

Tooting Common

Heritage Tree Survey



The Landscape Group, University of East Anglia

On behalf of Wandsworth Borough Council

May 2015

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1. Introduction

1.1. Origin and Scope of Report

This report has been prepared by the Landscape Group (University of East Anglia) for Wandsworth Borough Council. The Landscape Group were commissioned to undertake a Heritage Tree Survey to inform a 10-year Management and Maintenance plan for Tooting Common and a Conservation Plan for the Tooting Common Heritage Project. This project has received stage one funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with a view to preparing a bid for stage two funding by the end of 2015. Additional reports have been commissioned to explore the history and archaeology of the common and report on the Common's trees.

The brief for the Heritage Tree Survey required a focus on two key areas:

- The historic avenues on the Common – Dr Johnson Avenue, Chestnut Avenue, Garrad's Road Avenue and Tooting Bec Road Avenue.
- Trees with significant heritage value in terms of age, species and location.

Work undertaken included consultation of previous reports on the history, trees and woodland of the Common, consultation of a range of primary and secondary historical material, analysis of cartographic sources and site visits.

1.2. Site Parcels and Tree Numbers

Where particular areas of the site are referred to the names used are those defined on the site parcel map of Tooting Common produced in 2007 (Figure 1.2). On the occasions where specific trees are referred to the numbers used (e.g. T123) are taken from the 2015 Tooting Common Tree Condition Survey conducted by Treework Environmental Practice.

1.3. Tooting Common

Tooting Common is an 85 hectare area of open space in the London Borough of Wandsworth (NGR TQ291722; Figure 1.1). It comprises Tooting Bec Common and the smaller Tooting Graveney Common. Dr Johnson Avenue marks the boundary between the two commons. The landscape of the common is a mix of open lawns, scattered trees and shrubs, avenues of trees, parcels of woodland and sports pitches. It is surrounded by housing, much of which dates to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Two railway lines run across parts of the common and it is also crossed by three roads: Dr Johnson Avenue, Bedford Hill and Tooting Bec Road. A number of large areas of common land and heathland existed in the area to the south of London up until the nineteenth century; many of these now survive as valuable public open spaces.

The topography of the Common is generally level with only a 15 metre difference between the highest and lowest points (25 to 40 metres above sea level). The soils of the Common present a contrast between London Clay to the north and east and more free draining sands and gravels (overlying London Clay) to the south and west.

1.4. Designations

Tooting Common is a Site of Metropolitan Importance (SMI) for Nature Conservation (Site M124) due to its extensive woodland and relict acid grassland. It also an area of Metropolitan Open Land (MOL), affording a similar level of protection as the Metropolitan Green Belt.

Parts of the Common fall within the Garrard’s Road Conservation Area and the Streatham Park Conservation Area.

The London Biodiversity Action Plan ‘identifies priority habitats that are of particular importance for biodiversity in London’ and includes 11 Habitat Action Plans, plus an additional 4 ‘Important Habitats’ (www.lbp.org.uk). A number of these plans have relevance to aspects of the landscape of Tooting Common:

- Acid Grassland (1)
- Heathland (3)
- Parks and Urban Green Spaces (4)
- Woodland (11)
- Open landscapes with ancient/old trees (15)

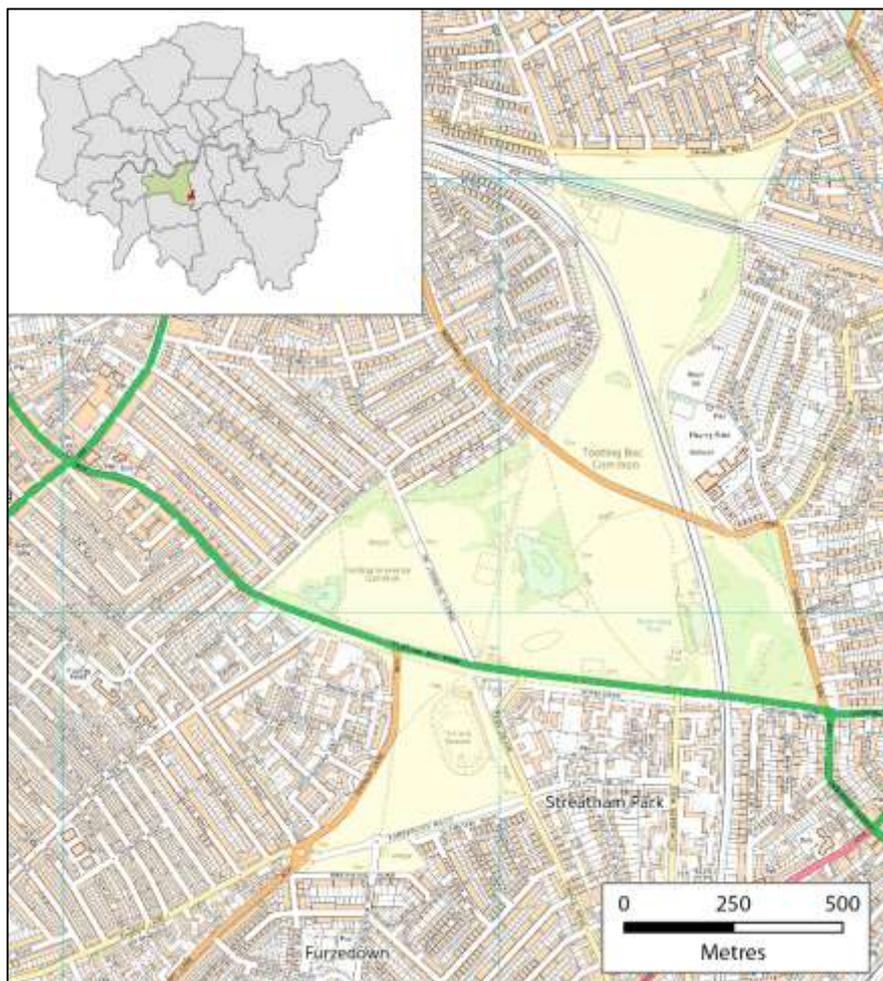


Figure 1.1 – Location map of Tooting Common (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2015).

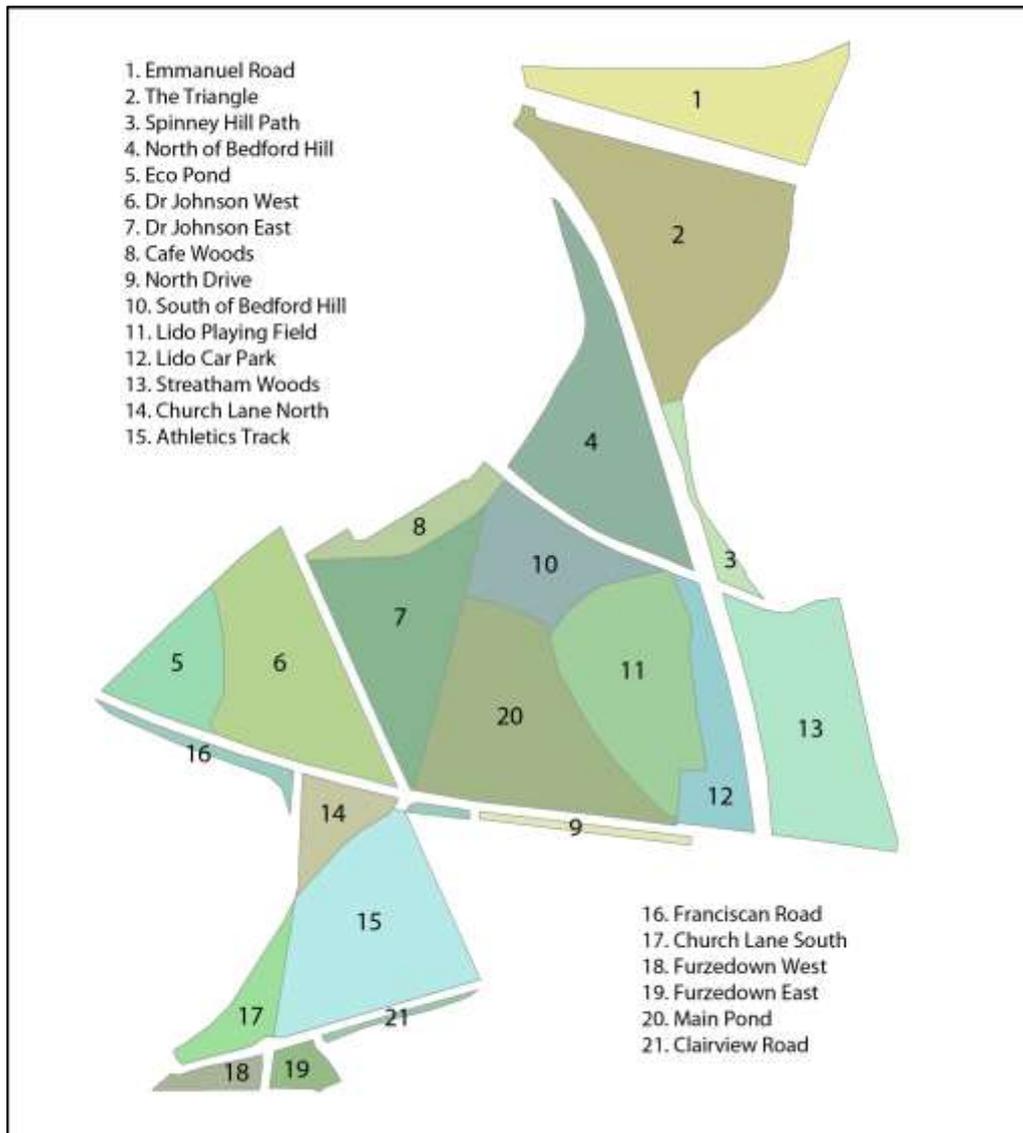


Figure 1.2 – Tooting Common ‘parcels’ as defined in 2007.

