

**WORKING PEOPLE'S HISTORIES:
PRIMROSE, POOL FARM,
HAWKESLEY
1914-2014**



Working People's Histories Project

Kings Norton has a long and rich history that is available to discover through several books published on the area and two vibrant local history groups. But when looking at the history of the newest area of Kings Norton, The Three Estates, there is very little to find.

The Sweet Project and Kings Norton Library approached the Heritage Lottery Fund with an idea to record the history of the area known as The Three Estates as it undergoes a period of intense regeneration. The project focused on the lives of families on Primrose, Pool Farm and Hawkesley estates, all built since the 1950s. The aim of the project was to preserve and document changes which have taken place over the past 100 years in work, leisure, education, transport, health, values, beliefs and environment. The hope was that successive generations would share their experiences of living on The Three Estates.

The focus was on how the lives of working class people have changed over the course of a century. Local volunteers explored the origins of their estates and tried to answer questions on how changes in society have impacted on their everyday lives.

For instance, the architects of the estates had high expectations for the residents when they were built. Have those desires been realised? Society and culture was very different when the estates were conceived. How are we different now? What is the nature of a post-industrial Birmingham in the 21st century?



Hobbis family, Masshouse Farm 1920s

A Short History of Kings Norton



View of The Green, Kings Norton and farmlands taken from St Nicolas Church Bell Tower.

The Three Estates are a part of the Kings Norton ward in South Birmingham. Kings Norton has a long and rich history with some evidence to show prehistoric and iron age use of the area. It is during the Anglo-Saxon era that permanent use of Kings Norton is first recorded historically. In the Domesday Book the area is called 'Nortune' of Bromsgrove and over the next centuries the manor of Kings Norton had many owners and leaseholders until it was separated from Bromsgrove in 1564. It remained a royal manor until 1804 when it was purchased by John Taylor, co-founder of the Lloyds Banking Group.

By the Tudor period Kings Norton Village had begun to develop a trading and manufacturing centre of wool and pottery. Links with burgeoning towns were developed and a market charter was awarded in 1616. The land remained royal during the Civil War and was regularly used by the Royalist Army as a base when travelling through the area.

Kings Norton took full advantage of the Industrial Revolution and a canal was built in the late 18th century to ensure the transportation of the many goods now being produced locally.

During the 19th century the areas in and around Kings Norton had established a chemical works, paper mill and a screw factory. Chocolate makers Cadburys had also become significant employers of local people. In 1911 Kings Norton became a part of Birmingham and the building of affordable housing became a focus of the area as the slums of Central Birmingham were emptied during post-war period.

In 1914 the area that came to be known as the Three Estates: Pool Farm, Primrose and Hawkesley was land occupied by several farms in the Kings Norton ward. Three years earlier the area had left the control of Bromsgrove and had become part of Birmingham. On 4th August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany beginning World War 1.

Education

Maxine Hegney, interviewed June 2014

“When it re-opened as ARK Kings Academy the internal appearance changed lots.. Initially the school was called Primrose Hill School and it had 8 forms. Each letter of ‘Primrose’ made up a form. Primrose Hill School didn’t have a good reputation in those days so I didn’t go there.

On Sundays, kids used to play football on the school grounds because there were no gates.”



Kings Norton Library
visit to St Pauls
School in 1986.

A visit was made to St Pauls School to get the pupils to record their opinions of where they live and what they like to do in 2014 through creating pictures and writing. The children looked at the 1960’s to compare their lives now with the lives of the first pupils of St Pauls in 1965. They looked at toys, television programmes, magazines and sweets. They were surprised to find that many of the brands were still available today for them to buy.

The students at ARK Kings Academy became involved in the project early on, researching the projects themes of housing, transport and public services through the material available at Kings Norton Library. The students then created an attractive display for the Kings Norton Village Festival in July 2014 to promote the project to the local community. They looked at news stories, maps, the clothing fashions of the 1960s and spoke to local residents to reflect upon the changing interests of the area since the estates were built.

The students also attended a Heritage Day held by Kings Norton Library to inspire the local community to engage with the project. The enjoyed a workshop on poetry and creative writing with local poets Spoz and Stephen Burke-Morrison.

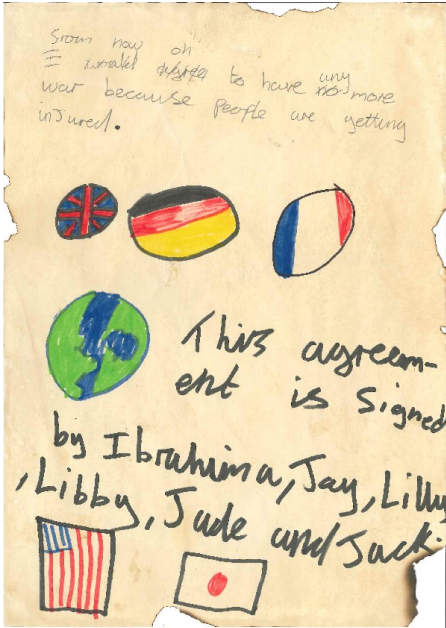


War

2014 was the centenary of the start of World War 1. To mark the changes on the estates over the past one hundred years, The Sweet Project went into the local residential homes and schools to see how both the young view war and how the elderly reflect upon the changes in their lives since their experiences in World War 2.



