Fairfield Gardens history

For many centuries fairs were held every year in Croydon and from early Tudor times the Walnut Fair was held on the Fair Field. Fairs used to form part of the social life of a town, and as they were first introduced by the Church they were planned to coincide with a church festival.

As well as being a cattle fair, Croydons Great Fair was an occasion for an enjoyable outing, and various groups came to entertain the people including mummers, jugglers, tumblers, men with dancing bears, and other attractions to entertain the crowd. The funfair side of the event became more and more important but it unfortunately attracted undesirables and the fair was abolished in 1868 after rioting, but the cattle fair continued for a number of years on Fair Field and other locations.

The arrival of the railway in Croydon made a tremendous difference to the town, the population rapidly increased and although people could reach the fair more easily they were no longer way of life.

The new railway was always seeking more land and in 1863 it was reported that the Brighton Railway Company was planning to buy the Fair Field. Although people protested about the sale of the field the Croydon Local Board of Health took the opportunity to suppress the Croydon Fair which they found difficult to control. The Croydon pleasure fair was officially abolished in 1868 and instead Croydon had a new railway line. The site turned out to be rich in gravel and for years the old Fair Field was carried away load by load in railway trucks.

The old gravel pit was used as a car park and in the 1960s Croydon Collage of Technology was designed and built. Next to the collage the gravel pit was turned into an underground car park with the Fairfield Gardens on top. The gardens were laid out in a modern geometric style which was quite different to any other park in Croydon. The gardens were given over to grass and boarders and fish ponds, due to the shallowness of the soil above the car park large trees could not be established. 1969 saw the first of a number of open-air art exhibitions and in 1976 the first of several permanent sculptures was located in the gardens.

Situated on the opposite side of the gardens is the Fairfield Halls, they were opened in 1962 by the Queen Mother and were the largest complex of halls between London and the Coast.