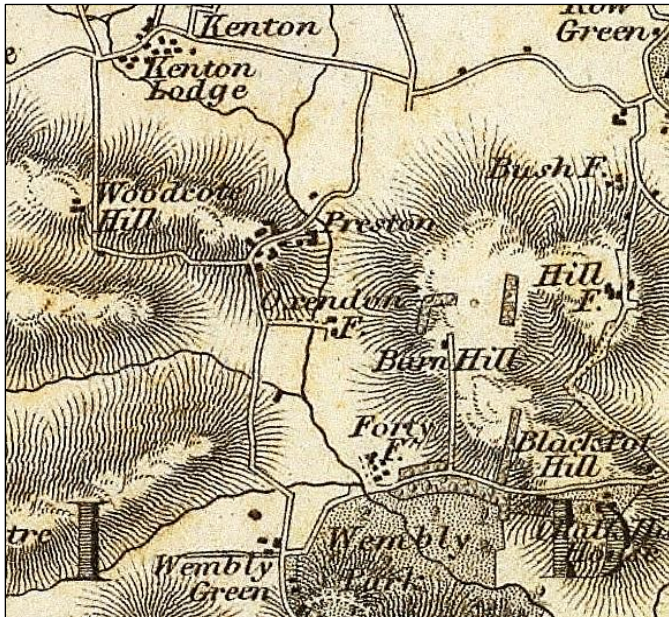


The Preston Story - Part 2

We left the end of [Part 1](#) of the Preston Story in the 18th century, with the landscape scarcely changing over the previous 500 years. In the early 19th century, the population grew slowly – in Preston and Uxendon together there were 64 people in 1831 and 105 in 1841. Preston was still very much a rural area, but not a contented one.



Preston and its surrounding area, 1832. (Extract from the Environs of London Map, 1832)

The agricultural depression after the Napoleonic Wars caused problems for both farmers and their labourers. Following the Enclosure Acts 1803 and 1823, the continuing fencing off of common land by large landowners caused problems for tenant farmers. An 'Anti-Inclosures Association' distributed manifestos throughout Harrow Parish and there was a petition to Parliament in 1802 and fence breaking incidents locally in 1810. In 1828, when there was a further outbreak of violence in the area, Harrow's only fire engine and six crew were called into action at Uxendon as desperate workers burnt haystacks and threatened local landowners.

Unrest continued and in 1830 local workers were active in the **Swing Riots**, a widespread protest across South East England, which used arson and machine breaking against the increasing use of agricultural machinery and the subsequent unemployment and lower wages. The Uxbridge yeomanry cavalry and the militia were mobilized to shield London when rioting spread to the Harrow area at the end of November 1830.



Swing rioters (in Kent), 1830. (Image from the internet)

Tenant farmers called for a reduction in rents. Lord Northwick, who held the manor of Harrow with land bordering Preston, accused local farmer Thomas Trollope, the novelist's father, of conspiracy and had his crops seized. Anthony Trollope described Lord Northwick as 'a cormorant who was eating us up'. Northwick received a threatening 'Swing Letter' demanding a reduction of rent and warning that "our emisaris shall and will do their work - you have ground the labouring man too long". The 1834 Report of the Poor Law Commissioners showed wages of agricultural labourers in Harrow district to be around 10/- per week or £26 per annum "supposing work is available all year round - which for most it is not".

Despite poor wages, the area continued to attract migrant labour. In 1841, there were 415 migrant haymakers, mainly from Ireland, living in barns and sheds in Harrow. The 1851 census clerk for Preston and Uxendon notes these conditions for in-house migrant workers: "All persons entered as lodgers are those only who occupy generally part of a bed, at the usual charge of 1/6 per week, including washing and attendance, with a seat by the evening fire". Some seasonal workers settled down in Preston. In 1851, the Irish family occupying Forty Farm cottage had a child born there, and there are Irish and West Country domestic servants elsewhere.



