

Chapter 2

THE TOWN

SOCIAL CLASSES:- Railways - Metropolitan Line – Public Transport – Buses – Harrow – Outer London Suburb – Road Network – Satellite Towns - North Harrow – Pinner – Rayners Lane – Housing Developments – Outer Garden Suburbs – A place for the lower middle classes.

It would not be true to believe that it was only the workers who suffered greatest from the terrible waste of human life during the war. To encourage men to enlist the war department set up enlistment offices in each town and major industry calling for all fit men. This naturally meant that the men making up a battalion knew each other, went to school together, danced with the same girls, married within the circle, and were of the same social network. In many of the battles some Battalions lost over half their men. They were replaced early on by other men from the same holding Battalions back home. Once again when in battle more men were lost. This meant that in certain towns and sections of society whole swathes of men were missing.

When the troops went ‘over the top’, they were lead by mainly junior officers. These junior officers were also from the same catchments areas supplying the enlisted men. Again in battle some Battalions lost all their junior officers. These men were in the main from the upper middle classes – from the landed gentry.

After the war, many of the families owning large estates holding positions of responsibility – likely to be future heads of the family, were dead. In many cases their younger brothers were dead too. In time their parents were too old and impoverished to retain and manage the family home, business and estate. These were broken up and sold to maintain their only home which ultimately became too much and sold. In this way the countryside lost the traditional squire in his manor house and the once fine estate sold, to be split up and sold piecemeal, some to be for building land. The countryside was never the same again. And this is what happened, starting gradually after the war, until the older, moneyed population, had died – by about 1938 – twenty-years after the war ended. The social classes lost a tier at the top... shortly it was to lose a tier at the bottom.

The First World War sounded the death knoll of the next generation of ‘landed gentry’, and to some extent, to the aristocrats as well. It speeded up what was likely to take place by natural evolution. Taxation in the form of death duties saw to it that over a period of time there would be a redistribution of wealth. The enclosure act forced some of the poor off the land. They gravitated, as did others, to the towns and factories. The agricultural depression at the end of the nineteenth century changed the balance of the working population between town and country. The war hurried this change along. The 1919 budget raised death duties to forty per cent to estates over two million. A million acres of land was sold over that year. By the end of 1921 a quarter of England had changed hands... A quarter of agricultural land had passed from being tenanted into that of the farmer-owner. Land sales had reached their peak - three years of land sales, now the new owners totted up what their purchases had given them... The repeal of the Corn Production Act saw massive grain imports from Canada, America and Russia. The price of cereals plummeted. What large estates had survived started again to be split up and houses attached to them sold to become detached dwellings. A quarter of country houses were torn down or left derelict. By the first years of the Second World War there was less arable land. What land there was, was not being farmed properly. It took the war and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to take Britain close to self sufficiency.

The result of all this was, a large reduction of wealth owned by the top one per cent of the population – mainly the landed gentry. This land found its way to the next social layer down.

Seventy-five per cent of Britain's population still held less than one hundred pounds in their estate. The change in the population's occupations – from country to town – from working the land to working the production line, gave an opportunity for skills to be learned and entrepreneurship to blossom. This flattened-out the social class graph, and reduced the layers.

Within this now reduced, or flattened out, layer of wealth is accorded a class position defined by occupation, background, education, speech, fashion and hobby – giving social structure.

For those who are interested in class and where they fit into the structure the concept is of interest... for it is a perceived thing. You may like to think of yourself as belonging to one class but your neighbours may not agree with you. In the period and setting we are discussing, 1929 – 1939, in suburban Harrow, class was not of over-riding concern. There were no aristocrats, gentry or Gentlemen – rich men, without occupation. It was a working environment – of mainly men, travelling to and from their work, mostly by rail. There were very few cars and the local bus routes took prospective rail passengers to access a different rail network. It was not an area of heavy industry, textiles, mining or farming, but one of light engineering, service industries, office, and shop work.

North Harrow did not have any grand houses... Its premier houses lined the Pinner Road leading to Harrow. They had an extra living room and bedroom above, were detached, and designed in a similar style to all the rest of the town. If North Harrow had no houses for the very rich it neither had houses for the very poor... the town was made up of similar houses. Some streets had a better place upon the map – close to the park. Others had trees that lined the road. Those that backed upon the railway, positioned next to the shops, or linked to the council houses, had a disadvantage. But in the main, all were very much like each other... held a suburban likeness.

RAILWAYS

The first railway to be opened locally was The London & Birmingham Railway, later to be called the London & North Western, in 1837. It ran from Euston to Boxmore passing through Harrow, later to be called Harrow & Wealdstone station.

