

# WOOL ROAD CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

## LAND USE ANALYSIS

### Historic Land Use Patterns

Initially agricultural fields, the only significant feature to have influenced the pattern of development is the trail of an old footpath linking Woodhayes Rd with Copse Hill along which Ernie Rd now runs. The area was divided up into building plots during the 1920s to form what was then called the 'Barnes Field Estate' and building plot boundaries have remained for the most part unaltered since completion of the Estate in 1939. The roads were all named after the estates belonging to the Drax family in Dorset and the ships associated with Admiral Sir Richard Plunkett-Ernie-Earle-Drax, who sold the land. The street layout has also remained unaltered since completion.

Evidence of prior land use has been largely lost to development, although the remnants of field boundaries do define the edge of development and northern conservation area boundary. The present alignment of Dunstall Road follows the line of an old stream/ drainage channel. There is no evidence to suggest that earlier land-use had any influence on the type or 'style' of present dwellings.



Extract from the 1933 Ordnance Survey Map showing the 'Estate' nearing completion

### Current Land Use Patterns

The land is now almost entirely residential apart from the area of recreational open space currently occupied by the Westside Lawn Tennis Club. The land is likely to remain in residential use dominated by substantial single family houses.

## LANDSCAPE

### Topographical Features

The highest point of the site occurs where Ernie Rd meets Copse Hill. From here Wool Rd. descends a steep gradient as it runs to meet the lower end of Dunstall Rd. and beyond towards Lady Jane's Wood. Though these steep gradients have no particular bearing on the distribution of the houses themselves the vistas provided by these changes in level are a distinctive feature of the area.

### Landscape/Built Environment Relationship

The steeply sloping sites of the individual plots, particularly on the south side of McKay Road, have influenced the design of houses to a degree. For example the changes in levels across the site have enabled semi-basement garages to be incorporated into the design of some buildings and as a result some buildings are effectively three storeys high at the front and two storeys at the rear.

### Panoramic Views

The best vistas in the area are probably those from the houses along Mc Kay Rd., from where views to the north are virtually unimpaired.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONSERVATION AREA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The whole of the Wool Road conservation area is located within the Wimbledon Common Archaeological Priority Zone. Immediately to the south is part of the Wimbledon Village Archaeological Priority Zone which extends along the south side of the Ridgway and Copse Hill. There are no known archaeological features or recorded finds within the conservation area. However, Caesar's Camp, formerly known as The Rounds or Bemsbury, a Scheduled Ancient Monument is located approximately 500 metres to the north-west of the conservation area. This is believed to date back to the sixth century BC (bronze-iron age) and may have served as a defence for the old State of London against the peoples of Wessex in the south west. There is however no known connection with the Roman Empire.

Caesar's Well, like the camp, is probably not of Roman origin but is known to have been used since very early times. During the eighteenth century it was known as Robin Hood's Well. Its waters were thought to have medicinal properties.

## INTRODUCTION

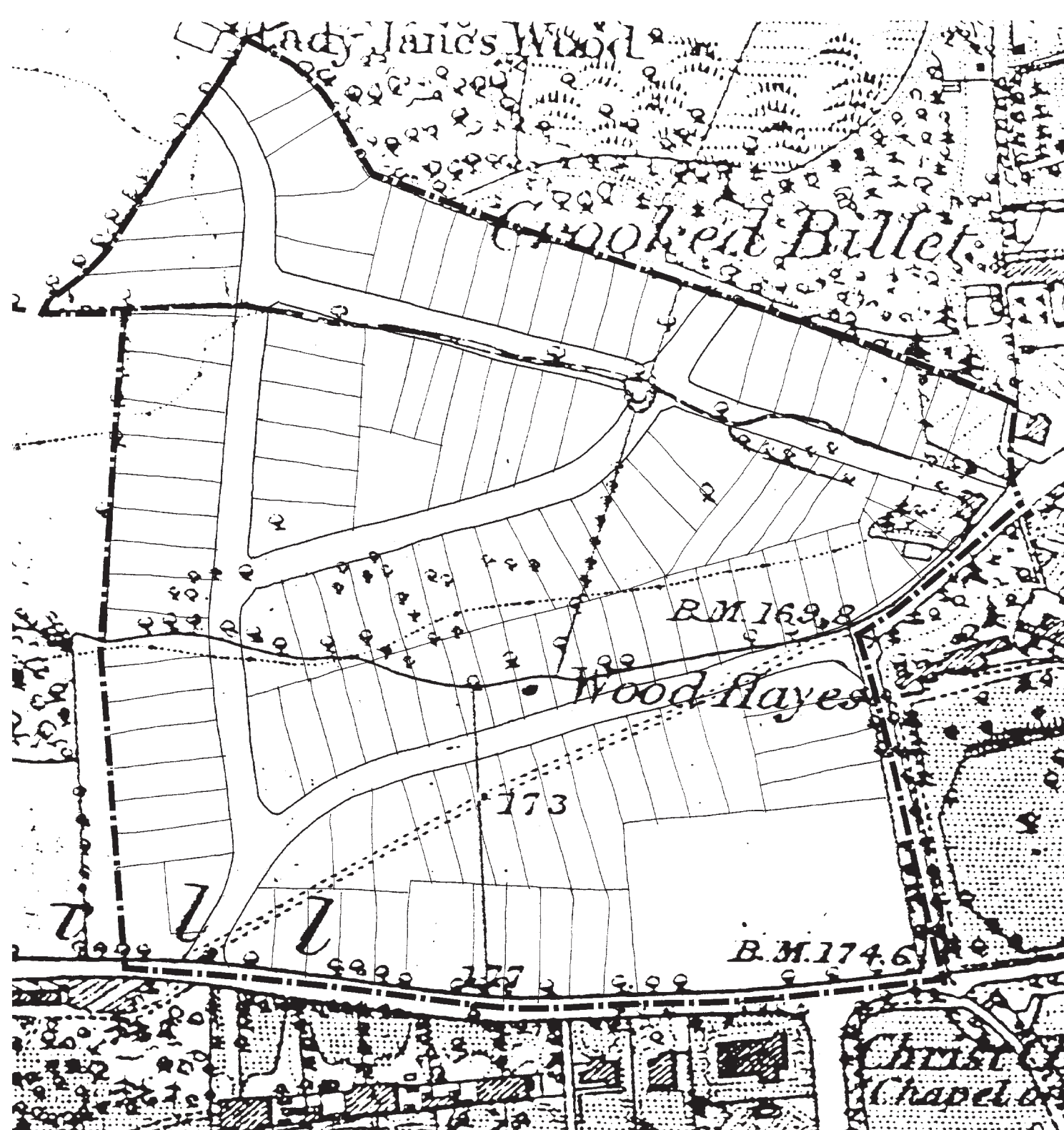
Conservation areas are designated by the Council as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which should be preserved or enhanced. The Wool Road conservation area was designated by Merton Council, following a Borough-wide review, in November 1990. The special character of this area derives from the early 20th Century architecture and diverse styling of the large 'ornate' detached houses, the uniform street design including grass verges, and natural landscaping of the surrounding area and views towards Wimbledon Common, particularly from Wool and McKay Roads.

