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Truett & Steel's Thornton Heath clock tower, and other works in the Borough of Croydon

Thornton Heath clock tower

The Thornton Heath clock tower, square on plan and clad in Portland stone, stands at the junction of Parchmore Road, Brigstock Road, and Thornton Heath High Street. This district was the 'New Thornton Heath' which developed on the opening in 1862 of the direct railway line from east Croydon Station to London Victoria, with a station (still open) about ¾ mile east of the 'Old' Thornton Heath on the London Road (now the junction of the A235 with the A23).

Curiously, the clock tower has no lettering or date on it to explain when and why it was built. An advertisement in a local directory or newspaper placed by the former Thornton Heath building firm Truett & Steel Ltd claimed this tower to be one of their works.

At first sight, it would be easy to assume that this was one of the many monuments erected in and after 1901 to commemorate the life of Queen Victoria [1819 - 1901], who died in January that year, although the absence of any dedicatory plaque is puzzling. Local street directories, and the records of the County Borough of Croydon, make it clear that the tower was erected in 1899 – 1901, half the cost being subscribed locally, and half met by the County Borough.

Purley Branch Library

Croydon's other most prominent reminder of Truett & Steel's work locally is the purpose-built public library building, now the Purley branch library for the London Borough of Croydon, standing in Banstead Road, just up the hill from the junction of the A23, A235, and A22. This was erected as the chief or central library for the former Coulsdon & Purley Urban District Council, subsumed into the LB Croydon in 1965. The foundation stone on the front of the building is lettered as follows:

This stone was laid by
Councillor J.H. MORTON,
Chairman of the Libraries Committee,
23rd November 1935.
Gold & Aldridge, Architects.
Truett & Steel Ltd, Builders.

Other works of Truett & Steel

Still within the LB Croydon, Truett & Steel Ltd erected estates of housing at several areas, including Norbury, Selsdon, and Sanderstead. A collection of contemporary photographs and brochures relating to these, recently acquired by the Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society, will shortly be deposited on loan at LB Croydon's Local Studies & Archives Service, on level 3 at the Central Library in the Clocktower complex at Katharine Street.

History of Truett & Steel Ltd

The Thornton Heath based firm last appears in local telephone directories in 1990.

In 1975, Truett & Steel Limited celebrated their centenary, claiming to have been founded in 1875 as a partnership formed by Eli Charles Truett, a stone-mason of Thornton Heath, and Robert Steel, a stone and marble-mason from Carshalton. At first the partnership operated from an address in Osborne Road North (now Osborne Road), Thornton Heath.

In 1897, it was claimed, the partnership re-located to 71 Thornton Heath High Street, where they remained until the firm ceased trading locally (in or about 1990). As a result of changing demand, the stone-masons' yard was closed sometime after World War I. The firm's later advertisements often mention a substantial carpentry workshop at Thornton Heath after this.

The partnership was incorporated as Truett & Steel Ltd (company number 171385) in 1920, both families remaining actively engaged in the firm's management for the rest of its existence in Croydon.

Examination of entries in local street directories makes it possible to supplement and to some extent correct the firm's account of the early years at Thornton Heath. It is intended, with the assistance of surviving members of the Truett family, to compile a short account of the history of the concern.

Companies House records that the firm relocated to Portsmouth, with the objectives of developing and selling real estate and of letting its own property. Accounts due to be filed in October 2009 were reported in September 2010 to be overdue. Annual returns were also overdue and. at 17 September 2010 there was a proposal to strike Truett & Steel Ltd off the register of active companies.

Paul W. Sowan

John Whitgift's legacy to Croydon

An article about the life of the Archbishop was published in issue 121 of the Bulletin in March 2004. Since then Sue Turnbull has given a fuller account in a talk to the Society. What follows has been summarised by Brian Lancaster and is taken from the later part of Sue's talk.

