

clearer? No mention of parks, environmental services, green space or play under the responsibilities of the new 'delivery units'. Instead, we are told that parks management will come under a Procurement and Contract Management Strategic Support Unit.

This will send shudders through anyone aware of the history of public parks. There are ominous signs that we are going to repeat the mistakes of the seventies and eighties when cutting parks maintenance was seen as an easy, or less difficult, option for local politicians than other cuts. Both the Council reorganisations in 1974, which saw parks departments dissolved into leisure services, and the vicious reductions that resulted from Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the 1980s seem to have vanished into the memory hole.

It may be that, finance aside, parks will be a casualty in an accelerating retreat from the communal, from the space which demands consideration and tolerance in return. The human need for communality is under attack from the commercial imperative of purveying fear and selfishness. We may have spent nearly half a billion on parks, but at the same time the Government has continued the Thatcherite atomisation of society in favour of the private, of choice and the market. Perhaps the last ten years of spending on parks was in some ways a freak of history, and, under the new Conservative government, the shredding of the public realm will just accelerate in a headlong tumble towards urban wastelands.

For those of you still with me, this is a gloomy sort of rant. You may think I exaggerate: perhaps. But it can take so little to undo what has been gained. The axing of the ranger who has become a familiar and reassuring presence; the tiny adjustment in a maintenance contract that shifts weed control or litter collection from manageable to impossible; the reduced budget that means the toilets will have to be closed rather than repaired. I think we are back to the barricades, and Friends groups, citizens' panels, park-user forums are going to be in the front-line of the battle, with the weapons at hand – petitions, letters, meetings, demonstrations – rallying around the fluttering Green Flag, to preserve the hard-won gains of the last twenty-five years.

HIGHBURY HOUSE AND ITS GARDEN 1778-1938: FROM PASTORAL IDYLL TO URBAN STREETS

By Michael Ann Mullen

Highbury House, a villa residence set in a park in the hamlet of Highbury, was built by John Dawes, a retired City stockbroker, between 1778 and 1781. The population of British cities was growing at this time and the quality of urban life deteriorating. Insufficient housing for working people was producing overcrowding and discontent, and inadequate sanitary infrastructure was causing pests and diseases to spread. Seeking more tranquil and healthier conditions for their families, members of the growing merchant classes, tied to the city by work, built villas set in estates – most less than a hundred acres – in rural settings within commuting distance.

In 1809 these were sufficiently numerous for the Edinburgh author and gardener Walter Nicol to publish *The Villa Garden Directory* to provide 'hints on the formation of their villa gardens, shrubberies, and parterres' 'to gentlemen whose business necessarily confines them to the Chamber and to the Counting-room, ... and to the ladies of their families ...'¹ Subtitled *Monthly Index of Work to be done in Town and Villa Gardens*, he associated the villa firmly with the town. As the villa residence was a relatively new phenomenon, Nicol felt it necessary to emphasise that 'the Villa is one thing; the Country Residence and the Palace are of another cast; so are their respective Gardens'.² Highbury House, situated less than three miles north of the City of London, was one such villa.

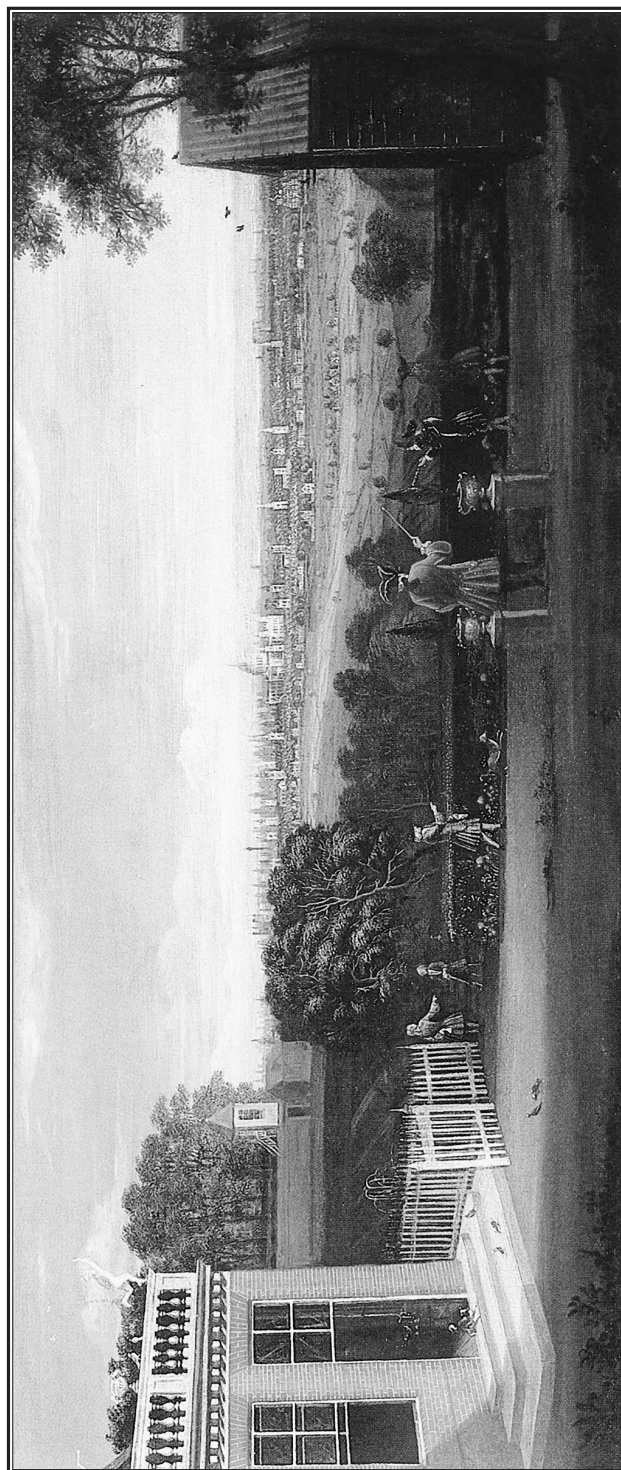
Near a main road leading to *The North*, at a hundred metres above sea level, Highbury was valued for its pure air³ and panoramic views. Highbury House was one of the numerous villas built in the area during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries⁴ (*fig. 9*) but its pastoral setting was short-lived.

1. Walter Nicol, *The Villa Garden Directory or Monthly Index of Work to be done in Town and Villa Gardens* (Edinburgh, 1809), Preface.

