Evaluation
Proposed Cobb’s Corner conservation area

Introduction

The Sydenham Society have proposed a new conservation area called Cobb’s Corner conservation area focussing around Cobb’s Corner which is at the junction of Kirkdale and Sydenham Road, just west of Sydenham railway station. The area they propose is shown on the map below. It includes Peak Hill in the north, some of Kirkdale, and part of Sydenham Road.

The area includes buildings such as the Greyhound public house, no. 2 Lawrie Park Road, the Cedar’s on Westwood Hill, the shopping parade along Sydenham Road and the Post Sorting Office on Silverdale.

This document looks at the architectural and historic interest of these buildings and provides an evaluation of the proposal to designate a new conservation area.

The map above shows the boundary of a new conservation area in blue, as proposed by the Sydenham Society. Other adjacent conservation areas are shaded light blue and listed buildings are shown in orange.
History

Sydenham has an interesting social history - a possible derivation of the name is from the Anglo-Saxon “Cippas’ settlement - meaning drunkard’s settlement. A more likely derivation is from “Syp” meaning sheep, “en” (inga) meaning people and “ham” (haema) home of hamlet - ie the home of people who keep sheep. This was a heavily wooded area of fine oaks, yew trees and quiet country lanes - a few cottages among the woods and along a rough road than ran through the wooded area of Upper Sydenham to the lower part called Southend. The inhabitants grazed their animals (cattle, sheep, pigs), collected wood for fuel and drank cider made from the local orchards of apples and pears.

In the 1640s mineral springs, with alleged healing properties, were discovered on Sydenham Common, in the present Wells Park Road and Taylor's Lane area. As demand for the water increased a number of wells was sunk to ensure adequate supplies. Their popularity increased and complaints were made about the “rabble of Londoners” who came to visit the wells. In 1651 the Commonwealth Government was concerned with the number of people gathered at the wells and a declaration was published to behave themselves peacefully at their peril. The popularity of the Wells peaked with visits from George III (reigned 1760 - 1820) and during this period wealthy people began to settle in the area.

The greatest change to the area resulted from the passing of the Enclosure Act of 1810. This proposed the enclosure of all common land in Lewisham except for Blackheath. In 1810 Sydenham Common covered nearly 500 acres. From about 1820 what had been open common land from the Greyhound to the top of Sydenham Hill was gradually built over and Sydenham became a suburban community. Public coaches and private carriages were travelling to the City and Westminster.

Canals became popular for the transportation of goods in the late 18th century. The Croydon Canal Company was formed in 1801 and work was started on the Deptford to Croydon canal following an Act of incorporation passed by Parliament which recognised the town of Sydenham as having water. The canal was nine miles long and was formally opened on the 22 October 1809 with a 21 gun salute in Sydenham, a band playing God save the King and a procession of barges decorated with flags and carrying coal, stone and corn. The canal did not prosper for long as competition came in the form of the railway. The Greyhound Inn was a convenient meeting place for the directors of the company and provided refreshment for the workers who built
the canal. It was also a resting place for those who used the canal for work or recreation. An early painting shows pleasure boats moored against a landing stage beside the inn which had a boat-house.

By 1836 the Croydon Canal had closed and the London and Croydon Railway Company bought up the assets. The Company used the canal bed as a base for the rails and the Sydenham Reservoir was drained so that the railway line could be opened in 1839. Sydenham Station was built almost adjacent to the Greyhound Inn. Around the station the area developed for the middle classes as train fares were too high for the working class community. (Coulter)

The rapid growth of Sydenham in the 19th century can be attributed to the impact of the Enclosure Act, introduction of the canal which was then converted into a railway followed by the relocation of the magnificent glass building, called the Crystal Palace, of the 1851 Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. By the middle of the century there are shops, inns, schools, churches and a busy social life at Bell Green as well as the Dolphin and the Golden Lion. The Golden Lion was also home to a Music Hall Palace of Varieties.

In 1852 the Directors of the Railway Company decided to purchase and relocate the Crystal Palace built by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition in 1851 from Hyde Park to Sydenham. They bought up 389 acres of land on Sydenham Hill - high ground with views of the centre of London that was easily accessible. In 1854 the “Palace of the People” became the world’s first theme park. The vision of the railway company was to encourage Londoners to take a day out ‘in the country’ to visit the new enlarged Crystal Palace set in its own pleasure gardens complete with pools, fountains and a Dinosaur Theme Park. Exhibitions, concerts, conferences and sporting events were held at the Crystal Palace until it burned down in 1936.