2. Tooting Common - History

2.1. Introduction

- 2.1.1. More detailed accounts of the history and archaeology of Tooting Common have been produced in separate reports. The information included here is therefore intended as a summary of key developments relevant to the current and historic patterns of trees and woodland on the Common, rather than a comprehensive history of this area.
- 2.1.2. Tooting Common comprises what were historically two distinct, though contiguous, areas of common land – Tooting Bec Common (sometimes referred to as Upper Tooting Common) to the east and the smaller Tooting Graveney Common to the west. The commons lay within the county of Surrey before boundary changes in the nineteenth century brought the area within the County of London.

2.2. Medieval to eighteenth century

- 2.2.1. In the medieval and post-medieval periods the common was surrounded by a mosaic of enclosed fields, common open fields and small areas of woodland. A map of Tooting Bec manor in 1729 provides a good overview of this landscape prior to its gradual disappearance through enclosure and urban development (London Metropolitan Archives E/BER/S/E5/3/1).
- 2.2.2. The Common provided valuable resources for those that lived in the surrounding settlements in the form of grazing, gorse (for fuel) and gravel digging. The survival of a number of pollarded oak trees, and the number of trees shown on historic maps, suggests that parts of the Common were also an important source of wood, primarily for fuel. Such trees were mainly found on the heavier clays of the Common, while areas of sand and gravel would have been dominated by acid grassland and heathland vegetation such as gorse.
- 2.2.3. Morden's survey of documents relating to the history of Tooting Graveney common reveals that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were numerous disputes relating to the digging of gravel and cutting of gorse. Fines were frequently issued and attempts made to prevent the removal of excessive amounts of either material. This highlights how highly prized such materials were by those who held rights to use the Common. Morden does not mention any disputes relating to trees or woodland, suggesting these were of secondary importance (Morden 1897, 6-15).

2.3. Eighteenth century

- 2.3.1. In the eighteenth century an increasing number of residences were built around the edge of the Common, surrounded by small-scale designed landscapes. Such a pattern can also be seen around the periphery of other nearby commons and heaths. Numerous encroachments were made by the owners of these properties as they sought to add areas of the Common to their own properties. In some cases the encroachments were allowed to remain and payment for the land shared between the Lord of the Manor and the local poor (Eversley 1910, 61). By the early eighteenth century the southern half of the Common had been transformed by the establishment of long avenues of trees along Tooting Bec Road and what are now Dr Johnson Avenue and Garrad's Road. Planting trees for aesthetic reasons on, or close to, commons was not unique to Tooting. The

proximity of several large commons to London made them an attractive location for high-status residences and numerous contemporary authors remarked on the potential for 'improving' the commons through planting. Writing in 1798, John Middleton described Streatham Common as having the appearance of 'a handsome lawn to the surrounding gentleman's villas' (Stevenson 1798, 462). It is important to remember, however, that some commons already possessed trees, typically pollards, which formed part of the working agricultural landscape.

- 2.3.2. Two maps by John Rocque, published in 1746 and 1768, give some indication of the appearance of Tooting Common and its surroundings in the eighteenth century. The Common is depicted in similar fashion on both maps, with the roads crossing from east to west between Upper Tooting and Streatham and from north to south between Balham and Streatham. The avenue of trees that later became known as Dr Johnson Avenue is clearly shown, and crosses Tooting Bec Road to continue along the line of what is now West Drive. The southern end of the avenue terminates close to a house on the edge of the common. It is depicted as a single avenue of what were presumably well-established trees. Further avenues of trees are shown running between Dr Johnson Avenue and Streatham, alongside Tooting Bec road. Four lines of trees are shown, creating two separate avenues on either side of the road. For a short section an additional line of single trees is shown running parallel to the southern avenue.



Figure 2.1 – Rocque's map of London and the country ten miles round.

- 2.3.3. On some versions of Rocque's 1746 map scatters of isolated trees are shown at the north-western edge of the common and, more extensively in the eastern portion of the common. Given the importance of common grazing at this time these were presumably

pollarded trees. Rocque's map also reveals that Tooting Common was not entirely unique in having avenues. Other examples can be seen on the nearby commons of Dulwich and Mitcham and on Putney Heath.

2.4. Nineteenth century

- 2.4.1. In the nineteenth century the landscape of the Common was divided by the construction of two railway lines; in 1855 a line linking West London to Crystal Palace was built across the northern half of the Common, and in 1861 a further line was built running north-south across the eastern half of the Common, linking Balham and Croydon. The earlier line, in the north, was built on a large embankment, whilst the second line was sunk within a cutting. The construction of both lines resulted in the loss of many trees from the Common (Sexby 1905, 221).
- 2.4.2. Stanford's Map of London (1862) shows the Common as it appeared in the nineteenth century, still largely surrounded by fields and parkland, though with several areas of new residential development and the two railway lines crossing the common. The most significant concentration of individual trees is shown in the south-eastern portion of the common, alongside Garrads Road. A further scatter of trees is shown at the northern end of the common, between the two railway lines. The way in which the boundary of the Common is shown suggests that there were trees, or at least a hedge of some form, around most of the perimeter.
- 2.4.3. Dr Johnson Avenue and the avenue along Tooting Bec Road are both shown, although the use of different tree symbols suggest the latter was a more substantial feature. A continuous line of trees is shown along the western edge of Garrad's Road, which at its northern end is joined by a parallel line of trees on the Common, forming a short section of avenue.
- 2.4.4. Stanford's map makes clear the relationship between the common and mansions and villas which surrounded it, with the Common forming the backdrop to areas of garden and parkland. There is little evidence of concerted efforts to screen out the common; indeed the densest perimeter planting around Streatham Park is found on the opposite side to the Common.



Figure 2.2 – Detail from Stanford's 1862 map of London showing the southern end of Tooting Common.



Figure 2.3 – Detail from Stanford’s 1862 map showing individual trees at the northern end of Tooting Common, probably survivors from the earlier landscape of common wood pasture.

2.4.5. The Victorian period saw increasing tensions between the commoners, local landowners and those who wished to see commons protected as open spaces as London began to expand rapidly. The landscape of enclosed fields around the Common began to be filled with terraced houses and streets; the different Ordnance Survey editions published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show this process unfolding. Development could be spectacularly rapid - between 1851 and 1861 the population of Wandsworth alone increased by 20,000 people (Select Committee 1865, 78). By 1920 the Common was bounded on all sides by housing. The expansion of London in this period meant that open space was at a premium in some areas, and was therefore at risk from development. Early conservation groups fought to preserve commons - the Commons Preservation Society (now the Open Spaces Society), founded in 1865, succeeded in saving Hampstead Heath and Wimbledon Common from development.

2.4.6. In 1862 William Thompson purchased the manor of Tooting Graveney for £3,650. At first, local residents hoped that Thompson would commit to preserving the Common, but in 1863 he began proceedings to enclose the Common for building. He enclosed 25 acres of the Common, despite protests from the commoners themselves and other residents. The resulting arguments culminated in 1870 when the commoners took Thompson to court, winning their case against his enclosure of the Common (Eversley 1910, 60).

2.5. Late nineteenth and twentieth century

2.5.1. The Metropolitan Board of Works purchased Tooting Bec Common in 1873 and Tooting Graveney in 1875. From the late nineteenth century onwards the Common began to assume more features that are typical of urban parks and gardens, including walks, a horse ride and new planting whilst still retaining its character as an open common. The

Common was also increasingly used for leisure activities; a golf course was opened in the 1890s, Tooting Bec Lido opened in 1906, and the athletics track in the 1930s. During the Second World War the Common was used for allotments, and for prefabricated housing. In the postwar period additional sports pitches and other facilities, including a putting green were created on the Common.

2.6. Contemporary views of Tooting Common

Alicia Amherst, 1908

On Tooting Common one can successfully play at being in the country. The trees are quite patriarchal, and have nothing suburban about them, except their blackened stems. There are good spreading oaks and grand old elms, gnarled thorns, tangles of brambles, and golden gorse. The grass grows long, with stretches of mossy turf, and has not the melancholy down-trodden appearance of Clapham or Peckham Rye. Fine elm avenues overshadow the main roads, and no stiff paths with iron rails, take away from the rural effect. Even the railway, which cuts across it in two directions, has only disfigured and not completely spoiled the park like appearance' (Amherst 1908, 208).

William Henry Hudson, 1898

Tooting Common is the general name for two commons—Tooting Bec and Tooting Graveney, 144 and 66 acres respectively. A public road divides them, but they form really one area. Tooting Bec has a fair amount of gorse and bramble bushes scattered about, and a good many old trees, mostly oak. The number of old trees gives this space something of a park-like appearance, but it is not exhilarating; on the contrary, its effect on the mind is rather depressing, on account of the perfect flatness of the ground and the sadly decayed and smoke-blackened condition of the trees. An 'improvement' of the late Metropolitan Board of Works was the planting of a very long and very straight avenue of fast-growing black poplars, and this belt of weed-like ungraceful trees, out of keeping with everything, has made Tooting Bec positively ugly...Tooting Graveney has a fresher, wilder aspect, and is a pleasanter place than its sister common. Its surroundings, too, are far more rural, as it has for neighbours Streatham Park and the wide green spaces of Furze Down and Totterdown Fields. Tooting Graveney itself is in the condition of the old Clapham Common as Macaulay knew it in his boyhood. Its surface is rough with grass-grown mounds, old gravel-pits, and excavations, and it is grown over with bushes of furze, bramble, and brier, and with scattered birch-trees and old dwarf hawthorns, looking very pretty (Hudson 1898, 247-8).

