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The Area surrounding Fox Hollies Road

Initially what intrigued me as I started to research this road, was on my old side-by-side map OS 25 Inch 1892 – 1914 the name Yardley in bold type, didn't refer to Yardley we know now, which lies north of the A45. The Yardley in the old maps showed The Parish of Yardley which covered over 13 square miles and had its town hall next to the Sparkhill baths on the Stratford Road A34.

The parish of Yardley in north-eastern Worcestershire was incorporated into the City of Birmingham in 1911. The lane formerly known as Hall Green Lane in the 18th century, became Fox Hollies Road more recently. It ran through a rural landscape with a few farms and some notable large houses, on its way between the Stratford Road and Warwick Road.

This former parish could sense the presence of Birmingham as the major manufacturing City was growing ever nearer, with new metal working ventures cropping up unhampered by restricted trade guilds and being able to exploit new opportunities employing skilled metal workers and was rightly called 'the City of a thousand trades'. The reference to skilled metal workers was very important to maintain that expansion.

Expansion continued after the first World War and the city council built modern council housing on a huge scale to rehouse families from inner city slums. In the Hall Green and Acocks Green districts the Fox Hollies Estate, promised a new way of living, with more space for housing and wider roads.

To keep up with the developments such as the Fox Hollies Estate, the road system was changed and added to as the traffic increased and changed from horsepower to petrol and diesel vehicles and some of the narrow lanes and streets were widened into broad tree lined Boulevards in Hall Green and Acocks Green, as part Acocks Green bypass of the Olton Boulevard East, Fox Hollies and The Fox Hollies Estate. Fox Hollies Road became part of the Outer Circle and from around 1922 was designated as A4040.

Why I chose Fox Hollies Road

As you can appreciate, once you start digging, into an area's history an ordinary road like Fox Hollies Road, becomes a personal challenge and I have enjoyed going on its journey from

rural to bustling 21st century with developments still taking place. All in all from a relative low period at the end of the 20th century things are picking up. I have uncovered a rich tapestry of former properties, learning about the families who lived there and explored the area on foot with my camera to get to know it better.

As we look through today's lenses at the legacy buildings, we realise the key people who helped give this place and its roads their names. The Fox family bought the farm from 'atte Holies' in the 15th century; 'Foxholleys' gets mentioned in 1624. The 'Hawe' family built Hawe Hall, later they were known as the Halls and their house became known as Hall Green Hall; The 'Walkers', who bought much land in the area and sold part of it for the Fox Hollies Estate (see below) and one of the Walkers founded a bank which morphed over couple of centuries into the HSBC.

As I mentioned earlier, you can trace Fox Hollies Road on street maps old and new in both Hall Green and later in Acocks Green. I walked it from south to north on its pavements, with wide grass verges and the tree lined dual carriageways before returning to the final section 2-way road as it joins Warwick Road A41.

Walking Fox Hollies Road and some points of interest

Starting our 1½ mile walk at the Four Ways junction with Stratford Road, lies the mid-18th century coaching inn The Bulls Head (picture 1) which was just a 'request stop' not a staging Inn. This 4 square building is now part of the Ember Inns and offers 'their must-have app with access to all the best offers' etc.

Continuing up the western side of the dual carriageway, you may be struck by The Hamlet and Hamlet Road a 19th century 'private development built sometime around 1880s.

On your walk you will notice there is housing on both sides of the road which is a mixture of 19th and 20th century housing, including some examples of council housing (picture 2) which you can see elsewhere in the area.

By the junction with School Road B4146 you will reach the Church of the Ascension (picture 3), formerly called Job Marston and Hall Green Chapel or known locally as Marston's Chapel, built around 1703, with its cupola sitting atop its tower, which was an example of the Queen Anne style.

Opposite the church on the eastern side of the Fox Hollies Road are the Charles Lane Alms houses which replaced Hall Green Hall around 1935.

Further up on the left stands the once good drinking pub The York, which opened in 1931. It closed finally in 2019 and there have been a number of different plans, the latest to convert this Peaky Blinders styles pub into a hotel.

The striking 21st century white concrete Fox Hollies Children's Centre (picture 4) built in 2008 stands within the grounds of the former Fox Hollies Hall. All that remains are the old front gates and pillars (picture 5) and the small park called Curtis Gardens, including fairly recent tower blocks built in 1955.

Fox Hollies Hall was the former home of the Walkers, its Italianate style house was built around 1869, but was demolished by 1937.

In 1930s Colonel Walker sold the Gospel Farm on the eastern side of Fox Hollies Road, to create the vision of the new Fox Hollies Estate. It was to provide 'splendid avenue, (Greenwood Avenue) with its ring-centre, forming the axis of the lay-out, with a splendid radiation of gracefully-curving roads' (Hartfield Crescent), apart from these roads, the rest was never built to such high, however a very large council estate was built in its place, meaning that this completely changed the nature of Acocks Green and with some saying it led to little sense of community.

Moving north into Acocks Green, ahead on both sides are the inter-war shops (picture 6) built in around 1931 as one of Acocks Green's two shopping areas.

On crossing Olton Boulevard West you would have found another pub The Fox Hollies in the triangle with Fox Hollies Road and Summer Lane, however that closed in 1997 and today we discover the Walker family crest of a fox and holly (picture 7) built into the side of the Lidl supermarket built in 1999. Next door we find a modern replacement filling station built 1980, to the original garage there from 1969.

Acocks Green is home to the 'Outer Circle route A4040, said to be Europe's longest bus route and the buses are housed in the Acocks Green's Number 11 Bus Garage (picture 8) set back from the road just passed Summer Lane.

There is another park, this time on the far side of Westley Road, which is the Acocks Green Recreation Ground, given by Yardley Charity Estates to Yardley District Council 1898, where funfairs come to town.

Beyond the bus garage is a 19th century row of terrace houses (picture 9). Beyond that is a house number 39 once called Mayfield in late 1870s. By 1938 it was converted into the City's

first old people's home for 'gentlewomen' later men and women. It was named Grey Gables after one of the residents.

Ahead is very wide junction A41 Warwick Road and A4040 Fox Hollies Road. It would seem the planners were preparing to widen the north section of Fox Hollies Road, by setting a number of houses back from the road and grassing the frontages (Picture 10). That plan was not carried out. You have reached the end of Fox Hollies Road.

Thank you journeying with me along and through time.

The Bulls Head (picture 1)

Council housing (picture 2)

Church of the Ascension (picture 3)

Fox Hollies Children's Centre (picture 4)

Old front gates and pillars of Fox Hollies Hall (picture 5)

Row of 1930s shops (picture 6)

Walker family crest of a fox and holly (picture 7)

Acocks Green Number 11 (outer circle) bus garage (picture 8)

19th century row of terrace houses (picture 9)

Houses set far back from road, with large area of grass (picture 10)

I have made use of a number of websites covering the area, Yardley, Fox Hollies, Hall Green, Acocks Green, Number 11 bus route, Acocks Green Recreation Ground and the history of Birmingham

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