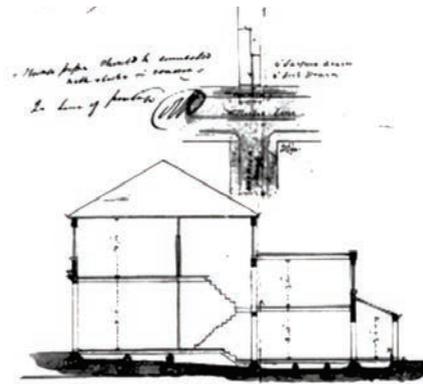


379-381 High Road, NW10 A Hidden History

At the heart of Willesden's community for over 100 years

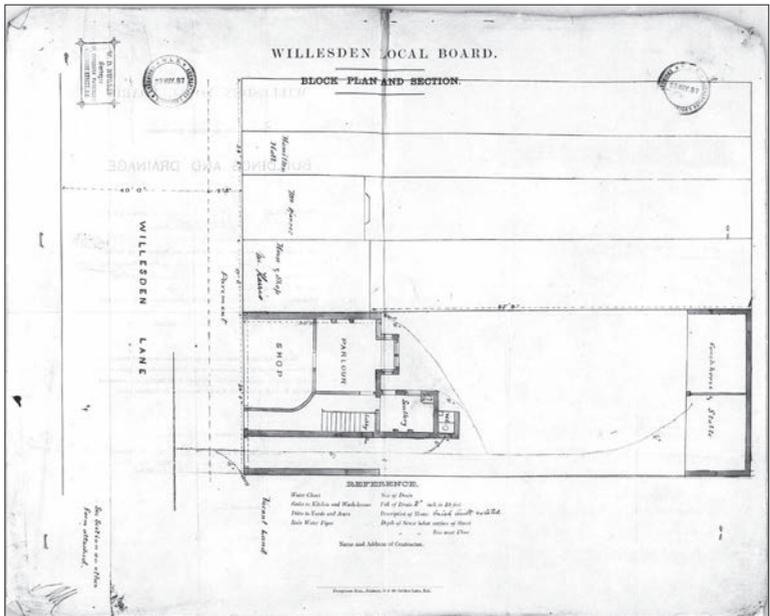
The Hidden History project aimed to discover the history of 379-381, the people who lived here, the memories of the people who used its services and its importance to the Willesden community over 100 years



Thank-you!

We would like to thank everyone who helped with the Hidden History project including: The Heritage Lottery Fund; Brent Archives; Willesden Local History Society; people who gave interviews and shared their memories; all the volunteers, interviewers and researchers; Brent Mencap staff and clients; Rob Bailey, Indre Balcaite, Shirley Bickers, Harry Brown, Michelle Burke, Eileen Collins, Sheila de

Alteriis, Tony Davey, Ray Frost, Taylor Glover, Jentilal Gorsia, Howard & Ben Greenwood, Eve Barker, Max Hopkinson, Pam Kenny, Theo Litovli, Sophia MacGibbon, Mike McGing, Teresa Neal, Ann O'Neill, Irina Porter, Margaret Pratt, Jo Rowlands, Robin Sivapalan, Tony Spence, Bridget Sullivan, Tony Twyford, Dick Weindling. Linda Davies, Project Worker Ann O'Neill, Project Director



In the 1860s Willesden was still countryside. The land was owned by All Souls College, Oxford and became more valuable as the railways were built. In the late 1860s-70s the college started to sell the land. Rapid building took place in Willesden. Meyrick Road, opposite our building, was built in the 1870s.

In August 1880, the United Land Company bought land along this road. The High Road was called Willesden Lane. Our stretch of the lane was called Market Place. The company sold numbered plots to builders.

The small house: a mix-up!

On 12 September 1883 William Harris bought plot number 54. He submitted a planning application on 24 April 1883 for a 'shop and premises'. An amended plan was passed on 26 June. He noted on 11 June "The frontage line to be the same as passed for Mr Martin."

James W. Martin, a local builder, applied for permission to build on 6 plots, on both sides of Mr Harris's plot. He intended to build six, 3 storey shops and dwelling houses, in 3 pairs, with one pair of plots 55 & 56 to the left of Mr Harris, and plots 53 & 52, and 50 & 51 to the right. His plan was approved on 10 October 1882.

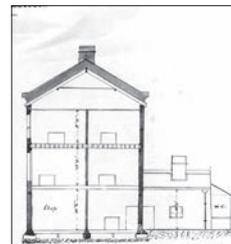
But there was a mix-up! Mr Harris built his "premises and shop" first. It was completed on 30 January 1884. Mr Harris owned plot 54 but had built on plot 53! As a result, the property was called 54 Market Place. The number 53 was never used!

