

The Oaks: a rather splendid house where was it and what happened to it?

by Eileen M. Bowlt

Before the First World War, a house and a short road in the centre of the village of Ruislip were both called The Oaks. The road still exists and there is a bus stop called The Oaks, but the house has disappeared, leaving not a rack behind. In this article I have brought together such scraps of information as I have been able to discover about its relatively short life. I regard The Oaks as something of a mystery because the late Ian Tait frequently referred to the house when showing old postcards and photographs of the High Street. 'Its just behind those trees' he would say pointing casually at the centre of the picture, leaving me completely in the dark as to its exact position. Both road and house were connected with the Park House Estate.

A note on the Park House Estate

Harry Edgell Esq, a barrister-at-law, created the estate piecemeal between 1790-1827 around an old house that had stood on the High Street from at least the 16th century.¹ The estate was surrounded by the High Street, Sharps Lane and Ickenham Road. Access was from a lodge on the corner of Ickenham Road and the High Street. The house still stands behind Nos 23-27 High Street.

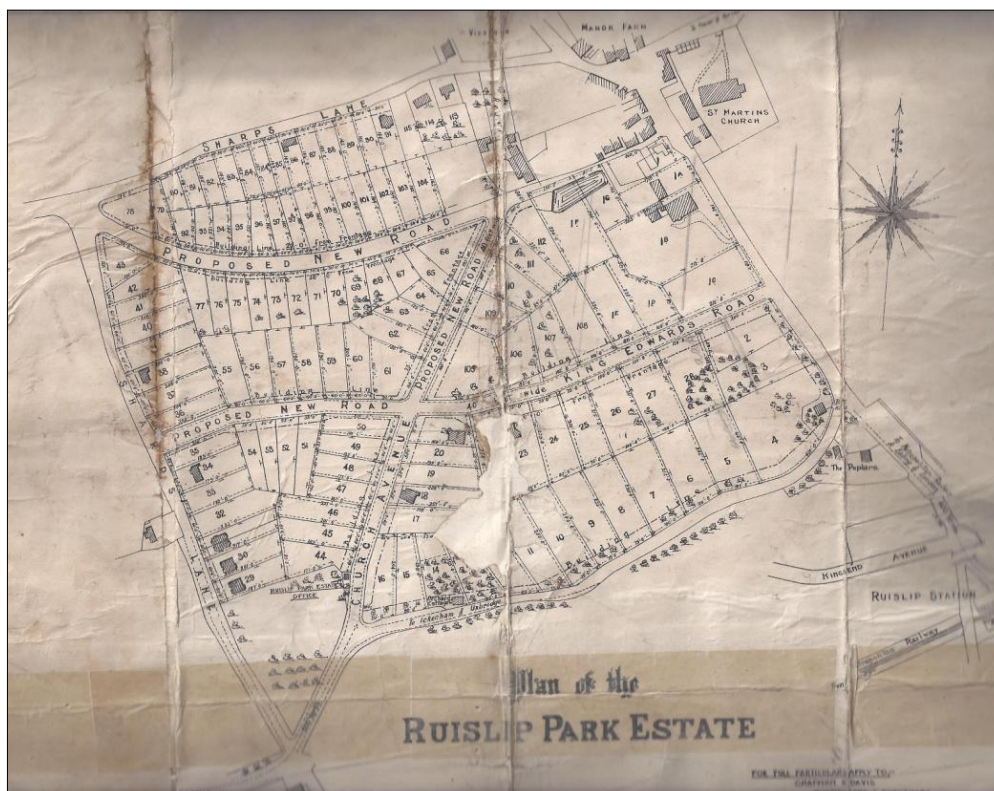
The Road

A sign near Café Rouge at The Swan points to 'The Oaks leading to Manor Road'. The road from the High Street as far as Church Avenue is called The Oaks and beyond that point, as the sign says, becomes Manor Road. The Oaks led from the High Street into the Park House Estate and its short length was terminated by a fence with a stile that gave access to two footpaths, one leading to Little King's End (the bend in Sharps Lane) and the other, called Church Path, as it provided a short cut across the Park from Great King's End to St Martin's Church.