Preston House and tea rooms, 1912. (Brent Archives online image 331)

Early in the century, Preston House was built on Preston Hill near four cottages recorded there in 1817. The census shows Preston House was initially a 'country residence' leased to various professional men, including a corn merchant, a surgeon, a cigar importer and a solicitor. Around 1880, Preston House was acquired by George Timms (d. 1899), who turned the grounds into the Preston Tea Gardens.



An advertising card for the Preston Tea Gardens, c.1910. (Brent Archives online image 6864)

The Tea Gardens flourished well into the next century and the building survived until the 1960s when it was demolished for flats. By 1864, the four cottages were replaced by a pair of Victorian villas, now 356-358 Preston Road – the oldest surviving houses in Preston. They must have had a fantastic view over the surrounding countryside, to Harrow-on-the-Hill.



356 and 358 Preston Road. (Image from Google Streetview)

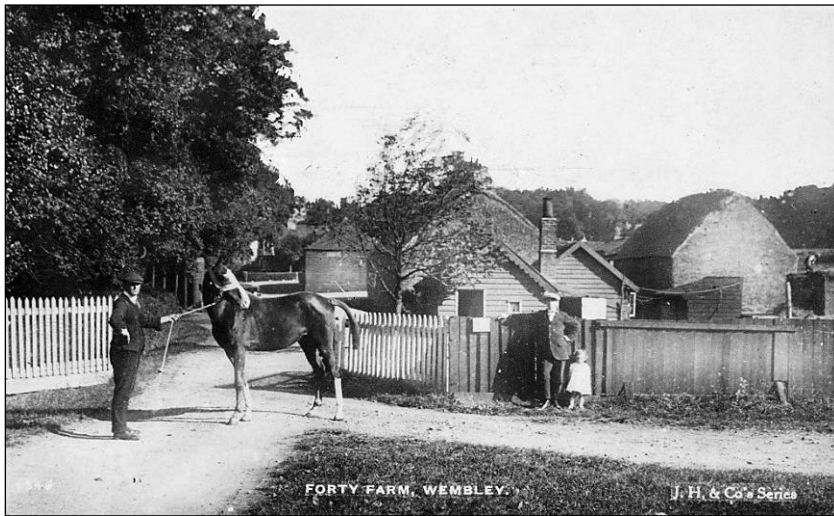
Further down Preston Hill, Hillside Farm was also hosting the 'Rose & Crown' beershop in 1851, run by the farmer's wife, Sarah Walker, and her daughter. Hillside Farmhouse was also demolished in the 1960s, but Hillside Gardens recalls its location. Lyon Farm remained in the hands of tenant farmers with its profits going to the Harrow School that John Lyon founded [see Part 1]. The Uxendon Manor Estate had sold Preston Farm to the Bocket family some time before 1799 and it was held by various people until last farmed by the Kinch Family, after whom Kinch Grove is named, in the 20th century. By 1820, the Wealdstone Brook at the bottom of the Hill had a ford and a footbridge, making the route to Kingsbury more accessible.



Farms at Preston in the 1890s. (Extract from a large-scale Ordnance Survey map)

