

The Fryent Country Park Story – Part 4

Welcome back, to our wander through the history of one of Brent's best open spaces. If you missed the previous instalment, please "click" on [Part 3](#) (which has "links" to Parts 1 and 2).



1. A view across the fields at haymaking time, with Kingsbury and Stanmore Common beyond.

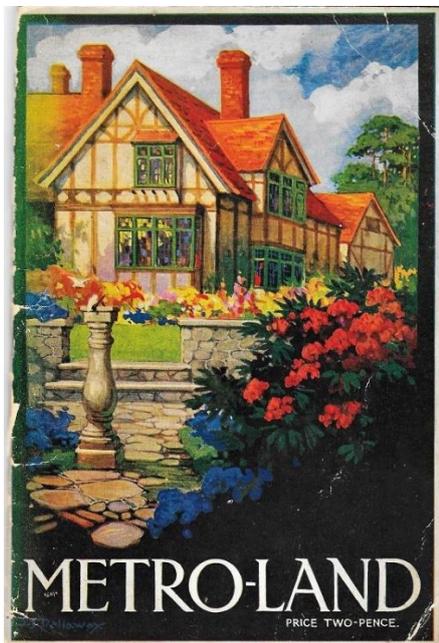
The story so far has brought us up to the early 20th century. The hay trade, which had been the main source of income for Kingsbury's farmers, was declining by this time. In part, this was due to the import of cheaper foreign hay, but the introduction of motor vehicles was also having an increasing impact. New uses had to be found for many of the local pastures. Some, like Fryent Farm, had switched to keeping dairy cattle.

George Withers, at Little Bush Farm, had become a breeder of, and dealer in, polo ponies. You might not imagine our area as a centre for playing polo, but in the early 1900s there were at least two local polo grounds. The Kingsbury Polo Club occupied land that is now the site of Roe Green Village, and part of Roe Green Park. There was also a polo ground, with stables and fields for the ponies, centred where Greenhill Way now stands (which is why the road across this hill is called The Paddocks!). The First World War put an end to the polo clubs, after their ponies were requisitioned by the army in 1915.



2. Little Bush Farm, in a postcard from c.1920. (Courtesy of the late Geoffrey Hewlett)

After the war, the spread of suburban housing would bring about greater changes. When Wembley Park was chosen, in 1921, as the site for the British Empire Exhibition, Blackbird Hill, Church Lane and Forty Lane were all converted from narrow country byways to wide modern roads, to make the exhibition easier to reach. This better access to the area also attracted property developers. In 1923, Wembley Golf Course was purchased by Haymills Ltd, who were soon building streets of detached homes on the southern slopes of Barn Hill.



3. The cover of the 1922 "Metro-Land" booklet. (Wembley History Society Collection at Brent Archives)

Around 27 million visitors came to the [British Empire Exhibition](#) in 1924/25. Many were attracted by the pleasant countryside, close to London. The Metropolitan Railway was already promoting the districts along its line as "Metro-Land", a healthy place to live, from which the man of the house could commute "to town". Wembley Council could see the danger of overdevelopment, and in 1927 purchased 50 acres at the top of the hill from Haymills, to be Barn Hill Open Space.

In 1929, the Metropolitan Railway announced that it would build a branch line from Wembley Park. Construction began on this [Stanmore Line](#) in January 1931 ["click" on the link for full details]. The route curved around Barn Hill and through Uxendon Farm, which had already been demolished to make way for it, on its way to Kingsbury.



4. Uxendon Farm, about to be demolished in 1929. (Brent Archives online image 0498)

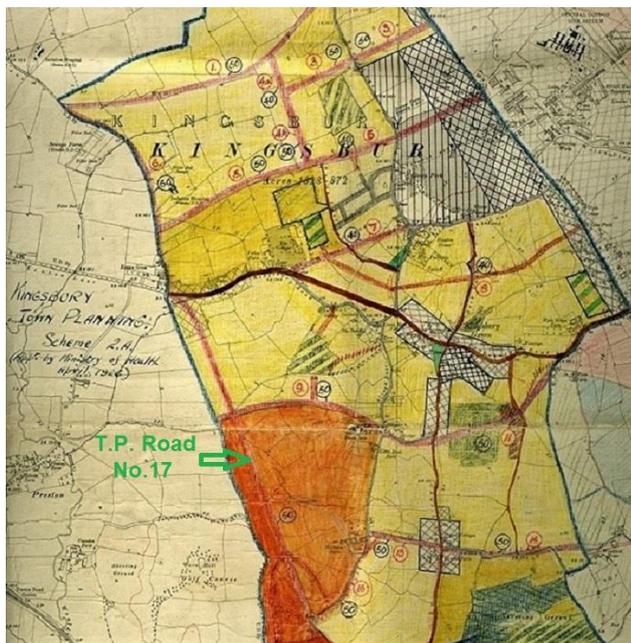
Haymills had already purchased more land, to the north of the hill, from Preston Farm. These were the fields known as Upper and Lower Hydes, and Bugbeards – the latter may seem an odd title, but this field name was first recorded in the 15th century, and a document from 1642 lists five men in Harrow Parish with the surname Bugbeard! In 1934, Haymills stopped building in the area, and sold their undeveloped land to George Wimpey & Co.