Mr Martin could no longer build his pairs of three-storey shops properties as Mr Harris's house was in the wrong place. The building register shows he had several other local projects on the go.

In 1895-6, the street was re-numbered. The name Market Place was also lost. 54 became 379 High Road!

The big house: 52 Market Place, Chapel End

On 14 June 1887, the board approved a building plan for one shop and a dwelling house with stabling, for Mr Twyford, a local greengrocer. The builder was Joseph Dixon. Somehow Mr Twyford secured a larger plot with only one number, 52, perhaps due to the previous mix-up. The new building was completed on 7 September 1887. The Twyfords lived nearby, at Chapel Place. By 1889 they had moved into their new house and John appears on the electoral register. His greengrocers shop was at the front.



On the 1891 Census the family are listed as John Twyford, 52; his wife Jane, 46; and their 8 children: William 21, also a greengrocer; Kate 18, a dressmaker, Louisa 16, Thomas 14, Fanny 12, Charles 10, Lilly 8, Jane 5. The family included an adopted boy, William Kemp, 14, a telegraph messenger.

The Twyford family were the first people to live in the larger house. They let spare rooms to tenants: William Corke, widower, 39, general labourer, born Willesden. Ebenezer McCaskie, 57, a brass finisher, born in Scotland, and his wife Eliza, 60, a ladies nurse, born Weedon, Northampton. 14 people lived at 52 Market Place in 1891. Four years later it became 381 High Road.

Civil Parish		Municipal Borough		Municipal Ward		Urban Sanitary District		Town or Village or Hamlet		Rural Sanitary District		Parliamentary Borough or Township		Ecclesiastical Parish or District	
Willesden						Willesden						St. Martin		St. Mary	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
No. of Houses	No. of HOUSES	Street Name	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION or to Marriage	AGE last Birthday	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employed	Single	Married	Widow	ORphan	WHEN BORN	(1) Date and Parish of Birth	(2) Parents' Surname or Name
289	1	52, Market Place	John Twyford	Head	M	52							Willesden		
290	1	52, Market Place	Jane Twyford	Wife		46							Willesden		
			William Twyford	Son		21	Greengrocer						Willesden		
			Kate Twyford	Daughter		18	Dressmaker						Willesden		
			Louisa Twyford	Daughter		16							Willesden		
			Thomas Twyford	Son		14							Willesden		
			Fanny Twyford	Daughter		12							Willesden		
			Charles Twyford	Son		10							Willesden		
			Lilly Twyford	Daughter		8							Willesden		
			Jane Twyford	Daughter		5							Willesden		
			William Kemp	Adopted Son		14	Telegraph Messenger						Willesden		
			John Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
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			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
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			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		
			William Corke	Labourer		39							Willesden		
			Ebenezer McCaskie	Brass Finisher		57							Scotland		
			Eliza McCaskie	Ladies Nurse		60							Northampton		

1899: both houses are sold

On 23 November 1899, John Twyford sold 381. By 1901 the Twyfords were living at 99 Cobbold Road. John was 63 and retired. The adopted William Kemp, was still there, now 24 and a post office sorter/clerk.

Strangely, a month later, estate agents Catt & Gilling reported the sale of 379³.

Martin family – Coffee house and Cocoa rooms

By 1900 the Martin family is living at 379. Joseph Martin is a ‘coffee-house keeper’ on the 1901 census. In Kelly’s Directory, he is the proprietor of ‘Cocoa Rooms’. So in 1901 the front room of 379 was some sort of café!

His wife and daughters helped to run it – Annie, 44, plus Annie, Harriet and Josephine, 15, 10 and 7. Joseph was born in Blackburn, Lancashire. Annie was born in Windsor, Walter their son, 18, was born in Paddington, and the three girls in Willesden. So the family had been in Willesden for at least 15 years.

Mr Martin tried to get Walter a job by advertising in the Kilburn Times, 16 March 1900: ‘Lad wants job under smith or farrier, 18 months experience, good character. J. Martin 379 High Road Willesden Green’. The 1901 census shows Walter as a blacksmith, so he did get a job. Despite all the house-building, at the turn of the century Willesden still had rural occupations. As transport was still horse-drawn, horseshoes would regularly need replacing.

