

Chase Green, by Reginald T. Williams

The following text was sent to the Society for possible publication by Reg Williams, one of our Vice-Presidents, in 1979. It was not published at that time, but we are pleased to be able to make it available now in electronic form. The text is as it was submitted 36 years ago, apart from minor typographical changes and the addition of illustrations.

Chase Green is undoubtedly the oldest of Enfield's Public Open spaces, being a fragment of the famous Enfield Chace. when the Chace was "dischased" and broken up, the Commissioners, in 1801, granted Chase Green to the parish "for the recreation of the people of Enfield". It was recorded in the reign of George III that the size of the Green did "not exceed 20 acres". Until 1899 it was under the jurisdiction "of the Vicar, Churchwardens and Overseers". In 1872, while under the control of the Vestry, the Green became much abused by horsemen, carters and horse van drivers, whose animals and vehicles badly cut up the turf. This was not in accordance with the original intention for the use of the Green, namely for the recreation of the people, so the vestry then took steps to avoid any further encroachment by having posts put round the Green. Chains were put between the posts on Windmill Hill on the South West corner of the Green and a single square iron rail between the remainder of the posts, which were painted white. These were all there until they were taken down during the 1939-45 war. The Vestry also closed the Green for grazing, between November and March, and forbade gentlemen from exercising their horses there during the same period.

In 1899 it was transferred to the control of the Enfield Urban District Council and still comes under the London Borough of Enfield. At one time the Council wanted to erect a Town Hall on the site, but such was the outcry that the idea had to be dropped. One good thing that did arise out of this proposal was the formation in 1936 of the Enfield Preservation Society to protect Enfield from that and similar disastrous ideas.



Aerial view of Chase Green (from Google maps)



Chase Green cottages

It was at one time larger than it is now having been encroached on at various times. On the South side, small nibbles have been made in widening Windmill Hill. On the West side we have of course, the railway embankment which took a piece of the Green. The row of cottages there now are quite old although most of them have been given a "face lift".

Approximately where Newsome's workshop now stands there stood, early this century, Wiggett's the blacksmith and I can remember being fascinated as a lad by the goings on in the gloom round the forge. The double row of lime trees across the Green now, were on either side of the lane which went to three houses up the hill and on to Chase Hill.

The lower one with its lodge which was known as The Shrubbery, was the home of Alderman Abbis and bounded the Green on its East side. According to Ford & Hodson's History of Enfield, "The sum of three pounds is paid by the occupier of the Shrubbery on Chase Hill for encroachments, and disposed of in clothing for the poor". The lane across the Green and past the Shrubbery was called Harrison's Lane after the occupier of one of the other houses, Capt. Daniel Harrison, J.P. Before the railway extension to Hertford was built, there was a row of six cottages similar to the existing ones on the Green, but set back in line with the Shrubbery and facing the Green which were served by a track from Harrison's Lane. These cottages

were known as Providence Cottages and an old photograph shows in the garden of one near the centre, a well which undoubtedly supplied water for the occupants before the advent of piped water. Further along near Chase Green Avenue stood a large house known as Chase Court, this together with the Shrubbery and its Lodge and Providence Cottages were all demolished to make way for the railway.

Chase Green Avenue itself was not made until 1880, when Mr Culloden Rowan, who was developing the Bycullah Estate, was given permission to make a road linking Rowantree Road with Chase Side "in return for the payment of £200, the income from which is applied in the maintenance of the Green" (See Whitaker's History of Enfield, p.251).

At the corner of Chase Green Avenue and Chase Side on the Green there was at one time a horse pond (one of many in Enfield) and close by, a horse & cattle pound, where stray animals were impounded and released only after the payment of a fine by the owner. The tale is told of a chimney sweep by the name of Street (they were a large family in Enfield) who was the owner of two donkeys. One of these was found straying and impounded. Hearing what had happened the sweep gathered all his chimney boys together that evening and next morning the pound was empty. It is said that the boys had a ride home.

On the Green close to the pond and pound is a square plot of land on which at the turn of the century stood a single house with a walled garden, known as "The Limes", but often known locally as "the pest house". Before the first world war, this house and ground came on to the market, but regrettably the Council refused to buy. How this plot of land came to be privately owned on common land is a mystery, some say that it is the site of a plague pit but many authorities do not accept this theory. What we do know is that the site was bought by a developer, who put up the private residences which are there now.

Chase Side itself, although old, is not so old as the footpath to the east of it, which runs from the Parish Church to Clay Hall. An old map of 1777 gives the impression that Chase Side finished somewhere near Horse Shoe Lane and then continued as a track across Chase Green. There must however, have been a carriage way because between what is now Chase Side and the New River and bounded on the south by the Chase Gardens and on the north nearly as far as the narrow alley which links up via the bridge over the New River with Gentleman's Row, there stood until the turn of the century, a large old house and grounds with a high wall around, known as Beauchamp Lodge. Between that and the narrow alley stood two smaller houses known as "Tintern" and "Langdale". Some years ago now, an old Enfield resident remembered seeing, as a girl, a carriage and pair with footmen, drive out and return through the entrance gates of Beauchamp Lodge. On the pillar by the entrance gates was an old iron bell pull, which was no doubt a temptation to the young generation of those days. The house was demolished in 1906 and the site remained derelict for many years until it was sold in plots and the present houses and bungalows erected over several years.

