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Forty Hall a history



By 1572 there were several settlements established in this part of Enfield. Forty Hill was then known as Forty Green. There were cottages in Bulls Cross Lane (now Bulls Cross). There were two small settlements in Whitewebbs Lane - Romey Street (at the Bulls Cross End) and Whitewebbs proper (near the King and Tinker). In Clay Hill lay the settlement of Bridge Street (near where the Rose and Crown now stands).

The focal point of Forty Hill in the 16th century was the great house of Elsynge which lay between the site of Forty Hall and the Turkey Brook. The house belonged to Sir Thomas Lovell, Chancellor of the Exchequer to Henry VII. It became a royal palace in 1539. It was here in 1547 that Edward VI was told of the death of his father (Henry VIII) and of his own accession to the throne. Although Queen Elizabeth stayed at Elsynge on several occasions, the property was not particularly well maintained and by the early 17th century was in a fairly parlous state. It was still standing in 1656, but appears to have been demolished shortly after this date. The remains were partially excavated in the nineteen-sixties.

The New River, an artificial cut bringing fresh water from Chadwell Spring (near Ware) to London, was completed by 1613. The course through the Forty Hill area was drastically altered in 1859 with abandonment of a huge loop through the Whitewebbs Estate and its replacement by a new section running from Turkey Street to Tenniswood Road including a new aqueduct over Maidens Brook. Substantial remains of the abandoned loop can be seen in the Whitewebbs and Gough Park Estates including an early 19th century cast iron aqueduct in Flash Lane.

Forty Hall was built from 1629 for Sir Nicholas Rainton, a prominent member of the corporation of the City of London. Other great houses in the area include Whitewebbs (built in 1791 for Dr Abraham Wilkinson), Capel House (built in 1793 for a former governor of Bombay) and Myddelton House (built in 1818 for Henry Carington Bowles).

By the mid 19th century the basic layout and the disposition of the settlements had changed relatively little since 1572. Being remote from public transport, the area was unattractive to commuters and grew relatively little. Jesus Church was built in 1835, paid for by the Meyer family of Forty Hall. A National School was built in 1851 close to Maidens Bridge.

Communications in the Forty Hill area have never been particularly good. The nearest railway stations are at Turkey Street (opened 1891, closed 1909, re-opened 1960) and at Gordon Hill and Crews Hill (both opened 1910). Road access was considerably improved after 1924 with the opening of the Cambridge Arterial Road (A10). This road has become even more important in recent years with the opening of the M25 motorway. These two roads intersect at a major junction to the north of Bullsmoor Lane.

In 1868 the Bridgen Hall Estate was sold for building - a large tract of land between Carterhatch Lane and Goat Lane. The streets were laid out - St George's Road, Garnault Road, Russell Road, Layard Road and Bridgenhall Road. Development, mainly in the form of workmen's cottages, was extremely slow and protracted. There were vacant plots on this estate well into the nineteen-thirties. In addition, gravel digging took place on parts of the estate resulting in subsidence problems in the mid 20th century.

By 1914 the Forty Hill/Bulls Cross area was still predominantly rural and, apart from some rather half-hearted attempts to build on the Bridgen Hall Estate, was still largely undeveloped. There was still open country separating Forty Hill from Enfield Town

The local authority, showing remarkable foresight, took steps to acquire land for use as public open space. The North Enfield Recreation Ground (Tucker's Fields) was purchased in 1907, followed by Hilly Fields in 1911. This policy was continued after World War I, notably in 1931 with the purchase of the Whitewebbs Estate from Sir Duncan Orr-Lewis.

After World War I, the provision of bus services to the north of Enfield Town resulted in ribbon development along Baker Street linking up with Forty Hill. The construction of the Cambridge Arterial Road (1924) stimulated development in the Hoe Lane and Carterhatch Lane areas. Development of the area north of Lancaster Road, begun in the late eighteen-seventies, was completed, resulting in the built-up area extending as far as the south side of Clay Hill. The late nineteen-thirties saw the development of a huge tract of orchards stretching from Southbury Road to Carterhatch Lane as the Willow Estate. By 1939 the Forty Hill area was solidly linked to the rest of London conurbation. North of Forty Hill, however, the area remained essentially rural and the Green Belt policy has restricted any further major developments in this area after World War II.

After the War the area saw the development of two large council estates - to the north of Hoe Lane and between Turkey Street and Bullsmoor Lane. The resulting increase in population required the building of two new primary schools - Worcester (1954) and Capel Manor (1958). Further public open space was secured when the local authority purchased the Forty Hill Estate in 1951. In 1971 the construction of a short section of road linking Myddelton Avenue to Baker Street, enabled most through traffic to be diverted away from Forty Hill and Maidens Bridge. As a result of these changes bus services which had previously terminated at Forty Hill were diverted along Carterhatch Lane.

Further Reading

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