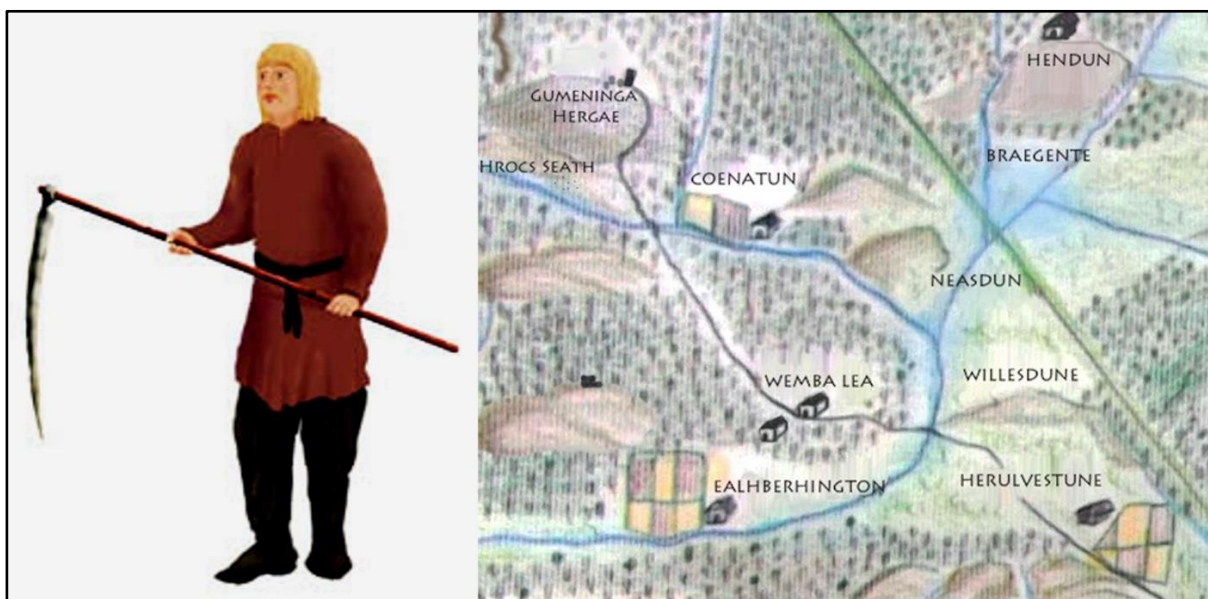


## The Wembley Park Story – Part 1

*Philip Grant, of Wembley History Society, begins a new weekly series.*

Long before Wembley Park, there was Wembley. Wemba lea (Wemba's clearing) was first recorded in a document in AD825. My fellow local historian, [Len Snow](#), enjoyed saying that football fans, with their chants when going to the Stadium, were singing its correct name.

The clearing is thought to have been just north of the Harrow Road (in the Triangle / Wembley Hill Road area). But who was Wemba? Probably one of the many immigrants, known as Saxons, who crossed the North Sea in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century. Although some were invaders, most came with their families to start a new life as farmers in southern England. Wemba's lea was in Middlesex (the land of the middle Saxons), and in 825 was part of around 12,000 acres in Harrow given by King Beornwulf of Mercia to Wulfred, Archbishop of Canterbury. This was to make up for land that had been stolen from him by the previous King!



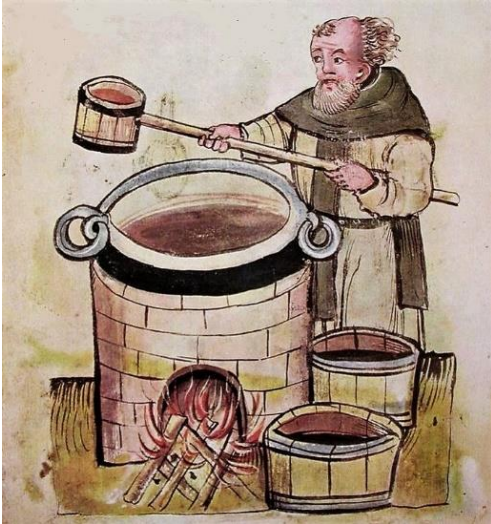
**1. A Saxon farmer, and extract from a map depicting this area in Saxon times.** (Images from the internet)

As Wembley was just a tiny settlement then, within the much larger Parish of Harrow, there is little in the way of records about it for the next few centuries. By the 1100s, there was a slightly larger number of people living nearby in Tokyngton (the farm of Tocca's sons), and it had a chapel. The parish church was at Harrow-on-the-Hill, so Wembley's farmers were saved the longer walk to Sunday services.

