

Fitzjohns

HISTORY

The Conservation Area was divided between three historic estates; Hampstead Manor, Belsize Estate, Greenhill. Their histories together with the growth of urban London during the 19th century largely account for the development of the residential area of Fitzjohns/Netherhall.

Hampstead Manor. In medieval times Hampstead was a small upland village, with Hampstead Manor stretching westward from Hampstead to Watling Street (now Kilburn High Road). It belonged to Westminster Abbey and had the best farmland in the area. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the manor and land was given to Sir Thomas Wroth and was subsequently sold on until 1707, when it was bought by Sir William Langhorne, descending to his cousins the Maryon family. Around Hampstead Village there were two parts to the estate, the main estate being Manor Farm with 356 acres in the vicinity of Finchley Road. The other area was known as East Park, to the east of East Heath, now part of Hampstead Heath. Sir Thomas Spencer Wilson became lord of the manor in 1777, through his wife, a Maryon. As with previous lords, he never lived there.

Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson died in 1821 and divided the estate between his sons. His will limited his heir's ability to build on the land as they could only grant short agricultural leases. This impeded the younger Sir Thomas' desire to develop land for housing following trends in neighbouring areas. Residential development had reached St John's Wood, while Hampstead Village had a growing population during the 18th century. The development of Finchley Road also brought urban development closer to Hampstead when the turnpike was built by Colonel Eyre of the Eyre estates connecting St John's Wood to Finchley in 1827. The road went through Maryon Wilson land.

A long legal battle in the Houses of Parliament began as Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson tried to amend the will. He encountered strong opposition to his proposal mainly because the loss of East Park would have adversely affected public access to the Heath. During his lifetime he made 15 attempts to get the Bill passed. All failed and both areas were kept as open land during most of the 19th century. For many locals the delay was welcome, keeping open farmland in an area increasingly surrounded by brick. The area around Shepherd's Walk was known as Conduits Fields, with a footpath from there to Hampstead Village. Resistance to the loss of this area led to a campaign to acquire them supported by Octavia Hill, but the campaign failed. When Sir Thomas died in 1869 his heir (his brother) Sir John Maryon Wilson was willing to negotiate the selling of his manorial rights to the Heath part of the estate. Following the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 East Park finally became public property in 1886. In contrast the Manor Farm area was developed for housing. The long legal battle delayed the development of this part of the Conservation Area accounting for its distinct 1880's character.

Unlike his brother Sir John Maryon Wilson was free to grant building leases to his heir, and decided to develop the Finchley Road part of the estate. He agreed in 1873 to divide the estate with his son Spencer, whose portion included two proposed new roads, Fitzjohns Avenue and Priory Road. (Fitzjohns Avenue named after the Spencer Wilson house in Great Canfield). In 1875 the contract for Fitzjohns Avenue was let to Culverhouse (tenant at will of two main estate farms on the site of Fitzjohns Avenue and a builder) at a price of £8,987, and road making began. Culverhouse had previously been given a lease to exploit the East Park estate as a brick-field. In fact, bricks from the fields on the Heath were used for houses on Fitzjohns Avenue.

The design of Fitzjohns Avenue came from the grand vision of Spencer Wilson, with a 50ft wide road and 10ft pavement. Harpers magazine in 1883 called it "one of the noblest streets in the world". It was planted with alternate red and white chestnuts and the houses were set well back from the road with long front paths. Land agent, F.J.Clark advised the Maryon Wilsons to build the main roads and sewers and control the release of land carefully. The north/south alignment of the roads was determined by building surveyor HR Newton's concern with convenient access between Swiss Cottage and Hampstead. The termination of the

northern end of Fitzjohns Avenue raised problems where the impressive new road ended in a mass of alleys and courtyards. Town Improvements were proposed to clear slums and rearrange roads and a public meeting was held in 1881 where traders on Hampstead High Street voiced concern about the new road causing loss of trade. A compromise was found and the north-west end of the High Street was demolished and widened, Heath Street was extended southwards and a new intersection created to make the link between Swiss Cottage and Hampstead.

Three railway tunnels lie under the area and also influenced the street lay out. The North London Railway (LNWR) made a tunnel between Hampstead Heath Station and Finchley Road and Frognal in 1860. East of Fitzjohns Avenue it runs under properties and their gardens but the northern end of Netherhall Gardens was designed to lie over the tunnel. The Midland Railway connection to St Pancras was opened in 1868, and the mile long Belsize Tunnel was created to link Haverstock Hill and Finchley Road. Nutley Terrace was required to run over the line of the tunnel, which explains its angle to Fitzjohns Avenue. The tunnel was not able to meet the railway's requirements and a second tunnel (known as the Belsize New Tunnel) was built in 1884. Airshafts to the tunnel are located at No.32 Belsize Lane, Copperbeach Close and the land adjacent to No.46 Maresfield Gardens.

The neighbourhood of Fitzjohns Avenue was built in ten years after 1876. The adjoining streets were slightly less spacious than Fitzjohns Avenue but all had large building plots with detached or semi-detached properties, and some had room for carriage drives. Netherhall Gardens and Maresfield Gardens were named after a manor and parish of the Maryon Wilson estate in Sussex.

Architectural interest was increased as private individuals bought freeholds and commissioned architects, creating good quality one-off buildings. The area became popular with a community of artists, writers, social reformers and the medical profession. In the 1870's and 1880's the architecture that was popular included a variety of styles; Queen Anne revival, Arts and Crafts influenced by Norman Shaw (he designed three buildings in the area, one now demolished) and Gothic. The freestyle of Victorian influences comes together in the Conservation Area.

