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Palmers Green a history



The 25-inch-to-the-mile Ordnance Survey map of 1867 shows Palmers Green as a minute hamlet. It consisted of The Fox and a cluster of cottages where Fox Lane and Hazelwood Lane join Green Lanes. To the south, in the area around the Cock Tavern lay another small hamlet known as Bowes. To the west, close to the junction of Fox Lane and Bourne Hill (then Dog and Duck Lane) lay the tiny settlement of Clappers Green. Much of the land formed part of large estates such as Bowes Manor, Broomfield, Grovelands and The Lodge.

In 1881 the Great Northern Railway opened its branch line from Wood Green to Enfield. A station was built at Alderman's Hill to serve Palmers Green. The station stood in open country: the nearest houses were nearly a quarter of a mile away near The Fox. For nearly thirty years little development took place. Most of the land was tied up in big estates whose owners had no intention of selling for building. By 1896 the only development that had taken place was the construction of some large villas on the west side of Green Lanes between Fox Lane and Hoppers Road.

Things changed dramatically in 1902 when large tracts of land formerly owned by the Taylors of Grovelands were sold for building. The first area to be developed was the Old Park Estate between Fox Lane and Alderman's Hill. This was rapidly covered with large semi-detached houses which were built by a great variety of small builders. At the same time building work began on the Hazelwood Park Estate, between Hazelwood Lane and Hedge Lane. The houses were large but the general layout of the estate and the detailing of the individual houses were rather old-fashioned and unimaginative compared with the Old Park Estate.

Development was given a boost by an electric tramway along Green Lanes completed as far as Winchmore Hill in 1907. More and more land came on the market. Clappers Green Farm (between Fox Lane and Bourne Hill) was sold in 1908. Part was acquired by Middlesex County Council forming the site of the Southgate County School. The rest was sold for building. Many of the streets on this estate were developed with small terraced houses. At the time this aroused fears that, as a result, a poorer class of resident might be attracted to Palmers Green. These fears turned out to be unjustified

In 1911 The Lodge estate (between Hazelwood Land and Oakthorpe Road) was sold off for building. This was developed rapidly mainly with smaller terraced houses similar to those on the Clappers Green Farm estate.

The rapid development of Palmers Green involved more than just the building of houses. Shopping parades soon lined much of Green Lanes and part of Aldermans Hill. The Fox in Green Lanes was completely rebuilt in a rather hearty art nouveau style to suit its new surroundings. There were also many new places of worship. St John's in Green Lanes was built in stages between 1904 and 1909. The number of Roman Catholics in the area, previously insignificant, rose rapidly. A large Roman Catholic Church (St Monica's) was built in Green Lanes in 1914. The Congregationalists built a large church and hall in Fox Lane. Nearby in Fox Lane a Presbyterian church was built. This attracted a substantial number of emigrant Scots to the area.

The new population also required places of entertainment. The Queen's Hall Cinema in Green Lanes opened in 1912. This was joined in 1921 by another cinema, the Palmadium, on an adjoining site in Green Lanes. For those who liked live entertainment, Palmers Green was just a short tram ride away from the Wood Green Empire whose programmes were prominently advertised in the "Palmers Green Gazette".

The growth of Palmers Green is reflected in census reports in a vast increase in the population of Southgate Urban District. Prior to 1881 Southgate had formed part of Edmonton. In 1891 Southgate had a population of 10,970. By 1901 this had risen to 14,993. The census of 1911 shows a spectacular rise to 33,612; the population more than doubled in ten years.

Housing building stopped during World War I and was not resumed until the mid nineteen twenties. Gaps left on earlier housing estates were filled. The builders then turned their attention towards the Edmonton border rapidly developing the Hedge Lane/Firs Lane area. The 1936 edition of the 25-inch-to-the-mile Ordnance Survey map shows Palmers Green fully built up.

Since that time the changes have been fairly minor. The electric tramway gave way to trolleybuses in 1938. These in turn gave way to conventional diesel buses in 1961. Both cinemas closed and were demolished to make way for supermarkets. Gaps caused by World War II bomb damage were filled. Railway electrification, originally promised by the Great Northern Railway in 1904, finally materialised in 1976.

Further Reading

Dumayne, Alan - Once upon a time in Palmers Green. Southgate. 1988
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Pam, David - Southgate and Winchmore Hill: a short history. Enfield. 1982
Smith, Stevie - Syler's Green: a return journey. In Smith, Stevie: Me again. London. 1981, pp 83/99.