At some time around 1594 Whitgift conceived the idea of founding an almshouse in Croydon. It already had two – the Elis David Almshouse and the Little Almshouse – but his was to be on a grander scale. For £200 he purchased the old Checker Inn on the outskirts of Croydon and later other land and properties, including the adjoining Swan Inn, amounting to a total of thirteen acres. The licence for the Hospital of the Holy Trinity was granted in letters patent by Queen Elizabeth on 22 November 1595, among the Whitgift Foundation's most treasured possessions. There were to be a warden and poor Christians not exceeding forty in number. The foundations were laid on 22 March 1596 and 22 March continues to be a day of celebration. The building resembled that of a Cambridge College. It included a chapel and a hall, a suite of rooms for the warden and the Archbishop. Today the Audience Chamber is used for meetings of the Governors, the Archbishop's suite by the Clerk to the Foundation, and the Archbishop's small bedroom as a store cupboard. On 10 July 1599 the Chapel was consecrated by Bishop Richard Bancroft, and the first residents were admitted in October. The 'poore brothers and sisters' were either to be akin to the founder or to have served in his household or from the parishes of Croydon and Lambeth or from certain parishes of the see of Canterbury.

Almost as an afterthought Whitgift included provision for two schoolmasters to teach in Croydon and Lambeth. A tenement had been purchased with one and a half acres of land at Stay Cross (now the end of George Street) and this provided a site for school buildings and a schoolmaster's house.

This school did very well for fifty years but had troubled times later and no pupils by 1801.

In 1856 a court of Governors appointed by Archbishop Sumner was established to manage the affairs of the charity, which by now had a greatly increased income. Two schools were proposed: the first, a poor school opened in 1858 in Church Road. For a while its title was Whitgift Grammar School but was reborn in 1882 and called Whitgift Middle School. The Second, Whitgift Middle Class School, usually just called

Whitgift School, opened in 1871 in North End. In 1931 it moved to Haling Park and Whitgift Middle School moved into North End but because of the confusion of names adopted the name of Trinity School of John Whitgift in 1954. In 1965 it moved into new buildings in Shirley Park and the North End site was developed to become the Whitgift Shopping Centre.

The interior of the Hospital of the Holy Trinity was modernised and refurbished in 1983 and Queen Elizabeth II visited and unveiled a plaque. It has since housed sixteen residents, a warden and the offices of the clerk to the foundation and his staff.

The governors of the Whitgift Foundation decided to develop its elderly care facilities in true John Whitgift style, with the old and the young side by side at Haling Park. Archbishop John Runcie laid the Foundation stone for Whitgift House on 3 February 1984, the date now celebrated as its birthday when White Gifts are distributed, and a complex of sheltered accommodation, residential and nursing care, a chapel and other facilities were built, the first residents moving into the sheltered accommodation in January 1985. It was officially opened in 1988.

The Old Palace, abandoned by the Archbishops in 1780, was put up for sale. After a chequered career, it was used as a girls' school, founded by the Sisters of the Church, from 1889. In 1993 it became part of the Whitgift Foundation and was named The Old Palace School of John Whitgift.

In 1996 the Whitgift Foundation celebrated its quatercentenary with a visit by the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh and Archbishop George Carey.

Today the schools with over 3,000 pupils are famous and influence education worldwide. Croham Hurst School, in financial difficulties, was rescued by the Foundation and merged with Old Palace School but occupying two sites and maintaining a nursery for both sexes on the Croham site. The Hospital has sixteen happy residents and Whitgift House provides care for over eighty people and has recently extended its number of nursing beds. Wilhelmina House in Park Hill Rise has been added to the elderly care facilities. The Whitgift Foundation has now a new Clerk, Martin Corney, and the Foundation is about to enter a new and more high profile era compatible with the 21st century. The Foundation continues a close relationship with the Archbishops of Canterbury, as each holder of that post has special responsibilities as Visitor, and also with Croydon Parish Church. It has valuable archives and antiquities, and an amazing history entwined with that of Croydon.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library

The year 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. Therefore this is a particularly appropriate time to record the existence of a relevant facility that can provide assistance to our members in various ways.