By 1870 Sydenham had become a thriving and populous suburb. The heart of Sydenham had shifted from Bell Green and Lower Sydenham to the upper end of Sydenham Road around Cobb’s Corner. Wealthy Victorians looked for fresh air on high ground as they believed the air was healthier. Sydenham Hill had a number of large houses for families with servants and the privacy of large gardens. There was a class divide between the more affluent Upper Sydenham and the contrast with Lower Sydenham where the gas workers and other labourers lived in some of the worst slums in Sydenham.

Right: Map of 1894: Peak Hill Gardens and Peak Hill Avenue can be seen as can the current Greyhound building with the shops on its western flank.
The Old House was the base for the Mayow family who owned most of the land between Sydenham Road and Perry Vale. The last occupant of the house was Mayow Wynell Adams who died in 1898 and the estate was the largest section on Sydenham Road covering from Mayow Road to the Greyhound - a total of 110 acres when demolished in 1902. Shops were built on Sydenham Road whilst the garden area provided the space for the building of The Thorpe Estate.

Above: Map of 1914 showing the Thorpes Estate with commercial buildings along Sydenham High Street.

History taken from Councillor Chris Best’s website.

Buildings in the area

**The Greyhound public house**

Built in 1873 by / for Abraham Steer of South Norwood Park. Two storey large brick chalet or hunting lodge style building with two unmatched double height shallow square bays to the front elevation, decorative timber barge boards, slate roof and sash windows. The building sits behind an open space where pub tables are currently located. The brickwork is painted cream but was original unpainted. This building is on the site of an earlier inn dating to the early 1700s and some of its structure or features may still be incorporated into the existing rear building. The Georgian inn was first referred to as the Greyhound in 1727 and this was a timber framed, weather boarded that faced the common to the west.

Above right: the Greyhound in July 2007-08-16
Right: The Greyhound c 1908
The 1873 pub has a recessed entrance bay containing the front door which is flanked by two Edwardian style curved glass windows. This would have been the entrance to the public house, whilst the entrance to the hotel part of the building was situated on the western elevation. The former hotel entrance is now concealed by a glass porch. This entrance is a tiled room with mosaic floor, stained glass roof and fine Victorian embossed, floral tiles and printed tiles showing vases of flowers. Over the bar at the eastern end of the room are the words “Greyhound Hotel”.

The Greyhound has a level of special interest because it is a Victorian detached pub of simple architectural design and because of its date. Throughout the Georgian and Victorian periods pubs were built on corner sites to help fund the subsequent residential terraces. The 1880s and 1890s was the heyday of the high Victorian pub where much decoration was applied both inside and out. However, the Greyhound was built before this heyday and therefore was a simpler architectural style and was detached which is rare for a South London pub. The style chosen seems to hark back to the hunting days that was soon to disappear to rapid urbanisation. The Greyhound is certainly the location of Sydenham’s oldest inn from its origins in the early 18th century, however, the present day building, built in 1873, is itself one of Sydenham’s oldest pubs.

The building occupies a central location in the proposed conservation area as well as being at the entrance to Sydenham High Street. The pub was part of the development of the area brought about when the Crystal Palace was moved to Sydenham in 1854. Cobb’s Corner (as it was later known) was the higher class end of Sydenham with houses such as those on the corner of Lawrie Park Road (no. 2) and the Cedars (Grade II listed) being built for fashionable and wealthy people who wanted to move to this up and coming area. This can be compared to Lower Sydenham where smaller houses were built for workers at the gas works.

The small addition to the west of the pub was Harold Pace’s confectioners between the wars and appears on the 1894 map. Now so altered that it is of little value.

On Spring Hill a simple house and shop (now residential) today form part of the Greyhound site and were also built by 1894. (Pictured right)

*Early history from Steve Grindley’s history of the Greyhoundy*

**Kirkdale**

*321-323 Kirkdale:* Three storey stock brick terrace dating from c.1845 with modern shopfronts. Stucco cornice and window surrounds. These buildings have been altered by unsympathetic replacement windows and in poor decorative order.

