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Upper Edmonton a history



Upper Edmonton started life as a hamlet centred on the intersection of Fore Street with Silver Street and Water Lane (Angel Road). By the early nineteenth century it had been extended by ribbon development along Fore Street until it formed a long straggling settlement stretching from the Tottenham boundary to just south of Boards' Lane (Brettenham Road). By the mid eighteenth-sixties further ribbon development was closing the gap between Upper and Lower Edmonton. At this time Upper Edmonton must have presented an appearance very like some of the single street villages so common in Hertfordshire.

A report by the General Board of Health (1850) on sanitary conditions in Edmonton reveals a very sorry state of affairs. Pymmes Brook was little better than an open sewer and there had been an outbreak of typhus in a common lodging house in Orchard Street (Raynham Road). The 1851 census reveals evidence of gross overcrowding in the area including several common lodging houses that were largely populated by refugees from the Irish potato famine.

Pymmes Park originated as a private estate. In the late 16th century it was owned by the powerful Cecil family. In 1589 Robert Cecil, later 1st Earl of Salisbury, spent his honeymoon at Pymmes. The estate was eventually acquired by Edmonton Council and opened as a public park in 1906. Pymmes House was destroyed by fire during World War II and the remains were demolished.

Weir Hall, a fine Tudor house, the home of the Huxley family, stood close to the site of the Cambridge Roundabout. It was demolished in 1818. Its Victorian replacement, after serving as a home for alcoholics and a boys' boarding school, was demolished after World War I.

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act resulted in the setting up in 1837 of the Edmonton Poor Law Union to administer poor relief in Tottenham, Hornsey, Edmonton, Enfield, Cheshunt and Waltham Abbey. To replace the former parish workhouses, the Edmonton Union Workhouse was built in Silver Street in 1842. Many of the workhouse buildings survive as part of the North Middlesex Hospital.

St. James' Church in Fore Street was built in 1850. Before this date Upper Edmonton came under the Parish of All Saints. The church closed in 1981 and the building was converted into flats.

The railway arrived in 1840 with the opening of the first section of the Lea Valley Line from Stratford to Broxbourne. A station was provided in Water Lane (Angel Road). As the station was badly sited and the trains were slow and expensive, few people used the railway in the early days, preferring the horse buses. In 1845 there were buses every fifteen minutes along Fore Street, travelling alternately to Bishopsgate and Holborn. In 1872 the direct line from London to Enfield Town was opened with a station at Silver Street. The station was well sited and moreover, offered exceptionally cheap workmen's fares. A horse tramway along Fore Street opened in 1881. The tramway was re-constructed and electrified during 1905, lasting until 1938 when trolleybuses took over.

The first sign of suburban development was the sale of Snells Park in 1849. The estate was rapidly covered with small terraced houses. Building

accelerated after 1872. The last major development to take place was the Dysons Estate (Middleham Road, etc) built in the early nineteen-thirties. By then Upper Edmonton was more or less fully built up.

In 1888 the Theatre Royal was built on the south side of Angel Road. Despite the name, it was a low-class establishment specialising in cheap melodrama. It was converted into a cinema and re-named the Hippodrome in 1919, surviving until 1947. A new super-cinema, The Regal, was built at the junction of Silver Street and Fore Street in 1934. Audiences began to decline in the nineteen-sixties and the cinema closed in 1972. After being used for bingo for some years, the building was demolished in 1986 to make way for a supermarket.

After World War II Upper Edmonton had a distinctly run down and woebegone appearance. From the mid nineteen-fifties the area was subjected to a massive programme of redevelopment. New shops, flats and houses took the place of much of the working class housing built to house the Great Eastern Railway's commuters of the eighteen-seventies.

Further Reading

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Palmer, Alfred - Old Edmonton. Edmonton. 1936

Robinson, William - The history and antiquities of the parish of Edmonton. London. 1819

Sturges, George W - Edmonton past and present. Edmonton. 1938/41.