

Acton

It is 6.1 miles west of Charing Cross.

At the 2011 census its four wards of East Acton, Acton Central, South Acton and Southfield had a population of 62,480, a ten-year increase of 8,791 people.

Acton means 'oak farm' or 'farm by the oak trees', and is derived from the Old English *ac* (oak) and *tun* (farm).

There is evidence of pre-historic settlement in Acton. There have been finds of Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age burials in Mill Hill Park and Iron Age coins near Bollo Lane. In the middle ages the northern area of the parish was heavily wooded.

Landholders figuring in county records were resident by 1222 and houses were recorded from the late 13th century. By 1380 some of the tenements, such as *The Tabard* and *The Cock*, along the south side of the road were inns.

Londoners were increasingly involved in land sales from the early 14th century but apparently did not live in Acton until the late 15th.

By the 17th century Acton's proximity to London had made it a summer retreat for courtiers and lawyers. Sir Richard Sutton bought the seat at East Acton known later as Manor House in 1610 and Sir Henry Garraway probably rebuilt Acton House in 1638.

Acton was lauded as 'blessed with very sweet air' in 1706 by the local rector urging a friend to move there. The fashion for medicinal waters brought a period of fame with the exploitation of wells at Old Oak common, when East Acton and Friars Place were said to be thronged with summer visitors, who had brought about improvement in the houses there.

There were 241 inhabited houses in 1801 and 426 by 1831. Growth took place in the established residential neighbourhoods of Acton town and East Acton, but Acton Green also had acquired a cluster of cottages and houses at the bottom of Acton Lane by 1842.

More widespread building was planned and took place in the 1850s. As a result of its soft water sources, Acton became famous for its laundries and at the end of the 19th century there were around 170 establishments in South Acton. These laundries would serve hotels and the rich in London's West End, leading to the nickname 'Soapsuds Island' or 'Soap Sud City'. At least 600 different laundries operated in South Acton, the last closed in the 1970s and is now a redbrick block of flats.

The parish of Acton formed a local board of health in 1865 and became an urban district in 1894. The town was incorporated in the Municipal Borough of Acton in 1921. During the 20th century Acton was a major industrial centre employing ten of thousands of people, particularly in the motor vehicles and components industries. One of the most important firms was Renault of France, which made cars, including the 4CV and Renault Dauphin, at a factory in North Acton from 1926 until 1960.

The authority combined with the municipal boroughs of Ealing and Southall to form the London Borough of Ealing, within Greater London in 1965.

Acton is now principally residential, though it maintains some light industry, particularly in the northeast Park Royal area, and the south near the border with Chiswick.

Famous Actonians:

Adam Faith:

Was brought up in Acton and lived there in the 1940s and 1950s. He was a successful pop star in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Sean Connery:

Lived in Acton from 1962 to 1967 whilst he was playing James Bond. He lived in Acton with his first wife Diana Cliesto. He lived near Acton Park in Central Road.

Waite, Rose and Taylor established their grocery business in Acton in 1904. They moved out of the Borough after the First World War, before which Taylor had bailed out of the business. This was, of course, to become the famous upmarket store Waitrose.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1696 to 1761, lived in Berrymeade Priory in the mid-eighteenth century. She was married to a MP and Ambassador to Turkey. She was an exceptionally well-travelled and educated lady. She was a prominent figure in Whig political circles.

Richard Baxter, 1615 to 1691, lived in a modest house near St Mary's Church on what is now the High Street. He was a leading non-conformist clergyman. He was offered a bishopric by Charles II in 1660 on the restoration of the monarchy, which he refused. He was imprisoned for holding illegal religious gatherings by the King during his reign. He wrote many religious tracts.

Matthew Hale, was a prominent lawyer who lived in Acton in the late 17th Century. He was Lord Chief Justice under Charles II. There is a carving of him near the main door of St Mary's, Acton on the exterior of the building.

Famous residents of Bedford Park include W.B. Yeats. He lived there in the 1890s as a young man. He went on to be a prominent Irish poet, the poet laureate of the Irish Free State and a Senator.

The famous French impressionist painter Lucien Pissarro lived in Bedford Park in the 1890s.

The actor Richard Briers of *The Good Life* fame and much more lived in Bedford Park in the 1980s and 1990s.

The actor, Bill Owen, who played Compo in the sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine* spent his early life in the 1920s and 1930s in Acton.

The MP Kenneth Baker, now Baron Baker of Dorking, won a bi-election in 1967 in Acton. He was voted out in the 1970 general election. He was to go on to be a prominent cabinet member in the Thatcher Governments, amongst other roles he was Education Secretary and Chairman of the Conservative Party.