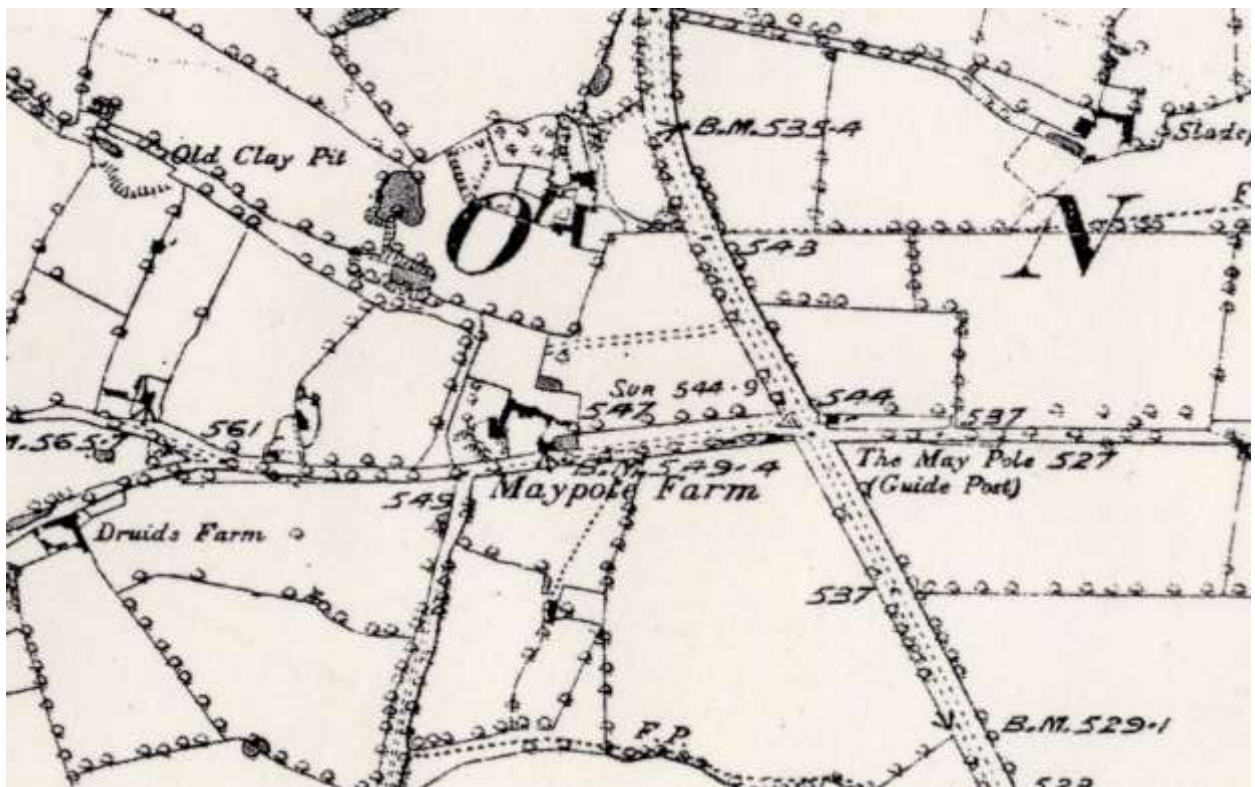




**KING'S HEATH LOCAL HISTORY
SOCIETY**

The Maypole, King's Heath

By Stan Budd



Occasional Paper No 2
December 1987

30p

THE MAYPOLE

Stan A. Budd

I wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Andrew Blizzard, Chairman King's Heath Local History Society.

Design Stan Budd and Andrew Blizzard.

Published by King's Heath Local History Society
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Cover - Ordnance Survey Map 1st Edition 1884 (2 1/2" = 1 mile).

Occasional Paper 1 The Grange S. A. Budd. April 1987.

The Maypole

The Hollywood Maypole was one of two erected in the parish of King's Norton, in the second half of the seventeenth century. We can only speculate on the number of young people who have, over some three hundred years, danced round these poles to celebrate the arrival of Spring.

There is evidence of Maypoles existing in the sixteenth century and possibly much earlier. These high poles, painted with spiral stripes of different colours and often decorated with flowers, were set up on village greens or other open spaces. In 1644, Maypoles were forbidden throughout the land; the Puritans saw them as symbols of paganism and immorality. However, Maypoles appeared again after Charles II's return to the throne in 1660. (1)

The Hollywood Maypole, situate at the crossroads of Alcester Road, Alcester Road South, Druids Lane and Maypole lane, was erected amidst some controversy. Thomas Hall B.D. (brother of the Vicar of Bromsgrove), master of the original King's Norton Grammar School (2) from 1610-1665, and curate of King's Norton Church 1640-1662, was apparently a very strict puritan, writing a short treatise in 1660 against Maypoles and the pagan celebrations associated with them. Doubtless the King's Norton Maypoles incensed him to such writings!

The number of actual poles which stood on this site can only be guessed at. One erected in the late eighteenth century, so tradition has it, was used as a guide post to aid travellers through the waste lands of Kingswood and Highters Heath. (3) At least two Maypoles were blown down in heavy storms and gale force winds. The first fell during the Spring of 1895, but a new pole was soon erected, by the local council. (4) This one remained until a fierce blizzard in the Autumn of 1916 demolished it.

By this date Birmingham Corporation had jurisdiction over the area (5), but it being wartime they left the pole where it lay until the Armistice in 1918. Shortly afterwards the broken pole was cleared away and replaced by a metal boundary post.

