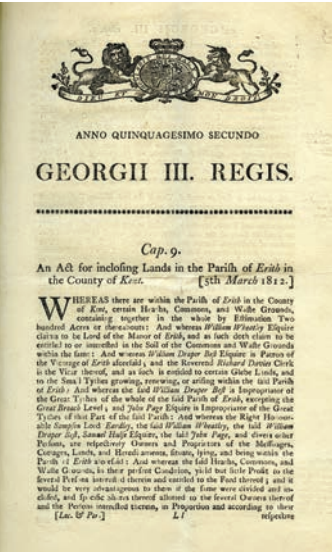


# Belvedere Enclosure

*In medieval England there were large tracts of ‘Common Land’ which was owned jointly by the commoners of the manor. They each had the right to graze their animals and forage on this land which was not fertile enough for crops.*



Erith Inclosure Act 1812

However, improved agricultural techniques were beginning to make it possible to grow crops on poorer soil but first the land would need to be enclosed. This would extinguish the rights of the commoners but who would in return receive a share of the land as their exclusive property in proportion to their existing landholdings.

Enclosure of the common land could be accomplished either by buying out the Lord of the Manor who owned the soil and mineral rights as well as all the commoners who could prove they had rights over the land or by passing a special act of parliament that enforced enclosure.

Lord Eardley of Belvedere House proposed a bill in parliament to enclose the commons of Erith. In 1815 the act came into effect and he obtained 32 acres of land on Lessness Heath. Nine acres of land were left as common ground and was used for grazing animals.



Sir Sampson Gideon c1784



Erith Enclosure Map 1815



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# The Belvedere Estate

*The Belvedere estate was acquired in 1751 by wealthy Jewish merchant Sampson Gideon for £5,250.*



*Lord Eardley*

The existing house was rebuilt by the architect James “Athenian” Stuart who popularised the so called Greek revival on behalf of Sampson Gideon’s son, Sir Sampson Gideon, later Lord Eardley, sometime after 1762. The new house was named ‘Belvedere’ or beautiful view in Italian because of the prospect of the ships sailing down the Thames viewable from the house.

Eardley died in 1824 and his eldest daughter, Maria the wife of Lord Saye and Sele, inherited the estate. Their son, William

Eardley Fiennes, inherited the estate and took the title of Baron Saye and Sele on his father’s death in 1844. Dying 3 years later he left Belvedere to his cousin Sir Culling Eardley Smith.

Under the ownership of Sir Culling Eardley the township of Belvedere grew quickly and began to encroach upon the estate. During the 1860s the Belvedere Estate was sold for £12,148 to the Shipwrecked Mariners Society, who converted the house into a home for retired sailors. The house was finally demolished in 1959 and replaced with a modern home but this was closed in 1975 and the land redeveloped for housing.



*Belvidere House near Erith The seat of Lord Eardley*



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# Development of Belvedere

*Belvedere consists of two distinctive areas: Upper Belvedere and Lower Belvedere. Before the opening of the North Kent Railway in 1848 Upper Belvedere was known as Lessness Heath. Mostly barren waste land it contained few houses until 1847 when streets comprising of fashionable villas began to be built for middle-class families to enjoy the view over the River Thames.*

