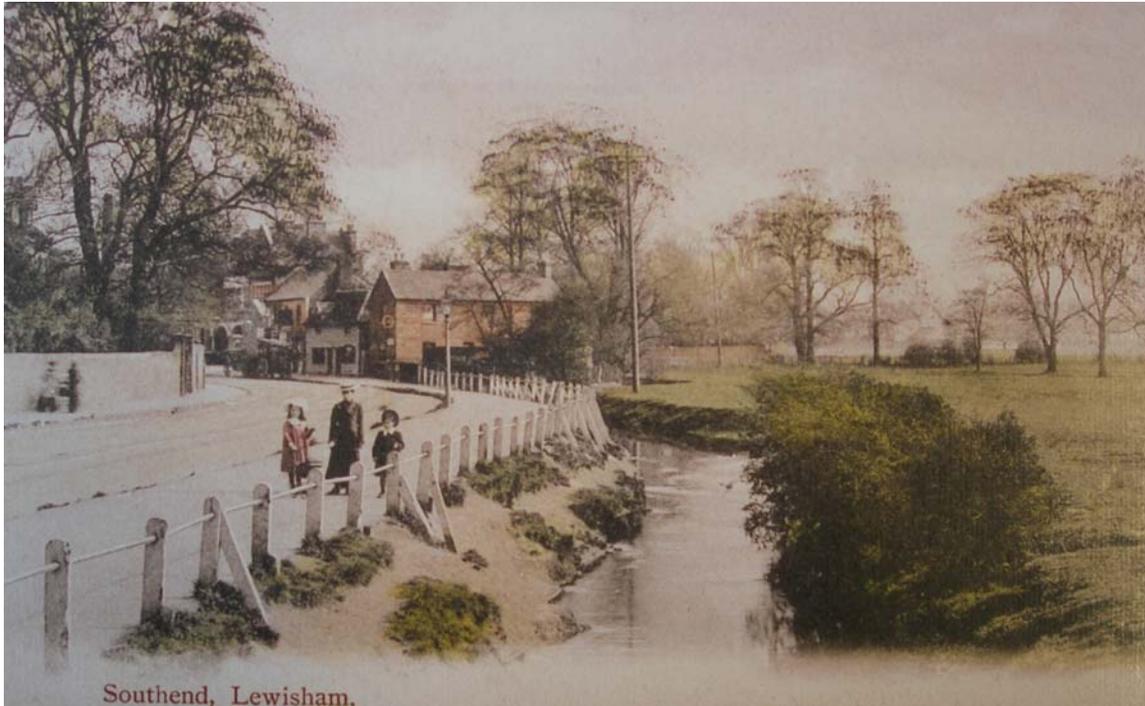


SOUTHEND VILLAGE CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT



Location and setting

Bromley Road runs from London Bridge to Bromley and is one of the main arteries in the Borough of Lewisham, now part of the A21. The road follows a meandering southerly route that alongside the Ravensbourne river to the west, flowing northwards to join the Thames at Deptford Creek. The Southend stretch of Bromley Road is east of Sydenham and about a mile south of Catford town centre. Its most prominent feature today is the Homebase store, set back from the main road behind the remains of the old mill pond. Other landmarks include the Church of St John the Baptist, two large inter-war public houses and an eight storey block of flats known as Nayland House. The study area is generally flat, rising gently to the east and west on the sides of the Ravensbourne valley.

Two other main roads, Southend Lane (A2218) and Beckenham Hill Road (A2015) join Bromley Road in the study area and all three are quite heavily trafficked. Behind these roads are a network of quieter residential streets and housing estates, built speculatively at various periods of the twentieth century.

The general character of the area today is mixed and feels unplanned, reflecting its piecemeal growth.

