

1: CLAPHAM COMMON

Introduction

This conservation area includes that part of Clapham Common and its fringes within the Borough of Wandsworth. The Clapham Conservation Area in the Borough of Lambeth includes the remainder of the common and its surrounds.

History and Topography

Clapham Common was originally the common grazing land of the village of Clapham (the whole of which was within the Borough of Wandsworth until 1965). Although vestigial agricultural uses survived until the C19, the Common was partly levelled and planted in 1722, becoming an improved landscape setting for the increasing numbers of large middle class houses around its fringes. These were at first concentrated around the village centre itself; those examples now in Wandsworth are generally slightly later (mid C18 to c.1830).

In the mid to late C19 the surrounding areas were gradually built up with tight terraces of speculative housing. The presence of the common side houses and their large grounds delayed this process close to the common until the turn of the century, when many of the large houses were demolished and their grounds built over. Slight variations in line, curving streets and changes in building types still mark these different phases of development around the common. The infill actually on the common sides was often of a grander nature than the terraced housing behind. The most recent development (C20) includes the former Walsingham School and the Police Section House on Nightingale Lane, together with the air raid shelters/gun emplacements that still survive on the common itself.

Archaeology

Clapham Common Northside is within an Archaeological Priority Area, and may contain

evidence relating to Saxon and Roman remains and to the medieval village or post-medieval expansion of Clapham. Other parts of the conservation area are likely to contain only chance finds and evidence of the C18 mansions that ringed the Common. The series of listed parish marker posts that run across the common are of archaeological and historical interest.

Townscape

Main roads - the A3 which frames the northern side of the Common and The Avenue which branches off and crosses it - have the effect of cutting off some of the best houses from the Common, which was the original reason for their location in this area.

Clapham Common West Side is not a through route, being interrupted by the front gardens of the C18 group of listed buildings. It retains something of the older, almost rural character of a commonside lane, complete with timber posts and knee rails. The roads around and leading off the Common are residential in character. Boundaries throughout the area are of brick walls, especially to the earlier buildings, although some timber fencing also survives and this may originally have been as typical. Traces of a "ha ha" remain in front of Gilmore House, North Side. The typical late C19 terraces on West Side have low brick walls with cast iron panelled railings.

Buildings and Materials

Many of the largest and most important buildings historically have been demolished. The C18 mansions that survive are in a restrained classical style, predominantly of stock or gault brick with stone and stucco detailing. They are simple two or three storeyed blocks, with a variety of classical

mouldings and features, doors, window heads, porches, iron verandas, string courses and occasional canted bows and pediments. Although all of great quality, they are generally more modest than the aristocratic mansions of Roehampton; the Shrubbery (listed Grade II) described by Pevsner as "a remarkable surprise in this suburban area.... a neo-classical mansion in the Grand Manner", stands out in size and appearance mostly because of its rendered elevations and mid C19 extensions. Additions and alterations to these buildings have on the whole been sympathetic. The most interesting are the additions made by Philip Webb to the Rochester Deaconess' House (113 North Side) for William Morris's sister in 1891 (listed Grade II).

These older buildings are found mainly along North Side, in a small group on West Side and again in the south west corner of the Common on West Side and Nightingale Lane. Newer developments are slotted in between and, in some cases, on the former grounds of these properties.

The more interesting late C19 inserts are to be found on the north side of the common. The most prominent buildings, J.T.Knowles's Cedars Mansions, are just outside the Borough, but there are other prominent inserts, notably the Renaissance style four storey brick and stone, slate roofed Grove Mansions (1896). Most of the rest of North Side is typified by large, elegantly detailed red or stock brick late-Victorian or Edwardian terraces, balustraded balconies being a particular feature. St.Barnabas's Church (1879, Grade II), a ragstone church by W.Bassett-Smith, and the brick St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church are the only non-domestic buildings of note on the Common Side.

The conservation area extends north behind the common side to include the whole of Altenburg Gardens and Lavender Gardens, the latter with terraces built by Alfred Heaver and similar to those on the Heaver Estate. Of exceptional interest are the substantial bow fronted classical houses on the east side of Altenburg Gardens built by Edmund Wood, a rare type found only here and in nearby Sisters Avenue. Other buildings of note in the road are the church of St. Vincent de Paul and the Arts and Crafts reference Library (listed Grade II).

Along the West Side, the later buildings are more typically late-C19/early-C20 domestic terraces. In the case of Leathwaite Road, the rear elevations face the common. Although designed with quite imposing bow windows, they are not of the same order as those on the North or West sides designed to look out onto and to frame the views from the Common; but they still need to be treated as frontages rather than as rear elevations. The terraces along the West Side are two or three storeyed red brick and relatively plain, relying for effect on single or two storeyed bay windows, ornamented and tiled door surrounds, and painted cast mouldings around windows, cornices etc. The best examples of this type of speculative terrace are actually just off the common side in Broomwood Road (listed Grade II) where Gothic detailing has been used to great effect.

Twentieth century developments have been limited to the area around the junction of Nightingale Lane and the common, with school buildings (1969), recent mansion blocks in a reproduction Edwardian style, the multi storey brick clad Police section house, and the pre-war brick and Portland stone block of flats added over and around the listed underground station, designed 1926 by Charles Holden (listed Grade II).

Green Elements

The dominant feature of the conservation area is clearly the Common itself. This is owned and maintained by the Borough of Lambeth, and has a mixture of formal and informal planting, tree lined roads, sports facilities and playing areas as well as broad open spaces. Remnants of late C19 urban park improvements survive, particularly the ponds and the Bandstand (1861, sited here 1890, listed Grade II). The Common is typified by large mature trees; there has been considerable replanting in recent years following Dutch Elm disease and gale damage and the general ageing of the older planting on the common. Some elements of the landscape still require improvement including abandoned air raid shelters.

The C19 housing facing the common has small to medium sized front gardens, with a variety of generally medium-sized trees and bushes. Some of the older houses retain their large front gardens (the scale of which is reflected by the fact that St.Barnabas's church was built in the front garden of the Shrubby).

Rear gardens throughout the commonside areas are limited in size and impact, the main exception being the group of listed C18 buildings along West Side; the older gardens tend to have more mature planting.

This character statement is intended to give an overview of the development and current character of the conservation area; it is not intended to be prescriptive, nor to be a summary of planning constraints or an inventory of individual buildings or other features whether listed or otherwise.