

Changing Land Use and Development in the Enfield Chase Area 1840-1940

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This paper aims to explore changes and development that took place on the former Enfield Chase between 1840 and 1940. The first section will describe the Enfield area as it was around 1840. This will be done in the context of the parish of Enfield, in which the greater part of the ancient Chase lay.¹ The next section will examine changes that took place in the nineteenth century in population growth and the development of rail transport and housing, including a close examination of building around Enfield Town and on the former Chase. The final section will examine other changes in land use in the twentieth century.

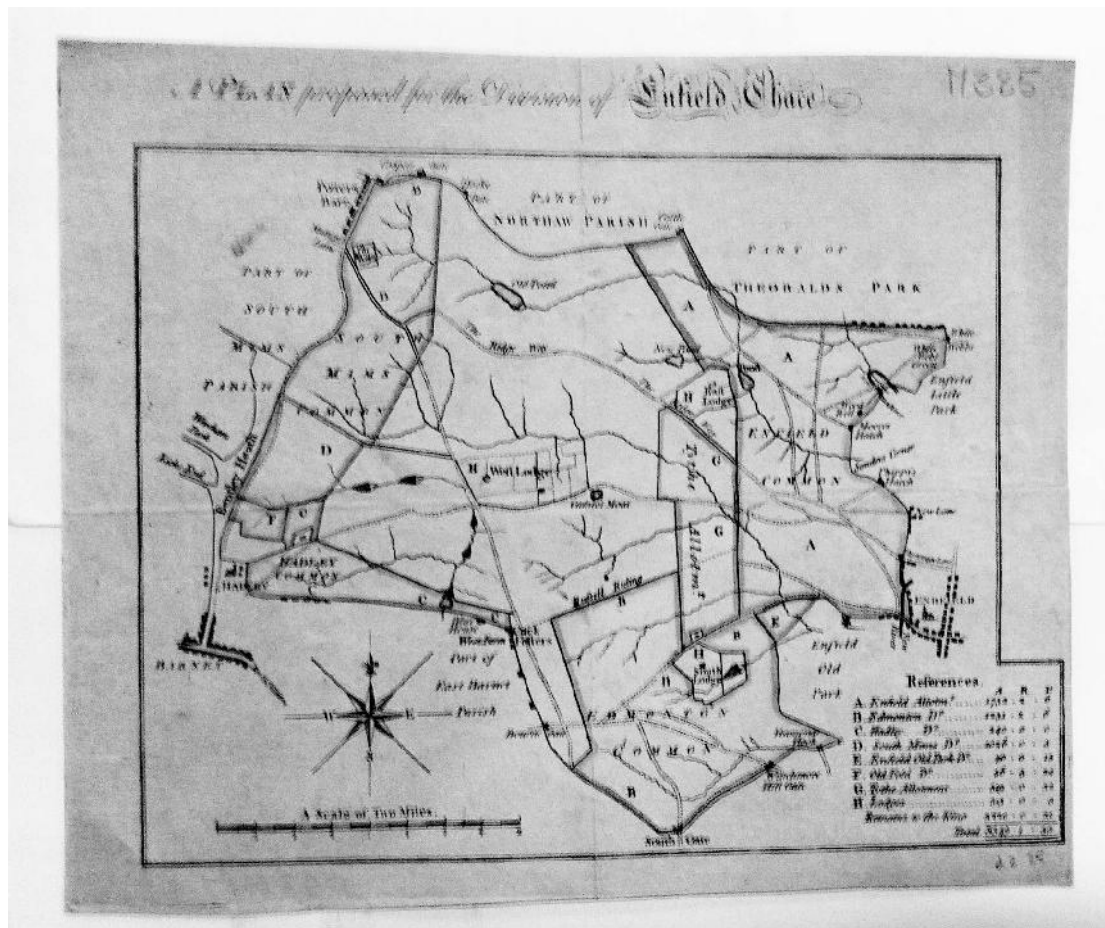


Fig. 1. Enfield Chase in the 18th century. Enfield town is in the South-East.