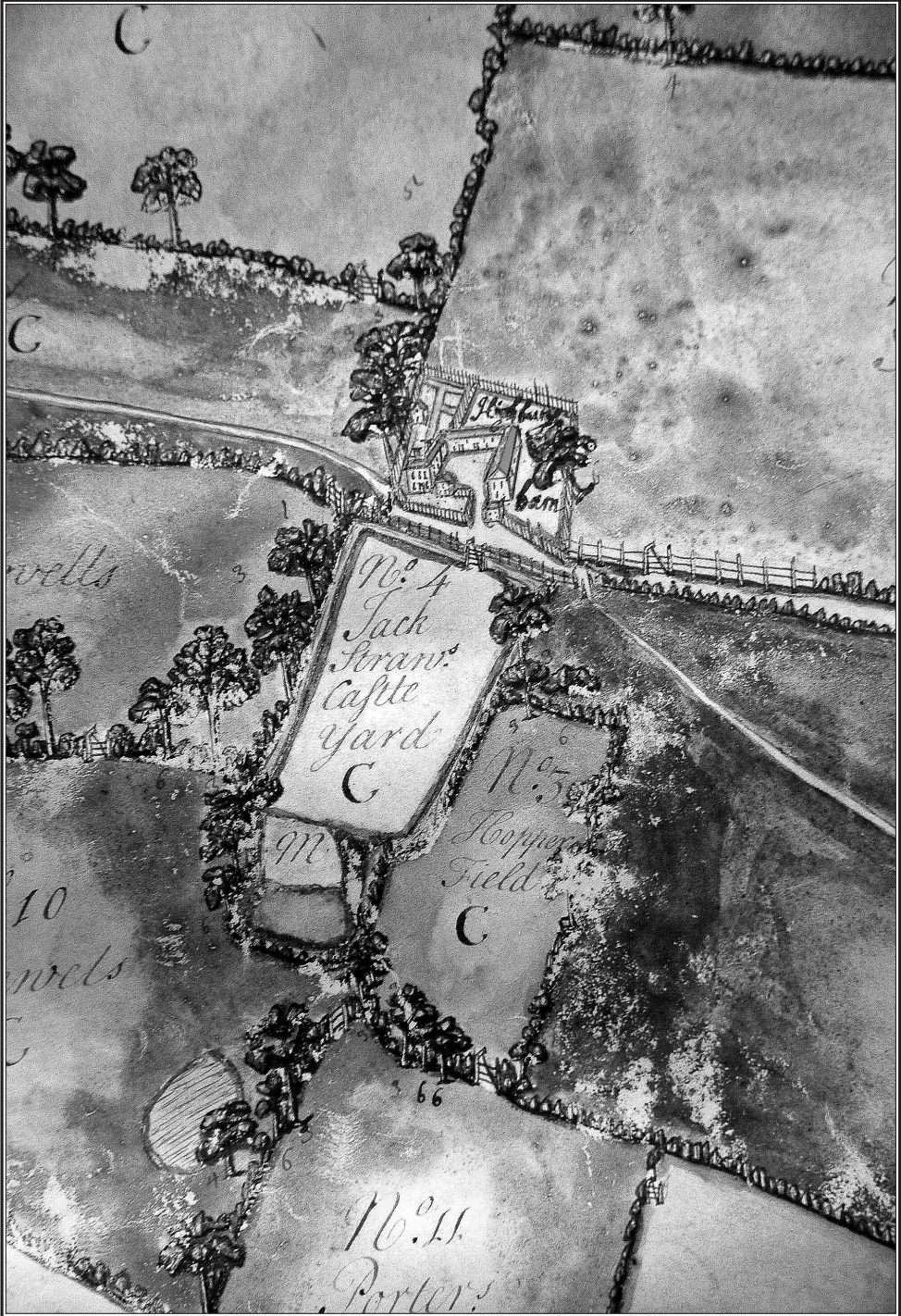
2. Nicol, *op. cit.*, p.1.

3. Patricia Croot, *Victoria County History, A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 8: Islington and Stoke Newington Parishes* (1985), pp.1-3.

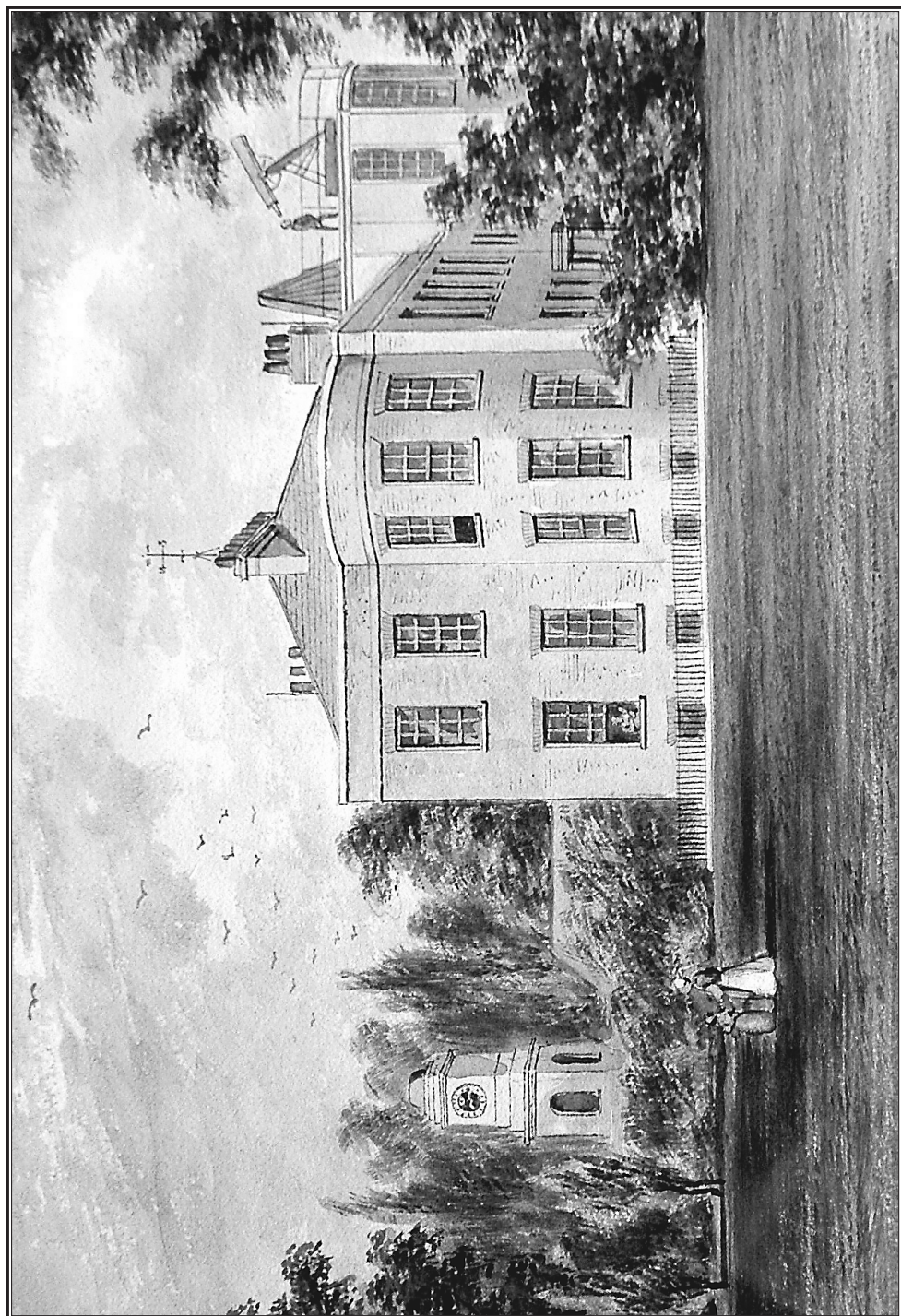
4. Humphry Repton alluded to this trend when he wrote: 'in the neighbourhood of every city or manufacturing town, new places, as villas, are daily springing up'. (Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London, printed by T. Bensley & Son for J. Taylor, 1816), p.69.



