

INTRODUCTION

Conservation areas are designated by the Council as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which should be preserved or enhanced. The Copse Hill conservation area was designated by Merton Council, following a Borough-wide review, in November 1990.

The unique character and appearance of the Copse Hill area derives from its special historic interest, the number buildings of architectural importance and interest, two of which are Listed, the areas archaeological importance, its topography deriving from its location covering one of the highest parts of the Borough, the very low built area footprint and the way the built form fits into a wide area of predominantly open space. The area also benefits from a significant and unusual ecology, particularly within the grounds of the Atkinson Morley Hospital, and extensive open spaces which support a diversity of recreational, leisure and sporting activities.

These features taken together reinforce the unique semi-rural character and appearance of the area as a whole.

This character assessment covers the whole of the conservation area and provides an analysis of the area's history and development, and identifies the main architectural features, and important qualities that contribute to the areas' special character. The appraisal is not intended to be comprehensive and the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

Merton Council hopes that residents will find this leaflet of interest and take into account the recommendations made in it when considering alterations and improvements to their properties. A separate 'Design Guide' has been prepared which provides advice on improvements that can be carried out by residents to preserve and enhance their area, copies of this leaflet can be obtained from the London Borough of Merton.

ORIGINS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The present Copse Hill conservation area covers an area of approximately 20 Hectares (50 Acres) which, apart from a small area embracing Thurstan Road and adjacent houses on the north side of Copse Hill, occupies the area of land located to the south of Copse Hill, extending down to Cambridge Road and currently occupied by the Atkinson Morley hospital grounds, Raynes Park High School playing fields and the Cottenham Park allotment gardens, all formerly part of the 'Cottenham Park Estate'.

The name Copse Hill derives from the extensive woodland which covered the area from ancient times. The area has significant historical associations which according to local legend stretches back to the time of the Doomsday Book in which the area around what is now Cottenham Park Road was allegedly referred to as the "Field of the Five Ais" deriving from the breaks in the North and South Downs which permitted free flow of air. The woodland has gradually disappeared over the years to make way initially for agriculture and eventually housing development. However, the Atkinson Morley fields have survived as open land since the time of the Black Death. The area is referred to in a document of 1481 as part of "the wild land", described as "from ancient times, arable but for many years overgrown ..."

