

History

By the initiative of the Sevenoaks Community Association, formed in 1968, funds were raised and the Centre on the Otford Road opened in October 1983 to serve Sevenoaks and the neighbouring villages. Much credit is owed to the efforts of the first two Association chairmen, Reg Quinnell and Gwenneth Mehew. The Centre was on a site owned by the District Council and leased to the Association at a 'peppercorn' rent. Due to increasing costs Sevenoaks Town Council agreed to take over the operation of the Centre and the lease. The Community Association was dissolved in 2001.*

*Extract from *Sevenoaks, An historical dictionary*; David Killingray and Elizabeth Purves, 2012



Sevenoaks Community Centre entrance circa 1999

Early records of Sevenoaks date back to the 13th century when a market was first held here. The settlement grew from the 15th century after the construction of Knole House between 1456 and 1486 by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The house, which still stands today, has been extended many times through history and is now one of England's largest homes and an important landmark.

Land to the north of Sevenoaks was largely agricultural with a number of estates and manor houses including Bradbourne, Greatness and Riverhead. In the 18th century the area included a number of mills. These included a silk mill set up by Peter Nouaille – a French Huguenot and owner of Greatness House. This mill employed over a 100 people including French refugees.

Two turnpikes were opened through the area in the 18th century, the east-west Reigate to Wrotham (1765) and the north-south Farningham to Sevenoaks (1766). These met at Bat and Ball junction and a toll gate and inn were established at the location.

The railway arrived in 1862 and Bat and Ball railway station was the first station to be built. The area around the station became a hive of activity with a large goods yard and coal operation. Sevenoaks Station followed in 1868.

Brickmaking had been a feature of the area for several centuries, with Tudor bricks from the area used to build Otford Palace, dug and fired next to Otford Road. The 1910 plan of the area indicates brickworks to either side of Otford Road on the site of the current Vestry Road Industrial Estate.

In the inter-war years the demand for bricks and sand to construct new homes led to further works being established in the area including the Greatness Brickworks to the north-east of the area and sand and gravel extraction to the west of Bat and Ball.

Through the 19th century Sevenoaks continued to grow. The St John's Hill area was developed for housing through the period 1840 to 1880 and the Sevenoaks and Holmesdale Cottage Hospital opened on St John's Hill in 1873.

In the post war years gravel extraction at Bradbourne led to the creation of Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve. The Reserve, established in 1956, was the first of its kind with the excavations flooded to create a series of lakes. Extraction of sand and gravel was completed in Bradbourne in 1980; however, extraction is now taking place at Greatness on land known as Tarmac land adjacent to the former Greatness Brickworks.

Employment use continues to play an important role in the area. Former rail sidings adjacent to the station are now occupied by the Sevenoaks Enterprise Centre and the Vestry Road Industrial Estate to the north is located on a combination of former brickworks, landfill and railway sidings.