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Ponders End a history



Ponders End started out as a large hamlet in the parish of Enfield. The Enfield enclosure map (1803) shows a straggling L-shaped settlement. The High Street was built up from Red Lane (Lincoln Road) to just south of Farm Lane (Southbury Road). Houses were dotted along South Street as far as Ponders End Mill and the Lee Navigation. There was also a small settlement clustered around Scotland Green. There was no road access across the river to Chingford. (It was not until the early eighteen-seventies that Lea Valley Road was built, financed by public subscription).

The River Lee in its natural state was more or less navigable as far as Ware and Hertford. The present Lee Navigation was constructed from 1766 under the supervision of John Smeaton, including a lock at Ponders End.

The ancient moated manor house called Durants Arbour stood to the east of the High Street, between The Ride and Durants Road. In the sixteenth century it was held by the powerful Wroth family. Both Sir Thomas Wroth and his son Sir Robert Wroth were prominent MP's during the reign of Elizabeth I. The property later passed to the Stringer family, one of whom, William Stringer, was married to the daughter of the notorious Judge Jeffreys. The manor house was destroyed by fire in the late 18th century, but a Tudor gatehouse survived until 1910. The moat was subsequently filled in and the site built over.

In 1826 there were coaches every half hour to London. In 1840 the first section of what was to become the main railway line to Cambridge was opened between Stratford and Broxbourne with a station at Ponders End. In 1845 the station was served by 6 trains daily in each direction. In 1891 the opening of the Southbury Loop gave Ponders End a second station, sited in Southbury Road. However, this line lost its passenger service in 1909 due to tramway competition.

In 1881 a horse tramway from Stamford Hill was opened as far as the junction of Southbury Road and the High Street. Sadly, it did not prosper and within a short time the service was cut back to Tramway Avenue Depot at Edmonton. In 1907 a completely new electric tramway was built through Ponders End, reaching Waltham Cross in 1908. In 1911 the tramway was extended along Southbury Road, forming a branch to Enfield Town. Apart from the Southbury Road route the trams gave way to trolleybuses in 1938.

A report by the General Board of Health (1850) on sanitary conditions in Enfield reveals an alarming state of affairs in Ponders End. Many of the older cottages were grossly overcrowded and extremely insanitary. The worst affected areas were South Street and Scotland Green. The whole area suffered from poor drainage.

Housing development began at a fairly early date. Alma Road was developed from 1855 and Napier Road had been laid out by 1867. The Lincoln House Estate (Derby Road and Lincoln Road) was built up from 1871. Durants Road was developed from 1888 and Nags Head Road from 1890. By 1914 much of the area had been built up, but there was still open country separating Ponders End from Enfield Highway to the north and Edmonton to the south.

For many years the nearest church was at Enfield Town. Then in 1831 St James Church was built at Enfield Highway. Ponders End did not get a church of its own until 1878 when St Matthew's Church was erected in South Street.

The nonconformists, however, took Ponders End rather more seriously. An Independent Chapel was built in the High Street in 1768. (This is the direct ancestor of the present United Reformed Church).

The oldest industrial site is the Ponders End Mill. The present mill buildings date from the late 18th century. In 1809 Grout and Baylis' crape factory was built in South Street. This closed in 1894 and the factory was later taken over by United Flexible Metal Tubing. A jute mill was opened beside the Lee Navigation in 1865, lasting until 1882. The building was taken over by Ediswan in 1886 and used for the manufacture of electric light bulbs and later radio valves. During World War I, a huge munitions factory, the Ponders End Shell Works was built in Wharf Road. The factory buildings were sold off after the war. Further factories were built in the thirties alongside the newly-built Great Cambridge Road.

Housing development resumed after World War I. The gaps separating Ponders End from Edmonton and Enfield Highway were finally closed. Much former market garden land was built upon. By 1939 the area was virtually fully developed.

There have been several transport innovations since World War II. The Southbury Loop, closed to passengers since 1909, was re-opened and electrified in 1960. The Lea Valley Line was electrified in 1969. Trolleybuses gave way to conventional diesel buses in 1961. In the early nineteen-sixties Nags Head Road was extended to link up with Lea Valley Road, bypassing the heavily congested level crossing at Ponders End station.

After World War II much of the older part of Ponders End was in a rundown state. From the fifties onwards there was much council redevelopment particularly in the South Street and Alma Road areas. Today Ponders End is an uneasy mixture of old and new: the Mill buildings survive in the shadow of the Alma Road tower blocks.

Further Reading

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