

# WEST BRIDGFORD

## A CENTURY OF CHANGE

1898 - 1998/99

*by Geoffrey Oldfield.*

Between 1891 and 1901 the population at the censuses increased from 2,500 to 7,500. The next ten years was to see an even greater increase, 6,600 compared with the previous ten years 5,000.

Some of the developments of the decade to 1908 included the building of the Suspension Bridge to enable a new water main for the district; the opening of the Urban District Council's new offices on Bridgford Road (now a 24 hour store); and the establishment of a fire brigade.

The next decade to 1918 included the four years of the 1914-18 war, which put a stop on further development. The war meant that the Musters Road school was used as a military hospital and refugees from Belgium were housed in the area for a time. Just before the outbreak of the war, the Urban District Council started its own bus undertaking, although its progress was affected by the war.

The first ten years after the end of the war saw a resumption of new house-building including the first council houses. In 1921 the War Memorial at the junction of Musters Road and Bridgford Road was opened and named the 203 Bridgford men who were killed in the war. Perhaps the most significant feature of this period was the departure of Mr & Mrs Albert Heymann from Bridgford Hall and the sale of the Hall to the Urban District Council for its headquarters. The sale included the land around the Hall, which was made into a public park with facilities for tennis, bowls and croquet. The population started to increase after the war, some 4,400 between 1921 and 1931.

From 1928 onwards redevelopment continued with new roads and houses - especially in the area south of Melton Road, with new roads such as Eton and Boundary roads. Central Avenue had become a much more important shopping centre. In 1932 there were 24 shops compared with only 4 ten years earlier. Also on the Avenue was a motor garage and a billiard hall, with of course one of West Bridgford's most popular ventures, the Tudor Cinema. Four years later permission was granted for the building of two public houses, the Test Match, and The Wolds, the first such premises in the "New Bridgford"! From April 1935 the Urban District area was expanded to include South Wilford and Edwalton. The new Secondary, later Grammar School on Loughborough Road was built. A branch County Library was opened in the Hall in 1936, and followed two years later by the building of a new purpose-built library. A more ominous event to close this decade was the setting up of an Air Raid Precaution Committee.

The next ten years were dominated by the 1939-45 war, and the air-raid precautions were justified in May 1941 when houses were demolished and people killed in the worst raid Nottingham suffered. The war put a stop to all non-essential building - which was to continue even after the war, almost up to 1948.

From 1948 onwards development re-commenced, on a limited scale at first, for houses. Later, expansion was resumed and Wilford Hill estate was commenced and new schools including Jesse Gray on Musters Road, were built. In 1952 the boundary with the City was altered by making it in the middle of the River Trent. This meant that County Hall and Forest Football Ground, became part of West Bridgford.

From 1958 to 1968 was a time of mixed fortune for West Bridgford. The Tudor Cinema, the farm-house (where the BT Telephone Exchange now stands on Rectory Road), the old rambling Rectory and the 150 year old residence 'The Poplars' - all disappeared. The new block of flats was built on the site of the latter, and on Loughborough Road the GEM (now ASDA) superstore was built. The decade ended with the transfer of the bus undertaking to the City with the loss of the familiar chocolate and cream buses. Trains ceased to run on the former LMS line to London via Melton Mowbray.

An event of some importance in the next decade was the visit of Her Majesty the Queen in 1977 as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations. Traffic problems in West Bridgford were to be tackled at this time by alterations at the south end of Trent Bridge and the conversion of the former railway bridge at Lady Bay into a road bridge. Other railway bridges were demolished and some of the lines used for new developments. In 1974 West Bridgford Urban District Council was disbanded and the town became part of Rushcliffe Borough Council. South Wilford, having been part of West Bridgford for over 38 years was transferred to the City.

The ten years from 1978 to 1988 saw a continuation of the expansion of the area - new roads and houses - including the extensive Compton Acres site, with its shopping centre, public house and a pond. Other incursions into the green belt occurred on Boundary Road behind St. Paul's Church. The school on Musters Road, erected in 1895, was demolished in this period and the site was used for the building of a new Health Centre. Rushcliffe Borough Council built a temporary single storey building between Park Avenue and Stratford Road after demolishing the houses thereon. This included the Council chamber but when the Council moved its headquarters to the former Bridgford Hotel, the temporary building was replaced by a new supermarket.

The last decade has seen the demolition of the police station on Rectory Road and its replacement by a new police headquarters for the south of the county. This incorporated the site of St. Giles' Rectory, which was replaced by a new building on Bridgford Road on land which was formerly a bowling green. St. Giles' also had a new hall built on Stratford Road and the former Parochial Hall was sold to Rushcliffe Borough Council and it is now used as a Community Hall. Another leisure development by the Council is the Rushcliffe Arena on Rugby Road which incorporates an indoor bowling green. A major alteration on Musters Road was the demolition of the former Musters Hotel, and several adjoining buildings, including the privately owned West Bridgford High School. There is now a new block of flats on the site.