The houses were of such a large size (No.55 Fitzjohns Avenue had 25 rooms) that letting became difficult and towards the end of the 1890's a number of girls schools opened, a trend that continues today, in properties that were originally designed as houses.

Since the initial development there has been small-scale development in backland sites in the 1920's and 1930's (see O.S.1934 map). A number of local authority housing schemes were built in the 1970's by the London Borough of Camden, on the sites of demolished houses.

Belsize Estate. The Belsize estate lies on the east side of the Conservation Area, (1866 map shows the lane that marked the boundary) and was owned by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The name derives from 'belassis' French for beautifully situated. The estate extended south of the Conservation Area and also includes the Belsize Conservation Area. The Earl of Chesterfield leased it from the 17th century when it was farmland and also the location of Belsize House, a substantial house and grounds. The Earl sold the 234 acres interest in 1807 to four Hampstead men who then divided it into eight portions, each with a separate lease. These estates were called parks and individual villas were built on them, or the existing house retained such as Belsize House and Rosslyn House. In Fitzjohns/Netherhall Conservation Area there were three large houses on leases: Rosslyn House, Rosslyn Lodge and Belsize Court, prior to major residential development.

Rosslyn House originated in Tudor times, and was known as Shelford Lodge. At the end of the 18th century it was occupied by Alexander Wedderburn who became Earl of Rosslyn. He changed the house into a Georgian mansion and the name to Rosslyn House. Print Rosslyn House It had grounds of 21 acres and lay at the end of a private drive with an entrance on Haverstock Hill. From 1828 the Rosslyn Park estate with Rosslyn House was lived in by Henry Davidson, a city merchant. In 1853 he agreed a 99-year building lease, anxious to start developing part of his estate before the adjacent Maryon Wilson estate, while keeping the house. The newly created Soldier's Daughters Home moved into Rosslyn House in 1855-58 before moving to Rosslyn Hill in 1858. In 1859 Davidson sold Rosslyn House to Charles Woodd who lived there until 1893. Woodd built the mews in the 1870's. The 1894 map shows Rosslyn House and grounds surrounded by houses. The 1915 OS map shows the south side of Lyndhurst Road built on after Rosslyn House was demolished in 1896. The gatehouse (or former lodge) survives in Lyndhurst Road.

Rossllyn Lodge (or part of it) has survived unlike the other grand houses of the 18th and 19th century. It lies beside the entrance to Rossllyn House and is thought to have been built at end of 18th century. It had a series of tenants and was used as an Auxiliary Military Hospital during the First World War. In 1975 the freehold was acquired by Camden Council who built a supported housing scheme there in 1978 in the southern part of the garden. In 1979 the west wing was demolished and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts now owns it.

Belsize Court Built about 1811 by George Todd, one of the eight lessees, on the site of a previous house, at the east end of the present Wedderburn Road. Confusingly it was initially called Belsize House (the other Belsize House lay outside the Conservation Area near Belsize Avenue). It was demolished in 1937 and the land developed by Laing in 1938 for the Belsize Court flats.

Development of the Rossllyn Park Estate started in the 1860's under Davidson and was largely completed in the 1880's. In 1862 development on Thurlow, Lyndhurst, Eldon Roads and Windsor Terrace was proceeding. Houses in a similar style were also built on the west side of Rossllyn Hill. The substantial three/four storey houses were built around the boundaries of the estate (see 1866 map) with no connecting roads between Lyndhurst Road and the area west of it. A through route was only established when Fitzjohns Avenue was built. Lyndhurst Road was named after a Lord Chancellor, as was Thurlow Road and Eldon Grove. Wedderburn Road, to the west of Belsize Court, was built in the 1880 and 1890's. In 1883 the Rossllyn Grove Congregational Church was built adjacent to the Lodge, designed by Alfred Waterhouse. It was later known as the Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church and is now the Air Recording Studios.

In 1885 William Willett the speculative builder, who with his son ran one of the most successful building firms in the London area in the late 19th and early 20th century, returned to Belsize Park and the Belsize Court Estate. Having worked in Belsize Crescent he moved into Lyndhurst Gardens. Harry B Measures was office architect from 1884-1892 and he may have influenced the move to detached quality villas. Measures designed all the Willett properties in Lyndhurst Gardens.

Greenhill. The Greenhill estate was smaller than the adjacent estates and ran from the King William IV public house to Thurlow Road. There were some substantial houses on the estate; Mount Grove was probably built in the 18th century and had extensive grounds. It was bought in 1817 by Thomas Norton Longman the publisher who created a garden quite renowned at the time. He died in 1844 and the house was demolished in 1871 to be replaced by a Methodist Chapel in the 1880's. The Chapel was demolished in 1935 and replaced by the present Greenhill Mansions); Vane House built in the mid 17th century by Harry Vane (executed for treason in 1662). Historic drawing VH The Soldiers Daughters Home moved to Vane House in 1858 and was opened by the Prince Consort. The Home had a school attached (the building is now occupied by now Fitzjohns Primary School accessed from Fitzjohns Avenue) designed by William Munt. Vane House was demolished in 1970, only the gatepost survives, and Vane Close and Mulberry Close were built. The Royal School was also erected on the site.

The information in the history section has largely been drawn from the books listed in the bibliography at the end of the Statement.