

Moseley Village Walk

1. Victoria Parade and Alcester Road

The walk starts at the crossroads of Alcester Road, Salisbury Road and St Mary's Row and heads north towards the city centre. The area on the right around St Mary's Row and St Mary's church is the oldest part of Moseley, which until the latter part of the 19th Century was a small village in the parish of Kings Norton in Worcestershire. The Alcester Road was turnpiked in 1770 and thereafter re-surfaced and much improved. Salisbury Road was not cut until 1896 (and named after Lord Salisbury the prime minister of the day). Until then the whole of the west side of Alcester Road formed the eastern boundary of the Moseley Hall Estate.

The **Victoria Parade** of shops on the left was built along the former boundary of the Estate in two sections in 1899 and 1901 with an ornate archway between them. This involved the demolition of the original entrance gates and gatehouse which were located here. The Hall is now accessed via another drive off Alcester Road to the south of Salisbury Road (seen later in the walk).

Opposite Victoria Parade is the **Fighting Cocks** public house. A pub has occupied this site since 1750 when cock fighting took place on Boxing Day. The current splendid building was erected in 1899, designed by Newton & Cheadle, in the style of the Glaswegian architect Charles Rennie Macintosh. The original spectacular tiled public bar still survives today.

At the end of Victoria Parade is the entrance to **Moseley Park and Pool**, the result of community action to preserve the pool and parkland of the Moseley Hall Estate which were designed following the suggestions of Humphry Repton. In the latter part of the 19th century the owners of the Hall took advantage of the demand for housing by selling off land on the edges of their estate for the development of Park Hill and Chantry Road, then Salisbury Road and later Reddings, Moorcroft and Amesbury Roads and there were fears that the remainder of the Estate would be bought up for houses and the surviving open space and pool would be lost. Consequently a small consortium of local businessmen formed Moseley Park & Pool Company which took out a 40 year lease on about 14 acres around the Great Pool and laid it out as a private Park. Members of the syndicate owned houses in Chantry and Salisbury Roads overlooking the Park. In 1958 the freehold of the Park was purchased for £3,500 and it is now run as a charitable Trust. Admission is generally for keyholders only although keys are available on a daily basis at no charge (subject to a deposit) and open access is provided on farmers' market days and at certain other times, in particular during the annual Moseley Folk Festival which is held in the Park.

Beyond the Park entrance the black-and-white half timbered building was formerly the premises of W H Smith, as shown by the inscription 19WHS13 carved on the frontage. Next to that the building now occupied by an O'Neills pub was formerly Park Garage, a car showroom with offices over the top and the multi-storey horse stable blocks of Moseley Park Mews at the rear.

2. Woodbridge Road

The route turns right along **Woodbridge Road**, previously called Blayney Street after the landowners and later re-named after the wooden footbridge which used to take it across the railway line. The shop on the left-hand corner of the road used to be Shufflebotham's a high-class grocers, highly regarded by local residents. The Patrick Kavanagh pub further down on the left with large plate glass windows and typical polychrome brickwork was built in 1870 as the Trafalgar Hotel and had a roller skating rink at the back. It was owned by a wealthy landowner Wilkinson known as "the man who bought up Moseley". The house on the left before the bridge was one of the victims of bomb damage in Moseley during World War II. Laburnum Grove opposite is an attractive double terrace of cottages built for railway workers, with the stationmaster's house behind.

3. The Railway

The bridge crosses the former Birmingham to Gloucester railway line, which was cut through the old village in 1840 and was instrumental to the development of Moseley as a residential suburb of Birmingham. The original Moseley station was in Kings Heath near to the present day Homebase, but in 1867 a new station was constructed here close to the centre of the village. Looking over the parapet to the south, it is possible to see the remains of the former station on the right among the vegetation, the ramp leading to the station and the entrance to the tunnel under St Mary's Row, built using a new 'cut and cover' technique. Since 1941 the line has been used only for freight traffic and as emergency relief for the south western line although consideration is being given to re-opening it for passenger use during the next decade.

4. Church Road

Beyond the bridge, the building on the left at the corner of Woodbridge and Church Roads is **Woodbridge House**, built in 1850 as a school consisting of two large classrooms entered from Church Road and the headmaster's house which faces on to Woodbridge Road.

The route turns right into Church Road. The terrace of particularly attractive old houses on the right is called Holly Bank. Further along, no. 89 was owned by the postmaster and was the site of the first civil marriage in England. Church Road and Ladypool Road were once known as Ladypool Lane and provided a route from St Mary's Church to the Lady Pool (pool of Our Lady, St Mary) which was situated in the vicinity of Balsall Heath Park. The Lady Pool was owned by the church to provide a regular supply of fresh fish for the incumbent of St Mary's church.

Further along Church Road on the left stands **Highfield House**, the former home of John Avins, the philanthropist (1816-1891). He was born, brought up and worked in the Worcester Wharf area of Birmingham, off Gas Street, and owed his wealth to his family's various businesses in japanning and wood processing. In 1858, aged 42, he sold his businesses and retired to Highfield House in Moseley as a 'gentleman'. The grounds of the house then extended as far as Wake Green Road and were not built upon until the 1920s. John contributed to many charities over his lifetime, including eight different Birmingham hospitals, the Birmingham Institutes for the Blind and the Deaf and Dumb, and the Middlemore and Blue Coat Schools for the poor. He held important civic posts, sat on public committees and was very active in St Mary's Church, supporting many new developments financially including the new church in Sparkbrook. On his death he bequeathed money to set up the John Avins Trust to be invested and paid out annually to Birmingham hospitals and institutions, which still operates today. He is buried in St Mary's Churchyard. Highfield House became St Francis's Orphanage in the 1930s, at which point a chapel was added. It is currently occupied by the All Services Club.

