

Barnehurst

The story of Barnehurst begins in 1745, when Miles Barne, the son of a wealthy London merchant, married Elizabeth Elwick.

Elizabeth was the only child of Nathaniel Elwick of May Place in Crayford and on his death in 1750 Miles Barne inherited May Place and its large estate. The family retained May Place and the remaining estate until 1938, when it was sold to Crayford UDC for £24,500.

The name Barnehurst, a combination of 'Barne', the landowner and 'Hurst' the Saxon word for woodland, came into being when a name was required for a station being built in Conduit Wood, Crayford, by the Bexley Heath Railway Co on their new railway opened in 1895, where it crossed the May Place Estate owned by Col Frederick Barne. At that time the area we know as Barnehurst was part of the Parish of Crayford and consisted of a mix of farmland and market gardens, with apple, plum and cherry orchards, together with wood and parkland belonging to the estates of May Place, Martens Grove and Oakwood. The small population was concentrated along and to the south of Mayplace Road.

The opening of the railway failed to attract large scale house developers and passenger numbers were small, only boosted at weekends by golfers travelling to the new Barnehurst Golf Course opened in 1903. Its club house, the old mansion of May Place, was destroyed by fire in 1959. The electrification of the Bexleyheath Line in 1926 signalled the start of the large housing developments of the 1920s and 30s. The first builder, J.W. Ellingham, chose the prime site next to the station on which to build the "Barnehurst Estate" of 578 semi-detached houses selling for £600 each. Building started along Barnehurst Road (previously called Hills and Holes Road) in 1926. The Midfield Parade of shops followed in 1928 and the estate was completed in the early 1930s.

The builders W H Wedlock Ltd., established in 1902 at Barrow-in-Furness, moved south in 1915 to maintain the Vickers Estates and stayed to play a major role in the development of Barnehurst. In 1926

W H Wedlock Ltd started building the 'Mayplace Farm' estate based on Oakwood Drive. Their brochure offered a comprehensive range of house and bungalow designs at prices from £495 to £850. Their next development of Lyndhurst Road, Brantwood Road and Risedale Road started in 1929. Their roads on this and later estates are easily identified, being named after Lake District locations.

By 1932 development south of the railway was well advanced and the developers had moved to the more difficult terrain north of the railway. W H Wedlock Ltd developed the 'Mayplace Estate' between Erith Road and Barnehurst Avenue. The only new Public House, the Red Barn, was built by Arnolds of Chelmsford in 1936. To the east of Barnehurst Avenue, New Ideal Homesteads Ltd started work on their 'Barnehurst Park Estate'. It was not until after the war that lands of the Normandy and Venners farms were developed.

Schools

Crayford Barnehurst Council School in Barnehurst Close was the first to open in 1927. Mayplace Council School, built on part of the Oakwood Estate, opened in 1933 was badly damaged during the war and was rebuilt in 1946. Normandy Junior Mixed and Infants School in Fairford Avenue opened in 1952. A second school opened on the site in 1956.

Churches

Members of the Open Brethren held their first meeting in 1930 and met in temporary premises until Lyndhurst Chapel built by members of the church opened in 1936. The Methodists also met in a temporary building in Risedale Road on land given by W H Wedlock which, with later additions, was their home until the present church was consecrated in 1952. The congregation of St Martins, Erith Road, met in the church hall opened in 1935, until the new church, built with grants from the Bishop of Rochester's 12 Churches Fund, was consecrated in 1936.

Services

From the early 1900s tram services operated along Erith Road and Watling Street. In 1935 trolleybuses took over their routes operating

from the new London Transport Depot in Erith Road until buses took over operations from the depot in 1959. The ill-fated Bexleybus service ran from 1988 to 1989. Today the depot is operated by the Go-Ahead Group under contract to London Buses.

Leisure

A library for Barnehurst was opened at No1 Midfield Parade in 1932 and Martens Grove Recreation ground opened in 1933 with the lake serving as a swimming pool until a purpose built open-air pool opened in 1939, (it was demolished in 1989). A children's playground and tennis courts opened at Manor Way in 1939 and after the war part of the golf course was laid out as the Mayplace Playing Fields, with football, cricket, and hockey pitches.

Generally, post-war development has been achieved by building to a higher density on the larger pre-war housing plots. The last major development was the building of the Woolwich Building Society Headquarters complex, opened by Princess Anne in 1989, on land to the north of Watling Street previously occupied by nurseries and 19th and 20th century houses and shops.