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 AND HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOOL ROAD CONSERVATION AREA

The present Wool Road conservation area which covers an area of approximately 12.7 Hectares (31.3 Acres) occupies part of the area of land located to the north of Copse Hill, between Beverley Brook to the west and Wimbledon Common to the east, that was originally known as the Old Deer Park. This land, which was renamed The Warren, remained almost entirely undeveloped until the mid 1920s.



Extract of the 1865 Ordnance Survey Map with building plot boundaries and 'Estate' Roads overlaid

The earliest record of the area is Rocque's early plan of 1741-45 which shows the area to be undeveloped and divided up into a group of open fields which formed part of the extensive Warren Farm. Its use was therefore purely agricultural and before that it was covered in woodland. The 1850 Wimbledon Tithe Map shows a footpath linking the old Woodhayes Road with the present Copse Hill, along the present alignment of Ernie Road. Comparing 1865 Ordnance Survey Map (First Edition) with the more recent Ordnance Survey map of 1986, shows how, apart from the golf course to the west and the woodland within Cannizaro Park (Lady Jane's Wood) directly to the north of the conservation area, the area has been completely transformed in character from rural and semi-rural to suburban.

Records indicate that from 1705 until the 1870s, the land changed ownership a number of times. It was during the 1870s, when the six lots of land, forming part of the Drax Estate, which the current Wool Rd conservation area occupies were leased from the then owner John Samuel Sawbridge-Earle-Drax MP by a developer, Mr Dixon, that there were first plans to comprehensively develop the area. However, it was not until the inter-war period that the area, which according to Building Records was then known as the 'The Barnes Wood Estate', was eventually divided up into building plots and sold off for the construction of houses. All the houses within the conservation area were, therefore, built between 1925 and 1939. These building plot boundaries survive largely unchanged since the completion of the 'Estate' in 1939. The street layout has also remained unaltered since completion, even an area safeguarded for a future road opposite McKay Road can still be discerned in the area presently occupied by the garden to No 18 Dunstall Road.

## ORIGINS AND HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

The Wool Road conservation area is surrounded on the north, east and south sides by the adjacent Wimbledon West conservation area. Immediately to the North is Lady Jane's Wood now within Cannizaro Park, included on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens listed as Grade II. To the south is Copse Hill, formerly a narrow country lane and now a busy thoroughfare linking Wimbledon Village to the Kingston-by-Pass, and to the east by Woodhayes Road. To the west of the conservation area is the Wimbledon Wood, formerly known as Brooms Down Wood, which became part of the Royal Wimbledon Golf Course in 1907 and which is designated as Metropolitan Open Land. From the earliest maps, there do not appear to be any tangible historic elements which have influenced the present topography of the areas surroundings apart from Cannizaro Park, and the historic roads, Woodhayes Road, Copse Hill and Ernie Road which follows the trail of an old footpath that once linked them. The part of Cannizaro Park that meets the Wool Road Conservation Area, just behind Dunstall Road known as Lady Jane's Wood was planted by Henry Dundas who moved into Warren House, since renamed Cannizaro house in 1785.

Mr. Dundas or Viscount Melville as he later became planted the wood to celebrate his marriage to Lady Jane Hope in 1793 and named it after her.

The surviving parkland and woodland to the north and east of the conservation area remains to this day mostly undeveloped.

Although the conservation area itself does not benefit from and historically significant buildings there are several properties of historic importance along Woodhayes Road, Southside Common and Copse Hill. In the immediate vicinity is Gothic Lodge, previously known as Gothic House and Gothic Cottage, situated just opposite Dunstall Road. Built around 1783 it is notable as the first house in the London area to have electric lighting, kettle, iron and telephone.

Two of the oldest houses built along Copse Hill and still in existence today stand just west of Christchurch. At Number 11 is Colebyfield built in 1862 and designed by Francis Cranmer-Penrose distinguished Architect and Surveyor of the fabric of St. Paul's Cathedral, he lived there until his death in 1903. Its neighbour Oakfield, is another of the earliest dwellings to be built along Copse Hill. It was completed some five years earlier in 1857.



MAP OF THE WOOL ROAD CONSERVATION AREA