

A SHORT HISTORY OF CURZON PARK CHESTER

The Curzon family, whose family estate was Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, acquired the lands now known as Curzon Park and Chester Golf Club, by virtue of the marriage of Assheton Curzon to Elizabeth Hanmer in 1756. She inherited the land from her father upon his demise. The land at that time was a farm known as Brewers Hall which name was an anglicised version of its original 13th century title of Brueres Halgh. Little of note had happened on the land over the years apart from the Parliamentarians sighting a large cannon at the farmhouse to bombard the Royalist held City during the Civil War siege of 1645-46. To commemorate the event a plaque has been erected on the site which is now the seventh tee of the golf course.

Asshetons grandson, Richard William Penn, eventually inherited the farm together with the titles of Viscount Curzon and Earl Howe from his grandfather and father respectively and it was he who decided to develop. In 1846 he had an advert placed in the Chester Courant of 27 September advertising the sale of leasehold plots on the north side of Deva Crescent which we now know as Curzon Park North. Chester at that time was enjoying a short period of railway led economic prosperity – for some! Chester was regarded as a desirable place for the gentry to live as is illustrated by the following quote from Hemingways History of Chester written in 1831. “There are few places where the gentry form such a high proportion of the community...all the elegant amusements and establishments that grace the most distinguished towns and cities may be found within the city and are patronised by the higher classes with the utmost zeal.”

He was encouraged to develop also by the opening of Grosvenor Bridge in 1832 which enhanced access to the lands south of the River Dee which hitherto could only be reached via the Old Dee Bridge in Handbridge. Improving access to the south bank was not the primary purpose of the bridge which had been constructed in a vain attempt to recapture the lucrative London – Holyhead coach trade which had been lost with the opening of Telford’s quicker route via Shrewsbury, now known as the A5. He was also encouraged by the arrival of the railway to Chester in 1840 with lines to Birkenhead and to Crewe. He envisaged that the railway would appeal to Liverpool merchants wishing to commute to Chester. In fact the opening of the first section of the Chester – Holyhead line in 1846 created a junction with the earlier North Wales Mineral Railway Company line from Wrexham at Saltney. Saltney prospered as a result and would become Chester’s premier industrial zone by virtue of its access to rail and river. For example, William Woods established a very successful chain and anchor foundry there. He was an early Curzon Park resident. There was a direct path from Deva Crescent to the Saltney wharves and sidings via the pedestrian way under the railway. The route still exists in parts. The lane now known as The Serpentine was the first part of the route.



Sale and development of the Deva Crescent plots must have been rapid. By 1851 “there were a line of nine large detached houses along the river cliff and three others built near to the entrance to the estate”. The western end of Deva Crescent branched into two separate bridges over the railway which still exist. My guess is that Curzon intended further housing development on what is now golf club land via one bridge whilst the second bridge was for access from the farm to the farmland south of the railway. Curzon Park Lodge, now The Lodge, which controlled access to the estate via a gated barrier across Deva Crescent, must also have been built at this time. The original footbridge across The Dingle was “a pretty little suspension bridge”