¹ See John Langton's paper. Of the 8,354 acres 1 rod and 30 perches 'or thereabouts' in the Chase when it was divided in 1777, 5,824 lay in parish of Enfield. The Chase also occupied areas of Edmonton, South Mimms and Hadley and this was reflected in the allocations of land each district got when the Chase was divided. See Cuthbert Wilfrid Whitaker, *An Illustrated Historical, Statistical & Topographical Account of the Urban District of Enfield* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1911), pp. 258--9.

ENFIELD IN 1840

According to the *Victoria County History (VCH)* for Middlesex,

Inclosure² did not radically alter the pattern of settlement within the former Chase, but it wrought great changes on the landscape: scarcely any trees were left by 1823 and the remaining patches of woodland were largely confined to the estates of Trent Park and other seats which had been built after inclosure. New buildings included the farm-houses of Holly Hill and Fernyhill farms, which survive, Home Villa, and other early-19th-century villas on the Ridgeway, and isolated houses like Owls Hall at Crews Hill.

Moreover, ‘The western half of the parish, comprising the former Chase [. . .] remained very thinly populated before 1830.’³ In fact, even in 1900 there were comparatively few people living there.

In 1911 Cuthbert Whitaker wrote: ‘At the commencement of the nineteenth century Enfield may be said to have reached its zenith as a quiet and secluded town within easy driving distance of the capital.’⁴ He continued: ‘Soon after the accession of Victoria (1837-1901) the district appears to have entered upon its career of providing residences for those whose occupations take them daily into the capital.’⁵ Thus he identifies the period around 1840 as a point when Enfield’s relationship to the metropolis started to change. The change was gradual at first; as Graham Dalling explains, until well after 1850, ‘London was still a long way off, with development just lapping up to the border of Shoreditch and Hackney -- even Stoke Newington was still largely rural, well-known in ornithological circles for its nightingales.’⁶ The first Ordnance Survey (OS) map of the area, published in 1844, shows Enfield Town separated by open fields from Southgate and Tottenham and other areas incorporated into London today: Hornsey, Stoke Newington, Islington; even Kentish Town and Hampstead.

² From 1777; see Sally Williams’s paper.

³ *The Victoria History of the Counties of England*, edited by R. B. Pugh, *A History of Middlesex*, 12 vols., v, *Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton, Enfield, Monkton Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham*, edited by T. F. T. Baker (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 218.

⁴ Whitaker, p. 78.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

⁶ Graham Dalling, *Southgate and Edmonton Past* (London: Historical Publications, 1996), p. 30.

Nevertheless, changes in Enfield and on the former Chase need to be understood in the context of changes in London, its gigantic neighbour, which lay only nine miles to the south. In the nineteenth century, as England evolved into an industrialised country, London grew at a dizzying rate. For example, the population of Islington, which lay directly south of Enfield, doubled between 1800 and 1820 and grew another 134 per cent between 1841 and 1861. The number of houses in Islington increased by a phenomenal eighty per cent from 1821 to 1831 and another 150 per cent by 1861.⁷ This pace of change could be compared to urban growth in some areas of China today.

Not only did London progressively expand, but outlying towns like Enfield also began to grow. From the 1840s, when railway lines started to link London to other cities, stations at intermediate points joined towns like Enfield to the metropolis. Two lines served it: in the east, the Great Eastern Railway (GER) eventually ran from Liverpool Street to Cambridge. West of Enfield Town itself, the Great Northern Railway (GNR) ran from King's Cross to Peterborough. As transport links improved, an increasing number of people chose to move away from the noise, polluted air and what many considered the moral degeneracy of the city to accessible but more rural areas like Enfield. By 1904, Stoke Newington, Islington and Kentish Town had been incorporated into metropolitan London and development had reached the edge of Hampstead. However, Tottenham, Muswell Hill and Hornsey were still separated from London by fields.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT 1840-1900

Population

Enfield's population grew comparatively slowly between 1801 (the first national census) and 1861. It was 5,881 in 1801, slightly larger than the population of nearby Edmonton, but considerably larger than that of the villages of Hornsey, Tottenham and Stoke Newington. By 1811 it had risen to 6,636. This was a smaller percentage increase since 1801 than that of the population of England and Wales, and Enfield's numbers continued to increase at a slower rate than that of the country as a whole until 1861, with the exception of 1811-1821. Thereafter, from 1861 to 1911, it grew more rapidly than the population as a whole – the percentage increase in Enfield climbing to six times the national figure for the period 1881 to

⁷ Michael Ann Mullen, 'The Changing Landscape and Gardens of Nineteenth Century Islington' (unpublished dissertation, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2007), p. 40.

