

◀ *Hampstead Village*

▼ *Vale of Health*



For original map visit Historic England: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search>

Background Notes

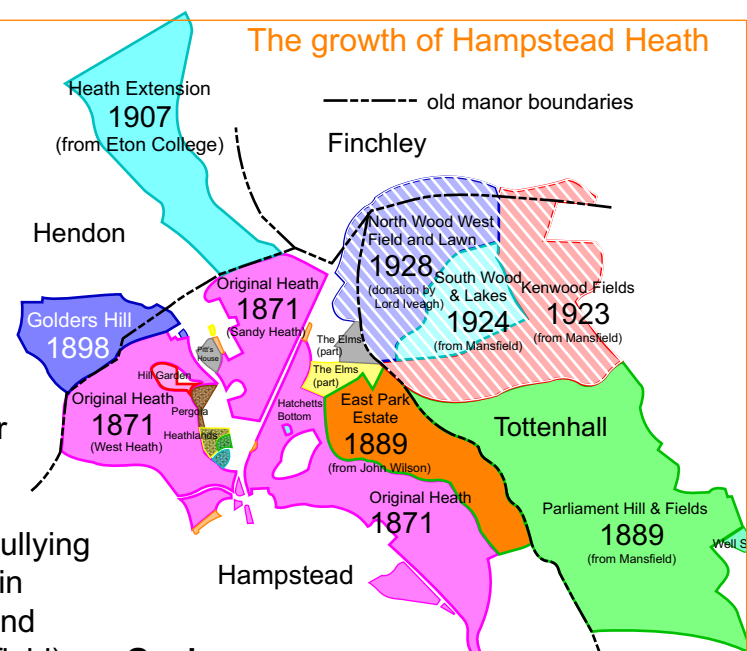
The Heath Grows

The Heath started out as the wastes of the Manor of Hampstead (the area shown in purple) and demesne land (orange). Over time, commoners gained rights on the common such as grazing, and cutting gorse. The common was encroached on in many ways, as usual. The manor came into the hands of the wealthy Maryon Wilson family, of Charlton House (walk 39). It passed to Thomas Maryon Wilson. With the new turnpike from Regents Park increasing value as building land, he decided in 1829 to capitalise by granting building leases and introduced a bill to Parliament to overturn the restrictions on the land left in his late father's will. He hid in it a clause regarding copyholders rights, and a further clause giving him the right to enclose the heath. (He was to try 5 times in parliament for various purposes). When discovered, people were angry and resisted, with the help of powerful neighbours. There was nothing to stop him building his own houses on farmland (but not lease plots) so in 1844 he decided to develop the East Park estate himself and had a road constructed through the estate from Jack Straw's to Pond Street which remains to this day. It crossed a tributary of the Fleet by a new viaduct. He built a

brickworks on the site but ran out of money. When Maryon Wilson died in 1869 the estate passed to his brother John, who was happy to negotiate the sale of the 220 acre common to the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW) and the parts constituting the original heath (in purple) passed into public hands in 1871, albeit in a devastated state. Sir John died in 1876 and the danger of building on East Park resurfaced. George Shaw-Lefevre, assisted by Octavia Hill and others, after much bullying and negotiation, got the landowners in 1889 to sell the East Park (Wilson) and Parliament Hill Fields estates (Mansfield) to the MBW with correspondingly large donations to pay for it. Further tracts of land followed, as shown.