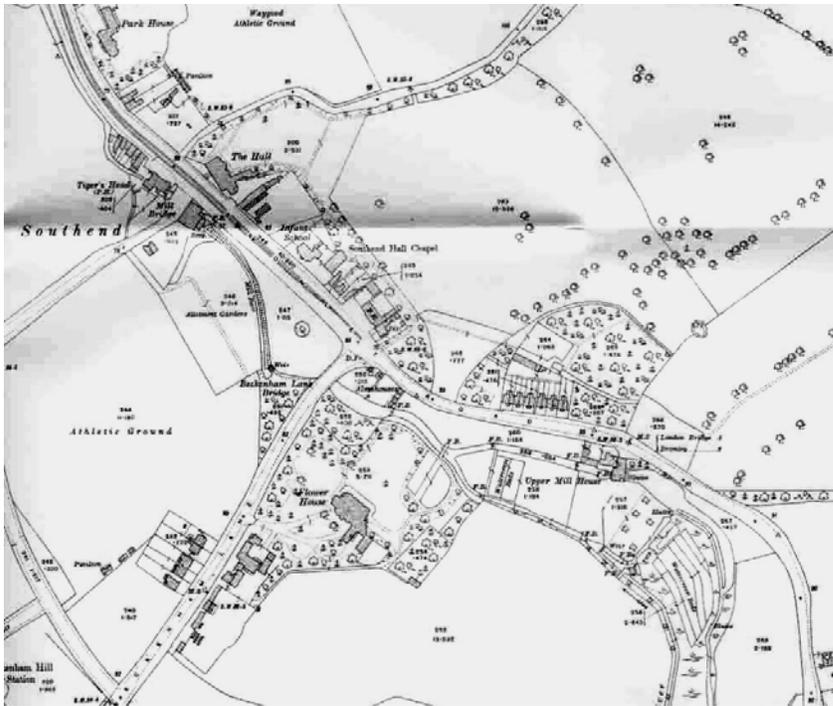
Historical development



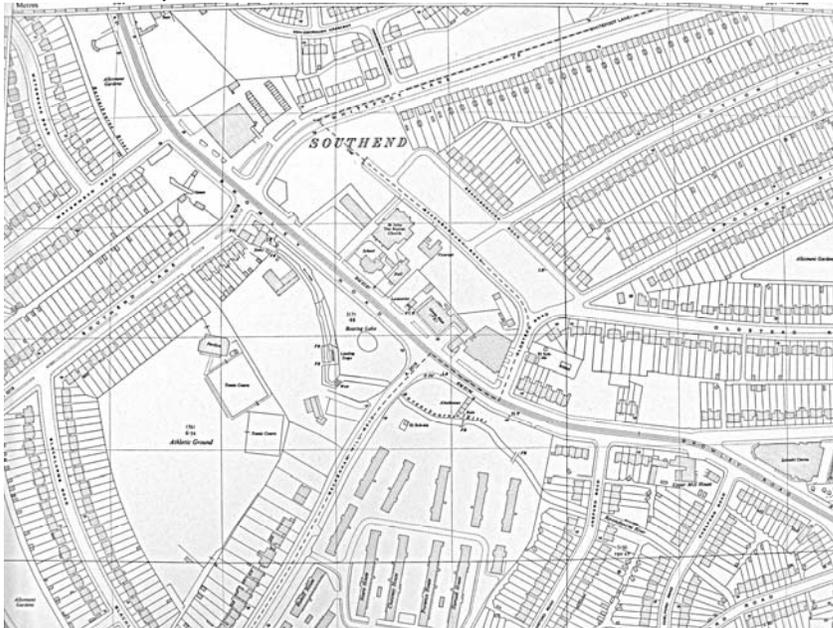
Southend: Ordnance Survey First Series 1863-68

Bromley Road is one of the older roads in the Borough and Southend's name reflects its southerly position in relation to Lewisham. Until the start of the twentieth century it was no more than small, stretched-out hamlet surrounded by arable fields and pasture. The village was too small to support its own church, but it had a Chapel of Ease from the nineteenth century. There was an Infant school next to the chapel and a number of large houses occupied by the local gentry – amongst them Flower House, Park House and Southend Hall – of which almost all traces have vanished.

There were two corn mills on south side of Bromley Road; Upper Mill, immediately to the south of the Tigers Head, and the Lower Mill, close to the junction of the modern Chetford Road. In the eighteenth century the Lower Mill was used for the manufacture of cutlery. From the seventeenth century there were at least three pubs in Southend, including predecessors of the Green Man and the Tigers Head, as well as the Kings Arms, which was demolished in 1858.



Ordnance Survey 1916



Ordnance Survey c1960

The arcadian character of Southend changed forever with the coming of new public transport, bringing the village into the orbit of suburban London and prompting the sale of the farms and rural estates for housing development, including the LCC's Beckenham Estate. In 1892 the London, Chatham and Dover Railway opened the Catford loop of the main line, running from from Nunhead to Shortlands 1892 with stations at Bellingham and Beckenham Hill. This endeavour was followed in 1914 by the tramway from Catford to Southend which terminated at the Green Man, complemented by local omnibus services. Growth began in earnest after the First World War and fell into three main phases: the interwar estates in the period 1918-1939, the large scale post-war blocks, and finally the consolidation after the 1960s, including the retail development of the 1970s and 80s.



Flower House Estate under construction 1948-9

The shopping development along this part of Bromley Road has been in the form of clusters of local shops serving the immediate community, but also filling stations, garages and retail warehouses which, like the pubs, have sought passing trade from Bromley Road. Most recently, the area has witnessed a decline in activity with the closure of the two pubs and a downgrading of the shopping facilities, as well as the demolition of the former Splendid Cinema which once stood at the apex of Bromley Road and Whitefoot Lane.