1891.⁸ Moreover, Whitaker notes that, by 1875, ‘the proportion of the poorer classes [predominated] for the first time over the independent and the wealthy’ in Enfield.⁹

Transport

From its early history, Enfield Town was directly linked to London. It lay on an ancient Roman road that led from Cripplegate through Newington, Enfield and the Chase to Hertford.¹⁰ By 1823 a turnpike road linked Enfield to Shoreditch. ‘This road’, wrote William Robinson in 1823,

is well lighted, watched, and watered. The watch consists of both horse and foot patrol, and also of the Bow-street horse patrol, who communicate with the others at certain places, which renders travelling from London to Enfield very safe.¹¹

By 1832 there were four coaches a day from Enfield Town to London.¹² At this time, Mr Glover’s coaches, carrying ‘six insides’, which ran between Enfield Town and the Bank of England, provided the most convenient access. However, by 1849 Glover had closed shop -- put out of business by the GER.¹³



Fig. 2. Clarkson Stanfield, Greyhound Inn and Market Place, Enfield, 1827.

⁸ Whitaker, pp. 81 and n. 353-4; *VCH, Middlesex*, V, 218 and n. 64 (*Census*, 1801-1851). Additional population figures: 1921: 60,738; 1931: 67,752; 1941: no census because of the war; 1951: 110,465, *VCH Middlesex*, v, 224 and n. 89 (*Census*, 1851-1961).

⁹ Whitaker, p. 90.

¹⁰ In the 19th century, the main road from London to Hertford ran about a mile west of Enfield Town itself.

¹¹ W. Robinson, *The History and Antiquities of Enfield*, 2 vols., (London: John Nichols and Sons, 1823), I, 40.

¹² *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 211. The text continues: ‘In 1783, a coach called the Enfield Fly left Enfield for London on weekdays, returning in the afternoons, and by 1791, coaches ran twice daily to Holborn, Bishopsgate Street and Aldersgate Street.’

¹³ Whitaker, pp. 83-84.