Topology (see map next page)

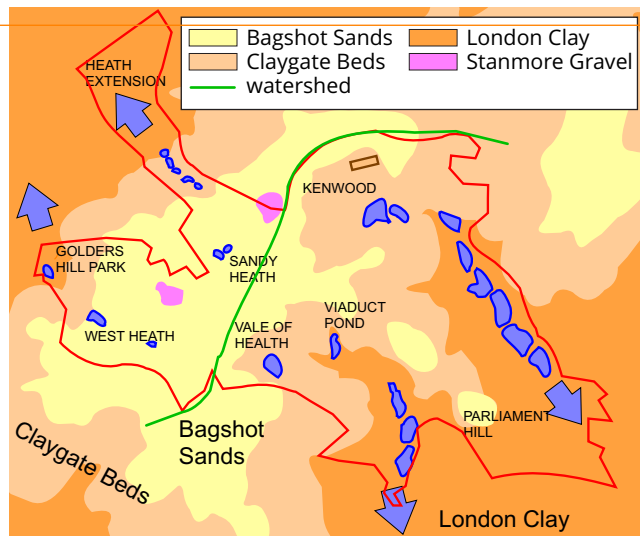
Much of the heath lies across the top of two tributaries of the Fleet River, draining south, creating two valleys and a ridge between. West Heath, Sandy Heath, Golders Hill Park and the Heath Extension are over the watershed and drain northward into the Mutton Brook, thence to the Thames at Brentford. There are three strings of ponds on the tributaries and various others on West Heath, Sandy Heath and Kenwood.



Geology

The highest parts are covered with a deposit of Bagshot Sand from the Ice Age, a pure, variable coloured, finegrained sand, high in iron salts and seams of pebbles. This acid unfertile soil gives rise to heath type vegetation on West Heath, Sandy Heath and Ken Wood. Sandy Heath was exploited by the Maryon Wilsons for its gravels, and the ground there is much lower than the original level, as represented by Spaniards Road. The middle slopes consist of Claygate Beds of variable sand and loam, acid at the top and more clayish and neutral below, and below that, London Clay.

Sources (highly recommended): Hampstead Heath, Alan Farmer; Hampstead Heath Wolton & McDowall



Water

The water of the Bagshot sands is variable. In some places Hampstead's springs are pure, soft and lime-free. Elsewhere the water contains iron carbonate, oxide and sulphate. These rust-brown 'chalybeate' waters were taken for their purgative properties. Several sources are visible near Kenwood, including the Goodison Fountain. Water emerges from between the layers, halfway down slopes, giving localised small patches of mud and acid bog. A gully on West Meadow contains Sphagnum Moss.

Heath Vegetation

Since grazing stopped in the last century the largely treeless heathland has been replaced mainly by expanding woodland and scrub. Only North and South Wood

predates the heathland. Rare trees include wild service tree and midland hawthorn.

Also present today are grassland, hedgerows, ponds and wetlands, along with remnant areas of the original heathland. As you move downhill over different soils, fine-leaved grasses and sorrel give way to lush broadleaved grasses.

Small areas of acid grassland are of particular note, with plants such as heath bedstraw, oval sedge and tormentil.

Over 500 species of fungi have been recorded here, including the rare bracket fungus *Ganoderma lucidum*.

Noteworthy plants include broad leaved helleborine, lady fern, hard fern and lily of the valley (woodland); cowslip, black knapweed, oxeye daisy, devil's-bit scabious and pignut (grassland); marsh marigold, purple loosestrife, yellow iris and water mint (wetland).

Heath Wildlife

Twenty three species of butterfly, including occasionally purple hairstreak, can be seen. Brimstones, Fritillaries, Peacocks and Orange Tips are often visible. Seventeen species of dragonfly and damselfly have been recorded at ponds across the Heath. Over 180 bird species have been recorded recently - lesser spotted woodpecker, whitethroat, garden warbler, jackdaw, stock dove, hobby, great crested grebe, common tern and kingfisher, siskin, redwing,

fieldfare, swallow, wheatear, woodcock, kestrel meadow pipit, shoveler, gadwall. Hampstead Heath is one of the best places to see bats in London and Natterer's, Daubenton's, Noctule, and both species of Pipistrelle are present. Moles, foxes, hedgehogs and muntjac deer are other mammals found on the Heath.