9. *Prospect from Hermes House, Canonbury Looking toward the City of London 1721* by William Grimbaldson.
This shows the geographical relationship that Canonbury, an area just south of Highbury, had with the City of London in the eighteenth century
(PRIVATE COLLECTION)



10. Manor of Highberry [sic] Islington Plan of Part of the Estate of Sir John Austen, baronet, 1718, John Johnson, surveyor
Scale: 1 inch to 20 poles (detail). The moated area in the middle of the image labelled 'No.4 Jack Straw's Castle Yard' is about 2 acres.
Above it, labelled 'Highbury Barn,' are buildings in what was originally the manor yard
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)



11. Highbury House c.1800, C.H. Matthews
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

London, with a population of over a million by 1800,⁵ started to incorporate Highbury into its urban fabric, and by the 1830s terraced housing had begun to spread over the grounds of Highbury House.

This paper traces the evolution of the garden at Highbury House from eighteenth-century villa garden to nineteenth-century terraced housing, and the evolution of the house from the genteel residence of a City squire to a twentieth-century block of flats for families displaced by slum clearance.

In 1778 the imminent construction of Highbury House was mentioned in a letter written by a Mr Brooke, who reported that John Dawes, 'formerly a stockbroker,' was 'about to build himself a house on the site of Jack Straw's Castle and has paled around a considerable space of ground for a park'⁶ which will have a delightful view of the Essex hills, the vale before Hornsey, Highgate and Hampstead and Islington.⁷ The house was to be on the moated site of the former Manor of Highbury, the seventy-four acre park to extend beyond.

The manor had been given to the Clerkenwell-based Priory of St John of Jerusalem (or Knights Hospitaller) in the thirteenth century and its manorhouse was used by the Prior as a country retreat until it was destroyed during the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. Thereafter the site was known as Jack Straw's Castle in memory of a leader of the Revolt. When John Dawes bought it from Sir George Colebrooke around 1770,⁸ the site is likely to have looked much like it did on a 1718 plan made for the then owner, Sir John Austen, and to have been used as a cattle pound (*fig. 10*).⁹

It is reported that Dawes spent around £10,000 on 'a commodious house, with suitable offices, on the spot where the Prior's house formerly stood'. He laid out 'the grounds in a handsome manner, with shrubberies, paddocks, hot houses, green house, etc.',¹⁰ retaining two parts of the moat as ornamental features in the garden and filling in the rest.¹¹ A plan for the garden and initial planting is likely to have been made between 1778, when work on the house began, and 1781, when Dawes moved in. No garden plan has been found to date nor has a designer been identified. Dawes lived there until his death in 1788.

Reporting the sale of the house after Dawes died, a contemporary source emphasised the attention paid to the gardens during his tenure:

The house and adjacent grounds, the residence of the late Mr Dawes, at Highbury, Islington, were yesterday sold by Skinner & Co at Garraway's. The lot was knocked down at £5,400 which *prima facie*, considering that the expense of erecting the house and outbuildings, and cultivating the gardens, building hot-houses, etc. cost upwards of £10,000 may appear a great bargain for the purchaser. The fact is, the grounds are beautifully disposed, and richly cultivated, but the house is by no means adequate to the situation in respect to convenience and elegance.¹²

Soon after the sale reported above, Alexander Aubert (1730-1805), a businessman and amateur astronomer, bought the estate for 6,000 guineas. Writing in 1811, John Nelson reported:

The improvements made on the estate by this gentleman were of the first magnitude; gardens, lawns, shrubberies, and plantations, of every description, were soon brought to environ the dwelling-house; and the old moat, which had, in the gloomy ages of superstition,

5. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London: Abacus, 1999), p.23.

6. Author's emphasis.

7. A 1778 letter from Mr Brooke to Mr Gough bound into a grangerized copy of John Nelson's *The History, Topography and Antiquities of the Parish of St Mary, Islington* (London, printed for the author by John Nichols, 1811).

8. John Nelson, *History of Islington: A facsimile of the First Edition (1811) together with 79 Additional Illustrations and an Introduction by Julia Melvin* (London: Philip Wilson & Summerfield Press Ltd, 1980), p.138; Thomas Cromwell, *Walks Through Islington* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1835), p.302; and Thomas Edlyne Tomlins, *Perambulations of Islington* (London: James S. Nelson, 1858), pp.116-125 all provide information about the complex ownership and leasehold history of the manor and demesne lands after the dissolution of the Priory in 1541. By early 1700 it was in possession of John Austen who conveyed it to James Colebrooke for £10,500 in 1723.

