

THE OAKMOUNT TRIANGLE CONSERVATION AREA

Towards an Appraisal

Introduction

The following pages set out material collected on behalf of the Oakmount Triangle Residents' Association in preparation for an application for Conservation Area status. Use is made of the headings given by English Heritage in its guidance document, *Conservation Area Appraisals. Defining the Special Architectural or Historic Interest of Conservation Areas* (1997). The material presented shows clearly that the area has the historical, architectural and social characteristics required of a conservation area.

Although the Oakmount Triangle is now a tract of Southampton townscape, it has preserved within it elements of a much older rural landscape. This can be traced back at least as far as the thirteenth century and is probably much earlier. The framework was provided by fields mapped in the mid-seventeenth century and continued as the boundaries of Highfield House Estate when that was created, probably before 1800. The estate was sold as an entity in 1910. Most of the buildings in the Triangle were erected over the next twenty years. Although a variety of styles is present, one form dominates and is characteristic of the work of one major developer, John Smith. He was responsible for much of the residential building in sub-urban Southampton before and after the First World War. Almost uniquely, the houses in the Triangle remain largely unchanged since they were first built, and retain many original features, both outside and in. The maturing of the gardens has provided an attractive sylvan setting. Social stability has been remarkable. Not only has population turnover been low, but also the association of professional people with the area has continued over a period of some ninety years.

1.0 Location and Population

1.1 Location (Fig. 1)

Oakmount Triangle consists of four roads: Blenheim Avenue, Leigh Road, Oakmount Avenue and Westbourne Crescent. Its southern edge is about 2 km (1.25 miles) north from the Civic Centre of Southampton in a straight line and its western edge borders Southampton Common. The area slopes away from the Common in a south and south-easterly direction and its height ranges from 41.1 m above sea level near the western end of Oakmount Avenue to 38.4 m at the junction of Westbourne Crescent with Blenheim Avenue and 31.7 m where Oakmount Avenue meets Blenheim Avenue. The geology underlying the more elevated part of the Triangle, ie. Westbourne Crescent, the western half of Leigh Road and the upper half of Oakmount Avenue, consists of undifferentiated 'River Terrace Deposits' of Quaternary Age. These are 'mainly gravels made of flints, with a considerable sand content' and are locally described as *hoggin*. The whole of Blenheim Avenue, the eastern part of Leigh Road and the lower half of Oakmount Avenue are underlain by the Wittering Formation of the Bracklesham Beds of Eocene age (about 50 million years old), described as 'laminated clays and sands with clay laminae'¹.

1.2 Population²

Three Output Areas³ provide data from the 2001 Census for the Oakmount Triangle area. Two of these, OOMSNC009 and OOMSC0041, cover most of the Triangle, but the third, OOMSNC0038, includes Crofton Close and the Uplands Way area, as well as the northern side of Oakmount Avenue.

¹ British Geological Survey, 1987.

² Census, 2001.

³ 'Output Area. The lowest level of Census data available. Output areas are subdivisions of 2003 wards and each represents approximately 125 households'.

Table 1: Oakmount Triangle: Demographic Characteristics, 2001

Output Areas	Total Population	Density Persons/ha	Gender		Marital Status			
			M	F	Never Married	Married	Divorced	Widowed
9	308	31	151	157	119	133	22	34
38	316	53	157	159	157	119	21	19
41	205	55	107	98	118	59	19	9
Total	829	41	415	414	394	311	62	62

The total population of the three Output Areas was 829 people (Table 1), but we estimate the population of the northern side of Oakmount Avenue in 2001 at 64, giving an *actual* population for the Oakmount Triangle of about 577. This is equivalent to 0.26 per cent of the entire population of Southampton and 4.01 per cent of that of Portswood Ward. The mean density was 41 persons per ha, less than the figure for Southampton as a whole (44 persons/ha) and much lower than that in Portswood Ward (55 persons/ha). The distribution of the sexes showed an almost equal balance. Some 37.5 per cent of the population were married and 8.4 per cent were widowed, while 46.2 per cent had never been married. Age distribution (Table 2) shows a balanced community with a predominance of mature people, in which those 26 and over formed a majority (68.5 per cent) and those 40-65 were the largest single group (32.6 per cent).

Table 2: Oakmount Triangle, Age Distribution, 2001

Age Group	Total Number of People	Percentage of Total Population
1-15	99	11.7
16-25	168	19.8
26-40	138	16.3
40-65	276	32.6
65 and Over	166	19.6
Total	847	100.0

Over 60 per cent of the population were economically active, most as full-time employees (Table 3). The majority of the population was classified as 'Higher and Intermediate Managerial or Administrative or Professional' (37.8 per cent) and 'Supervisory; Clerical; Junior Managerial or Administrative or Professional' (32.1 per cent), but 16.9 per cent was classified as 'On State Benefit; Unemployed; Lowest Grade Workers', perhaps the result of the proportion of the population aged more than 60

Table 3: Oakmount Triangle: Number of People Economically Active, 2001

Output Areas	All People	Economically Active	Full-time Employees	Part-time Employees	Other
9	219	140	94	16	30
38	228	138	85	19	34
41	174	102	64	14	24
Total	621	380	243	49	88

(Table 4). More than 47 per cent of the population possessed Level 4/5 qualifications (Table 5), compared with 18.8 per cent for Southampton as a whole and 32.2 per cent for Portswood Ward. More than 80 per cent of the people had lived at the same address for over a year in 2001, indicating a high degree of stability in the Oakmount Triangle population (Table 6).

Table 4: Oakmount Triangle, Approximate Social Grade, 2001

Output Areas	All People	AB	C1	C2	D	E
9	266	113	87	12	10	44
38	262	115	95	8	15	29
41	189	59	59	17	21	33
Total	717	287	241	37	46	106

Categories

- AB: Higher Intermediate Managerial, Administrative, Professional
- C1: Supervisory; Clerical; Junior Managerial, Administrative, Professional
- C2: Skilled Manual Workers
- D: Semi-skilled and Unskilled Manual Workers
- E: On State Benefit; Unemployed; Lowest Grade Workers

Table 5: Oakmount Triangle: Level of Qualifications, 2001

Output Areas	All People	No Qualification	Level of Qualifications					
			1	2	3	4/5	Other Level Unknown	

9	222	36	13	38	21	109	5
38	226	29	18	44	30	97	8
41	175	24	25	23	21	79	3
Total	623	89	56	105	72	285	16

Table 6: Oakmount Triangle, Migration, 2001

Output Areas	Lived at Same Address One Year Ago	Lived Elsewhere One Year Ago
9	267	41
38	241	73
41	167	36
Total	675	150

2.0 Origins and Development

The outer boundaries of Oakmount Triangle coincide exactly with those of the Highfield House Estate as shown on the sale plan of 1910, but they are considerably older. The western boundary is defined by remnants (up to 1.5 m high) of the turf bank and ditches which marked the edge of Southampton Common and have been incorporated into some of the gardens of Westbourne Crescent (Fig.2)⁴. These date back to 1771, when the City Council contracted with John Vaughan to make new fences on the northern and eastern sides of The Common, but they probably redefined the banks and ditches created in 1577 when The Common was originally enclosed. The earliest written record of Southampton Common itself comes from 1228⁵, and some form of perimeter demarcation probably existed by that date. On its eastern side The Common abutted the Manor of Portswood.

⁴ Velecky 2000, 105.

⁵ Thomson 1974, 16.

2.1 The Manor of Portswood

Two land grants of Henry I to the Priory of St. Denys in 1127 contain the earliest references to what became the Manor of Portswood. St. Edith, daughter of Edgar, King of England, and abbess of Wilton, who seems to have had a special devotion to St. Denys, may have established the community itself in the tenth century. Although Henry I's grants formed the core of the monastic estate, the property was increased with grants of meadow and demesne by Stephen (1137) and the wood called *Porteswood* by Richard I (1189)⁶. Portswood Manor was the largest source of income to the Priory down to the community's dissolution in 1536⁷. Two years later it was granted to Francis Dawtry, a burgess of Southampton knighted by Edward VI and later Sheriff of Hampshire. By 1570 the manor was in the hands of Dawtry's stepson, John Knight⁸. A second John Knight commissioned a plan of the manor of Portswood, dated 10 December, 1658.

