

Horsham Park

The following is taken from the 7 volumes on the History of Horsham – with kind permission of Jeremy Knight, Horsham Museum

Horsham park has had an interesting history, as a plot of land it receives the occasional mention in the documents that cover the early history of the town, for at that time it was seen as farmland with a small garden attached to a burgage plot. Only later in the late 18th and early 19th century did it take on the status of a Park, associated with the wealthy and one family in particular – the Hursts who in 1927 sold it to the Urban District Council, as the following account tells. The Hursts seem to have allowed the land to be used for town events, not all events but some notable occasions.

The story of Horsham Park begins in the early 18th century when John Wicker a successful brewer and merchant decided to build what became known in the 1930s as Park House around the core of the medieval burgage house known as Cockmans. According to a letter published in the 1930s “in the summer of 1701 “Cockman’s” was struck by lightning and badly damaged by fire, necessitating rebuilding, the present house resulting”.

In the 1770s Park house as it was to become was rented out to John Baker, who kept a detailed diary of his life including the months he spent living in Park House. One of the most interesting notes is that John Baker records that he had an American cook, as on “May 2 (1772) Eudosia the N. American cook goes down in stage today - Eliza Page to leave us on Monday...”. The day before John had travelled to London, which suggests, though the diary is cryptic, that he sent down from London Eudosia to replace his cook in Horsham – was their American cuisine being cooked in Park House? On October 11 of the same year he records that “Eudosia, the black cook, went away in the wagon this morning”.

This raises a number of questions the most immediate being was she a slave? We don’t know, nor should we assume being black meant being a slave, she could be a freewoman, born free to liberated parents, or granted her freedom in America and travelled to England with John Baker, his diary is not complete. But it is a forgotten person in Horsham’s history, a black servant working in Park House.

In the same diary is a rather cryptic account that could have meant that as well as Hills place having gardens designed by Capability Brown, Horsham Park was put forward for a grand makeover, for on “September 6 (1776) ...A lusty gentleman here with Mr Ellis to look at house and gardens in forenoon. Charles says he heard since from Mr Ellis’s boy it was Browne Capability who came at Sir Tho: Broughton’s request” though nothing happened. (Thomas Broughton then owned Park House and leased it to John Baker).

One of the greatest changes in land holdings occurred when Horsham common was enclosed with the Hurst family becoming major landowners, using the money left in the will of Sarah Hurst, some £10,000 the Hurts bought up land and as the survey of 1815 records bits of land were incorporated in to Horsham park – bits that still exist today in the boundary.

Croft of land in Scarfolkes of about 3a called Pollard’s Croft or Watering Pond Field, occupied by John Wicker and now Robert Hurst .The land is boarded by Henry Waller on the E., John Lintott and Bernard Lintott on the S, Highway from Horsham to Warnham on the W, and the “heath lately enclosed called Horsham Heath or Common on the n” and is now used with or forms part of the park of the said Robert Hurst.

Croft in Scarfolkes called Burgage Croft or Burgess Croft or Dennes Croft of 2a. Now part of the park of Robert Hurst.
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Horsham Park the centre of celebrations.

On 1st August 1832 a party was held to mark the passing of the Great Reform Act. The event is recorded by Henry Burstow in his *Reminiscences* in which he mentions a peal of bells in the old Church, a band playing around the town, and at 2 o'clock the people marched to the Cricket Field, then in North Parade roughly where Hurst Road is. By 3.30 nearly 3,000 people sat down at 62 tables with cold roast, boiled beef and mutton, vegetables and hot plum pudding and beer. There then followed fireworks where an estimated 4,000 people in the evening viewed the displays. In the evening there was a grand ball at the Kings Head Hotel.

