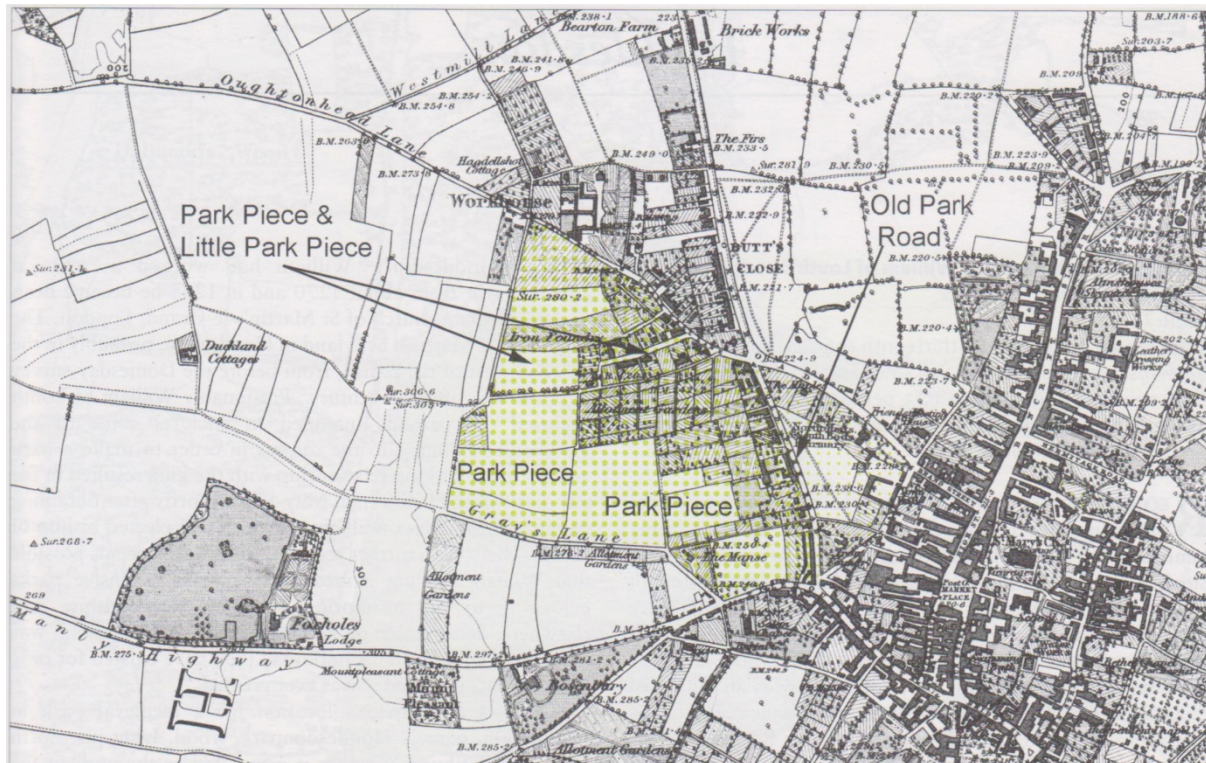


Park Piece Detached Gardens (now Gaping Lane)

Kate Harwood

Hertfordshire Gardens Trust, 2017

The early history of this area of Hitchin is covered in *Medieval Parks of Hertfordshire*¹. It was the northern part of Punfold Park, first mentioned in 1380. Remnants of boundary banks at Grays Lane and Lucas Lane are still extant, and the names Park Piece Gardens and Old Park Road, attest to the earlier park.

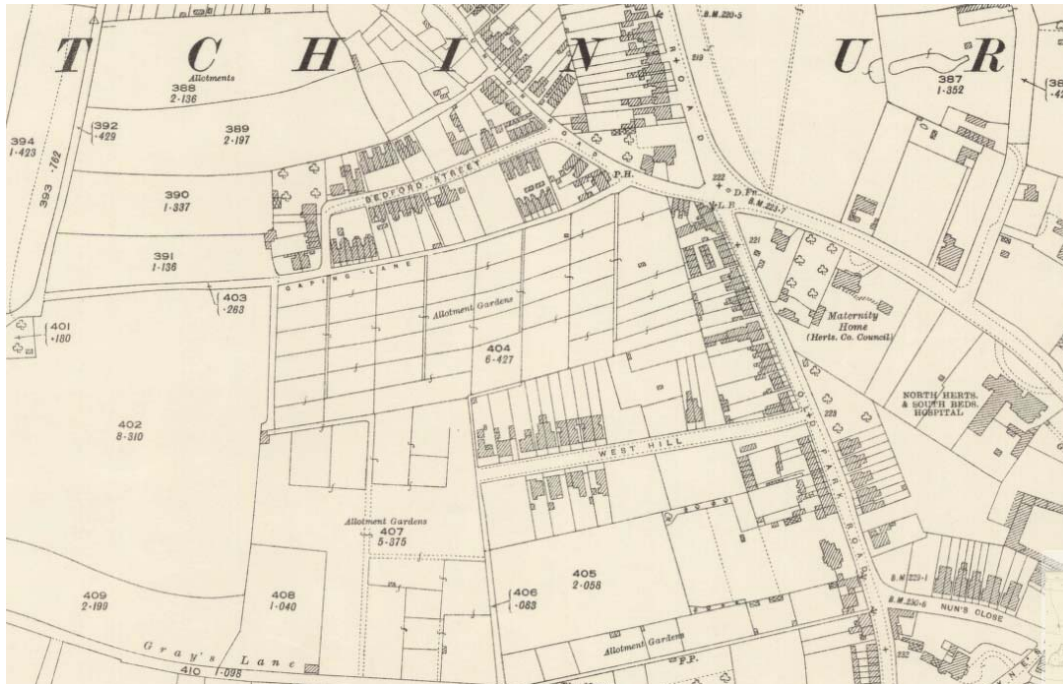


Extent of Punfold Park on OS XII (surveyed 1878-81) publ. 1884. Field names are from an early 18th century map (From Rowe, *A Medieval Parks of Hertfordshire*, p. 129)

During the 18th century the area was still agricultural, as attested by various 18th century maps. By the 19th century the area now covered by the Samuel Lucas school and Gaping Lane Allotments was divided into individual detached gardens and named Park Piece Gardens. These gardens are very rare nationally and the only ones left in Hertfordshire (See Appendix on Detached Gardens). The land was owned by the Wilshire family of the Frythe at Welwyn certainly by the early 20th century and let out as allotments at Park Piece Hitchin as shown on later maps. At least one of these contains a building (glasshouse or shed) and some are laid out as orchards. Individual paths (some of which remain) and hedges surrounding each plot (some also extant) demonstrate that these were not just allotments with their rules on vegetable production but private gardens to be used as the tenants wished for leisure or productive gardening. Hill Close Gardens in Warwick have an identical layout and are now on the Historic England *Register* at Grade II* (Of exceptional national interest). The Register entry for Hill Close includes this comment: *The survival rate for this type of site is extremely low, with most examples having disappeared under built development. Where they do survive, it is generally as allotment sites with hedges and buildings removed.*

¹ Rowe, A, 2009, University of Hertfordshire Press

around important towns. These should be conserved and restored to original use but with the opportunity taken to provide facilities for gardening for the local schools and many care homes in the vicinity as a true community asset. We note that the site has been Registered as a Community Asset with NHDC in 2017.



Ordnance Survey Sheet XII.1 publ. 1923



Path between hedged gardens. Gaping Lane Detached Gardens 2014



Neglect arising from lack of use 2014



Apple Trees in former hedged Garden 2017