

Haven Green

A Brief History

Haven Green is not the largest open space in Ealing. Yet it is well known to most people who live or work in Ealing because of its location. It is very near to both the main railway station and to the bus terminus. However, few people know much about its history and development. I hope that in the next fifteen to twenty minutes everyone here will join that number.

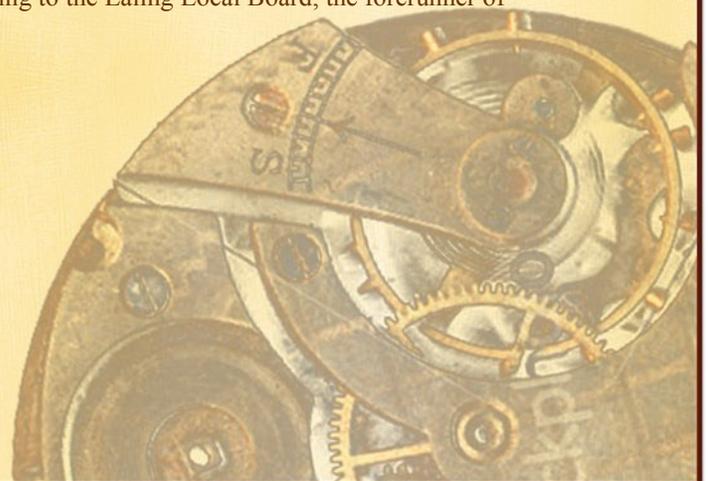
The origins of the Green are Medieval. The Bishops of London were lords of the manor of Ealing until the nineteenth century and they owned the numerous open spaces in Ealing, including Ealing Green, Dean Gardens, Ealing Common and Haven Green. However, we don't know much about this stretch of land until the eighteenth century when it featured on the Rocque map. The map shows that Ealing's Haven as it was then known, stretched as far south to what is now the Uxbridge Road and as far to the north east as Hanger Hill and to the north west to Pitshanger Lane. A much larger space than now. There was a road of sorts on the east and west sides and a little on the north and south, with a footpath running south east to north west. There were a few houses on the west and east sides, one called Phoenix House.

The accuracy of the Rocque map is somewhat doubtful. But the parish map of 1777 is not. It shows The Haven as a rectangular piece of land from the Uxbridge Road, with its south west corner just to the north of what is now Ealing High Street and the south east to what was the Feathers pub. There was a footpath running from the south east to the north west as before, but now a road ran all the way around it and it did not extend as far as Hanger Hill. There

was a large house on the south side, just to the north of the Uxbridge Road. There were a few other buildings nearby. There was also a large pond to the north west of Haven Green. In 1822 the situation was much the same.

The first major change came in 1837. This was the construction of the Great Western Railway which ran through Ealing and cut across the Haven; indeed what is now Ealing Broadway Station was known as the Haven station. The railway company had to pay £150 in the way of compensation. This also effectively sliced off the southern section of the Haven and reduced its size considerably. The 1840 tithe map shows that the land to the south of the railway line was mostly built upon. It seems that the name Haven Green dates from about 1840.

The next major milestone came in 1877. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners had taken over from the Bishop of London as owners of the land in the parish. They decided to hand over management of their lands in Ealing to the Ealing Local Board, the forerunner of



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Ealing Council. It was also at this time that the pond was filled in, that a low fence was constructed at the perimeter and that seats were placed there. Trees were planted in the next decade to make 'this Green a place of pleasant recreation'. As the nineteenth century progressed and building in Ealing took place, the Haven began to be surrounded by buildings. These included the GWR station and from 1878? The Underground station. There followed a parade of shops to the east and a baptist church to the north, but much was good quality residential property. That to the west was last to be built. The largest house was The Haven, to the north of the Green, which was once the home of Admiral Collinson, once chairman of Ealing Council.

There was controversy in 1884 when the Vicar of Christ Church, the Rev. Hilliard, had a coffee stall on Haven Green. He saw this as fulfilling a social need and aiding the temperance movement. But he had not gained the council's permission and so was taken before the courts. Eventually the council decided to grant him a licence for his stall.

The cab rank on the Green, designed so as to capture trade from those using the railway station, also became a bone of contention. It was suggested that it could be moved from its present site to being along the road which led to the Baptist church. This was so there could be no doubt as to which cab was first in line for customer and also that the foul language of the cabbies could not be heard by children or servants. The scheme did not go ahead.

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In 1898 Mrs Wilson of Haven Green paid for a drinking fountain to be erected there for the sake of the horses who pulled all forms of non-motorised transport.