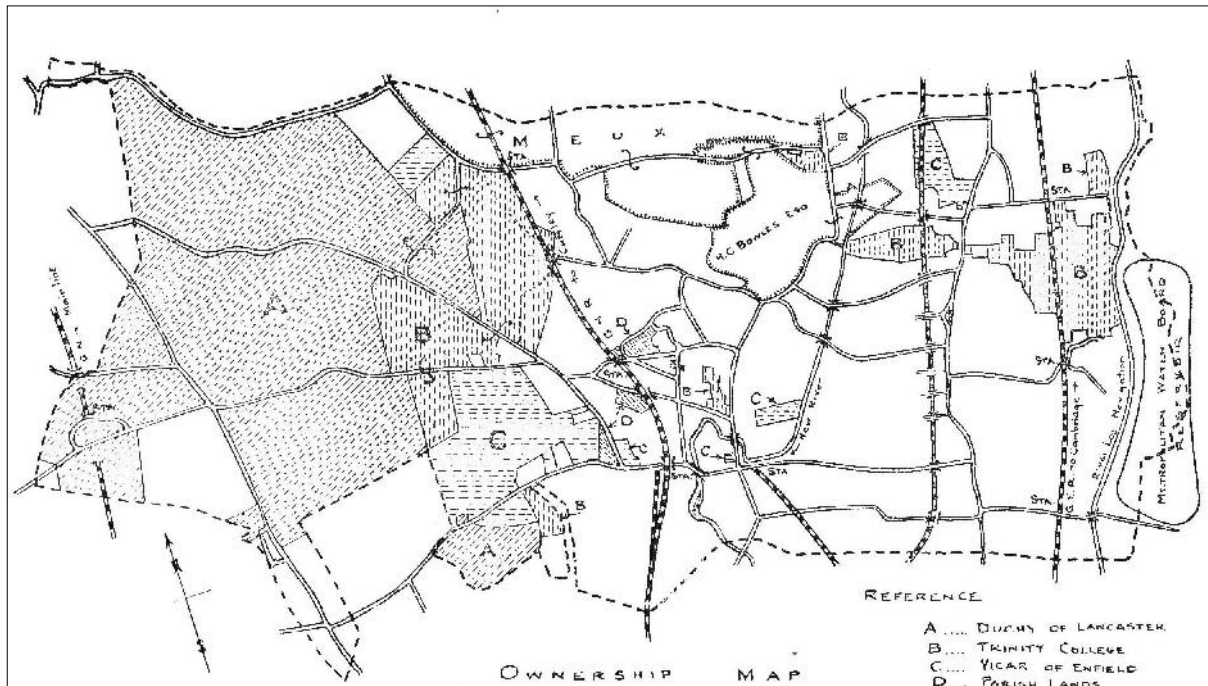


Fig. 3. Railways across Enfield Chase, 1911.

The railway, in fact, transformed Enfield’s relationship to London. It changed not only the speed of travel; it also provided a massive increase in transport capacity at a price affordable by an increasing number of people. The GER served Enfield Town and the more industrialised areas in the Lee valley to the east, and the GNR the western part of the parish. In 1840 the Northern & Eastern Railway (after 1862 part of the GER) opened the first section of the Cambridge main line from Stratford to Broxbourne. It passed some way to the east of Enfield Town with the closest station at Ponders End. Services were infrequent at first, before a branch line from Water Lane (later Angel Road) to Enfield Town opened in 1849.¹⁴ Years later Charles Plume, an Enfield resident, described the excitement when he almost saw the first train leave Enfield. ‘Only a little chap’ at the time, he ‘didn’t see the train, only the smoke – there was such a crowd of people who came from miles around to see the first train run.’¹⁵

¹⁴ Graham Dalling, *Enfield Past* (London: Historical Publications, 1999), pp. 47-8.

¹⁵ *Recollections of Old Enfield: Being Interviews with Old Inhabitants of the District reprinted from “The Enfield Observer”* (Enfield: Meyers, Brooks & Co., 1911), p. 11.



Fig. 4. The Old Enfield Town G. E. station, formerly a school.

In 1859 there were ten trains a day to and from Enfield Town, the journey to London taking forty-five minutes. On the Cambridge main line ten trains called at Ponders End daily going north and returning. The service to Enfield greatly improved after the opening in 1872 of a branch line via Bethnal Green to Lower Edmonton, where it joined the line to Enfield Town, and in 1874 the GER completed the expansion of Liverpool Street Station as its London terminus.¹⁶ Because this required extensive demolition of working class housing, the company was required by an act of Parliament to run working men's trains at the cheap fare of two pence return. The result, according to Dalling, was 'a working-class settlement up both sides of the Lee Valley'. Enfield felt the effect of this policy. 'On the Middlesex side the immigration concentrated on Tottenham, Edmonton and to a lesser extent, Enfield.' However, 'much working class housing still survives in the Bush Hill Park, Chase Side and Lancaster Road areas' of Enfield, and 'Chase Side clearly marks the boundary between GER [working class] and GNR [middle class] suburbia.'¹⁷

In 1850 the GNR, which eventually ran from King's Cross, built its main line north from London through the western section of Enfield parish, including parts of the former Chase, but bypassing Enfield town. There were no stations serving Enfield itself until a branch from Wood Green to what became Enfield Chase Station opened in 1871, the line

¹⁶ Dalling, *Southgate and Edmonton Past*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Dalling, *Enfield Past*, p. 96.

