

ASHBURTON PARK

UNCOVERING THE STORY BENEATH OUR FEET



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PREPARED FOR CROYDON COUNCIL

BY AOC ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP



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AT A GLANCE

In May 2026, local schools, community volunteers and archaeologists came together in **Ashburton Park** to explore the history hidden beneath a familiar public space. The work formed part of the wider **National Lottery Heritage Fund**-supported restoration of the park.

The project combined two kinds of investigation. Eight small test pits were excavated by hand near **Ashburton Hall**. A geophysical survey also used specialist equipment to look below the ground without digging across wider areas of the park.

The excavation found part of a brick foundation in Test Pit 8, along with demolition material in several other test pits. The geophysical survey traced further buried walls and surfaces connected with the former hall, including likely entrances, internal divisions and staircases. It also identified an old path and a drainage system in the area of the former pond

The finds were mostly from the later history of the site, particularly the 19th and 20th centuries. They included **pottery, glass, roofing slate, nails, a fragment of marble fireplace, a graphite stylus** and a **small piece of a copper brooch**.

The **project gave participants direct experience of excavation, finds washing and three forms of geophysical survey**. It also created a **new body of evidence** that **Croydon Council** and the **community** can use when discussing the **park's history** and **planning its future**.



1. WHY WE EXPLORED ASHBURTON PARK

Ashburton Park is used **every day** for **walking, play, sport, relaxation** and **community activity**. Its present landscape also carries the **traces of houses, gardens, religious buildings, paths, ponds** and **public facilities** that have come and gone over more than **two centuries**.

The community archaeology project was created to investigate some of those traces and to **involve local people in the process**. **Archaeology** can help us understand how a place has changed, while **community archaeology** allows that work to be shared. **Participants** were able to **ask questions, handle evidence** and **take part** in the methods used to explore the past.

The project focused on the area around **Ashburton Hall**, where **historic maps** showed the former **Stroud Green House** and later buildings. The work aimed to locate surviving remains, learn more about the layout of the site and give the **community practical access to archaeology**.



2. A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PARK

The area around Ashburton Park once formed part of a much more rural landscape. Woodside was recorded by the **14th century** and lay close to the **Great North Wood**, the extensive woodland that also gave **the Norwoods** their names.

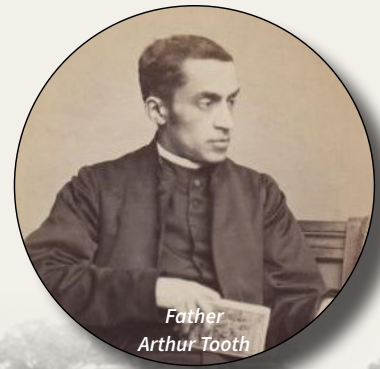
By the late **18th century**, the land belonged to **Joseph Humphrey**. A large house, later known as **Stroud Green House**, was built in **1788**. Historic maps show the house within grounds that included woodland, paths and water features.

The estate briefly became known as **Byculla Park** in the 1860s. That name came from **Byculla** in **Mumbai** and belongs within the wider history of British connections with India and the **East India Company** in the **Addiscombe area**. The surviving reports suggest a possible connection between the estate's owner and India, though they do not provide firm evidence for the exact relationship.

In **1878**, Father **Arthur Tooth** bought **Stroud Green House** and its grounds. He developed the site with a convent, cloister, lodge, stable and other buildings. The convent building, now Ashburton Hall, dates from the early 1880s. The estate also included institutions for children and for people receiving forms of care that reflected the attitudes and language of the Victorian period.

Croydon Corporation bought the estate in **1924**. The Georgian house was largely demolished in **1927**, while the convent became a public library. The grounds were retained as a park and took the name Ashburton Park.

The park continued to change during the **20th century**. New paths, play and sports facilities were added. **The ornamental lake** was filled in, and a later pond was eventually removed. **Two high-explosive bombs** fell in the park in October **1940**, damaging buildings in and around the site. The cloister was demolished in **1975**, while **Ashburton Hall** and the Lodge survived.



3. HOW THE INVESTIGATION WORKED

EIGHT TEST PITS

Archaeologists opened eight small test pits close to the known position of the former buildings. A test pit is a carefully measured area of excavation used to answer a particular question about what may survive below ground.

The pits were dug by hand. Soil was removed in stages, changes in the ground were recorded, and finds were collected from the layers in which they appeared. This allows archaeologists to study the order in which deposits built up and to distinguish recent material from older remains.