The New River itself is of course on land which is part of Chase Green. The following extract from Whitaker's History is interesting

"New River Company's Gift. The sum of two pounds is annually paid by the New River Company to the Churchwardens of Enfield for the time being, for certain privileges in respect of drainage on Chase Side, granted by the Parish, which sum is disposed of in clothing for the poor."

I wonder if the two pounds is still paid? I doubt it.

The land to the east of the New River as far as the frontages of the houses in Gentleman's Row was all part of Chase Green. The gardens in front of the houses on the town end of Gentleman's Row accordingly encroached on the Green and were the subject of litigation many years ago.

It is of interest to note that the Chase Gardens by Chase Side were apparently laid out in the early 1900s, for Whitaker in 1911 says, "a small portion (of Chase Green) between the road and the New River, has been laid out as an ornamental garden, golden privet and aucubas being planted with painful symmetry around the nicely gravelled paths".



New River Loop

For centuries Chase Green has been the ideal meeting place for every sort and kind of meeting: protest meetings where all and sundry aired their grievances; election meetings before halls or the funds to pay for

them were available. It was also the assembly or dispersal point for parades for special occasions and religious services. It was here that in the early 1800s the first Primitive Methodists held their services, these being conducted by itinerant preachers who spoke whenever possible from a farm wagon or other suitable vehicle.

The Green was very much in use for sports of every kind and when cricket matches were played the players invariably adjourned to either the “Cricketers” or to “the Crown and Horse Shoes” to the east of Chase Side, for supper or refreshments, (except when one of the XI's was the City of London Total Abstiners Union!)

The “Cricketers” had at one time, and no doubt still has, the records of over a hundred years of cricket matches that were played on the Green. It is recorded that in 1871 the Enfield Institute beat the Enfield Police by an innings when one of their players scored 71 runs. Quite a feat I should imagine, as I doubt if the turf was up to County standards.



A previous sign for The Cricketers

May Day was a great occasion. The Maypole was raised on the Green behind “The Limes” and further over near Mr Wiggett’s forge, a greasy pole was set up with a leg of mutton at the top as a bait for would be climbers. It was on May Day too, that the sweeps and their wives changed clothes and with much jollification went in procession round the town (there must have been a good number of them). The children were entertained by Mrs Everett of Chase Side House, which stood on what is now the Library Green, Mrs Everett being well known for her hospitality for many good causes.

Another event which Enfield residents enjoyed was Guy Fawkes day and night – when the lads of the village, known as “Bonfire Boys”, really let their hair down, with much fun and games round a huge bonfire with fireworks on the Green. Collections were made for good causes, the Cottage Hospital, now the War Memorial Hospital, benefiting most.



Chase Green bandstand, early 1900s

We must not forget the bandstand which stood between Windmill Hill and Harrison’s Lane, which like most Victorian band stands of the time, was an ornamental cast iron affair with steps up to the platform level. It was octagonal in shape, with cast iron supports to carry the ornamental canopy, and of course it was all painted green. Here the Enfield Volunteers Band played and later the Enfield Silver Prize Band of which Enfield was very proud, and rightly so, they were very good and did well in competitions but alas, the band and the bandstands have now all gone.

One of the highlights for Chase Green must surely have been Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee of 1897. Much thought and preparation were given to the celebrations and Enfield was rewarded with a glorious sunny June day. The celebrations started with

processions and parades round the town by all the various organisations. These arrived at Chase Green by about 3 p.m. ready in time for the various games and competitions that had been arranged. So great was the excitement and the crowds that the marshalls in charge of the sports had a job to keep the running tracks etc. clear for the games. It was reckoned by Mr Meyers’ Observer, that there were over 4,000 people there. There were the usual side shows and, of course, the traditional greasy pole which has nowadays fallen out of favour as a feature of public events.

For this national occasion, flags were put at the top of the pole instead of the traditional leg of mutton. Four competitors managed to get to the top, howbeit there seems to have been a mild form of cheating as some used chains or ropes to get a grip on the pole. Mr Meyers’ Observer gave the list of names of winners in the sports. It appeared to have been a great day concluding when the National Anthem was sung at 9 p.m.

Now, to bring us up to more recent times, we have on the Green the Cenotaph to remind us of two world wars, which was erected after the 1914-18 war, and replaced a temporary one placed in the road opposite Barclay's Bank in the Town – as you can guess the traffic in the Town was nothing like it is now.

Around the Cenotaph a service of remembrance is held on Armistice Sunday each November, conducted by the local clergy and usually led by a brass band. These are supported by members of the armed forces, the British Legion and uniformed organisations, and the Mayor and Councillors are usually present as well as the general public.

Next time you pass Chase Green, give a thought to what this green has meant to past generations who had no public parks as we have now and be thankful for our piece of the famous old Enfield Chace.



Cenotaph war memorial

REG WILLIAMS
September 1979