

Walthamstow's Playground



For many Walthamstow people the area around Whipps Cross was their favourite playground. I've previously written about the Lido but there was also the whole area around the Hollow Ponds, Eagle Pond and the Bullrush Pond by the Rising Sun that formed a huge open air recreation ground.

Left: Whipps Cross Road c1906

The Hollow Ponds

Below: Unemployed men extracting gravel by hand c1905



Like many of the Epping Forest ponds, these are not a natural feature. They were formed at the beginning of the twentieth century as a form of outdoor relief work for unemployed men. At the time there was a huge house building boom in Walthamstow which

needed to be supported by creating an infrastructure of roads and sewers.

Unemployed men were set to work digging out gravel by hand that was used in building the necessary infrastructure. The result was a series of gravel pits that filled with water forming a large pond with eight islands and a smaller pond that overflows into the large pond.

Walthamstow's Playground



Left: Whipps Cross Turnpike Tram Terminus

The area became a well known recreation spot and was easily accessible by trams which terminated at Whipps Cross. The large pond was used fishing and for boating and had rowing boats and a boathouse from which you hired the boats. It was such a well known place that the boathouse became a

target for militant suffragettes who burned it down to draw attention to their cause. The small pond was used for model yacht sailing. In the winter when the ponds froze they were used for skating.

Memories

Many people remember the Hollow Ponds with great fondness. Dawn Smith writes:

<http://www.francisfrith.com/leytonstone/memories/#utmcsr=google.co.uk&utmcmd=referral&utmccn=google.co.uk>

“We used to have lovely picnics, mum took sandwiches and some pop in a bottle, a towel and a flannel to wipe dirty hands and faces. We spend all day paddling and catching minnows with our net. My brother Tom always used to send a model boat out and they usually got stuck or sunk by a wave ! “

Florrie Morris tells us is, courtesy of Claire Magnifico née Morriss
<http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/pdfs/ClaireMorriss.Nan.pdf>

“At the Hollow Pond which once had been gravel pits, we bathed in summer and skated in winter”



Men fishing c1930

Karen Smith tells us on http://www.francisfrith.com/leytonstone/memories/Leytonstone-in-the-1950s_307491/

“Out of school we spent a lot of time on Wanstead Flats and Hollow Ponds, just like most other Leytonstone kids. I doubt today’s youngsters would be allowed the freedom we had. Totally unsupervised, we stayed out from after breakfast till tea time and if we got into a scrape we got ourselves out of it”



From <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/5282855> we learn:

“From the age of 10 years upwards, I used to go to this boathouse most days and I have many happy memories. My older brother used to work there so I had free boat rides! As I grow older, I was allowed to help people get of the boats but one day I fell in the water and had to go home soaking wet.I would love to go back again and see how things have changed. I am now 50 but still think I could go on those boats and row around the Hollows.”

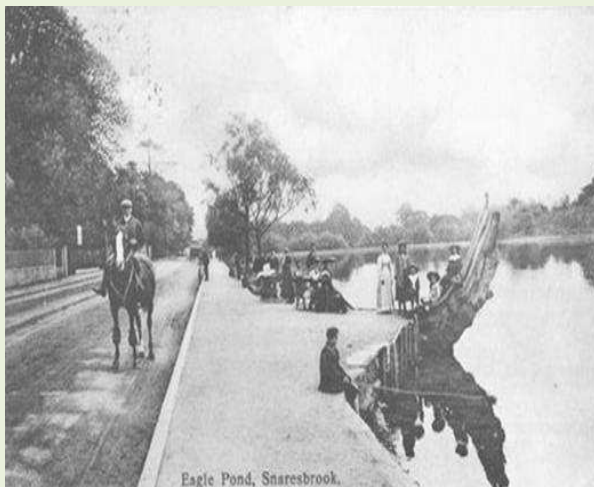
Present Day Hollow Ponds

The area is a wild life haven and today is designated as a site of scientific interest. Over last 100 plus years, it has never stopped being a recreation area and in recent years has been discovered by many new Walthamstow residents who, like their predecessors, enjoy the amenities of the area.



