

PARK HISTORY

The first identifiable owner, in the 1550's, was John Broomfield, a leather merchant, after whom we assume the house was named. The name "Broomfield" has its origins in the old word "bromfield", which meant a field of long grass that provided hay and grazing. Geoffrey Walkenden acquired the Broomfield estate in 1566. He was Master of the Skinners' Company trading in furs, notably with Muscovy.



Sir John Spencer owned the estate after Walkenden's death in 1599. He was a Master of the Clothiers' Company, Lord Mayor of London in 1594-95, and reputedly the richest man England, partly from trade with the Ottoman Empire and the Levant. He had a colourful life, the subject of a failed kidnap attempt by Dutch pirates, and imprisonment for cruelty in the Fleet prison when he forbade his daughter to marry one of Elizabeth I's courtiers, Lord Compton. Sir John and his wife died within a few months of each other in 1610 without a will in 1610, leaving his personal and business affairs in disarray. His impressive memorial tomb (below) is in St Helens Broadgate. This was paid for by the by then enriched Lord Compton.



Joseph Jackson, who had been Spencer's apprentice, took control of his business, perhaps because he was the only one able to get to grips with the situation. In 1605 he had become a member of the Spanish Company set up to control trade with Spain and Portugal. In 1623 he followed Spencer in becoming a Master of the Clothworkers' Company.

The Jackson family owned Broomfield until it passed to the Lybbe Powys family in 1816. It was during the ownership of Mrs Judith Jackson in 1726 that the hall, impressive staircase and the Lanscroun Murals were added.



The Powys-Lybbe family let the house to a succession of tenants from 1838, the last being Sir Ralph Littler, Chairman of Middlesex County Council. He ensured the 1881 separation of Southgate from Edmonton. Littler gave up Broomfield House in 1901 and there was a risk that it would be bought for housing development. After some hesitation, Southgate Urban District Council bought the House and 54 acres for £25,000 in 1902. This was initially paid for by W M Ellenor the Clerk to the Council, who was subsequently reimbursed by the Council. The remainder of the estate was sold to builders for development.

The Park opened to the public on 25 April 1903.



There were many plans to add to the park. The most ambitious was this major reworking proposed by the internationally renowned landscape architect Thomas Mawson in 1905.

