

A Brief History of Markeaton Park

This is a quick summary of the history of Markeaton Park, with a quick timeline provided at the end. For those wanting a more detailed history of the park this can be found in the Conservation Management Plan that can be downloaded from the Derby City Council website.

Early History – Romans to the 1500s

There is little evidence of human activity in the immediate area until around AD80 when the Romans are known to have built at Little Chester (Derventio) about 2km east of Markeaton Park in Derby. The Romans developed a network of roads and one went almost due west from Little Chester to Rocester in Staffordshire. The road is still traceable along the west drive to Markeaton, along Long Lane and through the fields to Mackworth.

It is likely the first settlements developed where the road crossed Markeaton Brook by the Anglo Saxons and it is probable the name Markeaton derives from Mearca's Ton, a Saxon farm settlement.

The first written record of Markeaton is contained within the Domesday Book of 1086. Earl Siward and his heirs had held the part of the estate that contained what was to become the medieval village of Markeaton, including the site of the hall, church and mill. The land at Markeaton, Mackworth and Allestree was confiscated when Siward was dispossessed following the invasion of England by William Duke of Normandy in 1066 and went to William's nephew Hugh d'Avranches, the first Earl of Chester.

The Markeaton estate was then first let and subsequently sold to the Touchet family and became an established and prosperous estate with a Hall and a 'park' used for the raising of deer and boar. It is also during this period that the road layout for the area is thought to have emerged with the main route from Derby to Ashbourne probably diverted to the south away from the village and the old historic route used to provide a new entrance to the Hall.

The Mundys 1516-1720

In 1516 the Manor of Markeaton with Mackworth and Allestree was sold to John Mundy, a goldsmith and the Sheriff of the City of London and over the next eight generations his successors at Markeaton continued to hold office as High Sheriffs and Members of Parliament.

A hall was constructed in the 16th century, though the exact dates are uncertain. A drawing from 1753 illustrates the 16th century old hall which included a fine central hall and linear farm buildings, with a larger fenced enclosure containing fishponds, an orchard and formal gardens with extensive walls and two gateways with ornate stone pillars. The position of the farm buildings can still be traced today as part of the stone built plinth which still exists on the north and west sides of the later range converted to stable buildings.

In the 17th century some family discord resulted in a split in the Mundy's inheritance, with one branch of the family becoming established at the manor house at Allestree (later Edward Mundy of Shipley).

The Enclosures and the Eighteenth Century

In 1720 Wrightson Mundy inherited the Estate from his father Francis at the age of seven. Wrightson trained to be a lawyer, and was active in his support for the Jacobite cause in 1745 and it is recorded that Bonnie Prince Charlie's rebel army passed through the Markeaton estate on the Ashbourne Road on its ill fated march to London.

Wrightson Mundy promoted the enclosure of the 'open fields' in Markeaton, Mackworth and Allestree to increase the estate's value. In 1760, together with several others including Nathaniel Curzon (Lord Scarsdale) of Kedleston Hall and Edmund Mundy of Shipley, the enclosure of land began along with land exchanges which allowed Wrightson Mundy to obtain land in Markeaton Village close to the hall and on the edges of his estate.

The medieval hall was demolished and a new hall was erected in the same location by 1755. The new hall, described as a 'dignified brick edifice' was built to designs by James Denstone of Derby (1724-1780) in collaboration with Wrightson Mundy before his death in 1762. The estate then passed to his son Francis Noel Clark Mundy, who continued to improve the farmland using the new ideas and methods being pioneered in farming at that time. Pastoral use replaced arable crops and farming for profit became increasingly important as the population of Derby grew rapidly from 1750 onwards.

As a final part of the enclosure and 'emparking', the old village of Markeaton was finally removed in its entirety by 1790. A new village was built to the west of the old village street outside the newly established park gate.

The Eighteenth Century Parkland

It is not possible to be exact about the time and date for the planning of the park and gardens at Markeaton Hall but the accepted dates are between the enclosure in 1763 and the review of the Mundy Estate in 1778-80.

From 1763, with the new hall in place F.N.C Mundy concentrated on increasing his landholding and making improvements to the grounds and parkland. An Orangery, now a Grade II listed building, was built in the Palladian style adjacent to the house in 1772, thought to have been designed by local architect Joseph Pickford. The Orangery screened the stable block beyond, which was probably built at the same time using the ashlar plinth work of the medieval outbuildings.

Although no plans or maps have been found, circumstantial evidence suggests that William Emes (1730 -1803) may have had a strong influence on the design for the ornamental parkland at Markeaton. Emes was to become a well known English landscape designer working in a style similar to 'Capability Brown' and was responsible for designing many of the local parks and gardens including Calke Abbey, Foremark Hall (1764) and Radbourne (Radburne) Hall (1790) where Erasmus Darwin lived before he moved to Derby in 1783.