The work on site took place over two weeks. Local schools attended during the first week, with two or more sessions each day. Sessions last from 90-120 minutes each. Bookable community sessions followed during the weekend and the second week, with morning sessions themed by social group to make sure the project was as inclusive and accessible as possible. Participants could help with excavation and wash finds recovered from the soil, as well as handle animal bones and try their hand at archaeological illustration (which took place during week 2).

LOOKING UNDERGROUND WITHOUT DIGGING

The wider survey used three forms of geophysics. These methods record differences beneath the ground and turn them into plans that archaeologists can study.

Ground-penetrating radar, usually shortened to GPR, sends signals into the ground and records the echoes that return from buried materials. Brick, stone, floors, rubble, soil and empty spaces can produce different responses.

Earth resistance measures how easily a small electrical current passes through the soil. A buried wall often produces a different reading from a ditch, a path or ordinary ground because each holds moisture in a different way.

Magnetometry measures tiny changes in the earth's magnetic field. It can sometimes reveal filled ditches, pits, burning and other activity. It also detects modern metal, drains, services and disturbed ground. The survey covered about two hectares with magnetometry, around 0.2 hectares with GPR and one 20-metre-square area with earth resistance. Community volunteers took part in all three methods.

4. WHAT THE EXCAVATION FOUND

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A FORMER BUILDING

The clearest structural discovery came from Test Pit 8. Beneath the topsoil and a layer containing broken building material, the team uncovered a brick foundation covered with hard white mortar. Its position suggests that it belonged to one of the former buildings beside Ashburton Hall, possibly an internal wall. Only a small section was visible within the test pit, so the excavation cannot show the full size or purpose of the wall by itself. Its value lies in confirming that buried foundations survive and in providing a fixed point that can be compared with maps and geophysical results.

EVIDENCE OF DEMOLITION

Test Pits 1, 5, 6 and 7 contained layers of rubble and mixed soil that were interpreted as demolition material. These deposits are likely to relate to the removal and alteration of buildings during the **20th century**.

Test Pits 2, 3 and 4 remained within topsoil and did not reveal archaeological structures. This is still useful evidence. It helps define where remains were encountered and reminds us that buried archaeology is rarely spread evenly across a site.

EVERYDAY OBJECTS

The recovered finds were mainly later post-medieval or modern in date. They included fragments of pottery, animal bone, glass, nails, brick, ceramic roof tile and roofing slate.

Individual objects included part of a **a graphite stylus, a pottery base** with part of a maker's mark, a **fragment of marble fireplace surround** and a **small piece of a copper brooch**. These finds are modest, but they add texture to the story of buildings that were used, repaired, altered and eventually demolished.

The finds were retained for assessment in consultation with Croydon's archaeological adviser and the local museum service.

5. WHAT THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY FOUND.....

A CLEARER PLAN OF THE FORMER HALL

The GPR survey produced the strongest archaeological results. It identified a group of straight and rectangular reflections that match the position and shape of the former hall shown on historic maps. The results suggest the survival of outside walls and some internal divisions. They also appear to show entrances, the circular corner features of the building and possible staircases. Some less distinct responses may relate to floors, demolition rubble or internal walls.

Further features in the south-western part of the survey area may represent part of the former cloister and associated garden landscaping. This interpretation fits the historic maps, although the survey evidence is less clear in this area and should be treated with care.

A FORMER PATH

The earth resistance survey identified a strong line that matches a path once leading towards the hall. Other patches in the results could have archaeological, natural or modern causes, so no firm interpretation has been made for them.

DRAINAGE, SERVICES AND THE RECENT LIFE OF THE PARK

The magnetometry survey did not reveal clear archaeological features connected with the former buildings. Its results were dominated by drainage, modern metal and disturbance.

A herringbone-shaped drainage system was recorded in the northern part of the park. Its location corresponds with the former pond or boating lake and may help explain why this part of the park remains vulnerable to flooding.

The survey also recorded underground services and many small magnetic responses, probably caused by modern metal objects and building debris in the topsoil. These results provide useful information about the more recent management and use of the park.