continuing to Cuffley in 1910.¹⁸ This stimulated the development of middle-class housing in Enfield: ‘the Great Northern ran few workmen’s trains on its suburban lines and clearly preferred to encourage first and second class season ticket holders’.¹⁹ Further west Hadley Wood Station on the existing main line was opened in 1885 to serve the new Hadley Wood estate. Twelve trains a day ran to London. So, by the mid-1880s, there were lines providing for both the east and the west sides of the former Chase. In 1933, these were joined by the Piccadilly Line extension that linked the parish of Enfield to the London Underground system.²⁰ Stations opened at Southgate, Oakwood (originally Enfield West) and Cockfosters. This precipitated a major development of suburban housing in the south-west of the former Chase that ended abruptly in 1939 when war was declared on Germany.



Fig. 5. Liverpool Street station: train to Enfield Town, 23 October 1884.

Development on and around Old Park and the Former Chase

Development east of Enfield Town came earlier than in the west, but even taking this into consideration, it is generally accepted that Enfield was more a Middlesex town than a London suburb until after World War One.²¹ The opening of GER stations at Water Lane and Ponders End in 1840 stimulated industrial growth in the Lee Valley. The area west of Enfield Town was dominated by the former Chase and developed slowly. Population growth in this area tended to be mainly middle class. It is this development that will be discussed here.

¹⁸ Further south, the effect of this line was ‘at first fairly limited’ as the two biggest landowners in the area around Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill refused to sell any land for development, operating ‘what was in effect a private green belt policy’ (Dalling, *Southgate and Edmonton Past*, p. 67).

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 212.

²¹ Dalling, *Enfield*, p. 106.

The Chase itself continued to resist development. Before it was divided in 1777 it was royal land and so sacrosanct, but ‘over the centuries householders had progressively encroached on the boundaries of the Chase on all sides’, nibbling away at land on the edges, being prosecuted, even imprisoned, and their homes and farm buildings torn down, only to be replaced by others, in a haphazard fashion.²² After division some landowners built estates on the Chase, among them Trent Park and Beech Hill Park.²³ Although trees were retained there, most of the rest of the Chase was cleared for agriculture. However, the soil was heavy clay and unsuitable for tilling. The land didn’t appeal to housing developers much either -- probably because it was remote from existing centres of population and the transport that served them.

Development on the edge of the former Chase began around Enfield Town; that is on its southern and eastern fringes, and was relatively small-scale till well into the 1880s. After Enfield Town station was opened in 1849 there were ‘several proposals for new housing’, but it proved difficult to attract residents.²⁴ The most successful was the National Freehold Land Company’s Enfield New Town. It was begun in 1852 on what had been market gardens west of London Road, and Charles Plume, interviewed around 1911, was still able to remember ‘when the “New Town” [...] was innocent of chimney pots and consisted of orchards and meadows’.²⁵ The names of Essex, Cecil, Raleigh, and Sydney roads were redolent of the area’s Elizabethan past. In 1854, ‘proposed prices ranged from £400 for detached houses in London Road to £100 for terraced cottages in Raleigh Road.’ After 1859 some purchasers of ‘first and second rate’ houses were attracted to the development by the offer of free season tickets to London, but despite this perk houses there were still under construction in 1874.²⁶ This estate lay in the former Old Park, previously the home park of Enfield manor house, just outside Chase land (see fig. 1).

Whitaker writes that by 1869, this and developments further east ‘appear to have whetted the appetite of the land speculator’ and by 1875 Enfield’s ‘constituent hamlets were rapidly becoming united by the continued erection of villas, cottages and terraced dwellings’. He reports that, between 1870 and 1880, ‘the craze [. . .] for changing the face of the land

²² David Pam, *The Story of Enfield Chase* (Enfield: Enfield Preservation Society, 1984), p. 135.

²³ Dalling, *Enfield*, p. 25. See also contribution by Sally Williams. Just outside the Chase further west were two other villas, Bohun Lodge and Little Grove. Bohun Lodge was on the site now occupied by Middlesex University’s Cat Hill campus and Little Grove was situated next door, immediately to the south of the campus. The landscape gardener Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown was commissioned to lay out the gardens of Little Grove between 1768 and 1770.

