



LAND OF THE FANNS

Teacher Briefing

Dagnam Park “The Manor”

From, Land of the Fanns Online Resource

Dagnam Park

Settle Road, Romford

RM3 9XR, UK

www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk

Summary

- 26.25 ha (64.86 acres)
- Known locally as The Manor
- A historic landscaped park
- Originally a medieval manor; absorbed into an 18th century parkland by famous landscape designer Humphry Repton; the house was demolished after the Second World War; made into a public park owned by the London Borough of Havering in 1948.
- Forms part of The Manor Nature Reserve which also includes Fir Wood, Duck Wood and Hatters Wood.
- Many high-quality wildlife habitats; ancient woodland; a variety of grassland; flora including bluebells, Dog's Mercury and Butcher's-broom; ponds; and fallow deer
- Has open grassland, ponds, woodlands, archaeological remains, historic archive material

History

- In the medieval times, the manor of Dagenhams and Cockerels comprised two adjoining tenements.
- In 1633 the manor was depicted as a gabled house built around a courtyard within a square moat, with an approach avenue on the west side.
- The name Dagnams or Dagnam came into use in the 18th century.
- The manor was purchased in 1772 by Sir Richard Neave, who had made his fortune trading in the West Indies and the Americas when slave trading was at its height. He later became Governor of the Bank of England.
- Neave rebuilt the manor house into a grand Georgian mansion. "The house had three stories with six rooms to each floor. On the ground floor, to the right, were the drawing and dining rooms, with an ante-room, and to the left, were billiard and

smoking (study) rooms with another ante-room. The rooms were entered from a large main hall, from which staircases ascended on both sides to a landing on the first floor. The first floor landing continued as a central corridor on both sides of the house from which the main bedrooms of the Neaves and their guests were entered. On the top room were bedrooms for the governess and senior servants; also the nursery and schoolroom.....The majority of the servants lived in an annexe built onto the east side of the house, where the kitchen and other domestic rooms were located. The butler had a waiting room and bedroom in the main house at the back of the stairs on the ground floor” (Brian Lingham, History of Harold Hill and Noak Hill, 1969)

- The house had formal gardens, surrounded by fields, with the kitchen garden to the east and the fenced park on its south side. An approach road leads through the park, and there are ponds to the south and west of the house and five ponds on the eastern side.
- Famous landscape designer Humphry Repton was employed to give advice on landscaping the grounds. Repton described his solution for improving a large circular pool at Dagenhams in Essex, almost certainly the cattle pond to the south west of the house, and illustrated this with a before and after view. The pool was 'circular, with naked banks, from which the cattle are excluded by a hurdle', creating an unsightly view and reflecting only the sky and its fence. Repton proposed fencing the opposite bank of the pool so that dark foliage could grow there and overhang the water creating reflections, and continuing the fence below the water's surface to create a small area with a gravel or paved bank where the cattle could enter the water, to give a more picturesque effect. The pond was thus made 'an ornamental part of the dressed ground near the house.' (Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, 1816)
- Neave and his descendants bought additional land around Dagnams until the estate was 1600 acres (today it is 65 acres).
- Sir Thomas Neave and his wife Dorina Lockhart in 1908 were the last to properly live at Dagnams. Before the First World War they employed over 40 servants and the only other work in the locality was on the estate farms.
- Sir Thomas Neave died in 1940 and his daughter Dorina described what happened to Dagnams after that: "In 1940 my father, Sir Thomas Neave, 5th Baronet, died and the house and grounds were requisitioned and soldiers billeted in it, and all their transport was parked under the trees in the park. The house was damaged by a V2 [rocket] right at the end of the war which cracked the wall of the front of the house. When emergency repairs were done they found the walls were two and a half bricks thick, which was why it hadn't collapsed. The house had cellars and a barrelled shaped damp course, you could easily crawl along the whole way round the house....

After the war the LCC [London County Council] bought the property for £60,000 under a Compulsory Purchase Order - I have never and will never return. He diligently stripped the lead off the roof - an easy task - you got up through a trap door and could walk all round inside the parapet and scramble into a sort of well in the centre about 20 ft. X 15 ft; all lead covered, where we as children could hide, or later on sunbathe. Once the lead was stripped off, the rain got into the bomb cracks and eventually the house was demolished. I've often wondered if the stables and garden walls still stand. On the south side was a large lake and on the west side, the largest cork Ilex tree in England, heavily propped. There was a drive leading from Noak Hill which passed between the house and stables and garden and continued in a straight line to the main Romford to Brentwood Road."

"When the LCC bought the house they said they were going to repair the house and use it as a club centre, so they put in a caretaker. He diligently stripped the lead off the roof - an easy task - you got up through a trap door and could walk all round inside the parapet and scramble into a sort of well in the centre about 20 ft. X 15 ft; all lead covered, where we as children could hide, or later on sunbathe. Once the lead was stripped off, the rain got into the bomb cracks and eventually the house was demolished. I've often wondered if the stables and garden walls still stand. On the south side was a large lake and on the west side, the largest cork Ilex tree in England, heavily propped. There was a drive leading from Noak Hill which passed between the house and stables and garden and continued in a straight line to the main Romford to Brentwood Road."

(Written in a letter printed in The Essex Countryside magazine, 1981, by Dorina Eileen Parsons ne Neave)

- In 1948 the house and 500 acres around Dagnam Park were sold to the London County Council to build the Harold Hill Estate. You can still notice references to the site's history and the Neave family in the street names at Harold Hill.
- Dagnam Park itself was opened as a public park.

Brief nature guide

- Dagnam Park forms part of The Manor Nature Reserve which also includes Fir Wood, Duck Wood and Hatters Wood.
- It includes many high-quality wildlife habitats.
- Ancient woodland.
- Variety of grassland.
- Wildflowers including bluebells, Dog's Mercury and Butcher's-broom.
- Ponds
- Fallow deer.

What you might see

- Open grassland in 18th century parkland style (but with a flat sports pitch also!)
- Historic pond
- Cockerell's ancient moat
- Archaeological remains of historic house
- Historic railings hidden in the woodland
- Mature trees - conifers, horse chestnuts and cedar
- Footings of lost stables, walled kitchen garden and round pond so you can trace the structures
- Clump of trees as part of the landscape design

Archive material

There is good archive material available online:

<http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk/Auction%20Map%20simple.htm>

http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk/Guide%20to%20dagnam%20park/guide_to_dagnam_park/Front%20Page%20guide.htm

http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk/Guide%20to%20dagnam%20park/guide_to_dagnam_park/dagnams_and_gardens.htm

http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk/Guide%20to%20dagnam%20park/guide_to_dagnam_park/dagnams_stables_and_walled_gardens.htm

http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk/Guide%20to%20dagnam%20park/guide_to_dagnam_park/cockerells.htm

<http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk/Dorina%20Neave%20letter.htm>