

History of the Cranley Road Area.

What is The Cranley Road Area

The Cranley Road Area lies to the east of Guildford. It was originally developed as large Victorian villas by the 4th Earl of Onslow. It is bounded by Cross Lanes in the west, Epsom Road in the south, Boxgrove Road in the east and the “New Railway Line 1885” in the north.

1 Early History

What is now known as the Cranley Road Area was originally a part of Stoke next Guildford. In 1835 Guildford was enlarged. The Cranley Road Area remained in Stoke next Guildford. Cross Lanes became the municipal boundary between Guildford and Stoke. In 1904 the Cranley Road Area was absorbed into Guildford and Cross Lanes is now the boundary between the Christchurch and Holy Trinity wards.

The earliest reference to Cross Lanes is in 1205, when King John sold the manor of Stoke next Guildford to the Bishop of London. The Bishop did not live in Stoke and the manorial courts which supervised the administration of the manor were held in Warren Farm on Browning’s Down.

Cross Lanes is an ancient “Green Lane” that originally ran from Stoke next Guildford, across Stoke Park and up on to Browning’s Down. Part of Cross Lanes has survived as a “Green Lane”, running south, between steep banks, from Cranley Road, crossing Epsom Road and finishing at Warren Road, a total of 600m. To put the date of 1205 in context, Guildford Castle also dates from that period, with work starting on the original Castle Keep in 1140. This makes Cross Lanes one of Guildford’s oldest historical landmarks. Incredibly this “Green Lane” has survived in a built up area, no more than 1000m from Holy Trinity Church, in the centre of Guildford.

The Waterden Road Conservation Area “Study and Character Appraisal” which is approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance, also refers to Cross Lanes. “It is interesting to note that Cross Lanes, which lies just beyond the edge of the Conservation Area, remains as an ancient track way formed perhaps by the villagers of Stoke on their way to their own manorial courts being held at Warren Farm”.

In 1779 William Aldersey returned to England from a successful career with the East India Company. He opened up the road from Guildford to Woking and bought the paper and corn mills in Stoke. Aldersey bought Stoke and Stoughton from Lord Onslow and laid out Stoke Park.

Prior to the coming of the railways in 1845, the area that was to become Cranley Road, was open farmland, with some extraction of chalk from a number of pits which followed the chalk horizon on the north face of the Downs. Two of these pits survive at Pit Farm and in Meads Road off Boxgrove Road. The land was owned by Nathaniel Hillier. The Ordnance Survey map (1816) shows only Watford Farm, London Road, Epsom Road and Cross Lanes.

In 1801 Nathaniel Hillier bought Stoke Park from William Aldersey and moved into Stoke Park House. Nathaniel Hillier died in 1810 and the estate passed to his elder daughter Harriet and then, as she was childless, to her younger sister Susannah. Susannah Hillier was married to Thomas Cranley Onslow, the younger brother of the 3rd Earl of Onslow. Their son William Hillier Onslow was born in 1853 and became the heir to both the Onslow Estate and Stoke Park when he became the 4th Earl of Onslow in 1870.

2 Victorian/Edwardian History (1845 – 1914)

Guildford began to grow with the opening of the Guildford to London (via Woking) railway in 1845. However, there was no significant development in what was to become the Cranley Road Area until 1867 when work started on the new railway line (Guildford to London via Cobham).

The 1873 Ordnance Survey shows no roads other than London Road, Epsom Road, Cross Lanes and Boxgrove Road.

The new line and London Road Station were opened in 1885. The railway was built in a deep cutting that cut off access to Watford Farm and the chalk pits at Pit Farm. Bridges were built at London Road, Cross Lanes and Boxgrove Road. These three bridges shaped the future development of the area.

In 1892 William Hillier 4th Earl of Onslow returned from New Zealand (where he was Governor). Between 1892 and his death in 1911, the Earl of Onslow began to develop the Cranley Road area, selling land for large out of town villas.

Cranley Road and Pit Farm Road were created to provide access to the farms (Warren and Pit Farm), from Cross Lanes in the West and Epsom Road (then Merrow Road) in the South.

Cranley Road, was named after one of the Earl of Onslow's family names. His father was Thomas Cranley Onslow.

The 1896 Ordnance Survey shows Cross Lanes, together with Lower Edgeborough Road, Cranley Road and Pit Farm Road

The Victorian villas were all individual in design, but shared many common architectural features. They were substantial three storey buildings, set back in large gardens, so that they could be screened by shrubs and large trees. Many of the larger houses also had cottages for gardeners and coachmen.

