

Heritage Statement of Ashburton Park, Croydon

Introduction

Ashburton Park, located in Croydon, Greater London, is a site of significant historical, cultural, ecological, and horticultural value. This heritage statement outlines the park's development, historical importance, and its contribution to the local community's heritage, with particular attention to Stroud Green House, Woodside Convent, the park's role in food growing, its biodiversity, and its importance for children and young people.

Historical Development

Ashburton Park originated as part of the Stroud Green Estate, a notable feature of Croydon's rural landscape during the 17th century. By the 18th century, the estate had become a prominent landmark with the construction of Stroud Green House, a grand Georgian residence surrounded by ornamental gardens, a kitchen garden, agricultural lands, and a picturesque lake. The park's creation was part of a broader movement to provide urban populations with recreational areas, influenced by the Victorian and Edwardian ideals of public health and well-being.

The estate's head gardener, who lived in the building now known as Park Lodge, oversaw its productive and ornamental grounds. These included:

- Kitchen gardens, which supplied fresh produce to the estate.
- Ornamental gardens and a lake, designed to reflect the aesthetic values of Georgian landscaping. The lake, a key feature of the estate, was both a focal point of its grandeur and a practical element of its self-sufficiency. It exemplified the Georgian ideal of blending utility with beauty, setting the stage for the park's later evolution.

Historical Context

*****Roman Period (AD 43–410):*****

The area around Ashburton Park has historical significance dating back to the Roman period. Located approximately 2.8 km east of the Roman road connecting Londinium (now London) to Brighton and 3.3 km west of the road to Lewes, the area was likely part of a network of small settlements supplying produce to Londinium. Although there are no specific Roman finds within the park itself, Croydon's proximity to these Roman roads suggests that the broader area was integrated into the Roman economy and infrastructure.

*****Early Medieval Period (AD 410–1066):*****

Following the Roman withdrawal in the early 5th century, the region experienced socio-economic decline. By the 7th century, Croydon had become part of Surrey. Croydon remained active during the Saxon period, with notable activities such as councils and synods held there. The area's name, derived from the Anglo-Saxon "Crogedene" (meaning 'crocus valley'), points to its long-standing significance.

*****Later Medieval Period (AD 1066–1485):*****

By the Domesday Survey of 1086, Croydon Manor was held by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Croydon developed into a significant market town by the late 13th century, hosting weekly markets and annual fairs, contributing to its regional importance. Addiscombe, first mentioned in the 13th century, formed part of this rural and heavily wooded manor.

*****Post-Medieval Period (AD 1485–Present):*****

By the 18th century, the area around Ashburton Park was predominantly rural, interspersed with villages, hamlets, country houses, and farms. Rocque's map of Surrey in 1762 shows the site in an arable field at the corner of two roads, reflecting its agricultural use.

The Croydon Rate Book of 1778 records the Woodside lands, including the future park site, belonging to Joseph Humphrey. By 1788, Stroud Green House, later known as Byculla House, was built, occupying the current park area. Subsequent maps from the 19th century, such as Bainbridge's Croydon Parish map of 1800 and Robert's map of 1847, detail the development of Stroud Green House and its grounds, showing paths, mixed woodlands, and a lake.

In 1865, the property was renamed Byculla Park under Mr. Tanner, likely due to his connections with India. The house reverted to Stroud Green House in 1869 when purchased by Henry Dorling, a notable figure in horse racing and manager of the Epsom Derby. The estate's proximity to the Woodside Racecourse made it an attractive home for London's elite. Urbanisation began to encroach upon the area during this period, facilitated by the opening of Woodside Station, which made the estate more accessible to commuters.

While urbanisation progressed, the estate retained its focus on food production and horticulture. The head gardener at Park Lodge continued to oversee the cultivation of the kitchen garden, maintaining the estate's self-sufficiency. The lake and grounds remained symbols of the estate's prestige, linking its rural heritage to its evolving suburban identity.