On the Kingsbury side of our future country park, Masons Field in Old Kenton Lane had been sold to the London General Omnibus Company in 1928, for a sports ground. Just along the lane, another field beside the Junior Mixed and Infants' School (now Kingsbury Green) was acquired by Kingsbury Council as a recreation ground. Little Bush Farm had closed by 1930, while Hill Farm had become a horse-riding establishment, the Premier School of Equitation.



5. Hill Farm and its pond, in Salmon Street, c.1920. (Brent Archives online image 0480)

Having established the Barn Hill Open Space, Wembley's Parks Committee had to make sure it was looked after. In March 1935, a report from the Council's Surveyor referred to an annual loss of "decayed and rotting trees", and suggested a regular programme of tree planting. One of his proposed schemes for Barn Hill was to 'plant approximately 4 dozen Lombardy Poplars in the form of an avenue leading from the top of the hill to the gate on the east side adjoining Town Planning Road No.17 (Kingsbury).' Some of those poplars are still a skyline feature.



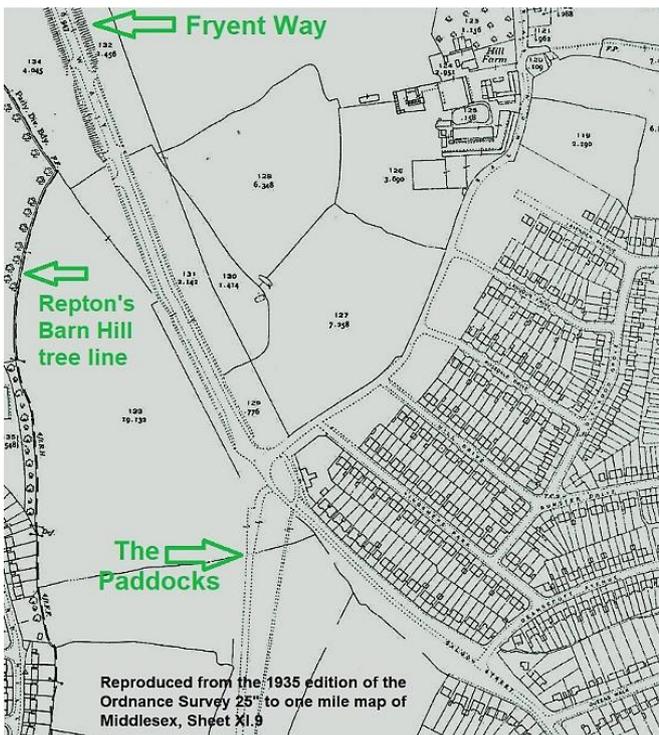
6. Part of the Kingsbury U.D.C. 1926 Town Planning Scheme map. (With thanks to Gareth Davies)

Proposed future main roads were something that local Councils had to include in the town planning schemes the government asked them to prepare in the 1920s. Kingsbury had been a separate Council area, until it became part of Wembley Urban District in 1934. Its T.P. Road No.17 was built in 1934/35, and named Fryent Way. Another of the new roads included in the 1926 scheme would have run from Slough Lane, by Bush Farm, to Fryent Way, and the kerb stones for that junction are still in place, just south of Valley Drive! All of the land between the Stanmore Line and Salmon Street was zoned for future housing development.



7. Bush Farm in a postcard from c.1930. (Brent Archives online image 0479)

By the end of 1935, Wimpeys already had a planning application approved to build two new streets, with 362 houses, between Uxendon Hill and Fryent Way. As the map extract below shows, housing development was also spreading northwards on the other side of Barn Hill. Salmon Estates Ltd had put in an outline application to build homes at 8 per acre, on all the land beyond Salmon Street zoned for housing. Then, in January 1936, they submitted detailed plans for houses on both sides of Fryent Way, north from the junction with The Paddocks.



8. Extract from the 1935 O.S. map, showing Salmon Street and the Hill Farm land due for development.

The rapid spread of suburban housing around London had given rise to the idea of a “Green Belt”. In 1934, Parliament gave Middlesex County Council powers to acquire land for this purpose, and during the following year it worked out, with local councils, how such purchases could be financed. The area which is now our country park was identified as land suitable for such a scheme.

In early 1936, the County Council put a compulsory purchase order on the Wimpey’s land north of Barn Hill. There was a court battle over how much compensation the developer should receive. When this was settled in 1938, Wembley Council contributed 25% of the cost, and the fields were added to its Barn Hill Open Space, with some used as sports grounds.

In March 1936, Wembley’s Planning Committee “disapproved” the Salmon Estates planning applications, on the grounds that the land was now reserved for open space purposes. Again, it was 1938 before the purchase of the fields in Kingsbury Parish from All Souls College was finalised, and they became Middlesex C.C.’s Fryent Way Regional Open Space. As part of the Council’s policy, the existing farm tenancies on the land were allowed to continue.

You may think that this is the end of the story, and that things have stayed the same on our open space since the late 1930s. However, there will be more to discover next weekend, if you wish to!

**Philip Grant,
Wembley History Society, April 2020.**