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Moseley's suburbanisation, 1850–1900

Moseley developed in four phases over the second half of the nineteenth century. From 1851 to 1871 suburbanisation gathered pace. In the next two decades it took off and intensified, and in the decade 1891–1901 it became a mature suburb. The pace of development fluctuated, slowed by the control of landowners and economic circumstances and stimulated by transport developments. Change also brought regrets, concerns and controversies and the slow erosion of the rural landscape.

1851–71: suburbanisation gathering pace

At first there was minimal change to the village: the increase in population between 1841 and 1861 averaged only twenty-five people per year. Between 1861 and 1871 Moseley's population increased more markedly – by approximately 940, from 1,500 to 2,440, an average of ninety-four new residents per year. Moseley was fortunate in that land was concentrated in the hands of a small number of families, which enabled a more consolidated approach to development, but also suggests the ongoing influence of the landed gentry rather than a radical new social structure shaping the area. These families were largely locally based, which gave them a personal interest in how the village developed. They released land slowly and in small blocks with covenants that stipulated the type and cost of houses; such covenants excluded the less well-off, thereby protecting the village from rampant development and helping preserve Moseley for the middle classes. The Blayne family sold their land off in small tracts from 1843 to 1886 and modest plots of land came up for sale in 1853 and 1858, the latter among the first from the Shorthouses' Greenhill estate.¹ In 1865 a field of freehold land in Church Road next to Highfield House, John Avins' home, was offered for sale following the death of the owner, Mr William Nutt.² It was described as 'well-adapted for erecting a villa residence'. The death of a landowner, particularly those with numerous inheritors, often prompted such sales. In 1868, two-acre plots of the Grange Farm estate and land between Cotton, Billesley and Greenhill Lanes were put up for auction.³ The potential for development was clearly there and being

1 LBA, MS/179416, Bham/Sc, Birmingham: a collection of auctioneers' bills, Vol. 1.

2 *Ibid.*

3 LBA, MS/183, Grange Farm building estate brochure.

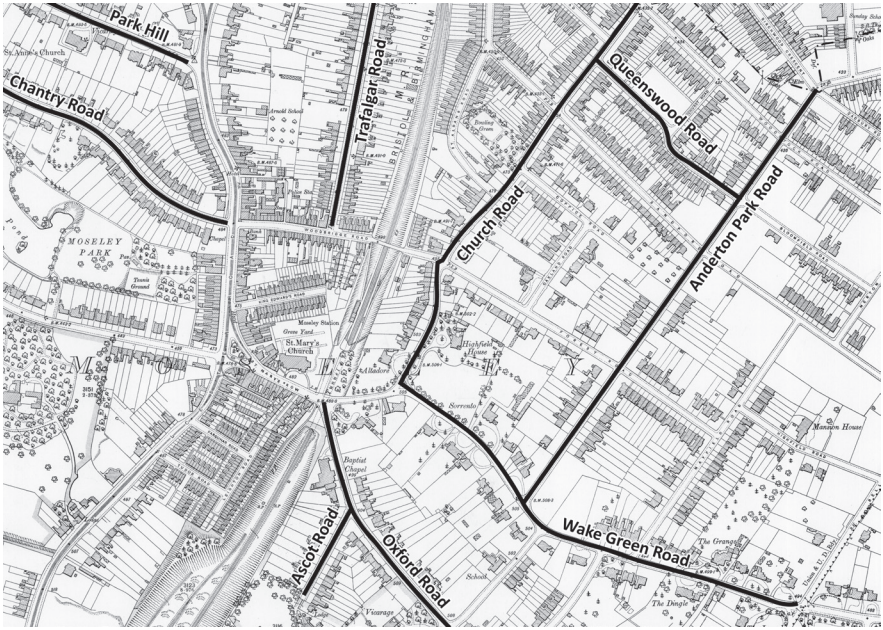


Figure 2.1. Key roads. Map constructed by Janet Berry (<https://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, 'Digimap', 'Historic', 'Historic Roam'. Accessed 2015). Redrawn by Sarah Elvins.

noticed, but development was controlled and small-scale, a decided advantage in determining the kind of suburb Moseley would become.

Road formation was modest between 1851 and 1871. H.J. Everson, a Moseley resident and local historian, listed thirty-six roads built in Moseley between 1850 and 1900.⁴ Three of these were formed in this period: Park Road (1850), Trafalgar Road (1852) and Park Hill (1868), all off the village centre (Figs 1.5 and 2.1). A total of 102 new houses was built between 1861 and 1871 in seven roads. Fifty of these were in Trafalgar Road, leaving fifty-two built in the other six roads, an average of just over eight new houses in these roads. Houses were often built before roads were formed or rapidly thereafter. Ascot Road and Oxford Road (to School Road) were new roads proposed in 1871 on part of a 'very attractive' freehold estate, 'eminently suitable for the erection of first-rate suburban villas'.⁵ Thirteen houses were built in Ascot Road in the same year as the plan and seven in Oxford Road. Coppice, Forest and Woodstock Roads, all formed in 1870, had twenty-two houses by 1871.

A crucial event that spurred Moseley's development was the building of the station in the heart of the village behind St Mary's church, which opened on

4 LBA, H.J. Everson.

5 LBA, Bham/Sc 1368.



Figure 2.2. Moseley station, late nineteenth century. PCRC.

1 November 1867, some twenty-seven years after the Moseley section of the railway was completed. Thomas Lewis, writing in *Birmingham Faces and Places* in 1890, thought there was ‘no prettier station or one more picturesquely situated than that which was opened at Moseley’.⁶ Figure 2.2 shows a station with a terrace of neat buildings, litter-free platforms, gas lighting, the wooden bridge and, celebrating the locomotive, an oncoming train. A report in the *Birmingham Daily Post* on 31 October 1867 stressed the convenient siting of the station, the short eleven-minute journey to Birmingham and the frequent and advantageous services offered:

The station is formed immediately on the town side of the Moseley tunnel, and at the back of the old church. Access is gained to the station both from the upper or old part of Moseley, and also from the newly built district in the vicinity of the wooden bridge which spans the line some 200 yards below. The station is built on the Moseley side of the railway. According to present arrangements, six trains leaving New Street will stop at Moseley, and seven leaving Moseley for town each weekday. A dinner train leaving New Street at the convenient hour of one p.m. arrives at Moseley at 1.11, and an equally convenient train picks up the after-dinner passengers at 2.48, and deposits them on New Street Station platform at 3.5. After business hours Moseley may be reached by trains leaving town at 5.20 and 6.30, or later still, at 7.00 p.m.

6 M. Baxter and P. Drake, *Moseley, Balsall Heath and Highgate, the archive photographs series* (Chalford, 1996), p. 74.