3. Tooting Common Avenues

3.1. Introduction

Maps of Tooting Common from the eighteenth century onwards make it clear that the landscape of the Common, particularly its southern half, was dominated by long formal avenues of trees. The oldest of these are reputed to be Dr Johnson Avenue and Garrad's Road Avenue, both of which have been claimed to have seventeenth-century origins. Chestnut Avenue is a more recent addition, planted in the late nineteenth century after the Common had passed into the hands of the Metropolitan Board of Works. A further avenue, apparently dating to the early eighteenth century, ran along Tooting Bec Road between Dr Johnson Avenue and the south-eastern corner of Tooting Bec Common. This was an avenue of elm trees, lost to Dutch Elm Disease in the twentieth-century. Dr Johnson Avenue, Tooting Bec Road Avenue and Garrad's Road Avenue are all shown on a 1729 map of the manor of Tooting Bec (Tooting Common Management Plan 1988, 27-28).

Most of the historic avenues followed the lines of roads and boundaries rather than crossing open common land. Dr Johnson Avenue, for example, followed the line of a watercourse known as the York Ditch, which marked the boundary between Tooting Bec Common and Tooting Graveney Common. It is unclear precisely who was responsible for the original planting of each avenue, though several likely candidates could be identified from among the owners of those estates which bordered the Common. These include the Dukes of Bedford, who had considerable holdings in this area between 1696 and 1816 (VCH Surrey Vol IV 1912, 92-102).

Today the surviving avenues are a key component of the landscape of Tooting Common and play an important role in defining separate elements of the landscape and structuring views around the Common.



Figure 3.1 – Map of Tooting Common showing location of main avenues. Trees marked are those which are present today (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2015).

3.2. Avenues and Landscapes

- 3.2.1. Avenues were first planted in England during the late sixteenth century, but reached the height of their popularity in the years after the Restoration in 1660. They were widely used in France, and were one of a number of landscape features that were directly inspired by continental practice (Williamson 1995, 28). They continued to be planted until the middle of the eighteenth century, when formal landscapes began to fall out of favour. In the second half of the nineteenth century the planting of new avenues became fashionable again, although often with new non-native species such as Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*).
- 3.2.2. Avenues were a typical feature of parkland landscapes, often focused on the main facades of a country house, or forming the main approach. They were also often planned around the key views surrounding a country seat, perhaps planted along the sight lines to a garden building (such as a temple), or a significant local landmark. There

are some early examples from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, mainly found at royal palaces or very high status country houses. It was only in the period after the Restoration that they began to be planted more widely, and filtered further down the social scale to the level of the local gentry. Some country houses had a single avenue, whilst other parks could be criss-crossed with a dense network of intersecting avenues.

- 3.2.3. One of the earliest depictions of an avenue is in a painting of Nonsuch Palace (c.1620), which lay six miles to the south-west of Tooting (Harris, 25). It shows the main approach to the palace with a single avenue of trees through the park, protected from the road by a simple fence. Other early examples include that at New Hall, Essex, planted in 1623 with limes and elms, and one of the lime avenues at Burghley, Lincolnshire, which may date to the early seventeenth century (Couch 1992, 174). Avenues are shown on estate maps of Theobalds, Hertfordshire in 1611, and at Cranbourne Manor, Dorset in 1610 (Henderson, 85; 106) The term 'avenue' itself was first used to describe a tree-lined walk or drive by John Evelyn in 1664 (Couch 1992, 173). If the avenues at Tooting could be dated to the early seventeenth century (even if the current trees are more recent) then it would make them among the earliest examples of this form of planting.
- 3.2.4. Lime was a particularly popular tree for avenue planting, described by the writer Stephen Switzer as 'the only Furniture of all our Country Seats' (Williamson 1995, 26). Elm was also a favoured species for avenues, as were horse and sweet chestnut. Writers such as Evelyn and Switzer recommended such trees for their height and attractive appearance. English oak was often used in avenues which formed the main approach to a country house, but their slower growth compared to other species meant they were more widely used for plantations and woods elsewhere. Other species of oak, including holm oak and sessile oak were sometimes adopted instead of the native English oak (Couch 1992, 183). Establishing an avenue took a great deal of work to prepare the ground, and the trees themselves, which were usually transplanted when they were between five and ten years old. Some writers recommended 'heading' the new trees to promote branching and growth (Couch 1992, 191).
- 3.2.5. The significance of the avenues at Tooting lies in the fact that they were being established upon, or at least alongside, common land - this is unusual in terms of avenue planting across the country: most were created in the private, enclosed space of the park. When planted, the trees at Tooting must have been protected in some way to prevent damage by animals grazing on the common.
- 3.2.6. However, in the context of the growing suburbanisation of London in the eighteenth century, the avenues planted at Tooting begin to appear slightly less unusual – trees were planted on several other commons and heaths in this period to improve their appearance, usually for the benefit of the elite villa residences which were built around the edges of such open spaces. The commons of Wimbledon and Putney were distinguished by 'the great road from London to Portsmouth passing over these commons, the easy distance from the metropolis, but above all, the number of gentleman's seats which nearly environ them, and the example which the present Earl Spencer has shown, both as to the manner and the effect of covering such parts as might be agreeable with plantations – it is only matter of surprise, that they should so

long have remained in their present uncultivated state’ (Middleton 1798, 468). Commons near London attracted elite residences, subsequently aesthetic tree planting, in a way which was less usual elsewhere in the rural landscape, where the majority of landowners sought to enclose and cultivate commons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

3.3. Dr Johnson Avenue – history and development

3.3.1. Today Dr Johnson Avenue runs between Hillbury Road and Tooting Bec Road. However, eighteenth-century maps such as Rocque’s maps of London and Surrey (Rocque 1746 and 1768) clearly show the avenue stretching beyond Tooting Bec Road, terminating near what is now Ullathorne Road. The avenue followed the boundary between the commons of Tooting Graveney to the west and Tooting Bec to the east, partly running along the line of the York Ditch. Faden’s map of the 25 miles around London shows the avenue extending beyond Tooting Bec Road with a portion of common extending to the east of this. That piece of common later became part of Streatham Park (Sexby 1905, 212) and later nineteenth-century maps appear to show part of the avenue still present along the western boundary of the park. By the 1890s the park had been replaced by housing, with the new road of West Drive marking the line of the former avenue.



Figure 3.2 – Rocque’s map of London and the Country Ten Miles Round (1746) showing Dr Johnson Avenue extending both sides of Tooting Bec Road.

3.3.2. It is often stated that Dr Johnson Avenue was planted in 1600 in honour of a visit paid by Elizabeth I to Sir Henry Maynard at Tooting. Morden, in his 1897 *History of Tooting Graveney*, noted that ‘It would appear that about 1600 Queen Elizabeth paid a visit to this village, and it is certain that she was entertained by Sir Henry Maynard’. He also suggested that ‘The magnificent avenue of trees upon the common was planted during her visit’ (Morden 1897, 10). Elizabeth I certainly did visit Tooting at this date: a letter from Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sidney dated August 12 1600 records that ‘Her Majesty removed upon Monday to Tooting’ (Nicholls 1823, Vol 3, 513). However, there appears to be no direct reference to the planting of the avenue. Sexby was more circumspect in his assessment, noting that ‘many a story is told about the fine avenues’ (Sexby 1905, 220). Further research may shed more light on the origins of Dr Johnson Avenue, but regardless of whether a planting date of 1600 can be proved, the fact that

the link to Elizabeth I holds such currency means that it is an association which can not be ignored when dealing with the history of the avenue.

- 3.3.3. The avenue today is dominated by English oak, with the earliest photographs presenting a similar picture. The fact that the largest surviving trees in the avenue are all English oak suggests that it was used for the original planting, even if these do not represent survivors from the first planting. Oak was certainly used for avenues and tree-lined roads and walks in the seventeenth century, with John Evelyn referring in 1664 to oaks that had been planted in an avenue in Devon (Evelyn 1664, 13). Not all authors agreed on its merits as an avenue tree however, with some suggesting that a combination of slow growth, difficulty in transplanting and high value as a timber tree meant that it was better suited to other uses (Couch 1992, 183). The choice of oak was, however, highly symbolic in terms of its associations with national character, strength and identity (Harris 2003). A further, more prosaic, advantage may have been its availability due to its ubiquity in the wider countryside.
- 3.3.4. The large scale Ordnance Survey maps of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century provide an opportunity to examine changes in the form of the avenue in more detail. The 25 inch to 1 mile map of the late 1860s shows the avenue as largely continuous with some small gaps shown halfway along each side. This map was revised in 1895-6, with this edition showing a large gap on the west side which appears to have been filled with younger specimens.



Figure 3.3 – Dr Johnson Avenue as depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map (1868-75).

