

## Chalkhill – 1,000 Years of History

Chalkhill was part of the old Parish of Kingsbury, which has existed since Saxon times. This was in the County of Middlesex (the land of the Middle Saxons). The name Kingsbury means 'a place belonging to the King', and there is a record showing that King Eadwig gave some land in the parish to one of his followers in 957AD. Land at *Chealchylle* (Chalkhill) in *Kynggesbrig*, was donated to Saint Peter's Abbey in Westminster to help provide income for the building of its new church (Westminster Abbey). The gift was made by Thurstan, a *housecarl* (royal bodyguard), with the agreement of the King, Edward ("the Confessor"),

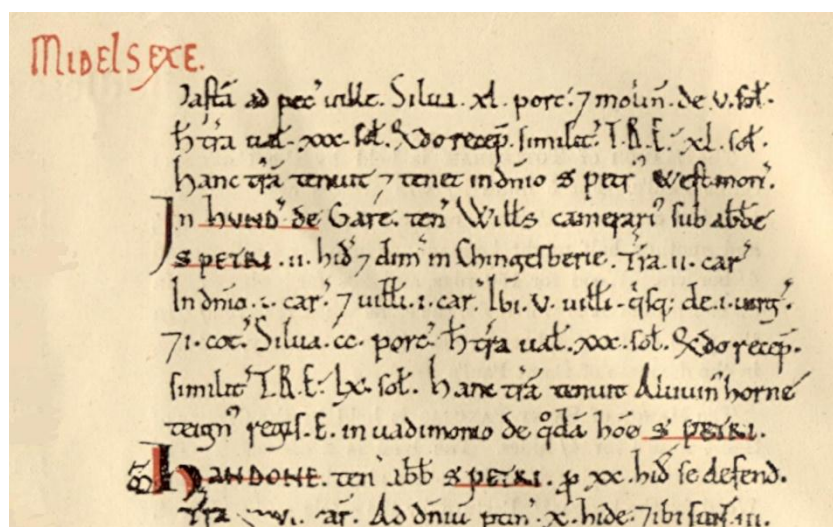
at whose wish the Abbey church was built between 1050 and 1065AD.



The new St Peter's Abbey, Westminster, and the funeral of King Edward in 1066, as shown by the Bayeux Tapestry.

One of the most famous years in English history, 1066, started with the funeral of Edward and crowning of King Harold at Westminster Abbey in January, and ended with the coronation of King William ("the Conqueror") there on Christmas Day, after he had beaten Harold at the Battle of Hastings. It is quite possible that men from Chalkhill were part of the Middlesex *Fyrd* (militia) which was part of Harold's defeated army. In 1085, William ordered a survey of all of the land and property in his kingdom, the *Domesday Book*, which gives a good picture of what Kingsbury was like at the time. St Peter's Abbey held 2½ *hides* of land (about 300 acres or 120 hectares) worth 30 shillings, about half of it farmed by five villagers who shared a single plough. The rest of the Abbey land was woodland, sufficient to feed 200 pigs.

An extract from the Domesday Book, including details of the land at Kingsbury (*Chingesberie*) held by St Peter's Abbey (*abbé S PETRI*).



The Chalkhill family were active in Kingsbury from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, and by 1400 they owned *le Chalkhulland* from which they took their name. It seems that they did not always get on very well with the priests at the nearby St Andrew's Church. In 1435, John Ingram, the chaplain at Kingsbury, was fined by the manor court for striking Maud Chalkhill, while in 1503, Thomas Chalkhill was pardoned for killing John Fell, chaplain and curate of Kingsbury, as this had been in self-defence.



The Hovenden Map of *Kingsburye* (drawn in 1597 for All Souls' College, Oxford, a major local landowner) shows that Eyan Chalkhill was the tenant of land on both sides of 'the Way from Wembly to Brante bridge' (Forty Lane). A large building just south of this lane is identified as 'Eyan Chalkhill's ten<sup>t</sup>' (tenement, or house), and a watermill on the River Brent, near the foot of Blackbird Hill, is also shown as his. In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, All Souls' College had built a footbridge, the *Brante* (Brent) bridge, because works for the