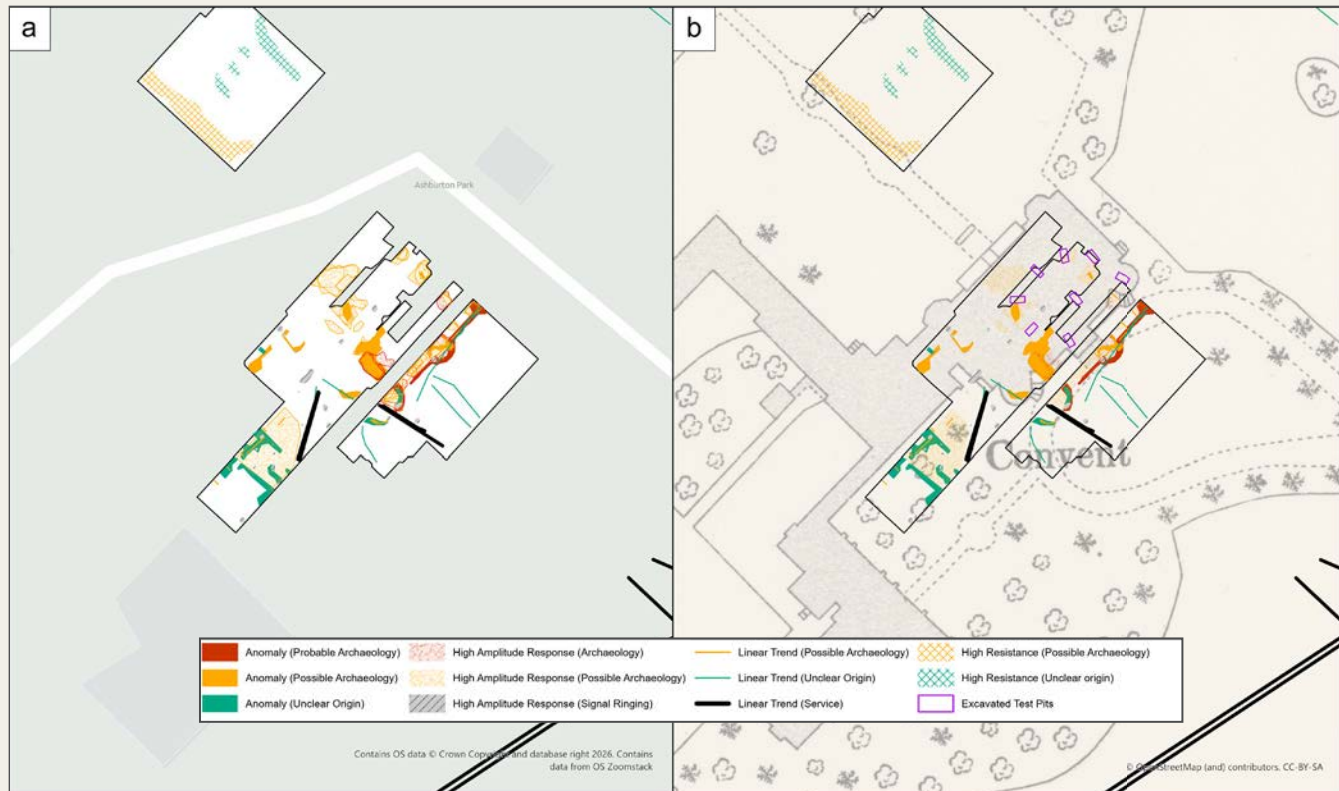
6. BRINGING THE EVIDENCE TOGETHER

The excavation and geophysical survey support one another. Test Pit 8 provided direct physical evidence of a surviving brick foundation. GPR then placed that kind of survival within a wider pattern of walls, surfaces and possible building features.

Historic maps and photographs helped the team compare the survey results with the changing layout of Stroud Green House, the convent complex, the cloister and their gardens. The match is strongest around the former hall, where the geophysical results provide greater detail than the excavation could achieve within eight small pits.

The investigation has also improved understanding of the park landscape. The former path, garden features, drainage and pond area show how the grounds were designed, adapted and later reorganised for public use.

The results do not provide a complete plan of everything below the park because geophysical survey depends on ground conditions and on the physical properties of buried remains. Some features may be too slight, too deep or too similar to the surrounding soil to appear clearly. The interpretations in this report represent the best reading of the available evidence and can be refined if further work takes place.



7. THE COMMUNITY VALUE OF THE PROJECT

The project opened archaeological work to people who might otherwise only encounter it through television, museums or books. School groups and community participants were able to work alongside professional archaeologists and see how conclusions are built from soil, objects, maps and survey data.