The coloured plan, now much faded and difficult to decipher, was reproduced as a line drawing by Skelton and analysed by 'G.W.M.' (Fig. 3)⁹. The plan shows the eastern edge of The Common and two fields immediately adjacent to it named, from north to south, *Upper Westwoods* and *Westwoods Pond Close*. Both border on *Westwoods Middle Ground* (Fig 4). All three were recorded as demesnes, that is land retained by the lord of the manor for his own use. They may have possessed this status since the twelfth century. *Upper Westwoods* formed much the largest part of the Highfield House Estate when this came into existence before 1800, but to it was added a triangle of land taken out of *Westwoods Middle Ground*. The north-eastern boundary of *Upper Westwoods* and part of that of *Westwoods Middle Ground* were incorporated into the present landscape with the creation of the Highfield House Estate and fossilised by their adoption as the boundary

⁶ Blake 1981, xxxv; Farmer 1997, 150-51.

⁷ Blake 1981, xxxvii.

⁸ Blake 1981 1; Skelton 1894-97, 164.

⁹ Skelton 1894-97, 164.

for properties laid out on Oakmount Avenue roughly a hundred years later. In the mid-seventeenth century the two fields abutted *New Coppice*, a large field which remained in existence until encroached upon by the building of Oakmount House (c.1850). The old oak and chestnut trees along the boundary at the rear of Oakmount Avenue may date from this phase of the field's history but could be older. The 1:2,500 maps of the area also show access from Highfield Road to the stables and associated buildings of Highfield House at the western end of this line and there are hints in some of the documentation that the track continued south along this boundary. The Estate Plan of 1910 also shows a sewer (the 'main sewer' of the sale catalogue) on the same alignment. Much of what survived from *New Coppice* became a playing field when a boys' preparatory school moved into Oakmount House in 1907¹⁰. The field was subsequently built over with the development first of Woodstock Drive (1984-85) and later of Crofton Close (1990-92).

The southern boundary of *Westwoods Pond Close* as it existed in the mid-seventeenth century formed the northern edge of the ornamental gardens associated with Westwood House, as shown on the famous 1846 Ordnance Survey Map of Southampton¹¹. In addition to the boundary of the two estates, the first edition of the 1:2,500 map of the area (1878) shows a track leading from the north-south track along the edge of the Common (*Lovers' Walk*) across the southern end of what had been *Westwoods Pond Close* to the drive leading east from Westwood House to Brookvale Road. This disappeared subsequently when the boundary was straightened for the building of Winn Road (from 1880¹²). However, some at least of the trees which stood on the original boundary between the Highfield House and Westwood House estates appear to have survived to the present day, while the track may be represented in the double lines which defined part of the boundary on 1:2,500 maps down to at least 1946¹³.

¹⁰ Information from Joe Savage, the last headmaster of Oakmount School, 1989.

¹¹ Ordnance Survey 1846.

¹² Leonard 1989, 151-52.

¹³ Ordnance Survey, 1:2,500 Hampshire, Sheets LXV3 and LXV7.

2.2 Highfield House Estate (Fig. 5)

The origins of the Highfield House Estate are obscure, but the house was typical of the substantial detached residences ('ornamental villas') built by business and professional people, including higher ranking officers in the army and navy, on the fringes of many English towns, starting in the late eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth¹⁴. In the case of Southampton, ornamental villas first appeared to the north of the walled town in the 1720s with the creation of Bevois Mount from an existing farmhouse (Rance 1980), but their development gathered pace from the 1760s when the town became a fashionable resort for London society and reached its fullest extent in the early nineteenth century¹⁵. Westwood House (also developed from a farmhouse c.1805) (Fig. 6) and Portswood Lodge (c.1800) were situated in the vicinity of Highfield House; Oakmount House was to follow c.1850.

Table 7: Owners and Occupants of Highfield House and Estate

Captain, later Admiral, Edward James Foote (c.1810-33)

John Goater (1834)

Colonel Henry Metcalfe Wardle (1835)

Friend Williamsen (1853-55)

Admiral William Morier (1855-63)

William Henry Ogden (1863-1881)

Jane Ogden (1881-1893)

William Henry Gingell (1893-1896)

Mrs. Emily Mary Lee (née Gingell)(1896-1910)

Ellen Annie Lee and Alice Mary Lee (1910)

¹⁴ Slater 1978.

¹⁵ Patterson 1966, 39-60; Kingman 1970.

John Smith and the Newcombe Estates Co. Ltd (1910-13)

John Smith (1913-26)

Highfield House and estate existed before 1800. They are shown on the first edition of the 1-inch Ordnance Survey sheet (Old Series) for the area published in 1810 (Fig.7). The coastal section was surveyed as a matter of high priority between 1797 and 1810¹⁶. An application in 1811 for permission to build a road across the Common from the Southampton turnpike (The Avenue) to land 'lately acquired' suggests that a Captain Foote was already in possession by the time the Ordnance Survey map was published. Skelton's Guide to Southampton described the house c.1820 as a 'pleasant and agreeable villa', 'on an elevated situation, commanding picturesque views in every direction' (Fig. 8)¹⁷.

Captain Edward James Foote RN (1767-1833) had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy during the Revolutionary War with France (1792-1802)¹⁸. He commanded the frigate *Niger* at the battle off Cape St. Vincent (1797) and then the 38-gun frigate *Seahorse* in the Mediterranean (1798-1800). Subsequently Foote served as captain of the Royal Yacht, *Princess Augusta* (1802-12), at the specific request of George III. Promoted to flag rank in 1812, he became second in command at Portsmouth two years later, but saw no further service after the peace in 1815. Foote appears to have moved into Highfield House in 1819, after previously letting it out¹⁹. Foote became a Vice-Admiral in 1821 and was knighted a decade later (Fig. 9). He played a leading role in Southampton's affairs and became a serving burgess in 1823. He died at Highfield House in 1833, aged 66, and was buried at his parish church, St. Mary's South Stoneham.

¹⁶ Harley 1969; Harley and O'Doneghue, nd.

¹⁷ Skelton 1818, 61; Skelton 1823, 99.

¹⁸ Tracy, 2004.

¹⁹ South Stoneham Poor Rate Books, 1814-20.

Foote has two major claims to fame. First, he was acquainted with the novelist, Jane Austen, who lived in Southampton in 1806-08 and mentions a visit to Captain Foote's house in the country²⁰. Two of her brothers were in the Navy and may have known Foote. His other claim to fame, though, is his published attack on Nelson for his conduct in the Bay of Naples in 1799²¹. Foote was temporarily the senior British officer on station when, with the other allied commanders there, he signed an agreement made with anti-monarchist rebels and French sympathisers in Naples giving them safe conduct to Toulon. Nelson arrived soon afterwards and not only abrogated the agreement but had the rebels tried and hanged. Foote had given his word to the rebels and felt that Nelson had dishonoured him. He complained to the C-in-C Mediterranean, Admiral Keith, at the time and found the matter taken up in Parliament when he returned to Britain in 1800, but 'out of a combination of patriotism and prudence, he kept his peace' until Nelson was dead²².

On Foote's death Highfield House was put up for auction by Messrs. Driver of 8 Richmond Terrace, Whitehall, London²³. It seems to have been bought by John Goater, but Colonel Henry Metcalfe Wardle was living there a year later, though he may have been simply a tenant (Table 7). Wardle or Wardell is a shadowy character. He was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Second or Queen's Regiment of Dragoon Guards on 22 June, 1809, after being a cornet for three years. He was still with the Dragoon Guards in 1812, but thereafter disappears from the *Army List*²⁴. Since Wardle/Wardell does not appear to have been listed in the Indian Army²⁵, he may be assumed to have taken service in a foreign army and there reached the rank of colonel.

²⁰ Letter of 7 January, 1807. Chapman 1952, 48 (172).

²¹ Foote 1807, 1810.

²² Coleman 2002 192-95, 220, 228.

²³ *Hampshire Advertiser and Salisbury Guardian*, 27 July, 1833.

²⁴ *Army Lists* 1809-1812.

²⁵ *East India Registry and Directory* sampled for 1812, 1813, 1820, 1825 and 1830.