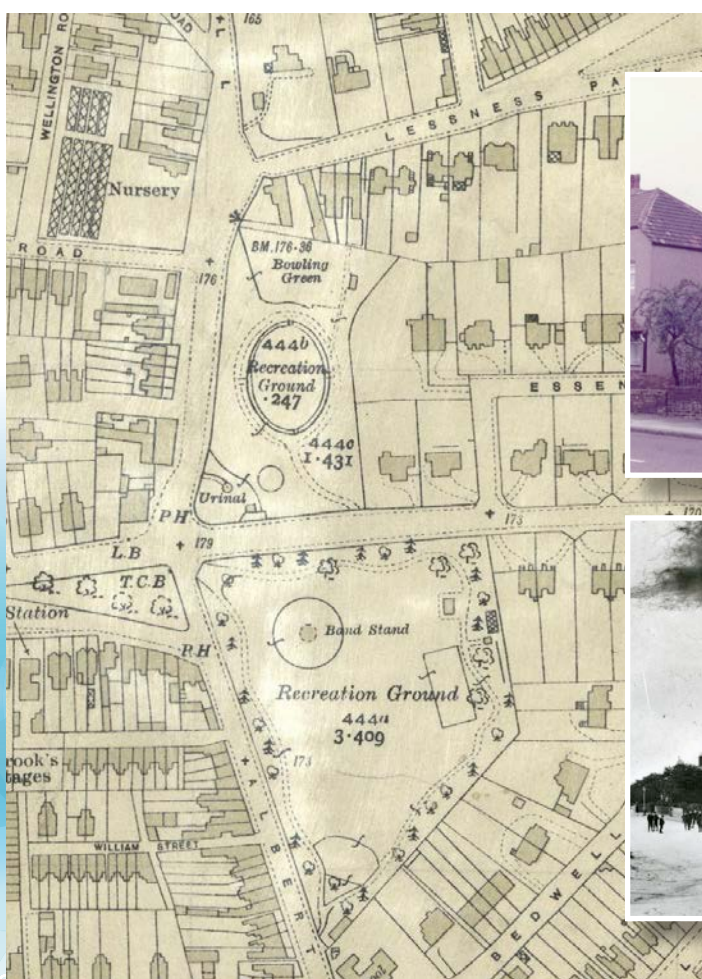


Lower Road c1910

Upper Belvedere became a suburb of large Victorian and Edwardian houses, inhabited by affluent families, who were able to enjoy the many civic amenities provided by a progressive Erith council

including the open-air paddling pool and a large public park. At the same time the North Kent Railway gave residents' access to both London for work and business and to the countryside for holidays.

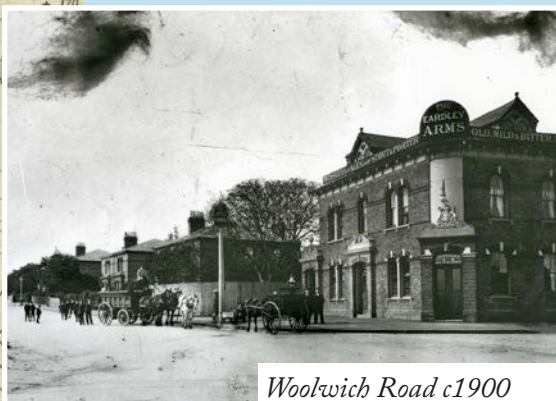
Lower Belvedere is situated on the Erith Marshes and the houses here are much smaller, usually terraced, for the working-class families who worked in the industries that lay on the Thames' flood plain. The isolation of the marshes also made it a suitable location for manufacturing certain dangerous or noxious products whilst the river provided excellent transport links.



Upper Belvedere 1931



Villas on Woolwich Road



Woolwich Road c1900



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# Belvedere Recreation Ground

*In 1888 The Erith, Belvedere and Abbey Wood Times reported that activities on Lessness Heath had become a problem as there was “reoccurring... musical roundabouts, shooting galleries and such like gipsy amusements being allowed to settle on the Heath to the annoyance of residents near it; the heath being without any apparent control over it.”*



*Children enjoying paddling in the lake 1930s*

Finally in 1896 Erith Urban District Council bought the remaining 9 acres of common land for £5.1s to use as a recreation ground. In 1902 toilets were built opposite the Eardley Arms. An ornamental lake was created in about 1910 which after the First World War was adapted to become a paddling pool.

