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Cockfosters a history



These settlements grew up on what had been the north-west corner of Enfield Chase after it was enclosed in 1777. The Chase originated as a royal hunting ground. In its natural state it was covered by a mixture of scrub and forest as can still be seen on Hadley Common and parts of Trent Park. There were three lodges on the Chase, one of which was West Lodge (on the site of the present West Lodge Hotel). This corner of the Chase figured in national history in 1471 when the so-called Battle of Barnet was fought in and around Monken Hadley village. The battle was an overwhelming victory for the Yorkist army of King Edward IV. His opponent, Warwick the Kingmaker, died on the battlefield.

The enclosure of the Chase saw the creation of two new estates. Francis Russell, the surveyor responsible for the enclosure, acquired 152 acres of land on which he built himself a mansion: Beech Hill Park. Elsewhere on the Chase, Richard Jebb, a popular society doctor, was granted a lease on three adjoining plots of former Chase land. He built a house which he named Trent Place. It was named after Trento in the Tyrol where in 1777 Jebb had cured the Duke of Gloucester, brother of King George III, of a serious illness. This house was progressively enlarged by successive owners and came to be known as Trent Park.

By 1867 a small settlement, virtually an estate village for Trent Park, had grown up at Cockfosters. Its main component was a collection of cottages on the west side of Cockfosters Road (north of the main gate to Trent Park). There was a collection of larger houses and a pub (The Cock) in Chalk Lane. Also in Chalk Lane was Christ Church, built in 1839 and paid for by Robert Bevan of Trent Park. (The Bevans, who were partners in Barclays Bank, held Trent Park from 1833 to 1908). To the south of Chalk Lane, a row of cottages (Woodside Cottages) lay on the east side of Cockfosters Road at right angles to the road. In the angle between Cockfosters Road and Cat Hill stood Belmont, a substantial house in its own grounds, later known as Heddon Court.

At Hadley Wood, development was at an even more primitive level. There were three large houses (West Lodge, Beech Hill Park and Greenwood) plus two small groups of cottages sited on the north side of Camlet Way. There had been no development at all in Wagon Road. The Great Northern Railway's main line had been opened in 1850. (The construction involved the boring of two major tunnels). However, at first no station was provided for Hadley Wood.

In the early eighteen-eighties Charles Jack, the owner of Beech Hill Park, drew up plans to develop much of Hadley Wood. In 1882 he signed a building lease with the Duchy of Lancaster to lay out streets and build houses. Negotiations with the Great Northern Railway resulted in the opening of a station at Hadley Wood in 1885. By 1896 Crescent Road (Later Crescent East and Crescent West) was partly built up. Some large detached houses had appeared on the North side of Beech Hill. Lancaster Avenue had been laid out, but was as yet without houses. By 1914, apart from the addition of a few houses in Lancaster Avenue, Hadley Wood had grown relatively little.

Cockfosters hardly altered at all during the late 19th century. The 1914 O.S. maps of Cockfosters differ only very marginally from those of 1867. Two of the

larger houses, Heddon Court (Belmont) and Ludgrove, had become boys preparatory schools.

Trent Park was sold in 1908 to Sir Edward Sassoon. On his death in 1912 the house passed to his son Sir Philip Sassoon. In the twenties and early thirties Sir Philip spent vast sums on the house and estate, the house being virtually rebuilt. Trent Park was the scene of some elaborate society parties - guests included politicians, nobility and royalty.

After an abortive attempt to break up the estate for building, the Beech Hill Park estate was converted into a golf course in 1922. The mansion became the club house.

The Piccadilly Line reached Cockfosters in July 1933. The great building boom which had overwhelmed Southgate spilled across into Cockfosters. Heddon Court (Belmont) and Westpole Farm were sold for building and new streets were laid out. By 1939 Cockfosters as far north as the station, was part of London suburbia. However, development of the housing estates was by no means complete and there were many gaps which were filled in the early nineteen-fifties. The introduction of the Green Belt prevented any further expansion northwards and the London conurbation still ends somewhat abruptly by the junction of Cockfosters Road and Chalk Lane. North of this point the east side of Cockfosters Road remains farmland, while, on the west side, thin ribbon development links Cockfosters to Hadley Wood.

Sir Philip Sassoon died in the summer of 1939. During World War II Trent Park became an interrogation centre for high-ranking German prisoners of war. The house subsequently became a teacher training college, merging into Middlesex Polytechnic in 1974 (now Middlesex University). The estate was purchased by the former Middlesex County Council and was finally opened to the public in 1973.

Since World War II the gaps left on the pre-war estates at Cockfosters have been filled. At Hadley Wood some further limited housing development took place. Hadley Wood station was rebuilt in 1959 as part of a major scheme for widening the line at this point. The work was on a big scale and involved the boring of extra tunnels. The line was electrified in 1976.

The outbreak of World War II and the subsequent introduction of the Green Belt has left Cockfosters and Hadley Wood in a half and half state.

Further Reading

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