

Grangewood Park history

Grangewood was originally part of the Manor of Whitehorse which was bought in 1787 by John Cator, Esq. and enclosed by him in 1797. The wood known as Whitehorse Wood was part of the great North Wood (Norwood). It was 80 acres in extent and belonged to two successive Bishops of London between 1299 and 1338. The name White Horse was not used until 1368 when the manor became the possession of Walter Whitehors, Shield-bearer to Edward III (Before that it was known as Benchesham Manor).

On the death of John Cator in 1806, the estate passed to his nephew, also John Cator, Esq. who sold it to a John Davidson Smith, Esq.

In 1800 the wood was completely surrounded by fields and the nearest dwellings were cottages clustered around the farm house. By 1847 a track had been constructed across the wood to connect Beulah Spa (which was laid out by John Davidson Smith Esq.) with the road junction at White Horse Farm. This formed the line of what is now Grange Road.

John Davidson Smith divided the Whitehorse Estate into small plots and sold them for development. The east and west sides of Whitehorse Wood were cleared before 1850 and the remaining 30 acres to the east of Grange Road were developed as a private estate.

The first edition of the 6" Ordnance Survey Map gives the layout of the private estate. The Mansion, stood in the middle of the estate with stables between it and the main entrance which was at the junction of Wharncliffe Road and Grange Road. To the East of the house there was a nursery and Ross Lodge, there was a second lodge at the entrance (today known as Wharncliffe Lodge). Heath Lodge which stands at the southern end of the park is not shown on the 1870 map, it was built at a later date possibly when a second entrance was made from the junction of Grange Road and Ross Road. The southern tip of land had not been part of of Whitehorse Wood but part of Woods Field.

The Mansion looked out onto quite extensive gardens which ran south from the house to the southern point of the property, and near Grange Road there was a small pond crossed by a rustic bridge. The northern end remained natural woodland with trees down both sides of garden.

The Corporation of Croydon bought Grangewood Park for the public in 1900. To complement the ornamental gardens and woodland walks that already existed, the Council built a bowling green and tennis courts, and a band stand. Band concerts entertained the public during the summer months but the popularity of the performances declined and the stand was eventually demolished after the war.

The mansion was a two storey building of Victorian style with bay windows, veranda and a conservatory on the south east corner. Following the purchase of the park by the Corporation the mansion was used as a Museum which housed a fine collection of minerals, corals, shells and local Roman antiquities. One room in the Mansion was known as the Veterans Club for the use of the male pensioners of the district where they played cards and other various games or sat and talked. Visitors to the park and museum could obtain refreshments from the tea-room in the house.

The nursery was used by the Corporation for plant production and locally was famous for its chrysanthemums; in the autumn the greenhouses were open to the public so that they could see them. During the war, like other Corporation nurseries, it was given over to food production. After the war part of the nursery was demolished to make room for tennis courts and in the mid sixties it was closed when all nursery production in the Borough was transferred to one central site.

The Mansion was used during the First World War for billeting Canadian troops and in the Second World War both the house and grounds were badly damaged.

The Mansion fell into disrepair and in 1960 was pulled down. The foundations were retained and laid out as a formal garden with the bay windows as flower beds.

Ross Lodge was demolished in 1987 due to serious movement of the foundations caused by the underlying London Clay and the site is to be redeveloped as a garden.

Despite the changes that the park has seen it is still a popular area with the Oak woodland, gardens, sports facilities and playground, and in the spring the steep bank beside Grange Road provides a magnificent display of Daffodiles.