

## FIVE WAYS AND EDGBASTON VILLAGE (AREA 5)

### MALCOLM VEITCH

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Five Ways and Edgbaston have been synonymous with each other, but of course there's a lot more Edgbaston beyond Five Ways. The name of Five Ways dates to around 1565, when 5 roads leading to Harborne and Halesowen were recorded as being located there. At that time Edgbaston would have been a small village one mile away from Birmingham. Edgbaston became a parish in 1658. The name Edgbaston, comes from "village of a man called Ecgbald", meaning in Old English 'bold', and tun meaning 'farm'. The first settlement lay along the Birmingham sandstone ridge, when around 585 The Anglians settled here, in what had become the Anglian Kingdom of Mercia. During the Civil War there is mention of the roof timbers of St Bartholomew's church having had its lead roof taken down and melted into bullets and the roof timbers as a barricade to Edgbaston Hall, now within the Edgbaston Golf Course.

### The role of Parishes

Most people in England and Wales lived under manorial courts, however their powers faded away during the 16th and 17th centuries. Regular public meetings of the clergy, churchwardens and parishioners were often held in the vestries of parish churches to decide questions relating to the fabric and possessions of the church, the appointment of constables, upkeep of roads and the maintenance of the poor, and raise money by taxes. The Vestry meetings were overseen by the Parish Clerk who was paid a small salary.

Parishes were responsible for the maintenance of their roads and the degree to which they managed their roads varied from district to district. The state of the roads was very affected by the way they were built and the way they were maintained and the types of substrata and soil through which they went. Much of the Birmingham plateau was on to gravels and sands but as you moved into Staffordshire and Warwickshire there was much marl clays. These latter held the rainwater and turned to deep mud with the traffic of horses and carts. Few understood how to build good roads until Thomas Telford and Loudon McAdam came along. Good land drainage could help take water away from easily flooded areas, but when local authorities started to improve roads, they used surveyors to help create better routes that maintained lesser gradients and avoided obstacles.

The other major improvement was in the better road construction using graded stones to form a dry, fast running surface known as Macadamising, these cut travelling times for

one route from 45 hours to 27. Coach design improved at the same time and mail coaches could complete a 170-mile journey in 17 hours in 1820s. These improvements to the roads cost money both to build and maintain and for that reason one assumes the business of turnpike roads seemed the best way of providing the parish with an income and ensured the merchandise produced locally got to their markets.

### **Turnpike Roads**

Turnpike trusts were set up by individual acts of Parliament, with powers to collect road tolls for maintaining the principal roads in Britain for London first and elsewhere during the 18th and 19th centuries. Their first job as a new trust was to erect turnpike gates at each end of the turnpiked road and displaying the fixed tolls to be charged. The Act set out maximum tolls allowable for each class of vehicle or animal – say one shilling and six pence (7½p) for a coach pulled by four horses, 1 penny (½p) for an unladen horse and ten pence (5p) for a drove of 20 cows. The trustees would use some of the revenue to pay for labour and materials to maintain the road. They were also able to borrow for substantial improvements to the existing highway. The term “turnpike” refers to barriers used to defend against attack by cavalry, where rows of pikes sharpened at one end and attached to horizontal bars are secured at one end to an upright pole and can be rotated to open or close the gate.

There was much opposition when they were installed across roads, that had been freely accessible for everyone. Turnpike roads only covered a small percentage of the roads in any given area and so those not wishing to pay were left with often rotten, rutted and often blocked roads through floods but least they were free. In the case of Hagley Road, which was turnpiked, that was rescinded ie de-turnpiked in 1841 because the trustees fell out with those doing the maintenance.

### **Edgbaston becoming a suburb**

Roads have been at the heart of the area, as it became a more genteel place to live after Birmingham began to expand. Whilst its position to the west of Birmingham along Hagley Road brought in much traffic through and into Birmingham from Halesowen, Edgbaston was also growing away from its rural heritage into a more select Victorian suburb that had more of the professional classes living there, than many other areas. Narrow lanes turned into roads with smart houses and sizeable gardens and the traffic increased also. The Botanical Garden and nearby parks like the Chamberlain Gardens, were where people took their leisure.