Father Tooth and Woodside Convent

By 1878, Father Arthur Tooth (1839-1931) bought the estate had established Woodside Convent on the grounds. Rev. Tooth a Church of England clergyman, had resigned his position at Hatcham, New Cross after being imprisoned for a month in 1877 under the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874. He was imprisoned for contempt of court because he refused to recognize the jurisdiction of a secular court over what he regarded as spiritual matters. Following his prison sentence, he could not find another ecclesiastical position but, having private means, he was able to buy the Stroud Green estate with its existing house and gardens.

Tooth brought the Community of the Holy Paraclete, an order of Anglican nuns who had existed since 1871 at Hatcham, to the estate. He also brought St. Michael's Orphanage, founded at Hatcham in 1872, to the site. The sisters cared for orphans who were 'sons of professional men and others in distressed circumstances'. In 1880, he added St. Raphael's hospice, a refuge for women who were 'inebriates', separated into three social classes. They were treated by Tooth's powers of 'auto-suggestion' which is a form of positive thoughts and affirmation therapy to combat negative thoughts. Finally, in 1884, St. Gabriel's Orphanage for Girls was added to the complex.

The existing convent building, dated 1882 with a bellcote dated 1883, was designed by architects Somers Clarke Junior and J.T. Micklethwaite FSA. An illustration of St. Raphael's Hospital appeared in the Building News of March 7th, 1884, showing a planned quadrangle consisting of nine houses, a chapel, and a refectory. However, only one side of this quadrangle was built, and the existing chapel does not match the architects' drawing.

The 1880 Ordnance Survey map shows only Stroud Green House and grounds, but by the 1896 map, extensions had been added to the south-west of the main house, including the 1882-3 block and the chapel. There is little change by the 1913 Ordnance Survey map. An undated but pre-1920s photograph shows Stroud Green House connected by a single-storey corridor to the existing single

side of a quadrangle, shown with an unfinished gable end, and the chapel behind. The orphanage school continued as a public elementary school until 1915 and thereafter became a private school. The grounds hosted numerous charitable events during this period which was built upon for most of the 20th century.

The nuns, orphans, and residents sustained the estate through collaborative work, tending to the kitchen gardens, foraging, and rearing livestock. This emphasis on self-sufficiency created a resilient and supportive community, embodying the values of care and dignity.

Becoming Ashburton Park: Public Green Space and the 20th Century

In 1924, Father Tooth sold Woodside Convent to Croydon Borough Council for £20,000. The ground then opened to the public a year later in August 1925. The sisterhood and orphanage continued at Otford Court in Kemsing. Stroud Green House and most other structures, except for the 1882 block and chapel, were demolished in 1927. The 1882 building and chapel became Ashburton Public Library, a use which continued until 2006.

Key developments included:

- Demolition of Stroud Green House, replaced by open parkland for public use.
- Conversion of the ornamental lake into a boating lake, which became a popular attraction during the early decades of the park.
- Preservation of Park Lodge and the convent buildings, repurposed for public facilities.

During World War II, Ashburton Park played a vital role in the Dig for Victory campaign, with much of its land converted into allotments. This wartime initiative reflected the site's historical focus on food production and self-sufficiency.

The Lake: From Ornamental Feature to Community Attraction

The lake, originally created as part of the estate's Georgian design, was transformed into a boating lake during the park's early years. This feature provided recreational opportunities for Croydon residents and was a beloved aspect of the park's landscape. However, by the 1970s, maintenance challenges led to the lake being filled in. Current restoration efforts aim to reinstate this area as a wetland habitat, enhancing biodiversity and addressing modern environmental challenges such as flooding.

Ecological and Landscape Heritage

The park retains significant elements of its historic landscape, including:

- An avenue of lime trees, which provides a striking visual feature.
- Cedar and redwood trees, planted during the convent era and visible in historical photographs.
- A small orchard of cherry trees, contributing to the site's biodiversity.