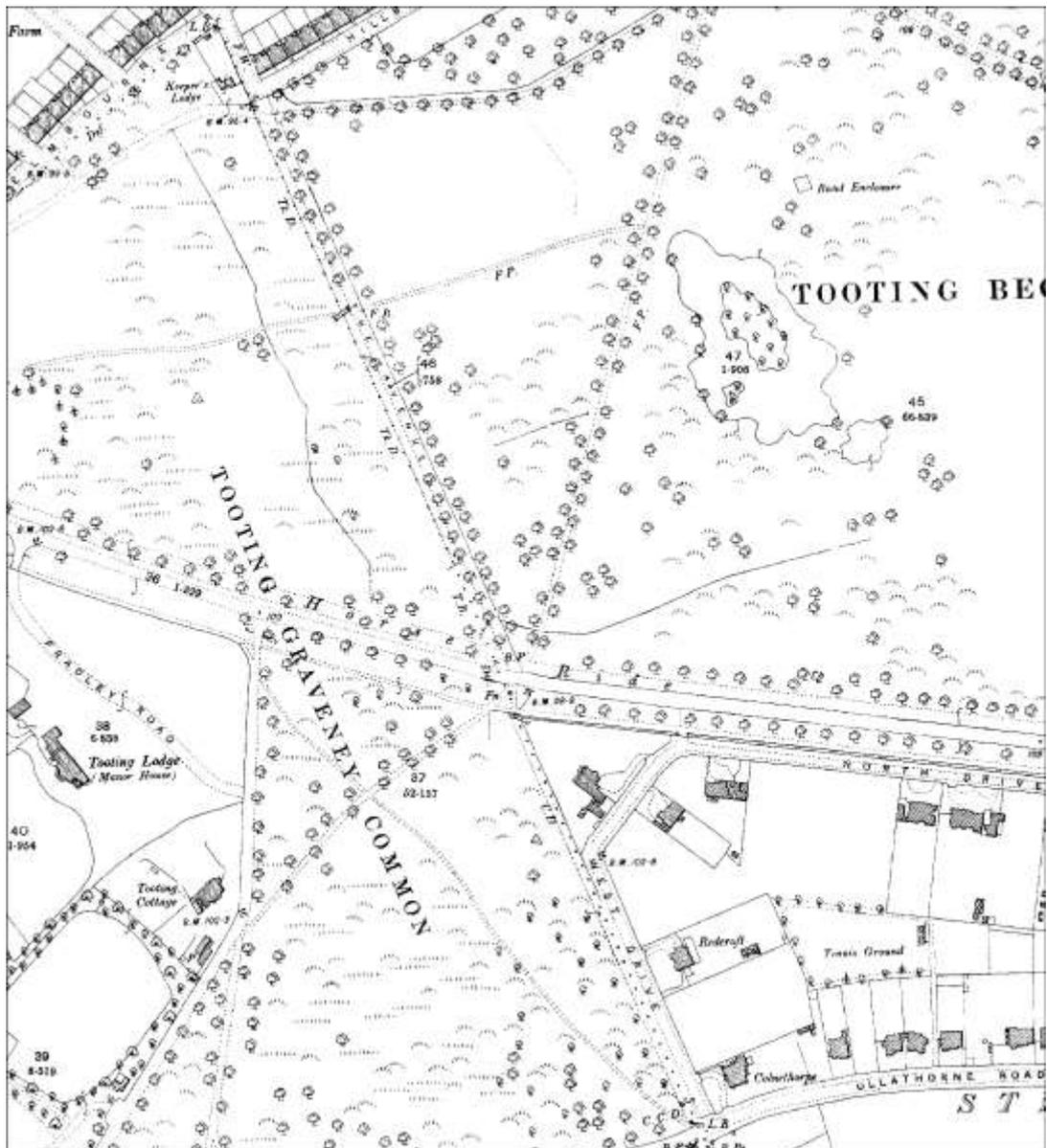


Figure 3.4 – Dr Johnson Avenue as shown on the OS 25 inch to 1 mile map of 1895-6.

- 3.3.5. This mixture of planting is shown in more detail in a postcard dated 1908 (Figure 3.6) At this date the avenue is labelled simply as 'The Avenue'. The third edition of the 25-inch map, published in 1916, shows the avenue to have a very fragmented west side, but a much more uniform east side with regularly spaced trees and no significant gaps. The name in 1916 continued to be recorded as 'The Avenue'.

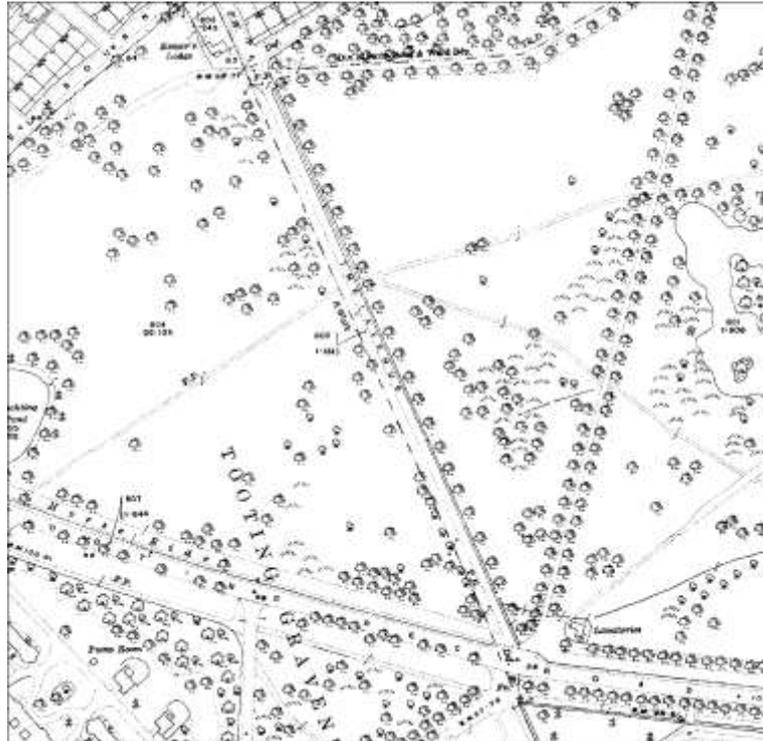


Figure 3.5 – Dr Johnson Avenue as shown on the OS 25 inch to 1 mile map of 1916.



Figure 3.6 Dr Johnson Avenue in 1908, showing oaks of various sizes and ages, including some, to the left of the girl with the bicycle, which have clearly been recently planted (Patrick Loobey collection).

- 3.3.6. This pattern of a fragmented west side and more regularly planted east continued into the mid twentieth century to judge from the 1:2500 OS map of 1950, which also shows a number of prefabricated houses alongside the avenue. The largest gaps in the avenue are shown at the northern end of the western side.
- 3.3.7. Maps surveyed in the 1970s are the first to officially record the name as Dr Johnson Avenue rather than as simply 'The Avenue'. The association with Samuel Johnson stemmed from his friendship with the wealthy brewer and MP Henry Thrale and his wife Hester. Between 1765 and 1781 Johnson stayed often with the Thrales, giving rise to numerous supposed connections between Johnson and Tooting. Sexby notes that some of these were questionable, such as the belief that Johnson compiled his dictionary here when it had in fact been completed a decade before his association with the Thrales (Sexby 1905, 214-17). In addition to the avenue which bears Johnson's name there was once also a tree known as 'Dr Johnson's Elm' in the south-east corner of the Common. The stump of the tree was removed shortly after the First World War (Tooting Common Management Plan 1988, 27).

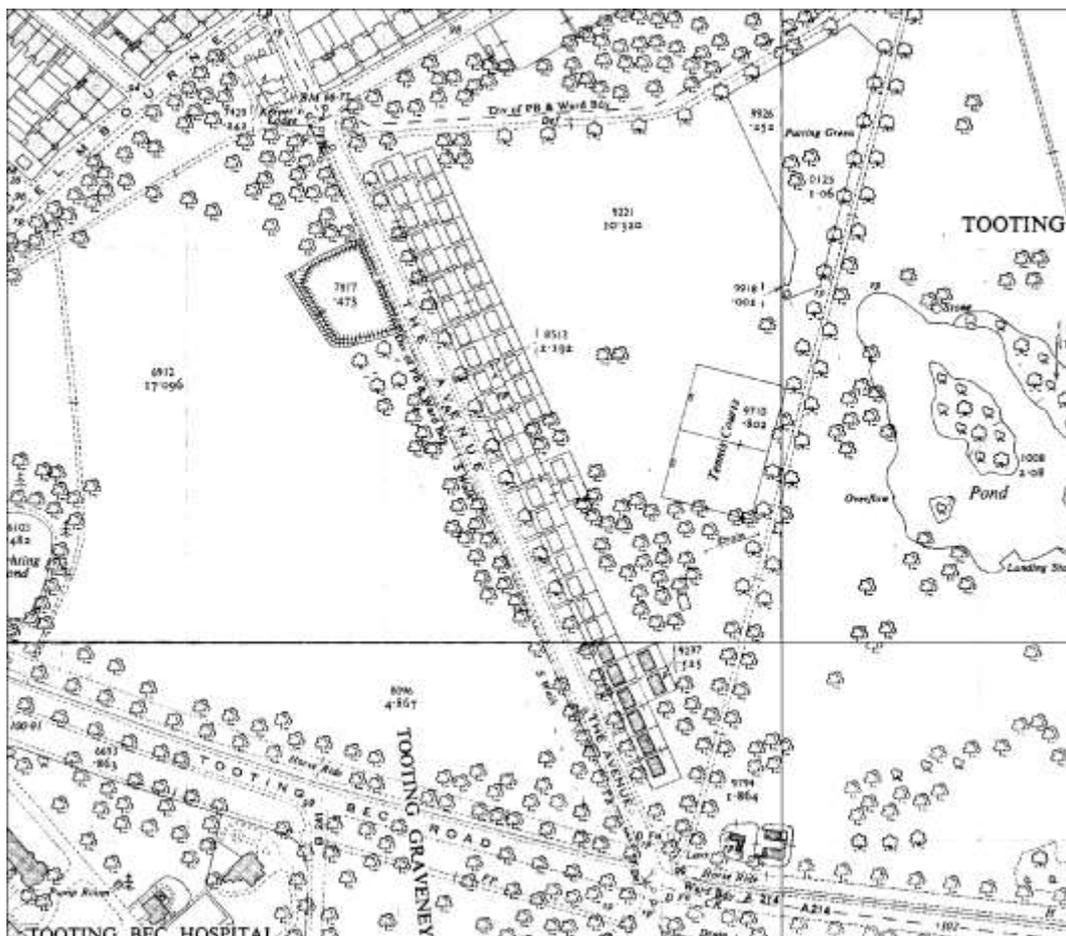


Figure 3.7 – Dr Johnson Avenue on the 1950 Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 map.

- 3.3.8. The 1988 Tooting Common Management Plan noted that the condition of all avenues on the Common 'had been allowed to deteriorate', a situation exacerbated by the 1987 storm which caused a considerable loss of trees across the Common. Filling in gaps in

the avenues was identified as a priority and this has continued to take place in recent decades (Tooting Common Management Plan 1988, 33).

3.4. Dr Johnson Avenue – current composition and condition

- 3.4.1. Dr Johnson Avenue currently comprises 46 trees on the west side and 37 on the east side (Treework Environmental Practice, 2015). The dominant species is English oak (*Quercus robur*) which accounts for 78 of the 83 trees (94%). The remaining 5 trees include 1 red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and 4 Cypress oaks (*Quercus robur* 'Fastigiata'). The trees have a very varied composition in terms of size and age, ranging from recently planted introductions with stem diameters of 6-20cm to large survivors from earlier phases of the avenue's history with diameters between 100-140cm and circumferences between 3 and 4m. Five trees fall into this latter category and clearly represent the oldest surviving trees within the avenue. Two of these lie on the west side of the avenue (T701 and T710) and three together in the middle of the east side (T873, T874, T875).