5. Wake Green Road

At the end of Church Road the route turns right into Wake Green Road. This is the highest point of the old village and a watershed for local streams. Moseley's position on a hill made it attractive for residential development as its higher elevation raised it above the frequent smogs of the city. The land opposite the junction is thought to have been the site of the original **medieval village green** and would have had fine views towards the Rea Valley to the west and Cole Valley to the east. An Elizabethan building stood here, and later a large house, Elmhurst, occupied the site until the early 1900s.

6. Oxford Road

The route crosses Oxford Road, cut in 1879 as far as School Road (then Letts Lane). **Oxford Road Baptist Church** on the right hand side was built in 1888 to a design by local architect J.P. Osborne, who had been unsuccessful in the competition to design St Agnes Church at the other end of Oxford Road. Osborne also designed the Hope Chapel in Moseley (formerly the Swedenbergian).

7. St Mary's Row

The walk continues downhill into St Mary's Row passing **St Mary's Church**. The church was founded in 1405 as a subsidiary of the church of St Nicholas in King's Norton, to save local worshippers the three mile journey to the parish church. Nothing remains of the original church which was presumably built of wood. The current stone tower was built in the 16th Century but the remainder of the church is the result of numerous additions and alterations in the 19th and early 20th Centuries as the population of Moseley increased. A set of extremely rare steel bells from Sheffield was installed in the tower in 1874 and three of the original bells donated to the newly built St Anne's Church in Park Hill. The steel bells however deteriorated and produced a rather discordant sound and were therefore replaced in 2012 with a new set made from traditional bell-metal. A number of celebrated local people are buried in St Mary's Churchyard including Joseph Lucas the founder of the automotive electrical components business. Opposite St Mary's, Stanley Place and Church Avenue are further interesting and attractive examples of terraced housing built for local artisans.

8. Village Green

The small triangular piece of grassed land on the right at the end of St Mary's Row is the present-day **Moseley Village Green**, a focal point of the village and the site of successful monthly farmers' markets. Approaching the Green, the three buildings adjacent to St Mary's are the three oldest houses in Moseley as shown on local maps, built at the end of the 18th or early 19th Centuries. The next building with a grand archway was once a cab depot which incorporated vehicle storage and mews facilities. The mews were later used by Gascoignes the undertakers who owned the premises opposite now occupied by a Wetherspoons pub. The top of the original archway leading to the stables is still visible above the left hand ground floor window of the pub. The cab stand was located on the Green and provided transport for passengers to and from the nearby railway station. The **Bull's Head** occupies the oldest pub site in Moseley dating back to 1700 although the present building dates from about 1900. The ornate building on the left hand corner of St Mary's Row and Alcester Road, now The Junction pub, was built in 1906 as the offices of the Tramways Company with shops on the ground floor. Previously in the late 19th Century the site was a tram depot with stabling for the horses. This was the terminus of the tram route from the city centre and the lines looped back round the Green with a spur into the depot.

9. Alcester Road and Moseley Hall

At the traffic lights the route crosses Alcester Road and turns left towards Kings Heath. The **Post Office** building on the right was once entirely occupied by the Post Office and an early telephone exchange. It now houses the Moseley Community Development Trust, providing meeting rooms and office space for a number of local businesses and voluntary organisations. The Village public house further along on the right was originally the Moseley Gentlemen's Club built in 1894.

The walk ends just beyond this at the entrance to Moseley Hall Hospital and the adjacent Dovecote and Cow-house, two surviving buildings from the original Moseley Hall Estate. The first **Moseley Hall** was built by the Grevis (or Greaves) family and purchased along with the estate for £9,000 in 1764 by John Taylor, a wealthy Birmingham manufacturer of metal products. His son (also John Taylor) founded the Taylors and Lloyds bank (the predecessor of Lloyds TSB). John Taylor rebuilt the Hall in stone in 1776 but it was partially burnt out by a mob in the Priestly Riots of 1791. It is reported that Lady Carhampton requested the rioters to remove her furniture and belongings first, to which they kindly agreed. The central part of the Hall survived the fire and the Hall was rebuilt in 1792-1796. The Dovecote, Cow-house and Ice House (in Moseley Park) also survive from the 1776 buildings. In 1791 Humphry Repton, the first person in Britain to describe himself as a landscape gardener, produced a 'Red Book' containing suggestions to enhance the design of the park. A painting by Repton shows the fine view from the house across the park and pool to the distant city centre. Apart from the addition of an eastern wing in 1838, the external appearance of Moseley Hall has remained unchanged until the present day.

In 1890 Richard Cadbury purchased the Hall and donated it with a generous endowment to Birmingham Town Council as Moseley Hall Convalescent Hospital for Children. In 1948 Moseley Hall was absorbed into the NHS and became Moseley Hall Hospital.