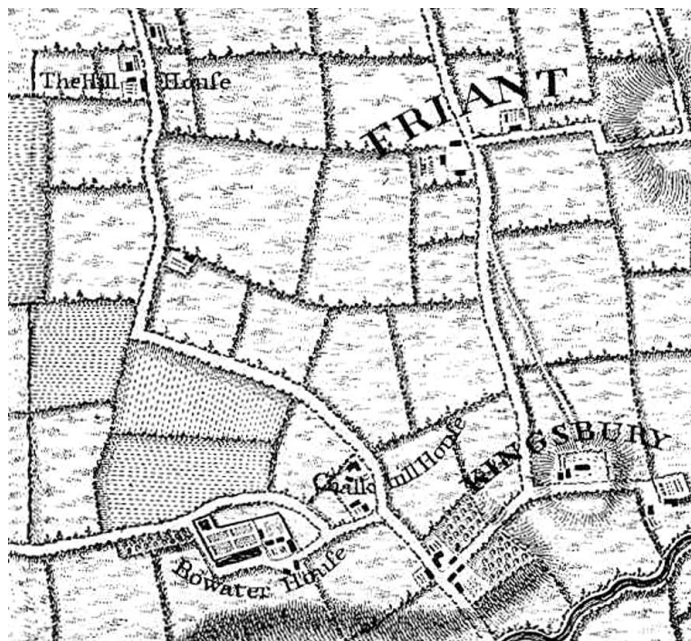
watermill had made the ford across the river too deep for pedestrians to walk through. Jon Chalkhill (probably Eyan's father) had agreed to maintain the footbridge.



**An extract from a 1597 map of Kingsbury, showing the Chalkhill area, south-west of Salmon Street and Blackbird Hill, where Eyan Chalkhill held most of the land.**

[Source and copyright: The Codrington Library, All Souls' College, Oxford]

Eyan's son, John Chalkhill, who may have been the famous 17<sup>th</sup> century poet of that name, succeeded to the estate in 1605, but soon moved out. Chalkhill, described as a mansion house and 161 acres of land, was sold in 1649 to Ralph Hartley, a London apothecary. By the 1680's Chalkhill was in the hands of his relative by marriage, Richard Bowater, a London mercer (cloth merchant), and it stayed in the possession of his heirs (all called Richard Bowater) for at least the next 100 years. It was probably Hartley, or the first Richard Bowater, who had a new brick house built on the site of the mainly timber Tudor building shown on the 1597 map. John Rocque's Map of 1745 shows it as Bowater House with large ornamental gardens, while the name Chalkhill House is given to a smaller property at junction of Forty Lane and Salmon Street.



**An extract from John Rocque's 1745 map of London**

[Source: Brent Archives]

The Bowaters' leased out much of the Chalkhill land to local farmers, and after them the estate passed through the hands of a number of owners. In the 1870's the Metropolitan Railway Company wanted to build a line from Baker Street to Harrow. The railway company reached an agreement for their line, which opened in 1880, to cross the southern edge of Chalkhill. At this time Chalkhill House was home to H.D. Rawlings, who owned the famous Rawlings Mineral Waters (fizzy drinks) business.



## *Chalk Hill Estate, Wembley Park.*

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SAY YOU SAW IT IN "METRO-LAND."

An advert from the 1924 edition of "Metroland" magazine.

[Source: Brent Archives - Wembley History Society Collection]

By 1918, the Metropolitan Railway's property company was developing housing estates on land that it had bought beside its railway lines, promoting the benefits of living in the countryside of "Metroland". In 1919 it purchased the land between Forty Lane and Wealdstone Brook, and from 1921 its Chalk Hill Estate offered plots of a  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre,  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre or one acre on which large detached houses or bungalows could be built. Many of the 17 million people who came to the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, and the 10 million visitors who followed when it was re-opened in 1925, liked the look of Wembley and its surrounding areas as a place to live, and soon other "suburban" housing estates were being built as well, including the Barn Hill estate from the late 1920's onwards.



An aerial photograph taken in March 1939, showing the Chalk Hill Estate (Chalkhill and Barnhill Roads) in the foreground, with the new Wembley Town Hall (nearing completion) and Barn Hill estate beyond.

[Source: Brent Archives – Aerial Photographs collection]

By the early 1960's the large plots of land around the houses on the Metropolitan Railway's Chalk Hill Estate were attracting the attention of developers, including Prowtings who built Chalklands and The Leadings in 1963/64. Willesden Council also considered buying some properties there, to redevelop as an estate for people from its area who needed homes.