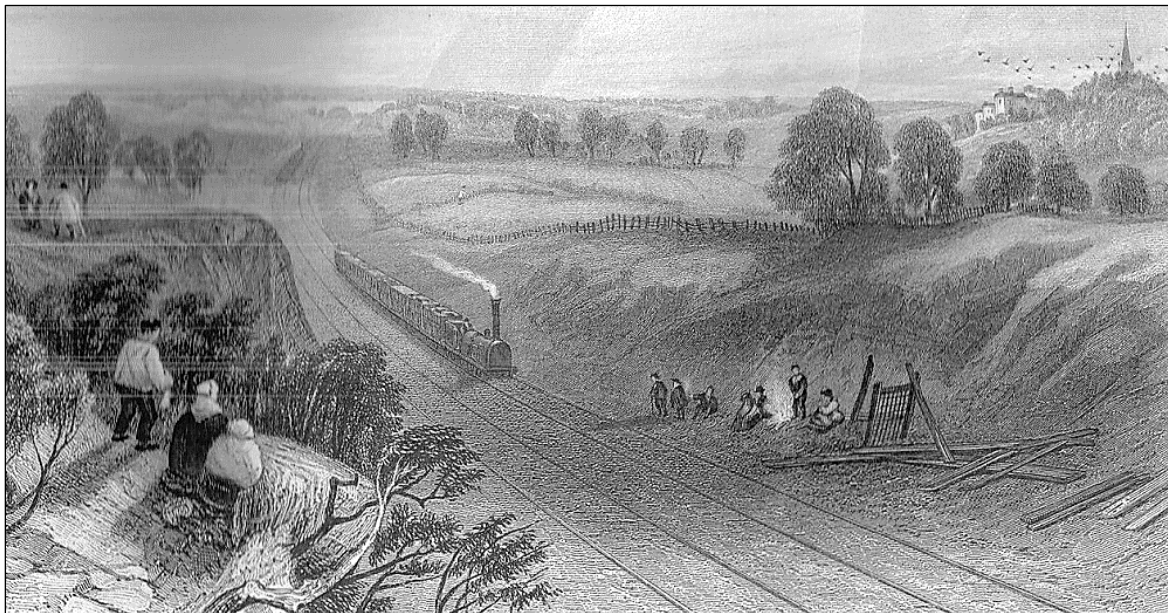
At Uxendon Manor, life had settled down after the tumultuous events of the 16th and 17th centuries, with the Page family still owning the farm until 1829 when the land passed to Henry Young (d. 1869), the junior partner of the Page's solicitor - with some suspicion that he [had obtained the lands fraudulently!](#) The original Manor House was demolished and a new farmhouse built just a little

further north [now 18-20 Uxendon Hill]. The farm drive led west to a gated entrance lodge. In the 19th century, this was the only building on Preston Road between Preston House at the top of the hill and Wembley Farm [built around 1805] at the junction with East Lane.



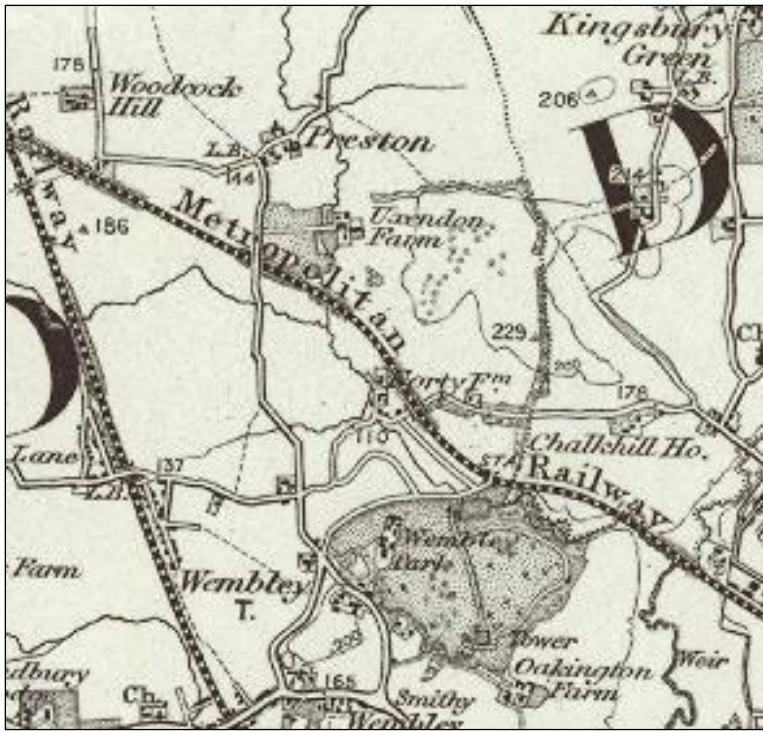
Forty Farm, with the farmer showing off one of his horses, c.1910. (Brent Archives online image 1205)

