FORDHOOK AVENUE / BYRON ROAD
A SHORT HISTORY BY RUPERT DEBARR

In his book *Place Names of Middlesex,* J.E.E. Gover describes a reference to the area of Fordhook in 1462 when it was spelt 'Forthehoke' which, he says, probably means 'the spur or hook of land in front'. Another possible origin of the name is that it refers to the bend in Bollo Brook (which rises on Hanger Hill and flows, now largely underground, to the Thames) where it crossed the Uxbridge Road.

FORDHOOK HOUSE

Long before construction of Fordhook Avenue and Byron Road began, Fordhook House stood very roughly in the back gardens of nos. 6-12 Byron Road. The 'Poor Rates' Records show the house to have been occupied from 1707, the occupants providing some interesting historical – and particularly literary – connections. Among them was the writer Henry Fielding (1707-1754) who used Fordhook House as his country retreat. He left it in 1754 bound for Lisbon, where he died. Named after him, Fielding Terrace is the line of flats on the north side of Uxbridge Road between the shops and Wolverton Gardens. In 1816 Lady Byron (1792-1860) moved to the house after she separated from her husband. She founded Byron House School in 1836, which stood on what is now the site of the Thames Valley University building in St Mary's Road. Lady Byron's daughter, Ada (the world's first computer programmer), was married at Fordhook House on 8 July 1835. Possibly the last occupant of the house was a barrister who in 1891 employed a total of 8 servants. But in 1903 the house was demolished as a result of its having deteriorated over the years, and construction of Fordhook Avenue began in 1904, with development of Byron Road coming a couple of years later.

EXPANSION OF EALING

With the opening of Ealing Common Station on 1 July 1879 and the coming of District Railway service, Ealing became easier to reach and the population expanded rapidly in the later years of the 19th century – from 26,000 in 1881 to 47,500 in 1901. The grounds of Fordhook House, being opposite the station, have been cut in two by the railway at the western end. The electric tram service from Shepherd's Bush reached Acton in April 1901, and was extended down the Uxbridge Road to Ealing three months later. Between 1901 and 1910 the population almost doubled.

FORDHOOK AVENUE / BYRON ROAD

Fordhook House was demolished c.1903, and Fordhook Avenue and Byron Road – comprising a total of 121 houses – were built within its grounds. A few pear trees from its orchard do survive in the back gardens of houses in the 'inner ring'.

Some of the drain covers at the houses are original, and bear the name 'H&W Kendall Builders Ealing Common' – the Kendalls, along with a Mr Blount, were the developers of the estate. Mr Kendall Snr built No. 33 Fordhook Avenue for himself; not only was this the biggest house on the estate, it also had the longest garden and a garage. Mr Kendall's granddaughter, the late Miss Muriel Kendall, was born at No. 37 Byron Road. Although she moved away, she later returned to live in Fordhook Avenue. Several houses on the estate were retained by the Kendalls as investment properties; others were sold or rented. Their managing agents were Jones & Co. (predecessors to Winkworths) by Ealing Common Station.

In the 1904-5 edition of Kelly's Street Directories mention is made of the new road, Fordhook Avenue, and subsequent editions detail individual houses as they were constructed and the development grew. In 1905-6 Fordhook has entries in the Directories for most even numbers up to 34 and odd numbers up to 13. In the 1907 edition Fordhook Avenue houses are recorded up to 52 (even) and 35 (odd). This contains the first reference to addresses in Byron Road, but there are only two: nos 6 and 8.

In the 1908 edition the Fordhook Avenue even-numbered entries have increased to 52 and then there is a gap with apparently no houses up to 92. There are five houses at nos 92 to 100. (Nos 102 and upwards are either under construction or not yet started.) On the odd-numbered side there has been no progress beyond 35. Byron Road even numbers are complete, but odd numbers built only as far as no 19.

