



St Mary's
Harrow on the Hill



HARROW HILL TRUST

Harrow's Hidden Nature



St Mary's Church, Harrow on the Hill and Harrow Hill Trust have collaborated to produce a suggested walking trail and leaflet to explore Harrow's Hidden Nature.

Route —We have a fairly simple route from St Mary's Churchyard—along the High Street to the Green, highlighting aspects around the theme of Hidden Nature. You can then venture further afield along the range of wonderful public footpaths!

The theme of Hidden Nature has given us all sorts of challenges as we try to illustrate for you the dark forest of the sixth century, and how the Hill evolved to what we see today. So some of what we are going to cover is "Hidden" as it barely exists any more, some of it is "Hidden" as modern day technology superseded it and some of it may be "Hidden" from us as we take it for granted and don't actually realise what's before our very eyes!

Geology and Harrow's Origins

Start at the top of the of the Harrow School Memorial Steps-with views of the height and narrowness of the hill.

Clay and sand-- Harrow Hill is a giant earth pillar of London clay topped by beds of Claygate and Bagshot sand. Most of the topsoil is heavy London clay, but the hill is composed of Claygate and Bagshot Beds which once covered all the London Clay. Below this, there is Cretaceous Strata, and below this again is Palaeozoic rocks of the Devonian series at a depth of about 1,000 feet. The claygate beds are fifty feet thick. These beds are only visible when building work takes place. The Clay beds run across the top of the hill for over a mile from north to south. The London clay, of which most of the Hill and the area at its foot are composed, is a stiff clay of dark grey or bluish colour. When exposed to the weather it is brown, owing to the conversion of ferrous oxide to ferric oxide by weathering. The clay is also important to North London, as it made tunnelling the Tube Lines much easier for the Victorian engineers, hence why most of the London Underground is in the North part of the Thames. We also have a poem from 1598 for you regarding the Harrow clay soil-which the gardeners may like—

“The deepe, and dirtie loathsome soyle,
Yeelds golden gaine, to painfull toyle.”

The heights--There are 2 summits--one at its north end reaching 407 feet above sea level, the other near the south end being some 25 feet lower. The 2 are connected by a crescent shaped ridge which narrows to a mere 30 yards at the point where West Street joins the High Street. It is interesting to think how this narrowness has forced out the development of the town. North of this point the slopes are steep—one in five on Church Lane and one in seven on Grove Hill.

The lie of the land and the soils affected the settlement pattern of Harrow--with most of the inhabited land being 200 feet above sea level. Practically all the farmland was on the London Clay.

The east side has particularly bad drainage—before modern drainage it meant there were only 3 farms.

Although several brooks run towards the River Brent, there were no meadows. No important river runs through Harrow which accounts for the absence of any mills or fishponds.

The elevation of the Hill causes certain modifications in climate—the average temperature is about 1 degree lower than Kew. It's interesting that Winston Churchill didn't go to Eton because he had poor health, and his family wanted him to be away from the cold river Thames.

In early days Harrow was heavily forested with oak and hornbeam—Part of the ancient forest still forms part of the north slope of the Hill. Formerly, the forest abounded in stag, roebuck (there are still roebuck deer today) and wild boar, and Harrow was a favourite hunting ground of the Archbishops of Canterbury. Gradually the forest was removed. At first the soil was tilled and large crops of corn reaped, but later farmers put it to grass. Apparently the best corn near London was procured at Harrow.

“Harrow Hill is the highest in the county, under which lies fruitful fields--which yields such fine flour that the King's bread was made thereof, and Queen Elizabeth received no money from these villages, but took her wheat in kind for her own use.”

Worshipping place

Move up Church Hill to St. Mary's Churchyard

The shape of the hill may have led to its development as a sacred place of worship. The Middle Saxons arrived on the Hill in the 6th century. The folk who settled in Harrow were the Gumeningas.

Harrow is first documented in 767 when it was described as Gumeninga hearh, or shrine of the Gumeningas. And this is the origin of Harrow's name—The evidence is that the hill was a worship place—and Hearh—the Anglo Saxon word for shrine—became the name Harrow. The Anglo-Saxon names also led to the names of other neighbouring areas. They say the Gumeningas worshipped a god called Gumen! They were one of the early Saxon kin-groups, associated by place names. Others were Gillingas of Ealing and the Geddingas of Yeading!

It is assumed that the Gumeningas temple was on top of Harrow Hill and predated the spread of Christianity amongst the Saxons. St Paul's had been established by 605, but the faith was adopted patchily and the Gumeningas may have been around Harrow in the late seventh or eighth centuries.

When William the Conqueror arrived in 1066 it's fascinating to think that his Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, determined to prioritise building a new church in Harrow. The church took 7 years to build—it must have been such hard work for the builders to get the materials up this hill. And it is quite rare to have a church of this age in a London borough. - Lanfranc started the church in 1087, it was completed in 1094 and consecrated by St Anselm. Anselm was one of the great Christian thinkers, and it's amazing to think that a saint opened St Mary's in 1094, nearly 1,000 years ago.