Early in the 1920s it was suggested that a new Maypole should be erected as a war memorial, but this was later rescinded on the grounds that such a proposal was totally unsuitable.

Towards the end of 1927 plans were drawn up for a bus shelter to occupy the Maypole site and the old sign was removed. The number 17 cross city bus service, from the Maypole to Erdington, commenced in March 1928.

For nearly seventy years the district was without a Maypole. However, in 1983, a local school - Bayerstock - entered the Birmingham Education Department's annual Environmental Studies Exhibition. West Midlands County Council (now defunct) were very interested in the school's display and invited the children to undertake a survey on the needs of local people.

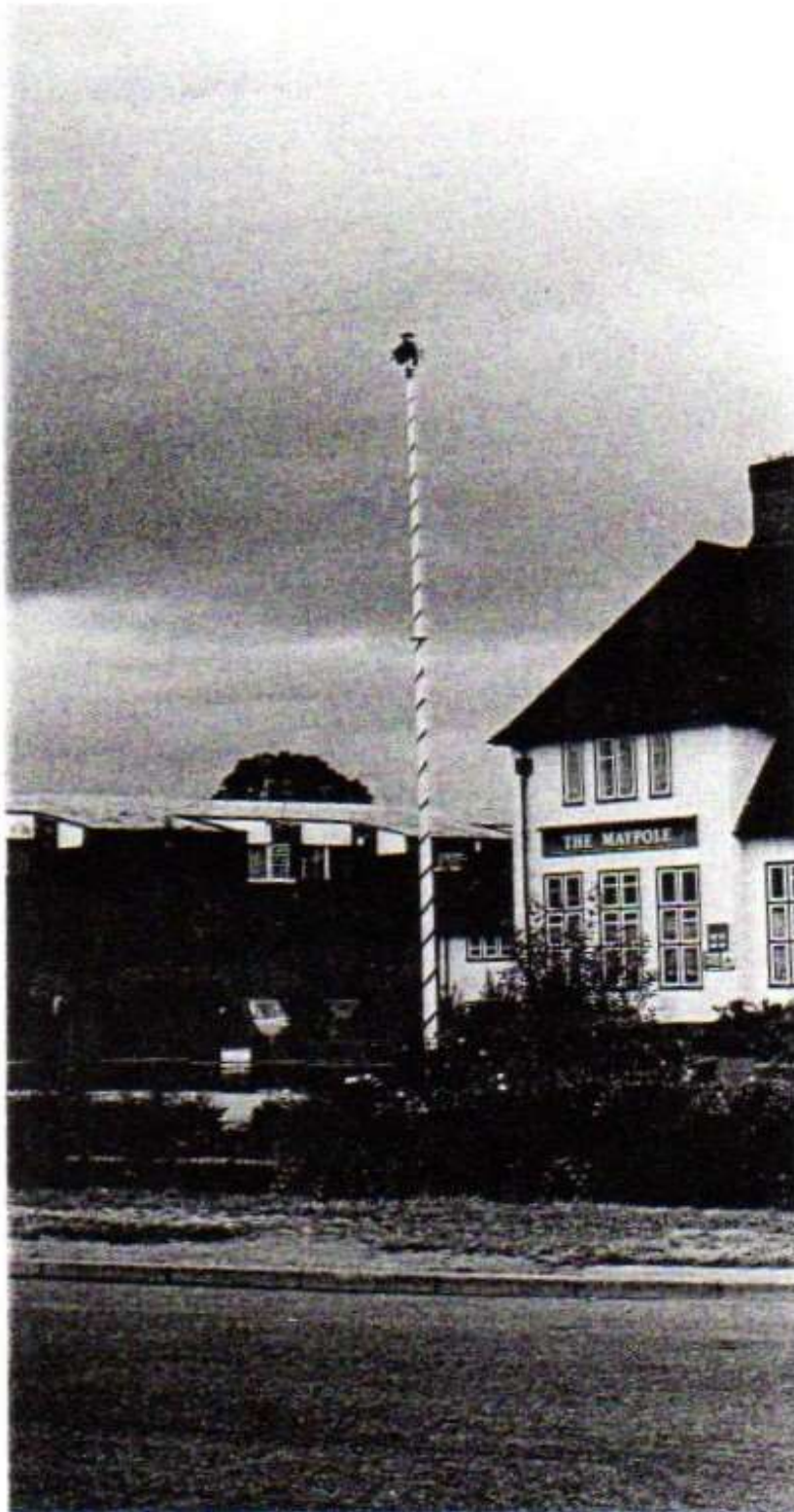
The results of the survey showed that many people would like to see a new Maypole put up. In due course a suitable pole was obtained and delivered to the school, where a top-piece was added and the pole painted. In 1984 the school was involved in the ceremony of raising and initiating the new Maypole and participating in the May Day dances round it for the first time.

This area of King's Norton, as elsewhere, has witnessed many changes - once rural but now heavily urbanised; it is hoped, nevertheless, that the history and traditions associated with the Maypoles on this site will be continued for many years to come.

1. Christina Hole British Folk Customs. Hutchinson 1976.
2. The Old Grammar School building remains, between King's Norton Church and Pershore Road.
3. Stephen J. Price Birmingham Old and New. EP Publishing 1976 (p.95).
4. The Rural District Council of King's Norton.
5. The 'Maypole' has marked the southern boundary of Birmingham since 1911.



The Maypole c. 1900 (postcard)



The Maypole and The Maypole Public House 1984.