In 1247, the two areas were brought together as 'the manor of Wymbley'. The "Lord" of the Manor was actually a woman, the Prioress of Kilburn. Her Priory would have received rents from tenants, as well as food, from the land it held in Wembley and Tokyngton. Although it changed over time to Oakington, the original name was revived when a new Church of England parish was set up in 1925. I am indebted to its first vicar, Rev. H.W.R. Elsley, whose well-researched book, "Wembley through the Ages", provided details used in this article.

The manor system was very important in medieval times, and all tenants of land were meant to observe the laws, and make sure that their neighbours did the same. They had to attend regular Manor Courts - these are entries from its 14<sup>th</sup> century records. In 1315: 'Appointed John Godwyne taster for Wembele' (his duty was to check the strength of beer). In 1321: 'Alice Germayne, of Wembele, has blocked a watercourse, to her neighbours' damage' (she would

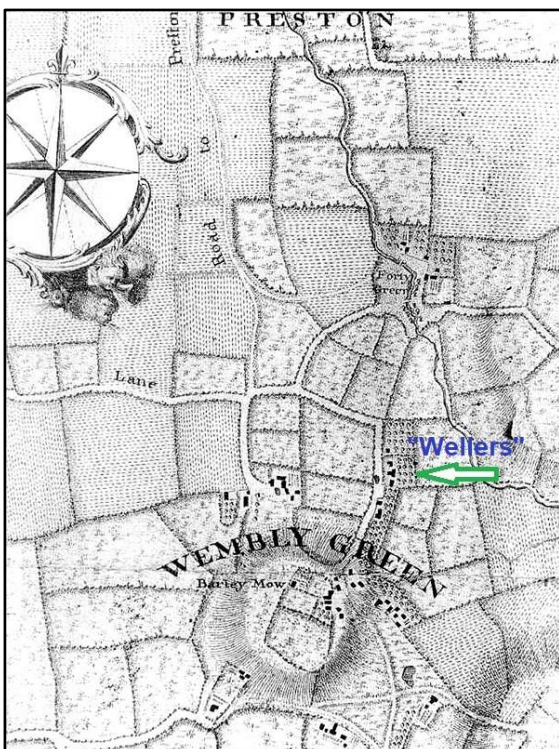
be fined if she failed to put this right). In 1337: Alice le Carpenter, Ralph de Wembely and five others 'in mercy for selling and brewing ale contrary to the assize' (the taster had been busy!).



**2. Making beer in Medieval times.** (Image from the internet)

Over the next 200 years, the Page family emerged as one of the wealthiest in this part of Middlesex. They were farmers, but also rented out land to sub-tenants. After King Henry VIII made himself Head of the Church in England, he dissolved Kilburn Priory in 1536, and forced the Archbishop of Canterbury to hand over his large Harrow estates in 1545. Some of the land Henry seized was sold to tenants, such as John Page of Wembley.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Page families of Wembley, Harrow and [Uxendon](#) (acquired from the Bellamys in the early 1600s) became united through marriage. The widowed Richard Page of Harrow married again, to the granddaughter of (another) John Page of Wembley. The Page's main farm in Wembley since Tudor times had been on the Harrow Road, south of Wembley Hill. By the 1740s they had acquired a new slate-roofed brick house, "Wellers", at nearby Wembley Green. John Rocque's map shows it had a large orchard, as well as farm buildings.