²⁴ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 218.

²⁵ *Recollections*, p. 10.

²⁶ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 219.

continued unabated'.²⁷ In 1871 Bush Hill Park, south of Enfield Town, was offered for sale. *The Victoria County History* relates how the land was 'advertised as suited for small houses and close to railway stations'. The developer, the Bush Hill Park Company, built detached houses west of Enfield Town railway line, 'many [. . .] gabled and tile hung, in large gardens along tree-lined streets'. East of the station terraces were built in straight lines. It is evident that the developer had in mind two sorts of buyers – working class for the east and middle class for the west of the estate. The opening of Bush Hill Park station in 1880 (GER) was a further impetus to growth in the area.²⁸

South of Windmill Hill, part of Chase Park Estate (first enclosed after the break-up of Old Park) was offered for sale in 1879 'as good building land' and was developed under the same name. The present Town Park covers the remaining area. By 1880 Shirley and Station roads, 'adjoining the G. N. R. (later Enfield Chase) station', had been divided into lots and were soon lined with terraces. After 1900 detached and semi-detached houses were built further south. The opening of the Grange Park Station (GNR) in 1910 stimulated further growth in the area.²⁹

Development along the Ridgeway, north-west of Enfield Town, and along Slades Hill to the west, began in earnest after Enfield Chase Station was opened by the GNR in 1871. By 1879 plans were afoot for the ambitious fifty-four-acre Bycullah Park housing estate on the Ridgeway. The houses were to be detached and semi-detached in two styles, one with Gothic porches, the other tile-hung and with mock timber framing. Potential buyers were told that care had been taken to preserve the trees and that the views were good. The houses eventually built were somewhat more modest than those envisaged in the early proposals, though in 1972 the area still preserved 'a distinct "garden suburb" appearance'. Building was completed in 1897. In fact, by that date north of Bycullah Park 'some of largest houses in the parish [. . .] lined the Ridgeway as far as the junction with Holtwhite's Hill'. In 1879, building land was advertised for sale on Slades Hill. By 1896 there were houses on nearby Uplands Park Road, and in Chase Ridings by the following year. At that time 'the demand for villas was said to be unlimited'.³⁰

²⁷ Whitaker, pp.90-1.

²⁸ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 219.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 219, 221.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 220-21.

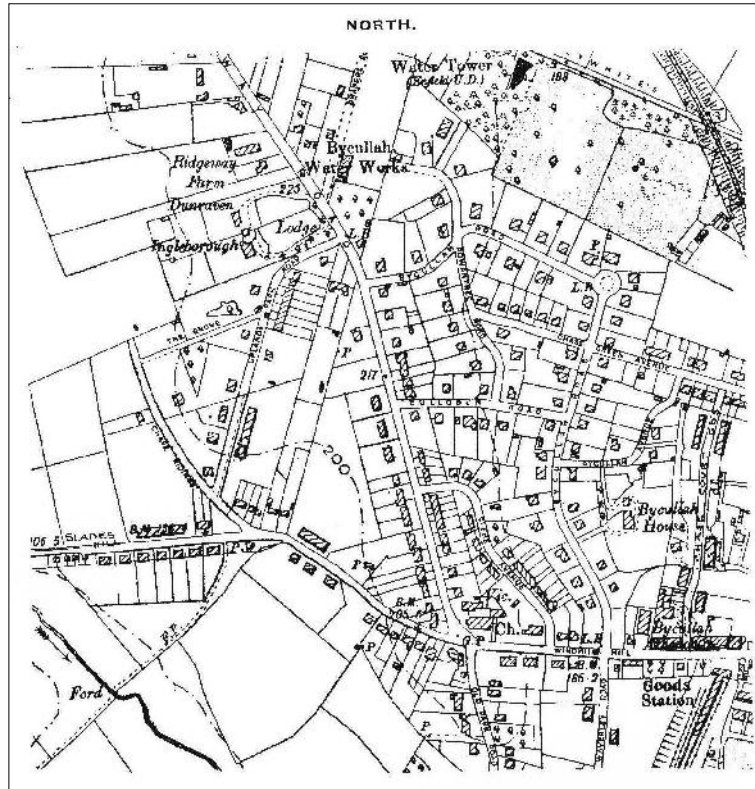


Fig. 6. The Bycullah Estate.



