

## Southgate

Southgate originated as a tiny hamlet which grew up in the north west corner of Edmonton parish along the southern boundary of Enfield Chase. The name derived from the south gate of Enfield Chase which stood roughly where Chase Road now joins Winchmore Hill Road. Slightly to the south another small settlement known as South Street, grew up around Southgate Green. The two settlements were eventually linked by ribbon development along what is now Southgate High Street. The name South Street gradually fell out of use during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Southgate's first place of worship, the Weld Chapel, was built in Waterfall Road in 1615. (It was replaced by the present Christ Church in 1863)

The area was originally very heavily wooded. Much of the future Arnos and Grovelands estates consisted in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century of oak coppice woods which were heavily exploited. The main products were firewood, charcoal and oak bark which was sold for use in tanning. Remains of the woodland can be seen in Grovelands Park

An Act of Parliament of 1777 resulted in the enclosure of Enfield Chase which had previously been a royal hunting ground. Although most of the Chase remained part of Enfield, parts were allocated to the parishes of Edmonton, South Mimms and Monken Hadley as compensation for lost grazing rights. The portion allocated to Edmonton was a large tract of land to the north of Chase Side and Winchmore Hill Road (now the Oakwood area). Initially this area was used as a parish common. The land was badly drained and was enclosed as a direct result of the Edmonton Enclosure Act (1801)

The early 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw the area thinly populated and relatively undeveloped. Southgate lay between two main roads, (Green Lanes and the Great North Road) and its own communications were relatively poor. Much of the land formed part of the great estates, particularly Grovelands and Arnos. The landowners preferred to keep Southgate rural in order to protect their own amenities.

The early railways also gave Southgate a wide berth, mainly because of the hilly nature of the ground which would have required prohibitively expensive tunnels and earthworks. The Cambridge mainline (1840) stuck to the Lee Valley passing through Tottenham, Edmonton and East Enfield. The Great Northern Railway (1850) passed to the west of Southgate but it did provide a station at Colney Hatch (now New Southgate). Southgate had to make do with a horse bus to Colney Hatch Station. In 1871 the Great Northern Railway opened a branch from Wood Green to Enfield with Stations at Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill. Palmers Green Station became the railhead for Southgate and the Southgate horse bus now ran to Palmers Green rather than to Colney Hatch.

The first attempt at suburban development in Southgate dates from 1853. A large tract of land bounded by Chase Side, Chase Road and Bramley Road was sold for

building. Streets were laid out: Avenue Road, Nursery Road, Reservoir Road, Chelmsford Road etc. Some workmen's cottages were erected in Chelmsford Road and Nursery Road. A few larger houses went up in Chase Side and parts of Avenue Road and Chase Road. The builders had great difficulty in finding tenants for the houses and work ground to a halt. There were plenty of vacant plots on this estate into the early 1930s. Elsewhere the stubborn refusal of the major landowners (especially the Taylors of Grovelands and the Walkers of Arnos Grove) to sell land for building effectively stifled development.

Even in 1914 the district remained predominately rural. However development along Fox Lane (particularly in The Mall and Selborne Road) meant that Southgate was for the first time linked to the London conurbation. Even after World War I relatively little development had taken place. The Southgate House Estate (Meadway etc) was developed from 1924. By this time the end of rural Southgate was in sight. Luckily Southgate Council had taken the wise precaution of acquiring land as public open space: Grovelands Park (1913), Arnos Park (1928) and Oakwood Park (1927).

Public transport innovations were largely responsible for the obliteration of rural Southgate. Development remained slow for as long as Southgate was fairly remote from public transport. In 1912 the London General Omnibus Company moved the northern terminus of their route no. 29 from Wood Green to Southgate Green. The route was later extended to Cockfosters. Then in 1930 Parliament sanctioned an extension of the Piccadilly Line north of Finsbury Park to Cockfosters. Trains reached Arnos Grove in September 1932, Enfield West (Oakwood) in March 1933 and Cockfosters in July 1933.

The effect of the new railway line was spectacular. The builders moved in on Southgate. The Taylor and Walker families had left the area and the landowners of the 1930s were only too happy to sell to the builders. By 1939 Southgate was largely built up as far north as Bramley Road, covering most of the former Edmonton Allotment of Enfield Chase. Beyond Bramley Road a solid block of development protruded northwards to Cockfosters. Not all the estates were fully built up when World War II broke out. In South Lodge Drive, The Vale and other locations the observant can still spot where gaps were filled in the early 1950s. The Southgate shopping centre in Chase Side expanded and a new shopping centre in Bramley Road grew up around Oakwood Station. A substantial council estate was developed in the Green Road/Reservoir Road area.

Since the end of World War II Southgate has been prevented by the Green Belt policy from expanding further. The main change has been the progressive demolition of older houses in Chase Side, Avenue Road and Chase Road to make way for blocks of flats. In the 1970s the shopping centres at Southgate and Oakwood began to look more and more dated and business was lost to Wood Green and Enfield Town. The opening of an ASDA superstore in Chase Side (1989) helped to revive the Southgate shopping centre.

Despite the survival of remnants of the old village and evidence of earlier phases of development, the overwhelming impression conveyed by Southgate is of the 1930s.

### Further Reading

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Dumayne, Alan: Southgate: a Glimpse into the Past (Southgate, 1987)

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Newby, Herbert: Old Southgate (Southgate, 1949)

Pam, David: Southgate and Winchmore Hill: a short History (Enfield, 1982)