In 1850, the tenant farmer John Elmore made Uxendon a venue for steeplechases and was well known for its "sensational water jump", while Forty Farm was famous for horses. By the 1880s, Forty Farm was also known as South Forty Farm because a new farm, North Forty Farm, had been built [now Newland Court on Forty Avenue]. Part of the fields on the southern slopes of the hill behind the farm became Wembley Golf Club in the 1890s – the course stretching up over Barn Hill pond. I wonder how many golf balls were lost in there!



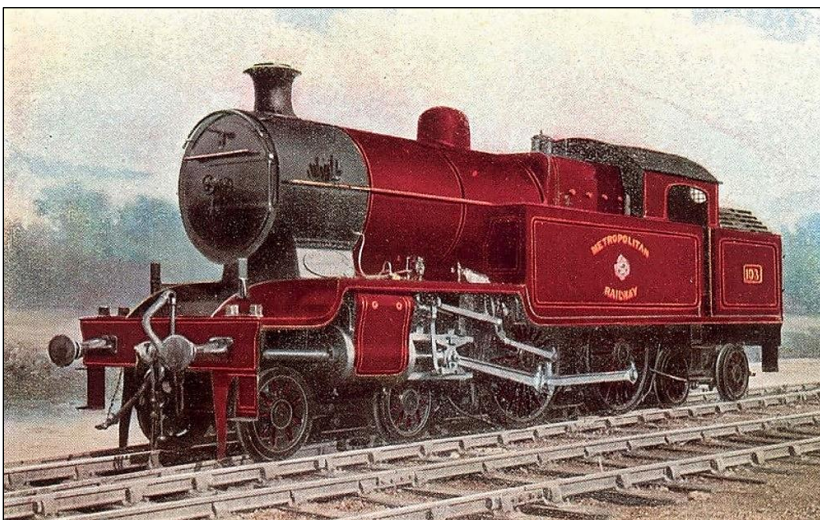
The Harrow-on-the-Hill cutting, London & Birmingham Railway, 1838. (Image from the internet)

It was the arrival of the railways which started the slow change of the area from countryside to suburbia. The world's first main line - the London to Birmingham Railway, built by Robert Stephenson and opened 1837, carved its way through Harrow Parish and soon a network of railway lines crossed the district. Horse drawn buses ferried passengers from villages like Preston to Wembley station, known from 1882 as Wembley and Sudbury. The 1881 Census shows several railway workers - railway plate layers, clerks and train drivers – living in cottages along East Lane to what is now North Wembley Station. Some settled, but others moved on as the network grew.



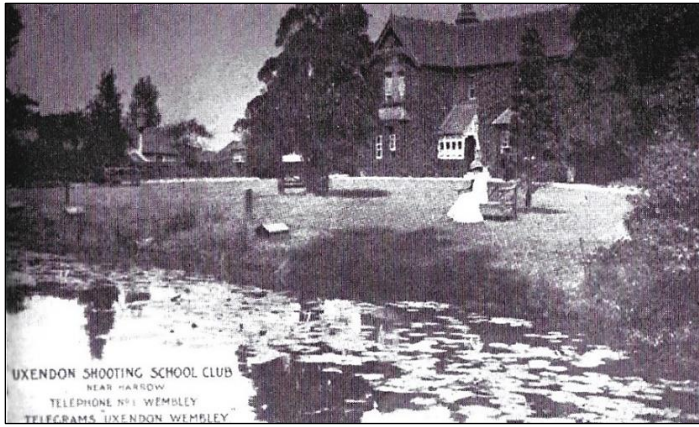
An 1890s map showing how railways were shaping the Preston of today. (Extract from an O.S. map, c.1895)

In 1863, the first Underground railway opened. By the 1870s, it was expanding north-west from Baker Street via Willesden Green to reach Harrow-on-the-Hill in 1880. The construction of the Metropolitan Railway effectively destroyed Forty Green, although South Forty Farm continued into the 20th century. Further changes were underway – following the 1894 Local Government Act, Preston broke its historical connection with Harrow and became part of the newly formed Wembley Urban District. No longer ‘rural’ – at least officially.