These features, along with plans to restore the lake and introduce flood-resilient landscapes, connect the park's ecological heritage to its future sustainability. The mature trees, some over a century old, provide crucial habitats for birds, insects, and small mammals. Seasonal flower beds and native

plantings enhance the ecological richness of the park, attracting pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

Horticulture:

The park's horticultural heritage is rich and varied, reflecting its long history of landscape design and plant cultivation. The remnants of the historical gardens of Stroud Green House continue to influence the park's horticultural practices. The formal gardens, featuring a variety of ornamental plants, showcase traditional gardening techniques and plant varieties. Community involvement in horticulture is encouraged through various programs and volunteer opportunities, fostering a deeper connection between the residents and their local environment.

Ecology:

Ecologically, Ashburton Park plays a vital role in maintaining urban environmental health. The green space helps mitigate the urban heat island effect, reducing temperatures in the surrounding areas. The park's trees and plants contribute to air quality improvement by absorbing pollutants and producing oxygen. Water management features, such as rain gardens and natural drainage areas, help manage stormwater and reduce flooding risks. The park also serves as an educational resource, providing opportunities for ecological studies and environmental education programs for schools and community groups.

Importance for Young People

Ashburton Park is an invaluable resource for young people in Croydon, offering numerous opportunities for education, recreation, and personal development. The park's open spaces and sports facilities provide a safe and accessible environment for physical activities, promoting health and well-being among the youth. Organised sports events, playgrounds, and activity areas cater specifically to children and teenagers, encouraging active lifestyles and social interaction.

Educationally, the park has historically served as an outdoor classroom, where local schools and youth groups can engage in education and hands-on learning experiences. Programs focusing on Geography, Local history, nature and sustainability offer young people insights into the natural world and the importance of conservation.

Youth engagement in the park's maintenance and activities fosters community spirit and a sense of ownership. Volunteering opportunities and youth-led projects allow young people to contribute to the park's upkeep, developing skills and a sense of achievement. These experiences not only benefit the park but also help young individuals build confidence, teamwork abilities, and a strong connection to their community.

A Legacy of Care and Community

Ashburton Park has a long-standing tradition of supporting vulnerable populations. From its days as a sanctuary for orphans and women in recovery to its current role in supporting care-experienced children through community programmes, the park remains a vital space for healing and growth.

Current initiatives include:

- The establishment of the Oasis Community Hub in Park Lodge, fostering community engagement.
- Community gardens and educational workshops, celebrating the park's agricultural heritage.

Conclusion

Ashburton Park is a unique and cherished space in Croydon, representing centuries of history, resilience, and community care. By preserving its heritage—through the restoration of its landscapes, the celebration of its stories, and the continued engagement of its diverse community—the park continues to serve as a vital resource for future generations. It is a living link between Croydon's past and its future, embodying the spirit of growth, care, and connection.

Sources

1. Local Archives and Historical Records of Croydon Council.
2. "Ashburton Park History," Friends of Ashburton Park (FOAP).
3. Historic England Listings for the Ashburton Hall and Convent Buildings.
4. Records of Father Arthur Tooth and the Community of the Holy Paraclete.
5. Ordnance Survey Maps (1880, 1896, 1913).
6. National Archives on the Dig for Victory Campaign.
7. Victorian and Edwardian Landscaping Literature.