Harrow church 1094



The top of the Hill and special area for birds and wildflowers

Many rare birds and plants come to the top of the Hill. Inside St Mary's church, we have a photo exhibition for you of some of the wonderful wildflowers which grow in the churchyard

Move to see the glorious view from the Peachey Stone, which was once described as one of the best in the country...

Water

Move down Church Hill, to the Fountain

Look at the Victorian Fountain—this marks the site of the town's busiest and deepest well, which remained in use until 1870. It has also been beautifully restored—again with many thanks to the Harrow Hill Trust, Harrow Council and help from the Lottery.

In 2018, some of the Friends of Harrow School together with the Head of Estates and Grounds started trying to track down wells on the hill, as part of an attempt to determine whether these required special maintenance.

It's amazing to think that tapped water wasn't available until 1855, when it came from special waterworks on Bessborough Road, down by the cricket grounds. Before then, everyone had to manage their own supply—the most common solutions were digging a well, which was very expensive, or collecting it from a roof and storing it in a large tank. The less well off had to rely on public wells or pumps. The Hill was once a farming community and animals as well as people needed water. A fenced off well in the woods below Churchill schools is situated close to the fields where sheep once grazed.

35 West Street was the poor-house—housing 60 people the well discovered there in the garden would have served them all. Further up was the town well, which was fitted with a Braithwaite pump so 2 fit men could deliver 150 gallons every hour. This became a focal point for the townspeople who gathered there not only to get water but to buy fish from visiting fishmongers. In 1646, King Charles I who was fleeing from the Puritan army, paused at the top of Grove Hill to water his horse at the well which is still there but now below the pavement.

Harrow School and the Sports Fields

Walk back to The Shaftesbury Plaque, outside the old Harrow School

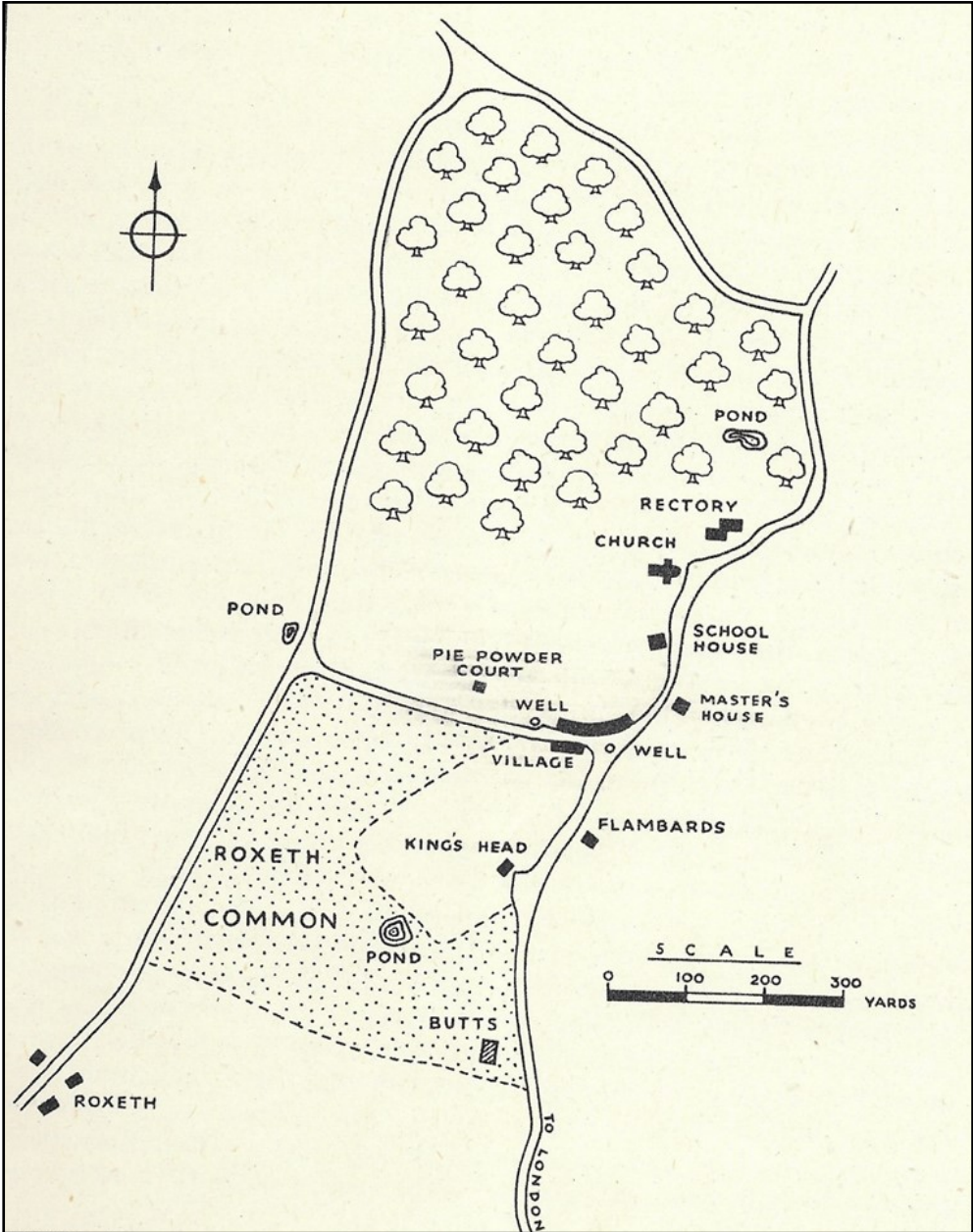
Originally with the school being only a single building on the summit of the hill, the boys had only had a small yard for games. The boys founded the game of Squash here, devised on a court below the Bill Yard. They also originally devised a game of football around the school building, with the goals either side, using a ball called a fug, which was smaller than the current football. In about 1680, they extended into an orchard, where they developed squash and racquets.

