

Arden Road

Arden road has existed under a variety of names, including the prosaic 'Back Lane' and the poetic 'Quality Lane', which it relinquished early in the 20th century in favour of the present name.



The oldest surviving building is clearly No. 91 thought to date from the middle of the seventeenth century, with the adjacent one somewhat later. The three white cottages in the road date from about the time Victoria ascended the throne.

Coincidentally, the three-storey houses which dominate the other side of the road date from around the time of her death and mark the high point of the development of the road.

Inter-war and post-war development brought Arden Road to something approaching its present form.

The oak tree in the middle of the road causes amusement for some visitors and a perplexing moment for others. Its origin in the Forest of Arden is surely open to doubt, but the fact that it has stood for two centuries is not disputed. It originally stood at the roadside, but by a quirk of fate was allowed to remain when the road was widened. At any rate, it is much loved by residents of the road, since there is never a problem recruiting volunteers to keep the surrounding plants in check.



'Carols round the tree' sounds like a time-honoured tradition but tradition rarely survives changing times intact. The oak tree now merely listens as we hold our Christmas carol sing-along on the drive of a centrally located house, though the new tradition is mulled wine and mince pies by lantern light.

The carols mark the close of a cycle of events organised by an elected committee of the Arden Residents' Association, which encompasses 150 households. A full year might see plant sales (when we need to raise funds) or plant swaps (when we don't). There might be a table-top sale, our own WI-style market of home produce, a craft stall or a mix of all these.

A fixture within the year is a barbecue, held in a resident's lawned garden, complete with a pizza oven. Around sixty residents support this event.

One event last year was intended to surpass all others in terms of ambition and attendance - the Jubilee Street Party. It was billed to coincide with the national Big Lunch, but torrential rain the day before and on the actual day of the lunch put paid to any idea of a street party.

Riding to the rescue came the manager of the Birmingham City Mission, housed in a former church building at the eastern end of Arden Road. The Mission hosts prayer meetings, house visits and lunches for elderly residents in Acocks Green. The hall was hastily decorated the evening before, together with the street outside the hall and residents were informed about the new arrangements.



On the day over 120 people braved the downpour and laid out their party food for all to share, providing a feast from around the world and to spare. The decorations were left in place and a lavish tea provided by our committee for the regular visitors to the Mission, as a way of thanking them for rescuing our Street Party, in which so much time, effort and money had been invested.

The Street Party is to become a biennial event, with a Tea Party in the Mission garden in the intervening years, subject to its being available.

As a committee we've battled with the authorities over planning (we stopped Victorian houses being demolished), traffic calming (we've got a new safer road layout), tree management and other amenity matters.

But in the end what matters is the degree of social cohesion evident in our roads, the welcome extended to new residents and the care that residents show their environment. Perhaps we should go back to calling Arden Road 'Quality Lane'!