The next owner was William Morier (1790-1864). He came from a distinguished Levantine family of diplomats and merchants. His brother, James Justinian Morier (1780-1849), was also a novelist and is best remembered for his *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824). William, however, joined the Navy. He served in the Mediterranean (1807-10) and then in the short war against the United States (1812-15), but did not become an admiral until 1855²⁶. The census books for 1861 reveal that seven servants lived in Highfield House in his time, while six people occupied the lodge.

On Morier's death the estate passed to William Henry Ogden, a retired stockbroker of Southampton, on 23 June, 1863. Ogden's will (1881) made provision for his sister, Jane Ogden, to enjoy the property for her lifetime and then for it to pass to his nephew, William Henry Gingell, for his lifetime. On the nephew's death, Highfield House was to pass to Mrs. Emily Mary Lee²⁷. Since her maiden name was Gingell, she was either Ogden's niece or the daughter of his nephew²⁸. Emily Mary Gingell married the Rev. John Morley Lee in 1855, the year in which his father, a London builder, bought him the living of Botley and he became the rector²⁹. Mrs. Morley Lee moved to Highfield House on his death (20 January, 1903)³⁰. Her two daughters, Ellen Annie Lee and Alice Mary Lee, lived with her until her death on 6 January, 1910. They jointly inherited the property. On 21 July, 1910 Waller and King brought the 'fine old-fashioned family residence' and 24 acres of land to auction at the Auction Mart, their offices in Above Bar (Appendix 2)³¹. It did not sell. The sisters, then living at 9 Winn Road, sold the estate privately on 6 December,

²⁶ Lane Poole, 2004; Johnston 1998.

²⁷ The succession of owners from Williamsen to Mrs. Morley Lee is taken from *Abstract of Title of Mr. John Smith ...*, 1922.

²⁸ *Declaration of Canon Streatfield*. Streatfield was a friend of the Morley Lees

²⁹ Venn 1951, 132.

³⁰ *Kelly's Directory*, 1903.

³¹ Highfield House Estate, sale catalogue 1910. *Southern Daily Echo*, Tuesday 19 July 1910.

1910 to John Smith and the Newcombe Estates Co. Ltd for £10,000. John Smith was a prolific local builder based at Avenue House (now Ramsey Hall) on The Avenue. Smith bought out Newcombe Estates in 1913 and he became the sole owner of Highfield House Estate and its principal developer.

John Smith (1855-1926) was a controversial figure. Described as leading a quiet life and being connected with the Congregational Church on the Avenue, he was absorbed in his construction business. 'By enterprise and keen business acumen' he expanded his firm into probably the 'largest of its kind in Southampton'. At his death, it was estimated that in over thirty years of activity, he was responsible for erecting more than 1000 houses in the suburbs of Southampton, notably in Shirley. He built many of the houses in Oakmount Triangle. His obituaries report that he was a 'persistent litigant', frequently in conflict with the City Council over the interpretation of building byelaws and permission for development³². For example, in January, 1920 he was found erecting two houses in Oakmount Avenue, even though the plans had been rejected in the previous October. Moreover, the joists were not of the quality and thickness required under the byelaws, while the road itself had not been laid out in accordance with the byelaws and no sewers had been provided³³. The most celebrated case was over the erection of an apartment block in Devonshire Road. Smith ignored the building byelaws and the Council began to demolish the structure. Smith accused them of trespass and the case went to court in Winchester. He won and was awarded £1200 in damages, as well as an injunction to keep the Council's men away from his property. The action seems to have caused him considerable stress. He died suddenly on 8 July, 1926. No fewer than 160 employees preceded the hearse from Avenue House to the Old Cemetery and formed into two lines when the cortège passed through the gates³⁴.

³² Obituaries in *The Echo* 14 July, 1926 and *Hampshire Advertiser and Southampton Times* 10 and 17 July, 1926.

³³ *County Borough of Southampton Minutes and Proceedings of Council and Committees*.

³⁴ *The Echo* 14 July, 1926, 6; *Hampshire Advertiser and Southampton Times* 10 July, 1926.

When John Smith and his associates bought the Highfield House Estate, it had been advertised as 'offering to Building Societies, Syndicates, Speculators, and others a splendid chance of purchasing for **immediate development**, as the estate possesses, unquestionably, building features of a most exceptional and valuable character, rarely to be met with'³⁵. Although the area was still considered to be largely rural, the tide of building advancing north from the old town of Southampton began to encroach upon the Highfield House Estate from the 1880s when development began on the Westwood House estate on its southern border. Further development could be anticipated when the tramway on the Avenue was electrified to the company's stables at the southern end of Highfield Road (1904), in existence since at least 1888³⁶. The forces driving expansion in the built-up area were, first, the general growth in the population of Southampton (65,325 in 1891; 119,039 in 1911) and, second, the expansion of professional work in the city. Unemployment and socio-economic distress were acute in the working-class districts at the beginning of the twentieth century, while labour disputes affected most activities. Paradoxically, however, the demand for professional and managerial skills increased with the coming of the trans-Atlantic liners, enhancement of the port facilities and the transformation of shipbuilding and repair activities at Woolston and in the dock estate³⁷.

The development of the Highfield House Estate began in January, 1911 when plans for 'the laying out of roads and sewers' were submitted by the architects, Weston and Burnett, to the Council's Public Lands and Market Committee. The original plans included a proposal to build roads across The Common to The Avenue. Although approved by the Committee, this aspect of the plan was rejected by the Council following letters of

³⁵ Highfield House Estate, sale catalogue 1910. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ Mann and Ashton, 1998, 43-44; *Kelly's Directory*, 1888-89.

³⁷ Patterson, 1975, 119-129. For example, the White Star Line moved its centre of operations from Liverpool to Southampton in 1907 and J.I. Thornycroft moved from Chiswick to Woolston in 1909.

opposition from individuals and organisations in the town, including the Common Lands Protection Association (28 June, 1911). The architects finally withdrew it, and the amended application was approved (12 September, 1911)³⁸. Work on laying out the roads began before the end of the year, as revealed by dates on the fire hydrants. However, the Council remained concerned about the definition of the boundary between the Highfield House Estate and The Common. The records imply some encroachment by the Estate. Agreement was reached in April, 1912. The owners of the Estate offered to give up 'a strip of land westward of the existing iron boundary fence for the whole length of the Estate, subject to the Owners being allowed to provide a wicket gate entrance to the Common from the back garden of each house abutting on the fence'. The Council accepted this proposal 'at their pleasure' and subject to specified conditions. The design and colouring of the wicket gates had to be approved by the Public Lands and Markets Committee; the entrances were not to exceed 3 feet in width; a shilling a year was to be paid to the Council; and an agreement reached with the Town Clerk for each house³⁹.

Smith had already been forced to specify the minimum value of the proposed houses. This was to be £700 in Westbourne Crescent, 'with the exception of a small portion near the tramway depot', but £500 in Blenheim Avenue and Leigh Road⁴⁰. The difference is apparent today in the different size and character of the houses in the three roads. *Kelly's Directory* for 1912-13 reveals that 6 houses were then inhabited, 5 on the north side of Blenheim Avenue and one, the *Red House*, on the west side Westbourne Crescent (Fig. 10). Subsequent editions of *Kelly's Directory* allow the progress of development to be traced, though inconsistencies in the data make this a misleading source with which to work.

³⁸ County Borough of Southampton, 9th November, 1910-9th November, 1911: 117, 200, 269, 424, 491, 511, 586, 621, 726.

³⁹ County Borough of Southampton 9th November, 1910-9th November, 1911: 708; 9th November, 1911-9th November, 1912: 189, 218, 543.

⁴⁰ County Borough of Southampton 9th November, 1910-9th November, 1911: 269.

Building began on the north-west side of Leigh Road in 1912 and continued there and in Blenheim Avenue and Westbourne Crescent in piecemeal fashion into 1913-14 (Fig. 11). No attempt was made to build houses consecutively along any of the roads. Houses on the south side of Blenheim Avenue, the south-east side of Leigh Road and the east side of Oakmount Avenue were inhabited by 1914-15. Development continued during the First World War (1914-18), though the number of houses reported to be newly inhabited fell away in 1918-19. No new residents appeared in 1920 and only three in 1921. This probably reflects the shortage of labour, the lack of buyers and problems over the supply of finance and building materials. Development picked up again during the rest of the 1920s (Fig. 12). Apartment blocks appeared in the shape of Oakmount Mansions (first noted in 1923) and Westbourne Mansions (1925). The construction of Leigh Mansions (first reported in 1925) involved the demolition of Highfield House, which survived, apparently uninhabited, until then.