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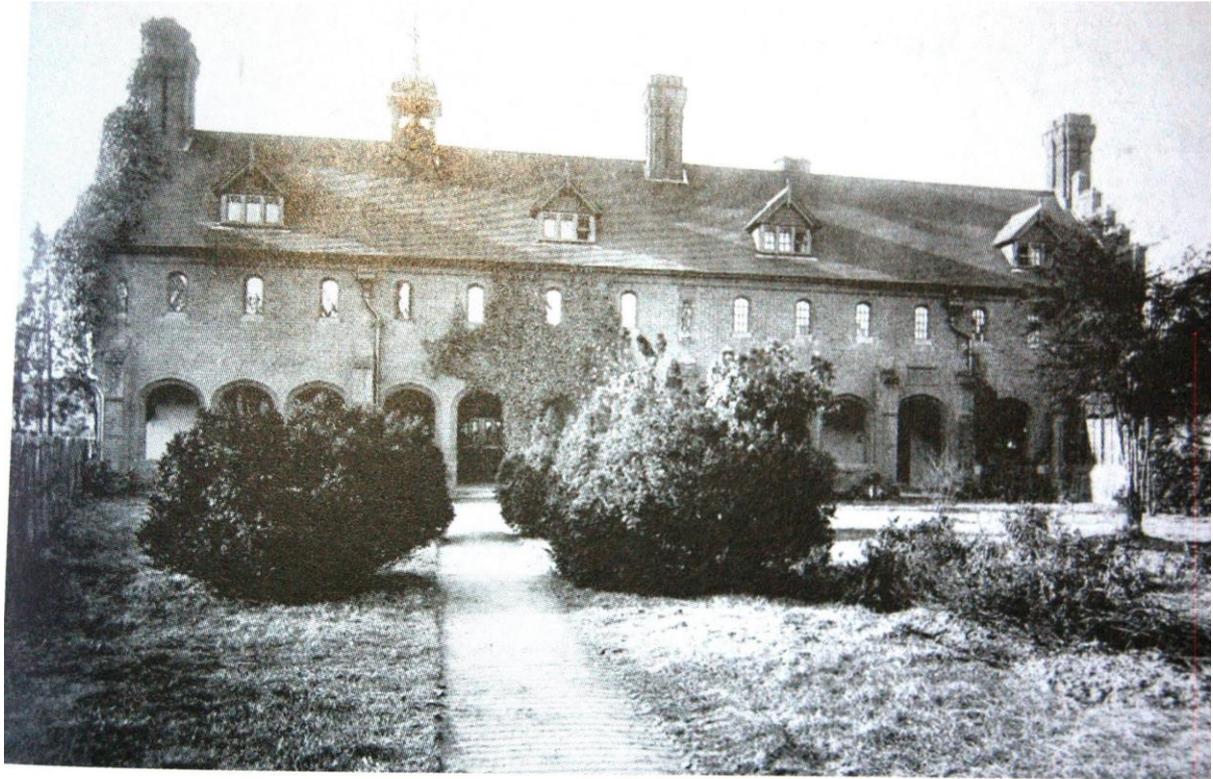
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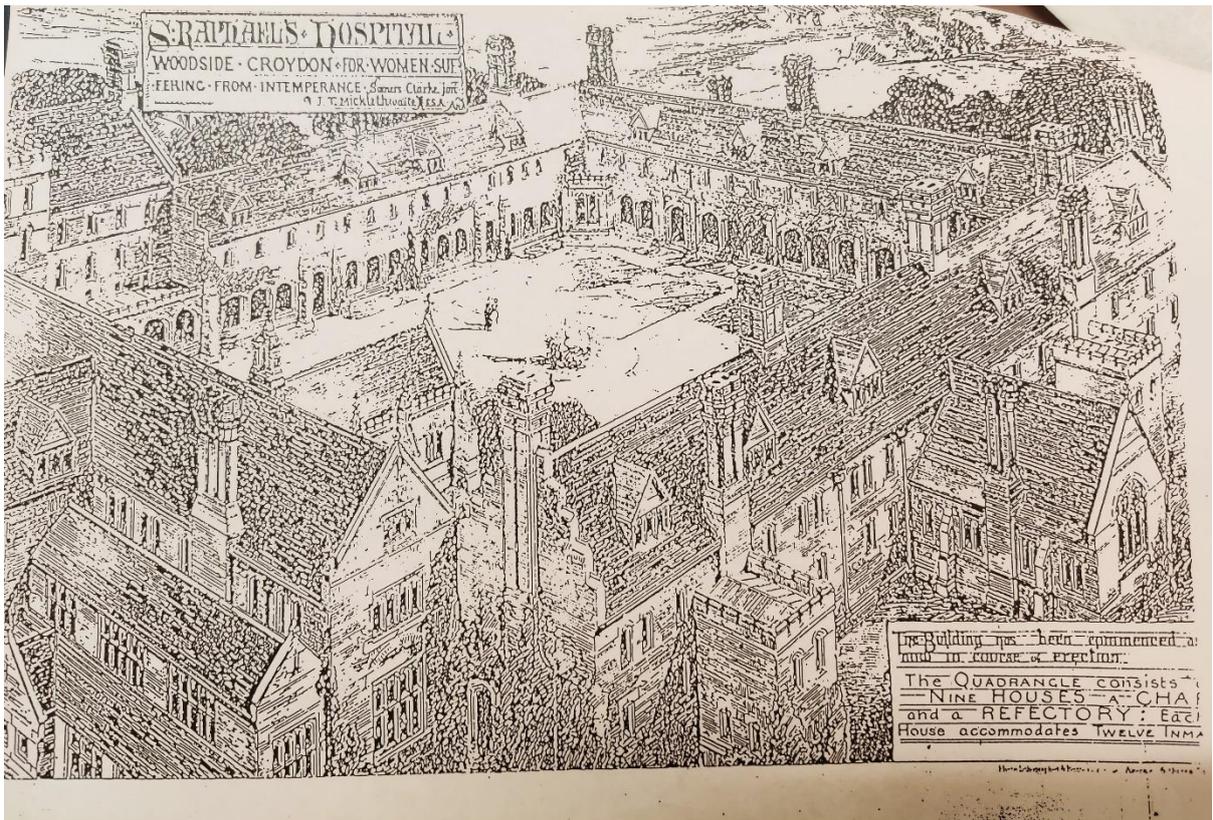
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Old Stroud Green Mansion House to the right. The convent to the right remains today.