381 in 1901 – House of Multiple Occupation

By 1901 the large house had become a House of Multiple Occupation, with four households: 1st: William Dickenson, 50, a carpenter, seems to be the owner, with his wife and 4 children aged 12-19. 2nd: James Samuel Harke, with his wife and son, 8. His occupation is ‘oilman’s Assistant – colour’. 3rd: Alexander Seton Huth, a lithographer, 28, born Scotland plus Alexander Seyyet, 16, his assistant. 4th: James R Plowman, 62, widower, a mechanical engineer, and his daughter Jessie, 30, a laundry packer in one of the local laundries. Thirteen people lived in the property.

In the Kilburn Times of 26 September 1902, Mr Dickenson advertised: “Large shop and parlour to let, area 340 feet inside, every conve-

³ Willesden Chronicle and Kilburn Times, 22 December 1899

Administrative County		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the										Page 11	
Civil Parish		Ecclesiastical Parish		County Borough Municipal Borough or Urban District		Ward or Municipal Borough or Urban District		Rural District		Parliamentary Borough or Division		Town or Village or Hamlet	
Willesden		St Marys		Willesden		Church St				Harrow			
House No.	ROAD STREET No. and No. of FLOORS of HOUSE	MOSES (Inhabitant)	Other	Age	Sex	RELATION to Head of Family	Age	Sex	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Marriage, Widower, or Own account	Working at Home	WEEKS BORN	(1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lame (4) Inebriate, Incontinent
67	377 High Rd				M	George Henry Wright	64	M	Painter			Wales	
68	379 High Rd				M	John North	45	M	Coffin Maker	own account		Wales	
					M	John North	44	M				Wales	
					F	Ellen	18	F	Blacksmith	Worker		Wales	
					F	Harriet	10	F				Wales	
					F	Josephine	7	F				Wales	
69	381 High Rd				M	James Dickenson	62	M	Carpenter	Worker		Wales	
					M	James	49	M	Carpenter	Worker		Wales	
					F	Beatrice	19	F				Wales	
					F	Anna	16	F				Wales	
					F	Martha	14	F				Wales	
					F	Albina	12	F				Wales	
70	381 High Rd				M	James Samuel Clark	40	M	Chemist	Worker		Wales	
					M	John M.	4	M				Wales	
					F	Anna	8	F				Wales	
71	381 High Rd				M	James R. Dickenson	62	M	Robertson	Worker		Wales	
					F	Anna	30	F	Blacksmith			Wales	
72	381 High Rd				M	Alexander A. Hill	28	M	Employer	Worker		Wales	
					M	Alexander A. Hill	16	M				Wales	
73	383 High Rd				M	Alfred Phipps	40	M	Blacksmith	Worker		Wales	
					F	Martha	21	F				Wales	
					F	Beatrice	16	F				Wales	
					F	Martha	8	F				Wales	
74	385 High Rd				M	Alfred James Smith	35	M	Employer	Worker		Wales	
					M	Anna M.	43	M				Wales	
					F	Ellen	16	F				Wales	
					F	Beatrice	14	F				Wales	
					F	Martha	8	F				Wales	
Total of Inhabitants of Houses and of Tenants (with last four) in this House		5	2			Total of Males and of Females		14	17				

nience.” From June to September 1902 he had a shed and store built, at the back of 381.

By 1905 William Dickenson’s name is replaced by his son Ernest, born 1882. George Henry Wright moved into 381 during 1905. He was an agent for the Salvation Army Assurance Society which offered ‘L.R. whole life and endowment with accrued profits’⁴. The electoral register also listed: David Gower, one room first floor, unfurnished, 4s per week.

In 1909, 381 was offered for sale again, in a local newspaper dated 28 May.

Drunk and disorderly

In 1910 a John North was living at 379. The Kilburn Times of 29 April says he was ‘charged with being drunk and disorderly in the High Road. While drunk he spoke to a number of ladies. He was held at the police station and a doctor was called. Fined 5s’.

1911: The Evans family at number 379

The 1911 Census listed: James Evans, 64, a painter and decorator;

1901 Census ©Ancestry [Martin & Dickenson families]

⁴Willesden Chronicle 8 Sept 1905

his wife Sarah, 60; their son Frederick, single, 27, a fishmonger, working from home. They had been married 34 years, and had 5 children, 3 still alive. The last column tells us Mr Evans senior has been 'Partly Deaf from birth'.

1911 Census :
379 High Road
©Ancestry
[Evans family]

1911: The Povey family at number 381

By 1911 the Povey family were living at 381: Elizabeth Povey, 50, and 6 children aged 4 to 17 including Gerald, 17, working in a boot warehouse and Nellie, 15, a photographic platewasher. Mrs Povey had been married for 30 years and had 11 children, of whom 10 survived. She worked as a stewardess in a club. She was born near Warrington, Lancashire, as were five of her children. Her husband was still alive but elsewhere at the time of the census. On 20 September 1917 Gerald sadly

1911 Census :
381 High Road
©Ancestry
[Povey family]

died aged 23 in the 1st World War, probably in the 3rd Battle of Ypres at Passchendaele.