## **Some of the Edgbaston's more illustrious residents**

One of Edgbaston's eminent citizens Joseph Sturge is remembered in a Statue for his work on the abolition of slavery, favouring a policy of gradual emancipation of the British slaves. His statue was renovated in 2007 and moved to be outside the Marriott Hotel.

Dame Mary Barbara Hamilton Cartland, novelist was born in Edgbaston.

JRR Tolkien lived in Edgbaston from 1902 to be near the Oratory and attended St Philip's School, with his brother Hilary. Later he used one of his neighbours as an inspiration for one of his Hobbits.

## **Edgbaston's first major redevelopment**

Prior to the developments in 1960s, the five roads, Hagley Road, Ladypool Lane, Broad Street, Islington Road and Calthorpe Road met in the area known as Five Ways. An island was built where the clock and the Statue to Joseph Sturge was located.

Otherwise, what we have now as the modern Five Ways with was the arrival of the roundabout and underpass for the Broad Street and Hagley Road. This came at a time Herbert Manzoni's time as Birmingham's Surveyor and Engineer. Some say that he had little interest in old buildings and the dramatic road system added to the Edgbaston Shopping Centre must have swept away many old and some fine buildings for this age. The former home of King Edward VI Five Ways School was in Five Ways, before it moved out to Bartley Green.

Five Ways is a major commercial area of Birmingham city centre, that was beginning to develop in the early 1960s when Birmingham's business centre expanded westwards towards Edgbaston, along Broad Street and Hagley Road. Calthorpe Estates, the landowners, started various schemes to encourage high rise construction in the area and to develop it into a business centre.

## **Iconic buildings in Edgbaston**

There were probably many fine buildings in vicinity of Five Ways, some have no doubt been swept away as part of the various major redevelopments. Lloyds Bank was built in 1909 on the corner of Islington Row and Calthorpe Road. Marriott Hotel, formerly the Swallow Hotel was where President Bill Clinton took over the hotel in May 1998 when he attended the G7 in Birmingham. Perhaps the most iconic building along Hagley Road is Tricorn House, which was built in 1976 on the site Francis Road Congregational Church.

One of the other significant buildings is Metropolitan House (also known as 1 Hagley Road after its address, No. 1 Hagley Road), is a landmark partly its location on the corner of Hagley Road and Ladywood Middleway and for its designer John Madin who designed this stand-out tower around 1976. Maden specialised in what was colloquially known as Brutalist style and included the former Central Library in Birmingham. Metropolitan House is a 20-storey high-rise tower that was refurbished in 2016, as a residential development offering high-specification apartments.

One of the first commercial developments by Calthorpe Estates was Five Ways Shopping Centre, with Auchinleck House above it. It comprised a traffic-free piazza with ground floor retail, an indoor market area, a car park on the second level. 10-storey Auchinleck House, was completed in 1962 and was named after Claude Auchinleck, a career soldier rising to the rank of Field Marshall having served in both world wars and in India (1884-1981). There is a statue of him outside the building that bore his name. In 2016 the building was refurbished and reopened as Park Regis a luxury hotel and conference and event centre.

### **Five Ways Railway Station**

Five Ways railway station is a short walk from Five Ways Circus down Islington Row and is on the Cross-City Line, which was opened in 1884 to replace the Granville Street station but the station closed in 1944 and reopened in 1978. The journey into Grand Central is short as there are no intervening stations. Almost after leaving the station, the Cross Rail service from Longbridge to Lichfield dives into a tunnel and in a few minutes, you can begin to see the platforms of Grand Central gradually coming into view.

