

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUNNINGDALE

**S**unningdale is now home to more than 5,000 members of a thriving community but 2,000 years ago it consisted of a few huts clustered around one of the most important paved roads in Roman Britain – the 'Devil's Highway' between the capital Londinium and the new city of Calleva, near Reading.

Today its modern equivalent, the A30, separates our community just as it did when the legions of Emperor Claudius built it. When the Romans left in the fifth century, Saxon settlements began to spring up in the area, with the name Sunningdale probably coming from the Saxon Chief Sunna who controlled Windsor Forest.

In the twelfth century a nunnery known as Broomhall Priory was established at Sunningdale, but in 1521 after a number of financial difficulties it was suppressed and its estates seized by the Crown. The land was subsequently granted to St John's College, Cambridge.

The core of the Old Village was established in the late eighteenth century with a scattering of cottages for agricultural and domestic workers on the big estates around the southern end of Windsor Forest.

As the population in what was originally Old Windsor Common grew to around 700, in the late 1830s it was decided to build a church (rebuilt in 1887 in its present Grade II listed form) and give the village – by then known as Sunninghill Dale – its own ecclesiastical parish. Both Queen Victoria and King Edward VII were among Royal worshippers. The primary school, known then as Sunningdale National School but run by the Church, was established in 1840.

The next key date in Sunningdale's history is 1856, when the railway arrived to connect the village to both London and Reading. This sparked a flurry of house building, both around the Old Village and the A30/Chobham Road area. There were even plans to build swathes of housing across Broomhall Farm, the recreation ground and the woods and fields beyond it. These never materialised and today much of the land is protected Green Belt.

At the same time the big estates, including Sunningdale Park, Coworth Park, Tittenhurst Park, Charters (the only other Grade II listed building in the parish) and Broomfield Hall, flourished and expanded providing much work for local people. The latter was demolished in the 1930s to make way for the Broomfield Park estate and the others have been converted into hotels or luxury accommodation.

In the 1894 local government re-organisation Sunningdale acquired its own parish council. This led to a much more coherent community and it is significant that many local organisations – including the Scouts, the Bowling Club, the Gardening Association, the allotments, the Village Hall, the (former) Coronation Memorial Institute – all date back to the decades around then.

The twentieth century saw the birth of Sunningdale Golf Club as part of the development of the Ridgemoor Road area. Building continued apace elsewhere in Sunningdale, both 'artisan cottages' for workers on the big estates and many larger villas for wealthy industrialists and famous figures like Agatha Christie.

Until nearly twenty years ago the A30 roughly marked the county boundary – so Broomfield Park and other southern parts came within Surrey. In 1995 they were brought together in Berkshire under the unitary authority of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. At the same time the largely Victorian heart of the Old Village area around Holy Trinity Church became a Conservation Area.

The big boom in development has been more recent, with the population doubling to 5,347 in the last fifty years. In past times Sunningdale attracted members of the Royal Family, the aristocracy and landed gentry, but today our 'big names' tend to be international sportsmen and women, stars of stage and screen, captains of industry and showbiz celebrities – a trend started by Diana Dors in the 1960s and continued by John Lennon, Ringo Starr and Cliff Richard.

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THE A30 WITH THE CHEQUERS PUBLIC HOUSE, SADDLERY AND POST OFFICE, c1905

THE STATION WITH THE OLD ENTRANCE AND HOTEL, c1905  
TOP: SUNNINGDALE STATION, c1860

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