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East Enfield a history



East Enfield started out as a series of small hamlets strung out along the Hertford Road. In 1572 Enfield Highway was known as Cocksmiths End. Close by, but still separate, was the small settlement of Green Street. To the north lay Enfield Wash then known as Horsepoolstones. The early settlement here lay on the west side of the Hertford Road. On the east side ran Turkey Brook, which followed the road as far south as Bell Lane. (The course was straightened in the early 19th century). The small settlement at Turkey Street was already well established. The 1867 O.S. maps show the area relatively little changed. Thin ribbon development along the Hertford Road had blurred the boundaries of the old settlements and there was a fairly consistent block of development stretching from Green Street to the junction with Welches Lane (Ordnance Road).

Enfield Wash briefly hit the headlines in 1753. A young girl called Elizabeth Canning claimed to have been kidnapped and held against her will at a house situated close to the junction of Welches Lane (Ordnance Road) and the Hertford Road. She claimed to have escaped from the house. On her evidence people were arrested, tried and convicted. Then doubts began to be expressed. The prisoners were released and Elizabeth Canning was charged with perjury, convicted and sentenced to transportation. In 1839 there were coaches twice daily from the White Lion, Old Road to London. These were supplemented by other coaches from as far away as Hertford and Cambridge which stopped on their way to London. In 1840 the first section of the railway from London to Cambridge was opened as far as Broxbourne, but initially there were no stations between Ponders End and Waltham Cross. In 1855 Enfield Lock station (originally called Ordnance Factory) was opened. This was followed in 1884 by Brimsdown station. The Southbury Loop line (1891) gave the area another station, sited in Turkey Street. (This was originally known, somewhat misleadingly, as Forty Hill). However, this station lost its passenger service in 1909 as a direct result of tramway competition.

The early years of this century saw an electric tramway constructed along the Hertford Road. It reached the county boundary at Freezywater in 1907 and was completed to Waltham Cross in the following year. In 1938 the tramway was converted to trolleybuses.

By 1831 the area had grown sufficiently to justify its own parish church (St James). Much of the early housing development was directly linked with the housing needs of the Royal Small Arms Factory. In the angle between Ordnance Road and Hertford Road, Grove Road and Alma Road (both now demolished) were developed from the mid eighteen-fifties. Medcalf Road and Warwick Road were built in the early eighteen-sixties. The Putney Lodge Estate (Mandeville Road, Totteridge Road etc.) was developed from 1867. By 1914 the Ordnance Road area had been fairly solidly built up. The Hertford Road was more or less continuously built up from St James Church to just south of Bullsmoor Lane. The best grazing land in Enfield was on the Lea Marshes. Many of the former access roads to the marshes survive today: Bell Lane, Pigots Lane (Carterhatch Road), Millmarsh Lane and Stockingswater Lane. The area later became a major centre of market gardening. Even as late as the mid nineteen-thirties there were glasshouses in large numbers.

Brickmaking was once a major industry in the area. The last brickworks (in Hoe Lane) closed as recently as the late nineteen-seventies. The Royal Small Arms Factory was built at Enfield Lock from 1814, coming into production in 1816. The factory was originally powered by waterwheels driven by the River Lea and both raw materials and finished weapons were transported by barge. The workers at the R.S.A.F. formed something of a working class elite in East Enfield, the factory had a trade union branch as early as 1855 and the workers were responsible for setting up the Enfield Highway Co-operative Society in 1872. The Brimsdown Power Station opened in 1903. The cheap and plentiful electricity supplies were to attract many other industries to the area.

Housing development resumed after World War I. By 1939 the area was substantially built up, but there was still a fair amount of open land left in the Hoe Lane and Turkey Street areas. The gap between Ponders End and Enfield Highway was finally closed. Two major council estates were developed: the Albany Estate (from 1926) and the Suffolks Estate (from 1930). Further council estates were built after World War II, in particular a major development on former market garden land between Turkey Street and Bullsmoor Lane.

Communications were greatly improved by the building of the Cambridge Arterial Road which had opened by 1924. Originally consisting of a single carriageway, a second was added in the mid nineteen-sixties. The road has become even more important since 1981 with the opening of a junction with the M25 motorway immediately north of Bullsmoor Lane.

The trolleybus routes along the Hertford Road gave way to conventional buses in 1961. Turkey Street station re-opened in 1960 with the completion of electrification from Liverpool Street to Bishops Stortford and Hertford East. The Lea Valley Line between Clapton and Cheshunt was electrified in May 1969.

East Enfield today presents a very uneven picture. In the Hertford Road, Turkey Street and Green Street a few buildings survive from the 18th century and earlier. The dominant impression, however, is of a slightly uneasy mixture of styles from mid Victorian through to the nineteen-seventies. The closure of the Small Arms Factory and the construction of the North-South Road promise major changes for East Enfield.

Further Reading

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