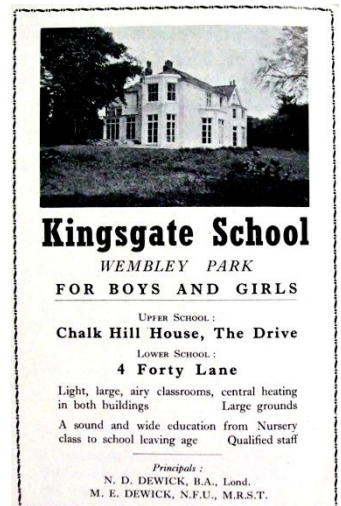
One of the first large houses to go was Chalkhill House, which had been used as Kingsgate Private School after the Second World War. When it was demolished in 1963, archaeological work by Wembley History Society confirmed that the house had been built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, on the site of an older building. The “dig” also uncovered some interesting pottery fragments and a King Charles II farthing coin (now held at Brent Museum). The former drive leading to the house from Forty Lane survives as a road called “The Drive”.



< Chalkhill House  
in 1939

A 1952 advert for  
Kingsgate School >

[Source of top 3  
pictures: Brent  
Archives – Wembley  
History Society  
Collection]



After the boroughs of Wembley and Willesden merged in 1965 to form the London Borough of Brent, plans to build public housing in the Chalkhill area were revived. There was a lot of opposition to a large high-density council estate in a mainly middle-class area. Brent Council had to use compulsory purchase orders to acquire some of the properties needed for the site, and many good forty-year-old houses were demolished to make way for the new Chalkhill Estate.

A house in Chalkhill Road being demolished in  
preparation for the new estate, around 1966 >



< The Chalkhill flats under construction, around 1967.

[Source: Brent Archives]



The Council's design for the Chalkhill Estate was based on modern ideas developed at Park Hill in Sheffield. The main housing area was to be built using the “Bison” system of pre-cast concrete panels, allowing for fast and precise construction. There would be about 1,650 homes, mainly in blocks of flats linked by walkways. No dustbins would be needed, as all of the rubbish would be chewed up by a waste disposal unit in the flat's kitchen sink! The estate would be a community of around 5,000 people, with a tenants'

meeting room and a row of local shops. By 1967, the modern concrete blocks of this *'bold and imaginative development'* were rising on the site, with lower more conventional housing at the eastern end of the estate. When finished in 1970, Chalkhill was described (in the "Sunday Telegraph") as *'one of the finest municipal housing estates in Britain'*, with open spaces, trees and play areas in between its curving blocks.

**A block of Chalkhill flats, with a walkway link to the multi-storey car park, in 1970**  
[Source: Brent Archives]



When the "Bison" blocks of the new estate were finished in 1970, they offered homes for 1,100 families, but initially around half of these were empty. Among those that the Council was trying to re-house here were people living in overcrowded Victorian tenement flats, without bathrooms, in Stonebridge, ready for another new housing estate there. Although



their accommodation was sub-standard, many of these families were paying "controlled" rents of only around £1 per week, and they thought the Chalkhill rents of £10 per week were too expensive.

**An aerial view of the Chalkhill Estate in 1970, looking from west to east.**

[Photograph courtesy of Barbara Phillips]

**Below: Potential tenants being shown round the estate, summer 1970.**

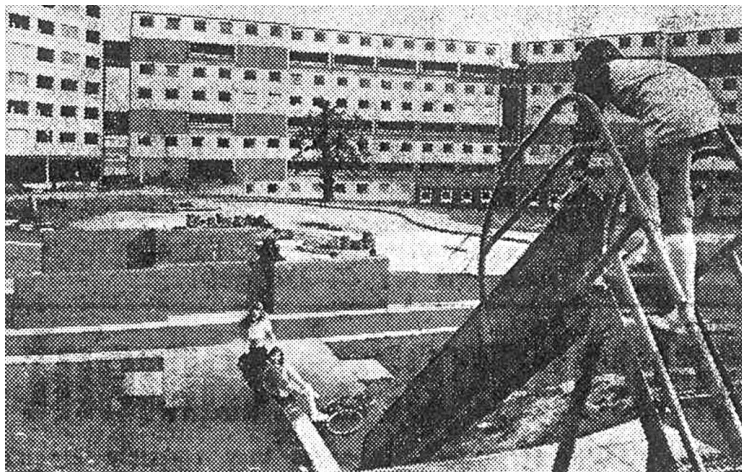
[Source: Brent Archives – Wembley History Society Collection]

In order to fill the flats, Brent Council had to offer homes for rent to private tenants, including some families where the parents had come to England from the West Indies to work for London Transport or as nurses in hospitals, or of Asian origin escaping from discrimination against them in East African countries following their independence. They had to show their passports and provide references to prove that they were of





good character and had sufficient income to pay the rent. Along with people from the Council's housing waiting list and those who were re-housed to make way for new developments elsewhere in the borough, the Chalkhill Estate was a mixed community, which felt like one big family to many living there.



