

# Heathfield history

Heathfield Estate at the top of Gravel Hill was originally owned by Raymond Riesco and was acquired by Croydon Council in 1964. In the 40 years that Mr Riesco owned the land he changed it from a run down farm to model estate set around a mansion and beautiful ornamental gardens.

Heathfield was once a simple sheep farm, known as Stones Farm, and was one of many tenanted farms belonging to the Manor of Addington. By 1837 the simple farm had been elevated into a Georgian estate in its own right and its name changed to Heathfield. A map of this time lists 3 drives complete with gate lodges. The lower drive crossed the fields from half way up Gravel Hill and across what is now the rose garden. Another driveway which still remains was on the corner of Ballards Way.

When the Viscount Goshen died in 1866 his great wealth was divided among his twelve children. The eldest son became the new Viscount and a partner in the family firm. The second son, Henry, leased the estate in the Parish of Addington now known as Heathfield; from his brother, Charles, who had also bought the neighbouring estate of Ballards.

Henry Goshen, who was born in 1837, was a Lieutenant in the 2nd Punjab Irregular Cavalry. He leased the estate which had once been known as Stones Farm, three years after he married in 1869. Around the time of Goshens tenancy a west wing was added, and the lower entrance drive was altered. There were also hard tennis courts built in the woods on the site of what is now the car park in Riesco Drive.

In May 1919 Howard Houlder bought the estate for £30,000. He was a member of the Houlder Brothers, a shipping firm, and was an Alderman and Mayor of Croydon for three consecutive years during the First World War. After the war Alderman Howard Houlder went bankrupt and the estate was sold to Mr. Costain who owned it for several years without occupying the house. During this time the building and grounds fell into disrepair. When Mr. Riesco bought the estate in 1927 he had to spend a considerable sum to restore the house and grounds, and he also demolished the west wing.

The estate included a farm which Costain leased to Peter Thrale who bred race-horses. There was a stable block behind the livery stables and horses were exercised in the field south of the house. One of the Heathfield horses was a Derby winner. Thrale remained the tenant farmer after Riesco purchased the Estate and his son succeeded him. The business was eventually moved to East Clandon.

The garage block opposite the house was once the livery stables and the stalls can still be seen at one end. The lofty ground floor centre section could hold at least four sizeable carriages. Stairs led from the ground floor to the accommodation above. The left-hand maisonnette was used by the stable-lad and the other half which has now been turned into a second flat was the hay loft.

Riesco had a win on a race horse called Arthurs Choice and with the winnings from a big race, oak panelled the hall and staircase in the house. Riesco was a very keen gardener and in the 1920s employed a firm of landscape contractors to lay-out the rock garden and terraces, and these were

planted with variety of alpines, small trees and shrubs. The walled garden provided fruit and vegetables for the kitchen and the small nursery on one side produced plants for the ornamental areas. Outside the walled garden there was a path running passed the orchard which was called Lavender Walk, no doubt because it was edged with lavender. At the bottom of the garden Riesco kept an excellent collection of roses.

There was a grass tennis court between the orchard and the rose garden but this was abandoned and returned to a field during the Second World War. Within the woodland Riesco developed a magnificent collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, during the late spring and early summer the grounds are a mass of colour. The immediate view from the main rooms in the house is over terraces planted with herbaceous borders but beyond this the gardens drop away and the view is over fields and groups of trees.

On the lawn near the entrance to the walled garden there is a large three legged iron cauldron, this was purchased by Riesco from Addington Palace.

When Riesco retired he took over the management of the farm and ran it as a model farm. The gates were whitewashed and the cows scrubbed; the yard was kept spotless.

In December 1945 Mr. Riesco entered into an agreement with the Corporation under which the latter would buy the estate for £83,000. Monks Hill was bought from the Estate immediately and was developed for housing and schools and the remainder was to be bought within 21 years when Riesco wished to sell. From 1958 onwards the gardens were opened to the public each year.

In March 1964 Mr. Riesco died and, as agreed, the Corporation bought the remainder of the estate. The gardens were opened to the public under the Open Spaces Act of 1906, and they are maintained by the parks department. The woodland on Bramley Bank is now managed as a nature reserve by the London Wildlife Trust. The farm is still used and is leased to a local farmer.

Due to lack of security at Heathfield the Riesco collection was moved to Fairfield Halls in Croydon. Those parts of the collection still on show are housed in a gallery in Croydon Clocktower.

During the hurricane force storm in October 1987 the woodland at Heathfield was devastated with many of the trees being lost or damaged, however a programme of clearance and replanting was undertaken and with care the woodland will gradually return to its former glory.