The Dingle Footbridge circa 1900

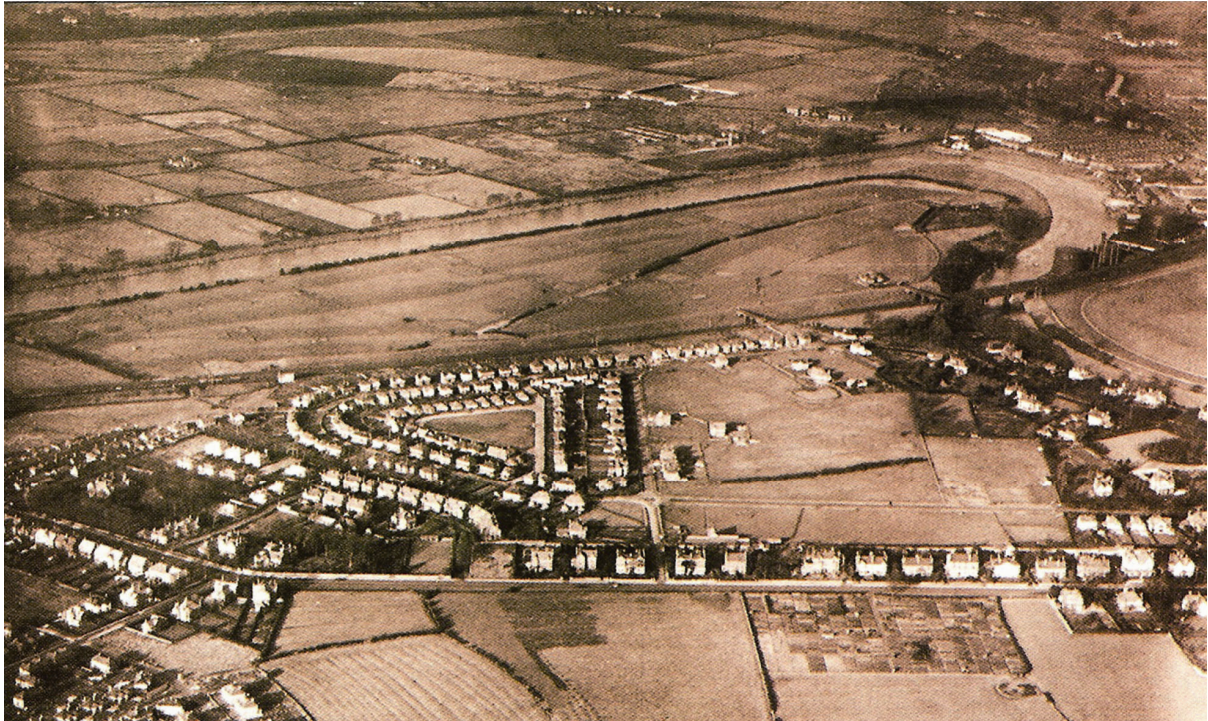
Subsequent development of Curzon Park was slow. The 1873 OS map shows only two buildings on Park Road, now called Curzon Park South, and no further houses on Deva Crescent. By 1900 only two more houses had been built on Deva Crescent and 12 more in Park Road which then only extended westwards as far as The Gables, the present day Convent. Construction of further houses beyond No.35 Park Road would not occur until after the 2nd World War!

Development on the north side of Hough Green was more rapid. The land was owned by the City Corporation which started selling plots in 1853 and by 1861 the census records that Nos. 2 – 62 were built and occupied. In 1879 a horse drawn tram service from Saltney Station to Chester Station opened. It was electrified in 1903.

By 1912 it was clear that the demand for exclusive property in Chester was smaller than the supply on offer. Consequently, Curzon advertised the sale of the remaining 72 acres of Curzon Park together with the sale of the freeholds of existing properties. At this time Chester Golf Club, which had been formed in 1901 on land at the Bache, was looking for a new course and acquired the land that it now occupies north of the railway. More of the club’s history is recorded in the club’s Centenary published in 2001. The sale of the rest of Curzon Park land was not successful. The Liverpool Post of 29 September 1919 announced that a syndicate had purchased 50 acres of Curzon Park for industrial development! The syndicate had obviously not realised that among the residents of Curzon Park there were a number of councillors and ex. Mayors. Although no planning policy existed beforehand, the Council hastily adopted one which restricted development to residential use only. As a result the syndicate sued the Council for damages and put their holding back on the market.

In 1921 a syndicate of prominent residents invited others to invest in a company to buy the undeveloped acres of Curzon Park to protect it from undesirable development. They proposed to divide the area into housing plots and produced a draft layout which included a railway station on Earlsway which would, of course, been attractive to commuters. The idea did not prosper.

The City Council had earlier been interested in developing public housing on the site with the aid of government mortgages but the government had to withdraw the offer due, no doubt, to national economic circumstances. However, in 1925 the Council purchased 52 acres and drew up a plan.



Curzon Park from the South circa 1930.

Between 1925 and 1939 several different developers built groups of houses on the western end of the estate. During the 2nd World War land on the north side of Curzon Park South was used for allotments. The land which is now The Paddock was reported to be a rough field with tennis courts and a pavilion. Some houses were taken over and used as billets or military offices. Post 1945 Curzon Park South was completed and the development of The Paddock, The Serpentine and Westfield Close completed the estate. In more recent times several of the larger houses have been divided or converted into apartments. The Victorian phase of the estate is now a conservation area and the broad tree lined verges are a significant feature. Some of the trees are reaching maturity. It is to be hoped that efforts will be made to conserve them and retain the attractive nature of the estate.

If anybody has any corrections or further information about the estate I would like to hear from them.

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