Figure 3.8 – Oak trees on the east side of Dr Johnson Avenue (T873-5).



Figure 3.9 – Oak trees on the east side of Dr Johnson Avenue (looking north).

- 3.4.2. While these are clearly the oldest trees in the present avenue it is difficult to assign a precise date to them, as it is to any mature or veteran tree (Barnes and Williamson 2011). The original planting date, past management practices, competition from neighbouring trees, damage and disease may all have had an affect on the current size of the trees. Even allowing for the fact that they have grown closely together in an avenue on relatively poor soil, a circumference of between 3 and 4m would seem rather on the small side for an oak tree supposedly planted in the seventeenth century, particularly the beginning of that century. An eighteenth-century date therefore seems more plausible for the oldest of the surviving trees. If this is the case then it suggests one of two possibilities: that the original planting date of Dr Johnson Avenue is more recent than has typically been assumed and that its origins lay somewhere in the decades either side of 1700, or that the oldest survivors date from an earlier phase of replanting, maintaining the line of a potentially earlier avenue. Even if a seventeenth-century planting date could be proved through documentary sources then it seems unlikely (though not absolutely impossible) that any of the present trees are original.
- 3.4.3. Of the smaller trees in the avenue it can be said with more confidence that most are the result of various schemes of replanting carried out in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The average stem diameter is 36cm (circumference 112cm) with a range of trees of various sizes and ages that, if properly maintained, will ensure the continuation of the avenue as an important part of the landscape of Tooting Common. Overall the trees here are characterised by younger specimens, with 56 trees having a circumference of less than 100cm.



Figure 3.10 – Dr Johnson Avenue (looking south) showing oak trees of various sizes and ages.

- 3.4.4. A tree condition survey carried out in March 2015 classed 49 of the trees as being in 'Good' condition and 34 as 'Fair'. None were recorded as poor, though three trees (T706, T708, T710) were thought to show signs of 'likely' or 'probable' Acute Oak Decline (Treework Environmental Practice 2015).

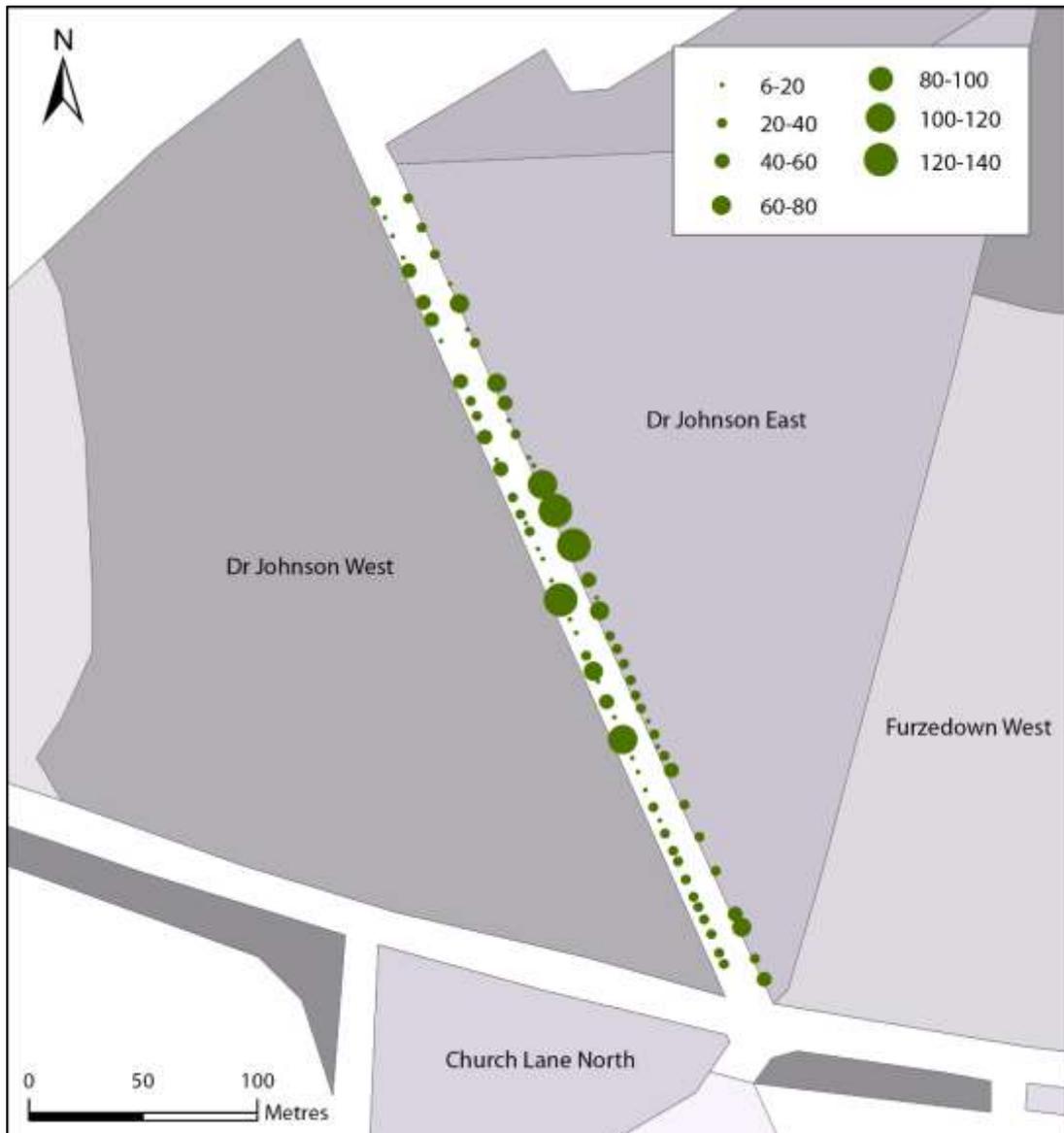


Figure 3.11 – Variations in stem diameter of trees in Dr Johnson Avenue (in cm).

3.5. Garrad's Road Avenue

3.5.1. Garrad's Road Avenue runs north to south parallel to Garrad's Road but lies inside the current boundary of the Common. It also forms part of the Garrad's Road Conservation Area (wandsworth.gov.uk). As with Dr Johnson Avenue it has been claimed that it was originally planted in the seventeenth century (londongardensonline.org.uk – Tooting Common) although the evidence for this is not clear. It is shown on a 1729 map of the manor of Tooting Bec but, curiously, is not shown on other eighteenth-century maps of London and the surrounding area such as those by John Rocque and William Faden.



Figure 3.12 – Garrad's Road Avenue looking south.



Figure 3.13 – Garrad's Road Avenue as shown on a map of 1729 (London Metropolitan Archives E/BER/S/E5/3/1).

- 3.5.2. The map of 1729 appears to show Garrad's Road Avenue running between a group of properties on the edge of the Common towards the end of Tooting Bec Road Avenue. At this date the Common extended further to the east than it does today. Its depiction raises a number of interesting issues. The fact that numerous existing Common trees are shown *inside* the avenue suggest that it had only been recently planted and that these trees were yet to be cleared. This is reinforced by the fact that the surveyor uses a different, smaller tree symbol for those trees in the avenue, implying they were young trees. An alternative, though probably less likely, explanation may be that at the time the map was drawn the avenue had not been planted; what is shown is a proposed, rather than existing avenue. Either explanation may account for its absence from Rocque's map of 1746 – either because it was still a young and poorly established feature, or because it was yet to be planted.
- 3.5.3. On nineteenth-century maps the depiction of the avenue is often incomplete and ambiguous. Stanford's map shows a continuous line of trees along the edge of the common, but with a corresponding row of trees only at the northern end. A short, but more complete, avenue is shown to the east of the common.

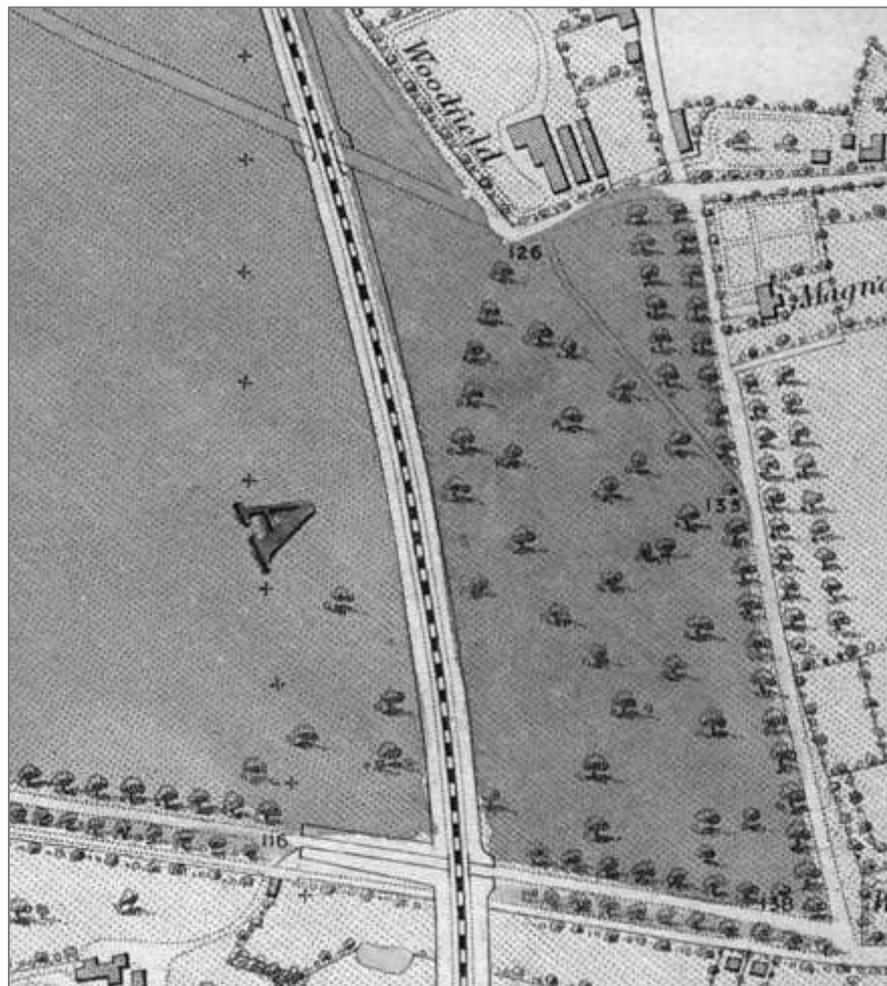


Figure 3.14 – Detail from Stanford's 1862 map of London.