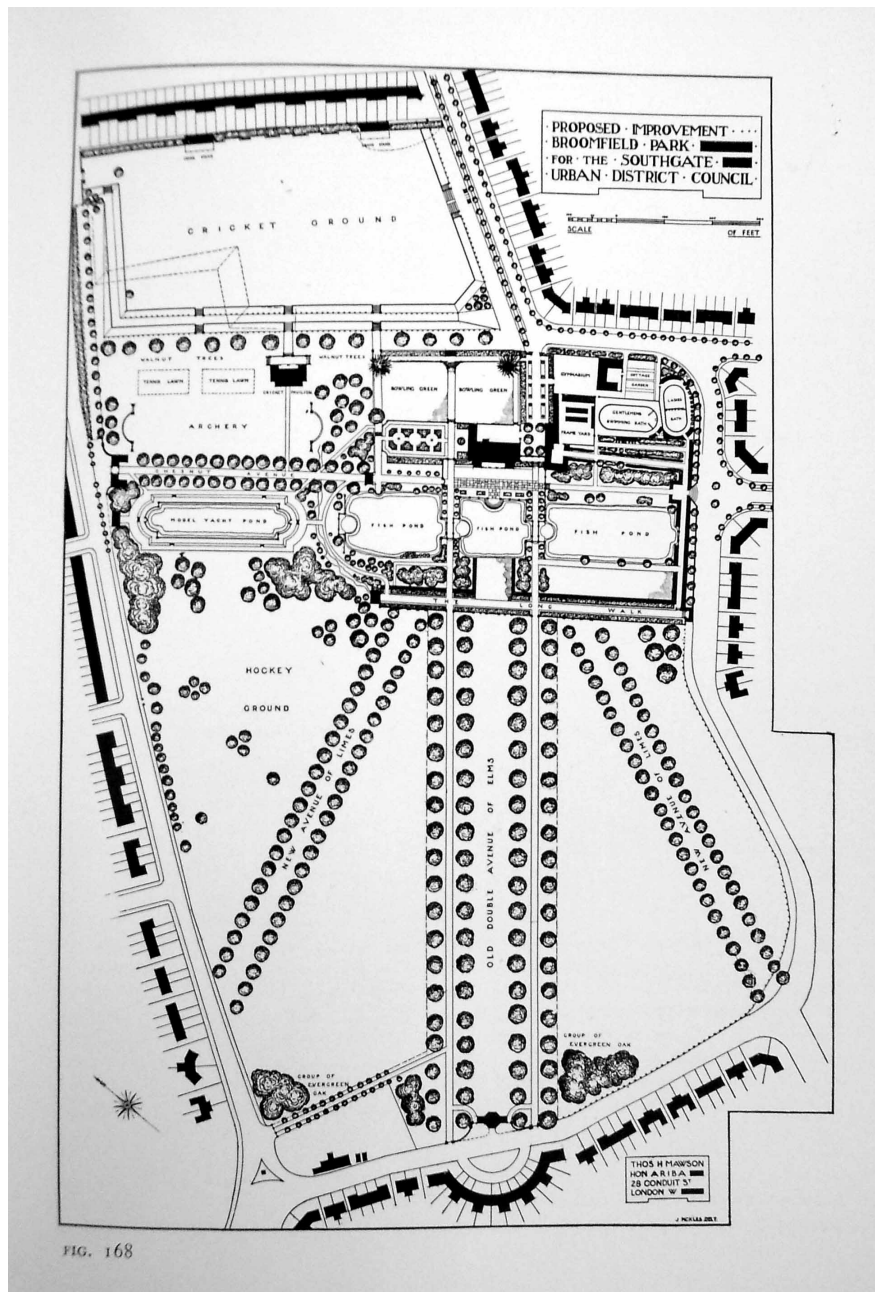


FIG. 168

This scheme was not judged affordable and only minor work to the existing lay out was carried out. The first priority was work on the cricket pitches then drainage in the large park. The Clerk was instructed to write to Wood Green council to explore the idea of joint funding the swimming baths. In spite of this and further meetings with Mawson none of his grand scheme was implemented.

This was not the last scheme for improvement which stayed on the drawing board. The most potentially exciting was for an large art deco style sports pavilion to be built above sports field. The plans for this are held in the Local Studies centre in Dugdale House.

The Village Gates

In 1903, Councillor Corke bought the iron gates which had stood at the corner of what is now Aldermans Hill and Old Park Road first as the entrance to the Old Park Estate and then the enlarged Grovelands estate, and offered them to the council to be erected at the park

entrance at the top of Aldermans Hill. This offer was accepted and they were hung on imposing stone pillars. The main gates appear to have been removed for “salvage” in WW II, but the rest remained until demolished in 1953.



Swimming in the Park

Between 1903 and 1912 the lower lake was used for swimming and bathing. Closing the lakes gave rise to great popular discontent, but the risk of disease from pollution as the area around the park was built up gave the council no alternative. A new settling pond was installed to the north west of the northern pond helped with pollution and between 1920 and 1933 swimming resumed, until once again health risks led to swimming finally being banned as a new pool in Barrowell Green was opened. The park lake was the original home of the Broomfield Park Swimming Club, which held regular competitions here and which is still very active.



The Park in War

From 1914 to 1925 there was a rifle club in the park, with a shooting range to the east of the lower pond.

Prior to WW II, underground air raid shelters, now filled in, were built above the sports field parallel with Aldermans Hill and an ARP Decontamination shelter was built which still stands to the west of the sports field. It was later converted as changing rooms and showers for those using the sports field.

Many patriotic displays were mounted in the park, for example civil defence exercises and gymnastic displays as well as exhibitions of military equipment.

Extensive areas of the open grassland, in the south east and north west was put down to allotments in WWII. Bombs fell in a number of places in the park, shattering trees and damaging the bowling pavilion, but the effects on shops on Aldermans Hill and houses at the north end of Broomfield Lane were of greater significance.



Sports Field

This area was probably originally a rabbit warren, managed to provide food for the House. It was dug out in the 19th centuries perhaps too provide gravel for the construction of the New River viaduct over the Pymmes Brook and to upgrade Green Lanes from a grass track into a road usable by wagons and carriages. By 1905 it had been levelled and grassed to provide cricket and football pitches. Residents of Broomfield Avenue complained that the original gravel heaps gave views into their properties, and when they were levelled, that cricket balls put them at risk in their gardens.

An athletics track was laid out, traces of which can be seen in dry weather. It was a base for the Southgate & Wood Green Sports Association, then the Southgate Harriers, a club formed in 1932, and was used for Middlesex AAA championships. In 1974, Southgate AC moved its HQ from Broomfield Park to White Hart Lane Community Sports Centre and adopted the title Haringey & Southgate AC which was later shortened to Haringey AC. A film of the track in use can be found at

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-southgates-new-running-track-broomfield-park-1930s-1950-online>

The sports field was one of the main sites for the amazing 1953 Coronation Celebrations which can be viewed at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-southgate-celebrates-the-coronation-of-queen-elizabeth-ii-southgate-1953-1953>