After the Park was first divided into building plots in the summer of 1906, the paths became Manor Road and Church Avenue respectively. The Oaks was an old way previously known as Park Lane or Swan Alley, depending perhaps, upon whether you were on visiting terms with the gentry at Park House, or were more familiar with the Tap Room at The Swan.



**View of the narrow road called The Oaks.
The Swan is on the right and the Old Post Office (Gooderson's Shop) on the left
is being demolished prior to the road being widened in 1930.**



View down The Oaks towards the High Street.
The wall of the Park Estate on the right,
deprived the families living in the mid-Victorian
cottages opposite of both light and view

The House

On the Park Estate Plan, shown above, that accompanied the first auction, Lot No 1 at the NE corner of the estate, comprised Park House itself, which had been renamed The Manor House (to the intense annoyance of the Provost of King's College), two cottages and a shop (occupied as the post office) opposite The Swan, and one of the features of the parkland, an 'ornamental water' of substantial size. Bidding had apparently not been brisk and a slightly later map shows Lot 1 divided into smaller plots.

A newspaperⁱⁱ account of the second auction sale in July 1906 states that the police authorities wished to obtain premises and were probably the purchasers of the post office and cottages, which were knocked down at £840. This was indeed the case, although the new police station was not built until 1961 and then on a slightly different site. Generally interest was low, with many plots being passed over altogether and the auctioneer refused to let 'The Manor House' go for £1,125, being unwilling to sacrifice 'this fine old building at this figure' having no doubt that it would be sold in the course of a few days. The Manor House (the name persisted into the 1930s) ended up with one acre of land. An adjoining oddly shaped piece of land that included the lake became the site of The Oaks house.



**Mrs Gooderson's shop (formerly the Post Office) and cottages
(seen during demolition in the first photograph)**

**This property was purchased for £840 by the receiver of the Metropolitan Police
at the second Park Estate sale in 1906**

The planning application is unfortunately one of those missing from the microfiche collection of early planning applications at the Civic Centre. However an applicationⁱⁱⁱ to extend the scullery of The Oaks in 1910 does exist and shows the house to be on the north side of 'the Manor House' with entrance via a driveway from the High Street. The two houses were very close neighbours.

The Builder

The application was made by W.J. Collins. He seems to have built the house for his own occupation as Walter Joseph Collins and his wife, Kate, were living there with two daughters in their twenties at the time of the 1911 Census. He was a builder from Harrow, where the two girls had been born, although he and his wife hailed from Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted, respectively. They are therefore unlikely to be connected with any of the Ruislip Collinses. The family was still at The Oaks in 1914, when the RNUDC Rate Book^{iv} shows him as the owner and occupier. Rate Books for the next 10 years are missing from the Hillingdon Heritage Collection and in 1925^v W.J. Collins, then aged 64, was still the owner, but Donald Alfred Elliot was living there. In fact Mrs Collins had died in 1914 and had been buried at St Martin's on the 29th December.^{vi} He moved to Kenton sometime later and died

there in 1927. He was buried at St Martin's and the burial register refers to Mr Collins as 'of Kenton House, formerly of The Oaks'.^{vii}

The Rate Books show that The Oaks was set in grounds of one acre and that the rateable value was £50 per annum. For comparison, The Manor House also had one acre, but the house being larger than The Oaks was valued at £64. The 'ornamental water' belonged to Mr Collins and in 1909 his firm, Collins & Charles of Harrow, applied for planning permission to build a tool shed and boat house.^{viii} It was quite a simple affair being constructed against an 'old wall' with an earth floor. Mr Abbott, Clerk to the RNUDC approved the plan, subject to compliance with the several statutes and the Bye-laws and regulations in force within the district, on 19 April 1909.

