



History of original Hardwick East Park Entrance Gate

Before the 20th Century development of a large housing estate to the west of the Durham Road in Sedgfield, and the construction of a new road to divert the A177 as a western bypass to the settlement, the eastern boundary of Hardwick East Park was marked by a high brick wall into which was inserted a decorative iron and steel gateway, catering for both carriages and pedestrians, as seen in this early photograph taken over 100 years ago.

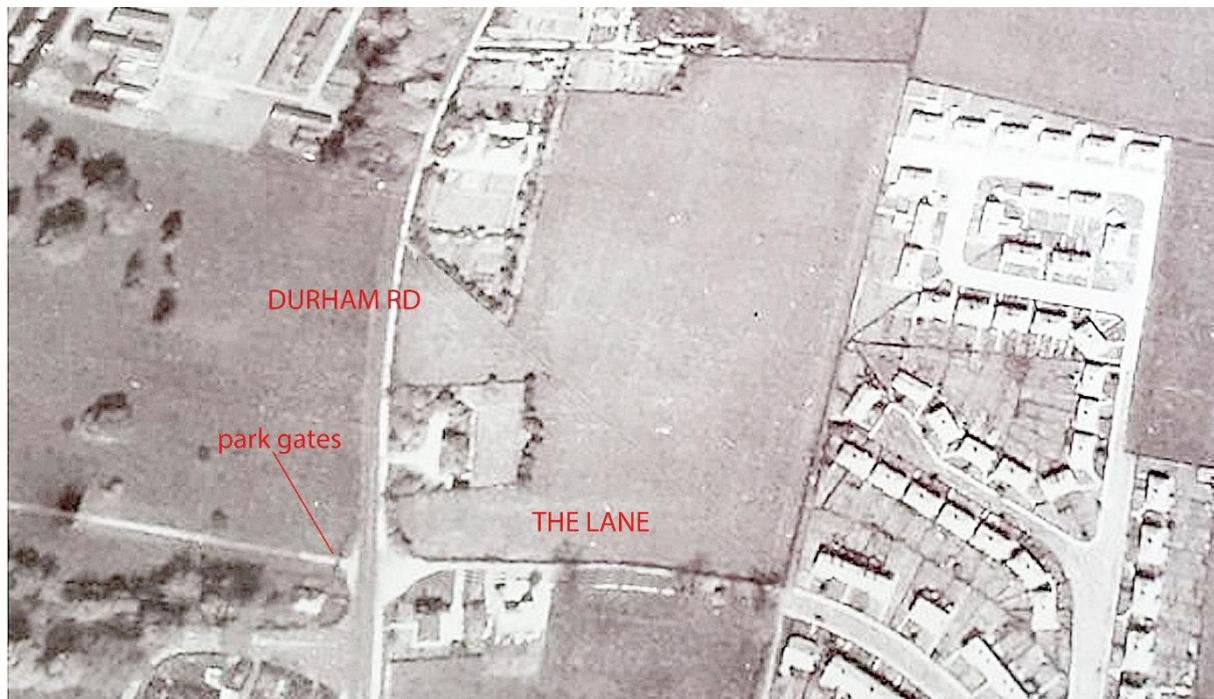


The original entrance to the drive leading to Hardwick Hall.

The gates have been decorated for the wedding of the Hon. Gustavus Hamilton-Russell, son of Viscount Boyne of Brancepeth, to Lady Margaret Selina Lascelles (of Harewood House) in October 1906.

The location of the gate was between the present West Park Lane and Hardwick Road. Part of the park wall still stands, and a bungalow occupies the site of the former lodge, the nearby bus stop is known locally as 'The Park Gates'. The 1945 aerial photograph below shows the location

of the gates and avenue. Opposite is the cart track that was transformed into The Lane as we know it today.



From the archive of Geoff Hill Sr.

Once through the gates, the drive to the front of Hardwick Hall proceeded down the grand avenue, formed by maturing beech trees planted on either side of the drive and glimpsed in the photograph above in the middle distance. Virtually all have long since been felled, leaving today a more open parkland with less than 20% of the original avenue remaining, mostly toward the western fringe of the East Park with a handful remaining in the top third of the Grand Terrace within the Main Park. Several majestic old Elm trees lining the drive sadly have succumbed to Dutch Elm disease. In December, 2000, then President of the Friends of Hardwick, the Pime Minister and local MP Tony Blair planted a heavy standard beech, with a commemorative stone at the eastern end of the remaining trees to mark the start of Durham County Council's comprehensive restoration scheme of this mid to late-18th Century and Grade II* Listed Parkland.

The journey of the gate.

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, Sedgefield experienced significant expansion in various directions, including the housing development of Hardwick Road.. While driving down Durham Road towards his residence on the western edge of the Village Green, local builder Ben Roper observed workmen demolishing the Hall Gateway as part of the new housing scheme. Seizing the opportunity, he inquired about the fate of the gates. Although the two side gates had already been buried in an intended garden area within the wall, the larger main gates were yet to be disposed of similarly.

Recognising a chance to preserve them, Ben was informed that he could take the gates immediately if he wished to do so. Without hesitation, and with suitable transportation readily

available, he transported the two gates to the bottom of his long garden and erected them as a gazebo. The gates remained there until a severe south-westerly gale struck Sedgefield in January 2005. Regrettably, Ben had passed away before this event. His widow, Elsie, approached the Friends of Hardwick Vice Chairman, Tom Stubbs, offering the two gates to the Friends and seeking assistance in finding a new location for them within the park. By that time the Hardwick Park restoration was progressing rapidly, and it had been agreed with the Planning Authority to construct a new entrance at the southeast corner of the Main Park, replacing the previous shared entrance with Hardwick Hall Hotel to the north. A new roundabout off the A177 road was constructed to slow traffic and ensure safe entry into the park.

The Council's Head of Countryside, Tony Smith, led the design of a new entrance that would maintain the character of the original as much as possible. Previously, the gates were mounted within a high brick wall, but no such structure existed at their new location. Additionally, modern vehicles, particularly coaches, are much wider than those from the past, making the old gates too narrow for current traffic. It was therefore decided to create new, larger gates that closely resemble the originals and to mount them between stone pillars modelled after the nearby stone plinth of the statue of Neptune.

James Godbold's Forge at Egton in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park delivered the new gates in 2009. Unfortunately, the second original heavily rusted and disintegrating gate, which was used to ensure its detailed design was followed as closely as possible, did not survive this process. Elsie Roper was understandably dismayed to learn of its demise but kindly agreed nevertheless to open the new entrance.

Friends of Hardwick worked with Durham Council Area Action Partnership to gain planning consent and funding for re-erection of the gate in 2025. The restoration of the gate was undertaken by PRM Fabrications Ltd of Tudhoe Industrial Estate. who previously worked at Hardwick for Durham County Council.

The Friends of Hardwick would like to acknowledge the help and support of the Durham Council Area Action Partnership and our local county councillors Chris Lines and David Brown.

The charity can be reached via the Secretary at foh-charity@outlook.com