**Children playing on the Chalkhill Estate, from the "Sunday Telegraph", 31 May 1970.**

[Source: Brent Archives]

With so many families moving to Chalkhill, it was essential to build a new school for their children. Chalkhill Infant School was taking pupils by the end of 1970, but shortage of money meant that the junior school did not open until 1972. In the meantime, local

7-11 year olds had to go by bus to Fryent Primary in Church Lane, while their younger brothers and sisters attended a school that had no fences and was in the middle of a muddy building site. When finally completed, the 250-pupil Chalkhill Primary School was the first in the country to be built on an open plan system.

Despite the initial optimism, Brent's Chalkhill Estate did not provide the ideal modern community living its planners had hoped for. Although a larger community centre had been provided, as well as a new youth centre created from part of a multi-storey car park, by the 1980's it had gained a bad reputation for crime and drug problems. From 1987 the walkways between the blocks were closed and door entry systems installed to improve tenants' security. In 1990 a new initiative was launched, and tenants were encouraged to take over responsibility from the Council through an Estate Management Board, which would manage and maintain Chalkhill's homes.

**Chalkhill, October 1992**

[Photograph courtesy of Eileen Yarde]



Two years later, consultation started on how the estate could be revitalised. After a competition to find a private developer willing to rebuild the estate, the "New Horizons" partnership between the Metropolitan Housing Trust and Wimpey Homes was chosen in 1994. The consultation had shown that the estate's residents wanted to demolish the concrete high-rise blocks and replace these with low-rise homes designed in consultation with them, and to refurbish the other homes. The new scheme accepted this, and proposed to raise the money needed by selling some of the land for a new retail superstore. By 1996 work was under-way on moving people from the concrete flats and replacing the flat roofs



and windows of the homes on the “Scientist” part of the estate. Then, in the autumn of 1997, contractors moved in to start demolishing the high-rise blocks.



< **Majestic Court**  
being demolished,  
in December 1997

**Demolishing St George's  
Court, Autumn 2000 >**

[Photographs courtesy of  
Eileen Yarde]



The new Asda supermarket at the western end of Chalkhill opened in March 1999. By 2000 refurbishment work was completed on the 450 low-rise “Scientist” homes which had



been transferred to the Metropolitan Housing Trust, and the first of the new homes were ready.

**Some of the new Metropolitan  
Housing Trust homes  
in Rawlings Crescent.**

[Photograph by  
Philip Grant, 2009]

Further phases of new homes followed over the next few years, providing 520 houses and flats for

rent as social housing and 150 apartments for sale to private buyers. By the end of 2006, the work of regenerating housing on the Chalkhill Estate was complete.

**The Wellspring Crescent,  
private apartments, built  
by Taylor Wimpey.**

[Photograph by  
Philip Grant, 2009]



The designers of the “new” Chalkhill Estate hoped that it would create a good community which would last, unlike its 1960’s predecessor. The plans included a linear park running from Forty Lane to Chalkhill Road, opposite the Town Hall, between the Asda supermarket and the estate’s homes. This was laid out in 2006, the same year that the Willow Children’s

Centre was opened, near the primary school.



**Chalkhill’s Linear Park in 2009, with the Town Hall and Wellspring Crescent in the background.**

[Photograph by Philip Grant]

The final building of the project, originally referred to as the Chalkhill Combined Facilities building, was finished by early 2009. This combines a Community Centre and large Health Centre with local offices for the Metropolitan Housing Trust and 42 shared-ownership apartments. The site which had been the temporary health centre during the regeneration, in Chalkhill Road opposite the linear park and looking over towards the new Wembley Stadium, is now (late 2012) being turned into a new public park. Chalkhill’s 1,000-year history is up-to-date, for now!



**The Chalkhill Centre, Chalkhill Road, in December 2011.**

[Photograph by Philip Grant]

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“Chalkhill – 1,000 years of history” was first compiled as a display forming part of Wembley History Society’s 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition, which took place in the Town Hall Library, Forty Lane, in February / March 2012.