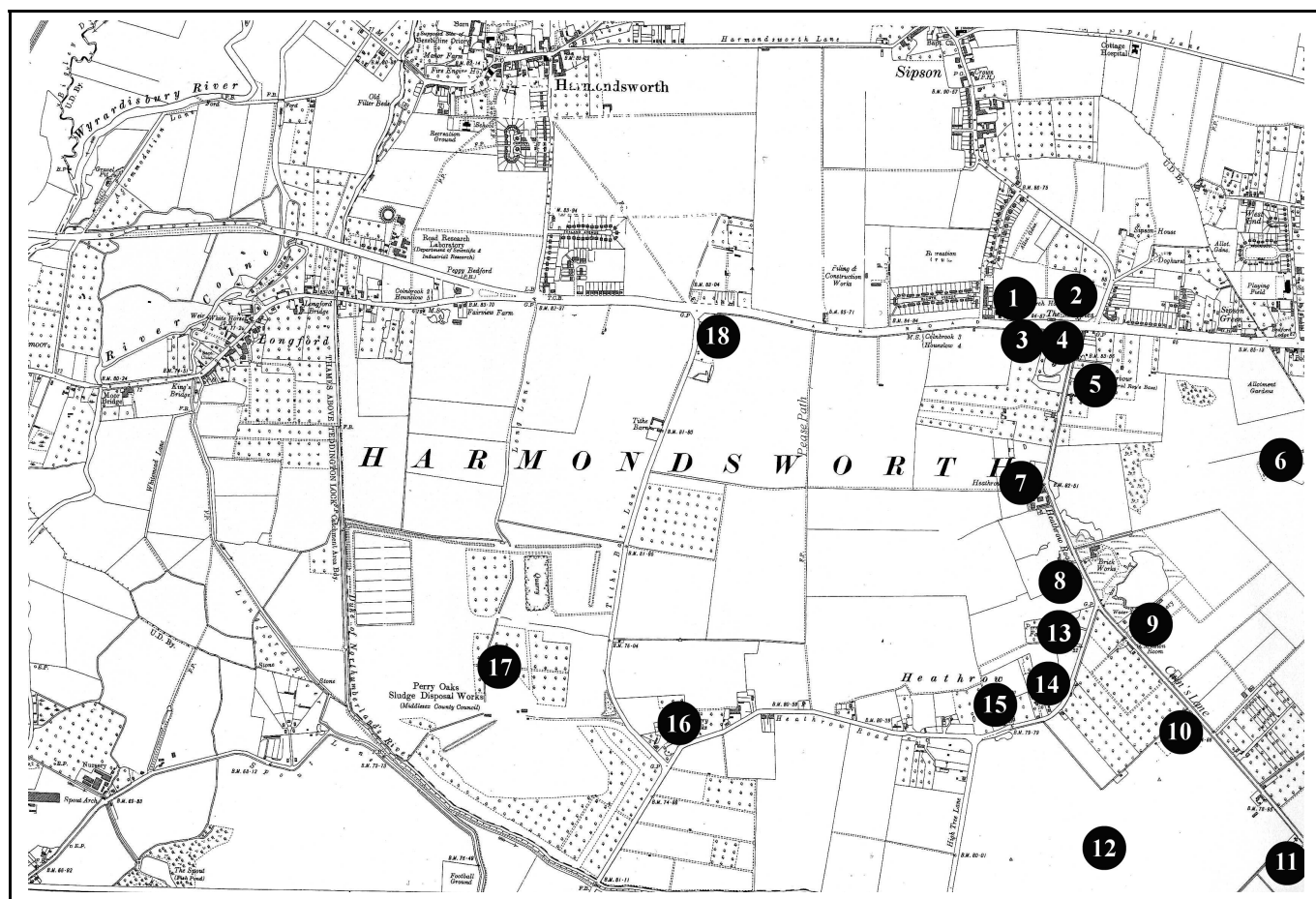


HEATHROW – THE LOST HAMLET

By

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Heathrow – Principal Features in 1935

