between 1977 and 1983 as firms went bust, moved away or 'downsized'. The Wall's factory on Atlas Road closed. Park Royal Vehicles, which had been at Park Royal since 1919 and was famous for making London bus bodies, shifted production to Cumbria in 1980. In 1984, following an industrial dispute, the 'Radio Times' stopped being printed at Park Royal. The Heinz factory survived, but at a cost. In 1964 it employed 3,500 people. Thirty years later it employed only 500. By 1987 Park Royal was described as "depressed."

Various attempts to reverse the decline were made by Central Government, the Greater London Council and the boroughs of Brent and Ealing. Some new firms set up in the area, but others continued to cut jobs.

Hope for the future

Things may however be getting better, partly thanks to the efforts of the Park Royal Partnership Ltd, a group of public and private organisations charged by the Government with the regeneration of the Business Park. The Partnership defines Park Royal in its broadest sense, including Alperton, North Acton, Old Oak Common, Stonebridge, West Acton and Willesden Junction, and obtained a Single Regeneration Budget to be spent from 1995 until 2002 on "projects that improve the Business Park to the benefit of those who live and work there."

New social facilities in the area include an Asda superstore and an entertainment complex containing a multiplex cinema. Local unemployment however remains high.



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