By 1930 almost all of the present buildings in Oakmount Triangle had been constructed. Although intended for families, it is clear from *Kelly's Directories* that some of the houses were divided into flats, while others were put to different uses. No. 28 Blenheim Avenue was used by the Rotary Club from 1924 to 1926, while No. 16 Leigh Road contained a school from 1925 to 1936-37 run by the Misses Weekes, whose parents had bought the house on completion in 1912. Prominent residents before the Second World war included the Anglican priest, William Slater Sykes (1863-1951)⁴¹ at *Balderstone* (47 Blenheim Avenue); the Borough Electrical Engineer, William Gilbert Turner, at *The Nook* (44 Blenheim Avenue); and Major Thomas Kenyon Pardoe (born 1873) who had been commissioned into the Warwickshire Regiment and had served as Adjutant to the Indian Volunteers (1907-11) but in 1916 was Assistant Embarkation Officer⁴² and living at *Woodlands* (6 Oakmount Avenue).

⁴¹ Venn 1954, Part. 2, Vol. 6, 100. Sykes was a Cambridge graduate and ordained priest in 1881. After serving in various northern parishes he became vicar of Wilcot in Wiltshire (1904-09) and then licensed preacher successively at Winchester (1909-10) and Chester (1920) cathedrals. He died in Birkenhead.

⁴² *Army List* 1916.

2.3 The Second World War, 1939-45

Southampton was a prime target for German bombing raids during the Second World War. Not only was it a centre for shipbuilding, ship repair, the production of aircraft components and the construction of aeroplanes, notably the Spitfire, but motor vehicles, accessories and components were also made there. An airfield lay nearby and, of course, the docks were of major significance.

The devastation of the city centre by major raids in the autumn of 1940 and spring of 1941 forced businesses and offices to relocate to the suburbs. Amongst these were the wholesale provision merchants, Misselbrooke and Weston, who established depots at 2, 4 and 6 Blenheim Avenue, while the builder, William Dibben and Sons, took over 9 Westbourne Crescent. The Royal South Hants. and Southampton Hospital established a nurses' home at No. 17 Westbourne Crescent and the Ministry of Works (Maintenance Division) opened offices further along at *The Red House*, No. 19⁴³. The solicitors, Ewing, Hickman and Clark, left Portland Terrace and rented rooms at 14 Oakmount Avenue, two doors away from the home of Mr. Ewing himself.

During the War, over 2,600 high explosive bombs were dropped on the City and more than 30,600 incendiaries. By its end, more than 3,500 properties had been either totally destroyed or so badly damaged that demolition was necessary. 631 people were dead, 481 of them killed in 1940⁴⁴.

Not a single house or apartment block in Oakmount Triangle escaped unscathed (Fig. 13), though Kingston's *Diary of Air Raids* names Highfield and Portswood specifically as districts where bombs fell on only three occasions – 17 November, 1940 (Highfield), 19

⁴³ Kelly's *Directories*, 1938-39, 1948-49.

⁴⁴ Berger 1952.

March, 1941 (Portswood) and 1 May, 1944 (Highfield)⁴⁵. The amount of damage in the Triangle, however, varied considerably and was related to both the distance from the exploding bombs, which landed in the area and also the direction of the blast (Fig. 13). No. 10 Oakmount Avenue, the home of the solicitor J.A Ewing (see above) seems to have taken a direct hit and the back was completely demolished, the only one in the Triangle to be so badly affected (Fig. 14). The houses on either side were so badly damaged that demolition was deemed necessary. No. 12 lost its roof, and is remembered in the area as being used for a while by the Home Guard for training purposes. It was refurbished. No. 8, like No. 10, was completely rebuilt. A bomb exploding at the junction of Westbourne Crescent and Oakmount Avenue in 1942 wrecked part of Westbourne Mansions, already badly damaged in the previous year (Fig. 15), and damaged No. 32 Oakmount Avenue so severely that it was rebuilt. Houses in Blenheim Avenue, too, were badly damaged (Fig. 13), while the effects of shrapnel can still be seen (2004) in the front garden walls of Nos. 29 and 31.

2.4 Recent Developments

In the immediate post-war years Nos. 8, 10 and 32 Oakmount Avenue were rebuilt and the other damaged houses in the Triangle were repaired. Misselbrooke and Weston relocated to Winchester Road and Dibbens moved their offices to Winn Road. The Ministry of Works, however, retained No. 19 Westbourne Crescent until 1955-56, while hospital staff used No. 17 until 1974/75.

Development also re-started soon after the end of the War (Fig. 16). Maisonettes were erected on the site of No. 34 Oakmount Avenue. Most of the surviving open spaces were filled up, notably on the south side of Blenheim Avenue. The process continued into the 1960s with the building of two detached houses on Westbourne Crescent and the erection of four town houses at the western end of Oakmount Avenue, on a plot which, following

⁴⁵ Kingston, nd.

use as a vegetable garden, became the builders' yard for Chilworth Estates⁴⁶. *Leigh Court* was built on the site of *Kelvedon* on Leigh Road following a fire in 1960. The largest house in the Triangle, *Gallia*, a spacious Arts-and-Crafts style house at the south-western end of Blenheim Avenue, which – uniquely – faced the Common, was divided into three flats before 1951 and demolished in 1974/75. Warden-assisted accommodation for elderly people was built on the site by the City Council and opened in October, 1977. Meanwhile, No. 5 Blenheim Avenue became *Braeside Nursing Home* (by 1951) and was subsequently turned into a private and commercial hotel, *Blenheim Lodge*. The hotel had expanded by 1966 to take over the neighbouring houses, Nos. 1 and 3 (Fig. 17). It became a student hostel (*Methodist International House*) in 1973. After being offered to the University as student accommodation, it was bought by three families (Brown, Chiari and Lawson) in 1982 and the individual houses were reconstituted during the early 1980s. This consolidated a trend away from multi-occupation in the area.

During the 1950s and early 1960s many houses in the Triangle were converted into two or three flats (No. 47 Blenheim Avenue contains 6 flats) and small purpose-built blocks were erected (Nos. 20 and 32 Oakmount Avenue; *Leigh Court*)⁴⁷. As a result the Triangle seemed to be on the edge of a transition in the 1960s. It could easily have slipped into an area of multi-occupation and consequent neglect. The trend was gradually stopped by two developments. One was the closure to traffic of the link from The Avenue to Oakmount Avenue (the former drive to Highfield House) in 1973. Until then the route to Brookvale Road had developed as a 'rat-run' to Portswood Road. Following closure, the area became quieter and safer. This added momentum to the second development in train sporadically since the early 1960s. Hospital consultants, dentists, and University and Polytechnic/Institute staff began to infiltrate the area, attracted by conveniently located large houses. The new owners began to restore their properties into single-family dwellings, a process which continued through the 1990s into the new millennium.

⁴⁶ Kelly's *Directory*, 1951.

⁴⁷ Kelly's *Directories* 1951-75.

Formal recognition of the distinctive identity of Oakmount Triangle resulted from the formation of the Oakmount Triangle Residents' Association in 1981. Established initially to resist the re-development of Nos. 1, 3 and 5 Blenheim Avenue for an apartment block following the closure of *Methodist International House*, OTRA has been sustained not only by concern over various planning proposals for the area but also by a genuine feeling of community in the Triangle expressed, for example, in the street parties in Leigh Road organised for the fiftieth anniversary of Peace in Europe (1995), the Millennium (2000) and the Queen's Jubilee (2002)(Fig. 18). The Triangle's 'closed' physical nature had already been established with the exclusion of through traffic (see above).