1. Sipson and Heathrow School;
2. St.Saviour's Church;
3. Old Magpies;
4. Three Magpies
5. Cannon;
6. "Caesar's" Camp;
7. Heathrow Hall;
8. Palmer's Farm;
9. Wild's Fam
10. Fairey Hangar;
11. Cain's Farm;
12. Great West Aerodrome;
13. Perrott's Farm
14. Plough and Harrow;
15. Heathrow Farm;
- 16 Perry Oaks Farm;
17. Perry Oaks Sludge Works
18. Shepherd's Pool

Before it was destroyed in 1944 Heathrow it was the most remote and rural of the villages and hamlets that make up the parish of Harmondsworth. Little modern development had occurred and a third of the 28 buildings in Harmondsworth parish listed by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments were in Heathrow even although it was by far the smallest hamlet.

The settlement of Heathrow was spread out in a straggling manner on the west side of Heathrow Road from the Bath Road to Perry Oaks. Perry Oaks itself could almost be regarded as separate from Heathrow and it had direct access from the Bath Road via Tithe Barn Lane. The area bounded by Heathrow Road, Tithe Barn Lane and the Bath Road was, before the Enclosure of Harmondsworth Parish in 1819, one of the open fields of the parish and was known as Heathrow Field. The area to the south and east of Heathrow Road was common land of the parish and formed the western edge of Hounslow Heath. Heathrow, as its name suggests, was on the edge of the Heath bordered by the open arable fields of Harmondsworth Parish. It was not in the centre of a blasted uninhabited heath as the aviation mafia is apt to suggest when seeking justification for its destruction to make way for the airport.



“The Three Magpies” in 1926

Although most of the agricultural land in West Middlesex was in use for market gardening, mixed farming was also practised at Heathrow itself. This made it more attractive than the rest of the locality as mixed farming, unlike market gardening, could in the 1930's exist quite happily with trees and hedgerows. The presence of numerous ponds and historic farmhouses added to its attractions. Gordon Maxwell in “Highwaymen’s Heath” published in 1935 well described its general character thus:

“If you turn down from the Bath Road by the “Three Magpies” you will come upon a road that is as rural as anywhere in England. It is not, perhaps, scenically wonderful but for detachment from London or any urban interests it would be hard to find its equal; there is a calmness and serenity about it that is soothing in a mad rushing world”.

It is impossible now to imagine the general tranquillity of the area as described by Maxwell and which John Keats, speaking of another part of Middlesex, likened to a *“Little noiseless noise among the leaves, Born of the very sigh that silence heaves”*. Nor is it possible to reveal the appearance of the hedgerows and verges which also added much to the rural scene. A description by Tony Harman of the hedgerows of Buckinghamshire in the 1920's and 1930's (“The Guardian 6th July 1989) could well have been written of Heathrow:

“Early in the spring big white patches of blackthorn appeared, associated in people's minds with a cold snap, the so-called blackthorn winter; a false assumption though. Soon after came the may on the hawthorn trees. Not long after the last hawthorn petals had fallen, the hedges were festooned with honeysuckle and that lasted a long time, overlapping the season where there were wild roses everywhere, some pink some white.

“As soon as the roses had gone, bramble flowers were hanging off the branches. By September there were big dark purplish-blue sloes where the blackthorn had been, and blackberries where the bramble flowers were. And everywhere else red berries on the May trees (haws - but known as agars to the children of the Heathrow area); big bright red berries where the roses had been (hips); and round, red berries of innumerable plants one had hardly noticed before.

“Over it all were great drifts of what looked almost like human hair - Old Man's Beard. Its flowers had been green and inconspicuous, but you notice it in the winter all right, big strands and tresses of it.”

Tony Harman does not mention the roadside verges but at Heathrow along the roads at Heathrow there was a drainage ditch under the hedge and then a wide verge, both of which were rich in wild flowers such as red and white campion, ragged robin, harebells, ox-eye daisies with willow herb and yellow iris beside the ponds.