Above 21st century images of the Hollow Pond

The Eagle Pond



Above: the Eagle Pond c1905



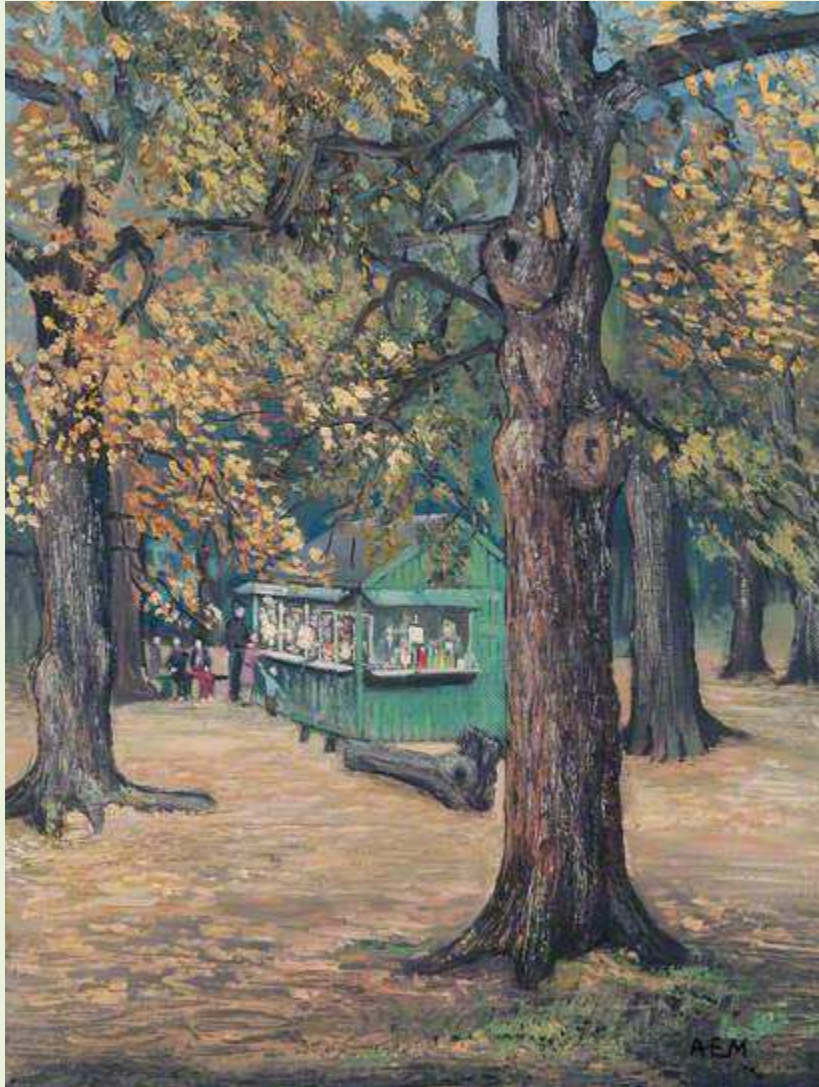
Above: the Eagle Pond c2002

A short distance from the Hollow Ponds is Eagle Pond. This is situated between Snaresbrook Road (Opposite Snaresbrook Court formerly the Wanstead Orphanage) and Hollybush Hill. It was originally called the Snare but later became known as Eagle Pond because of its close proximity to the Eagle Pub (Formerly the Spread Eagle)

Up until the 1980's it was a popular fishing spot but fishing is now prohibited. The reason for the ban is probably because of its closeness to the road and the danger posed by fishermen when casting their lines together with nuisance to residents caused by night fishing.

Hollybush Bond at the Rising Sun PH

The stall opposite the 'Rising Sun' Public House by [A. E. Manning](#) at Vestry House *'Rising Sun' Public House by [A. E. Manning](#) at Vestry House Museum*



Today, this is the least known of the ponds but for many generations of Walthamstow children this was the best loved. It is situated in Woodford New Road close to the Rising Sun public house. This is where they dipped for tadpoles and went on the paddlewheel boats.

John Lewis wrote on <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/html/postbag06.html>

“I spent many a warm Sunday boating on the rising sun boat pond. you had rowing boats and canoes. On the opposite side of Lea Bridge road was a tea stall.”

Michael Gilby, a regular correspondent with Walthamstow Memories who writes the excellent Mick's Muses <http://micksuses.com/category/memories/walthamstow/>

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

.....In the early 1950's car ownership was still something of a rarity. As a consequence the Bank Holiday traffic did not yet exist and frequently a family day out was much closer to home, sometimes almost on ones doorstep. It may be now difficult to visualise, but one such location people flocked to was the lake on Woodford New Road adjacent to the Rising Sun public house. An aerial view using Google Earth shows the lake to now be much smaller and giving the appearance of being no more than an overgrown bog. The lake was completely visible from the road but again it now appears to be completely obscured. However on summer weekends hundreds of people used to flock to this location. Deck chairs were available for hire as were rowing boats for use on the lake. Swimming and paddling were also popular features and a permanent refreshment kiosk selling teas, sandwiches and ice cream was located near



the shallow sandy banks of the lake. This is a good example of the ever-changing and transient environment we live in that I mentioned earlier

It was probably the coming of mass car ownership that sounded the death knell for the lake. People could now travel further afar to real sea-side resorts or the countryside. People simply stopped coming to this location and the boats, deck chairs and refreshment kiosk all disappeared without trace. The

next time you have an opportunity to drive along Woodford New Road, spare a glance for the lake which may have gone unnoticed before. Try and visualise this sorry-looking bog which once rang to the sound of children's laughter, sunbathers, swimmers and serene boating.