Official recognition of the area's special architectural character came with the formulation of *Development Guidelines* for the Oakmount School Site during 1989⁴⁸ and the acceptance of its recommendations when planning permission was granted to the developers (Alfred McAlpine Homes Southern Ltd.) by the Strategy and Development (Plans) Sub-committee at a series of meetings during 1989 and 1990, following public consultation⁴⁹. The *Development Guidelines* recognised the sensitive nature of the proposed development between the Herbert Collins designed Uplands Estate with its 'garden city' character and the area of large detached houses along Brookvale Road and in the Oakmount Triangle⁵⁰. As well as recommending that the new development should reflect the character of the surrounding areas, the *Development Guidelines* also recommended the use of 'structural landscaping' for the 'protection of the existing neighbourhoods'. This included the planting of a strip at least 10 m wide along the southern boundary, that is along the boundary with properties in Oakmount Avenue⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Directorate of Strategy and Development, 1989

⁴⁹ *Daily Echo* 23 April, 1990. See also City of Southampton 1990, Council Meeting of 27 June, 1990, p. 188, Minute 30; Council Meeting of 28 November, 1990, p. 177, Minute 14.

⁵⁰ Directorate of Strategy and Development, 1989, 3.1 and 3.2

⁵¹ Directorate of Strategy and Development, 1989, 6.2 and 6.4

The 'Planted Strip', as residents of Oakmount Avenue know it, now defines the northern boundary of Oakmount Triangle.

New buildings appeared in the Triangle around the millennium. Second plots originally attached to No. 31 Blenheim Avenue and 5 Leigh Road were sold and developed for, in the first instance, a town house with integral garage (No. 33 Blenheim Avenue) and in the second for a detached house (completed 2004). After conversion into flats and then passing through a brief phase as a retirement home and subsequently a refuge for asylum seekers, No. 45 Blenheim Avenue was demolished in 2001, on the grounds of a risk of collapse from subsidence, and an apartment block (*Marlborough House*) erected in its place, with its entrance relocated to Oakmount Avenue. Although all three are clearly modern buildings, their designs and finish are in keeping with the general character of the area. A second plot attached to 4 Leigh Road was sold separately from the house, after the original proposals for the demolition of the house and the erection of five town houses across the site was rejected in 2004. At the time of writing, a traditional-style detached house is being built on the site.

3.0 Relicts of Former Land Use (Fig. 19)

Although the Oakmount Triangle has been a built-up area since the 1930s a number of features in the present townscape have survived from earlier types of land use.

1. The relicts of the boundary bank and ditch of Southampton Common, dating from at least 1771, are reminders of the manorial associations of the area.

2. The outer boundaries of the area define fields, which were held in demesne by the Lord of the Manor of Portswood and date back to at least 1658.

3. The fields themselves were incorporated into the Highfield House Estate before 1800 and this remained a recognised landscape unit until the development of the estate for housing following its sale in 1910. Relicts of Highfield House in the present landscape include:

- a. The Lodge (c. 1860) at the western end of Oakmount Avenue, at the point where the private drive left the Common (Fig. 20);

- b. Two stone-capped, brick gateposts (including pieces of ironmongery) and sections of ornamental wall marking the formal entrance to the estate (Fig. 21);
- c. The line of the drive, preserved in the western-most section of Oakmount Avenue as far as the curve seen in both the modern road and the original drive;
- d. A section of brick wall between Nos. 38 and 40 Oakmount Avenue (Fig. 22) which formed the eastern edge of an enclosure marked as Plot 1753 on Ordnance Survey maps dating 1867-93. This was probably the 'productive old world kitchen garden' mentioned in the sale catalogue of 1910. (Another section of wall, similar in style to the sections of ornamental wall by the Lodge, survives east and north-east of the tennis courts behind Southampton University's Avenue Campus. It may be a relict of the formal gardens shown on Ordnance Survey maps to the east of Highfield Road, which possibly belonged to Uplands, a substantial property on Highfield Road, or even at an early stage to Highfield House itself);
- e. Some, if not most of the mature trees on the eastern boundary of Oakmount Triangle, behind properties on Oakmount Avenue, probably date from the 'ornamental villa phase of development, if not before.

4.0 Archaeological Significance

The most important archaeological features in the area are the surviving sections of the bank and ditch between Southampton Common and the former Manor of Portswood. Excavation would reveal the form and structure of this ancient boundary feature and possibly establish its age. The former lodge of Highfield House and the associated walls are of some archaeological significance as examples of structures associated with the ornamental villas, once distinctive elements in the landscape north of the walled town of Southampton. They should be preserved and perhaps made the subject of a comparative study. The site of Highfield House itself largely lies beneath Leigh Mansions, but the central section might be sounded in the space between this block and Westbourne Mansions. Excavation here would reveal something of the sequent occupancy of the site, as well as more about the structure of Highfield House itself.

Although the Southampton *Sites and Monuments Record* contains nothing for the Triangle, the recovery of flint tools of Palaeolithic date (500,000-40,000 BC) from the

wider vicinity suggests that similar items might one day be discovered there since they are often associated with the river gravels characteristic of the area⁵².

5.0 Architectural and Historical Qualities of Buildings and the Contribution which they make to the Special Interest of the Area

5.1 General Description

A survey of Oakmount Triangle carried out on behalf of OTRA confirmed the overall impression that the area is dominated by substantial detached houses (Table 8), the great majority of which were built before the Second World War (1939-45) and some even before the First World War (1914-18). The detailed results of the survey are included as Appendix 3.

Table 8: Oakmount Triangle: Building Character, 2004

Building Type	Number	Percentage
Detached House	104	87.4
Semi-Detached/Terrace	10	8.4
Apartments	5	4.2
Total	119	100.0

There is a remarkable uniformity between the houses built before the Second World War in all four roads, despite the twenty-year period over which the former Highfield House Estate was under development (Fig. 23). Almost all of them (96.7 per cent) have pyramidal or hipped roofs covered with traditional clay tiles (84.4 per cent). Only two houses have slate roofs. Red-brown brick is the predominant building material Frontages are characterised by one or two gables above bay windows (80.5 per cent). Over half the houses have pebble-dashed gables (57.8 per cent)(Fig. 24) and a further 3.0 per cent can be described as ‘half-timbered’ (Fig. 25). The windows are predominantly of

⁵² Southampton City Council: *Sites and Monuments Record*. An abstract was kindly made available by Ingrid Peckham, Southampton City Council.

casement form and most retain the original wooden members (Fig. 26). The majority of houses have a verandah around the front door (72.4 per cent), in some cases extending to the full width of the house (Fig. 27). Most have kept one or more chimneys (94.5 per cent), and more than 40 per cent possess an original garage (42.2 per cent), in some cases contemporaneous with the house (Fig. 27). Widespread individual features of interest include front doors, most of which are glazed (often leaded and in some cases with coloured glass as well)(Fig 28). A few of the pre-War houses have retained their original cast iron guttering (3.3 per cent) but rather more still have cast-iron hoppers (11.1 per cent) and down-pipes (35.6 per cent)(Fig. 29).

Of the five apartment blocks in the Triangle, three (Oakmount Mansions, Westbourne Mansions and Leigh Mansions) date from the 1920s (Fig. 30). They originally contained substantial apartments in keeping with the social character of the area at the time, but these have been subdivided in recent years. Despite their size (3-4 floors), the build date and style of the apartment blocks ensured that they blend in well with the neighbouring houses. The peripheral location of the apartment blocks, conformity with the building lines of the adjacent houses and the use of gables and traditional roofs reduce their dominance of the Triangle's townscape.

Buildings erected in the Triangle after the Second World War are more diverse than their predecessors. Although the great majority are detached houses broadly in character with the area (75.0 per cent)(Fig. 31), the remainder are not. The most striking examples are the town houses and maisonettes at the western end of Oakmount Avenue (Nos. 42-46 and 34a-d respectively)(Fig. 32), the apartments of *Gallia Court* at the western end of Blenheim Avenue (Fig. 33), and *Leigh Court* towards the western end of Leigh Road (Fig. 34). As noted above *Leigh Court* replaced *Kelvedon*, which burned down in 1960, while *Gallia Court* was erected on the site of *Gallia* seventeen years later. Ten of the 24 houses built after the Second World War have pyramidal or hipped roofs (41.7 per cent). Most have end gables, rather than gabled frontages. Concrete roof tiles predominate (58.3 per

cent), while brick is the usual building material. Rendered and pebble-dashed finishes are rare (16.7 per cent). Bay windows are scarce, while a high proportion of the buildings have replacement plastic windows. A quarter of the houses have verandahs. *Marlborough House*, although built in 2001-02, has a design and elevation, which reflect the character of the previous house on the site and is generally in keeping with neighbouring buildings (Fig. 35).

