

## Dairy farms in Sudbury – some brief histories.



When we buy milk today, we are most likely to get it from a supermarket, in a plastic bottle. But how much do we know about where our milk comes from, and the stories behind the dairy farming business, especially when this was an activity carried out by people in our local area?

People have kept cows (and other animals) to provide milk for thousands of years, but it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that some farms began to specialise in milk production. This article looks at the history of three such farms in the Sudbury district of Brent, and at some of the changes in delivering milk from the farms so that we can enjoy it as a drink, or on our breakfast cereal, in our homes.

### One Hundred Elms Farm

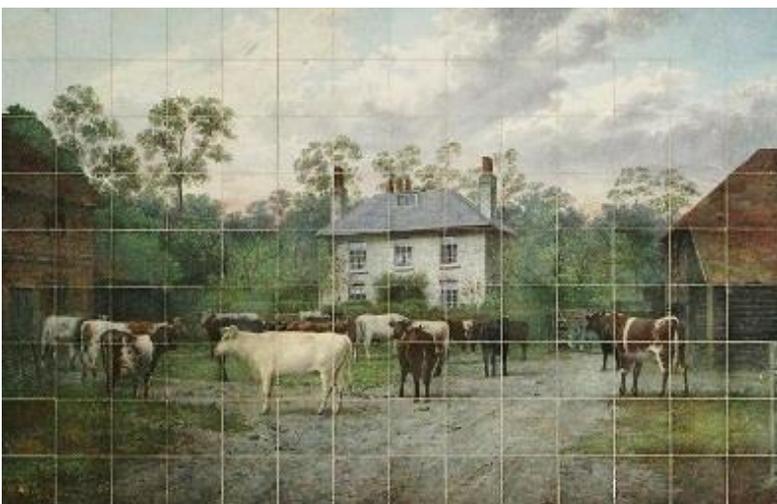
There was a farm on this site, on the northern edge of Sudbury Common, since at least the time of Queen Elizabeth I in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was probably named after the avenue of elm trees which used to line the sides of Elms Lane from the Harrow Road up to the farm. You can see Sudbury as it was 270 years ago, centred near Sudbury Court Farm (on the road now named after it), on this map.



**An extract from John Rocque's 1746 map of London and environs, showing Hundred Elms Farm and the avenue of elm trees.**

The Greenhill family were tenants of the farm from 1817 until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the 1881 census shows Charles Greenhill, a farmer of 147½ acres, living at "100 Elms Farm". His father, William Greenhill, had made it a dairy farm (keeping cows to produce milk) by the 1860's. This type of farming needed more workers, so cottages were built for them to live in, including Keppel Cottages (now 920-930 Harrow Road) which can still be seen at the corner of Elms Lane.

By the 1890's the farm was selling its milk, cream and butter through a dairy shop in Harrow. Adverts for the shop invited customers to visit the farm at any time to see how its milk was produced.



Cleanliness at the shop was ensured by its spotless tiled surfaces, and a specially painted tile mural adorned one of its walls.

**A view of the farm, painted by J.E. Dean, from an 1899 ceramic mural, made by the Minton factory on 6 inch square tiles, which used to decorate the wall of the farm's dairy shop in Harrow, and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. [Copyright: Victoria and Albert Museum]**

In 1918, Hundred Elms Farm and its shop were bought by United Dairies, a company run by Arthur Barham (the younger son of George Barham of Sudbury Park). By the mid-1920's its fields had been sold off for housing development. Although cows could no longer be kept here, the farmyard was retained as a dairy depot by the company, which later became known as Unigate.

**A postcard of  
One Hundred Elms Farm,  
c.1920.**

[Source: Brent Archives]



Eventually, the former farmyard was no longer suitable

for a dairy business, and it too was sold for housing development. In the 1990's, the Metropolitan Housing Trust built Dyson Court, at the corner of Elms Lane and Perrin Road, on the site, but if you go through these modern buildings you can still see two preserved old farm



buildings from the days of Hundred Elms Farm. A 16<sup>th</sup> century brick building has been converted to flats, while the 1840's farm house is now known as Franklyn Lodge, a residential care home for up to six adults who have learning disabilities.