- 3.5.4. The 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1868 similarly shows a fragmentary avenue adjacent to the northern end of Garrad's Road with scattered trees below. A more

complete avenue appears on the 1895-6 25-inch map, which may be directly related to the fact that it had been adopted as part of the Horse Ride around the perimeter of the Common, one of the early improvements made after the Common had been acquired by the Metropolitan Board of Works (Sexby 1905, 224).

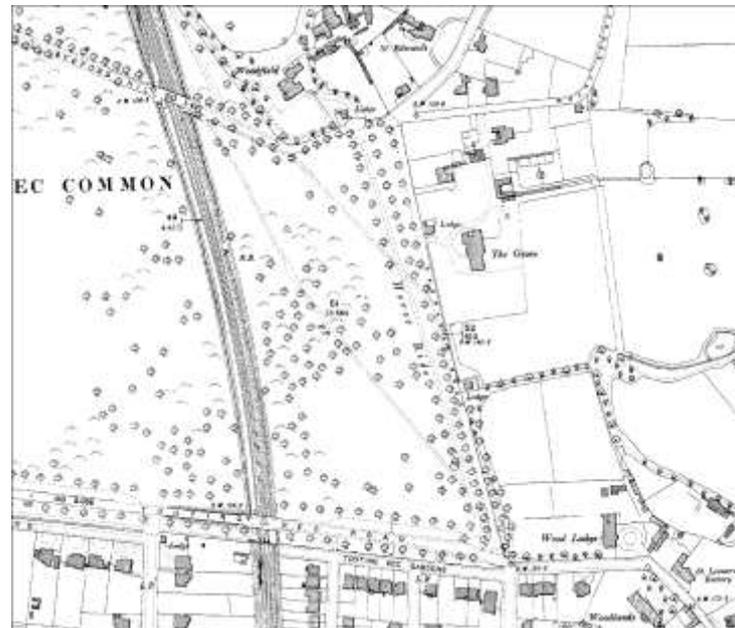


Figure 3.15 – Garrad's Road Avenue on the 1895-6 OS 25 inch to 1 mile map.

3.5.5. The 25-inch map of 1916 shows little change compared to the 1890s, though the southern end of the avenue was more defined by this time. It was, however, not a continuous avenue at this date with gaps on both sides shown in the middle of the avenue. Later Ordnance Survey maps present a similar picture of a rather discontinuous avenue following the line of the Horse Ride.

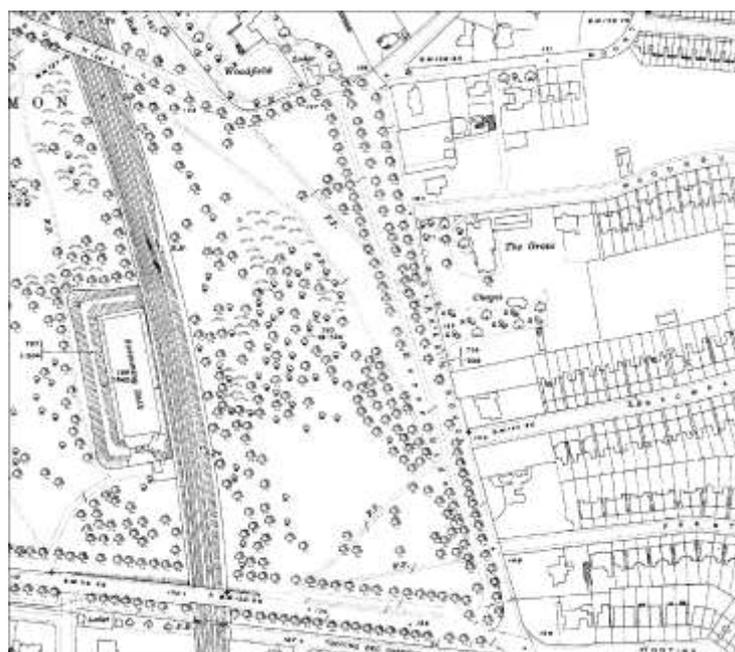


Figure 3.16 – Garrad's Road Avenue on the 1916 Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map.

3.6. Garrad’s Road Avenue – current composition and condition

3.6.1. Garrad’s Road Avenue currently contains 97 trees of 7 species (Treework Environmental Practice 2015). English oak is the dominant species, accounting for 70% of the total trees. The second most common species is horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), which is confined to the southern end of the western side of the avenue and makes up 20% of the total. Of the remaining trees, there are 6 whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*), which seem to have been chosen for replanting part of the northern end of the avenue in the twentieth century, given their size and limited distribution. In addition there are single specimens of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), bird cherry (*Prunus padus*), red oak and turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*).

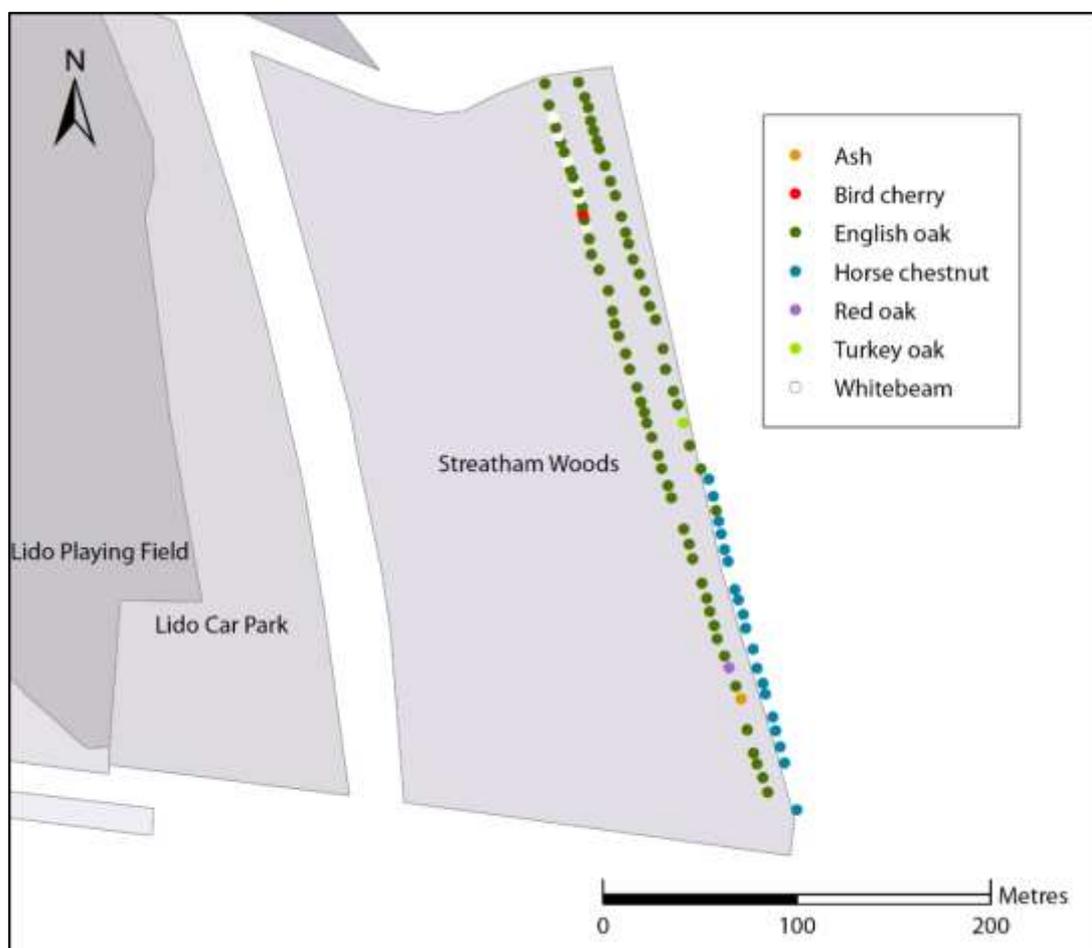


Figure 3.17 – Trees in Garrad’s Road Avenue by species.

3.6.2. As with the other surviving avenues on the common, the trees in Garrad’s Road Avenue encompass a wide variety of sizes, reflecting both the mix of species and various schemes of replanting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Stem diameters range from 5cm for recently planted trees to 153cm for the largest surviving tree. Compared to Dr Johnson Avenue the average stem diameter of tree is larger (51cm compared to 35cm, average circumference of approximately 160cm compared to 112cm) and there are a greater proportion of older trees – just under a third have circumferences of 200cm or more. Six oak trees have stem diameters greater than 100cm and

circumferences of 3-4 metres, while the largest tree in the avenue (T1535) has a diameter of 153cm and a circumference of 4.5m. This gives the avenue a much more imposing and enclosed atmosphere than Dr Johnson Avenue in its current state.