Ⓐ Hampstead Ponds

In 1692 the City Corporation leased the springs on Hampstead Heath to William Paterson and Partners, who formed the Hampstead Water Company. The company gradually made the string of four reservoirs known as the Hampstead Ponds and a further set known as Highgate Ponds. The lowest Hampstead pond was filled in in 1892, and the last water used in 1936 (for industrial purposes).

Ⓑ Boundary

At the time of the Domesday Book an ancient boundary, still partly visible as a ditch, divided the Manors of Hampstead and Tottenhall (owned respectively by Westminster Abbey and St Paul's).

Ⓒ The Tumulus

No one really knows what it is. It isn't Boadicea's grave, or the site of an ancient battle between two tribes.

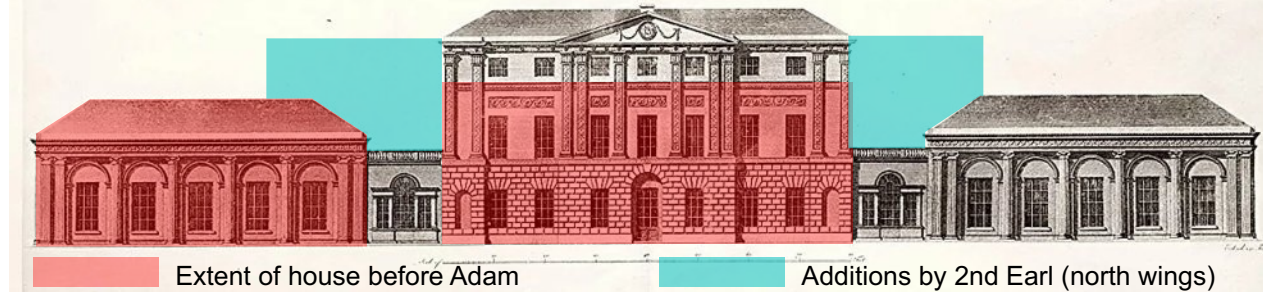
The site was excavated in 1894 and no trace of any burial was found. The explanation considered most likely is that the mound was made in the 17th Century,

possibly for a windmill after the woodland was cleared, and the trees planted later (though there are no paintings of that windmill, and lots of paintings of the trees).

① Kenwood House

Originally the Canewood estate stretched from the Finchley border to Kentish Town. The land was confiscated from Holy Trinity Priory Aldgate by Henry VIII, who then forced Waltham Abbey to receive it in place of Copt Hall Essex. Confiscated by him again in 1532 and sold in two halves, the northern passed eventually to John Bill in 1616, who built the first house. William Bridges probably built the second (two storey) house between 1694 and 1704. This building is incorporated into the central block of the current house.

In 1712 the house was bought by John Campbell, Duke of Argyll, and conveyed in 1715 to his brother & brother-in-law, the Earls of Islay and Bute. The house remained with the Butes until sold in 1754 to William Murray, later Lord Mansfield, by which time it had acquired a fine greenhouse, later called the orangery. Murray was to be Lord Chief Justice for 32 years and it was he who hired Robert and James Adam to improve the property. Adam added another building, the Library, to the east to balance the orangery and restore symmetry. The three buildings were



joined together by two chambers. A fine new full height portico with Ionic columns was added to the north front of the original building, and an extra storey added. The south front was united under a patterned stucco of special oilbased 'Liardet' cement, giving a more informal feel, overlooking the gardens. Adam's designs on stucco were innovative, and got a mixed reception at the time.

The library is by some considered to be Robert Adam's finest interior. The unusual shape of the room engendered a fine ceiling. The house passed to William's nephew, the second Earl, who built the two wings either side of the north front in white brick, and had an expanded service wing built of contrasting purple-brown London stock, relocated from the West side to the East. The stucco hadn't proved very durable, and the ornamentation on the south front is now fibreglass. It was he who had the gardens landscaped by Humphrey Repton and had the property extended northward, rerouting

Hampstead Lane in the process.