We have seen that the railway was a great destroyer of Haven Green. So were other forms of transport, all which served to erode the size of the Green. The chief culprit was road transport. Firstly, from the 1880s there was the cab stand which took bites out of the east side of the Green. Then there was road widening in the 1920s as car usage increased and the roads were too narrow. Fred Perry's father, Mr S.F. Perry of 223 Pitshanger Lane, wrote in 1923, 'I regret that the Town Council have thought it desirable to destroy partially the beauties of Haven Green by removing the fine row of trees and have also encroached upon the Green in order to undertake the widening of the road...the regret at the action of the Town Council is shared by a number of residents of Ealing'.

Finally there was the danger that on the north side a major coach station would be built – think of the one at Victoria if you want an idea of how this might have been. In 1930 a coach company bought the land that the house, The Haven, used to stand on and applied for planning permission to build there. This met with strong local objections from both estate agents and residents. There were many concerns. First that property prices in the locality would fall. Secondly, the actions of the coach company staff and users, 'while waiting their turns on duty and when coming off work, these men would no doubt loiter on the Green, especially in summer; they would be sitting and lying about, and perhaps taking their meals in the open...would it not tend to drive prospective property owners from the place and so in the end, lower rateable values?' It was also thought that the men would be 'deplorably untidy' and make the Green the home

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of loafers and passengers. And 'a good many children used Haven green as a playground, on fine afternoons, and with coaches continually passing there would be a great risk of accidents'.

Eventually the scheme was defeated but then there was in 1934 the danger of a seven storey block of flats being built there. Eventually this was modified to become the five storey block that we now know, and built in 1935.

During World War Two an air raid shelter was built on, or rather, under, the Green. It was completed just before the Blitz began in September 1940 and was to accommodate 1,346 people at a cost of just over £14,000. It was on the south side of the Green, in about the centre. A shell fell on the south east corner of the Green on 24 September 1940. Later a shot down German plane was displayed on the Green and people could pay to see it for sixpence. Unlike much open land during World War Two, it was not used as allotments to grow additional food. However, as elsewhere, the railings were ordered to be removed as scrap metal for the war effort in June 1940.

After the war there were a number of suggestions as to how to alter the Green. One was to instal a paddling pool for children. Another was to have a cenotaph, a fountain and seating so as to resemble Trafalgar Square in miniature. Or to have a public toilet on the south east corner. Or have a tea shop where the air raid shelter had been or to use this space as a car park. Some were against such ideas, merely wanting a return to the pre war space, after having it tidied up. 'Haven Green is the first bit of Ealing seen by visitors emerging from the railway stations and it adjoins valuable residential property. It should be tidied up and made as dignified in appearance as possible'. Toilets were built at the south east corner near to the cab rank by the 1950s but were

demolished three decades later.

In more recent times it has sometimes been an eye sore as was noted in 1974:

'From a distance, preferably a long distance, haven green is, as its name implies, a place of cool, calm and quiet peace. Along its edge, the famous Ealing Chestnuts blow, and under their shade stand the rustic seats whereon mothers watch their children play, weary shoppers pause and the strolling philosopher can pause for a moment of peace and tranquillity. If they can stand the waste paper, broken bottles, beer cans, flying cricket balls and footballs, petrol fumes and dogs' excreta, that is. For Haven Green is the haven of the vandal'.

Haven Green has also been used for a number of gatherings over the years. In 1975 anti-Common Market protestors used it as a meeting place.

Finally, Haven Green is even mentioned in a book by a well known writer of detective fiction. In one of the short stories in the volume *Poirot Investigates*, written in the 1920s, a commuter discovers what may be the murder weapon used in a long distant crime whilst crossing Haven Green! Since Agatha Christie often visited Ealing in the 1910s it would have been well known to her.



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A Sonnet for Ealing

The verdant sward is crossed by sunlit ways,
And nursed, and child and weary elders find
 'Neath leafy trees a shady covert kind,
And three church spires their guardian points upraise,
Romantic souls! That crave a breathless tale
 Of hate, heroic love and mercy's deeds,
 Of tragic passions, mad despair and greeds
Of heights that none but genius dares to scale,
 O could you lift the veil of hearts that haste
To trains that bear them to the western shore,
 Or into London's dust, and whirl, and roar-
The human drama here might full be traced;
You'd seek no tales of Greece, or fiction's scene.
 But view life's secrets all on Haven Green

Frederick J. Gould, 'Amoral', Woodfield Avenue, Ealing, April 1924

Middlesex County Times, May 1924



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