

## Blackfen

**Popular images of Blackfen mostly focus on the urban development of the area from the 1920s.**

However, the town's existence can be traced back to records dating from 1241, where the suburb has its earliest mention in an Assize roll (trial record) listed under "Blackwene". Blackfen is also mentioned in letters of Henry VII dated 1540, regarding tenement and fees.

The area lies between the ancient estates of Danson and Loworbey (Lamorbey) and to the north, the Great West Wood. The name Blackfen reflects the area that it is situated in, literally meaning 'black marsh'. The woodland surrounding the area included Christians Wood, Holly Oak Wood, Coldbath Wood and Restons Wood, which were cleared in the 1870s for farming. An Ordnance Survey map of the area shows that in 1897 Blackfen remained substantially under developed, with much of the land being used for agriculture. The two oldest records of farms in the area are "Black Fenn" and "Days Lane Farm", with documents indicating they date from the 1600s. The farms to the North of Blackfen Road mainly specialised in growing vegetables while the fields running towards Welling grew mostly potatoes, mustard and cabbages.

Aside from the fields the landscape of Blackfen also included some large houses such as "Merino Place", "Queen's Wood" and "Woodlands". The area of "Merino Place" is actually now occupied by a block of flats, but has a history of settlement dating from 1819 when originally a terrace of four cottages stood. It is believed that in 1860 the four cottages were used as a single dwelling and that sheep-breeding was carried out there. In 1908 the buildings returned to four single occupancies, and after the First World War the names of the cottages changed to "Bean Cottages" after the Bean family who owned the Danson Estate in the latter part of the 19th century. After the Second World War the Chislehurst and Sidcup Urban District Council used the site for "Prefabs" and the site went back to its old name of "Merino Place". The flats that can be seen today date from about 1957.

The earliest pub in the area is believed to be "The Woodman" on Blackfen Road, owned by George Staples, and the building can be seen on the Ordnance Survey map of 1897. The Woodman remained

within the Staples family for a generation, with George's son succeeding him in 1863 and he continued to run the pub until the local brewers Reffells leased it from him in 1899. They obtained a freehold of the premises in 1930 and rebuilt the structure in 1931, which still exists today, now known by the name of its original owner: "George Staples".

The Danson Estate was owned by Alfred Bean from the 1870s to the 1920s and it was he who sold the estate in 1922 which led to the development of Blackfen. Bean personally saw the potential of the area and was one of the prime movers in seeking the construction of the Bexleyheath Railway. Whilst the core of the Danson Estate still remains today, the Queenswood and Westwood estates saw the most development.

The development of Blackfen began with the sale of plots for £5 across Blackfen Road after the sale of the Danson Estate. Families then began to build wooden huts which had led, by the 1920s, to a string of individual, self-built bungalows on the main road, Days Lane and Fen Grove. The beginning of the 1930s saw the increasing growth of the estate development, with Days Lane School opened in 1931 to cope with the additional children in the area.

The main property developers at the time were Leech Estates, Smith Estates and New Ideal Homesteads Ltd. The majority of the development in Blackfen was undertaken by Ideal Homesteads whose advertising set the standard for most of the area's development. They aimed their properties at the lower end of the market, attracting buyers of the lower classes and also women, who became their target audience through tag lines such as "the house designed by the woman for the woman". The speed in which Blackfen was developed is reflected in the numbers of the new estates that were established - 2,500 houses were built in Albany Park within two years.

This increase in housing brought a growth of other facilities to the area. Electric railways provided quicker and more frequent train services and this made commuting for local residents easier and far more feasible. Farm land became more valuable and encouraged farmers to sell their land to property developers. Local shops were converted from local people's living rooms to parades of shops by 1931. By 1935 essentially all the local farmland had disappeared and the promise made by Ideal Homesteads to "maintain the rural

character" of the area was broken. The Estate agency also donated land and paid for the establishment of Albany Park Station which was completed on 7th July 1935 to serve the needs of the local residents. 1937 saw the establishment of Blackfen's own library and cinema and by this same year the street network had mostly developed into its present form.

Following on from the development of houses were the churches of Blackfen which all began in temporary structures and locations. For example, the Church of the Holy Redeemer, originally a mission church to Holy Trinity, began with services over a florist in 1904 until a chapel was built in 1909 to cater to the needs of the growing population. The present building in Days Lane was dedicated on 21 October 1933.

Blackfen's experience of the Second World War was similar to surrounding towns - its location in North West Kent meant that it was in the path of enemy attacks on London with its local rivers providing a target for bombers, as did the nearby munitions factories. Blackfen began to get bombed as the Battle of Britain commenced in 1940, with the last eighteen months of the war proving the most destructive for the area. Invaluable work was carried out by the Civil Defence Auxiliary Services, aided by the close knit community. Emergency "Hutments" to deal with the housing shortages after the end of the War were established on the bombed sites of Days Lane, Valliers Wood Road, Halfway Street, Ellison Road, Dene Avenue and Blackfen Road.

The post war years have seen little change to the area, although many families are now choosing to extend their homes rather than move because of house prices and whilst some of the Homestead and Leech properties still exist they have been doubled in size. The Blackfen Library moved from Cedar Avenue to newly refurbished premises on Blackfen Road in March 2005 and the Oval, a crescent-shaped parade of shops includes with Tudoresque details to the frontage and a small municipal garden are now included in a designated Conservation Area.

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