A second line, the Metropolitan, originally ran from Paddington to Farringdon, operating in 1863, as the first underground railway. Over the next twenty years was extended linking up with the District Railway and the Inner Circle in 1884. During this time, branch lines ran from Baker Street to Swiss Cottage in 1868, and Willesden to Harrow in 1880. This was extended to Pinner five years later, a station being built there within the year. It took a further twelve years to push the track-laying to Chesham, Chalfont, Watford, Amersham and Aylesbury. By the turn of the century the company stretched over fifty miles from central London – out to Buckinghamshire. The whole railway was electrified by 1905, and by 1927 North Harrow station was up and running. The electric Metropolitan District line, inaugurated 1904 operated between Park Royal and Roxeth - which included a halt at Rayners Lane. The company was not slow in planning the purchase of additional land for more lines, sidings and depots. This land was negotiated on the principle that the land could be used for other purposes. In the event it was used for housing instead. The first housing estates were built at Wembley and Pinner in the early 1900s. A few years later more land was let go all along the line which was only bought to a halt by The First World War.

However, the start of the war did not stop the railway company's publicity department continuing to operate - before its operations temporarily closed down. Its declared policy aim was to publicise the line. It had adopted the brand name of Metro-Land to title an advertising brochure aimed at promoting the company's land for development. This was not a one-off publication... for it continued publication for another twelve years - until the Metropolitan Railway ceased trading as an independent company, before becoming part of London Transport.

METROPOLITAN LINE

In January 1919, a property company called The Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Limited [MRCE] was set up to manage and develop the railway's holdings. It was this company's policy to plan and built residential estates all along the line, including Pinner, North Harrow, Rayners Lane, Northwick Park and Eastcote. The scale of the enterprise required the services of local property developers who were allowed to build to their own specifications. To advertise the housing projects all the railway's route maps, timetables and station posters carried detailed accounts of the sites, plans and local facilities. This was done under the slogan 'a better way of life', and, 'rural traditions with civilized progress'. This marketing ploy worked and the houses were soon snapped up not just for owner occupation but by investors renting out property.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT: BUSES

Tramways were laid at the end of the nineteenth century – they were company owned horse tramways. By 1897 electric tramways were operated, a number of tramway companies formed the Tramways and Light Railway Association. It wasn't long before the Omnibus Owners Association was formed to look after the interests of the horse drawn public transport. In the 1920s and 1930s the three forms of public transport – buses, trolleybuses and trains operated in and around London. The Road Traffic Act 1930 regulated road transport.

HARROW, OUTER LONDON SUBURBS

North Harrow did not appear on the map by chance. It was ordained by the government of the day and the local authority planning department... to cater for the increase in population, and expanding businesses in and around the capital city. The problems of mass unemployment and the need to stimulate the economy lead the government to press local councils for the need to produce residential schemes for house building, and instigate ancillary projects to service that increase in population. The Government Acts of 1919 – 1925 ordered ten council-house estates to be built. Amongst these was one of fifty-three houses to be erected in North Harrow.

Roads can easily be laid, then, linked to existing ones. Railways require land owners, and affected local authorities, to sell and grant planning permission to travel beyond the proposed building site – to link up with an existing system.

ROAD NETWORK

The need for workers houses close to their work, the location of the country's capital city London on a main river, with warehouses and dockland facilities, turned the southeast of England into Britain's most populous place. People and goods need to be moved from home to work, from factory to warehouse. Rivers, canals, roads, and railways are essential for moving troops, supplying goods, communication and personal travel. The direction of city developments happened along its lines of communication, both the roads and railways. As the city expanded farmland was built over. In 1929 the most desirable land left close to London of easy access to a railway was in Middlesex and Hertfordshire. The suburban sprawl of settlements along the railways came to Harrow, North Harrow and Pinner following the main Harrow and Pinner Road in the early thirties.

Before The First World War most people and goods travelled by the power of the horse. After the war the use of steam and then petrol - to power motors accelerated – the development of paved highways and improvements in road construction continued apace. The unemployed were given relief work which further accelerated what had begun. This government sponsored unemployment relief pushed forward road construction. More vehicles were manufactured giving a stimulus to proposals for arterial routes and side roads.

Under the Local Government Act 1929 County Councils became responsible for County Highways in their areas. They in turn proposed the building of town and city bypass to ease congestion. As the new garden towns were built in Metro-Land so the road layouts progressed to cover all the open fields.

The outbreak of War in 1939 brought an end to the expansion of trunk road construction but towards the end of the War the Ministry favoured the provision of a network of high standard routes. Post War saw the enactment of the 1946 Trunk Road Act.

NORTH HARROW, PINNER & RAYNERS LANE

North Harrow lies between Harrow and Pinner, on the Metropolitan Railway - which runs on an east to west bearing. Harrow, a main railway junction - services three railway companies. Pinner, in the north-eastern corner of Harrow parish was a large medieval hamlet in 1750, enlarged to village status a hundred years later then town by the turn of the century. Pinner Town had an existing railway station built at the time the track was laid. Both these towns are situated on the A404, Pinner Road.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

The development of farmland started in the 1920s and 30s. The electrification of the London & North Western Railway in 1917, and permission given for the Piccadilly Line to run over the Metropolitan District line in 1932 gave access to most of that land. By 1933 there were twenty-one stations including North Harrow available for commuters. Baker Street station was the company's headquarters incorporating the largest and most luxurious apartment block in London – completed in 1929.