The Southend area is identified in the Lewisham Unitary Development Plan as an Archaeological Priority Area.



Southend Mill Pond c 1900

Southend today

A trained eye is needed to detect evidence of the former hamlet of Southend as it has been all but obliterated by twentieth century developments, little of which is architecturally coherent or successful. Roads such as Whitefoot Lane have been straightened and widened and the area as a whole has lost the visual richness and intimacy suggested in photographs from a century ago. Development in the area has been opportunistic and piecemeal, taking advantage of outworn or redundant plots without evident regard for their surroundings.

Approaching from Catford, the first building of substance is Catford police station, a classical composition in red brick with an oversized false mansard that gives the building an awkward, top-heavy appearance. Its neighbour, older and rather better, is the remains of Park House, a Victorian mansion in the Jacobean style and now the TA headquarters. It is much altered however, having suffered the loss of its original roof and parapet and a experienced a succession of other changes.

Continuing south, there are former Council flats set back from the road on both sides, including the eight storey Nayland House. These blocks have been refurbished but are not especially distinctive.



Bromley Road today: looking north to the junction with Whitefoot Lane

The former Courts building, a plain shed-like structure, replaced a brick garage and car showroom on the corner of Whitefoot Lane. It has a rather aggressive form in this location and pays little heed to its surroundings.

The Flower House Estate was built by the LCC and opened by Herbert Morrison in 1949. As the name suggests, it stands on the site and grounds of the former Flower House. Although the block forms contrast with their surroundings, the development was stylistically conservative and its interest today is more socio-historical than architectural.

The two public houses have a presence on the highway because of their size and both have some historical associations as successors of earlier pubs on the same sites. The Green Man is in two parts and replaces at least one earlier building on the same site. Today it is a lofty classical block, and a neo-Tudor part to the south.

The Tiger's Head is a typical 'road house' of the interwar period, of a type found across the country. symmetrical neo-Georgian composition from the 1930s, built in red brick with a steeply pitched tile roof,

with projecting columned porticos flanking the entrance. Like the Green Man, it is vacant and boarded-up.

The Homebase store shoehorned in between the athletics ground and the old mill pond, is in the high tech style fashionable in the 1980s, with big glazed barrel vault roof. It now seems rather dated and flanked by car parking offers little to its surroundings. The former millpond later became a boating lake and today has a harder, more formal character than it once had.

Some mature trees on bend help to soften the approach into the area from the south and the lawn in front of the church provides a breathing space, otherwise there are few green elements of note in the study area. The public realm is generally hard and dominated by highways infrastructure – signs, lights and guard rails.

The historic character of Southend village has almost entirely subsumed in the suburban growth of south London and the Some of the redevelopment has been of poor quality especially the former Courts site on the corner of Whitefoot Lane, and the filling station at the apex of Winlaton Road and Bromley Road – the site of the former Splendid Cinema – is a weak termination to the vista.

The residential streets behind Bromley Road are typical of the estates built widely across London and the south east in the inter-war period. They have little or no local identity and many of the houses have undergone changes to their appearance, but the streets have a settled quality.

Buildings of note



St John's Church

Most of the buildings in the Southend area are unexceptional, but there are some interesting survivors: St John's Church 1926-7 – large scale essay in English Gothic with a well ordered interior that belies its austere front; the nave and aisles was planned to be longer. Even in its incomplete state, it is arguably the only building of distinction built in the area in the past hundred years. Its designer was the eminent church architect, Sir Charles Nicholson.



St John's Church Hall 1824 (Former Chapel of Ease)

The adjoining Church Hall, built as a Chapel of Ease to St Mary's Lewisham, built and endowed by J Foster in 1824.



Parish rooms, St Johns

The parish building to the east of the Church forms a group with the Hall and the Church. It appears to be late eighteenth century in origin, but with later alterations.

Conclusion



Southend Village c 1905 – Old Tiger's Head

Southend offers some evidence of the former character of the rural landscape around Lewisham and Catford before the widespread suburbanisation of south London. Today however that evidence is largely documentary, and few physical traces remain; almost all of the old buildings are gone, the roads and lanes have been straightened and widened, and the farmland has been built on. Of the new development, there is no unifying style, scale or material to mark the character of the area and it is relatively anonymous.

Urban Practitioners concludes that whilst Southend area is of some interest, it is not of sufficient architectural or historic merit to support the designation of a conservation area. Furthermore, whilst there is a clear need to revive the area and ample opportunities to do so, there is little that calls for preservation. The best buildings – St John's and the Church Hall – are listed Grade II and therefore have statutory protection for their fabric and setting. In our view, other planning initiatives can be used more productively to regenerate the area.

URBAN PRACTITIONERS
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