

JERRY TEW

I was drawn to this district by my curiosity about its association with my family name and the contrast between the historical significance of its heritage and the comfortable ordinariness of how the area was subsequently developed – a comfortable ordinariness that still remains to this day.

This district occupies the Western portion of what were the grounds of Soho House, the residence of Matthew Boulton, industrialist, inventor and member of the influential Lunar Society. Tew Park Road was named after the country estate which was acquired by Matthew Boulton's son, Matthew Robinson Boulton, in 1815, at Great Tew in Oxfordshire. This subsequently became the family residence as they chose to escape from the increasingly industrialised Birmingham townscape that their family had been party to creating.

The district comprises modest but respectable working class housing – mostly two storey terraces built in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The district is bounded by the Soho Road and the (originally) much grander housing of Handsworth to the north, and slopes down to the parallel railway and tram lines to the south which separate the district from Winson Green. The network of streets were, and are, punctuated by shops, pubs and places of worship (typically occupying prominent positions on corners).

Because the houses were relatively small, they have not lent themselves to multi-occupation in the same way as was the case in Handsworth. As a result, the character and feel of the area has changed relatively little over the last century, and many of the original shops and pubs are still in operation. However, the ethnic and cultural composition of the area has changed, with the Sikh community being strongly represented in what is now very much a multi-cultural area.

Photograph 1 is of the west facing elevation of Soho House itself, now largely hidden behind subsequent housing developments. Photograph 2 looks down St Michael's Hill from the junction with Soho Avenue with its characteristic two storey terraces on either side of the road, either built in brick or using white painted render. At the base of the hill where it crosses Hockley Brook, St Michael's Hill becomes Factory Road – as this was the site of Matthew Boulton's Soho Works. At the corner of Factory Road and Park Road stands the recently renovated Soho Tavern (Photograph 3), which is trying hard to redefine the image of what was a traditional corner pub.

Moving westwards, Khan's Food Store stands at the corner of Holliday Road as Nineveh Road ascends towards Handsworth (Photograph 4). Photograph 5 looks down Tew Park Road with the dome of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Gurdwara visible on the skyline in the distance. Photograph 6 is of the Life and Light Fellowship Pentecostal Church, and the two trees beside it which form a gateway to Tew Park Road from Nineveh Road.

In Photograph 7, we see into the beautiful colour-scape of a dress and fabric shop, with the owner working on her sewing machine at the back. Reflected in the shop window is another surviving pub, the Hockley Brook. Around the corner before the railway arch is the Gurdwara Singh Sabha Akaal Darbaar (Photograph 8). Referencing the district's history, to the west of the District lie Boulton Road (Photograph 9 looking up towards the Soho Road) and the brightly coloured and inviting entrance to James Watt Primary School (Photograph 10) with the Winson Green tram stop on the embankment behind marking the southern boundary of the district.

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