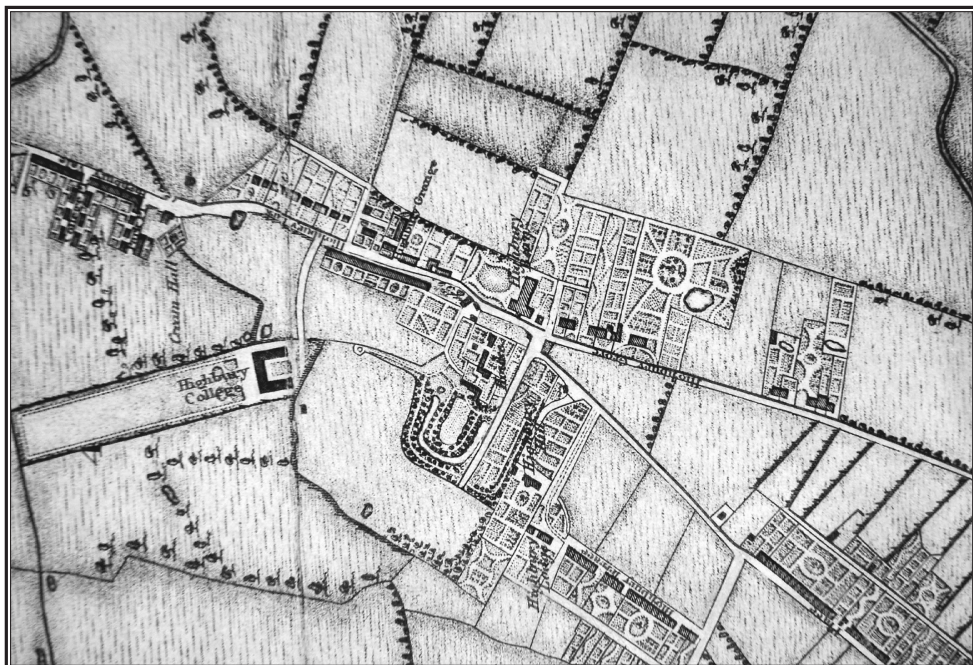
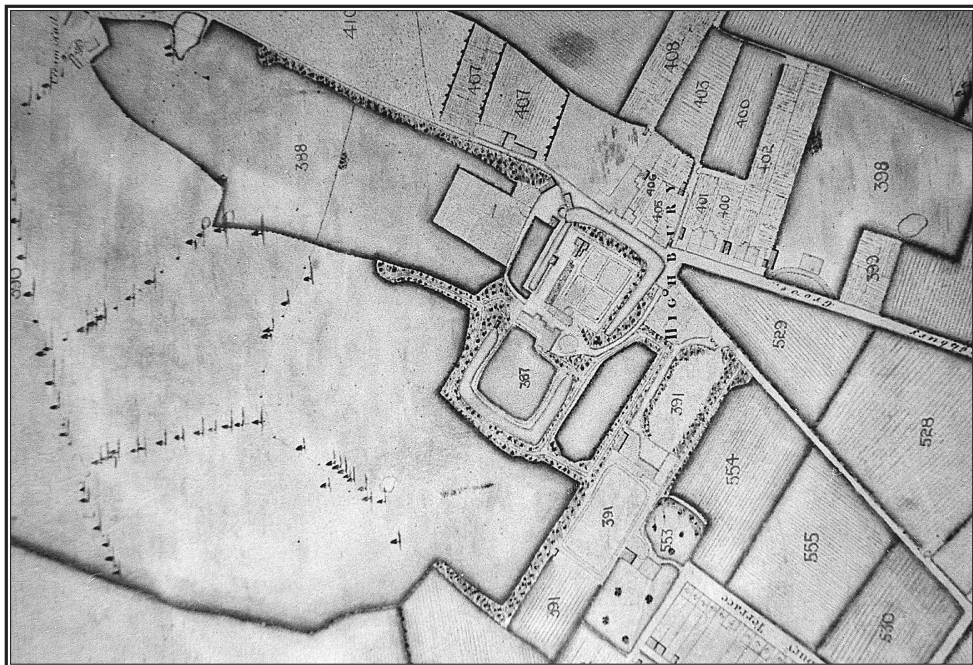
9. Keith Sugden, *History of Highbury* (London: Islington Archaeology and History Society, 1984), pp.5, 41.

10. Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, p.138.

11. Sugden, *op. cit.*, pp.5-6.

12. Quoted in Samuel Lewis, *The History and Topography of the Parish of Saint Mary, Islington, in the County of Middlesex* (London: J.H. Jackson, Islington Green, 1842), p.185N, dated 9 May 1788, no source given. Sugden, *op. cit.*, p.6, provides a quote from the *Morning Herald* of 1 May 1788 that provides somewhat different information: '... the property of John Dawes, esq., situated at Highbury, including his elegant villa and garden and offices, was sold by auction on Thursday at Garraway's Coffee House for £20,022'.

HIGHBURY HOUSE AND ITS GARDEN 1778-1938



12. *Plan of the Parish of St Mary Islington 1805-6 Sheet 8* surveyed by Richard Dent
Scale: 3 chains (66 yards) to 1 inch
(COURTESY ISLINGTON LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE)

13. *Reduced Plan of St Mary Islington 1805-6 (detail)* by R. Dent,
Scale: 3 chains (66 yards) to 1 inch reduced and corrected up to the present by L. Rhodes 1828
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

been only passable by means of a drawbridge, was partially filled up to form a carriage way to the house; it now assumes the appearance of a canal in front of the mansion, over which the weeping willow 'bends to the stream', and gives the landscape a very pleasing and picturesque appearance.¹³

C.H. Matthews' watercolour of the house shows the red-brick Georgian building from the west across a lawn (fig. 11). Trees, shrubs and a wide lawn dominate the planting.

Aubert is reported to have lived at Highbury like a local squire.¹⁴ A poem referring to the beauty of the place was published in *The European Magazine* in August 1793. It was addressed to Aubert by a lady who signed herself 'Simple Susan':

... Where Nature's hand redundant, but refin'd,
A second Eden for Aubert designed;
There the pure stream, refreshing as it glides,
The flowery bosom of the mead divides ...
But see yon lovely haunt, yet retir'd,
The HERMITAGE, where genius is inspir'd;
Thither retire, and 'neath its moss-grown cell
Bid for a while the giddy world farewell,
Else on the lawn, beside the nodding grove
Where violets and honeysuckles rove,
There let me view the villages around ...¹⁵

Richard Dent's 1805/06 *Plan of the Parish of St Mary Islington* provides an indication of how the grounds were laid out at the time of Aubert's death in 1805 (fig. 12).¹⁶

The main entrance, situated on the south side of the house, was approached by a curving drive reminiscent of the style advocated by Humphry Repton. Where it crossed to an approach circle by the house, the moat had been filled in to allow planting. Behind the house part of the moat had also been filled in to permit access to an area

planted with trees and shrubs. The area beside this may have been lawn; there the moat had been straightened to look like an ornamental canal. The large rectangular area above is likely to have been the walled kitchen garden and the area divided into four squares on the east side of the house probably an ornamental garden. To the west was the large lawn visible in C. H. Matthews' watercolour.

According to the *Reference Book* that accompanied Dent's plan, Aubert owned the freehold for the two-acre area within the moat and the field to the north of it (numbers 387 and 388 on the map). He also held the leasehold for the buildings of Cream Hall farm further north and the large field to the west of it (numbers 390 and 389).¹⁷

After Aubert's death in 1805, John Bentley bought the house. In his 1811 *History of Islington* John Nelson provided a summary of the particulars in the sales notice:

... a freehold villa, called Highbury House, not more than three miles from the metropolis, an observatory with various apartments three stories high, entrance lodge, lawn, paddocks, walks, shrubberies, plantations, pleasure grounds, canal, range of hot houses 70 feet in length, planted with choice vines, peach and nectarine trees, fruiting house, forcing house, greenhouse, kitchen garden, farm yard and pasture land, coach-house, stable, cow-house, brew-house, etc, etc, the whole inclosed [sic] within a ring-fence, and containing in the whole 74 acres, tithe free ...¹⁸

Nelson appears to have visited the gardens in 1809 and writes that Bentley 'has lately inclosed [sic] a considerable part of the grounds by a substantial brick wall' and that the 'grounds are abundantly stored with choice vegetables of every kind: the pinery and grapery are in the finest order, and extremely productive; there is also a small orangery, and a plantation of tobacco, which, in October 1809, was standing seven feet high'. That year Bentley¹⁹ harvested 'a hogshead of that

13. Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, p.139.