Six Earl Mansfields owned the house, but some of them preferred their Scottish residence of Scone. The sixth Earl began renting out the property in 1910, first to HH Grand Duke Michael of Russia, then to Nancy Leeds, American millionairess with Russian connections.

The estate was then sold off in tranches (see map page 1), the house contents already auctioned off in 1922. The House and its grounds were bought by Edward Cecil Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh, to house his art collection, otherwise it would have been sold as a housing estate for 32 villas, and it was Iveagh who bequeathed the house to the nation in 1928.

② Athlone House Gardens

Harry Hallows, the man dubbed Britain's richest tramp, lived in a shack for 20 years and claimed squatters rights. The land was left to charities who sold to a private individual in 2018 and is now a garden.

F Viaduct Pond

When Thomas Maryon Wilson wanted to construct a road down the length of his East Park estate he had to contend with a boggy tributary of the Fleet. He had to drain the unhealthy swamp and build a viaduct to take the road and it proved expensive. His plans came to nothing. The bricks of the viaduct were made with clay from the brick field, now a flat grassy recreational area further down the track and the bricks were baked in a brick kiln on the site.

G The Pergola

This raised walkway is set amidst some wonderfully dramatic gardens. Its history goes back to 1904 when soap magnate Lord Leverhulme purchased a Georgian house called The Hill which he demolished to build what is now Inverforth House. The idea of the pergola was to extend the level area outside the house and at the same time provide privacy from the public on the Heath below. He enlisted the help of Thomas Mawson, landscape architect. He had no need to purchase spoil for the construction. He offered to transport and dispose of the spoil from the construction of the Northern Line nearby for a fee! Progress was quick, and the Pergola was finished in 1906

H The Hill Garden

A well-known actress from Covent Garden

Theatre, Mrs Lessingham, applied for, and obtained despite violent opposition from local copyholders, a grant of land on which she built Heath Lodge. Lord Leverhulme subsequently bought the estate and demolished the house with the aim of extending his garden. His application to abolish the right of way between his two properties was rejected, so he extended his pergola across the lane using a bridge. The walled hill garden was purchased by LCC and opened to the public in 1963

I Golders Hill Park

In 1767 a colourful and somewhat shady character by the name of Charles Dingley carved out an estate for himself south of Golders Green at Golders Hill. Landscaping by John Coore with advice from Humphrey Repton. By 1897 the estate was put up for auction and after various battles it was bought to prevent developers building flats and opened as a public park. The Victorian pile of a house, on the highest point of the land, was bombed out in the Second World War.

J The Heath Extension

It was fear of developers on the doorstep that precipitated Henrietta Barnett to form the Hampstead Heath Extension Council in 1903. At that time the land, the Wylde Estate, belonged to Eton College. The original plan to buy an 88 acre extension to

the Heath did not attract sufficient funding, so it was reduced to 80 acres, leaving a strip of building land around the edge made more valuable by the amenity to pay the difference. The rest of the Wylde estate was bought for Hampstead Garden Suburb, over which there are fine views.

K Sandy Heath

was so named because it lay over a large deposit of Bagshot sands and gravels. The Lord of the Manor, Thomas Maryon Wilson, exploited this as an income. When the Midland Railway extended its line to create a new terminus at St Pancras he granted the company access to the sands and 30 cartloads a day were extracted leaving pits up to 25 ft deep. Spaniards Road marks the original surface level.

L Vale of Health

Despite its name, this area started out as a malarial bog at the source of the Fleet known as Hatch's/Hatchett's Bottom until the Hampstead Water Company drained it in 1777, making a reservoir. Squatters moved in and with the coming of the railway, the community grew to around 50 dwellings and became home to factories, tea-houses, boat rides, grottoes, arbours and a fairground. With time poets, authors and artists moved in. Building in the Vale was curtailed in 1872 when the Metropolitan Board of Works bought the Heath, limiting construction to the existing area.