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New Southgate a history



The area that became New Southgate is shown on the Edmonton enclosure map of 1801 as almost entirely undeveloped, apart from the two groups of farm buildings in Bowes Road. The basic road system was in place: Bowes Road, the High Road and Waterfall Road can all be distinguished on the map. The district was known alternately as Betstile or Colney Hatch (from the hamlet in nearby Friern Barnet). Most of the land formed part of the great estates: Minchenden, Beaver Hall, Arnos Grove or Broomfield.

The turning point came in 1850 with the opening of a station on the Great Northern Railway's main line from London to Peterborough. In 1851, on a site just within Friern Barnet, the Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum (later Friern Hospital) was opened. Shortly afterwards, development began near the station. (The area was originally known as Colney Hatch Park). Another sign of impending urbanisation was the setting up in 1858 of the Southgate and Colney Hatch Gas Light and Coke Company. A gas works was built beside the railway immediately to the south of New Southgate Station. The North Middlesex Waterworks was established to the east of the High Road in 1867, but was taken over by the New River Company in 1871.

By 1867 the core of New Southgate had been built up - a triangular area bounded by the High Road, Palmers Green Road (now Palmers Road) and Bowes Road. The area was originally solidly middle class, but had soon begun to acquire a shabby-genteel flavour. This phenomenon was associated with the presence of the Colney Hatch Asylum, the very name, Colney Hatch, became synonymous with mental illness and seriously impeded the development of the area. It was in this context that the name of the district was euphemised to New Southgate, the process can be followed in the changes of name to which New Southgate station was subjected. Originally called Colney Hatch, the station was renamed Southgate and Colney Hatch (1855), New Southgate and Colney Hatch (1876), New Southgate for Colney Hatch (1883) and New Southgate and Friern Barnet (1923). (Friern Barnet was dropped from the station name on electrification in 1976). The name of the asylum was altered to Friern Hospital in 1937. However, owing to unfortunate popular misconceptions concerning mental illness, the name, Colney Hatch, apparently remains irredeemably tainted.

The new suburb continued to grow. St Paul's Church was built in 1873. The Edmonton School Board opened Garfield Road School in 1883. Extra transport facilities were provided in the form of an electric tramway from Wood Green. The tramway reached New Southgate in 1907 and was extended to North Finchley in 1909. (The no.21 tram was replaced by the no.621 trolleybus in 1938 and this in turn gave way to the no.221 bus in 1961). By 1914 building development had spread well beyond the boundaries of the original Colney Hatch Park Estate. The area between the High Road and Station Road had been developed and the built-up area extended beyond the Barnet boundary into the Oakleigh Road South/Brunswick Park Road area. The district had by this time lost its former shabby-genteel flavour and had become essentially working class. However, New Southgate was still physically distinct from the rest of London - there was still open country separating the district from Wood Green. Development to the north of Bowes Road was blocked by the Arnos Grove Estate, still owned by the intractable Walker family.

The opening in 1932 of the first stage of the Cockfosters extension of the Piccadilly Line to Arnos Grove provided the impetus for further housing development. By 1939 the area was virtually fully built-up. Most of the Arnos Grove Estate was built over, but part was purchased by Southgate Council and opened to the public as Arnos Park. Further improvements in transport facilities came in the form of the North Circular Road. Planned as early as 1912, but delayed by World War I, the road had been completed through New Southgate by 1929.

After World War II much of the older part of the district was in a very rundown state. The area had suffered a fair amount of bomb damage including several V1 and V2 incidents. In 1956, after conducting an extensive survey of the district, Southgate Council devised a re-development scheme. The first phase to be implemented was the construction of the tower blocks in Highview Gardens begun in 1959 and completed a year later. Redevelopment continued after the merger with Enfield in 1965 and was eventually concluded in the mid nineteen-seventies. Garfield School was rebuilt on a new site in Springfield Road.

Further Reading

Mason, Tom - The Story of Southgate. Southgate 1948

Pam, David - Southgate and Winchmore Hill: a short history. Enfield. 1982.

St Paul, New Southgate - Church of St Paul, New Southgate: jubilee souvenir. Southgate. 1923.