Working Men's Club

Willesden and District Social Working Men's Club was also based at 381 in 1911-1912. Perhaps Mrs Povey worked as a stewardess there.

Descriptions of the buildings

A Valuation Office property survey was conducted from 1910 onwards, nicknamed the Lloyd George Domesday. The Field Books are at the National Archives at Kew.

Number 381 is described as follows: Main Building: Stock brick red stone facings, slate roof, few slates loose & missing, but generally in fair condition. Bkww (Brickwork) wants pointing. One or two settlement. Top floor: 4 good rooms. First floor: 1 large front room, 2 other good rooms. ½ [ie half] landing Bath & WC. Separate side door to these floors. Ground floor: Hall, Lobby, Kit, & large room could be used as Shop & parlour. Small garden with door from kitchen. Separate door at side leading to yard and stabling at rear. Shed o/s WC & 4 brick coal bunkers. Well built brick stabling comprising 6 Stall stable & open front coach house with carpenters shop [over]. Blue bullnose quoins to brickwork. Steel girders require painting. Main building internally very dilapidated and repairs would cost £100. Gross value £455.

The rear of 381 was a separate property, with a stable and yard. Around 1911, both 381 and the yard belonged to Middlesex County Council and were occupied by the Willesden District Laundries Association. By 1915 the yard is being used by William Holloway, a local builder.

379 is described as:

Shop with separate side entrance, stock brick, red facings, slated roof. Signs of settlement in (arches). 3 rooms & WC up Shop, Kit, Scullery & o/s WC down. Long back garden. Poor condition. Valuation: Let as a Fried Fish Shop at £40. Tenant doing repairs. Not worth more than £35/13 yr = £455.

The Evans Family at War 1913-18 challenges, struggles and intrigue.

On 3 May 1913 Frederick Evans married Margaret Biles in Willesden. She moved into 379. Their son George Frederick Evans was born on 1 May 1916. In those days most women gave birth at home. The bedrooms would have been on the 1st floor. Baby George may have been born in what are now the offices of BIAS or Brent Mencap.

Conscription was introduced in January 1916. At first only single men were called up, but eventually, in May 1916 married men were also conscripted.

‘By April 1917 nearly 800,000 men across England had been exempted by tribunals’⁵

The National Archives holds 22 pages of original paperwork, detailing the multiple appeals of Frederick Evans against conscription and giving information about his family. He made his voluntary attestation⁶ on 12 Dec 1915. However he kept re-applying for exemption in 1916 and 1917 and was given conditional exemptions based on hardship grounds.

On 10 June 1916 he stated “It would mean me closing up my shop and total ruin as my wife who is delicate⁷ and slightly deformed would not be able to carry the business on. Also I am the sole support of my mother age 65 and father who is afflicted age 69 which would leave them both chargeable to the parish.” His father James Evans died at home at 379 on 21 June 1917.

In September 1917 Frederick claimed exemption because it was a certified occupation, he had sole support of his widowed mother, and it was a one man business. The army requested “that in view of the urgent need of men for the army his exemption be reviewed”

On 28.12.17 he was given an exemption until 14.1.18 but with the words ‘NOT RENEWABLE’. He appealed against this decision, made by the local Willesden tribunal. A tribunal at the Guildhall Westminster on 24 January 1918 gave him another 4 weeks to the end of February. The words NOT RENEWABLE are not used so it seems he gained a further reprieve.

Frederick survived the war and had two more children, Evelyn on 29.6.1918 and Robert on 12.11.19. The Evans family’s tenancy at 379 was terminated. In one of his military appeals, Frederick Evans said the Landlord had given them notice to quit by Lady-day [25 March] but that this is ‘wrongful’ as they have a yearly agreement to Michaelmas Day [29 September]. The Field Book said the owner of 379 was a Mrs Sarah Evans. She was his aunt! Maybe the council were offering her a good deal, to buy 379 for the clinic.

⁵ Local Historian Vol 47 No 3, July 2017, p215
⁶ ‘Military Service Appeals in WW1’) by Sally Sokoloff

⁶ Under the Derby S scheme, men could voluntarily ‘attest’ or register for service at a later date

⁷ Apparently this was a common claim, see the Sokoloff article. One man is congratulated on not having a delicate wife!