In 2008 the Society received an email from the Natural History Museum (NHM) indicating that they were planning to scan some issues of our Proceedings and Transactions and that they sought our permission to go ahead with this project. The aim was to place the scanned and searchable documents on the website of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) and so make them available to anyone. Since the possibility of the Society initiating a similar project had been discussed in both Council and the Publications Committee, the Society's Council readily agreed to the NHM proposal.

The NHM has now contributed to the BHL files of the issues of our Proceedings and Transactions from the first in 1871 up to January 17th, 1905. These include Volume 1 to Volume 6 part 2 and cover the period in which we were the Croydon Microscopical Club, the Croydon Microscopical and Natural History Club and then the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society. These files can be downloaded to your computer for use offline.

The files can be found on the website by putting 'Croydon' in the search box on the top right of the BHL home page, which is at www.biodiversitylibrary.org, and then selecting 'Titles' in the drop-down categories box. Pressing 'Go' takes you to a page where there is a link to 'Proceedings and Transactions of the Croydon Microscopical & Natural History Club'. The link takes you to a page from which the five searchable .pdf (portable document format) files, totalling 126 MB, can be browsed or downloaded. If you download them it is helpful to put them all in one directory or folder by themselves as then, if you open one of the files in Adobe Reader, you can use the 'Open Full Reader Search' option in the drop-down menu of the Find box and set it up to search for your chosen text in all the files in that folder.

Being a biodiversity resource it is not surprising that the website, if used for searching files online, flags up any binomial names of species that it finds. However, because the first part of any binomials is frequently abbreviated and because the optical character recognition that is used to convert the images to text is fallible, it may be necessary to devise your own search strategy to maximise the chance of finding search terms. That said, the files you have on your computer can be searched for anything that you are interested in – names of places and persons, year dates, etc.

So, it also can be a resource for archaeologists, geologists, local historians and family historians (at this period the Society's membership lists were included in the Proceedings every few years).

Many other useful documents are on the website: if you search for Smee, Alfred as an author you find that there is, not only a copy of his book '*My Garden*', but also a copy of his 1847 book on the then active potato blight – '*The potatoe plant, its uses and properties: together with the cause of the present malady. The extension of that disease to other plants, the question of famine arising therefrom, and the best means of averting that calamity*'.

Similarly, if you search for our member Hinde, George Jennings currently you will find 10 publications under his name. Two of these are separate copies of his doctoral thesis '*Fossil sponge spicules from the upper chalk. Found in the interior of a single flint-stone from Horstead in Norfolk*' that was published in Munich in 1880. One of these copies was contributed by Harvard University and one by the University of California Libraries. Interestingly, each of these copies has a dedication 'with the author's compliments' which is written in a hand that matches specimens of his writing that we hold at the Society's museum. The dedication of our own copy of his thesis is not in that hand but in another; however, since we know that his wife and children assisted him in his work, it is probable that one of them wrote this dedication for him.

Are you going to see what you can find on the BHL website? If you turn up something interesting or useful why not let us know what it is!

John B Greig

Conduit Lane and Croydon's biodiversity and geodiversity

Conduit Lane (bridleway 575) with a length stated on the signpost at each end of half a mile, extends from the east end of Coombe Road (at its junction with Oaks Road and Coombe Lane) to the east end of Croham Road (at its junction with Croham Valley Road, Manor Way, and Ballards Farm Road). It traverses Green Belt land all the way. And it is, or at least most of it is, a very attractive 'green link' for walkers from Shirley almost to Sanderstead, and passes en route or connects such attractive public open spaces as Lloyd Park, Addington Hills, Coombe Wood, and Croham Hurst, with only two main road crossings to negotiate. It functions also as a 'wildlife corridor' and an important element in Croydon's biodiversity and geodiversity heritage.