**Dyson Court, on the site of  
Hundred Elms Farm, 2015.**

[Photo by Philip Grant, September 2015]

## Vale Farm

Vale Farm existed, on the north-east edge of Sudbury Common, by at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was owned by the Lake family, and later by Richard Page of Wembley Park. It was probably a mixed farm, growing crops and raising livestock for meat, run by a succession of tenant farmers.

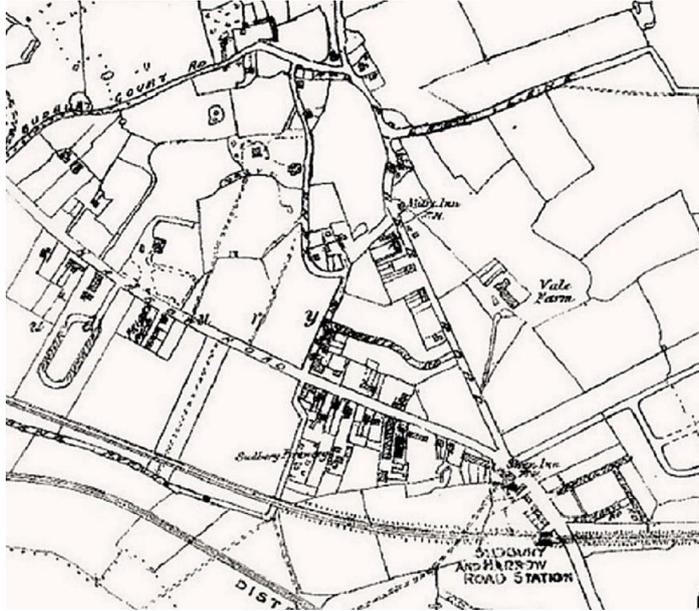
By 1875, the farm was owned by the biscuit magnate, Samuel Palmer, and before he died in 1898 it had changed to a dairy farm, with a herd of cows grazing its pastured fields to produce milk. The buildings put up at the time of this change included a new farmhouse.

**The farmhouse at Vale Farm,  
around 1900.**

[Photograph courtesy of Janet Prout]



By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of Sudbury was still farm land, but the area was starting to be developed for housing, particularly after new railway lines opened (at Sudbury Town in 1903,



and to Sudbury and Harrow Road station in 1906). A map given by Wembley's first estate agent, George H. Ward, 'for information of intending purchasers' at this time, shows Vale Farm and some of the new roads for housing nearby.

**An extract from George H. Ward's "Plan of Wembley", around 1908.**

[Source: Brent Archives]

In the early 1900's, the tenants of Vale Farm were the Panes family. A few months ago, their great-granddaughter kindly let

Wembley History Society have copies of several old family photos, including a group picture at the farmhouse from the wedding of Mabel Panes to Charles Caple. It shows what local people, in their "Sunday best" clothes, looked like in late-Victorian and Edwardian times.



**The wedding photograph at Vale Farm, early 1900's.**

[Photograph courtesy of Janet Prout]



By 1910, the Vale Farm Dairy business had a shop on Wembley High Road (near what is now Wembley Central Station) and was making milk deliveries to local homes. The milkman pushed a hand-cart, and would ladle milk out of a large churn into metal cans, depending on how much milk each customer wanted to buy.

**A Vale Farm Dairy milkman, around 1910.**

[From the Wembley History Society Collection at Brent Archives]

Housing development in Sudbury finally caught up with the farm in the 1920's. Wembley Urban District Council saw the need for public recreation, as well as homes, and bought 33 acres of Vale Farm land in 1928, for use as a Sports Ground. It built a large open-air swimming pool there, which opened in 1932, and the former farmhouse was used as the home for the Sports Ground's superintendent. The farmhouse is no longer there, and may have been demolished as part of the redevelopment of the Vale Farm Sports Centre in the late-1970's, when the present indoor swimming pools were built, so that only the farm's name now survives.

## Sudbury Park Farm

Sudbury Park Farm was opened by the Barham family in 1897, although its fields had been part of another farm, known as North Farm, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. George Barham had founded the Express Dairy Company in the 1860's, to bring fresh milk to London from the country by train. Around 1880, the family moved into Crabs House (now part of the Barham Park buildings) on the Harrow Road, and bought the mansion in whose grounds it stood in 1895, renaming it Sudbury Park.