*The Railway public house:* Red brick two storey pub dating from c.1920s having replaced a considerably better pub building of 1868. The pub is of little architectural value although its presence does continue the tradition of having a pub near a railway station.
264-274 Kirkdale: Four storey stock brick terrace with gabled end ‘pavilions’. First floor windows with stucco surrounds having incised decoration and second floor windows having iron balustrades to hold window boxes. Plain slate roof and tall chimney stacks with regular red terracotta pots. A good quality late Victorian terrace with a good traditional-style shopfront at no. 272 (Kirkdale Bookshop).

260-262 Kirkdale: These are part of the previous terrace, but of different design. 260 is of Arts and Crafts style with stone arches above the second floor Queen Anne style sash windows. Mansard roof. Stone dressings. High quality original shopfront. This was formerly Chalk & Cox butchers and more recently the Pine Shop. 262 (the Credit Union) has strong classical design with four Doric columns at ground floor level supporting a classical entablature containing the name of the bank. Italianate stucco window surrounds with bracketed cornices to the first floor. Mansard roof. Architect James Tolley who probably designed the others in this terrace. 262 opened in 1876.

Former Cobb’s Department Store
Prominent two storey stucco corner building with dome fronting the roundabout. A building of interest and quality. Built in 1902 for Walter Cobb who developed his draper’s store into this department store. Large tripartite sash windows, those of the first floor having curved top corners and the window fronting the roundabout being arched with pediment above. Parapet with simple cornice is repeated as moulded string course above first and second floor windows. Dome has green scallop tiled roof and finial / flagpole. Attached to the left is the sole survivor of Lawrie Place, dating from c.1862

Former Marshall & Tweedy, Kirkdale
1936. Moderne influenced building with flat front to roundabout. Three storeys, brown brick, upvc windows, flat roof, curved frontage to estate agent’s office at ground floor level. This building has lost much character due to the removal of horizontally proportioned Crittal windows and also fails to give the same landmark and townscape qualities that the former Cobb’s store has.
2 Lawrie Park Road
Large two storey stuccoed Italianate villa with square three storey tower. Ground floor has entrance portico, plain sash windows and rusticated render. First floor has arched sash windows with simple guilloche detail beneath and bracketed eaves to the slate roof. Possibly built by Banks and Barry c. 1862 as part of the Lawrie Park Estate. A building of significant importance to the area and of architectural value.

The Old Cedars (grade II listed)
Three storey stock brick villa with simple banding between floors and dentilled cornice to a parapet roof. Sash windows. Set in large front and rear gardens with mature trees. Built c.1770s, extended substantially in 1992. Walter Cobb, the owner of the department store, lived here during the 1890s. Its appearance has been altered by the substantial extension although its value at a national level is acknowledged by its listed status.

Peak Hill Gardens
Residential terraces of three storey stock brick houses with two storey bay windows and plan roofs. Out of 19 houses, 16 retain their timber sash windows. A number of original four panel timber doors with side lights remain. Good quality late Victorian housing with plain detailing, built by 1894.

Peak Hill Avenue
Pairs of three storey stock brick three storey houses with hipped roofs and central chimney stacks. Flat fronted. Stucco string course between floor levels, bracketed cornices to ground floor windows and simple moulded surrounds to higher windows. Entrances to sides. Earlier than Peak Hill Gardens, being built c. 1864 and of good
quality simple detailing. Two red brick houses to the eastern end. Traffic is blocked to eastern end giving a tranquil atmosphere to the street.

**Spring Hill**
Terraced houses, three storeys, built in 1970s and therefore not of historic value.

**Peak Hill and Kinver Road**
Late Victorian / Edwardian terraced housing of standard two storey type. Red brick, double height bay windows, stucco detailing such as capitals and brackets to windows and doors. 4-64 Peak Hill is a two storey red brick terrace with large Dutch gables and terracotta detailing. Gabled bays set forward of building line to give impression of detached houses. Good quality street of architectural interest.

**Railway Terrace**
Railway station built 1875. Simple single storey stock brick building with red brick dressings. Two gabled end pavilions flanking recessed booking hall.

Railway Terrace and Silverdale House are four - five storeys and examples of old buildings that have been over-restored with additional storeys having been added to both. Railway Terrace has rendered façade and shopfront with arched windows and applied mouldings.