⁸ 1948 Report of the Medical Officer for Health Willesden – all online via Wellcome Library

1918 - The Two Houses become a Clinic and a new Community Resource for Willesden”

Towards the end of the First World War, the council converted 381 into a mother and baby clinic to comply with the Maternity and Child Welfare Act 1918. One source⁸ suggests the health service began here on 1 October 1917.

The transfer of 379 took longer. The military tribunal paperwork shows the Evans family still lived here on 17 December 1917.

Eventually both 381 and 379 were converted into a health centre, later to be known as Willesden Municipal Health Centre No 2.

Willesden Municipal Health Centre No 2 1918

The building is described as “Two houses adapted and equipped for undertaking the care and supervision of the expectant and nursing mother and child up to school leaving age”⁹

“The Clinic had its beginnings in a gift to the local authority of 381 High Road Willesden Green by Dr and Mrs Acworth... for purposes of Maternity and Child Welfare. The adjacent premises were subsequently purchased, and the two houses adapted and equipped by the Council to carry on the work”

“The Clinic consists of: (1) Waiting Room, (2) Preparation or Nurses’ room (3) two Doctors’ rooms for general and specialist work, (4) an Examination room, (5) Dark room, (6) Dentist’s room, (7) Dental recovery room, (8) Dispensary, (9) Cleansing room, (10) Committee room, (11) Health



1921 aerial image. 379-381 at top right © Britain From Above. Ref EPW006174

Visitors’ room, (12) Clerk’s Office, (13) Matron’s Office, (14) Stores room.”

“The staff employed at the Clinic includes:- 2 Medical Officers, 1 Dentist, 1 Matron, 4 Clinic Nurses, 1 Dental Nurse, 8 Health Visitors and 3 Clerks”

On 1 August 1918 Mr Hayes Fisher, MP and President of the Local Government Board, “in declaring the Clinic open, stated thatWillesden had the most complete and comprehensive scheme of Maternity and Child Welfare yet evolved by any urban district Council”¹⁰

⁹ 1924 Report of the Medical Officer for Health Willesden
¹⁰ Public Health Journal 1918, Vol. 31, p143

Who were the Acworths?

Both Dr and Mrs Acworth were scientists¹¹. Dr Acworth was a research chemist who successfully pioneered a photographic process. He set up the Imperial Dry Plate Company on Ashford Road, Cricklewood, a large local employer, with 200 workers in 1919. The Acworths grew extremely wealthy and became local philanthropists. It's not clear why they owned 381 or when they donated it. The Lloyd George Valuation Survey shows that Middlesex County Council owned it in 1908 but it was up for sale in 1909. The building was named 'Acworth House'. Perhaps Nellie Povey, the photographic platewasher mentioned earlier, was one of their employees.

Willesden Cancer Centres 1929-1930

A trial cancer clinic was based here for 6 months October 1929 – March 1930, with weekly evening sessions. Although considered successful, it was not continued.¹²

In 1935 the health centre had two doctors and one dentist, and there were 73,137 attendances.¹³

The Doctors

Two doctors staffed the clinic. Dr Bessie Russell Mackenzie worked here for 30 years, from 1925 until 1955 (age 65). She lived at 28 Blenheim Gardens, Willesden. She had previously worked at Endell Street Military Hospital, opened in May 1915 by militant suffragists Dr Flora Murray and Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson¹⁴. Dr Edward Parker, who qualified in Dublin in 1917, worked here from at least 1935 to 1955.

Second World War: What happened at the clinic during the war years?

"The public anxiety and disorganisation of the first few weeks of war brought the work of the clinics to a standstill. This period of inactivity soon passed, and the requests for treatment regained considerable proportions"¹⁵

Pregnant women could register to be part of the government evacuation scheme here: 'On the 1st September 1939, 101 mothers within a month of confinement and 288 within more than a month of confinement had registered. Actually 77 mothers within a month of confinement were despatched from the three Municipal Health Centres on 2 September, 1939. The expectant mothers with more than a month

¹² In 1919, the chief medical officer for health Dr Buchan, recommended acquiring the property on the other side, number 383, to expand the clinic further, but this did not happen.

¹³ 1936 Report of the Medical Officer for Health Willesden

¹⁴ This Covent Garden hospital is said to have been the first unit to be entirely run and staffed by women. The majority of patients were men.

¹⁵ 1939 Report of the Medical Officer for Health Willesden

of confinement were evacuated with non-school parties by the Willesden Education Department'

The Health Centre also distributed babies anti-gas helmets. These were different to adult gas masks. The whole baby had to be put inside the "helmet". It pumped air, not always effectively as some babies fainted.

