

Princess Park Manor: from mental asylum to luxury complex

How to turn a tragic past into a luxurious present

By **Henri Nanushi**

When thinking about creepy locations in London, Victorian medical facilities might come to mind and evoke a sense of unease.

Friern Barnet Mental Asylum was no exception, the hospital ran from 1849 to 1993, and its reputation was negative for years, even after its closure.

In 1995 the site was restored and converted into a housing complex, 30 years later the former Friern asylum is amongst the most coveted location for tenants in London.

But How did Friern hospital change the narrative about its perception and what happened in the years after its closure?

Friern Hospital

One of the first questions to ask when talking about Friern Hospital is why did the site have a bad reputation to begin with?

The hospital, firstly named Middlesex County Asylum was inaugurated in the 19th century and was firstly intended to welcome the mentally challenged inmates of the nearby prisons. A few years after its opening, the hospital started functioning as a full mental facility, at its peak, the structure hosted more than 2,000 patients.

A common problem that plagued mental asylums and the psychiatric field in general in the 19th and 20th centuries was the backwardness of its methods.

In its troubled history, Friern Asylum's patients had to endure inhumane treatments such as waterboarding, electroshock, frequent sedation, forced isolation and lobotomy.

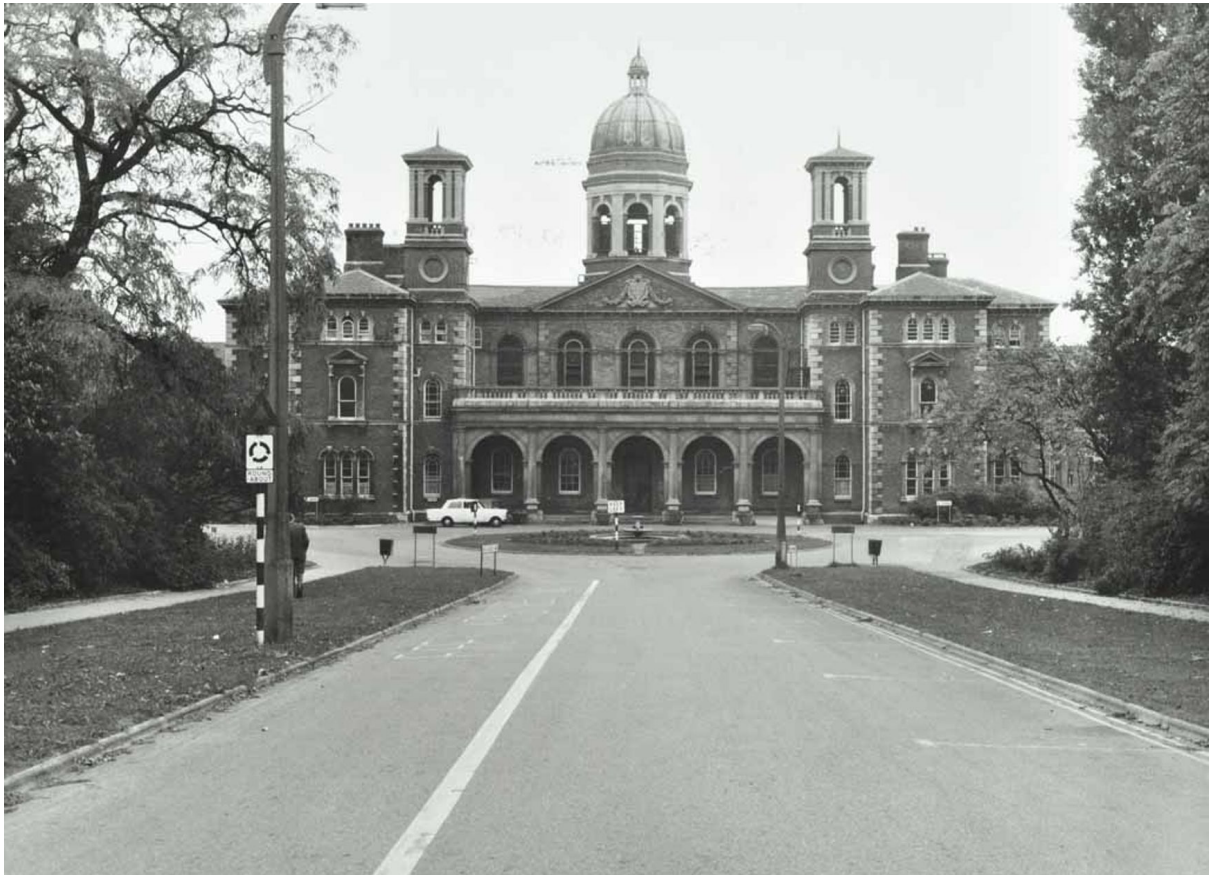
An undefined number of people died in the structure because of the harsh treatments that they were subjected to endure on a daily basis.