The final ensemble is characterised by detached houses arrayed along wide roads. Within this uniformity, each road displays a degree of individuality. Westbourne Crescent curves gently and the vistas are short (Fig. 36.). Larger houses, built before the Second World War in substantial gardens backing on to The Common, are the norm on the western side. Greater diversity is found on the eastern side. Oakmount Avenue rises to a retreating skyline, which ends with The Common. The buildings along much of its northern side are fairly uniform, and stand almost as solid rank on the slope (Fig. 37), but the southern side shows more diversity. Almost a quarter of the buildings were erected after the Second World War, but include replacements for houses badly damaged by bombing. Leigh Road almost runs along the contour, and seems both flat and open (Fig. 38). It gives the impression of being wider than it actually is, while the buildings are mixed in style. Most (90.5 per cent) were erected before the Second World War. Blenheim Avenue seems long, partly because of the detached sections at each end and the curve leading from Brookvale Road (Fig. 39). Over three-quarters of the houses were built before the Second World War. Those along the northern side are almost all of this period and display a degree of uniformity; those on the opposite side are more diverse both in age and appearance.

5.2 Relationship to the Topography

Oakmount Triangle was laid out across sloping ground. Westbourne Crescent and Oakmount Avenue run down the principal slope from near the Lodge, but while the gradient is almost imperceptible in the former, it is noticeable in the lower two-thirds of

the latter. Leigh Road and Blenheim Avenue run across the slope, the latter clearly rising gradually westwards. A distinctive street layout has been created (a double triangle) (Fig. 40) which, with the closure of vehicle access to the Common from Oakmount Avenue, 'drains' from the eastern end of Blenheim Avenue into Brookvale Road (Fig. 41). Coming into the Triangle at this point, the only vehicle entrance, one has a sense of buildings rising over the ground in gentle steps and of vistas opening out as one moves up-slope. A broken skyline results, punctuated by tall chimney stacks. The slightly staggered building lines moderate the rigid geometry of the street layout. This is particularly noticeable in Westbourne Crescent. Everywhere the trees, shrubs and the occasional hedge of front gardens soften the severe edges of the roads.

In terms of architecture, Oakmount Triangle is different from the adjacent Crofton Close development of the early 1990s and the Uplands Estate (c. 1920-39). Although dating from the same period as the Oakmount Triangle, the Uplands Estate was developed in a completely different way. It is characterised by terraces of four or five, two-stored houses built in a Georgian style with warm red/brown brick. The whole ensemble, designed by the local architect Herbert Collins, has something of a village atmosphere created by the imaginative use of the natural topography, the preservation of mature trees and the inclusion of greens and gently curving roads with verges⁵³.

Crofton Close is different again. It was developed on land originally belonging to Oakmount House and contains 28 modern detached houses with four and five bedrooms. The developers, Alfred McAlpine, used five designs. Red and light brown bricks are characteristic. Oakmount House was retained, though converted into apartments, while its garden and shrubbery provide an off-centre focus to a layout, which incorporates small closes, open front gardens and communal space. The wooded drive to Oakmount House and the 'planted strip' separate Crofton Close from the older developments between which it was inserted.

⁵³ Pevsner 1967, 586-87.

6.0 The Contribution of Key Unlisted Buildings

A number of buildings in the Triangle stand out as distinctive and give the area some of its unique quality. The former lodge of Highfield House is the oldest building in the Triangle and has a particular charm, the result of its scale and architecture (Fig. 20). With the associated ornamental walls and gateposts it provides a distinctive entrance to the Triangle from the path ('Lovers' Walk') along the edge of Southampton Common.

No. 4 Leigh Road, which occupies a slightly elevated site, is a house of some architectural distinction. It was built in 1914 to a design in the 'arts and crafts' style by F. Leonard Poole (Figs. 42 and 43).

No. 25 Leigh Road is a 'cottage' style house with windows of unusual shape. Reputedly built for a former sailor, it featured in the Ideal Home Exhibition of xxxx. Since it occupies a corner site, at the meeting of Leigh Road with Oakmount Avenue, this house is a prominent feature of the townscape (Fig. 44).

No. 4 Blenheim Avenue also adds a different element to the ensemble. It is a double-fronted house with a canopied porch (Fig. 45). Although five similar houses exist in Southampton, including one at the entrance to the Triangle from Brookvale Road (No. 19 Brookvale Road) and a second in Abbots Way (No. 9), its Queen-Anne style of architecture makes a pleasant change from the twentieth century styles dominant in the Triangle.

Six houses have corner towers with pointed, tiled roofs (Fig. 46). They provide interesting 'punctuation marks' within the building mass of the area. Two stand opposite each other at the entrance to Westbourne Crescent from Blenheim Avenue, almost as if they defend it.

7.0 Character and Relationship of Spaces with the Area

Although the area lacks formal open spaces, such as greens or public gardens, attention may be drawn to four areas.

The first is a tiny triangle of grass at the junction between Woodstock Drive and Blenheim Avenue. Although maintained by the inhabitants of 1 Woodstock Drive, it provides a distinctive marker at the entrance to Oakmount Triangle and enhances the appearance of the whole area (Fig. 47).

The second area of open space lies behind Westbourne and Leigh Mansions, on the one hand, and Leigh Road, on the other (Figs. 16 and 40). It is divided in two by rows of garages. Narrow entrances provide access from Westbourne Crescent, Oakmount Avenue and Leigh Road, but it is generally invisible, except from the air. Although it may be considered a 'negative' area within the Triangle, the associated garages provide a useful amenity for many residents and reduce the amount of on-street parking.

The third significant space is Leigh Road (Fig. 38). Reference has already been made to its apparent width, but another quality is the possibility of closing it off at each end to keep out traffic. Both qualities have allowed the road to be used for the three street parties mentioned above, thus giving it the function of an unofficial village green and providing a focus for communal activities.

Finally, the almost level western section of Oakmount Avenue is wider than the rest of the road, an effect enhanced by the intersection with Westbourne Crescent. Cars are often parked here two deep. However, relative elevation, which gives a view over the houses of Blenheim Avenue towards the 'Heights of Bitterne', endows this space with the character of a belvedere (Fig. 48). It is a quality originally enjoyed by Highfield House and could be enhanced.

8.0 Prevailing Building Materials, Textures and Colours

As noted above (Section 5.1), red/brown brick and tile are the main building materials for houses and apartment blocks in the area (Fig. 49), while stock brick walls are the most characteristic form of front boundary to the properties. About 36.1 per cent of the properties also possess brick gateposts (Fig. 50), and 18.5 per cent have followed the modern fashion and now have brick drives (Fig. 51). While some of the brick comes from the East Midlands⁵⁴, much is probably of local origin, and may even have been supplied from the brickworks, which now forms part of the University's Highfield campus.

Height makes the first floors of the houses conspicuous in the townscape. Just over 48 per cent of these are pebble-dashed (probably over timber and lath), 7 per cent are rendered and 2.6 per cent are 'half-timbered'. White and cream finishes are predominant. Windows are also generally painted white, and over half are wood. About 64 per cent of houses erected before the Second World War have retained wooden windows to their ground floor, though nearly 29 per cent have inserted replacement plastic windows. Hard wood is characteristic in pre-War houses, but in some cases this has been replaced with less durable soft wood in recent years. Plastic windows are more common in post-War houses (55.0 per cent). Metal window frames are found in 11.4 per cent of houses, but are relatively rare in houses built before 1940 (7.4 per cent) and more characteristic of those built after the Second World War (30.0 per cent). The front verandahs so characteristic of the area (61.3 per cent of houses) have tiled floors (some coloured and glazed). Their wooden supports, balustrades and infilling are generally painted white.

9.0 Local Details

The brickwork throughout the area generally uses 'stretching' bonding with well-filled mortar joints, but the style of pointing varies. Many of the front garden walls have recessed panels on their outer face and a line of dentils below a top layer of chamfered bricks (Fig. 52). Plain ridge tiles cap most roofs, but there is some variation. No. 16

⁵⁴ 'BBC' (= Bedford Brick Company) stamped on some bricks, for example in the garden wall of 16 Leigh Road.