The built form tapered from the ground to the roof. This was achieved by outbuildings on the ground floor and by building the third floor in the roof space. The roofs are steep pitched with orange or brown clay tiles. Joints and rafters were formed from single lengths of timber, thus restricting the maximum roof span and requiring larger roofs to be constructed in more than one span, resulting in L or T shaped roofs with gables, which reduce the bulk and enhance the appearance.

The roofscape features prominent and often ornamental chimneys. These break up the roof line and add interest.

The walls of the villas are predominately a local orange brick. However, the brick work is made interesting by the use of brick patterns, brick banding, timber frames, tile cladding and stucco. The main elevations would be relieved by using two or three of these features together on a single wall.

The houses had large ornate entrance porches, substantial front doors with brass fittings and stained glass windows in top half.

The Late Victorians and Edwardians were influenced by Art Nouveau and many of the villas have extravagant design features such as turrets or stained glass windows to illuminate the stairs.

The first part of Cranley Road and Maori Road were lined with lime trees to create a "leafy suburb".

Hilgay House was built in 1892 on the land between Cross Lanes, Cranley Road and Watford Farm. This was demolished in the 1960s but the coach house remains as Hilgay and Farthing Cottages.

Cranley Lodge was built in 1895 on the other side of Cranley Road. The lodge survives. It is now divided into flats and the coach house and outbuilding are separate properties (The White Cottage and Vanners).

What is now the Cranley Road Area began to take shape with Cranley Road extending east to Pit Farm and new roads being added joining Cranley Road to Epsom Road.

The first road to be developed was Pit Farm Road. The second new road was Maori Road. In both these roads, substantial plots were laid out for the development of large Victorian villas. These were built between 1892 and 1897.

Maori Road was named to celebrate the Earl of Onslow's Maori connections. He was Governor of New Zealand from 1889 to 1892, during which time there was a volcanic eruption which destroyed the Maori village of Te Wairoa. The Maori Meeting House called Hinemihi was one of the few buildings to survive. The Earl of Onslow purchased the Maori Meeting House, which was shipped home and rebuilt in Clandon Park.

The third new road was Aldersey Road named after William Aldersey, the creator of Stoke Park.

The fourth new road was Hillier Road, named by the 5th Earl of Onslow after William Hillier is father and Nathaniel Hillier, his grandfather.

In 1905 the Tormead School for girls was established.

3 Between the Wars (1914 to the 1940)

After the Great War development continued, but on a smaller scale. This saw the building of medium sized houses both on the existing roads and in new developments at Hilgay Close, Cranley Close and Landsdown.

These houses preserved the building line and were mostly tile clad, two storey buildings, and variations of the Surrey cottage/barn.

In 1930 the Royal Grammar School opened a boys prep school at Lanesborough in Maori Road.

4 Post War (1945 to Today)

Tormead Road was built in the 1950s, connecting Cranley Road to Boxgrove Road.

In the 1960s a number of the Victorian villas were demolished and replaced by 1960s “modern” designs, which made no attempt to preserve the local character. Examples of these are Hilgay and Easington Place.

Other large villas in Maori Road and Pit Farm Road became nursing homes. When new stricter Fire and Safety Standards were introduced, it proved uneconomic to modify them. Most have returned to residential use.

In contrast, Tormead and Lanesborough schools have expanded and preserved the character of the area, by taking over and sympathetically adapting six of the Victorian villas.

A number of villas have been divided into flats. However, there is a continuing and sustainable demand for larger family homes and recently some villas, that were divided, have been restored to single houses.

This sustainable demand comes from

- Families who want to live near the schools.
- Professional families who need to employ live-in child care.
- The need for space to accommodate “home offices”
- The need for “granny flats”.
- The tendency for children to stay in the family home because they cannot afford to buy homes in Guildford.

More recently the push for super high-density development in Guildford has increased pressure to demolish large Victorian villas adjacent to the conservation areas and replace them with high density developments. By 2005, in Clandon Road and Lower Edgeborough Road, 67% of the pre 1896 buildings had been demolished. While in the Cranley Road Area 53% had been demolished.

It seems that, without protection it is only a matter of time before we lose all the Victorian buildings that have until now, defined the look and Character of the area.

References:

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Waterden Road Conservation Area "Study and Character Appraisal" GBC Nov 2003

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