14. Nelson writes that he was 'particularly endeared to the inhabitants of Islington for his good humour, hospitality, affability and politeness' (Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, p.141) and Lewis that 'many friends visited his observatory and house at Highbury' (Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.188).

15. Quoted from *The European Magazine*, 1793 VOL. XXIV, p.139 by Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, pp.140-141. There is a copy of the poem in the cuttings file of Islington Local History Centre.

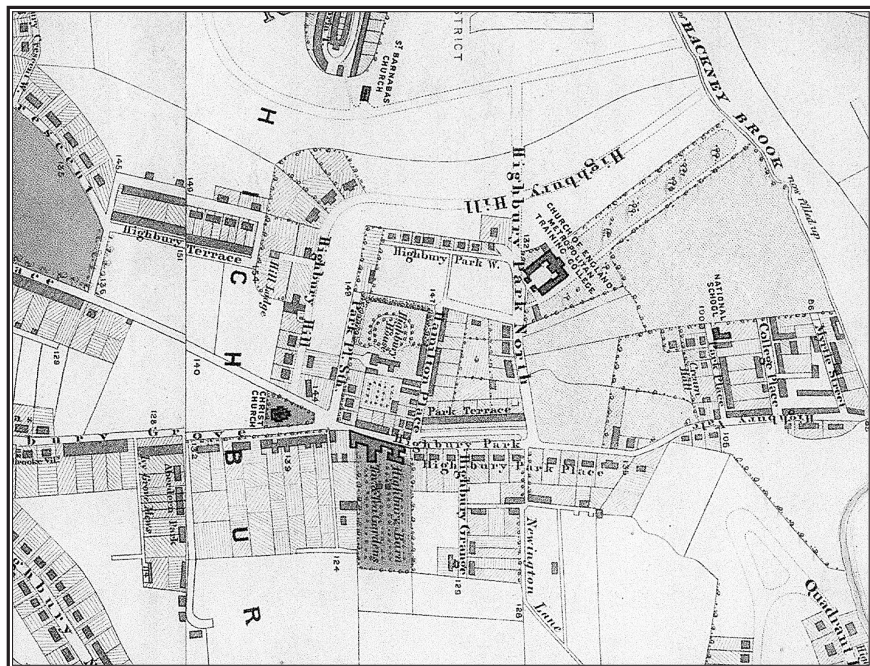
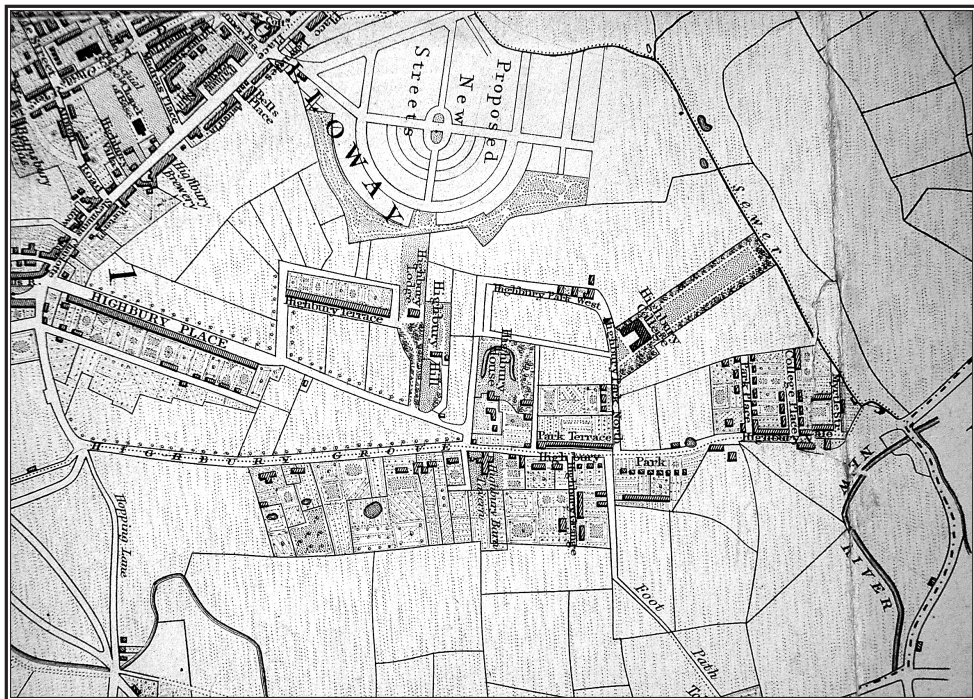
16. In summer 1805 Richard Dent was commissioned by the Vestry to supply a plan of the Parish of St Mary Islington. It was to show every house, outhouse, garden and enclosure. The plan was accompanied by a referenced field book in which was recorded the ownership and holdings of each property. For this Dent was paid £350 (Mary Cosh, *History of Islington* (London: Historical Publications, 2005), p.139).

17. Richard Dent, *Reference Book to the Plan of the Parish of St Mary Islington in the County of Middlesex surveyed in 1805*. See entries which refer to these numbered areas.

18. Quoted in Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, p.139N. No reference to the source of the sales notice is provided.