- 3.6.3. These seven trees represent the most likely survivals from the original planting of the avenue, but with the possible exception of the very largest they too appear more likely to date from the eighteenth rather than the seventeenth century. This does not conclusively rule out a seventeenth-century planting date, but suggests that if that were the case then there was substantial replanting afterwards.
- 3.6.4. A similar date of planting to Dr Johnson Avenue could be inferred from the current species composition of Garrad's Road Avenue, where English oak is predominant, though not to quite the same extent as in Dr Johnson Avenue. Oak does, however, particularly dominate the northern end of the avenue which, to judge from the cartographic evidence, represents the older and more complete end of the avenue. The larger size of the trees in Garrad's Road Avenue, compared to Dr Johnson Avenue, may be due to the more favourable conditions here – trees growing on water retentive clay soils rather than the sands and gravels of western part of the common. On the basis of surviving trees and cartographic evidence an early eighteenth-century date seems plausible for both avenues.



Figure 3.18 – Garrad's Road Avenue looking north towards Bedford Hill, showing some of the larger English oak trees which represent the oldest trees in the avenue.

- 3.6.5. The horse chestnuts towards the south of the avenue show a smaller range of variation in size (stem diameters of 41-75cm, circumferences of 120-230cm) than the oak trees and appear to all date to the late-nineteenth and twentieth century.

3.6.6. A tree condition survey carried out in March 2015 classed 53 of the trees as being in 'Good' condition and 40 as 'Fair'. One tree was dead and 3 were recorded as 'Poor'. Three of the oak trees displayed signs of 'probable' Acute Oak Decline (Treework Environmental Practice 2015).



Figure 3.19 – Variations in stem diameter of trees in Garrad's Road Avenue (in cm).

3.7. Chestnut Avenue

3.7.1. Chestnut Avenue runs from north to south between Tooting Bec Road (where it begins close to the southern end of Dr Johnson Avenue) and Bedford Hill. Today it lines a busy path across the Common, giving access to the playground, pond and tennis courts. It is first shown on Ordnance Survey maps of the 1890s and appears to have been planted in the 1870s or 1880s, soon after Tooting Common was purchased by the Metropolitan Board of Works.



Figure 3.20 – Chestnut Avenue looking north.

- 3.7.2. The 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1868-75 shows a footpath approximately on the line of Chestnut Avenue, running across Tooting Bec Common through a landscape of furze, rough grazing and a few scattered trees. The 1895-6 edition shows the avenue, with scattered gaps along its length, which may be a reflection of it having been relatively recently planted. It is certainly shown as a more continuous feature on the 1916 map. A postcard of 1910 shows a view looking south along the avenue, with horse chestnut trees of two clearly different sizes representing the original planting and presumably more recent replacements. An RAF aerial photograph taken in 1947 shows that, at that time, the avenue was composed of a continuous line of paired trees of very similar sizes, contrasting with the more irregular composition of the other avenues visible on the same photograph (MOLA 2015, Figure 14).
- 3.7.3. Horse chestnut was frequently used as an amenity tree in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is often found lining paths in public parks or as a street tree in contemporary housing developments. It was often recommended by eighteenth-century authors as a quick-growing tree with a strong vertical shape that was well-suited to avenues, though it usually fell below elm and lime in lists of preferred species (Couch 1992, 179).

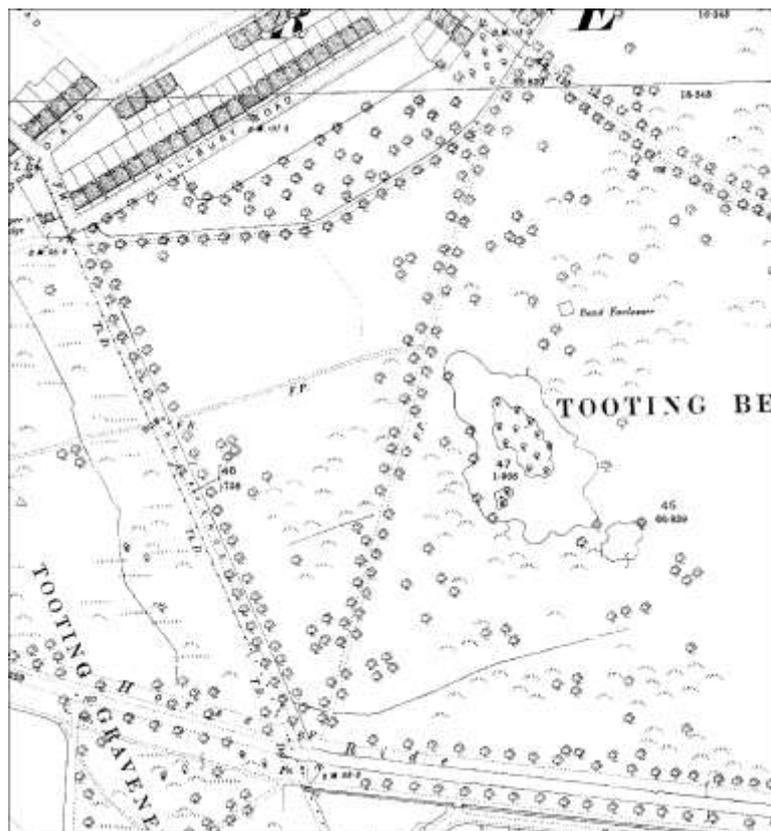


Figure 3.20 – Chestnut Avenue on the 1895-6 Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map.



Figure 3.21 – Chestnut Avenue looking from north to south, towards Tooting Bec Road (Patrick Loobey Collection).

3.8. Chestnut Avenue – current composition and condition

- 3.8.1. Unsurprisingly Chestnut Avenue is dominated by horse chestnut trees. These account for 67 of the 77 trees in the avenue (87%). Other species include English oak, Cypress oak, a solitary beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and a group of 3 small-leaved limes (*Tilia cordata*) at the northern end. All of these are small, recently planted trees with only one of the 10 having a stem diameter greater than 10cm. The horse chestnuts display a much greater variation in size as a result of various periods of replanting. Stem diameters range from 7 to 120cm (circumferences of 20 to 350cm). Replanting and losses have given the avenue a very irregular appearance in places – the southern end, characterised by young trees and gaps in the planting is very light and open, while the concentration of older and larger trees close to the tennis courts mean this area is much more shaded and enclosed.
- 3.8.2. Thirteen trees have stem diameters greater than 80cm and circumferences of 250cm and more. These, and possibly some others with girths greater than 200cm, are very likely to date from the first planting of the avenue in the 1870s/1880s. However, as the postcard shown in Figure 3.21 highlights, replanting was already taking place by the start of the twentieth century.

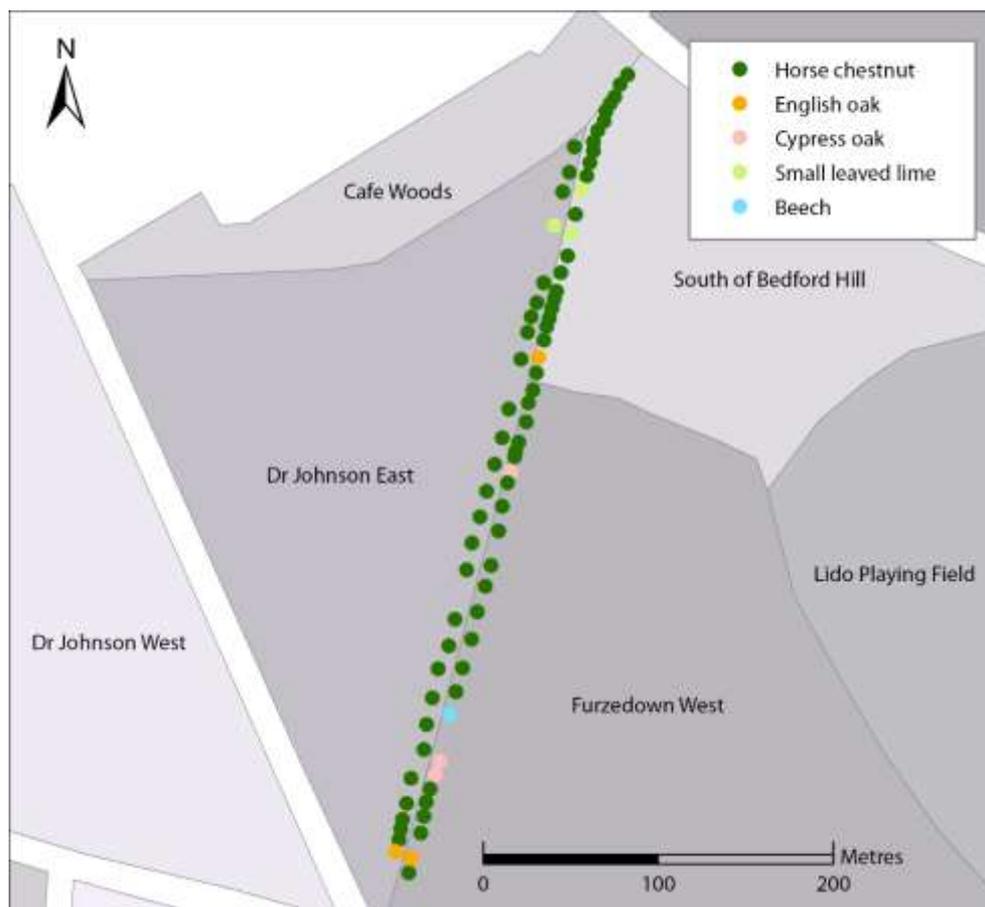


Figure 3.22 – Species composition of Chestnut Avenue.



Figure 3.23 – Chestnut avenue, close to the tennis courts, looking north.