Opposite page - North end of Conduit Lane as depicted on the 1911 revision of Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plan Surrey XIV(15). The tanks shown near the bend in the lane lie in the area destroyed by the 1950s landfill lorry road, a part of the Coombe Wood public open space currently fenced off from public access. Note also the slight embayment in the slope a little to the north east, probably a spring site; and the pond opposite. The pond in the grounds of Coombe Wood at the junction of Conduit Lane and Coombe Lane is known to have been dug in the 19th century to replace an earlier one filled in at Coombe Lodge.

It is however, currently, less attractive than it once was, and less attractive than it might yet be.

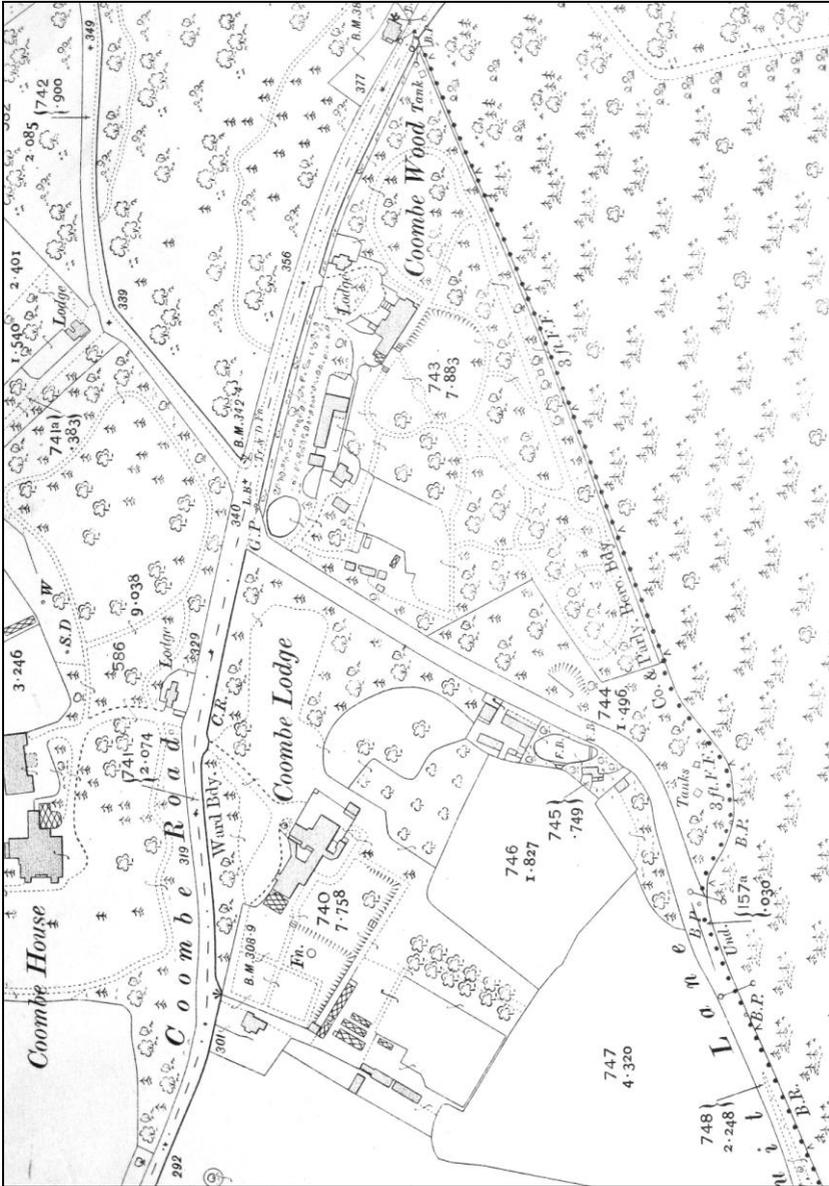
Historically, the lane is a puzzle. It is astonishingly wide between the fence lines, and it is fair to say runs from nowhere in particular (the top end of what was once the cul-de-sac called Croham Lane) to the minor hamlet of Coombe, alongside Oaks Road. Coombe, historically, possessed several significant houses and farms, whilst the east end of Croham Lane had nothing but a few cottages dating from the 1850s alongside a chalk pit. At one point the lane is so steep and muddily uneven that it is difficult to believe it was ever negotiated by wheeled traffic.

