

MALCOLM VEITCH

The Swan, Yardley, to Stechford

Arriving from Acocks Green along Yardley Road, as a pedestrian you can safely cross the busy A45 Coventry Road using an underpass, pedestrian bridge and go up some steps beside the tall grey former office building to see where the original Swan Pub was situated. Across the A45 is a modern office block beside the slip road up from the Coventry Road with its pointed clock tower. This replaced the last incarnation, the 1960s Ansells styled Swan Pub, that was demolished in the 90s. Those old enough may remember its predecessor Tudor Styled Swan Pub that was built in 1898. There has been a pub on the same site since around 1605.

Church Road has been diverted in a graceful curve around the Swan Shopping Centre car park beside Equipoint, the recently refurbished office block now apartments, towards the Oaklands Recreation Ground, where a beautiful mature Oak (picture 1) stands out on the boundary of the recreation ground. It makes a fine silhouette against the blue sky.

We turn left along Church Road at the roundabout towards the Yew Tree, which is dual carriageway and was at one time called the Long Causeway. Church Road is an ancient way from pre-historical times, making Coventry Road, which has been major route linking Coventry with Birmingham for mere one hundred years old.

In a short distance on the opposite carriageway was Church Road Infants (picture 2) when it opened in 1939 with 212 children, when Yardley was a large manor with its town hall in Sparkhill. The school is now known as Yardley Primary School and has 840 pupils.

Ahead now is the Yew Tree Island, where we leave Church Road to head northeast towards Kitts Green and stop off to find out about the Yew Tree. The Yew Tree takes its name from a yew tree living in a garden of a house called the Yew Tree House, a country mansion style close to the current roundabout and Church Road. The yew was removed some time ago.

As we know, yew wood was used for making longbows in the Middle ages, though few yew trees were straight enough for the task. Most yew trees tended to branch out from their base like a shrub, and then go on to be large trees with a great girth and live on, often in churchyards, to the ripe old age of over 2,000 years.

The Yew Tree junction today is a challenge for drivers and planners as the dual-carriageway approach from the Swan takes the traffic to the relatively small roundabout with not only five roads joining but also their own sets of pedestrian crossings to stop the traffic from all directions. Despite numbers of schemes to make the traffic move more freely, nothing has yet been implemented. The shops along Church Road area here were very active before the improvements to the Swan Centre has taken away much of their business.

The Yew Tree Pub was built around 1919, when Mitchells and Butlers purchased the land from the Flavell family who owned Yardley House and its extensive grounds by Hob Moor Road. Around 2000, the pub was demolished to make way for the purpose-built shopping centre with pub, The Clumsy Swan (picture 3).

We now move up Stoney Lane looking out for the brown signing us to the left to Blakesley Hall (picture 4) a few hundred yards down Blakesley Road. My picture features the Hall in the distance behind a very mature oak that with other similar trees would have lined that old road. Owned by Birmingham Museums Trust, The Hall is a beautiful Elizabethan timber-framed Tudor house and one of Birmingham's oldest and most historically significant buildings, dating from 1590 when it was built by one of Birmingham's leading merchants Richard Smalbroke.

Moving a few steps further up Stoney Lane across the road we get a view of St Edburgha's Church Yardley (Picture 5). It sits within the conservation area of Old Yardley, once in Worcestershire becoming part of Birmingham in 1911. The church dates from 13th century whilst the tower and the crocketed hexagonal spire are from 15th century. (You can read more on the very substantial account and description about St Edburgha's Church on their website). Leaving behind the older parts of this route, we are greeted by the modern West Midlands Police Station (picture 6). As we cross the modern Bordesley Green Road East (B4128) our road changes to Station Road.

Further up Station Road the new Stechford Leisure Centre greets us, (picture 7) opened in January 2018, it replaced the former Stechford Swimming baths, also known as the Stechford Cascades. In 2014 Birmingham City Council planned to build six new pools and leisure centres to replace the run-down older facilities such as those at the Stechford Cascades. Seeing it was vital the City continued to 'support first-class grassroots sporting facilities for Birmingham' after it was named Host City for the Commonwealth Games in 2022.

After crossing over the railway lines by the Stechford Railway Station we make our way down towards the new roundabout by the retail park which has improved traffic flows.

Just off to the left Albert Road (picture 8) comes into view with its period terrace houses. Just before Stechford Bridge we get the Shell Filling Station (picture 9) on the left.

The River Cole passes under Station Road at Stechford Bridge, on its way to meet the River Trent. Completing our journey at the junction of Cotterills Lane, Burney Lane and Stechford Road, the Outer Circle continues North on to Erdington.

Whilst waiting for my bus home, on looking back I noticed a family (picture 10) making their way towards the shops on Stechford Road.

Whilst I have used the Outer Circle bus route clockwise many times and have driven over this route going counter-clockwise, I was pleased to get the opportunity to see it close up and on foot.

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