The residents looking through their photographs and remembering their experiences of war.



The children explored the theme of war and peace, writing letters home after reading Siegfried Sassoon's 'A Letter Home' and writing peace treaties.

A Letter Home!
 I'm sick and tired
 of hearing bombs and guns
 I hate the sound I just
 want peace.

No more shouting No
 more bombs Just peace
 I want you to come I hate
 this. thanks alot who started
 this.

by Milliecent



Leisure

Maxine Hegney, interviewed June 2014

“When we moved here it was like moving to the country as we are on the edge of Worcestershire.”



Hide & Seek

Millennium
Green 1990s



By the 1990s Icknield Street Tenants Association had begun to fight for the right to use land next to the estate as a Village Green when plans to build further houses on ‘The Field’ were announced. The area is now known as the Millennium Green.

Roy Cooke, interviewed 20th June 2014

“In the early years people generally helped each other out—there was a community spirit, probably a remnant of the war, but the nature of the tenants began to change in the early seventies and by this time the estate had acquired a community hall, a couple of pubs and a Boys Club. The greatest advantage to living there was that the estate was built right up against farmland so you could escape into the countryside fairly easily.”



View from Cavendish Tower 1980



Housing

Roy Cooke, interviewed June 2014

“Pool farm was built first and building commenced I believe in 1955. Houses were built of large pre-cast reinforced concrete slabs which were manufactured in factories and then moved on site. This allowed for cheap and affordable housing for the mainly working class families that were moved in from all over the city. We, my parents, me and my two sisters moved there in October 1957. The house we moved into had three bedrooms, previously five of us shared one room and it also had an indoor toilet and a bathroom, luxuries we were denied at our previous house.”



Overlooking
Primose hill
Estate.

Dave Lee, interviewed June 2014

“I moved here in 1976... I remember my dad telling me that he felt ‘posh’ when he moved here—because they had a bath!”

Pam Dean, interviewed November 2014

"I moved from my parent's house... to Cavendish Tower which was at the top of Hillmeads Road on the Three Estates more or less on the edge of it. I moved there at the beginning of 1979 and I got it, you know, looking pretty good for myself and I was really quite happy there. Because it hadn't been particularly well constructed as was the case with a lot of the properties on Pool Farm which is where the Cavendish Tower was, Pool Farm. When it was really hard winter I remember certainly around 1980/81 there were icicles on the inside of the kitchen window and it was absolutely freezing. I mean we only had two bar electric fire in the lounge that was the only heating that was in that... Originally the tower had been built with underfloor heating, but of course that was so expensive for people that they basically did away with it."

Laurie Hunt, interviewed January 2015

"So I bought a paraffin heater to supplement it, because I could get that cheaper than the under floor heating. So I used to get the paraffin down in Stirchley. The garage has gone now but it was at the bottom of Warwards Lane, where the road runs into the back of it. It used to be the 2 bus ran along there, the 20, there's a 76 runs along it and I used to get the paraffin from there and I think it was £4.00 for 5 gallons."

Roy Cooke, interviewed June 2014

“Primrose Hill estate was commenced in the early sixties and again was built from pre-cast concrete blocks but ran into problems very early on mainly through poor construction. Following a very wet winter tenants began to notice fungus growing on the interior walls of their houses almost certainly because the damp courses had not been completed properly. Some of the locals who had lived in the area before any of the estates were built said that Primrose Hill estate was built in a natural basin where water collected from the local hills and which gave rise to the name of the local farm, Pool Farm.”

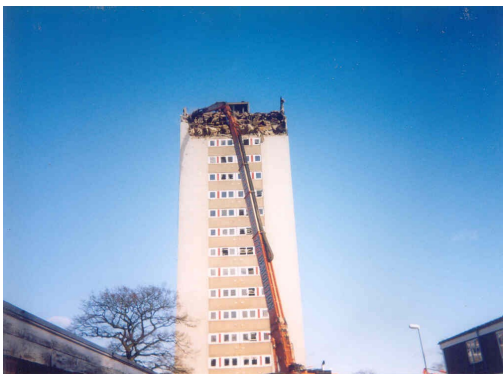


Noted as being
Cavendish Tower



The problems with housing had caused Cavendish Tower to be taken down in the 1990s. The photographs below show the demolition of Primrose Tower in January 2004.

By the mid 2000s a regeneration scheme had been planned for the area and is still ongoing in 2015.



Demolition of Primrose Tower, 2004



Pam Dean, interviewed November 2014

“I should have mentioned that Cavendish Tower was pulled down and I didn’t actually experience the pulling down of that, it was pulled down in the mid, early nineties, which was when we were living in Cumbria. But it was funny to come back to Birmingham and to see an empty space where I’d once lived.”