Fig. 7. Ten Bycullah Road: a good example of a large house on this estate.

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In 1911, Whitaker wrote that ‘the principal houses on the Chase [. . .] are situated on the three roads leading to East Barnet, Hadley and Potters Bar’.³¹ He described Cockfosters

³¹ Whitaker, p. 259. See also Whitaker’s discussion of these houses, pp. 260-72.

as a 'charming little village' and worried that the 1910 opening of the GNR branch line extension to Cuffley, with intermediate stations at Grange Park, Gordon Hill and Crews Hill, would lead to development on the Chase. He feared it would 'lose its rural aspect, after a century of cultivation, following upon several centuries of preservation for the chase', and would 'degenerate into "crescents," "avenues," and "parades."' ³² In fact, the provision of a GNR main line station at Hadley Wood in 1885 did stimulate development in the area. Charles Jack, the tenant of the nearby Beech Hill estate, had encouraged its opening. In anticipation, he leased land north of Camlet Way, and by 1888 had built fifteen large semi-detached houses on newly-laid-out Crescent East and was developing Crescent West. Lancaster Avenue, a link to Cockfosters Road further west, was laid out by 1901. As the *Victoria Country History* describes it, 'in 1914 there were about 100 houses in the area, including some along Camlet Way itself.' However, an 1899 plan to build on Beech Hill Park to the south came to nothing. The quite isolated Hadley Wood suburb that had developed around the station remained 'separated by open country from more populous suburbs' until after World War Two.³³

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Between 1900 and 1912 substantial development continued around Enfield Town on the southeast side of the former Chase. Southwest of the town, Grange Park station, opened by the GNR in 1910, encouraged building.³⁴ Development stopped, however, during the First World War and only started again slowly in the 1920s: the nearby Uplands estate was not built until after 1933.³⁵ Further west, 'by 1929 there were houses, mainly detached, in Wagon Road, as well as along Cockfosters Road on the edge of the Beech Hill estate'; by 1939 there were around three hundred houses in this area.³⁶

In the 1930s a national housing boom led to substantial new building in Enfield. Legislation subsidizing private house-building, cheap land and easier mortgages resulted in almost three million new homes nationally. The growth of relatively well-paid service and administrative jobs combined with falling costs of living and low taxation gave middle class

³² Whitaker, p. 272.

³³ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 221.

³⁴ In 1935-40, as part of the 'New Works Programme', this became part of London Underground's Central Line.

³⁵ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 223.

³⁶ *ibid.*

people more purchasing power. In addition, building societies reduced interest rates in 1932 and were prepared to provide up to ninety-five per cent mortgages, some for as long as thirty years.³⁷

Suburban housing spread over the south-west of the former Chase between 1934 and 1939. The extension of the Piccadilly Underground Line to Cockfosters in 1933 provided a catalyst to development in this area. In fact, 'suburban building in the former Chase during the 1930s was limited to its southern fringe [including the Oakwood to Southgate area], to Hadley Wood, and a small estate of 102 houses at Crews Hill³⁸ built after 1931, while elsewhere farmland survived'.³⁹ The development of the South Lodge estate near Oakwood station (1935-39) by John Laing & Co. is the subject of another paper.

Housing was not the only development on the former Chase, however: extensive tracts given over to golf courses helped to keep the land open. In 1920 most of Beech Hill Park was developed in this way. Large areas 'were acquired for golf courses after World War I, including those at Crews Hill, bought [. . .] after 1915, and others at Bush Hill Park and on the Old Park estate'.⁴⁰ By 1934 Middlesex County Council had proposed a North Middlesex 'green girdle', to include the Crews Hill course, the Trent Park and Beech Hill estates and a substantial area of farmland southwest of the Ridgeway. These open spaces, with other portions of the former Chase, became part of London's Green Belt in 1947.⁴¹ In 1936 Middlesex County Council also bought the bulk of the Duchy of Lancaster's estates in the parish (some 2,000 acres) to add to it (fig. 18). Other rural areas, notably the Whitewebbs and Forty Hall estates, which lay on the east side of the former Chase, were acquired as parks after the Second World War, as was Trent Park. Since then development has been restricted by Green Belt legislation.⁴²

³⁷ David Pam, *A History of Enfield*, 3 vols, III, *A Desirable Neighbourhood, 1914-1939* (Enfield: Enfield Preservation Society, 1992), p.107.

