

History of Ducketts Common

Images Courtesy of Bruce Castle Museum, www.haringey.gov.uk/brucecastlemuseum

If you travel along Green Lanes in Haringey or use the tube and bus station at Turnpike Lane it is difficult to imagine that little over 150 years ago you would have been in the middle of a large farm that extended from Hornsey to Tottenham. Ducketts Common is the green space that remains of that rural landscape.

The name of the Common derives from Laurence Duket, a goldsmith, who was descended from the knights who accompanied William the Conqueror in 1066. He came to own 160 acres of farm land, originally part of Tottenham manor, in the thirteenth century.

Subsequently ownership passed to St. Bartholomew's Monastery and Hospital and was leased to various members of the court. After the reformation the land was acquired from Edward VI by Richard Cecil for just over £1,100. From then until the mid nineteenth century the farm was sold on several occasions staying in much the same form.

In 1862 the lease to the farm was brought by a property developer and subsequent development, encouraged by the arrival of the Great Eastern Railway through some of the land, brought an end to the farm as it had existed for hundreds of years. Similar as happened to many smaller towns and villages around the City Of London shortly after the railway was built urbanisation of the rural landscape quickly followed.

Dovecote Farm (as it was known at the time) was sold off to the General Company, who initiated the spread of urbanisation in the area, including the construction of Noel Park Estate. The name of this farm remains to the east of the High Road, Dovecote Avenue, near Sainsbury's.

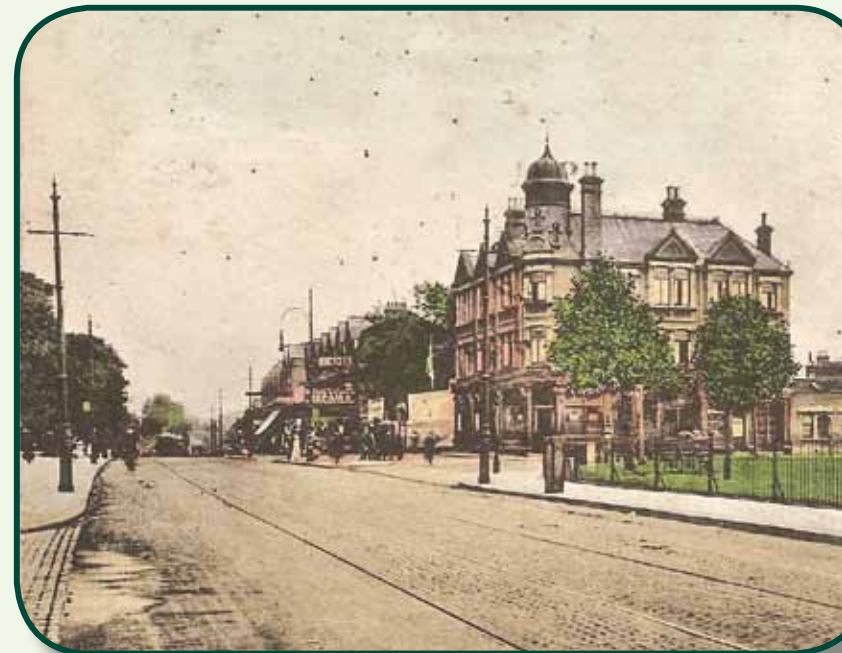
The Noel Park Estate was built between 1883 and 1893 on land to the east of what is now Wood Green High Road. Green Lanes itself was a thoroughfare of private houses and a link to the City of London. The Road itself however, is thought to have existed as far back as Roman times and where Turnpike Lane (then part of Tottenham Lane) crossed Green Lanes a tollgate was established in 1739 as it had previously been used as a convenient route to avoid tolling on the Great North Road through Highgate.



Duckett's Farmhouse, Image from Robinson's History and Antiquities of Tottenham 1840.

The Park itself was one of the very few green spaces left from Dovecote Farm following the huge amount of development and growth in the area that occurred in the 19th Century. It is bounded by Green Lanes and Turnpike Lane, as well as by Willoughby Road and Frobisher Road, which were built in 1887 as more workers from London Docklands were attracted to the area due to cheaper housing prices and easy access to the City via the railway.

Queen's Head Pub, 1916, copyright Albert Pinching



The Queens Head pub to the South of the common was originally built in 1794, and the owner from 1856 ran an omnibus service to London and Winchmore Hill. The Inn was particularly well placed for both traffic along Green Lanes and to Alexandra Palace after it was opened in 1862.

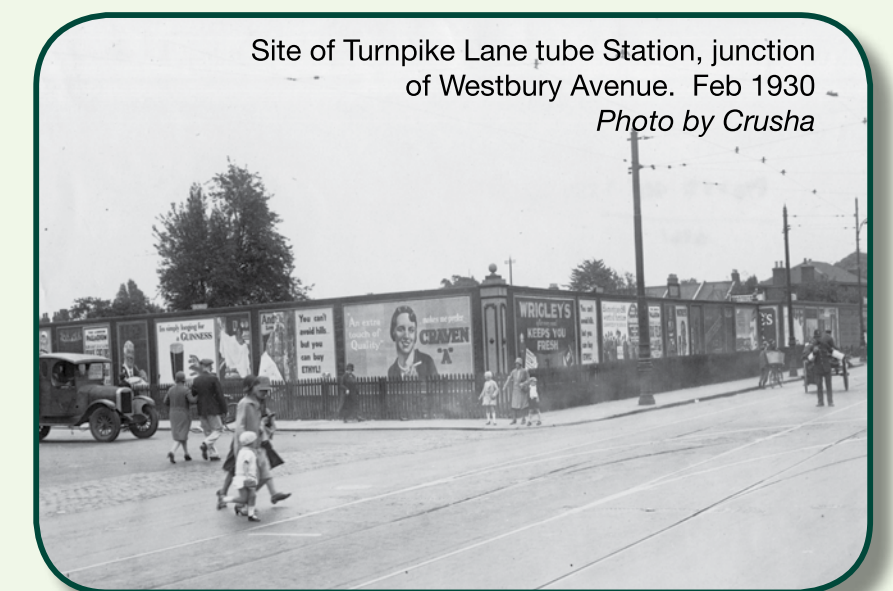
The present pub was built in 1898. In 1910 the Premier Electric Cinema was built adjacent to the Queens Head in Frobisher Road – and was claimed to be the oldest surviving purpose built cinema in London until conversion to a church in the 1990's.

The other major building work took place when the Piccadilly line extension was built connecting Finsbury Park with Cockfosters. Turnpike Lane tube station was built in 1932 and one of its entrances now forms the northern boundary of the common (9.7 million journeys are now made through the station each year). It was designed by Charles Holden and has distinctive art deco features. The present bus station was built in 1999 and replaced the Coronet Cinema – originally named the Ritz – and was part of the art-deco shopping parade built adjacent to the tube station in 1935.

Green Gate Common, across to the east side of Green Lanes is effectively a traffic island bounded also by Alfoxton Avenue and West Green Road. It is rumoured that air raid shelters exist below it, connected to the tube line and station, underneath the concrete structures that can be still seen.

As the above shows the present Common is very different from what existed even just over a hundred years ago. It remains a welcome area of green space in the heart of Haringey and affords much pleasure to those who use for sport (the basketball courts are especially popular), recreation or simply as a place to relax on a summer's day.

With thanks to the Hornsey Historical Society and 'Wood Green Past' by Albert Pinching, Historical Publications, 2000



Site of Turnpike Lane tube Station, junction of Westbury Avenue. Feb 1930 Photo by Crusha

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