

## 25: WANDSWORTH COMMON

### INTRODUCTION

#### History

Wandsworth Common was referred to in the Domesday Book as the common land of the Manor of Battersea and Wandsworth. It was known as Battersea West Heath and Wandsworth East Heath. The Common is clearly identified on Rocque's map of 1741 and is referred to as Wandsworth Common. At that time it occupied all the land between Bolingbroke Grove and Trinity Road, and from St. John's Hill to south of Burntwood Lane. Between 1794 and 1866 there were some 53 enclosures involving the transference of common land to a variety of other uses.

The main enclosures were those taken for the Royal Victoria Patriotic Asylum, the industrial school of St. James, Allfarthing Piece, McKellar's Triangle (Trinity Road/Bellevue Road/St James's Drive), the Justices of Surrey, and the land taken for the construction of railways.

The 'Allfarthing Piece' was appropriated by the Manor of Allfarthing in 1642. Magdalen College, Oxford were the landlords in the nineteenth century, and they leased it for use as a plant nursery. Part of this land was developed for housing in the late-C19 (the "Toast Rack"). The Royal Victoria Patriotic Building was built from patriotic funds set up in 1854 in aid of the many orphans of the Crimean War. The architect was Major Rhode Hawkins. Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone in 1857. The building was used as a hospital during the 1914-18 war, and for a variety of purposes subsequently until it eventually became vacant and derelict. It was restored in the 1980s. Part of the grounds of the RVPB was developed in 1871 for a boys' school, and then sold to Emmanuel Hospital in 1880. Part was used by a Mr Neal, using farm

buildings for storage of materials. This land was acquired by the London County Council in 1912 to restore it back to common land. The Parish of St. James, Westminster was granted 20 acres of land for the industrial school by the Lord of the Manor (Earl Spencer) around 1850.

The construction of the railways had a major impact on the Common by physically dividing it up. Lord Spencer sold land to the London and South Western Railway including part of Wandsworth Common. The Act of Parliament was approved in 1834 for the railway's construction.

The West End and Crystal Palace Railway was promoted as a tourist line to serve Crystal Palace. Because the Common was being developed with middle class villas, a station was opened on the present site to the south of the Bellevue Road bridge. In 1895 the line was quadrupled and the station re-built, with a reconstruction in 1907.

In 1851 the Surrey County Prison had been established on land adjacent to the Common to the west of Trinity Road. Nearby a small community had developed with Alma Terrace, the County Arms and a few villas fronting on to Trinity Road. There were also a number of estates, Burntwood House, Burntwood Lodge, and Burntwood Grange. West of Trinity Road to the north of the London to Southampton railway Heathfield Cottages had been established prior to 1830. In the vicinity were a number of isolated villas and market gardens and on the common a large lake with islands known as the Black Sea. To the south of the lake was the Windmill.

Rocque's map of 1741 shows a large mansion on the north-east of the common surrounded by parkland. It was leased in 1829 from Earl Spencer who was Lord of the Manor, by William Wilson, the founder of Price's Candle factory. The Black Sea was admired as "one of the most picturesque and ornamental waters near London".

In May 1868 the Vicar of Battersea hosted a meeting of people seeking to rescue the common from incremental development by appealing to the Metropolitan Board of Works to take over responsibility for it under the Metropolitan Commons Act of 1866. This action did not succeed and in 1870 further meetings were held and a Common Defence Committee was formed. Adjoining owners had erected fences around Plough Green in an effort to assert his rights over the land and in April that year an attempt was made to remove them. This effort to keep Plough Green open was a tumultuous affair with crowds and bands. Further meetings ensued and funds were raised. In July 1870 two members of the Preservation Society, Mr Buckmaster and Mr Ransome, petitioned the Lord Mayor to hold a public meeting, which he agreed to, attended by ten Members of Parliament. Resolutions of support for action to preserve the Common were made. Eventually Lord Spencer acceded to public pressure and offered to transfer the whole Common, minus the Black Sea, to the Defence Committee (later the Wandsworth Common Preservation Society).

The funds that had been raised were used to sponsor a bill through Parliament and on 10 July 1871 the Wandsworth Common Bill was enacted and the control of the Common passed to the Conservators. Land already enclosed remained so, but the Conservators were given

the opportunity to buy back the land which would then revert to Common status. In 1887 the duty to maintain the Common was transferred to the Metropolitan Board of Works, which was in turn superseded by the London County Council in 1898 and eventually Wandsworth Borough Council.

### **Sub-areas**

Due to the varying character of the conservation area it is broken down into sub-areas:-

Alma Terrace;

Bolingbroke Grove area;

The Common / Trinity Road / the Toast rack;

Dalebury / Crockerton / Trinity Roads / Trinity Crescent (HolyTrinity);

Ellerton Road area;

Elsynge Road / St. John's Hill;

St. Ann's Crescent area;

St. James's Drive / Bellevue Road / Brodrick, Wandle & Hendham Roads;

Spencer Park / Wandsworth Common North Side;

Wandsworth Common West Side / Allfarthing Lane.

*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.*