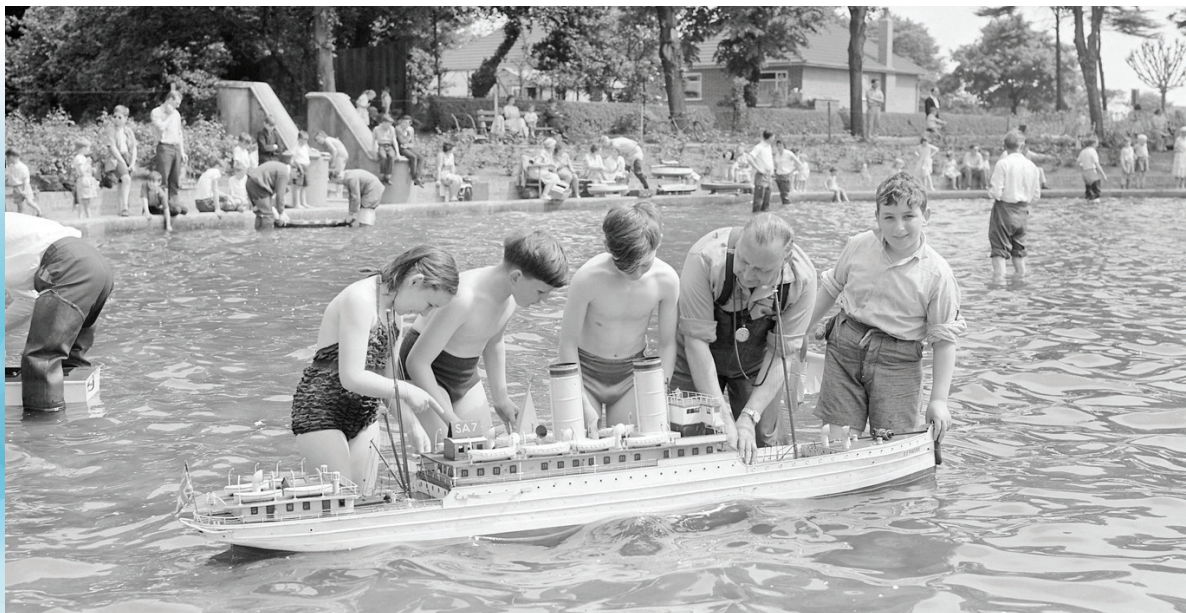
In 1933 the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain Association provided a new drinking fountain in the northern section of the park.



*Fountain Plaque*

This drinking fountain actually dates from the late 19th century and is dedicated to a wealthy family from Islington. A small plaque situated beneath the bowl of the fountain states, “Miss Ellen Reardon’s bequest in memory of her father, mother and sister, Daniel, Elizabeth and Margaret Reardon, 1880.”

The recreation ground remained largely unchanged for many years. It survived the bombing of nearby Albert Road in April 1941 and in 2005 it was renovated and re-opened as Belvedere Splash Park. In July 2017 the ‘Beach Playground’ opened to replace the Splash Park.



*Heron Hill Boat Regatta 1962*



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# People's Memories of Belvedere Park

*Belvedere Park has always been a place for the entire community of Belvedere and beyond to relax and enjoy a family day out. Through social media and reminiscence sessions at Belvedere Library, local people have been able to share their stories and pictures of the park.*

*"I used the paddling pool a lot... We used to jump off the fountain base into the water... One summer, I went alone, and some young girls found my clothes and threw them into the water. I went home soaked, but it didn't put me off... I loved going there"* Desiree



*"I can remember going to the park with my grandparents when I was 5 years old, couldn't get swimming trunks so my nan would sew up my underpants at the front!... Those were some of the happiest times of my life. (I am now 72 years old). Happy days"* Anthony

*"Spent a lot of my 1970's childhood there. I remember drinking from the water fountain on my way to and from school"* Lorraine



UB reminiscing

*"I have happy memories of the place, like watching the old blacksmith at his forge, and the old mobile library – a converted furniture van!"* Peter



UB visitors



UB Memory wall



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*Children from Belvedere School*



*6th Form Students at Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre*



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