

## LEE BANK MIDDLEWAY (AREA 5)

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The construction of Lee Bank Middleway in the early 1960s turned an already existing demarcation between two very different adjoining areas into an almost fortified barrier. To the north of Lee Bank Road lay an area of inner city slum housing known as Lee Bank. To the south lay the area of Edgbaston that was developed as part of the Calthorpe Estate from 1810 onwards, leaving a legacy of Georgian and early Victorian town housing for the middle and upper classes.

This area of the Calthorpe Estate had remained largely intact as all the property was owned on a leasehold basis by the Calthorpe Estate who restricted any potential out-of-character development. Much of the housing in the roads adjacent to Lee Bank Road were terraced with generous and lofty living accommodation on the ground and first floors, and sometimes with cramped attic quarters for servants tucked under the eaves above – fitted out with minuscule fires so that they did not burn too much coal.

After the Second World War (and significant bomb damage), the complete demolition of Lee Bank was seen as a priority. Grand plans were drawn up by the City Council for a modernist Scandinavian-inspired redevelopment of council flats in tower blocks with green space below following the contours of the land down to the Bristol Road on its eastern boundary – with provision of primary and secondary schools and some commercial development on the periphery. However, as was the case with many similar estates of this period, construction was of poor quality which, coupled with poor maintenance by the Council, led to serious problems of damp and insanitary conditions.

Although the area acquired a bad name for anti-social behaviour, its residents also achieved fame for a series of assertive protests about their living conditions, culminating in a protest on top of Birmingham Town Hall when the Eurovision Song Contest was held in the city in 1998. Shortly after this, ownership of the estate was transferred to Optima Community Housing Association as a way of attracting new funding from Government to allow the complete redevelopment of the estate with a combination of mid-rise blocks of owner occupied and social housing. In order to create distance from its less salubrious past, the area was given a new identity with the name of Attwood Park, and part of the new development became Park Central.

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Views of the redeveloped Attwood Park are captured in photographs 4, 9 and 10, while photographs 1, 7 and 8 show different views of the contrasting late Georgian and early Victorian terraced residences in the Calthorpe Estate just to the south of Lee Bank Middleway. The three-storey Georgian houses in photograph 7 probably date from before the rest of the planned residential development of the estate, as they are representative of an earlier style of town house. One of the houses in the white painted curving terrace in photograph 8 was the family home of Emmy Bridgwater, a member of the Birmingham Surrealists who were active from the 1930s through to the 1950s.

Lee Bank Middleway creates and solidifies the edge that separates these contrasting areas of residential development. As a busy dual carriageway with limited crossing points – and with fences on each side and on the central reservation – a largely impenetrable barrier is formed between them. Photographs 2, 3 and 6 show the section of road from the junction with Wheeley's Land down towards Bristol Road, while photograph 5 looks up towards Five Ways.

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