**3. Extract from John Rocque's 1744 map of London and Environs, with "Wellers" added.** (Brent Archives)



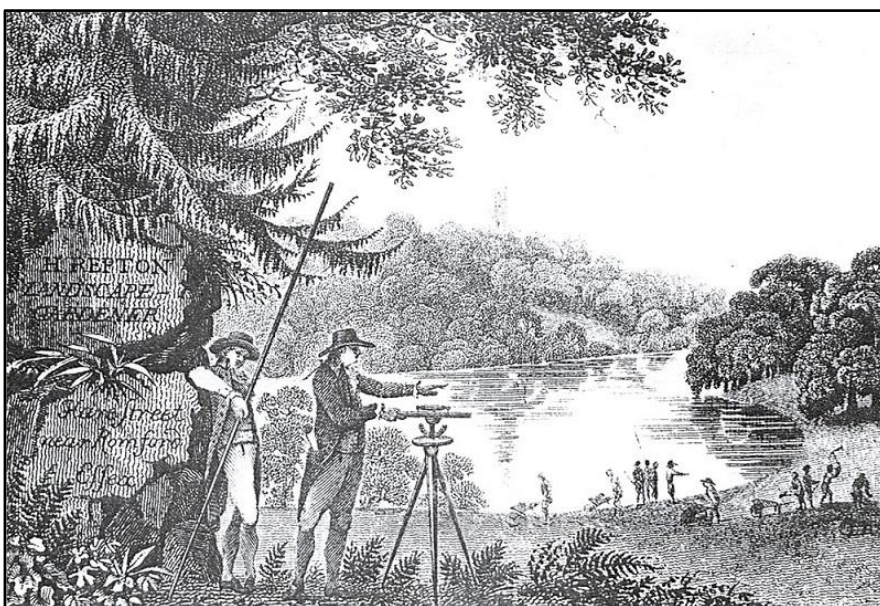
Wembley Green then was still a small settlement, which climbed to the top of the hill. Another map, a century earlier, had shown a windmill on Wembley Hill. The “Barley Mow”, a medieval timber-framed house which had become an inn by 1722, is named there. It was reached up a footpath from a row of cottages that were Wembley’s High Street (not to be confused with Wembley High Road!). The High Street and path (to an “inn”) are still there today, just off of Wembley Hill Road, and are well worth a visit once the “lockdown” is over.



#### 4. Some (modernised) homes in Wembley's High Street, August 2013.

Richard Page of Harrow’s first wife, Anne Herne, had a brother and a sister, but neither of them ever married. His second wife, Susanna, bore him five sons. The eldest of these, another Richard Page, decided in the 1780s that he would prefer to live at “Wellers”, rather than in his late father’s mansion at Sudbury Grove.

He had already planned to convert the farmland around his Wembley home to a country estate when, in 1792, Mary Herne died. She had inherited her family’s fortune on her brother’s death, without a male heir, in 1776. In her will, she left the Herne estate to Richard Page, her late sister’s husband’s eldest son! Richard Page lost no time in hiring England’s leading landscape gardener for his project, Humphry Repton.