### **Birmingham's Tramways**

Birmingham had by the turn of the 20th century achieved City Status and under The Tramways Act of 1870 Birmingham was empowered to own all the tram tracks within the city boundaries and let out the tramways to local operators to run the services under lease to the Birmingham City Tramways (BCT) in 1904. They operated the ever-increasing network of tramways into the largest narrow-gauge tramway in the country until 1953. It had the standard gauge of 3 foot 6 inches. Only three remaining tramways were running at the end, Short Heath, Pype Hayes and Erdington and all closed simultaneously in July 1953. It was 62 years before the Midland Metro on similar single decker trams started to ply between Snow Hill Station and Wolverhampton St George's.

In researching for Five Ways, I saw a photograph taken in the early 1900s showing this tall narrow electric tram, like a very sedate Victorian lady in black, making its way up the centre of Islington Row towards Five Ways.

There were many reasons for the eventual decline of the Tramways in Birmingham and possibly the effect of Luftwaffe's bombing the tramways, coupled with the rise of private car ownership and the tremendous improvements in buses.

### **The Middleway came to Edgbaston in the 1990s**

The construction of the roundabout and underpass in 1968 at Five Ways, also had a very substantial piazza, that was below the carriage level of the roads. Below that was the underpass for the traffic from Stourbridge into Birmingham which had been built below the piazza.

Some hoped the emerging Middle Ring Road, would take priority at the Junction and go under it, on the same level as the existing Hagley Road/Broad Street. This did not happen and some felt it was a missed opportunity. It may have been one of the plans however in the event the planners decided to run the two parts of the Middleway (Islington Row and Ladywood Lane) up to the street level at Five Ways Circus, where the traffic would to merge with traffic coming around the Circus.

They would have had two options, to drop the Middleway a further level below the Hagley underpass or to block off Hagley Road/Broad Street and create the new underpass for the Middleway. This option would have forced Hagley Road/Broad Street to use the roundabout instead.

From the first redevelopment in 1972, traffic either entering the city centre used the Hagley Road/Broad Street underpass in the mornings and the reverse in afternoons where it helped to keep the traffic moving free by avoiding the roundabout. However, as the plans were being discussed to extend the Midland Metro to Edgbaston folk were shocked to hear that the Hagley Road/Broad Street underpass would be permanently closed to private cars and commercial except the Metro, buses and taxis, with the coming of the Edgbaston Extension of the Metro to the terminal at Edgbaston Village. This was going to increase the bottlenecks at the head of Broad Street for traffic leaving out of City and that arriving at the Circus along the Hagley Road and taking their turn around the Circus.

Whilst the argument for through traffic on the Middleway was lost at Five ways another change affecting motorists and commercial drivers faced new challenges regarding new pollution legislation involved in creating a Clean Air Zone, under Clean Act in 2021. All the area on the City Centre side of the Middle would be so designated that only those vehicles that complied with the regulations could enter without charge. Cutting down through traffic in and out the Clean Air Zone has cut the pollution. Birmingham City has been forced in this with very poor air quality, motorists are having to adapt to more enlightened, environmental times.

It is taking longer for previous working practices following Covid, for offices to get back to normal. Whereas before Covid most people went to work and travelled in and out every day. Covid restrictions required only those who had to turn up for work, should do so, everyone else had to do home working. Many months later it is significant that the numbers of people either home working or hybrid working, where going into work at least one day a week. It may or may not be influencing traffic levels, however school traffic may have increased the traffic instead, except things quieten during school holidays.

### **The Metro comes to Edgbaston**

Of the 3 *Nodes* on the Middleway that I am writing about (Bordesley Circus, Five Ways and Dartmouth Circus) only Five Ways, at the present time, has the Midland Metro integrated into its transport system. The original Network ran along the track bed of the former GWR between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The Metro ran between Snow Hill to Wolverhampton St George's, started the service in 1999.

In 2012 the line from St. Paul's was modified to Bull Street instead of Snow Hill Station, along into Corporation Street to Grand Central Station, The Town Hall, City Library, Five Ways Railway Station and terminating in Edgbaston Village. At the time of writing the next phase is extending the service from Bull Street to Birmingham Bus Station with a further extension possibly to Birmingham Airport.