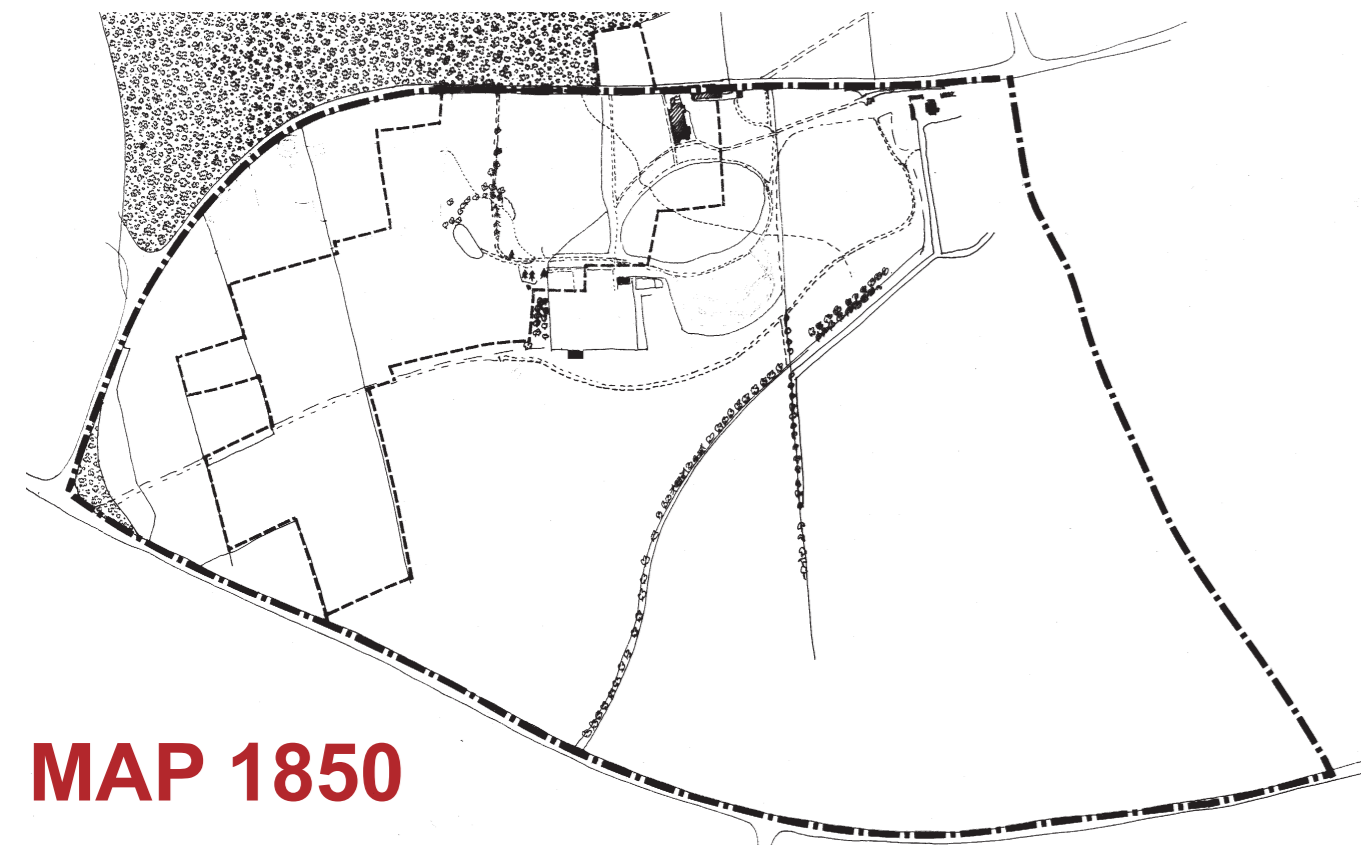


MAP 1741-5

A review of historic maps shows that over a period of about 250 years, the surrounding area has been completely transformed in character from rural to semi-rural to suburban. However, the area to the south-west of the main hospital buildings remains to this day mostly undeveloped surviving as a mix of open spaces, woods and footpaths with many historic field boundaries preserved.

The earliest record of the area is Rocque's early plan of 1741-45, this shows 'Ridge Way Lane' roughly following the current alignment of The Ridgway and Copse Hill, now a busy thoroughfare linking Wimbledon Village to the Kingston-by-Pass. Both Woodhayes Road and Coombe Lane, following the alignment of an ancient route known as "the Lane from Merton to Kingston" or the "Highway to Coombe Bridge", are shown laid out at this time. This map shows the area to be mostly undeveloped and comprising large areas of woodland some fields and what appears to have been an orchard.