Health Centre No. 3 at Stonebridge was used as a First Aid Post, so the other two (High Road Willesden and Kilburn) became even busier to cover all the work. Sessions were "increased to the maximum possible." Classes teaching Mothercraft stopped. 'This important part of the work of each Health Centre had to be suspended on the outbreak of war'.



Photographer: Hens Wild (1912 – 1969) LIFE Magazine.

1948 Launch of the NHS

The health centre had operated for thirty years before the start of the National Health Service. It continued for a further ten years as part of the NHS.

1950s memories of the clinic and dentist

On a 1954 map the building is marked as a Child Welfare Clinic. The medical officer stated that the dental service at "The clinic at High road, Willesden is still heavily over-burdened with work"¹⁶

People who went to the clinic as children in the 1950s still have bad memories of the dentist. Facebook comments included:

- When I was a girl I went there - horrible memories I have. When you had teeth out you had to take a towel with you and we would all be in a room together spitting blood into the sinks (Valerie Ireland, Facebook, Sept 2017)
- I also had teeth out there, one of the worst experiences of my childhood. The dentist was a horrible, cruel man who shouted at you all the time. (Julie Anson, Facebook, Sept 2017)
- I vowed no child of mine would ever go to a clinic and they never did - dreadful memories (Valerie Ireland, Facebook, Sept 2017)
- I remember going to the dentist there, well being dragged there by my Mum. 1950s I remember it well it put me off dentists for life (Joan Ives)
- Omg... my worse nightmare as a child... GAVE US KIDS GAS WHEN THEY TOOK OUR TEETH OUT (Pat Newman)

Baby anti-gas helmet. London 1941. 'Mother and baby wearing gas masks during gas preparations test during WWII'.

^{e16} 1954 Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Willesden

The clinic transfers to Pound Lane

In the late 1950s the health services gradually moved to the Pound Lane clinic. In 1955: 'Everyone is looking forward to the new clinic in Pound Lane, which will be the first for over 25 years'¹⁷

A history book said the new clinic at Pound Lane opened in 1957¹⁸. A local news report says the clinic services began in January 1958. The official opening was 18 March 1958.^{19,20}

People on Facebook remember the health services moving to the new clinic in the late 1950s.

- Remember going to this clinic and then onto the clinic in Pound Lane, for dentist, injections and the weighing of babies. (Rita Cutmore)
- I remember going to the new clinic at the top of Pound Lane in 57 for TB jab, me mum used to get cod liver oil from the old clinic, yuk. (David Harris)
- We used to pass the clinic every day but I was under 5, I think the entrance was dark and dingy, horrible looking place, they used to provide small bottles of orange juice, cod liver oil and big tins of powdered baby milk. For the 1st year of my eldest we took him to the new clinic (1964) thank god, the contrast between the two clinics was unbelievable. (David Harris) [All Facebook, 10 Oct 2017]

¹⁷ 1955 Report of the Medical Officer for Health for Willesden

¹⁸ A History of the County of Middlesex Vol 7. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol7/pp232-236>

¹⁹ 1958 Report of the Medical Officer for Health for Willesden

²⁰ An older clinic, probably the Chest Clinic, was on the opposite side of Pound Lane. The 1954 Medical Officer Report mentions an 'extension to the Pound Lane Clinic completed in March 1953 providing a new X-ray department with an adjacent dark room, a miniature camera unit'

²¹ Planning application, 14 March 1960: Case No: IL344 Submitted: 14/03/1960 Status – Grant Consent – Decided. Conversion to O/P Club & Caretakers Flat.

Old People's Club and Daycentre

A tiny news item in the Willesden Chronicle of 18 August 1958 reported the Willesden Old People's Committee offices had moved to 379-381 High Road. During 1960-1961 the building was converted to an older people's club. A photo of the building dated 1961 shows the building freshly renovated with a new frontage and whitewashed windows²¹.

An old email from a council archivist stated that "Willesden Council acquired 379 and 381 High Road, Willesden from Middlesex County Council under separate transactions in 1960 & 1961. There is a note in their registers about 381 being acquired by Willesden as Trustees to a charity".

Willesden Green Senior Club and luncheon club opened in August 1961.

'The Willesden Green Senior Club was opened to old people in August. It was formerly a health clinic and the extensive adaptations, planned

and carried out by the Council, cost some £8,000. [compared to £18,000 for the Kensal Rise club] ... members of each club pay 1/- a year and the amenities include rooms for billiards, television, hobbies, reading and spacious main club rooms for meals, whist drives and concerts. Light refreshments are available at certain hours during the day. The legal ownership of the building remains with the Council, the management is in the hands of the Old People's Welfare Committee'²².