Markeaton Brook was dammed to form a serpentine lake edged with trees to frame views from the house. Clumps of oak and forest trees were planted which seem to have incorporated the medieval trees and features, to add interest and views to the wider parkland and topography. The medieval road line and banking alongside the old Ashbourne Road was planted with a strong tree boundary to create an arboreal screen and visual enclosure to the park.

More formal features were included at a later date, as ornamental gardens were laid out to the west of Markeaton Hall, possibly using the layout of the earlier walled enclosures associated with the old hall. The cascades were visually enhanced, using the mill race and streams connected with the original mill buildings and water wheel to the east of the Home Farm buildings and north of the stable block.

Mundy and the Lunar Society/enlightenment

There are some clear connections between FNC Mundy and the intellectual movements of the later eighteenth century in the Midlands. It is known he had connections with the architect Joseph Pickford, Joseph Wright of Derby, Josiah Wedgwood and Erasmus Darwin.

Francis Noel Clark Mundy as magistrate and High Sheriff of Derbyshire became a powerful local figure. He was also a man of literary achievements and had a considerable acquaintance among the literary circles of his day. He even had his own poems published in 1776 on 'Needwood Forest' and later the more critical 'Fall of Needwood', as trees were cut down and the landscape was under threat of change. Among his friends were Dr Erasmus Darwin and Miss Anna Seward the Swan of Lichfield as she is sometimes called and who was much thought of in her time.

The Nineteenth Century

FNC Mundy continued to be the largest landowner in Mackworth and Markeaton but by the end of the 18th century, he was in financial difficulty and was forced to sell most of Allestree in around 1795.

In 1815, F.N.C Mundy's son, also Francis Mundy MP (1771-1835), inherited the estate, and the Land Tax Assessments for 1832 shows that there was less land in hand and the Mundy farms over 25 acres had been enlarged but the number had fallen from twelve to nine. Francis Mundy continued the work of improvements to the pleasure grounds and park, moving the original drive from its location alongside the lake to its current route and improving the ornamental gardens to the rear of the hall.

1900 to 1930 – From Private Estate to Public Park

Francis Noel died in 1903 and the direct line of the Mundy family at Markeaton for nearly 400 years, from 1516, came to an end. The Estate passed to The Prebendary William Gilchrist Clark. Emily Maria Georgiana Mundy remained living in the house until her death in 1929.

In 1924 almost 14 acres of land in two parcels was given to the town of Derby to provide areas for recreation for the children of Derby. These areas now form the Mundy Pleasure Grounds, located to the east of the A38 and the Mundy Play Centre, which has over the years expanded to form the now hugely popular play area in the north east of the park.

In 1930, The Reverend William Gilchrist gave the house, garden and pleasure grounds to the Borough of Derby while the remainder of the parkland was sold to the Borough, stipulating its use as a park for recreation.

1930 to 1939 – The Formation of the Public Park

The purchase of the wider parkland led to rapid changes to parts of the park. The sale included an earlier provision (1928) for the construction of the Derby Ring Road, which severed the south eastern corner of the parkland from the main park area in 1930. By 1931 work had commenced on the laying out of the Mundy Play Area and in 1933 the lake was widened to accommodate rowing boats. In 1935 Ashbourne allotments association requested use of part Markeaton park and in May 1936 the construction of a pitch and putt Golf Course was proposed.

By the start of WWII the public park was well established with elements sympathetic to the original parkland character. However, no good use was found for the Hall and although discussions took place about it having some educational uses, the property remained unused and gradually deteriorated through lack of maintenance.

Second World War to the Present Day

A major impact came to the park and occurred during World War Two, when the whole of the park south of the lake was commandeered by the army and turned into a camp, with barracks and parade grounds. The army occupied the Hall causing further irreparable damage to the previously empty building.

Following the war, the barracks remained as temporary housing for displaced families whose homes were lost in bombing raids. A number of the unsightly World War Two structures and buildings also remained with one of the parade grounds still in use as a car park and the buildings used as a depot and train shed for the City Council.

In 1964 Markeaton Hall was demolished after years of neglect and many of the architectural features were sold or lost. The park's character was further eroded during the mid - later years of the 20th Century as the expansion of the city brought new pressures on the park, while adding new urban development of high rise buildings into the historic views and the widening of the Queensway A52 and the A38 road in the 1970's.

The Mundy Play Centre grew to be a major attraction on the park in the mid 20th Century with a newer paddling pool constructed in the 1970's and a wide variety of play attractions added. In the 1980's the stable buildings were converted to a Craft village and the Orangery was converted to a café with an outdoor seating area on the terrace.

A Historical timeline