**Silverdale**
Post sorting office is single storey red brick Edwardian building, built 1896. Sash windows with vertical central glazing bars; “VR” carved in stone above and carved brick aprons below. Crow stepped gable to front, slate roof. A building of definite special architectural and historic interest. Three storey (plus basement) Victorian town house to right of post sorting office. Triple height bay window, bracketed eaves and slate roof. Portico over entrance. Asymmetrical design. Good quality design and an unusual survival in this street, shown on map of 1894 with space beside it for the imminent arrival of the Post Sorting Office.

**Sydenham Road, North side**
Three storey red brick terraces with stone dressings. Many with Dutch gables to each property. Most flat fronted, but some shallow bay windows containing ‘Queen Anne’ style sash windows. Built between 1901-1914 in the same style as the houses of the Sydenham Thorpes estate (designated a conservation area in 2001). A particularly fine group is 33-59 Sydenham Road which although not entirely symmetrical, has a central portion with a prominent roof. Shopfronts are of poor quality, although architectural details such as console brackets and pilasters still remain. Properties
on corner sites generally have two good elevations and corner entrances. This street is a well designed architectural composition with good quality detailing. It is a particularly fine shopping street within the borough and special for being such a long shopping street of early 19th century date with fine detailing and relative completeness.

Above: North side of Sydenham Road  
Right: South side of Sydenham Road

Sydenham Road, South side
This side of the road, although contemporary with the north and of similar scale, is plainer and less decorative. Red brick and slate roofs still used, but low relief stylised gables are set onto the building, rather than being part of the roofline. One original shopfront at no. 16: Mackray, formerly a chemist, the shopfront is probably original and is made of fine bronze glazing bars with “Mackray Chemist” in leaded panes in the top window. The early 20th century streetscape to the south is more broken than the north by earlier buildings (32-34 are early 18th century listed buildings) or modern buildings (such as Somerfield and the Post Office) probably on bomb damage sites.

Taken partly from information supplied by the Sydenham Society
The character of the area

The Greyhound public house is a focal point in the urban environment. It is positioned at the entrance to Sydenham high street and forms a group with the terrace of shops opposite and to the east of it in particular. Two of the 4 buildings (or 5 including the Cedars) around the roundabout actually face the roundabout. The former Cobb’s department store and former Marshall and Tweedy store are both on wedge shaped plots of land and front the roundabout. Cobb’s uses this site particularly well in having a distinctive turret. However, the Cedars is situated further from the road behind a large front garden and the shops and Greyhound face each other across Sydenham Road rather than facing the roundabout. This reduces the impact of the overall group of buildings in the townscape.

Further north-west are Peak Hill, Peak Hill Gardens and Peak Hill Avenue. These are two and three storey mid and late Victorian terraces built in different styles and materials and therefore probably by different builders. These houses fail to have a distinct and positive relationship or coherence with the Greyhound. The rear elevations of Peak Hill Avenue and Peak Hill Gardens back onto the Greyhound and Peak Hill and Kinver Road are much further away and built in different styles. Similarly, no.2 Lawrie Park Road is a fine Italianate house, now converted to flats, but fails to provide a successful link in terms of design to either the Greyhound, the parade of shops or the terraces of the ‘Peak’ roads.

Moving eastwards, it is clear that the shops along Sydenham Road are of the same period, design and possibly even builder as the houses in Thorpes Estate directly to the north. The Post Sorting Office in Silverdale is also designed using the same materials and displays similar detailing although it was built slightly earlier that the Thorpes. The use of red brick, Queen Anne style windows and carved detailing gives all these buildings a strong group value.
Conclusion and recommendation

Whilst many of the buildings in the area proposed as a conservation area by the Sydenham Society have architectural or historic interest in their own right, officers do not consider that the buildings west of the railway have the appropriate coherence and integrity as a group to justify conservation area status.

The commercial terraces along Sydenham Road and the Post Sorting Office however, do have a strong coherence with the Sydenham Thorpes conservation area in terms of style, date and builder and it is therefore appropriate to extend the Sydenham Thorpes conservation area to include them. Most of the buildings in the recommended extension are buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. These are the buildings that the Council has a duty to preserve or enhance when considering planning applications in the conservation area and are shown below.

Above: Map showing Sydenham Thorpes conservation area in light blue and the extension that officers recommend to the south, shown in green. Buildings shaded in orange are “positive” buildings.

Above: houses in Sydenham Thorpes conservation area which similar in character to the commercial buildings on Sydenham Road.