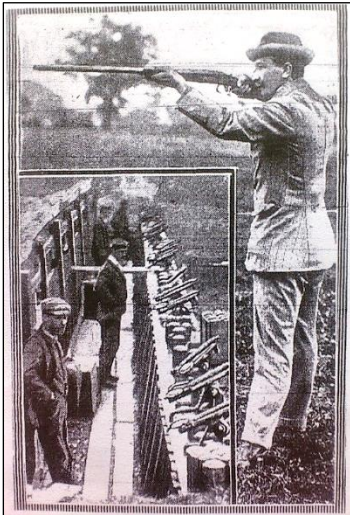
A Metropolitan Railway steam locomotive, early 1900s. (Image from the Wembley History Society Collection)

Towards the end of the century, and especially after the development of the Wembley Park pleasure grounds in the 1890s, the Preston area began to be seen as a pleasant location for other leisure activities. Uxendon became popular with shooting enthusiasts. By 1900, the Lancaster Shooting Club was established there and the celebrated Bond Street gunsmiths Holland & Holland had a shooting ground nearby. An Uxendon Shooting School was set up behind the rebuilt farmhouse, roughly where Alverstone Road is now, and had a 120 ft high tower for hurling targets. It survived until 1932 when the Metropolitan Line extension from [Wembley Park to Stanmore](#) cut across the land and housing development started on the site.



Uxendon Shooting Club, c.1910, showing the rebuilt farmhouse. (From the collection of the late Geoffrey Hewlett)

When the Olympic Games were held in London in July 1908, the ground was sufficiently important to be used for [Olympic clay pigeon shooting competition](#). The shooting club, which was a two-mile walk from the nearest station, joined local residents in petitioning the Metropolitan Railway Company to open Preston Road Halt on the opposite side of Preston Road to the current station in May 1908. [A proposal for a station in 1896 was rejected because there were not enough residents].



Clay bird shooting competition at Uxendon, 1908 Olympic Games. (From the "Daily Mirror", 7 July 1908)

The station's status as a halt meant it was a request stop and initially many trains failed to slow down enough to enable the driver to notice passengers waiting on the platform. Eventually, the booking office clerk was instructed to wave a red flag from the platform when passengers turned up.



Houses on Preston Road, c.1920 [note the unmade road and gas street lamp!]. (Brent Archives online image 329)

Preston Road Halt triggered the first commuter development in the district. Several large Edwardian-style houses [a few of which survive] were built along Preston Road opposite the Avenue from 1910 to 1912, and the Harrow Golf Club opened just south of the station in 1912. The photograph below shows a view across what would become the Preston Park estate. The Clubhouse was demolished during the development of Grasmere Avenue in the 1930s.



Harrow Golf Club, Preston Road, early 1920s. (Brent Archives online image 8947)

The absence of a full-time station and the purchase of unused fields for staff sports clubs by companies like Debenhams and Selfridges, kept Preston as a rural area into the early 20th century. Preston Road was still a twisting country lane and the Wealdstone Brook could be described as 'one of the most perfect little streams anywhere, abounding in dace and roach'.



"Pretty Preston Road" - postcard of a rural scene from the early 1900s. (Brent Archives online image 328)

However, in 1915, an employee at the Metropolitan Railway Company coined the name "Metroland" – and things started to change – which we will look at in Part 3, next weekend.

**Chris Coates,
Preston Community Library / Wembley History Society, August 2020.**

This article was written for, and first published on, the "Wembley Matters" blog website, but anyone is free to share it on a "not for profit" basis.