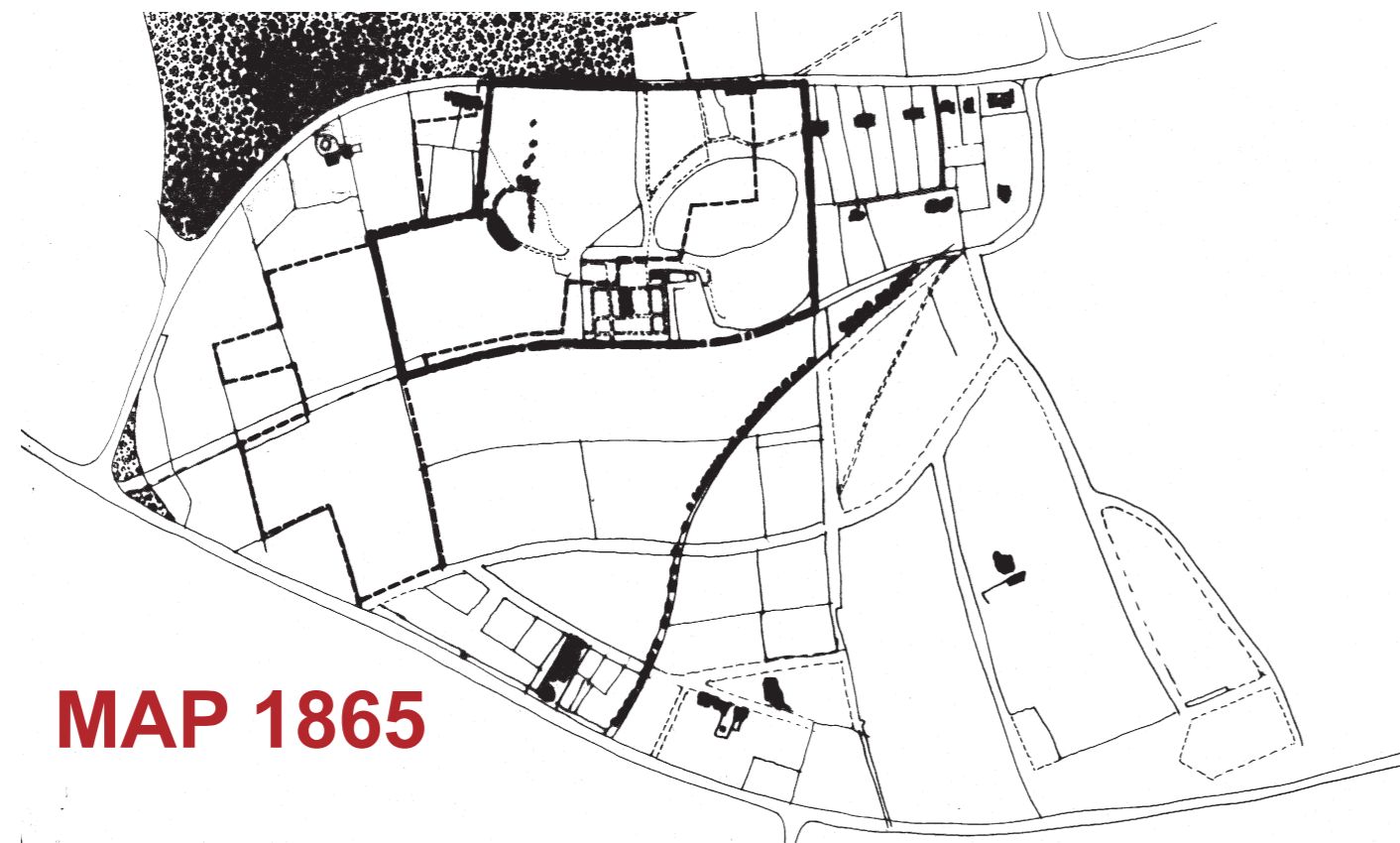
During the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, much of this land formed part of the extensive landscaped grounds of a large house called 'Prospect Place', of which only the former coach house/stable block now survives. The 1850 Wimbledon Tithe Map shows this house, located to the east of the present Atkinson Morley Hospital Building. This map also shows evidence of surviving landscaping



MAP 1850

COPSE HILL

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



MAP 1865

the design of which has been attributed to Humphrey Repton.

The more recent Ordnance Survey map of 1886, also shows surviving features of this landscaping, although much of the 'Estate' at this time is shown to have been developed. This map shows most of the roads in the area laid.

The Map of 1933 shows the early stages of the development of the Atkinson Morley hospital complex, with the main hospital building completed. This map also shows the development of Thurstan Road and Wimbledon Cottage Hospital to which Thurstan Road once led.

From the earliest maps, the main tangible historic elements which appear to have influenced the present topography of the area are some surviving areas of woodland, remnants of historic field boundaries, surviving trees from an early designed landscape, the alignment of Copse Hill and the roadway from Cottenham Park Road to the back of the Atkinson Morley Hospital believed to have once part of the original driveway to Prospect Place.