“The Old Magpies” 1935, demolished 1951

Until 1944 a traveller following Maxwell’s route and standing outside the “Three Magpies” would have seen an even older inn, half-timbered and with a thatched roof that stood only 100 yards to the west. This was the “Old Magpies” (No. 3 on map) almost opposite which was Sipson and Heathrow school (No. 1), opened on the Bath Road in 1877. Almost opposite the “Three Magpies” was St. Saviour’s Church (No. 2) opened in 1880 and now the site of the Heathrow Park Hotel. If he had then turned down Heathrow Road from the "Three Magpies" (No.4) he would have passed a row of houses (Doghurst Cottages) on the left, but after these the only buildings that would then be encountered were isolated farmhouses and cottages. The first farmhouse along the road was a rather undistinguished one on the left known as "Bathurst". In an orchard near to this house was a small fenced enclosure containing the barrel of the cannon marking the end of General Roy's baseline which was measured across Hounslow Heath in 1784 (5).

A little further along on the right-hand side of the road was one of the largest farmhouses; known as "Heathrow Hall" (6) it was an attractive 18th century building occupied by one of the several branches of the Philp family who farmed extensively in the area. The farmhouse adjoined a typical English farmyard with sheep, pigs and cattle and many old barns. Almost opposite "Heathrow Hall" on the left side of the road was a large pond which had probably started life as a gravel pit to obtain roadmaking material. This pond was surrounded by trees and reeds and had a rich variety of wildlife including kingfishers looking for fish in the pond.

About a quarter of a mile past the pond just after passing Palmer's Farm, an early 17th century farmhouse on the right, the road forked at Wheatcut Corner. The road to the left, known as Cain's Lane, (Isaac Cane owned land on one side of the lane in 1819 - hence its name) led to East Bedfont and was dead straight, having been laid out across the Common by the Enclosure Commissioners in 1819. On the east side of the lane were two modern farmhouses – Shrub End and Croft House - belonging to John Wild senior and his two sons David and John junior whose family had farmed in the parish for more than three hundred years.



Heathrow Hall in 1935



Demolition of Heathrow Hall 1944

On a corner of their farm and adjoining the road was a corrugated iron mission hall which had been erected in 1901. This belonged to the Baptist Church at Sipson and was the only "church" in Heathrow, although there had been earlier churches at Heathrow belonging to non-conformist sects.



Shrub End, Cains Lane, Heathrow 1943 (W.Wild)

David Wild standing with his wife Naomi, children Elizabeth and James with their nurse.

The family was evicted in 1944 and their house demolished

The Fairey airfield, opened in 1929, was a little further along on the west side of the lane opposite yet another modern farmhouse occupied by F.W. Longhurst. Cain's Lane then continued until it was crossed in

about half a mile by the Great South West Road, which had been constructed as a by-pass to the old Staines Road in 1930. The part of Cain's Lane beyond the Great South West Road was outside the boundaries of the airport and a small length of its south-east end still exists which until recent boundary changes was an incongruous part of the Borough of Hillingdon, completely cut off from the remainder of the Borough by the airport.



Surviving remnant of Cains Lane 2005

Coming back to the point at which Cain's Lane left Heathrow Road the road, which had been running roughly in a north-south direction, gradually swung round into an east-west alignment. About 200 yards along the road from its junction with Cain's Lane and on its north side was Heathrow's only public house, the "Plough and Harrow". a small building of no great distinction dating from the mid-19th century (No. 7) Soon after passing the "Plough and Harrow" was a T-junction where High Tree Lane branched off to the left. This was another of the Enclosure Commissioners roads leading in a straight line to West Bedfont.



The "Plough and Harrow", Heathrow c.1930. Demolished 1944

Half a mile along High Tree Lane at a fork marked on maps as "Goathouse Tree Ford" the road crossed the Duke of Northumberland's river. This is a man-made channel having been constructed in the mid 16th century to increase the water driving Isleworth Mill and to provide water to Syon House. It runs from the Colne at West Drayton, by way of Longford, Heathrow and Bedfont, to join the Crane for a short distance at Baber Bridge before proceeding on its own course to Isleworth. When construction of the airport began in 1944 it was diverted to a more southerly route for about two miles of its length, but until a boundary change in the mid 1990s, the route of its former channel formed the southern boundary of Harmondsworth parish and hence of the Borough of Hillingdon.