Lilian Haydon the organiser ran it until her retirement on 31 December 1962. She stated:

"This has been an important year which has seen the building and opening of our two full-time Senior Clubs, which are open daily from 10am to 9pm (Sundays excepted). The Clubs are situated at Kensal Rise, and High Road Willesden, and each have a membership of 300"

"The members so often express their appreciation of these delightful Centres which are the answer to many lonely hours"²³



The Garden

It's not clear how the garden was used when it was a clinic, but it now needed attention. 'A garden layout at the rear of the Club was completed and opened in 1963²⁴' and 'From the Working Men's Clubs, a very acceptable gift of garden furniture for the two Senior Clubs was also received'²⁵. Later, sheds were used by the Occupational Therapy team.

Caretaker's flat on the top flat

'A resident warden and caretaker keep the premises in good order.'⁽¹⁹⁶¹⁻²⁾²⁶

Electoral registers for 1963 to 1980 show a couple living at 379-381 High Road, Harold J. Giles and Annie L. Giles nee Sheldon. Their grandson Tony told us his family used to visit their grandparents on the top floor. They entered through the current door. He said his grandmother was the caretaker.

In 1964 a report²⁷ showed:'Three paid staff ...Organiser, Assistant, Clerk. The Organiser is responsible for maintaining the services of

²² 1961 Annual Report of the Medical Officer for Health

²³ Willesden Old People's Welfare Committee's Annual Report on the Activities of the Committee for 1961/62, by Lilian E. Haydon

²⁴ 1964 Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Willesden

²⁵ Old People's Welfare in the Borough of Brent, Report dated 14.12.1964 by C.N. Austwick, Chief of the Welfare Division

²⁶ Willesden Old People's Welfare Committee Annual Report 1961/62 by Lilian E. Haydon as above

the two Senior Clubs.... The above staff normally work from an office situated in the Senior Club, 379/381 High Road, NW10'

On 1st April 1965 London councils re-organised. Willesden and Wembley became Brent. Some services transferred from Middlesex County Council to Brent. This had an impact on the old people's centre: 'Prior to 31st March 1965, many of the welfare services for the elderly in the community, such as luncheon clubs, meals-on-wheels, full-time clubs, holidays, outings for the housebound, sale of welfare foods and distribution of Christmas gifts, were organised and administered by Wembley Old People's Welfare Committee and Willesden Old People's Welfare Committee, with financial support from their respective Borough Councils. From 1st April, these services were taken over by [Brent] Council'²⁸.

The Workcentre

Between 1964 and October 1979 a workcentre started to provide opportunities for elderly people to do work activities. It was in a big ground floor room at the front. Elderly people packed pens into wallets and stuffed envelopes: contract work for companies such as Bics and Grunwick.

"In the 70s and 80s it was a day care centre for the oaps. They used to pack pens into wallets and fill envelopes." Facebook, Brian Collins, son of day centre manager

Some people were brought to the workcentre by coach, from places such as Cricklewood and Wembley, while others walked. They were paid £4 a week. They worked 9am to around 3pm or 4.30pm. A kitchen was on the far side of the main room. Food was delivered from council kitchens. Tea and biscuits were also available. A bathroom was added, off the dining room. Staff used to help to bathe people who couldn't manage to have a bath at home. The room at the bottom of the stairs (now a disabled toilet) was an office²⁹.

Two unsuccessful planning applications were made on 6 August 1968:

- Erection of petrol filling station. New Willesden Green Senior Club & 16 flats. Case No: P6982 5876 Submitted 05/08/1968 Status – Refusal of planning permission – Decided.
- Erection of petrol filling station. New Willesden Green Senior Club & 8 maisonettes. Case No: P6982A 5877 Submitted 05/08/1968 Status – Refusal of planning permission – Decided.

²⁶ Old People's Welfare in the Borough of Brent, C.N.Austwick 14.12.1964, held by Brent Archives

²⁷ 1965 Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Brent

²⁸ Mrs Eileen Collins, phone conversation, 27.3.18

Both plans would no doubt have involved the demolition of the Victorian houses, which instead survive to this day. In 1982 the building a ground floor extension at the back was built. An exit, presumably the original front door to 379, was re-instated:

- Erection Single Storey Rear Extension and re-opening of pedestrian entrance to High Road (379-381). Planning Application – Case No: 821653L Submitted: 16/11/1982 Status: Grant Consent – Decided

Eventually the workcentre was phased out as people were not finding the work very stimulating, and new activities were introduced including exercise with music. Sixty people used the centre and could have lunch there. Although it was full, social workers would ask if there was a place and bring more people. There was no money for trips, the society was only able to provide a coach, so staff would ring round local companies for funding to take the old people to the seaside³⁰.