Whilst this account has been recounted on various occasions, no one has looked at the event itself and the logistics involved. The Act was passed on the 7th June, it took nearly 2 months for the party to be organised and fundraising to pay for it to take place. It was a major event. For a start where did they find 62 tables? These are not small tables for each one took 50 people, so they would have to be around 25 feet long or, 12 feet square. Who paid for the meal, the minimum 3,000 pints of beer (over 350 gallons), did the people bring their own plates and cutlery, or was it provided? This was no small undertaking it was a major costly event that would have involved a committee and fund raising and for what? To celebrate what for many was a non event, and even the most politically ignorant would have known that. Was it in effect a thank you by those who actually got the vote to those who did not but without whose support and politicisation would never have driven through a *peaceful* change? It might be possible to see the Kings Head ball as the real party by the real victors, and the dinner "al-fresco" and fireworks in the rain as the bread and circuses for the masses, the losers. It is interesting that in the Museum archives there are no documents relating to this event, which is surprising and therefore difficult to actually critically analyse the event to determine if and what the motives were. For all we know it might have been organised by the Union, though unlikely for cost reasons.

In the 1860s Dorathea Hurst describes Horsham Park thus,
"the grounds contain some fine timber, and in the front of the house there is a tulip tree, remarkable for its height and size, and known to be one of the finest in England"

In 1869

On the 6th July the thirtieth anniversary of the Horsham Volunteer Fire Brigade was celebrated. A procession through the town to the Horsham Park "*by the kind permission of Mr R H Hurst M.P.*", took place consisting of "*Horsham (no1), Brighton, Lewes (Cliffe), Redhill, Croydon, Reigate, Lewes (Borough), and Horsham (No.2) engines, the Horsham fire escape, salvage van, and a portion of the members of the several corps....At three o'clock the company, numbering about 260, assembled in two or three large tents to dine...The dinner was provided by Mr R. Gilbard, of the Hurst Arms Inn. ..Mr W. L. Thomas proposed the health of Captain Honywood.- (loud cheers) – and said they were met to do honor....and for whose untiring exertions and indomitable perseverance the members and supporters of the Horsham Fire Brigade, who numbered altogether about 350, had delegated him to present to the Captain a work of art of great merit – a portrait of himself, admirably executed (Applause) the portrait, which had been fixed directly over the head of the Captain, was thereupon unveiled, and this was the signal for a renewed burst of applause. At the bottom of the picture was inscribed the following:*

"Testimonial to Mr. T. HONYWOOD

Capt. Of the H.V.F.B.

For his noble services to the town and neighbourhood of Horsham. July. 1869"

End of WWI

The park was used throughout WWI for events and activities, fund raising and fetes. So it seems apt that to mark the end of WWI the park was the centre of celebrations as the local paper reported. Why two events -0 well Horsham decided to organise its own event and then the Government announced a national day of celebration – so the town held two.

Saturday 19^{July} came quick enough and the County Times carried a large formal notice, without any of the exuberance of the notice for the Carnival's Peace Celebrations that appeared a week earlier on 12 July. It was obvious to all which was the main event the town were supporting. The day would start with a procession at 10.30 by all current and ex servicemen to the Carfax where a short service would be held at 11.30 . The general public and children were asked to place flowers at a spot set aside in the Carfax in memory of the fallen by 10am. At 1pm the Aged People (those 65 and over) would be entertained by a Dinner at Albion Hall followed by an Entertainment at the Central Picture Hall. At 2.30 the Children of the Town, between 3 and under 16, took part in sports in Horsham Park. Those who were not attending school had to obtain a ticket from the nearest school. Parents and Friends were admitted to the Park at 2.15 with the admonishment to "Please make it a children's day". That was followed with a 4pm tea for the children and further sports. The day finished with a Torchlight Procession starting from Mr Burton's Meadow at 10pm and deck flares encircled Horsham were lit at 10.30. In London that day a wooden and plaster cenotaph was erected in Whitehall for the Peace Day Celebration enabling servicemen to march pass in remembrance. Horsham had its own temporary memorial in the Carfax.

The 24 July according to the advert in the County Times would start at 2.30 pm when Earl Winterton MP, and President of the Horsham Carnival Committee would open the fete held in Horsham park. There would be a Grand Peace carnival, open air concerts, Old English Fair, Horsham Town Prize band playing dance tunes till 10pm, a grand display of fireworks, battle of confetti, torchlight procession. Admission was 1s, children 6d and teas provided from 6d. Gates would open at 2'oclock. The tickets would carry the Entertainment tax. The Ladies committee of Horsham Cottage Hospital would be holding a street collection during the Peace Celebration for the Re-building Fund of the Hospital. The Hospital and the war were linked at every stage of celebration. The collection to be made after the Service. In addition to the funds raised the profits from the Peace carnival - £169.5s went to the cottage hospital via the Council.