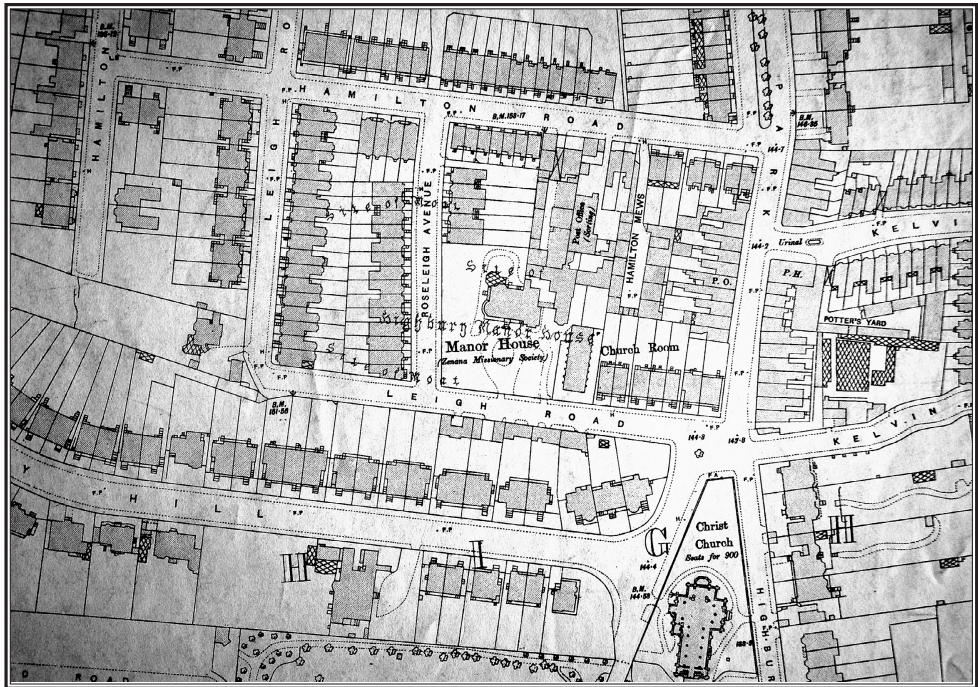
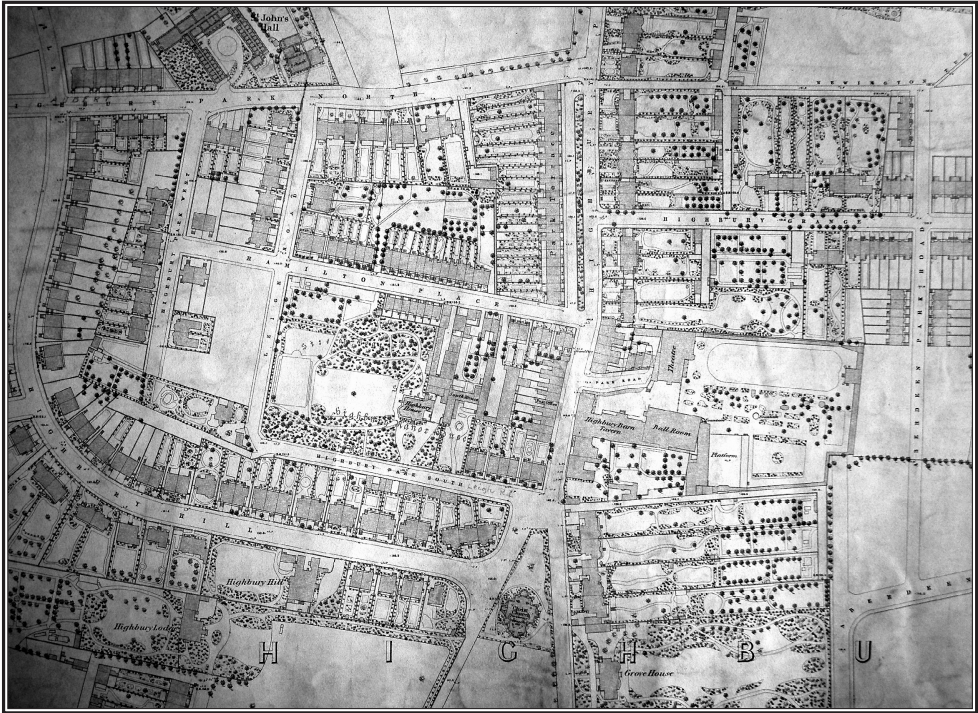
19. Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, p.140. It is clear that John Nelson knew Bentley as he is listed as one of the subscribers who helped to finance the publication of Nelson's *History*.

Highbury House and its Garden 1778-1938



14. *Plan of the Parish of St Mary Islington* surveyed by R. Creighton for the Parochial History by Samuel Lewis, 1841
Scale: half mile to 4 furlongs
(COURTESY ISLINGTON LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE)

15. *Map of Highbury 1862, Stanford Map of London and its Suburbs 1862-1871* Scale: 6 inches to 1 mile
(COURTESY BRITISH LIBRARY)



16. Detail of 1871 *Ordnance Survey Map of London*, Sheet 003.95, Islington surveyed 1869 Scale: 25 inches to 1 mile
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

17. Detail of 1897 *Ordnance Survey Map of London*, Sheet 003.95, Islington surveyed 1894 Scale: 25 inches to 1 mile
(COURTESY LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES)

entertaining exotic' but lost most of it because he did not have access to information about how to dry and cure it.

Bentley sold the house to Robert Felton in 1817. A sales notice in *The Times* described the estate at that time:

Highbury House with 74 acres of land, tithe-free and land-tax redeemed. Those distinguished freehold and Crown leasehold premises, an elevated, healthy and beautiful situation, commanding rich and extensive views, and though three miles only from the Royal Exchange, are as retired as if 100 miles from London, consisting of a very commodious, substantial and handsomely fitted up residence ... large and productive walled gardens, hot and green-houses, pineries, melon-ground, ice-house, plantations, groves, shrubberies, extensive shaded and gravel-walks, fish-pond, entrance lodges, and rich meadowland, lying within a ring-fence. This property forms as complete and desirable a property as any in the county.²⁰

This sale signalled the start of Highbury House's decline.²¹ In March 1818, Henry Ellis, the librarian at the British Museum, observed the east section of the moat being filled in. This left only the western section in the garden.²² There are conflicting accounts about Robert Felton's financial circumstances and about how long he was the owner. However, it is known that between 1817, when it was sold by Bentley, and 1835, when it was owned by John Gosling, land on the fringes of the estate was sold off.²³

By this time, rapid urbanisation had started to displace the stability of village life.

The population of the parish of Islington doubled between 1800 and 1820 and was to grow even faster in the next three decades. Situated to the north, Islington was particularly favoured as the City of London's population spilled into surrounding areas. There were few bridges across the Thames to encourage development to the south²⁴ and the prevailing west wind carrying London's polluted air made areas east of the City less appealing for suburban development.²⁵ The cleaner, fresher air and extensive views in the north of Islington, including those at Highbury, were highly prized.²⁶ In addition, from the late eighteenth century on, improvements in public transport had made it progressively easier for people who lived in Islington to commute to work in the City.²⁷ The number of houses in the parish increased by 80% in the decade 1821-1831 and a further 150% by 1861. After 1817 there is little written information about Highbury House. However, the effect of urban development on the property can be seen on maps of the area surveyed between 1817 and 1916.

Richard Dent's 1805/6 plan of Islington was revised and updated several times. The 1828 edition shows formal blocks of planting at Highbury House where, on the first edition, lawn appeared north and south of the house (*fig. 13*). Other changes to the property are also shown: the moat had been filled in to the north, east and south of the house, although it remained around the lawn to the west. North of the house on the main road, land had been sold for development. A terrace of houses is shown there; several had rear gardens but at its southern end there was only space for the terrace itself between the road and a section of garden that appears still to belong to Highbury House.²⁸

20. Press cutting of sales notice published in *The Times*, 5 April 1817 (from grangerized copy of Nelson (1811) in British Library); also quoted in Sugden, *op. cit.*, pp.41-42.

