

LONG ACRE, NEHELLS (AREA 1)

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Long Acre is a road of about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile in length, running along the border of Nechells and Aston, from the island on Thimblemill Lane (at its south end) to its junction with Cuckoo Road. It is crossed only by Holborn Hill, which runs down to Aston. Along the left (west) side is a range of commercial and industrial premises and along the right side, mainly houses.

Starting at the south end, we have buildings which are part of the Wing Yip 'village', (pic 1). On the left is Norton Kitchens and then the splendid St. Joseph's church and its garden of rest (pic 2). Its various parts were designed by the Pugins and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and are Grade II listed. The silos of Aston Manor Brewery on Thimblemill Lane are clearly visible in the background (pic 3).

Once Railway Terrace joins from the right and the railway is crossed, the pattern of residential development along the right side and commercial uses to the left is established and maintained, with a few exceptions, along the remaining length of the road.

The commercial and industrial uses run right down to the canal (the Birmingham and Fazeley) and the Aston Brook, which together form an impenetrable physical barrier with Aston, crossed only by Holborn Hill. A couple of side streets give access to the area but are no through roads. This area of land contains the Long Acre Trading Estate, Long Acre Industrial Estate, and offices at the Gee Business Centre (pic 4). Significant premises include a Kier transportation depot, a council highways yard with its distinctive 'salt dome' and the National Grid's Birmingham depot (pics 5,6).

Most of the houses on the right side derive from redevelopment in the 1960s (pic 7). Seven residential streets lead off Long Acre, so along the right many gable ends present their blank façades to the road (pic 8), but there are also some homes which front onto Long Acre itself (pic 9). There was once a fringe of housing on the left-side, but these homes were not replaced after clearance.

The exceptions to the streetscape on the right are the former Mitre Ale House, St Clements School, the Nechells Outreach Centre (Church of God of Prophecy) which was originally a Presbyterian chapel (pic 10), and some commercial uses on the corner of Cuckoo Road.

With reference to the criteria set out by Lynch, Long Acre can be said to form a strong edge for the following reasons:

- it has 'definite termini' (Thimblemill Lane and Cuckoo Rd)
- there is a 'sharp gradient of character' (commercial on the left, residential on the right)
- it is 'largely continuous in form' (the gradient of character runs almost the road's entire length)
- it is fairly 'visually prominent' (being the first road above the valley of the Aston Brook)
- it is mainly 'impenetrable to cross movement' (Holborn Hill being the only road of note which crosses East to West)
- it 'set limits to the district', running alongside the border of Nechells (B7) and Aston (B6), the actual boundary being the crooked path of the Aston Brook, rather than the straight road.

As well as being an edge it acts as a path for vehicular and pedestrian traffic along its length, facilitating access to the homes on the right side and the commercial area on the left. There is no visible connection between the places of business and the houses, so it would not constitute a seam, and nor would it be it a linear node.

With its sharp differentiation of commercial and residential along most of its length and its position at the periphery of a district (Nechells), Long Acre clearly acts as an edge. However, it would be wrong to assume that the commercial / residential split is anything other than localised.

The seven streets running off to the right are quite short and terminate at Mount Street. Here the edge is reversed with residential on the left, commercial on the right and a particularly hard barrier: the River Rea, the canal (Birmingham and Warwick Junction) and the fast and busy Heartlands Parkway all run between this part of Nechells and the neighbouring districts of Washwood Heath and Saltley.

Sources

Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. The MIT Press.

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