The Park becomes public

On 30 November 1927, from King and Chasemore on behalf of Colonel Hurst offering a portion of Horsham Park (about 16 acres) together with the Mansion.

December and in to January 1928 the local paper was full of the debates going on over the purchase of Horsham Park. Colonel Hurst wanted to sell the house, the gardens around the house and some rough parkland nearby, but not the centre of the park, nor the parkland near Springfield Road. However in January the Council decided to buy Park House. The agreement to buy the property reveals a great deal about the Councilors deferential treatment of the Hurst family. Colonel Hurst originally wanted £23,000 for the house and some 16 acres of land. The District Valuer, undertaking an independent valuation came up with a price of £17,000 and now Colonel Hurst decided to reduce the price to £18,000 and the Councilors fell over themselves to praise the generosity of Colonel Hurst in reducing his price. In a letter read to the Council, received by the Clerk, Colonel Hurst stated that "He entirely disagrees with the value placed upon this property by the District Valuer, and would have no hesitation in rejecting

it, but he appreciates the fact that your Council are of the same opinion as himself and he is anxious as he always has been that your Council should acquire the property for the benefit of the town at a moderate price. In order, therefore to remove the difficulty in which your Council find themselves placed and to give himself the satisfaction of feeling that in doing so he is to some extent contributing towards the cost of its acquisition, he has decided to offer the property to your Council at the sum of £18,000."

Whilst the Council were congratulating themselves not all ratepayers were happy about it. Colonel Hurst had tried to sell the property back in 1911/12 without any success, he had wanted £23,000, but an independent valuer said it was worth £5,000 less and now Colonel Hurst in saying that he is willing to sacrifice the money but still gets £1,000 more than the valuer recommended and the Councilors feel that they should honour Colonel Hurst for his generosity. The agreement to buy didn't end the discussions and in May 1928 there was a full public enquiry which led to an airing of a range of views. The Council didn't want to borrow just £18,000 for the park but in total £20,420 made up of

Purchase of Horsham Park

Purchase of property	£18,000
Subway and path	£460
Fencing	£195
Footpath from New Street to railway subway	£
Removal of bandstand	
(taking down Carfax bandstand and re-erecting in park	£300
Contingencies	£750

Total £20,420

The Clerk, Mr. Slyfield, outlined what the purchase would include, the main building, large range of stabling, garage, and outhouses, the gardens of about 6 acres and meadow and parkland of around 9 acres, as well as a subway which passed under North Street and the railway lines. The Clerk also identified one of the key reasons for buying the park, the need for recreation grounds in the town. As he said "At present Horsham had very little in the way of public playing fields or recreation grounds. It had no public park and its possessions for recreation were: underdeveloped playing field , Victory-road, just over four acres; a playfield near Cricket Field, just over three acres; and the Peoples Garden of Remembrance, nearly two acres of private grounds generously opened to the public by a lady. In all they had about ten acres of playing field, about 184th part of the whole area of the Urban District." He also noted that the Council would seek to close off seven acres of grounds. Later on in the submission, the District Surveyor laid out what was proposed for the nine acres of parkland. "There were two tennis courts that with slight alteration could be turned in to three courts. Of the remaining nine acres of land it would be noticed on the plan that a further five tennis courts, an 18-hole putting course and sites for clock golf and also a bandstand enclosure had been marked . It was not the intention of the Council immediately to proceed with the construction of these, but they had been shown on the plan as possibilities" In total 2.60 acres was identified for such provision leaving seven acres of grass land. The Clerk was also questioned about use of the house, for public baths, whilst the house had "a number of baths in the house which later on, when the scheme was developed would be utilised near the basement as slipper baths which residents could use." This seems to have been an off the cuff remark, more thinking on the feet, for when the Inspector asked was this part of the scheme, the Clerk replied "not at the moment."