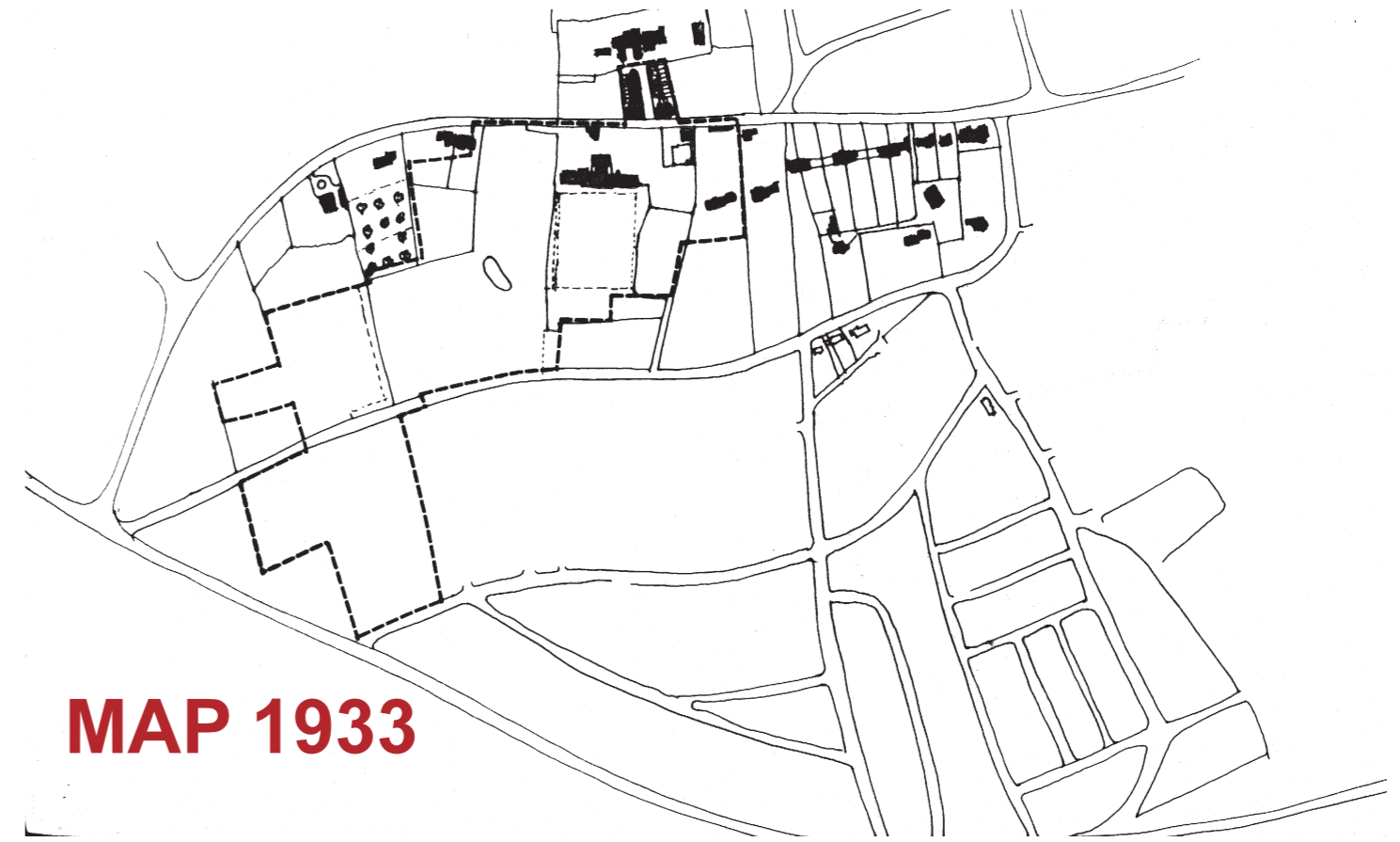
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Cottenham Estate

The Atkinson Morley Grounds embracing the former Oberon Playing Fields, now Raynes Park High School playing fields, and the allotments are all part of what was the "Cottenham Estate".

The first real built development within the area occurred in 1757-9 when Peter Taylor, a London Goldsmith, built Prospect Place. In 1767 Prospect Place and an Estate of 6 acres was sold to Moses Isaac Levy who extended the house and laid out the original gardens. In 1792 the Estate was acquired by James Meyrick, a parliamentary agent. He purchased additional lands and was responsible for the main expansion of the Estate. At its most extensive the Estate covered up to 250 Acres extending as far south as the railway line, which was diverted to avoid it. The grounds included decorative gardens with a five acre lawn and fine trees laid to a design attributed to Humphrey Repton.

From 1831 onwards the Estate had a succession of distinguished owners, including Henry Lambton, later Earl



MAP 1933



of Durham, Charles Pepys the Earl of Cottenham, after whom a number of local roads have been named, and the Duke of Wellington son of the 'Iron Duke'.

After lying empty for several years Prospect Place and the Estate was eventually acquired by William Sim in 1863 who parcelled up the land and sold it off for development; the house was eventually pulled down to make way for the Atkinson Morley Hospital. All that survives is the former stable building located close to the boundary with Copse Hill. The 1852 map of the Cottenham Estate shows how it was parcelled for sale with Prospect Place still in place.