In the 20th century, two more tragedies struck the site; in 1903 a fire killed 51 female patients and 1 nurse and during WW2 the London Bombings claimed the lives of 36 patients and 4 nurses.

The tragic history of the site led to the creation of various legends and paranormal sightings.

Many people claimed to have heard eerie voices in the night and have encountered spirits in hospital robes.

Friern hospital was the most important asylum in North London and had amongst its patients hosted famous personalities like the singer Adam Ant, the writer Jenny Diski, the historian Barbara Taylor and the journalist Dorothy Lawrence.



Friern Hospital before the restoration

Restoration

Friern hospital was definitely closed in 1993, shortly after the closure the site and its grounds were sold to the Irish billionaires Luke and Brian Comer.

In 1995 the Comer brothers started the restoration on the site and converted the former asylum into a housing complex.

The complex finally changed its name in the early 2000's and became Princess Park Manor.

Despite the initial scepticism of its potential inhabitants, the comer brothers kept investing millions in the complex.

As of 2025, Princess Park Manor is one of the most coveted luxury complexes amongst Londoners.

The complex is gated and guarded by a private 24h security.

The complex includes a fitness gym, a swimming pool, outdoor tennis courts, a parking lot, a courtesy bus and a concierge service.

The average rent price in Princess Park Manor is around £2,500 per month and the asking price for an apartment is £460,000 on average.



Princess Park Manor at night

Residents

The many commodities that the complex offers and the good connections of Friern Barnet, made the complex a hotspot for celebrities and Businesspeople.

Amongst the famous residents that lived (or still live in the complex) we can mention all the members of One Direction; Zayn Malik, Harry Styles, Liam Payne and Louis Tomlinson all lived in the complex for a period of time.

Football legend Ashley and pop singer Cheryl Cole also met and lived in the complex for years.

It's confirmed that members of Pop group's JLS and Suga Babes still live in Princess Park Manor, and it's also rumoured that various NBA players and Hollywood actors bought property in the complex

Eleanor Lewis has lived in the complex for years, when asked about her experience in the complex she said; "I really enjoy living in Princess Park Manor. Friern Barnet is a good area and the complex offers various activities".

When asked about what she likes more about the complex, Eleanor said; "well, I really like the fact that it's safe, as a woman I can leave my house at every hour and I don't have to be worried about any danger. I also love the fact that there's plenty of green, physical activity is very important and the area easily allows it".

When asked about the famous residents she said; "I know that few celebrities live here, but I personally don't have any personal relationship with them. I might have crossed them casually but I never had a conversation with any of them".

When asked about the legends that surround the complex, she said: "I've personally never seen or heard anything. Some people tend to be more susceptible, the history of this place also plays a part but I think it's mostly folklore".

A story of redemption

The story of Princess Park Manor can also be read as a story of redemption and mobiliary revival.

The Comer brother's investment paid off and proved that no matter how tragic the history of a building might be, with a bit of work and lots goodwill, it can still turn profitable.

And what about you? would you live in a former asylum rumoured to be haunted if it was renovated?