In all the *County Times* devoted 5 columns of the full page to the debate and enquiry. Such was the public interest in the purchase of the park. The Council only had to wait a couple of months when on the 17 July 1928 a Special meeting of council was called with the Clerk reporting that he was in recite of letter from Ministry of Health regarding the purchase of Horsham Park.

The Government allowed the following loans

- Purchase of Land £12,000
- Purchase of buildings £1,130
- Laying out est. of site £1,740
- Public Offices Purchase of property £5,000
- Fittings etc £320

The sanctioned loans were therefore £50 less than the Council application £20,420. Horsham Urban District Council could now buy Horsham Park House, but as we shall see later it wasn't plain sailing as unbeknown to the Councillors in a few months time the Great Depression would hit. But it was resolved at the same time that the decision to build a swimming pool – which was not originally in the Park, but on land given for its purpose by the Hurst family.

so it was that on 15 September 1933 *The County Times* announced the launch of the official appeal to support the Horsham & District Employment Fund. "all householders in the urban area - numbering 5,000 will receive a copy of the appeal. Some 2,000 appeals are being sent by post to the larger householders in the Rural District".

The work on the pool had begun in the winter of 1933/34, Colonel Hurst had given half an acre of farmland next to the park on 25 October 1933 and work commenced on 1 December. Work was to commence irrespective of the ability to raise the funds but by February 1934 over £1,100 had been raised with £1,000 going to the Council to pay for wages. That amount of money had paid for a very large hole and "a demonstration lesson in geology such as is seldom provided" according Christ Hospital master and keen geologist Mr. S. E Winbolt. A remarkable film survives of the building work taken by amateur film maker Cecil Cramp, this was one of the earliest films he took on his newly acquired camera. The local shops started to advertise swimwear, or as they termed them Swimming suits (Chart and Lawrence) Bathing Wear (Tanner and Chart). Then all of a sudden the pool opened on 7 July 1934 at 3pm with the Chairman of the Council, and keen swimmer, David Bryce taking the first plunge. However his presence was overawed not by the pool itself but by that of a tribal King from West Africa. The distinguished guest Nana Sir Ofori Atta KBE,¹ was hereditary King of Akyem Abuakwa and a member of the Legislative Council of the Gold Coast, who happened to be staying with Colonel J.L. O'Connor DSO MBE, so was invited to take part.

As a job creation scheme the building of the pool was successful in providing 21,900 working hours which cost £1,500 out of the £1,695 raised by the employment committee. Today little remains of this civic endeavor apart from ephemeral items and two souvenirs, bricks stamped Horsham Employment Scheme 1934 and a commemorative brochure with an account of the opening day.. As a financial concern the pool cost the Council £1,972, much of that cost was taken up by employing engineers as there were non-unemployed. The last payment on the

¹ Nana Sir Ofori Atta I (1881–1943). "Ofori Atta was the son of a senior official of the palace; his mother was the descendant of one of the founders of the kingdom.... Once in power, he was determined to return Akyem Abuakwa to its former glory. His approach to politics was a mix of educational modernism and aristocratic nepotism that gave as much importance to merit as it did to blood." Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "The Past Never Stays Behind: Biographical Narrative and African Colonial History", *Journal of Historical Biography* 2 (Autumn 2007):

debt on the pool was paid off after 40 years in the last year of the Urban District Council in 1973. Horsham had its own cold water swimming pool.

16 December 1938 A.R.P. Exec. Committee

A long discussion took place about casualty service, that there was no first aid post or cleansing centre. The suggestion that they could use the changing rooms at the swimming pool was discounted. In the end they agreed, subject to various conditions that they would buy from Light Steel Sectional Construction Co Ltd of Worthing a building covering 2,400 square feet with a concrete base, corrugated asbestos sheeting, metal framed windows and the provision of hot water supply and heating etc which would cost between £500 and £600. They had to make an application to Ministry of Health to use this land in Horsham park for such a purpose. This became the Nursery school after the war.