

Selborne Park

When my wife was a little girl, in the late 1940's and early 1950's, she lived above her grandparents Fish and Chip shop at the top of the High Street. Virtually opposite the shop was her playground in Selborne Park. Today, it is completely unrecognizable from what it was then.



The pictures above show what remains of the park in 2013. It has been renamed as Walthamstow Town Centre and the big screen was paid for by the Olympic Lottery distribution and installed before the Olympics.

The Inclosure of Walthamstow Church Common.

The British History on-line site: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42780> tells us that: *Selbourne Road recreation ground (4 acres.) originated in 1850, when 2 acres of land on Church Common were allotted for public recreation under an inclosure award. This land was sold in 1869 to the Great Eastern railway company and the Selbourne Road site was bought with the proceeds. The vestry handed over the ground to the local board in 1876. After excavating the cutting the railway company conveyed what was left of the 2 acres as a playground for the Orford Road National school; it survives as the Vestry Road children's playground.*

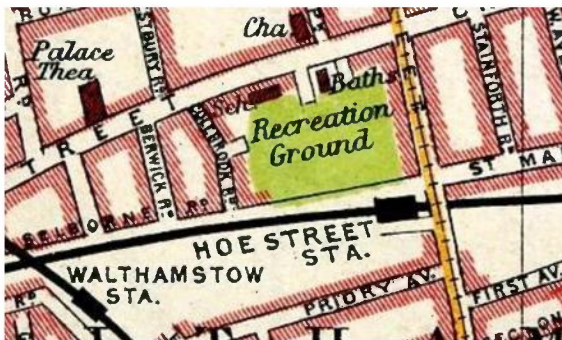
What this tells us, is that a substantial area of precious public land on Walthamstow Church Common was sold to the *Great Eastern Railway* company. They wanted this land so that they could make a deep cutting across part of Church Common to lay railway lines. This was for the section of the Liverpool Street line that ran from Hoe Street (Now Walthamstow Central) station to Shernhall (A short lived and now defunct station) and Wood Street stations.

A Binding Legal Document

In order that they could dispose of the common land, the Walthamstow Parish Council had to make an Inclosure Award. This was a formal legal document that was drawn up by commissioners in accordance with the Inclosure Acts and is a permanent legal record of the enclosure. The primary purpose of the document was to register the change from the ancient farming methods of open fields, common meadows and pasture, to the modern system of landownership, tenure and cultivation. In cases where title deeds to lands do not exist, the award serves as the ultimate proof of title.

The result was that the railway company got the necessary land and the land that was left over became Selbourne Park and the Vestry Road children's playground.

The Park



The old - Bartholomew Maps 1908



The new -Google Maps 2013

Of course my wife was not the only child to play in the park. **Mike Gilbey**, a former Walthamstow resident, chronicler and photographer paints a very accurate word picture of the park on:

<http://micksuses.com/category/memories/walthamstow/>

'Selborne Park was my local playground and the park was divided into two sections separated by a long pathway lined with trees. One side of the park backed onto the library and old swimming baths and was also overlooked by the long closed Selborne Restaurant. This was the children's side of the park with swings, roundabout and slide. A large grassed area also allowed a ball to be kicked about. As a child the slide seemed quite tall and was very slippery. On more than one occasion I got a sore bottom as I shot off the end of the slide and my backside made painful contact with the ground.

The opposite side of the park was for more sedate leisure activities. It contained a well manicured bowling green and an open air draughts board surrounded by wooden benches on three sides. Several huts around the perimeter allowed shelter to usually elderly people, to while away the time with each other.

Players moved the draught pieces using long wooden poles with flat bladed hooks fitted on the end. Flower beds adorned the outer perimeters of this section of park. Generally children were tolerated provided they were quiet and just watched the bowls or draughts. However children were never allowed to use the equipment. It really was a case of children should be seen and not heard in that section of park.

Alas with the redevelopment of the town centre the park had to go. The children's side of the park is now a bus station and the adults side of the park is an open grassed area with pathways leading to and from the bus station and Selborne Walk Shopping Centre. The tree-lined pathway between both sections of park is the only feature to survive. I remember watching with great dismay the day a bulldozer tore up the bowling green.....'

The Selborne Restaurant



In the 1940' & 50's, Walthamstow didn't have the large number of diverse restaurants that we enjoy today. Essentially, there were a few 'chain' restaurants like the *ABC* at the top of the High Street and *Joe Lyons* (Now a *McDonalds*) in Hoe Street and there were various working class cafes and fish and chip shops. Additionally, there were a few speciality eating places like *Rossi's* and *Manzes* in the High Street.

Compared with these eating establishments, the *Selbourne Restaurant* was quite 'upmarket'. The restaurant was situated behind the public baths. It had a sizeable dining area, that was also used for 'functions', on the first floor with views over the park. At one time, up to the 1950's, there was also a ground floor 'take away' café that was accessed from a roll up shutter.

The restaurant was run and operated by *Walthamstow Council*. Its clientele being market shoppers with some of its lunch time trade coming from Council and other public service local employees who worked in the area. Trade died off dramatically in the 1960's as it faced competition from an increasing number of franchised outlets (Remember *Wimpey Houses* and other burger chains) and similar other places to eat.

The Creation of the Bus Station



The present day Bus Station, the line of trees on the left shows how much of the park was taken to create the Bus Station

In 1968, the *Walthamstow* to Victoria line underground line opened and Hoe Street railway station was renamed as *Walthamstow Central*. In association with these works and as part of the Central Bus Re-shaping Plan, a new *Walthamstow Bus station* was created. Previously, buses had not entered Selbourne Road and substantial road alterations had to be undertaken to improve access for this purpose and about a half of Selbourne Park was taken to be used as the Bus Station.

The *Walthamstow Bus station* was completely rebuilt in 2004 and an underground link was made from *Walthamstow Central* underground and overground stations to the Bus station.

Bill Bayliss
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