

Ashburton Playing Fields history

This ground, as the name suggests, is mainly dedicated to sports and provides a valuable area of flat land for field events such as football and cricket. With the adjoining Long Lane Woods this gives a continuous recreation area from Shirley to Elmers End. The area is fairly low lying and the Chaffinch Brook runs north through the Playing Fields, in very wet weather drainage problems can arise.

The Playing Fields and adjacent areas have a long sporting history. Until well into the late Victorian age a race-course thrived on the ground now occupied by the Woodside Fire Station, the Stroud Green housing estate and Ashburton Playing Fields.

It is said that King James I established public horse racing at Croydon early in his reign. The course was bounded on the north by Lower Addiscombe Road and Long Lane, and on the east by what is now Bywood Avenue. The Chaffinch Brook marked its southeast edge, coming back to follow the line of Glenthorne Avenue back to Shirley Road, and then back to Lower Addiscombe Road. The Grand Stand was probably near the end of the present Shirley Park Road.

Woodside station, which was opened in 1871, brought race-goers to the course, as well as providing access by rail to Addiscombe, and via New Beckenham to London. Because the down side of the station was below road level, a ramp was constructed to enable horses to be brought out of the station, and the exit from the platform is noticeably high, high enough for a horse to be ridden through it.

The race course closed following pressure from the Mayor of Croydon who considered that the races only brought a lot of undesirables down from London. The race track was brought by Beckenham Golf Course and was used as a golf course for a number of years, the Club House was situated behind the fire station site. The area was acquired by the Council for housing and playing fields in 1942.