The new Metro trams are single-decker, double end articulated designs, which have four rigid sections linked by a pivoting joint double, often known as bendy bus. They and the platforms at their stations are at the same level to make access easy for everyone.

When I was photographing Five Ways for this *Node*, I was very keen to see the Metro ascending from or descending into underpass, it was like seeing some kind of caterpillar on roller skates. Whilst there are 8 buses going into the city centre, if you live near the terminus, Hagley Road or Broad Street the Metro is convenient with a daytime service every 12 to 15 minutes. It is a popular alternative to taking your car, when you also must pay to park, or worse still paying for the Clear Air Zone charge if your car is non-compliant.

### **My tour of the Five Ways Circus**

Travelling on the Metro out from town, I stopped at the Five Ways Train Station stop and walked along Broad Street towards Five Ways Circus. Just short of the Broad Street I saw a bus descending into the underpass. Looking around I failed to notice Auchinleck House, because the building has been revamped and is now Park Regis.

I took the steps to go down on to the piazza into the middle of the Five Ways Circus, which had been greatly changed since it was landscaped in the days when Tube Investments were a significant player in Edgbaston and owned the former Marriott. The hexagonal patterned flooring has been tarmacked over and the large planting beds with large evergreens were being cut back by council workers.

Back through the pedestrian underpass and I went up to street level by the former and empty Lloyds Bank, behind security fencing, which gave it the appearance of a building waiting for an imaginative developer to lift the spirits of this area. Wanting to find Five Ways Station, retraced my steps back to Islington Row and was surprised how far down and see the Railway Station. Crossing back down into the piazza and back out to beside the Marriott the other side of Harborne Road/Calthorpe Road and on to Hagley Road, where I had the view of 1 Hagley Road, (Metropolitan House) and some other familiar tall office blocks. Moving down Hagley Road, I stopped at the point where the Metro had come out of the underpass and would be about to cut across the traffic leaving the Circus and heading down Hagley Road, away from town. The traffic was stopped by controlled lights and allowed the Metro to cross in front of the traffic to continue near the pavement and the traffic to move out towards the central reservation. One of the Metros, was advertising the CBSO on its sides, having left the terminus and was about to descend under the Junction.

Passing the recently refurbished Morrison's supermarket, after a small fire in the roof, I arrived at Edgbaston Village Metro terminal. Previously there were some temporary barriers at the Metro Stop erected along the pavement, but these had been removed and where the Metro had become part of street scene.

Across the Hagley Road I could see fine lines and the attractive Tricorn House with its three curved sides rearing up. It still is a shining monument to good modern architecture that was built in 1972. It pleases the eye for any generation, what a pity they could not have retained more of old buildings and refurbished or at least created more attractive ones.

I now returned to the Hagley Road crossing over to the north side via the pedestrian crossing and got up close to Tricorn House and then back down the pavement to the piazza to come up on the Ladywood Middleway. The former Children's Hospital has long gone in the former General Hospital and now the Princess of Diana Children's Hospital. The hospital has been replaced by the Odeon Luxe Birmingham Broadway. Back to piazza and up Broadway formerly the local Tesco now various offices.

Finally waiting for the tram to take home I got a fine view of Five Ways Cineworld before taking my leave on my Metro back into town. Edgbaston is such an interesting place with Five Ways

its focal point, which has always been changing like the rest of Birmingham. What will it look like in 25 years, will the residents still be working from home, or will electric cars rule the roost? Who knows.

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I am indebted to the various websites connected with the road building of the Middleway, Edgbaston Manor, Edgbaston, Five ways, Parishes, Turnpike Roads, Trams, Midland Metro, and others, and the old fire station. Any views expressed in this article are mine and are my interpretations of any of the documents that I have encountered, I apologise for any inaccuracies.

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