21. The notice quoted above attests to the fact that the 74-acre estate bought by John Dawes was still intact at this time. *A Plan of Islington* surveyed by Ben & Edward Baker in 1817 shows the moated site basically as it was on Dent's 1805/06 map.

22. Sugden, *op. cit.*, p.9.

23. According to Lewis, within a year of its purchase Felton sold the estate to Mr Knight 'an eminent distiller' (Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.188). Providing a different story, Cosh says that Felton, a City merchant 'went bankrupt some time after buying it and, 'from 1826, gradually sold off the fringes of the estate' (Cosh, *op. cit.*, p.100; Cromwell, *op. cit.*, p.302). Certain tracts passed, via assignees, to different buyers, but it has not been possible to identify the purchaser of the tract on which Park Terrace was built (Cosh, *op. cit.*, p.100). This scenario leads to the conclusion that Knight bought it after 1826 but before 1835 when, according to Cromwell, it was owned by John Gosling Esq. When Lewis published his *History* in 1842, it was still owned by Gosling but was occupied by Thomas P. Warren, Esq. (Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.188).

24. Hobhouse, *op. cit.*, p.345.

25. Parts of Kent became popular suburban locations after 1850 when linked to the City by railway.

26. Croot, *op. cit.*, 'Introduction', pp.1-3.

27. In the 1790s, two local stagecoaches ran return journeys along the Great North Road (now Holloway Road) into the City every hour. After 1800 services of this type became increasingly frequent. Dramatically improved access came with the introduction of horse drawn omnibuses connecting Islington to the City in the mid 1830s. The first railway link to the City opened in 1850 and a series of new stations were opened thereafter. From 1871 a tramline ran from Holloway Road to Finsbury Square. (Cosh, *op. cit.*, pp.190-95; Richardson (2000), *op. cit.*, pp.119-123; and Croot, *op. cit.*, 'Islington: Communications', pp.3-8).

28. This is present day Park Terrace.

Equally important are changes in the wider vicinity. Two terraces and individual houses on side roads appear near the buildings of Cream Hall, a dairy farm further north.²⁹ West of this, the recently built St. John's Theological College (1825/6) is shown on the map; both were built on land that was previously part of the Highbury House estate. Across Highbury Park Road are the first ten houses of Thomas Cubitt's Highbury Grange development.³⁰

By 1841 the house and grounds were boxed in by new roads to the north and west. On Creighton's *Plan of the Parish of St Mary Islington*, it looks as if these areas were being prepared for development (*fig. 14*). Three houses had already been built on Highbury Park West, a road in what was shown as a field in 1828. Immediately to the north of the property, Park Terrace had been extended to the edge of the original moated site; the gardens that once belonged to the house in this area had disappeared (*see fig. 13*). To the east, small buildings had appeared on the two corners of the property that face Highbury Park Road. To the west, Holloway Road appeared to divide the rural landscape north-east of it from the urban development to the south-west, but a proposed development included on the plan ('Proposed New Streets') indicated that this would soon change.

By the time the tithe map of Islington was published in 1849, John Gosling, who had bought Highbury House by 1835, had died and his executors owned the estate. The original moated site was now divided into three leaseholds. The Highbury House section was the largest and included the majority of the diminished park; however, Highbury House was no longer used as the residence of its owner. The executors still owned the land to the west and north-west of the house but new roads in these areas indicate the owners' intention to encourage housing development here. Half a mile to the west, tracks for the Great Northern Railway were being completed and regular rail service started in 1850.

An ornamental garden or park surrounded by a hedge or trees still appears to the west of Highbury House on the 1862 *Stanford Map of Highbury* (*fig. 15*). However, just to the north along Hamilton Place, terraced houses had been built, one terrace encroaching the grounds of the house itself. To the west, Highbury Park West was filling with houses that appeared to have no rear gardens. As this is at the edge of a steep hill, the land behind them may have been considered too steep for gardens. Development here is likely to have been of recent date as permission for the construction of 260 feet of sewers on the road appears in the minutes of the Metropolitan Board of Works for 26th April 1861.³¹ More sewers were requested for Highbury Park West in 1866. Also at this time, the Vestry was authorised to lay sewage pipes along Hamilton Road to the north and Leigh Road to the south of the property.³²

East of Highbury House, the gardens and yard were filling with houses fronting on the adjacent streets. A terrace of houses with small rear plots had appeared along Highbury Park Road but behind them there was still a fair sized area of land; it is not clear with what dwelling this was associated. Three square houses had appeared on Park Place South, the road to the south of the property.

The first Ordnance Survey map of Highbury, scaled twenty-five miles to one inch, was surveyed in 1867 and published in 1871 (*fig. 16*). It indicates that Highbury House, still set in a small park, retained some of the characteristics of a suburban villa. To the south there was a circular drive surrounded by shrubs and trees with a planted central island; to the west was a great lawn. What looks like a rectangular pool lay along its western boundary; this may be what remained of the moat. It is likely that areas were planted with an assortment of ornamental and native trees and shrubs, in a style advocated by Loudon in *The Villa Gardener* where he explained that landowners were interested 'to render a garden