It is recorded in John Aubrey's *Brief lives* that William Harvey [1578 - 1657], who demonstrated the circulation of the blood in human beings, sometimes stayed at Coombe with his brother Daniel, where he had artificial caves dug in which he liked to sit in the dark to meditate. These caves were probably, like those investigated by the Society from time to time at Waddon, excavated into the Thanet Sand. The Royal College of Surgeons caused investigations to be made at Coombe in the 1920s to attempt to locate Harvey's 'caves' but without success.

The history of each end of Conduit Lane has been admirably noticed in Brian Salter's two booklets, *Coombe, Shirley and Addington* (1974 and a revised edition in 1985) and *Selsdon and Croham* (1983), although he says all too little about the intriguing bridleway between them.

Conduit Lane runs, for much of its length, just inside the boundary of the old ecclesiastical parish of Croydon with Addington, but diverting at the north end apparently to pass by the springs or 'conduits' from which its name is derived.

It traverses three geological formations, in each of which the flora and fauna reflect the differing natures of the subsoils. These three lengths are now described in order from north to south.



The north end on Woolwich & Reading Beds clay

As also around the eastern edge of Lloyd Park and formerly along Oaks Road, clay within the Lambeth Group beds (better known perhaps as the Woolwich & Reading Beds) has caused the development of a spring-line along the east side of the lane. Society member and Coombe historian W.H. Mills [1869 - 1951] (see *Bulletin* 138, March 2010, pages 11-12) recorded some of the now vanished 'conduit houses' which were generally brick-built water-collecting tanks tapping the springs, from whence 'conduits' (probably lead pipes as at Hampton Court) conveyed water to Coombe Lodge, before the arrival of mains water in this district. The fragmentary remains of one such tank can still be found in a rhododendron thicket just inside Coombe Wood.

There is still wet ground, and the relics of a wetland flora represented by a few sedges, just north of the bend in the lane. Sadly, this interesting area was desecrated in the early 1950s by the construction by Croydon Corporation of a lorry road across it to serve a landfill site in the grounds of what is now the Royal Russell Schools. This intrusive lorry road was not (contrary to undertakings at the time) removed on completion of the landfill, and dumped building rubble has subsequently added to the deterioration of this site. The lorry road cut off a corner of the Coombe Wood grounds, which is still fenced off from public access.

Perhaps at this time the north end of what had at this point been an attractive bridleway was (formally or not is not clear) converted into a motor road, serving Croydon Parks Department's former Central Nurseries. And it has since been converted also into a car park, where fly-tipping does nothing to enhance the scene. An electricity cable coolant pumping station, used also as an unsightly contractors' materials depot, completes the uglification of this part of the 'green link'.

The central part on Thanet Sand

Southwards from the wetland, the lane is unspoiled, running between the slopes of Ballards Plantation (Royal Russell Schools) on the Addington side, and Croydon Council's Coombe Lodge playing fields, with views towards the Norwood Hills and the skyline of central Croydon. This length is characterised by mature oak trees, and much holly.

Where the lane steepens, towards the south, a 'buffer zone' was left on the west side as public open space (at this writer's suggestion) when the extensive grounds of a large detached house called Coombe Dower were re-developed with 30 or so modern houses in Bench Field. Some, but not many, bluebells may be found here. Regrettably, neighbouring households appear to have dumped garden waste in this area, contrary to

the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act, 1990. These people may think 'natural' garden waste is somehow 'good for' public open space, but it is not! And dumping green waste on publicly accessible land is just as much an offence, and just as offensive, as dumping old mattresses and the like.