³⁰ Mrs Eileen Collins, phone conversation, 27.3.18



Hairdressers – story confirmed!

We heard the first floor had been used for hairdressing. People told us the sink on the ground floor was not suitable for hairwashing so they arranged for the hairdresser to bring clients up from the old people's daycentre to use the sink.

Brent MIND

Brent MIND already had an office on the first floor, when Brent Mencap arrived. The window cleaner Barry remembers in the early days a lot of activity with Brent MIND and other voluntary services here and next door (383). There was a community café in the Garden Room. Rob Bailey remembers Brent MIND ran counselling services next door. Mencap staff would sometimes use their rooms for confidential meetings with clients. From 2004-7 Brent MIND staffed a reception desk on the ground floor. When Ann O'Neill arrived, the staff kitchen on the first floor was a waiting room for Brent MIND clients and people smoked there. Brent MIND moved out in November 2008 but ran a social club from the Garden Room until early 2018.

Brent Mencap arrives in the building!

Brent Mencap was once called Brent Society for Mentally Handicapped Children. Before this, there were two organisations, in Wembley and Willesden. The minutes of the society's meeting held 26 October 1979 say: "Mr Stone [the chair] reported that he had seen an office that might be suitable for the Development Worker in High Road, Willesden.....The office is situated in the building of Age Concern and MIND. It is a large room facing the main road with the use of a kitchen. There is a workcentre on the ground floor and a spare room which could be used for meetings". At this point it is stated that the council would charge no rent and would pay for the heating and lighting.

The first paid worker was Pam Kenny³¹. She started work in January 1980. Nationally the organisation was re-named Mencap in 1980.

Pam confirms Brent Mencap had a 1st floor office at the front, Age Concern had a smaller office at the front, and Brent MIND had an office at the back. The top floor was empty to start with, and then a member of staff from the workcentre moved in. Eileen also mentioned

this and said: “They did it up for her again.”

Pam’s role was to develop and co-ordinate services. Pam remembers that to start with she liaised with two committees. The society received funding from the Manpower Services Commission and from Brent Council. They set up and ran housing schemes in Harlesden and Neasden for people with learning disabilities. They employed staff to support the residents. By the time Pam left, in September 1986, there were 8 or 9 staff, some part-time.

Other Brent Mencap staff and clients have told us about their memories.

One client remembered being a resident of the housing service and a volunteer. She helped at Mencap summer playschemes 24 years ago. She said Mencap celebrated 21 years with a big red and white cake. Newsletters were photocopied and put into envelopes. A housing officer held meetings in a back room for tenants of the Mencap houses. The Gateway Club has run for nearly 50 years. Due to a fire, the club transferred to this building for a period.

A client remembered “Step by Step” which helped people prepare for work. The weekly sessions in the Training Room included interview practice. Clients gained work experience.

Holidays were organised from the building and people enjoyed two weeks in Benidorm. Two clients had an engagement party but were so busy neither of them saw their cake before it was all eaten!

Another client remembers playing snooker in the building and that smoking was still allowed inside.

Frank also remembered a snooker table from the time of the old people’s centre: “When my dad did some cleaning over there for the OAPs I used to go and play snooker..... That snooker table was on the first floor at the front.”³²

People still involved with Brent Mencap recall the building

Shirley Bickers³³, a trustee, has been involved with Brent Mencap for over 40 years. She said there was a big open plan office but no private meeting rooms, so if she needed to have a confidential conversation with a staff member, she would use a secret codeword, and they would separately leave – to have the meeting in the Ladies toilet!

Rob Bailey³⁴ began working for Brent Mencap in May 1994 and still runs the Bonanza Club on Saturdays. Before he worked here the



³¹ Oral history interview recording is available

³² Frank Cogger, Facebook, February 2018

³³ Interview recording available

³⁴ Interview recording available

building was 'invisible' as the younger Rob had only noticed the music studios on one side and the Apollo Club on the other. Rob also pointed out that every room has two doors!

Ann O'Neill³⁵, the current director of Brent Mencap, started in January 2001.

The building has been modernised by partitioning the ground floor and first floors and installing emergency lighting, a new water tank and cabling. The disabled toilet became a larger Changing Places toilet in line with accessibility changes. The annual reports show that funding has been a continual issue throughout the years in this building.

We asked Ann about the pros and cons of the building as a base. She said that the spaces on the ground floor, including the large room and the garden, have enabled Brent Mencap to offer services that would not have been possible otherwise.



³⁵ Interview recording available