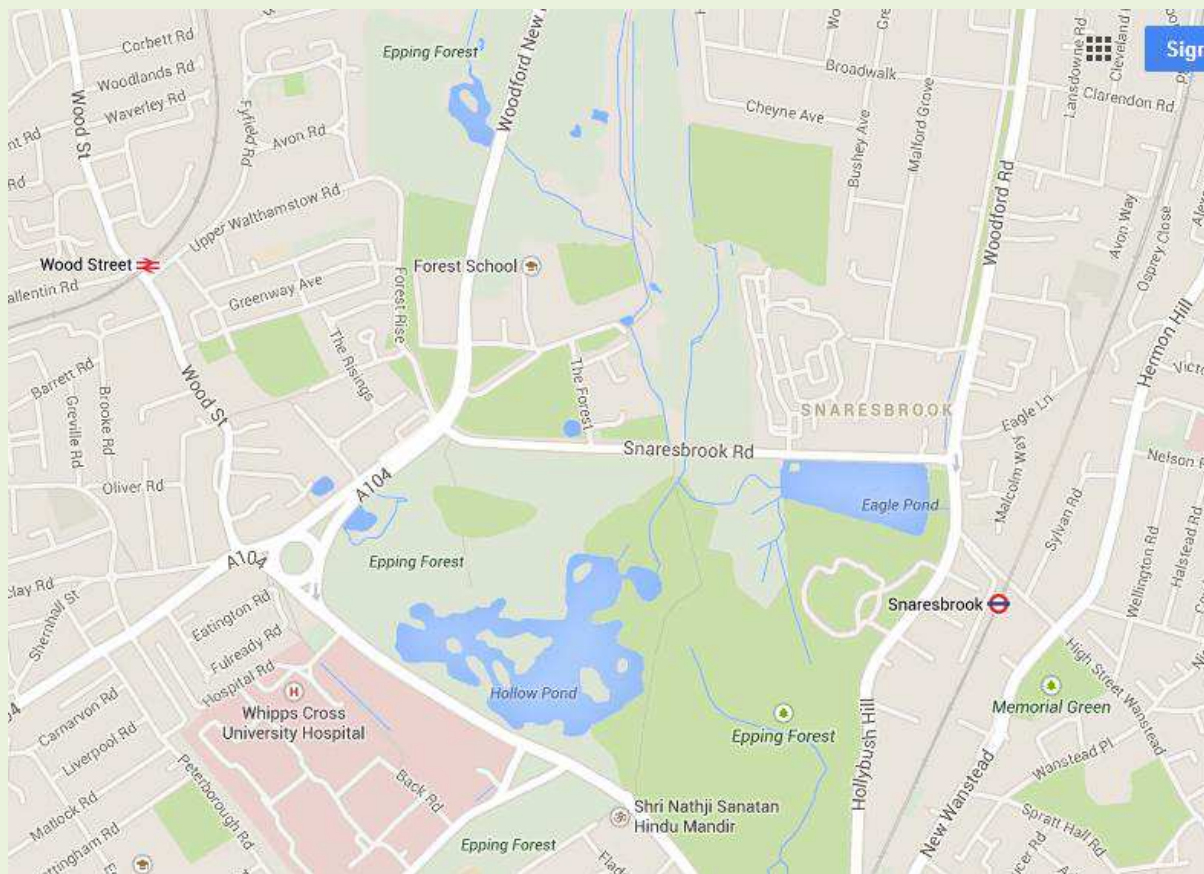


Above: children digging for old bottles at the Bull Rush Pond during the 1976 drought. They were collecting bottles that would have the bottles of pop that had been lost/abandoned by earlier generations of Pond users.

From Gillian Swanson on

http://www.francisfrith.com/walthamstow/memories/Walthamstow-in-the-1940s_248901/#utmcsr=google.co.uk&utmcmd=referral&utmccn=google.co.uk

“My aunt sometimes took me to the pond by the Rising Sun on Sunday mornings, to feed the swans. There was a little hut there, where you could buy drinks and snacks. I remember once the pond was frozen, and bigger children than me were breaking the ice with sticks, so that the poor swans could swim about a bit.”



The above map (Courtesy of Google Maps) shows the location of the Hollow Ponds, Eagle Pond and the Bull Rush Pond.

Bill Bayliss

March 2014