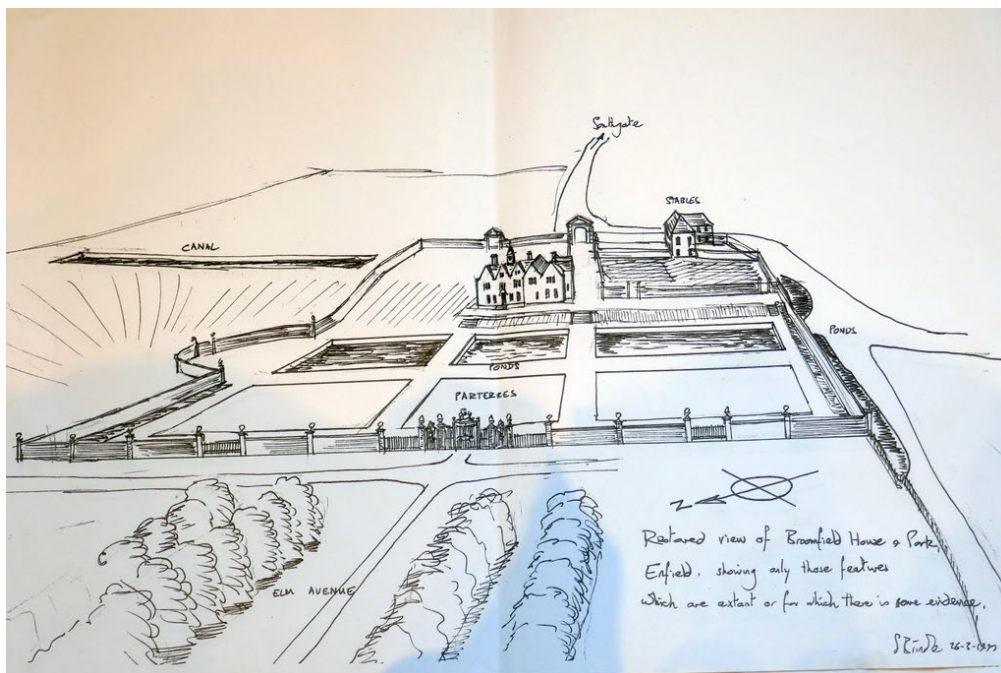
Bowling, Croquet and Quoites

The bowling greens were laid in 1921 and along with a croquet club, and opened by Lord Inverforth in 1923. There were two bowling and a croquet lawn. Very popular for many years, declining membership and the high costs of lawn maintenance led to the closure of the club in 2012.

Although little is recorded about it, there is a reference in council minutes in 1905 for a Quoites club being allowed to use pitches to the north of the sports field

Historic Walls

These Grade II listed walls, enclosing the 6 acre ornamental garden, date back in parts to the time of Henry VII and elsewhere to the 17th and 18th century. A sketch of their complete state is below



Bandstand

The bandstand was built in 1927 and in the past was regularly used by local brass bands. The area around it was known as the Concert Green and was used for dancing, chess and whist. During the 1920s there was a small stage at the southern end of the lawn, and the late 1920s it was licensed to the "All Bubby Concert Party" whose performances were watched by over 9000 paying customers in their 1928 season. The highlight of its current use is the Blues Festival which runs on Sundays in August.

Memorials

In addition to the Remembrance Garden there are a variety of memorials in Broomfield Park.

There are numerous memorial plaques at the base of trees and on benches many paid for by residents in memory of people who loved the park. Others commemorate prominent individuals such as Sir Anthony Berry, MP for Southgate for 20 years until murdered in the IRA bombing of the Grand Hotel Brighton in 1984.

There are two memorials reflecting on the opening of the park as a public asset in 1903. The first is the sadly neglected stone shell in the border by the main arched gateway engraved with the names of councillors at that time. Currently proposals are being considered about how best to restore and preserve it. The second is a black mulberry tree planted by local historian and champion of a Broomfield museum, Peter Brown, in 2003 to mark the centenary of the opening. This tree, planted outside the ladies toilets, as close to Broomfield House as was possible, links with the silk trade which was part of the basis of Sir John Spencer's fortune. Black mulberry leaves are eaten by the silk worm whose cocoon is the source of silk thread, unlike the white mulberry extensively planted elsewhere in the mistaken belief that this would be the basis of an English silk industry

Some memorials are for groups. The largest is the grove of silver birch planted in 1983 by the Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits as a memorial to the struggle of the Jews in the Soviet Union. The commemorative plaque it notes is no longer in place.

The other significant memorial is the Dipali memorial garden and sports facility by the netball courts recording the tragic deaths of the five members of the Miah family in a fire in their flat above the Dipali Restaurant in Alderman's Hill in 1997

One memorial commemorates the planting of a jasmine at the southern end of the main border by the Enfield branch of Amnesty to Aung San Suu Kyi, then under prolonged house arrest by the Burmese/Myanmar authorities.