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## London Borough of Enfield Local History Sheets.

### Enfield Town a history



Enfield Town was the largest settlement in the parish and was also the administrative and religious centre. At the time of Domesday (1086) Enfield had a priest. This implies that there must have been a church, almost certainly on the site of St Andrews Church. (The oldest part of the present building dates back to the 13th century). Much of the basic street layout was established by 1572. The centre of the Town was at this time a village green which in later years was progressively encroached upon, ultimately leaving only a small triangular paved area where the fountain now stands.

Enfield Town was an important business centre from an early date. The first market charter was granted in 1303, but it is not clear how effective this was. In the late 16th century a Sunday meat market was being held, resulting in conflict with the Church authorities. The present market traces its origins to a charter granted in 1618. In 1632 the parish authorities purchased a house called The Vine, demolished it and created the Market Place on the site. The market was initially very successful but began to decline in the late 18th century. It was still functioning in a small way in 1798, but closed not long after this date. There was an unsuccessful attempt to revive the market in the mid eighteen-twenties. The market was successfully revived in the late 19th century and continues to this day.

The early 19th century saw Enfield Town as a substantial settlement but, owing to the loss of the market, it was in a somewhat run down state. The main link with the outside world was a horse bus run between Enfield Town and Bishopsgate.

Enfield's first railway, the Lea Valley Line (1840), gave Enfield Town a wide berth, the nearest station being at Ponders End. In 1849 a single track branch line was built from Water Lane (Angel Road) to a terminus in Nags Head Lane (Southbury Road) on the site of the present Enfield Town Station. This line was under the control of the Great Eastern Railway from 1862. In 1872 the route to London was considerably shortened by means of a new line via Bethnal Green and Hackney Downs to Lower Edmonton. In 1871 the Great Northern Railway opened its station on Windmill Hill, the terminus of a branch line from Wood Green. This was replaced in 1910 by the present Enfield Chase Station when the line was extended to Cuffley.

Enfield Town was also the terminus of two electric tramways. The line from Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill (via Village Road and Park Avenue) opened in 1909. This was followed in 1911 by a line from Ponders End (via Southbury Road). In 1938 the route to Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill was converted to trolleybuses, while the Southbury Road route was completely abandoned. The trolleybuses were phased out in 1961.

Suburban development began shortly after the opening of the first railway station in 1849. The first major development was Enfield New Town (Raleigh Road, Essex Road, Sydney Road and Cecil Road) which was built up from 1852. This was a mixed development with large houses in London Road and Essex Road and small workmen's cottages in Sydney Road and Raleigh Road. To the east of Chase Side the Gordon House Estate was developed slowly from 1858. In the Lancaster Road area the Woodlands Estate, the Cedars Estate and the Birkbeck Estate were all developed from the late eighteen-seventies.

The Great Northern Railway tended to attract a much better class of

commuter than its rival, the Great Eastern Railway. Significantly, the Windmill Hill area saw some up-market housing developments. The Bycullah Estate (1878), the Old Park Estate (1880) and the Glebe Estate (1880) were all distinctly high class developments, consisting mainly of large detached houses.

After World War I housing development resumed, covering much former orchard and market garden land. The largest development was the huge Willow Estate stretching from Southbury Road to Carterhatch Lane, which was developed from the mid nineteen-thirties. The Cockfosters extension of the Piccadilly Line resulted in much more building to the west of Enfield Town in the Slades Hill/Enfield Road area. By 1939 the area was virtually fully developed. The gap between Enfield Town and the rest of the London conurbation was finally closed and the built-up area now extended as far north as Forty Hill.

In the post war period Green Belt restrictions have so far prevented further major expansion. There have been many small infill developments and many large houses in the Ridgeway/Windmill Hill area have been demolished to make way for blocks of flats.

Both railway lines have been electrified; the Great Eastern in 1960 and the Great Northern in 1976. Road transport facilities have been vastly augmented by the construction of the M25 motorway (completed 1986) linking up with the earlier Cambridge Arterial Road (1924).

For many years after World War II Enfield Town shopping centre was in obvious decline. Plans for an inner ring-road (now abandoned) did little to encourage investment. Things changed dramatically in 1982 with the opening of the Palace Gardens Shopping Precinct. The crowds have now returned. Enfield Town is now a place of great contrasts. St Andrew's Church, Gentleman's Row and the Grammar School rub shoulders with the Palace Gardens Precinct and the Civic Centre.

### **Further Reading**

Dalling, Graham - Enfield in the time of Charles Lamb in Charles Lamb Bulletin, new series, no. 38, pp. 25/34.

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Pam, David - Elizabethan Enfield 1572. Edmonton Hundred Historical Society. 1975

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Tuff, John - Historical, topographical and statistical notices of Enfield. Enfield. 1858.

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Recollections of old Enfield - Enfield. 1910. (1983 reprint).

Pam, David - A history of Enfield: Vol.1: before 1837. Enfield. 1990.