ALL THE ...



Original plans for the convent were to build four of them but it became too expensive. Only one was built which is now called Ashburton Hall that is still there today.

Article in the Croydon Times in August 1925 showing the opening of the park to the public.

NEW OPEN SPACE.

Beautiful Woodside Convent Grounds Opened.

Thanks to the recent purchase by the Croydon Borough Council of the Convent Estate, Woodside, the residents of Woodside and Ad-discombe have this week been allowed, with their children, to commence the use of the beautiful Convent grounds as a recreation ground. The youngsters have been having a most happy time during the past few days assisting in gathering in the newly cut hay. Great strides are being made in the matter of levelling and fencing this ground, which is a great boon to the district.



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

CROYDON

Flower and Vegetable Show and FETE, 1946

ASHBURTON PARK (Woodside)
AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY

At 2 p.m.

Buses 12, 54 & 197

IN AID OF THE

CROYDON WAR MEMORIAL FUND

FREE ADMISSION TO PARK

Opening Ceremony at 2.30 p.m., by The Rt. Hon. J. Beasley, P.C.

Resident Minister for Australia

ADDITIONAL ATTRACTIONS:

RABBIT & POULTRY SHOW

BY THE

SOUTH HORWOOD RABBIT CLUB

Hon. Sec.: Mr. O. P. HEDGES
18, Charthan Road, S.E.25
L. TRIES WELCOMED

DOG SHOW

Show Organiser:

Mr. JAS. PYE
14, Elgin Road, Addiscombe
ENTER YOUR DOG

CROYDON BOROUGH BAND • PUNCH & JUDY
THE OWLERS CONCERT PARTY
DANCING (Blue Stars Dance Band)

"ELOC" in his amazing X-RAY EYE ACT assisted by Marjorie
CROYDON MUNICIPAL OFFICERS' NUMEROUS SIDE SHOWS OF SKILL AND FUN

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

Catering by the Croydon Group of Town Women's Guild

General
Secretary

71, PARK LANE
CROYDON



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