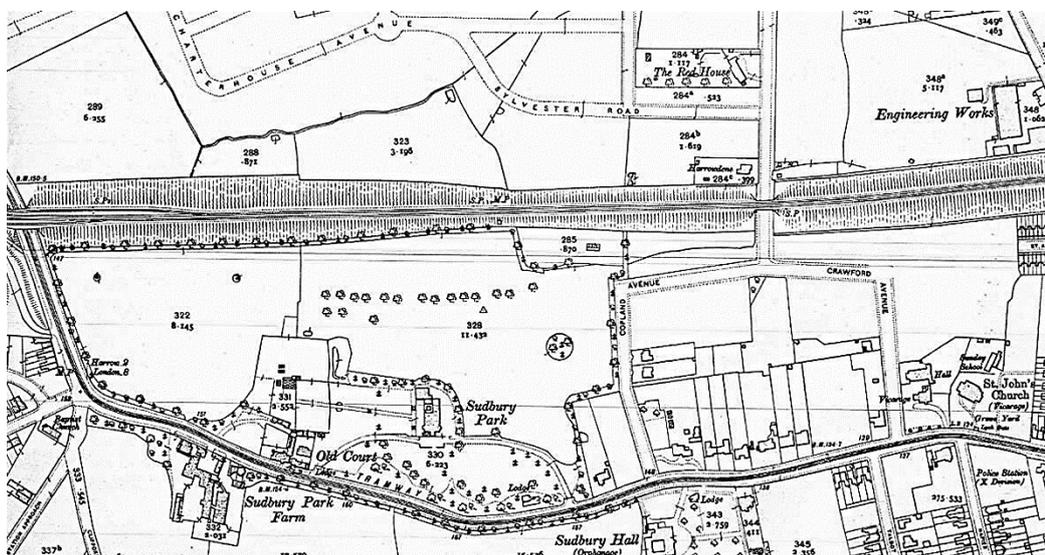
**A postcard of Harrow Road, c.1910, showing Crabs House on the right and Sudbury Park Farm on the left.**

[Source: Brent Archives]



The Express Dairy was already supplying milk to Queen Victoria, but their new “model dairy farm”, across the road from Crabs House, with its pedigree

herd of Jersey cattle, allowed George Barham, and his son Titus, to demonstrate the latest methods of dairy farming to other milk producers from around Britain and the world. Milk from the farm was very popular, and some of it was supplied to trans-Atlantic liners. When, the by then, Sir George Barham died in 1913, Titus Barham inherited the Express Dairy retail business and the farm, while his brother, Arthur, took over the Dairy Supply Company wholesale business (later United Dairies – see One Hundred Elms Farm).



**An extract from the 1914 Ordnance Survey map, showing the location of the farm.**

Titus Barham lived at the Sudbury Park mansion until his death in 1937, and was very fond of his cattle (he used to act as a judge at agricultural shows). The dairy farm supplied milk and butter to local Express Dairy shops, and for delivery to local homes, especially after the company pioneered the use of glass milk bottles by the 1920's.



**A local Express Dairy advert, from around 1930.**

[Source: Wembley History Society Collection]



As well as running his dairy company, Titus Barham did much for local charities. When plans were proposed for a new public hospital in Wembley, he donated some of the Sudbury Park Farm land in Chaplin Road as a site for it. By 1930, he also had to sell some of the land to Wembley Council, for a new junior school, which was named after him.

The Express Dairy Co. sold off the remaining fields of Sudbury Park Farm for housing development by the late-1930's, although Wembley's plans for an estate of Council homes on part of the land had to wait until after the Second World War. Its main road is called Farm Avenue.

Although it no longer had Sudbury Park Farm, the Express Dairy business continued to deliver milk to local homes for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Left: A horse-drawn milk cart in Kenton, 1954.** [Photograph courtesy of Angela Rumsey]

**Right: An electric milk float at Preston Road in the 1960's.** [Source: Brent Archives]

**Philip Grant, Wembley History Society, February / March 2016.**

This material on Sudbury's dairy farms was prepared for a local history display by Wembley History Society, at the March 2016 "Sudbury Fest" event organised by Sudbury Town Residents' Association and Sudbury Neighbourhood Centre.