Many trees from the original grounds were included in The Oaks land and one must assume that some of them were oaks, suggesting the name for the house! There was a clump, perhaps of elm, near the cottages bought by the Police and there were more trees inside the high brick wall that screened the cottages in the former Swan Alley. In March 1930 The Oaks road was widened, sweeping away the Old Post Office and Mrs Gooderson's cottages, depriving the police of their property, which accounts for the present police station being closer to Church Avenue.



**The Oaks being widened in March 1930,
showing the back of The Swan on the left and the then Police Station on the right**

A comparison of the 25 inch OS maps of 1914 and 1935 suggests that the Manor House had undergone a number of changes. Having lost its entrance drive, a new main door and probably entrance lobby was added to what was originally the side of the building, giving access from the High Street. There were bollards, two steps and a pillared entrance.^{ix}

Frederick Brewer, a 59 year-old widower had been living at the Manor House from at least 1911, when he appears in the census. He was leasing or renting it from Henry Austin, the owner. His sister-in-law was there too and they were looked after by George and Sarah Clark and their daughter, Lizzie, who all lived in.

Suburban Ruislip was expanding after the end of the First World War and gradually the High Street began to fill with shops. Clearly a large house on the High Street was no longer as smart an address as it had once been. The Brewers moved to Thame, where Lizzie Clark accompanied them and in 1927 the owner allowed three shops to be tacked onto the front. Some of the decoration that can be seen in the carpet shop suggests that the shop space includes part of the house, perhaps an entrance lobby. No wonder that when Mr Collins died about the same time, that the neighbouring house, The Oaks, should be considered as ripe for development.

A further sale of land in the Park Estate was advertised in 1931 and that may have been when

The Oaks was sold as a building site. It was replaced in 1934 by the handsome row of shops with classical details on the front, designed by Marshall and Tweedy of Cavendish Square.

Fate of this desirable residence

A house with a lake and boathouse was clearly one of importance and it is almost incredible that no photograph survives to show us what it was like. Since it does not appear to have changed hands during its relatively short life, there are no estate agents' descriptions giving the number and size of rooms. It is even more surprising that the people who were interviewed by Valery Cowley in 1982, when she was researching Park House for the Society's book. 'Ruislip Around 1900', made no mention of The Oaks. However, there is a drawing of Park House in the possession of the British Legion (see below) which has been associated with Park House since 1930. I have had a copy for at least 30 years, but having recently studied it more closely, have realised that it shows a building projecting beyond Park House, which must be The Oaks. It is only a partial view, but the house appears to be two storeyed and has five windows looking across the gardens. It has at least four chimneys and that is all that can be seen.

The house has gone, 'like an insubstantial dream faded leaving not a rack behind.' but at least its name survives.



**The drawing belonging to the British Legion
Park House looks out towards Ickenham Road
The High Street runs between the fence and St Martin's. The Oaks peeks out behind.**



**Park House, now the British Legion Club, is a listed building
and stands end on to the High Street, with shops added to the front in the mid-1920s.
The shops on the right of Park House were built in 1934
and extend as far as the widened Oaks road.
The first four shops are on the site of The Oaks, which stood back
and projected beyond Park House overlooking its grounds**

ⁱ 'Bowlt Eileen M, *The Goodliest Place in Middlesex* 1989 pp214-8

ⁱⁱ Newspaper cutting from FH Mansford with title and date partially cut off. '20 1906' survives.

ⁱⁱⁱ Civic Centre: Microfiche RNELHS Plan 442

^{iv} Hillingdon Heritage Services, Uxbridge Library: RNUDC Rate book 12 Oct 1914.

^v *Ut supra* 1925

^{vi} Ancestry available online at Hillingdon Borough Libraries

^{vii} Ancestry

^{viii} Civic Centre: Microfiche Plan 325

^{ix} Memoirs of Mrs Edith Jarvis, collected by Valery Cowley