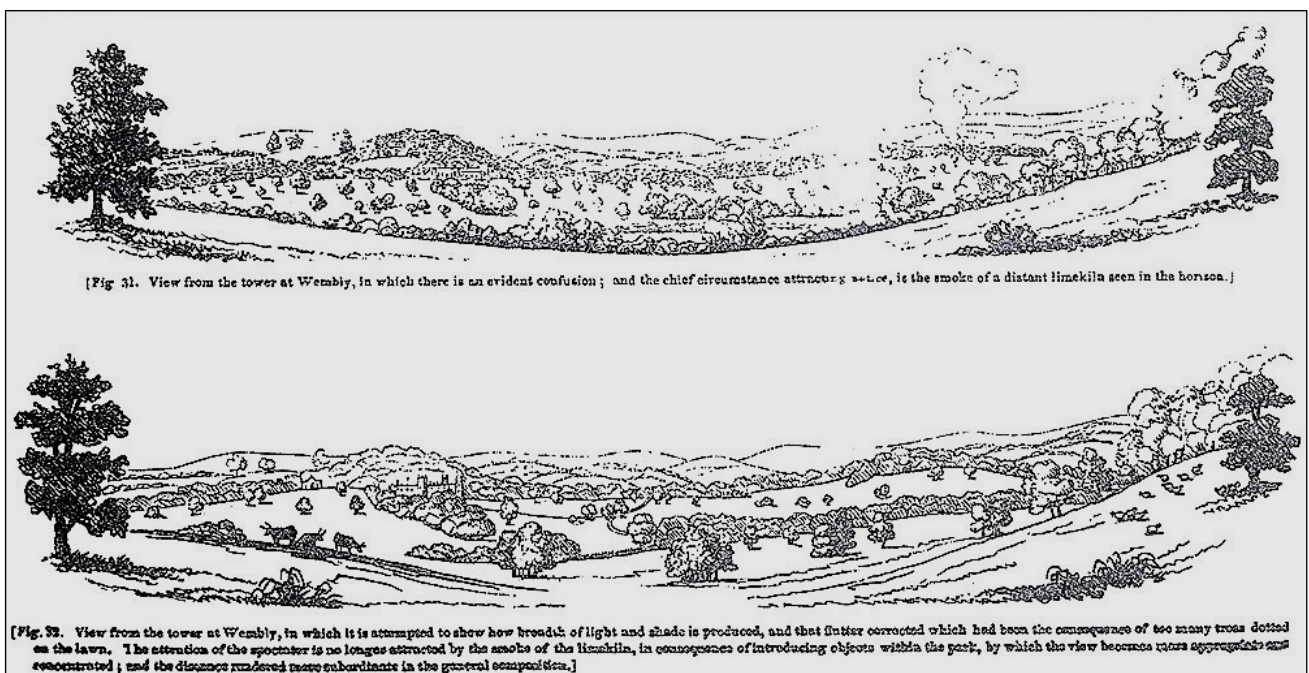
#### 5. Humphry Repton's business card, engraved from his own drawing. (From a copy at Brent Archives)

You can see Repton at work in the picture above. He used his skill as an artist to produce watercolour drawings for potential clients, showing their estate then, and how it would look if his designs were carried out. He presented his pictures in a leather-bound "Red Book". Many survive, but the one for Wembley is missing (if you find it, it would be very valuable!). Luckily, we do have some other evidence.

On Wednesday I go to Lord Mansfield at Kenwood  
 & on Thursday - to a most beautiful spot  
 near Harrow. I wish I could shew it  
 you - it belongs to Mr. Page & I have  
 just opened the trenches & am attacking it  
 in full force -

**6. Extract from a letter Humphry Repton wrote on 6 May 1793. (From a copy at Brent Archives)**

A letter Repton sent to a friend in May 1793 shows that work was underway at Wembley by then. He describes it as '*a most beautiful spot near Harrow*', but to him it was not free from defects. On another occasion he wrote: '*To the common observer the beauties of Wembly may appear to need no improvement, but it is the duty of my profession to discover how native charms may be heightened by the assistance of taste; and that even beauty itself may be rendered more beautiful, this place will furnish a striking example.*'



**7. Repton's before and after sketches of Wembley Park, as seen from Barn Hill. (From Brent Archives copy)**

There is an image, showing the before and after views of his scheme, from the top of Barn Hill, in a book which Repton published in 1794, "Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening".



That book includes the following note: *‘There is at present no word by which we express that sort of territory adjacent to a country mansion, which being too large for a garden, too wild for pleasure ground, and too neat for a farm, is yet often denied the name of a park, because it is not fed by deer. I generally waive this distinction, and call the wood and lawns, near every house, a park, whether fed by deer, by sheep, or heavy cattle.’*

And so, the estate was called a park, and its owner became known as Richard Page of Wembley Park. There are several “Parks” in Brent, but the only other one by Repton is Brondesbury Park, which he created for Lady Salusbury in the early 1790s. The term was used again by Victorian developers for upmarket estates like Kilburn Park and Stonebridge Park, while Queens Park has its own story.

In an earlier article on [Fryent Country Park](#), I mentioned that the history of the Page family did not end well. That is where I will take up the Wembley Park story again, next weekend.

**Philip Grant,  
Wembley History Society, May 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. Our local history belongs to all of us!