Land speculation and property development operated over the whole area continuously from 1925 till 1939. By 1926 the road layout was mapped out and road building started, provisions made for main services included, and by 1939 the network was complete. In 1933 Harrow Urban District Council produced residential schemes for house building using the existing main access roads of Harrow Road and Pinner Road to accommodate Alexandra Avenue, Imperial Drive, and George V Avenue. Side roads lead off main thoroughfares, giving today's existing road layout.

On a north south axis, North Harrow lies between Wealdstone – to the north, and, Rayners Lane, to the south - on the A4090, situated on the crossroads of two main arterial roads. The local authorities appreciated the need to build a new town with all its attendant services at this place.

Private house building flourished in the 1920s and 30s. By 1932 building was continuous alongside the railway, referred to a ribbon development, and main roads – from Harrow to Pinner, Wealdstone to Rayners Lane. Most of the countryside between Pinner and Roxeth was built during the 30s. By 1938 North Harrow was complete in all respects.

HOUSE OWNERSHIP

It is difficult now to explain the average workers feelings and opinions regarding house ownership prior to The First World War and shortly afterwards. Only a very small percentage of the population owned their own house. This ten per-cent of owner-occupiers bought because they had the money to do so without needing a loan. Many aristocrats, landed gentry and upper classes rented either their own home or a second home in the country – it was the done thing. There was no shame in not owning your own home, the rent was low and you had the benefit of being able to move quickly as a job became available. As inflation was low and static there was no point in buying to hedge inflation, or to use as a long-term investment. To a degree this attitude was accepted as ‘normal’ and not questioned. There was a certain amount of ‘what’s the point of owning a house and having to maintain it – then, having to pass it on – why should I save for another generation?’ With a growing family you could move to increase the number of bedrooms without over extending your income. Then, where the children left, you could rent something smaller as your income became smaller in retirement. At least ten per-cent of the population lived in tied accommodation – policeman, firemen, estate workers, mill workers, railway workers, servants, miners, land workers, the armed services and teachers – the house went with the job. In the twenties, houses held about one-quarter of the country’s annual fixed-capital security. Ten years later the amount was one-third.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

During this period over three million homes were built. The architectural style of the period was Arts and Crafts – a style of decoration with a romantic return to previous ages using solid wood panelling, and Georgian windows; Mock Tudor, aping the Tudor period with sham wooden framing and leaded lights, and Cottage Style, long- sloping tiled roofs and divided windows. The lower outer walls were built of red brick, above, pebbledash with half-timbering. Red clay tile roofs and tile hung bays. Georgian small windows set in metal casements with wooden frames and cills. Previous craftsmanship gave way to machine made products. Furniture used white wood and ply stained to resemble polished walnut. Carpet squares surrounded by lino. Parquet hall floors and decorated stair spindles. All treated with dark oak stain. Quarry tile kitchen floors, butler sinks, fire-back water boilers and gas cookers. Open fires in all living rooms with wood mantle above tile surrounds. Bedrooms had iron fire grates and fitted wardrobes. Sash windows, landing lights, front door lights and side windows leaded with stained glass.

Between large scale building sites of semi-detached houses, Bungalows, Modern and Art Deco Styles existed, dividing the more conventional style with their flat roofs, ziz-zag and fan window patterns, painted concrete bays and sun-trap curved windows. The construction sites were organized for multiple building techniques on a grand scale that gave a quick turn round of work completing large sites in a four year period – mostly all before 1936.

CUTLER HOMES

The majority houses built in North Harrow were Cutler homes. Albert Benjamin Cutler came from Tottenham. He began building in 1909 but most of his work was in North Harrow and Pinner during the early thirties. His son Horace took over becoming Mayor of Harrow, then Leader of the Greater London Council finally knighted in 1979. Albert Cutler lived in Beresford Road, Marsh Road and lastly in Eastcote Road. He was closely associated with the Imperial Properties Investment Company then Amalgamated London Properties. During the period, 1925-1939 T F Nash Ltd., had three large estates for developing. One was at Eastcote where he lived, another at Kenton and a third at Rayners Lane... they the most economical... then on the way to Pinner that ranged from £595 to £750 – four up and two down, with a garage.

LIGHT INDUSTRY

Depending on the industry, production started to push ahead in the early thirties. The first factories to set the wheels in motion were the new electric consumer goods – cookers, refrigerators, irons, toasters and vacuum cleaners. Radios, telephone equipment and cameras also felt greater sales being recorded. All these items needed ancillary parts to be manufactured. Indeed this was not ‘heavy industry’ but it had to start somewhere. Steel output rose from a low five million tons in 1932, to thirteen by 1937. Coal production had stabilized and productivity started to rise at a steady pace to reach its old peak by 1938. It was a marked change in textiles. Cotton never succeeded in reaching its previous high but woollens did. Generally the thirties, in comparison to other European countries, are described as being an improvement on the previous era – in the twenties.