The south end on Upper Chalk

Beyond the junction with the northern arm of Ballards Farm Road, the lane descends steeply over Upper Chalk. There is a private garden on the east side, and an overgrown and partially landfilled chalk pit on the west. There are several venerable oak trees, and some ash, although these are difficult to appreciate on account of abundant sycamore and elm. Other tree species present here include elderberry and hawthorn. The good chalk indicator species *Clematis vitalba* (old man's beard) struggles to survive against a great deal of ivy. Active management of this strip of land to encourage a good characteristic range of native chalk species would be welcome. Again, as we are close to habitations and to Croham Road, there are problems with fly-tipping and the dumping by nearby householders of garden waste. The ancient hedgerow alongside nearby Pilgrims' Way, also on Upper Chalk, shows what might be encouraged here, including maple, hazel, spindle, and wild hops.

The part-filled chalk pit is shown on LB Croydon development plan maps as 'of natural history interest' and appears to be owned by the corporation. However, it is completely neglected, and again suffers from garden waste dumping. The pit was described in 1905 by the geologist George Young [1862 - 1929] as 'disused for 15 years' and according to earlier Ordnance Survey maps had a lime kiln. It was first dug, perhaps, at about the time around 1855 when the adjoining flint cottages were erected. Between the two World Wars a private house, called Undercliffe, was built on the pit floor. This was destroyed by a V2 rocket during the night of 28 / 29 December 1944. The occupants at the time, Mark Keith Jackson (52), Gertrude Eleanor Jackson (56) and their friend Rosa Lilian Fishpool (56) from Hackney, all died. What was bad luck for them was good luck for their neighbours (including the author of this note then aged four) as the steep pit walls directed the blast upwards and away from nearby houses.

After the war this pit was used by the 7th Croydon Scouts as a site for camp fires (attended by this survivor), and the site of the house is now occupied by another electricity cable coolant pumping station.

An enquiry to Croydon Council in February 2010 as to the ownership of the chalk pit, legal status of the north end of the lane, and management

and other matters has, sadly, received no reply at the time (September 2010) of writing.

Paul W. Sowan

100 years ago

The death of one of our earliest members, Henderikus Martinus Klaassen, occurred on January 22nd, 1910. An obituary of him was published in the proceedings [Anon., (1911). Henderikus Martinus Klaassen. *Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society*, 7(2), xlv]. He was born in Kritzum, Hanover in 1828, had been a seed factor at the London Corn Exchange until his retirement in 1874, and had then started a study of science at University College, London devoting his time especially to geology.

He joined the Geologists' Association in 1875 and, in 1883, contributed a paper "On a Section of the Lower London Tertiaries at Park Hill, Croydon". This was the result of his observations of the railway cutting through the hill and he recorded the structure of the beds exposed and the fossils that he collected from them.

Amongst the fossils he found were the limb bone of a mammal which was named *Coryphodon croydonensis* and leg bones of a huge flightless bird, called after its discoverer *Gastornis klaassenii*.

News and Notices

Storage space — We are looking for somewhere to store our publications for sale as we shall have to vacate a hut in the Whitgift almshouses where most of our books are stored. We need a dry and reasonably warm place about the size of a garden shed from where publications can be fetched five or six times a year.

Clocktower exhibition — An exhibition about Croydon's experience of the Battle of Britain is being held in the Local Studies Library in the Clocktower until the end of December. Much larger than the Library's usual displays, the exhibition includes not only photographs but also contemporary documents and artefacts in glass cabinets: a log book from Archbishop Tenison's school, Olga Kennedy's diary and a map of the Addington area locating where bombs fell.