Goathouse Tree Ford was seldom, if ever, referred to as such and the area of the ford was known locally as High Tree River. It was a local beauty spot, popular for picnics, where children could safely paddle in the water and fish for "tiddlers". Although the very occasional traffic had to use the ford there was a footbridge high above the river, (the river had rather high banks, probably a result of the deposition of spoil during its construction). The banks were well-wooded and on the south side was a riverside walk to Longford, about two miles away.

Coming back along High Tree Lane to rejoin Heathrow Road and almost opposite the junction were two cottages, laying back from the road, besides which was the entrance to "Pease Path", a public footpath running across the fields in a northerly direction to join the Bath Road at a point between the Technicolor and Penguin Book factories, both of which had been built on the north side of the road in the late 1930's.

About another ¼-mile along the Heathrow Road, in an area of Heathrow known as Perry Oaks, the road forked again, the left fork, known as Oaks Road, led to Stanwell village. The right fork, known as Tithe Barn Lane, proceeded in a northerly direction to rejoin the Bath Road midway between the "Three Magpies" and the "Peggy Bedford".



Perry Oaks Farm, Heathrow 1935. Demolished 1948

Just before the road forked and on its northern side, stood Perry Oaks Farm (No. 8), a most handsome red-brick Elizabethan farmhouse occupied by S. Whittington, a member of another old farming family in the locality. This farm had some very fine old barns, a dovecote and a duck-pond and was, without question, the best of the many farmsteads of Heathrow. Just past the farmhouse on the west side of Tithe Barn Lane was the Perry Oaks Sludge Works (No. 9) opened in 1936 by Middlesex County Council. This was nowhere near as bad as it sounds being some 200 acres of land occupied by lagoons in which the sludge was allowed to settle under gravity. Before the lagoons were destroyed in the late 1990s to make way for a fifth terminal at Heathrow the sludge works had become a site of some scientific importance because of the large number of wading birds attracted to the lagoons.

Tithe Barn Lane got its name from a barn half-way along its western side that was reputedly a reconstruction of a northern wing of the Great Barn of Harmondsworth. It is doubtful if, in fact, the Great Barn ever had a northern wing, but the story of the wing being dismantled and being re-erected in Tithe Barn Lane is often quoted. The area at the junction of Tithe Barn Lane and the main road was known as

"Shepherd's Pool" (No. 10), the pool being a large pond completely surrounded by trees. It had probably started life as a gravel pit but had become completely naturalised over 150 years when its name was recorded on the Enclosure Map.



Shepherd's Pool, Heathrow 1927

The development of the airport meant the complete destruction of Heathrow, most of Hatton and those parts of Harlington and Harmondsworth that lay to the south of the Bath Road. The feelings of the residents of Heathrow who were ruthlessly evicted from their homes are well summed-up by the poem written by John Wild whose family had farmed in the area for over 300 years. It would win no prizes for poetry but the sadness and sense of great loss are unmistakable.

LAMENT FOR HEATHROW 1944

We shall remember thee in days to come
Before the ruthless hand of man had spoiled
When sweet peace lingered on thy country brow,
The day when sound of plover lulled thee,
The night when screech owl loved thy lonely shade
We shall remember thee although the time
Of visitation great had come!
No longer is there peace within thy gates
That peace which was thy birthright. Now they come
They strip the wealth and riches from the soil
Although most fertile land in all the south,
But now the tyrant's hand has claimed thee,
Cruel progress could not pass unheeding by.
Soon will be nought to mark thy hedges trim-
No hedge, no tree, no wayside flowerets fair-
Naught that is lovely left. Oh woe the day!
Long years have passed since Rome raised camp on thee,
And yet they passed and left thee undisturbed
Hadst thou a voice couldst tell us of thy past,
But now men want to rob of all thy grace
Full comely thou dost seem as we must go
And so "Goodbye" – a long last farewell.
For some short time the larks may still come home-
The weasel, mole and field mouse tunnel round;
Yet as the circling days go swiftly by
Soon will be gone all traces of the past
Save in our memories fond – we still
Remember Heathrow.

John Wild 1944