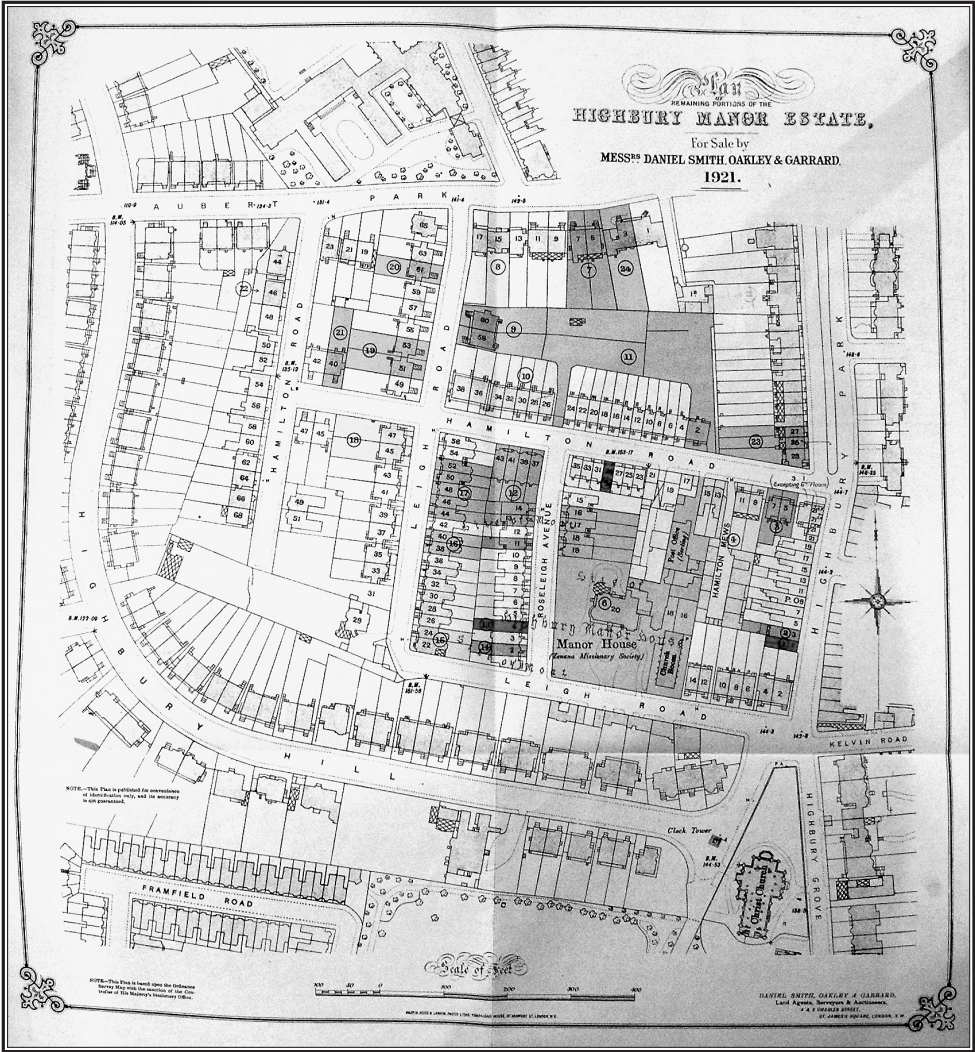
29. For information about Cream Hall see Nelson (1980), *op. cit.*, pp.154-5.

30. The developer Thomas Cubitt (1788-1855) was responsible for four relatively small developments in Islington. Highbury Grange, developed 1820-32, was the earliest and most upmarket.

31. *Minutes of the Metropolitan Board of Works* (MBW), Jan-Dec 1861, 26 April, p.312.

32. *Minutes of the Metropolitan Board of Works* (MBW), Jan-June, 1866, 6 April, p.423. By 1866, the road along the southern boundary of the original grounds was named Leigh Road and the road along the original northern boundary was Hamilton Road. (Hamilton was called Hamilton ROAD in the Minutes of the Board of Works and Hamilton PLACE on the Stanford Map of Highbury.)

HIGHBURY HOUSE AND ITS GARDEN 1778-1938



18. 1921 Map showing the unsold portions of the Highbury Manor Estate to be sold by Messrs Daniel Smith, Oakley & Garrard, Scale 25 inches to 1 mile (COURTESY ISLINGTON LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE)



19. Highbury House shortly before it was demolished in 1938
(COURTESY KEITH SUGDEN COLLECTION)

20. Eton House garden from Leigh Road, Highbury, July 2007
(PHOTOGRAPH MICHAEL ANN MULLEN)

botanically as well as pictorially interesting'.³³ The walled and ornamental gardens, originally to the north and east of the house, had disappeared completely under buildings, and the surrounding fields had been transformed into a criss-cross of roads lined with houses that possessed what Shirley Hibberd described as 'homely' (rather than 'great and grand') gardens.³⁴ A little open land remained to the west of Highbury House but, by 1894, when the second Ordnance Survey map was surveyed (published 1897), this too was gone. By then houses occupied most of the original garden and were beginning to crowd Highbury House itself (*fig. 17*).

The property had passed into institutional hands in 1887 when the Zenana Church of England Missionary Society bought the leasehold. By 1894, Roseleigh Avenue, a new road, truncated the garden to the west and the long narrow gardens of its houses ate deep into the garden of Highbury House. In addition, a large 'Church Room' had appeared next to the entrance drive. But Highbury House still had a circular drive to the south and some space for lawn and planting to the west and north.

In July 1921 the Revd. William George Gosling Thompson and Edward John Thompson, descendants of John Gosling, sold what remained of Highbury Manor Estate. The map supplied by the agents in their sales catalogue is identical to the 1916 Ordnance Survey map (*fig. 18*). On it the area looks little different than it did on the 1897 Ordnance Survey map.

When the proposed sale of the house became known to the Town Clerk at Islington Council, he wrote to advise the London County Council of its imminent sale, noting that 'next to Canonbury Tower, this house is probably the most interesting link with the

past in the Borough of Islington'.³⁵ The letter was passed to a sub-committee who instructed its Clerk to investigate the matter. His report, dated two days after the sale, summarised the salient facts of the site's history but did not comment on the historic importance of the house or its imminent sale³⁶ (*fig. 19*).

Sometime before May 1938 what remained of the Highbury House site was bought by the Old Etonian Housing Association whose aim was to provide decent housing for working people. They demolished the house and built Eton House, a block of forty flats, on the site. When the Marquess of Willingdon laid the foundation stone the *Islington Gazette* reported:

The site, measuring three-quarters of an acre, was acquired by the Association for £5,500. The building scheme, which is estimated to cost £25,000, provides for forty flats. ... Besides its habitable rooms (living room and bedrooms) each flat will have a kitchen-scully with ventilated larder, a bathroom and separate W.C. and an entrance hall. In addition, there will be perambulator and bicycle sheds, a garden, and a children's playground. The occupants will be drawn from condemned houses in Islington, which have been scheduled for 'slum clearance', and from basements which have been closed as unfit for habitation.³⁷

By 1890 St. Mary Islington had become the most densely populated parish in Britain³⁸ and by 1939 the site that had provided an idyllic setting for John Dawes' villa residence in 1778, had become home to forty working class families from Islington's urban slums (*fig. 20*). Its extensive former grounds lay beneath the terraced houses and gardens of London's expanding middle classes.

33. John Claudius Loudon, *The Villa Gardener*, second edition, edited by Mrs Loudon (London: Williams Orr & Co., 1850), p.299.

34. Shirley Hibberd, *The Amateur's Flower Garden* (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, Ltd, 1986, first published 1871), p.2.

35. Copy of an unpublished letter from G.C.E. Fletcher, Town Clerk to the Metropolitan Borough of Islington to Sir James Bird, J P Clerk of the London County Council, 14 May 1921 (Islington Local History Centre).

36. Copy of unpublished report by the Clerk of the Council [LCC] dated 8 July 1921, two days after the sale of the estate had taken place (Islington Local History Centre).

37. Cutting from *Islington Gazette*, 13 May 1938 (Islington Local History Centre).

38. Mary Cosh, *op. cit.*, p.270.