

A History of Graves Park

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At 248 acres, including the Animal Farm, Graves Park is the largest park in Sheffield, embracing an impressive variety of contrasting features. Vast expanses of open parkland with short grass are bordered and intersected by natural and semi-natural woodlands. Graves Park is also a multi-sports and recreation site with facilities for tennis, bowls, miniature golf, cycling, and orienteering. In Estate papers of 1887, it was described as 200 acres of 'rich arable pasture park and woodland' with timber, and abounding with oak and other trees, as well 'as sheets of water and extensive pleasure grounds'.

The land that constitutes Graves Park was formerly part of the Norton Estate, and the earliest known reference to its ownership is contained in the Last Will and Testament of Wulfic Spott in the year 1002.

The reference in the Domesday Book shows that Godiva and Bada held the land at Norton during the reign of Edward the Confessor.

Roger de Busli held the land thereafter, followed by someone called Ingelram. His son, Ranulph de Alfreton, and grandson, Robert FitzRanulph, followed the latter. A change of dynasty came in 1269, during the reign of Henry III, when the line of Ingelram failed to produce a son. The female heir, Alicia de Alfreton, married Sir William Chaworth who became the new ruler at Norton.

When the line of Chaworths ended in a daughter, Joan, the name disappeared when she married John Ormond. One of their daughters, Joan, married Thomas Denham, the other, Elizabeth, married Sir Anthony Babington. The result was that the estate was split between the Denhams and the Babingtons.

The Denhams' share passed by sale, successively, to the Bullocks, the Eyres, and the Blythes. In 1587 the other portion of the estate was also acquired by the Blythes, who sold the estate in its entirety again to a landowner, John Bullock.

When the Bullocks fell into difficulties they mortgaged Norton to Cornelius Clarke, who had no children and so passed Norton onto his sister Ursula, who married Stephen Offley. *The Norton Estate* remained with several generations of Offleys, until the heir, Urith, married Samuel Shore. It was Samuel Shore who rebuilt Norton Hall and is credited as being responsible for greatly extending and opening out the grounds around the house, forming the estate into a landscape of beautiful parkland.

The Norton Estate remained with the Shores until 1843, when the then Lord of the Manor, Offley Shore, was forced to dispose of the Estate, owing to the failure of his bank. The next resident at Norton Hall was James Yates who came, not as Lord of the Manor, but as a tenant. The sale by auction of the Shore Estate in 1850, received no bid, but was eventually secured by Charles Cammell.

The Cammells were followed by John Sudbury who sold the Estate to W.F. Goodliffe and in turn it was sold to Bernard Alexander Firth in 1902.

1925 saw the most significant change in the ownership of the land. 112 acres (including Norton Hall) were purchased on behalf of the Sheffield Voluntary Hospitals, from Bernard Firth, who at the same time presented some 7 1/2 acres of land as a gift to the hospitals. In the same year 154 acres of the Estate were purchased by Councilor and Mrs. J.G. Graves, and presented to the Corporation as a gift to the City of Sheffield, for use as a public park. At three times the size of Norfolk Park, this new public ground, which the Corporation named 'Graves Park' was the largest in Sheffield. Its location on the peripheries of Sheffield, yet within the city boundaries and bordered by the hospital site, was considered to be ideal. It would fulfill the dual purpose of providing the people of Sheffield with a fine sports and recreational space, while simultaneously protecting the land surrounding the hospital from pollution or development. The boundary of the new park ran along Hemsworth and Cobnar Roads then down Meadowhead as far as the lodge leading up to the hospital site, to which the park joined beyond Norton Church.