By 1909 Fordhook even numbers are complete except for nos 66-84, but odd numbers still only go up to 35. Byron Road is not complete on the odd-numbered side – the nos 29-35 are not yet recorded. By 1910 the only gaps left on the odd-side of Fordhook are 27 and above and on the even side nos 74, 76 and 78.

LOCAL SHOPS

UXBRIDGE ROAD – NORTH SIDE

Most of the shops on the north side of the Uxbridge Road, on The Bridge and Station Parade, were built around the same time as Fordhook and Byron. In 1907 they were (from west to east): Butcher; Ironmonger; Stationer; Dyers (now The Press Gang); Confectioners (now Ealing Strings), Paul's Bakers (see hoist at rear of property originally used for hauling flour up to the 1st floor. The next shop was the Grocer (now Grimshaws) – possibly with a costumier behind it); China & Glass; Dining Rooms; Fruiterer; Tobacconist; Hairdresser. The remaining shops on the north side (all 2 storeys) were not built until the 1920s, and the land was waste ground. The new (2004) block of flats on the site of Andrew's Garage used car lot was Pratt's filling station with just one pump – and in a 1920s postcard there is a Shell sign at the entrance.

UXBRIDGE ROAD – SOUTH SIDE

In the early 1900s there were two shops immediately adjoining the station to the east – a tobacconist, and a coal merchant's office. The stationmaster lived above the station. The shops were redeveloped when the station was rebuilt in the 1930s and replaced by the current buildings. (Nando's was previously a Midland Bank.)

In the 1907 Kelly's Directory the following shops are shown west of the station: Jones & Co. estate agents; Grocers; Vine merchants (Stowells); Baker; Post Office; Photographer (now dentist surgery); Nurseryman (on the site of what is now the small Council-maintained flower bed at the corner of Leopold Road). To the west of Woodgrange Avenue the same directory records another nurseryman, but by the 1920s the Ealing Common Hard Tennis Courts occupied the full length of the Uxbridge Road south side between Woodgrange Avenue and Granville Gardens, which became the site of The Granville (Harvester) public house, and Woodgrange House.

FORDHOOK AVENUE AND BYRON ROAD DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

There were just three incident reports of enemy action recorded in the official log, all in Fordhook Avenue:

18 September 1940	2 Fordhook Avenue	High explosive bomb
19 September 1940	Fordhook Avenue (no address)	High explosive bomb
8 December 1940	Fordhook Avenue (no address)	Unexploded bomb

Mrs Taylor at 60 Fordhook remembers the 250lb stick bomb that fell into the back gardens of 50 and 52 Fordhook Avenue. There was little damage to either property because it fell into soft soil. The bomb was part of a batch (these particular bombs always came in batches of 6!) and other bombs from the same batch fell in Woodgrange Avenue and on the north side of Uxbridge Road where Hartley Court now stands. Just outside our area, a bomb made a direct hit on the Hall of Haberdashers Girls School (now the Japanese School) in Creffield Road, hours after an Old Girls' event finished there. Debris from the blast was found as far away as the south side of Uxbridge Road.

Mrs Taylor also remembers neighbours organising wartime monthly 'bring a course' parties and, on VE Day, dancing on the post box while a huge party was going on.

TRIVIA

- The post box on the corner outside 52 Fordhook Avenue is reputed to have been placed there at the request of the occupiers, the Browns, who knew someone in the GPO!
- Jones & Co, House & Estate Agent (predecessors of Winkworths), appear in a photograph c. 1911.
- Post war, many houses were broken up into flats and bedsits. In 1940 the monthly rent for 40 Fordhook Avenue was £6.7s.6d
- Trolleybus route 607 (now the route number for the limited stop bus service) ran from Shepherd's Bush to Uxbridge. It operated for the last time on 8 November 1960.
- In December 1976 a gas explosion at 13 Byron Road (then divided into bedsits) totally destroyed the house, but so well built were the properties that photographs taken at the time show virtually no damage to houses on either side.

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