Oakmount Avenue, for example, has 'spiked' ridge tiles and each of its front gables is capped by a hooked finial (Fig. 53). Chimney stacks in the area have been treated as ornamental features and a variety of designs is apparent, while chimney pots are generally plain (Fig. 54). Lead and slate flashing are often still in place. Hanging tiles form the covering below upper bay windows; in some cases lead flashing has exists. As noticed above (Section 5.1), original cast-iron hoppers and down pipes survive on a number of older houses.

Original windows in pre-War houses are generally casemented, but at least one house (No. 27 Blenheim Avenue) has some sash-windows. Most windows are divided vertically into two unequal parts, separated by a projecting strip of wood. While the larger lower sections generally consist of a single pane of glass, the smaller upper sections vary. Some have a row of square panes of glass (probably indicating an original sash window), but others have a single oblong light. Broad chamfered sills are characteristic.

The design of front doors varies considerably throughout the Triangle, but except in the very latest houses they are generously proportioned. A few original doorbells and knockers survive (Fig. 55). Verandahs have a standard design, but again there is variety in the detail. Gates are relatively unusual, with 69 per cent of houses lacking them altogether.

Overhead telephone wires are conspicuous and should be removed. The street furniture is generally and brutally modern. However, there are two notable exceptions. The first is an original lamp standard (Fig. 56). The other is the pillar-box at the junction of Blenheim Avenue and Westbourne Crescent (Fig. 57). Used as a marker in *Kelly's Directories* from 1914-15 onwards, it carries the cipher 'VR', suggesting that it was either old stock or moved from elsewhere.

10.0 Contribution of Green Spaces, Trees, Hedges and Other Natural or Cultivated Elements

Although Oakmount Triangle can give the impression of being densely built-up, the impact of building lines and walls is softened by vegetation and open space. The piecemeal process of development left several houses with double-plots. Relatively large gardens break up the succession of buildings and give a sense of spaciousness. A similar effect is produced by the configuration of properties at the junction of Oakmount Avenue with Leigh Road and Blenheim Avenue where the length of the gardens parallels Oakmount Avenue. Mature trees provide screening.

All the buildings in the area stand back from the road. The houses and more recent apartment blocks (*Leigh Court* and *Marlborough House*) are set off by front gardens containing mature trees and shrubs, flowerbeds and small lawns. Encroachment for off-street parking has been minimal. Hedges are found at the front of some gardens and between some properties. The variety of woody species (including damsons, cherries, copper beeches, and evergreens) not only adds interest and colour to the townscape but also provides a sequence of change through the seasons. The larger older apartment blocks are also set back from the road and are fronted by maintained lawns.

Mature trees of some age stand along the outer boundaries of Oakmount Triangle, as already noted. They not only help to define the area within the wider townscape, but also close it off from the outside. Some of them may require replacement in the near future. Trees and shrubs on The Common close the vista at the western end of Oakmount Avenue so that The Common itself and The Avenue are invisible from this corner of the Triangle (Fig 58). The view from the west end of Blenheim Avenue towards the *Cowherds Inn* is framed by trees and shrubs, partly on the Common, but partly also in the adjoining gardens of the Triangle (Fig. 59). The 'planted strip' (Fig. 60) between Oakmount Avenue and Crofton Close contains native hardwood species, including some flowering shrubs, and softens the transition between two areas of distinctive type and age of development.

11.0 Setting of the Proposed Conservation Area and its Relationship to the Landscape

Oakmount Triangle is a defined and largely closed area within what is now the inner city of Southampton. There is effectively only one completely open view out from the area, and that is from the upper section of Oakmount Avenue. The area cannot be viewed at ground level from outside, even from the approach to Blenheim Avenue from The Common. A sense of seclusion is the result.

While housing of similar age and original target market is found elsewhere in the city, notably in Shirley, where John Smith was also active, the Triangle is an enclave of distinctive physical and social character (Sections 1.2, 5.1, 8.0). The dominance of detached houses means that the area contrasts with the rows of apartment blocks which have replaced substantial detached houses along Winn and Westwood Roads to the south, as well as with the more densely built-up areas of semi-detached houses in Portswood and nearby Khartoum, Nile, Omdurman and Heatherdeane roads. On the west the Triangle borders on the city's major open space, The Common. To the north it is close to the Uplands Estate Conservation Area with its distinctive houses and layout. The Triangle is within walking distance of the city centre, adjacent to Southampton University, close to bus routes and convenient for railways stations. Location, thus, plays a part in defining the character of Oakmount Triangle and makes it a choice area for residence.

12.0 Extent of Loss, Intrusion or Damage: Negative Factors

The special character of the area is adversely affected in various ways. Proximity to the University, the closed character of the area and the width of the roads attract non-resident parking during term time. The double-parking frequent at the western end of Oakmount Avenue has already been noted (Section 7). Non-resident parking also happens when fairs and other events are organised on the Common. Use of the area for driving instruction is perhaps more of an irritant than anything else. Overhead telephone wires, with their associated poles, detract from the residential character of the area,

while the modern lamp posts are out of character. The neglected state of the three early garages on the south-west side of Oakmount Avenue is unfortunate (Fig. 61). However, the rows of garages behind *Leigh Mansions* and *Westbourne Mansions* are effectively hidden from the adjacent roads by these large buildings and the curved access. While some replacement plastic windows are in appropriate styles, others are not. The employment of strong colours on some houses is out of character in an area where white, cream and muted red-brown predominate. Multi-occupation of a few houses has led to neglect of the fabric and the poor maintenance of gardens. About 27 per cent of houses have drives covered with tarmac and this perhaps detracts from the character of the area where gravelled drives were probably once normal and survive at 15 per cent of houses.

Conclusion

Oakmount Triangle is a discrete area within the inner suburbs of Southampton. It has a distinctive architectural character, a history traceable to the Middle Ages, associations with important local and national figures, and a high degree of social cohesion.

Despite a phase of decay in the 1950s, the area was fortunate to retain much of the architectural character and unity established when the major phase of development came to an end c.1930. Although some of the building after the Second World War was not entirely in character (Sections 2.4 and 5.1), developers have shown more sensitivity in recent years. Remnants of former landscapes and land uses are clearly visible in the townscape of today. These include the framework of the Highfield House Estate, the residence of Admirals Foote and Morier in the nineteenth century. The initial development of the estate after 1910 and the unity of building style was work of a significant local man, John Smith. His legacy of substantial, brick-built houses is reflected in the continued social cohesion of the area, though that is also expressed through the vitality of the Oakmount Triangle Residents' Association (OTRA) and the support given to local celebrations.

However, the character, integrity and cohesion of the Triangle are under threat (Fig. 62). Property developers see double plots and large detached houses as opportunities to increase the number of housing units in the city, either through the conversion of existing family houses into flats or through their demolition and replacement with apartment blocks. The pressure in this direction is strengthened by government policy in favour of developing 'brown field' sites and the provision of more dwellings in the South-East region. The convenient location of the Triangle within the urban fabric of Southampton also increases the pressure for land use change. On the other hand, Oakmount Triangle provides large, spacious houses of character, which attract considerable interest from families, as well as developers, when they come on the market. Conservation Area status would not only recognise the area's uniqueness within Southampton, but would also protect it from inappropriate development.

References

Abstract of Title of Mr. John Smith to Freehold Hereditaments Part of the Highfield House Estate Situate at Portswood in the County Borough of Southampton, 1922, Amongst the deeds of 16 Oakmount Avenue, but replicated in other sets of deeds.

Army Lists.

Berger, L. 1952. *War Damage in Southampton, 1939-45*, Southampton: Southampton County Borough.

Blake, E.O. (ed.). 1981. *The Cartulary of the Priory of St. Denys near Southampton*, 2 vols., Southampton Record Series Vols. 24 and 25, Southampton: Southampton University Press.

British Geological Survey. 1987. *1:50,000 England and Wales, Sheet 315, 'Southampton', Solid and Drift Geology.*

Census for 2001: <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/Reports/eng>

Chapman, R.W. (ed.). 1952. *Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, 2nd ed., London: Oxford University Press.

