

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CANFORD HEATH

by Frances Wheatley

The whole of Canford Heath was originally covered with forests of Pine, Birch, Elm, Oak and Hazel trees and was occupied by hunter-gatherers.

The first farmers cleared small areas of trees using stone axes and flint.

Bronze Age settlers cleared the birch and oak trees to create fields and pastures. Their burial mounds can still be seen on top of Canford Heath.

Subsistence farming continued through the Iron Age; peat, turf and heather were used for fuel; water was provided from natural springs. Cattle, sheep, pigs and horses grazed on the heath. Wheat and rye were grown.

The Romans dug quarries and established pottery industries making blackware pottery on Canford Heath, using gorse and heather to fuel their kilns.

The name Canford comes from the Saxon 'Cana.'

There are traces of medieval roads near Gravel Hill and to the east of Canford Heath.

The Normans called the heath 'Chereford'.

It is mentioned in the Domesday Book as the "Manor of Cheneford".

The Heath remained important for many centuries for the locals to graze their animals and for children to collect firewood.

In the early 1800s, gypsies had many camp-sites on the Heath, where they lived in 'flimsy benders' (tents), and elaborately furnished 'vardos' (caravans.) The gypsies had some quirky names for these sites, such as Fox Holes and Heavenly Bottom. They lived off the land and did seasonal work for the farmers. They were very clever at making and mending household articles. Gypsy women sold heather for luck and told fortunes.

Hatch Pond was a former clay pit, and there were a lot of brickworks in the area 1867-1904.

Around this time Lady Wimborne built farmhouse cottages for her workers and tenants. There were two or three small-holdings which

stretched from the Learoyd Road to the Adastral Road area. One cottage still stands today, i.e. Longfleet Lodge, in Darby's Lane.

Later Lady Wimborne built Longfleet Lane to accommodate her carriage.

During the Second World War, Canford Heath was used as a training area; the Heath became riddled with unexploded ammunition and sadly there were several accidents involving children. At this time most of the Heath was destroyed by fire.

In the 1950s, the gypsies were first moved to Alderney and many took up businesses and moved into houses.

The building of the Canford Heath housing estate, to the south of the Heath, was started in 1963 and continues right up to the present day. The Beacon Church opened in 1968.

Many roads were named after WW2 fighter pilots. "The Fighter Pilot" pub was built in 1970 and was opened by Douglas Bader. It is now known as "The Pilot".

The Canford Heath Community Centre started off as a shed and the present building was built in the 70's, money being raised in several ways including residents purchasing a brick !

It became a very friendly and close-knit community, e.g. Jan Mizen had her dancing classes and majorettes, who took part in carnivals on Canford Heath.

Over the years shops have come and gone on the Heath. In the 1970s Adastral Square boasted a Waitrose supermarket, a corner haberdashery shop, baker, butcher, greengrocers, newsagent, post office, bank, laundrette, and chemist; it was just like a small village.

The second phase of building on Canford Heath in 1980 included self-built houses near the Heath nature reserve. At one time before the Tower Park complex was built, there was a panoramic view of tall pine trees seen from the Lodge Hills.

The Neighbourhood Centre was developed and St Paul's Church was built in 1989.

Now all that is left of our natural Heath is 850 acres, which is a protected nature reserve: nevertheless it is the largest lowland heath in the UK ! Long-horned cattle were introduced to graze the heathland and trees are managed and felled to mimic past times. This keeps the habitat suitable

for rare animals such as the sand lizard, Dartford warbler, nightjar, smooth snake, rabbits, hares, foxes and roe deer.

St Paul's Church is very much for and of the community and we now have a community café, The Coffee Shop, at Adastral Square.

Hopefully, with the help of ARCH and all these other up-and-coming organisations on the Heath, we can unite and all become one big, thriving community once more.

Frances Wheatley. October 2017

To compile this account, information was taken from sources including:-

- *Poole Leisure Services*
- *Poole Museum Services*
- *"Echo" reports*
- *Warden's articles*
- *Gypsy tales*
- *Streetlife*
- *Wikipedia*

It is gratefully acknowledged.