³⁸ In the north of the former Chase.

³⁹ *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 223.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ The Greater London Regional Planning Committee proposed a metropolitan green belt around London in 1935. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 allowed local authorities to include green belt proposals in their development plans. In 1955, Minister of Housing Duncan Sandys encouraged local authorities to consider protecting land around their towns and cities by the designation of clearly defined green belts.

⁴² *VCH, Middlesex*, v, 223.

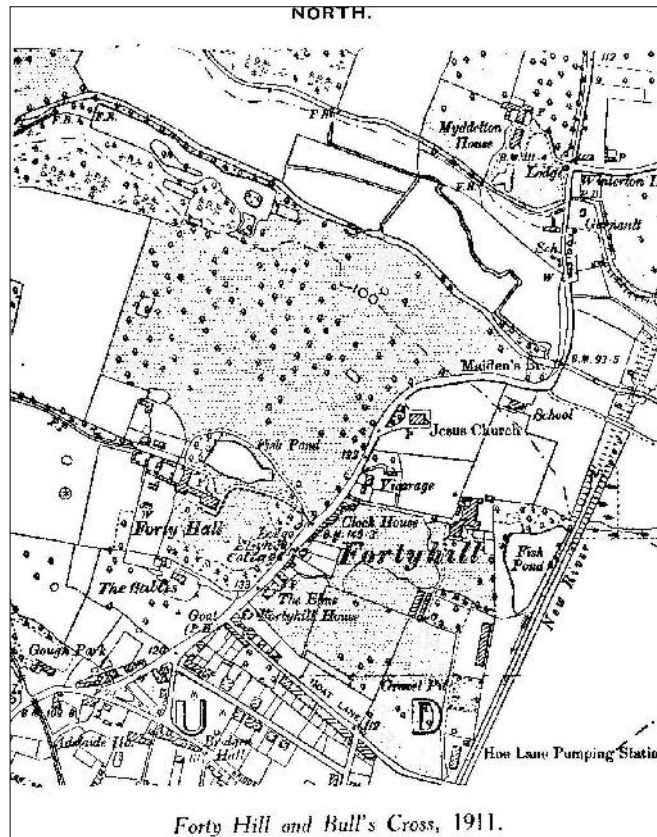


Fig. 8. Open space on Forty Hill later preserved as Green Belt land

CONCLUSION

Over six centuries of royal control protected Enfield Chase from development. During the nineteenth century its remoteness acted as a disincentive to suburban developers who had started to operate in the area, and it was not until the 1930s, with better transport connections, that housing developments covered the south-west corner of the Chase. By then measures were being enacted to include the rest of it in the Green Belt around London, which prevented further housing being built.

The landscape of the former Enfield Chase

can be seen as the outcome of almost two hundred years of public debate, government reports and legislation about the importance of open spaces in modern life. These include the 1833 Report by the Select Committee on Public Walks, the formation of the Open Spaces Society in 1865, the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association in 1877, the 1919 Housing Act, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, and more

recent concerns about biodiversity. The quality suburbs [and the numerous public parks and open spaces] on the former Chase are the result of numerous initiatives aimed at both controlling living densities and resisting the suburbs' encroachment into the surrounding countryside.⁴³



Fig. 9. Enfield Chase: view from Cuckold's Hill on the Ridgeway.

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⁴³ Elizabeth Lebas, text accompanying exhibition 'The Suburban Landscape: Two Hundred Years of Gardens and Gardening', Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA), Middlesex University, Cat Hill, Barnet, June 2007-March 2008.