Excavation offered a physical and collaborative form of learning. Participants could help uncover deposits, notice changes in the ground and discuss what those changes might mean. Finds washing created another point of contact with the evidence, allowing people to handle and examine material recovered from their own local park.

The geophysical survey introduced methods that can seem highly technical in an approachable setting. Volunteers helped use earth resistance, GPR and magnetometry equipment, learning that archaeology includes surveying, computing, interpretation and teamwork as well as digging.

This shared process adds social value in several connected ways. It supports learning outside the classroom, creates opportunities for different generations to take part in a common activity and strengthens understanding of a place that belongs to the whole community. It also gives local people a more informed voice in conversations about the park's restoration and future.

The project created a record that can be shared beyond the excavation itself. The reports and digital archive will preserve the results for future research, while an accessible community report can return the findings to the people whose park was being explored.

The available project reports do not include a final total for participants or detailed feedback data. This report therefore avoids claims about the scale or long-term effect of the engagement. Its assessment of social value is based on the activities that were delivered and the opportunities for direct participation recorded by the project team.



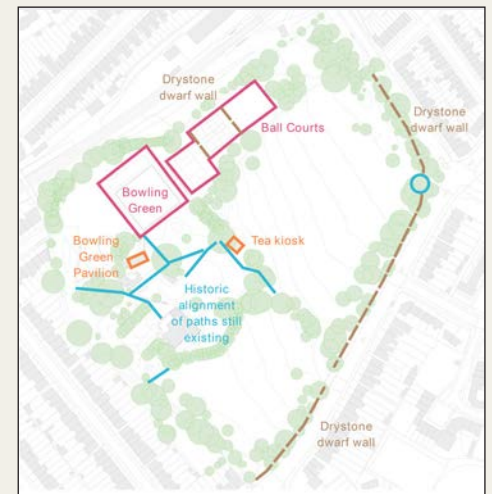
8. WHAT WE LEARNED

The investigation confirmed that parts of the former buildings survive beneath Ashburton Park. A brick foundation was exposed in Test Pit 8, and GPR traced a broader group of walls and buried surfaces around the former hall.

The work added detail to the known plan of the building, including likely entrances, internal spaces, circular corner features and possible staircases. It also identified a former path and evidence connected with the gardens and cloister.

Across the wider park, the survey mapped drainage, services and modern disturbance. The drainage in the former pond area is especially relevant to understanding the present landscape and its tendency to flood.

The finds tell a largely **19th- and 20th-century** story of occupation, maintenance, demolition and change. No earlier or exceptional discovery was required for the project to be worthwhile. The evidence has helped place familiar surroundings within a longer history and has made that investigation available to the community.



9. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The written, drawn and digital records will form a permanent archaeological archive. Copies of the reports and data are expected to be deposited with the appropriate historic environment records and the Archaeological Data Service, following the arrangements set out in the technical reports.

The results can help guide any future archaeological work connected with the restoration of Ashburton Park. They identify areas where structural remains survive and provide evidence that can inform decisions about further investigation, interpretation and public engagement.

Future community work could build on the discoveries through talks, guided walks, school resources, displays or further targeted investigation. Any new interpretation should continue to distinguish clearly between confirmed evidence, likely explanations and questions that remain open.

10. GLOSSARY

Archaeological evaluation: A limited investigation used to find out whether archaeological remains survive and what condition they are in.

Test pit: A small, carefully excavated area used to answer a question about what lies below ground.

Geophysics: Ways of investigating below the ground using scientific instruments, usually without digging.

Ground-penetrating radar (GPR): Equipment that sends signals into the ground and records reflections from buried materials.

Earth resistance: A survey that measures how easily a small electrical current passes through the soil.

Magnetometry: A survey that measures very small changes in the earth's magnetic field.

Deposit: A layer of soil, rubble or other material laid down at a particular stage in a site's history.

Foundation: The buried base that supported a wall or building.

Historic map: A map made in the past that can help show how buildings and landscapes have changed.

Archive: The permanent collection of records, plans, photographs, finds data and reports created by an archaeological project.



REPORT BASIS

This accessible report brings together the findings of **AOC Archaeology Group's** archaeological evaluation report (AOC Project 35244) and geophysical survey report (AOC Project 41125), both prepared for **Croydon Council** following fieldwork in **May 2026**.

Technical detail, specialist methods, plans and full references remain available in the original reports.