THORPE HAMLET HISTORY GROUP

Article 2 : THE BIG HOUSES OF THORPE HAMLET
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Introduction

Much of Thorpe Hamlet before 1900 was countryside and it had several large houses, with considerable land attached. Many were early Victorian, built for the wealthier people of the city, to enable them to escape the filth and slum surroundings in the centre of Norwich. It was also considered to be healthier to move where the air was fresher, plus the added bonus of the breathtaking views over the Yare valley. Most of the Thorpe Hamlet area was at one time owned by the Harvey family but was sold off over the years. Most of the large houses have now gone, being replaced with mainly terraced housing. Today we have only 4 large houses remaining: Mousehold House, Hill House on Hill House Road, Ferryside on Ferry Road and Holmwood on Harvey Lane.

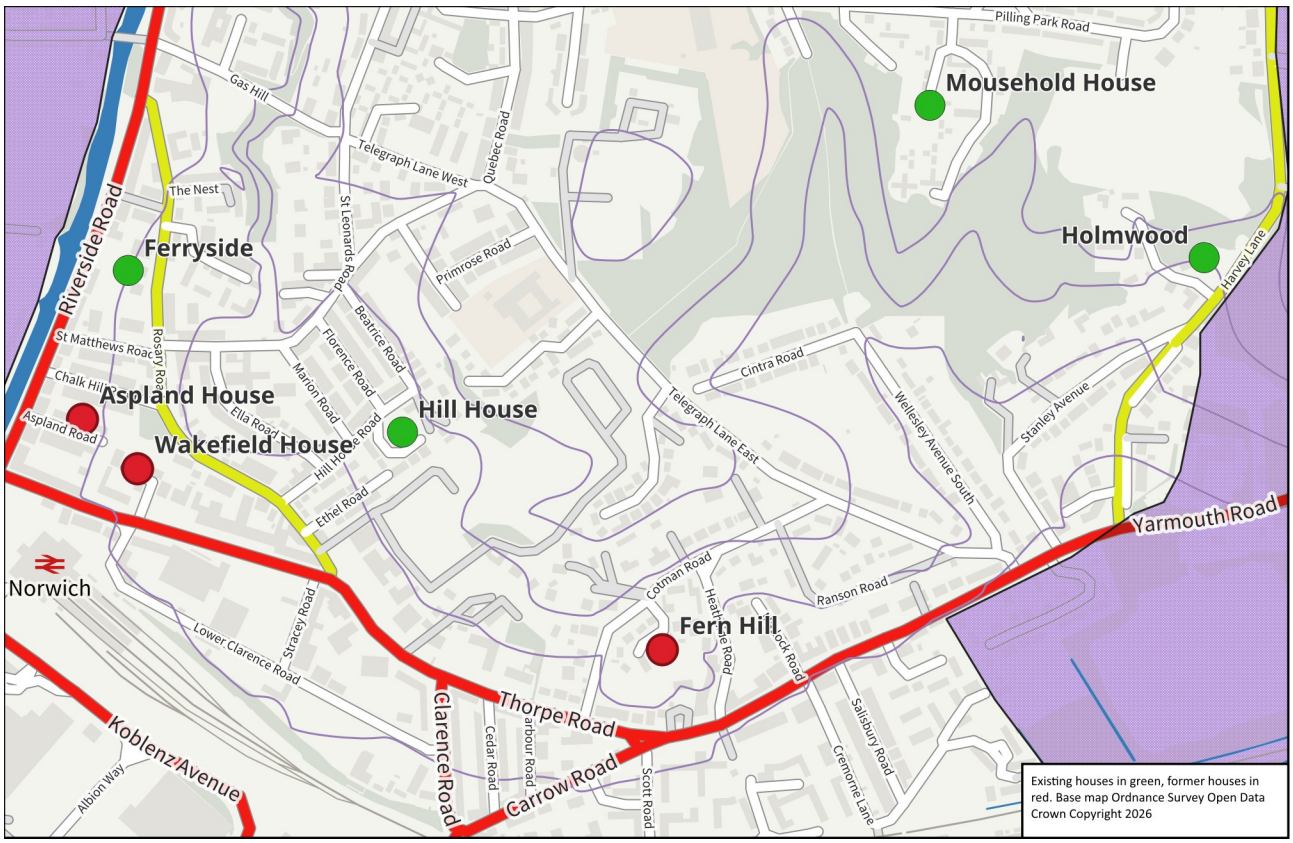
The houses can all be seen on the Ordnance Survey six-inch to the mile map of 1886, available online from the National Library of Scotland at http://maps.nls.uk/view/101582876.

Lost houses

There were several other large houses which have long since disappeared, one such being Wakefield House on Thorpe Road. In 1901 this was a private girls school run by three sisters. The school later relocated to further along Thorpe Road and is now a care home situated on the junction of Rosary Road and Thorpe Road. The school was then owned by a Miss Dorcas, who was a teacher at the original school. The original house was demolished in the late 1940's after having suffered severe bomb damage. The site was purchased by the Council and on it they built a Registry Office and Library. These were subsequently demolished and the new development, Old Library Mews, now stands in its place.

Aspland House on Aspland Road was at one time a maternity home in the 1930's and 40's. It later became offices and was eventually demolished. New houses now stand on the site.

On Thorpe Road we had many large houses but Fern Hill, built by solicitor Isaac Bugg Coakes, who owned the land once belonging to the Harvey's, was one of the grandest. It had extensive grounds which were later sold off as building land. The house was left empty after his death in 1909 but used as a T.B. hospital for soldiers during the First World War. After the war it was left empty again until used as a hotel in the 1930's. Fern Hill was later demolished and houses built on the site around the Cotman Road area.



Mousehold House

Now to the large houses that remain. Mousehold House sits in the middle of the Plumstead Estate and was originally surrounded by eight and a half acres of land. This beautiful Georgian house was owned by the Harvey family. When they purchased the house in the mid 1800's they had it extended by the architect, William Mear. Mousehold House was bought from the Mousehold House Harvey's by Norwich City Council in 1930 for the sum of £13,700 for the purpose of building the Plumstead Estate. Most of the estate was built before the Second World War and the flats date from 1961. Local historian, Geoffrey Goreham, fought to save the house from being demolished as part of the development of flats in William Mear Gardens and in 1964 moved his family into the house to save it from being vandalised, whilst awaiting a decision to be reached by the council. What he thought would be only a few months, turned out to be a 4 year occupation. If it wasn't for his determination to save such a beautiful house, there would probably now be a 16 storey block of flats on the site. Mousehold House has the distinction of being hailed as the poshest council house in the country since being converted into council flats in the early 1970's.

Hill House

Hill House remains standing and is now used as offices but most of the surrounding land which was owned by Isaac Bugg Coakes was sold by him to build the terraced housing and roads of Thorpe Hamlet. This was on the condition that the roads would be named after his daughters, now known as the Lady Roads. Primrose, Florence, Ella, Beatrice, Marion and Ethel. Also built on the land were Thorpe Hamlet Infant and Junior Schools and the Crome and Stuart schools.

Ferryside

Ferryside, tucked away at the back of Ferry Road, is today used as offices but was once a home to a member of the Bolingbroke family.

Holmwood

Holmwood is now a residential home.

Today we have memories of the houses we have lost over the years but are lucky to still have a handful to pass by and wonder what went on within their walls in days gone by.