After the demolition of Prospect Place, the Estate came on to the market and 28 of the 40 acres on the south side of Copse Hill were acquired in 1863 by St. George's Hospital, with funds received from Mr. Atkinson Morley's will, to build a convalescent home, out of London, for poor people. The remaining 12 acres, to the east of the Atkinson Morley site were sold off separately and two houses were built, Copse Hill House and "Cottenham", of which only "Cottenham" survives.

Little evidence survives relating to the history of Copse Hill house, although between 1892 and 1912 it appears to have been the residence of Sir Charles Tyrrell Giles JP a local magistrate who was also Chairman of the Wimbledon and Putney Common Conservators from 1892 until his death in 1940. Copse Hill House was eventually demolished to make way for the new housing in Cottenham Drive in the early 1960s.

"Cottenham" was built just a few years after the demolition of 'Prospect Place', around 1867-68, immediately adjacent the hospital. A handsome villa the house which took its name from Charles Christopher Pepys, first Earl of Cottenham, was probably built for its first occupant, George Walker a wealthy East India Merchant. Listed Grade II the house has been much extended and altered over the years and is now a significant building within the conservation area.

Although the architect for the house is not known for certain, it was probably designed by John Crawley who worked on the adjacent Atkinson Morley hospital. George Walker occupied the house with his family until 1894-95. In 1895 the house was acquired by Rev. Sir Peile Thompson Bart who appears to have proposed a number of alterations to both the house and coach house/stables. Whether he actually occupied the building remains uncertain as it appears to have lain vacant for a period until 1898 when he sold it to Miss Minnie Adela Schuster the heiress of Leo. Schuster a Director of the Union Bank of London and Chairman of London and Brighton Railway.

Miss Schuster was responsible for the large extension to the west end of the house which was added in 1899 and built by Arthur Dashwood and Sons Limited, who were also involved in some of the earlier proposals on behalf of Rev. Sir Peile Thompson Bart.

The surviving stable/coach house to "Prospect Place" was built between 1757 and 1786 for the then owner, either for Peter Taylor or Moses Isaac Levy. Extended to the west by Rev. Sir Peile Thompson Bart to provide accommodation for his gardener the western end was further remodelled after part of the site was taken up for widening of Copse Hill in 1936. The building was used by the hospital initially for doctors and students accommodation and more recently workshops. This building is included on the Statutory List as Grade II.

The histories of both the Atkinson Morley Hospital and of the Cottenham Park Allotments, first leased to the Corporation (now the Council) in 1907 are also of interest and their endowment stems from the Wills of Atkinson Morley with respect to the hospital and Constance Philippina Georgina Neville with respect to the allotments.

The original hospital building, built in 1863 using monies bequeathed by Mr. Atkinson Morley, a former medical student who made a fortune in the hotel business, was opened in 1869 and remained a convalescent home until 1939. During the 2nd World War it was transformed into a hospital and developed as a centre specialising in brain surgery.

The land for the Oberon Playing Fields had been used for sport by Wimbledon College until the 1920s when they acquired the land they now use in Coombe Lane. The playing fields were then purchased for a private sports club for the employees of Brettle/Coates (a hosiery company) by the Chairman, Sir Harry Twyford who was at one time the Lord Mayor of London and lived in Possil House on Copse Hill. The clubhouse (built in 1931) was used during World War II as a military isolation hospital and, after the war, the ground was donated to the Surrey County Council for educational purposes. Subsequently Wimbledon became part of Greater London and no longer in Surrey. The name Oberon was derived from the brand name of the stockings which Brettle's marketed and had contributed to the success of the company.

Thurstan Road/Copse Hill (North Side)



Laid out on land which was formerly part of the Drax Estate, Thurstan Road was named after Edward Thurstan Holland who was the first Honorary Secretary and Treasurer to Wimbledon Cottage Hospital which once occupied the site at the end of this road which was also originally part of the Drax Estate. The houses were built during the early 1870s by a James Mayhew for Sir Henry W Peek, MP for Mid-Surrey between 1868 and 1884. The son of James Peek, the founder of Peek Freans the biscuit firm, Sir Henry W Peek was a developer who built farms, schools, churches and estate cottages. At Rousdon in Devon he created a whole community in a similar vein to Saltaire and Port Sunlight. In the Wimbledon Area he also built 'Cinque Cottages' in Crooked Billet and was influential in securing the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871 preventing enclosure of the Common. He lived at Wimbledon House in Parkside which once occupied a site straddling Marryat Road close to its junction with the High Street.