During the 1980's the ward councillors were receiving many complaints about the condition of the housing stock. Publicity was sent out to gather as much information about the situation as possible to push for repairs to be made.

KINGS NORTON NEWS

THE COUNCIL NEWS
1984

ADVISOR: CHRIS KIRK
LYNNE JONES
PAM DEAN

Dear Residents,

We are very pleased that, after a long struggle of your local councillors, an alternative form of heating has finally been fitted to your property. We are anxious that any problems which may have arisen since the units were first fitted should be put right as a matter of urgency. Consequently, we will be calling on you in a few days time to check that the systems are working well.

If you are not in when we call and you wish to contact us about any problems, please visit one of our Advice Bureaux or return the form below to Councillor Chris Kirk at the Council House.

<p>Please return to: Councillor Chris Kirk, The Council House, Birmingham</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____ Tel. No. _____</p> <p>Details of uncorrected repairs _____ _____ _____</p> <p>Other Problems _____ _____</p> <p>12.50 (MONEY), COUPONS OR SPERMINO BREAD.</p>	<p>ADVICE BUREAUX</p> <p>These Advice Bureaux hold COUNCIL Advice Bureau Book Lists:</p> <p>WEDNESDAY 7.30 pm Friends Meeting Centre, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Edgbaston.</p> <p>THURSDAY 7.00 pm The Library, Walsall, Edgbaston, Birmingham, (122 Woodcock Road).</p> <p>FRIDAY 7.00 pm 27 Sanderson Avenue, Birmingham.</p> <p>If you are unable to visit an Advice Bureau, please use the form opposite.</p>
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Flats in Pool Farm

Laurie Hunt, interviewed January 2015

“They came and decided they were going to put central heating in and renew the heating system completely. So we had to have all that done. That took about a week to do each house. They did the house alright, either side of us they had leaks all over the place. I think it was because we used to supply them with plenty of cups of tea while they were working. But the house was smashing. We'd got a radiator in the kitchen, one at the top of the stairs and one in the bathroom, so I extended that a little bit. Put one in our bedroom and one in one of the other bedrooms. Not one in the small room because that was where the pipe ran under the floor and kept the room warm. It was too warm in the summer when you put the boiler on. Then they decided, just after I'd finished decorating, they decided to come and knock it all about again to put rewiring in.”



Speedwell House overlooking St Nicolas Church

Shopping and Transport



Roundabout at The Green, 1960s

Pershore Road
South meets Wharf
Road, 1960s



Maxine Hegney, interviewed June 2014

“In the 70s... we had a milkman that did the rounds, and we had a row of shops with a butchers and a greengrocers; ‘Michaels’ used to be a co-op.

There was a clothes shop up on The Fold, called Gaytones. Also, there was a man, ‘The Alpine Man’, who came round and delivered fizzy pop; if you took the bottles back you’d get money for them. We used to collect them from around the estate to earn money!”

Roy Cooke, interviewed June 2014

“I have two abiding memories of that estate, apart from the fact that the city had built a concrete jungle in the heart of the countryside, firstly there were no shops; families had to rely on grocers driving vans around the estate and hooting their horns to let people know of their presence. Since most people didn't have cars, they were few and far between on council estates in those days, people could charge what they liked. Staples such as bread and milk were still delivered to your door, as was coal which then was the only source of heating for most people.

The nearest shops to our part of the estate were in Kings Norton Village approximately a mile away and there was the 'added bonus' of no public transport, the second abiding memory, that did not arrive until about 1964 some seven years after the estate was completed. Shops 'The Fold' were eventually provided but most people had to wait about eighteen months before these were built.”

Laurie Hunt, interviewed January 2015

“(I remember) walking up to the Cartland Arms as it was, it's now Macdonalds. To catch the bus to go to Cotteridge to go to the outer circle to get the bus to go to the university. Then they started the number 4 bus from Poole Farm back to Cotteridge. It was one of the first 'one man' operated buses in Birmingham, as it was in those days. I got on well because at the time I was in the Specials, that was in 1963, and I used to get on that (the No 4 bus) to go on duty and come back home again.”

The Three Estates 2015

The regeneration scheme of the Three Estates has resulted in several streets of new housing, leaving many areas unrecognisable compared to the homes originally built.





Although there are still some recognisable landmarks.





Kings Norton Library and The Sweet Project would like to thank everyone who volunteered their time and experience to Working People's Histories.

We wish to give a special thanks to:

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All of the material, including recordings and documents of the project are stored in the Kings Norton Library Local History collection and is available to view.

Please contact the library at the details below for details on accessing the archive.

Kings Norton Library,
Persnore Road South,
Kings Norton,
Birmingham,
B30 3EU.

Tel: 0121 464 1532/Fax: 0121 464 0249

e-mail: kings.norton.library@birmingham.gov.uk

www.libraryofbirmingham.com/kingsnortonlibrary

