

Norwood Grove history

Norwood Grove was part of the Great Streatham Common, which was recorded in the Domesday Book as Lime Common, and stretched from Norbury to Tulse Hill. In 1635 part of the common was enclosed by the Duke of Portland to form an estate around the shooting box which was presented to him by King Charles II.

Roges Map of 1746 indicates that there was a house on the site of the Grove called "Coggate" Gibson's Hill in 1523 was known as "Cubgate Hill" and in 1800 this and the driveway past the house were important as the only roads between Beulah Hill and Green Lane. The estate was then known as Norbury Grove and owned by T. Mills Esq., this is recorded by up a document known as the "Indunture of Feoffment".

On Lady Day 1847 the Grove was leased to Arthur Anderson, who was born in the Shetland Isles and went to sea at an early age having received very little formal education. He became the captains clerk and later returned to London as a copying clerk. In 1822 he married the daughter of a shipowner who introduced him to Bradie Wilcox who was opening a small office as a shipbroker and commission agent. The two eventually became partners and after struggling for some years went on to form the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company in 1840. The partnership provided pleasure cruises for the ordinary man on the steam ships (as opposed to sail) of the P & O line known today.

From 1878 to 1913 the mansion was occupied by Mr and Mrs Frederick Nettlefold who were renowned for their good works and a blue plaque is displayed on the south wall of the Mansion in their memory. Frederick Nettlefolds father was the founder of Nettlefolds Ltd which started as a brass founder's and general iron mongery business in 1876. When Frederick retired from the business in 1893 he took an interest in the silk manufacturing firm of Samuel Courtauld.

The house was sold in 1913 to the Croydon Corporation by the daughter of Nettlefold after her husband's death at the Grove.

At the start of the century the growth of London and Croydon threatened Streatham Common and the surrounding countryside. In 1910 two estates, including the Rookery, came onto the market for development, the local residents realised they were about to lose these open spaces. A committee was formed for their preservation by Mr Stenton Covington, who managed to raise £3,000 which enabled the Rookery to be purchased and the three acres to be laid out as ornamental gardens; the land was vested in the London County Council.

By 1924 Norwood Grove, or "Streatham Grove" as it was then known was also threatened by development so Mr Covington reformed his committee. The first task for the committee was to raise £1215 towards the purchase by LCC of an orchard and meadow land that linked the two estates. With further assistance the Norwood Grove Acquisition Committee raised a further £18,200 and met with the trustees of the Nettlefold family, who agreed to sell for public use "30 acres of the higher and wooded portion of the park" (the area was remeasured and found to be 32 acres).

The Acquisition Committee was more than a local residents group for they had as their patron The Archbishop of Canterbury and The Mayor of Croydon as President. There were 14 Vice-presidents including 2 Earls, 1 Baron, 2 Members of Parliament and the Mayor of Wandsworth. It is no surprise therefore that on 16th November 1926, HRH The Prince of Wales visited Croydon to open Norwood Grove.

The Prince arrived at 3pm and was conducted to the drawing room where local dignitaries were waiting to be presented, he was then led to a carved seat on a dais overlooking the Park. The Standard of His Royal Highness was then broken and the National Anthem played by the RAF Band. After making a speech the Prince handed the Title Deeds to the Mayor of Croydon and the Mayor after receiving them gave the Prince a golden key cigar cutter, modelled from a key of the Grove, in token of remembrance of his visit. The Prince was then asked to plant a tree to commemorate the opening. Due to poor weather the Prince planted a Cupressus macrocarpa Lutea close to the french windows and not on the main lawn as planned.

The chair was given to Mr Covington as a token of appreciation of his work and he was also honoured by the construction of a bird bath in the garden and a road being named after him. Mr Covington and his wife later moved to Cornwall and on his death Mrs Covington presented the Chair to the local council. History repeated itself when the chair was again used when the present Prince of Wales visited his Dukedom in 1970.

The spade is kept in Croydon Reference Library and was again used in 1987 when The Mayor of Croydon planted another tree at Norwood Grove to celebrate its fiftieth year as a public open space.

The Mansion or "White House" as it is locally known is early 19th century and by the end of the century was considerably larger than now with the west wing and its identical bow front extending almost to the stable buildings. There was another wing running off this at an angle. During the war one wing of the house was bombed and part of the garden also suffered damage.

The fountain on the main lawn has small figures, depicting the months of the year, holding a large flat dish into which the water spills. Nearby is the bird bath commemorating Mr Covington's work and an iron rose arbour surmounted by the emblem of a raised arm with hand clenching a hammer. This motif is also to be seen on the Lodge.

At one time there was a stone sphinx at the side of the steps by the south east corner of the house but this has now disappeared. Norwood Grove had a small nursery that was used by the parks department until nursery production was centralised in the 1960's. During the war the glass houses were used for the production of tomato plants and onions. The stables were converted into a messroom and tool stores for the parks maintenance staff.

On the eastern side of the house is "The Orangery" which would have been used for displaying half-hardy plants and even orange trees, today it is a pleasant shelter surmounted by two glass domes.

From the grounds of Norwood Grove there are extensive views to the south west or, closer to the house, there are bedding displays, herbaceous borders and Erica beds.