As the school developed and farmland was taken over, it was a gradual process of Harrow School first acquiring land where they could play cricket. Roxeth Farm (on the East side) was purchased in 1913 to give room for cricket practice nets. The acres on the west side were bought from Lord Northwick—then later, they were given land on the western slopes which they used for “Philathletic” purposes, and which became the grounds for Harrow Football. It’s interesting to read how the master Edward Bowen encouraged football matches between the houses—and which presumably led to the different colours developing for each house.

Ironically the substantial improvements to the fields have led to Harrow School Football being threatened as the Sheepcote and Hentsall field, previously the preserve of the farm cows, provided a satisfactorily muddy, uneven surface on which to play.

So whereas some of our heritage has led to nature being hidden, here, we have this beautiful green belt surrounding the hill due to the fact the School secured the playing fields.

Harrow in 1750



Move to just outside Battels Cafe-and look at the Park and its Coadelion

This simple map from 1750s shows how basic the Hill was. The north was still populated by the oak forests. The Village was fairly close to the main well and fountain. The Pie Powder Court had developed as a small court for petty crimes which generally occurred on market days as these were held on the Church Fields. The church, the school house and the rectory are also shown. The original village clustered around the top of West Street, where it had a south-western aspect.

The Park essentially was the site for the grandest families on the Hill—you will still see their names mentioned both on the Hill and in the town—these were the Flambards and the Gerards.

The Park and Capability Brown

The Park was home to the Flambards —the brasses of the Flambards in St Mary's Church date from 1370. Sir Edmund Flambard was in charge of the army raised by the City of London for Edward III's wars against the Scots-and was the MP at the time. You can also see a wonderful statue of the Gerards in St Mary's.

In the mid-16th Century the Flambards estate was the site of the grandest residence on the Hill. The Park built on the old Flambards Estate is now one of the most handsome of Harrow School's Boarding Houses. In 1665, with 25 hearths it went on record as the largest house in the district.

In 1768 the owner brought in Capability Brown to landscape the Eastern slopes —and created the Harrow School lake. Capability Brown stated that no holes /bunkers should be carved out of his landscape and even today the bunker holes aren't on this part of the golf course. The lake was created from the natural springs on the hill which were shaped onto a Serpentine Lake. There's also an old Folly on the right side of the Park, built by Capability Brown to top the slope of the hill.

The Park also still has the magnificent Coade stone Lion—the Northwick Coat of Arms

It's also intriguing to think that in the 1920s the Lord Northwick of the time was so hard up for cash he sold his lands to develop the housing estates we now see all round the hill.

Green and Gantry and horses

Move down to the Green

The Green actually gives us our insight into how the Hill developed. Believe it or not 200 years ago this was Harrow Town Centre! It's fascinating that Harrow on the Hill is exactly 10 miles from the centre of London and that at one point, this was the extent to which horses could travel without a rest—so the Coaching Inn was an essential part of Elizabethan commuting!!

There are several reminders of the horses on the Hill—there is a beautiful stone horse trough on the Bessborough road leading to South Harrow. The key focal point is the Kings Head Hotel which may have existed even in Shakespeare's times 400 years ago although we don't know for sure.

We have a beautiful picture “The Entrance To Harrow” painted in 1770 by John Inigo Richards—it's interesting to see how little building there was here and how rough the roads look. Richards was the godson of Hogarth and became principal scene painter at Covent Garden in 1777. So 300 to 400 years ago Harrow was very much a rustic retreat!





HARROW HILL TRUST

For constant updates please follow us on

Facebook : [@Harrow Hill Trust](https://www.facebook.com/HarrowHillTrust)



St Mary's
Harrow on the Hill

stmarysharrow.org.uk

Email: stmarys.harrow@btinternet.com