City of Southampton Minutes of Proceedings of Council Committees, 1990.

Coleman, T. 2002. *Nelson: The Man and the Legend*, new ed., London: Bloomsbury.

County Borough of Southampton, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council and Committees from 9th November, 1910 to 8th November, 1911.*
Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council and Committees from 9th November, 1911 to 9th November, 1912.

Declaration of Canon G.S. Streatfield, 11 January 1911. Amongst the deeds of 16 Oakmount Avenue, but replicated in other sets of deeds.

Directorate of Strategy and Development. 1989. *Oakmount School Site, Highfield, Southampton*, Southampton City Council.

East India Company Registry and Directory.

Farmer, D. 1997. *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foote, E.J. 1807, 1810. *Captain Foote's Vindication of his Conduct ... in the Bay of Naples, etc.*, London.

Hampshire Advertiser and Salisbury Guardian, Special Collections, Central Library, Southampton.

Hampshire Advertiser and Southampton Times, Special Collections, Central Library, Southampton.

Harley, J.B. 1969. 'Cartographic Notes', *The Old Series of Ordnance Survey Maps*, Facsimile Edition, Sheet 86, 'Winchester', Newton Abbot: David and Charles.

Harley, J.B. and O'Doneghue, Y. (eds.). n.d. *The Old Series of Ordnance Survey Maps of England and Wales*, Vol. 3, *South-Central England*, Lympne Castle: Harry Margary.

Highfield House Estate Sale Catalogue, 1910. Southampton City Archives: SC20/3/2/1/4.

Kelly's Directories for Southampton, Special Collections, Central Library, Southampton.
Johnston, H.M. 1998. *Ottoman and Persian Odysseys: James Morier, Creator of Hajji Baba of Ispahan, and his Brothers*, London and New York: Academic Press.

Kingman, C. 1970. *Southampton before 1840. The Style and Character of a Town in the Pre-railway Era, with Emphasis on its Domestic Architecture*, Unpublished B.A. dissertation in Geography, University of Southampton.

Kingston, W. n.d. *Diary of Air Raids on Southampton, 6/6/1940-27/6/1944*. Photocopied Manuscript in Special Collections, Central Library, Southampton.

Lane Poole, S. 2004. 'Morier, William (1790-1864)', Article 19268, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Leonard, A.G.K. *More Stories of Southampton Streets*, Southampton: Paul Cave Publications.

Mann, J.E. and Ashton, P. 1998. *Highfield: A Village Remembered*, Tiverton: Halsgrove.

Ordnance Survey. 1846. *Plan of the Borough of Southampton Surveyed in 1845-46*, 1:1,056, Sheet 9.
1878, 1933, 1946. 1:2,500 *Hampshire*: Sheets LXV3 and LXV7. [Initial survey 1865-66].
1966, 1967. 1:2,500 Sheets SU 4214 (revised 1963) and SU 4114 (revised 1947).

Patterson, A. Temple. 1966, 1975. *A History of Southampton, 1700-1914*. Vol. 1: *An Oligarchy in Decline, 1700-1835*, Southampton Record Series Vol. 11, Southampton: Southampton University Press. Vol. 3: *Setbacks and Recoveries, 1868-1914*, Southampton Record Series Vol. 18, Southampton: Southampton University Press.

Pevsner, N. and Lloyd, D. 1967. *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Rance, A.B. 1980. *The Lost Houses of Southampton*, Southampton: City Museums Service.

Skelton, E. 1818, *The Southampton Guide*, 23rd ed., Southampton: E. Skelton and Co.
1823, *The Southampton Guide*, 26th ed., Southampton: E. Skelton and Co.

Skelton, A.H. 1894-97. 'The Priory of St. Denys', *Papers and Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club* 3: 155-169.

Slater, T.R. 1978. 'Family, Society and the Ornamental Villa on the Fringes of English Country Towns', *Journal of Historical Geography* 4: 129-144.

South Stoneham Poor Rates Books, 1814-20. Southampton City Archives: PR9/15/36.

Southern Daily Echo.

Southampton City Council. *Sites and Monuments Record – Oakmount Road (sic) Area*, 18/10/2004.

Thomson, S.D. 1974. 'History, 1228-1978'. In *Southampton Common*, Southampton: City of Southampton Society, 1-49.

Tracy, N. 2004. 'Foote, Sir Edward James (1767-1833)', Article 9805, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Velecky, L. 2000. *Protect it Now. A History of Southampton Commons and Parks Protection Society*, Southampton: Southampton Commons and Parks Protection Society.

Venn, J.A. (ed.). 1951, 1954. *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Part 2 Vol. 4, Part 2 Vol. 6, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Illustrations

Figure

1. The Location of Oakmount Triangle
2. A Section of the Boundary Bank on the East Side of Southampton Common
3. The Manor of Portswood, 1658
4. Mid-Seventeenth Century Fields (Upper Westwoods, Westwoods Pond Close, Westwoods Middle Ground) Superimposed on the Modern Map
5. Highfield House and the Surrounding Area, 1909-10, Superimposed on the Modern Map
6. Westwood House with (?) Highfield House in the Distance
7. Extract from the One Inch Ordnance Survey Map of 1810, Showing the Cowherds Inn, Westwood House and (?) Highfield House
8. Reconstruction of the Possible Appearance of Highfield House (Fran Naylor)
9. Edward James Foote (1767-1833) Wearing the Uniform of a Vice-Admiral (therefore 1821 or later) by Charles Hayter (? provenance)
10. The First Houses Built in Oakmount Triangle (Kelly's *Directory* 1912-13)
11. The Development of Oakmount Triangle at the End of the First World War (Kelly's *Directories* 1912-19)
12. The Development of Oakmount Triangle, 1921-39 (Kelly's *Directories*; OS Map 1:2,500 revised 1931-33)
13. Oakmount Triangle: Bomb Damage, 1940-42 (worst situation)
14. No. 10 Oakmount Avenue, Bomb Damage 1942
15. Westbourne Mansions, Bomb Damage, 1942
16. The Development of Oakmount Triangle since the Second World War (OS Map 1:2,500)
17. Advertisement for the Blenheim Lodge Hotel
18. Street Party in Leigh Road for the Millenium
19. Oakmount Triangle: Relicts of Former Land Use
20. The Lodge to Highfield House (c.1860)
21. The Gateposts at the West End of Oakmount Avenue
22. Wall of the 'old world kitchen garden'
23. A 'Typical' John Smith House
24. Pebbledash and Decorative Use of Brick
25. No. 9 Westbourne Crescent: 'Half-timbered' Work
26. Original Wooden Windows
27. Verandah and Original Garage (detail)
28. Doorways
29. Original Guttering, Hopper and Down Pipe

30. Leigh Mansions, 1924-25
31. A Post- Second World War House
32. Town Houses and Maisonettes at the North-east End of Oakmount Avenue
33. *Gallia Court*
34. *Leigh Court*
35. *Marlborough House*
36. Westbourne Crescent: Views
37. Oakmount Avenue: View
38. Leigh Road: View
39. Blenheim Avenue: View
40. Aerial View of Oakmount Triangle
41. Exit from Oakmount Triangle into Brookvale Road
42. No. 4 Leigh Road (House Front) with No. 6 in Process of Construction (December, 2004)
43. No. 4 Leigh Road: Plans and Elevations
44. No. 25 Leigh Road
45. No. 4 Blenheim Avenue
46. A Towered-house, No. 7 Blenheim Avenue
47. The Triangle of Grass at the Junction of Woodstock Drive and Blenheim Avenue
48. The Oakmount Avenue 'Belvedere' (Bitterne in the Distance)
49. A Redbrick House with Rendering
50. Brick Gateposts and Garden Wall
51. Block-brick Drive
52. Front Garden Wall
53. Spiked Roof and Gable Finial
54. Chimney Stacks
55. Doorbell and Knocker
56. Light Standard
57. Victorian Post-box
58. View West to The Common from Oakmount Avenue
59. View West to The Common from Blenheim Avenue
60. 'The Planted Strip' between Oakmount Avenue and Crofton Close
61. Neglected Garages on Oakmount Avenue
62. *The Red House*. This is probably the oldest house in the development of the Highfield House Estate and is now at risk from re-development.