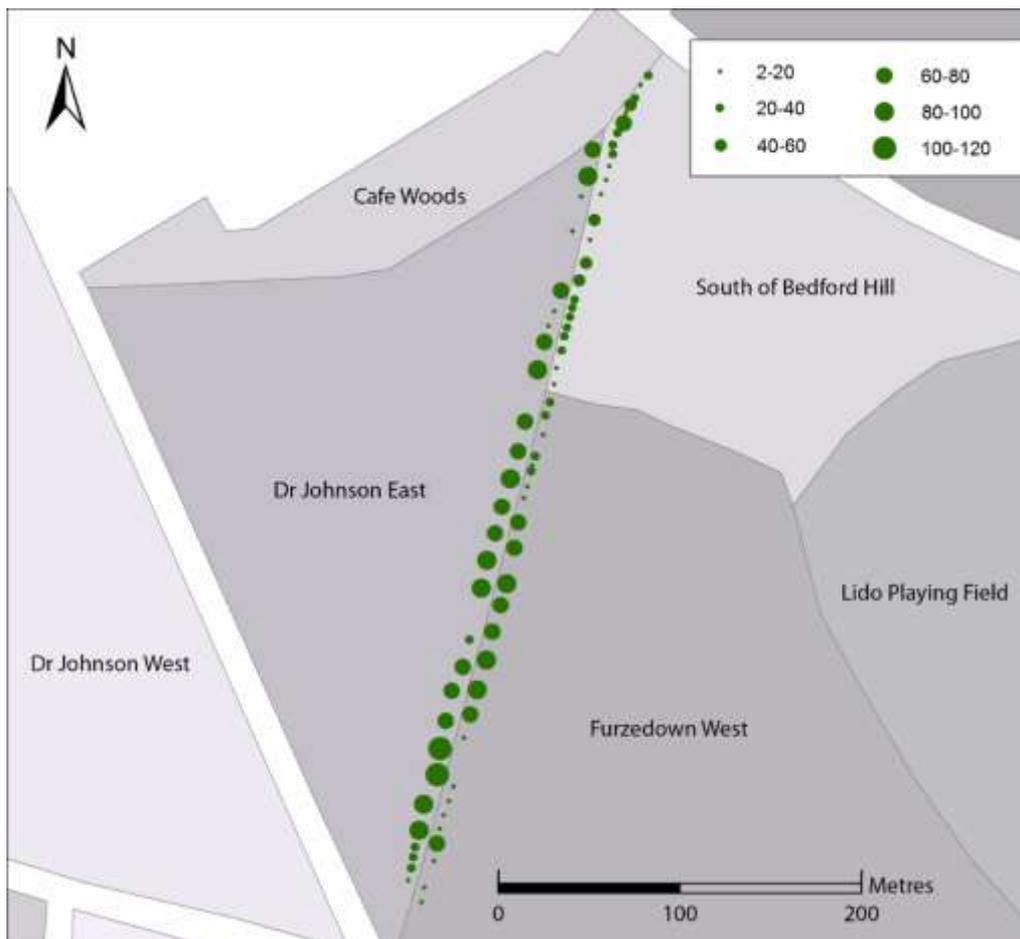


Figure 3.24 – Stem diameters of trees in Chestnut Avenue

3.8.3. Figure 3.24 illustrates the uneven character of the avenue, with numerous gaps and other sections dominated by recent planting. The majority of the mature specimens are found in the southern half of the avenue. Taking the avenue as a whole the average size of tree here is 43 cm in terms of stem diameter and 135cm for circumference.

3.8.4. A tree condition survey carried out in March 2015 classed 30 of the trees as being in 'Good' condition and 43 as 'Fair'. Two trees were dead and two were recorded as 'Poor'. A total of 20 horse chestnuts of varying sizes and ages were identified as showing signs of bleeding canker disease (Treework Environmental Practice 2015).

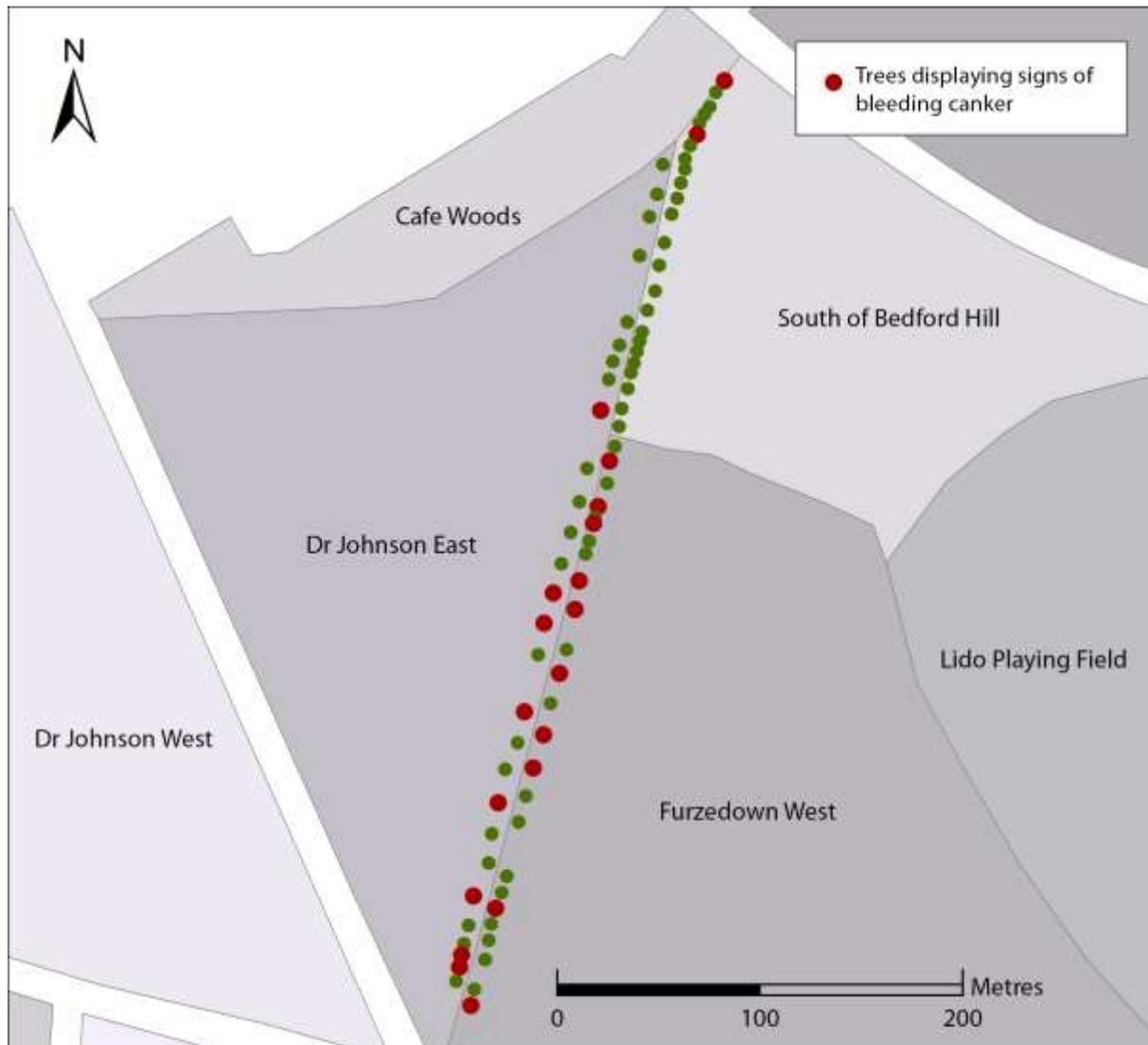


Figure 3.25 – Trees displaying signs of bleeding canker in Chestnut Avenue.

3.9. Tooting Bec Road Avenue



Figure 3.26 – Tooting Bec Road in 1911 (Patrick Loobey Collection).

- 3.9.1. The longest and most elaborate avenue depicted on eighteenth-century maps was that which ran from east to west across the southern edge of Tooting Common. The map of 1729 (Figure 3.13) and Rocque's maps of London and Surrey (Rocque 1746 and 1748) show this as a double avenue, with two rows of trees to the north of the road and two below. The avenue is shown starting alongside Dr Johnson Avenue in the west and running eastwards towards Streatham, stopping at the edge of the Common. Later references to the avenue reveal that elm was the predominant species, which eventually led to its demise as a result of Dutch elm disease in the twentieth century (Tooting Common Management Plan 1988, 28). Young elm suckers can still be found along the north side of Tooting Bec Road.



Figure 3.27 – Rocque's 1746 map of London, showing a double avenue running along the line of the Tooting Bec Road.

- 3.9.2. The absence of mature elms from the modern British landscape can lead to a failure to appreciate the historical importance of the species which, with oak and ash, was one of the commonest sights in many parks and the wider countryside. Alongside lime it was the species most often recommended for avenues by eighteenth-century authors due to its height when mature and the ease of propagating and transplanting young specimens (Couch 1992, 181).
- 3.9.3. The precise origins of the Tooting Bec Road avenue are, as with the other early avenues at Tooting, rather obscure. It appears to have been well established by 1729 but it is not clear how much further back its history could be pushed. The 1988 management plan for the Common suggests that the Duke of Bedford was responsible for planting the avenue, which would narrow the date down to between 1696, when the Russell family acquired the manor of Tooting Bec and the 1720s (VCH Surrey Vol IV 1912, 92-102).
- 3.9.4. Stanford's map of 1862 shows a single avenue, which by this time appears to have extended a little way to the west of Dr Johnson Avenue. A large gap in the avenue can be seen either side of the London, Brighton and South Coast railway line, which had opened in 1861 (Gower 1988). Sexby notes that the building of the two railway lines across the common had resulted in the loss of a significant number of trees (Sexby 1905, 221) A further line of trees immediately to the south of the avenue could represent part of the more complex eighteenth-century arrangement. Alternatively it might relate to planting carried out following the expansion of Streatham Park. The Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1895-6 shows a single row of trees either side of Tooting Bec Road, with the third row on the edge of Streatham Park having disappeared to make way for new houses. Some trees are shown to the west of Dr Johnson Avenue, but the continuation of the Tooting Bec Avenue in this direction is not as clear as Stanford's earlier map implies. The newly established Horse Ride is shown running between the northern row of the avenue and Tooting Bec Road. The 1916 edition show a more defined avenue beginning at the western tip of Tooting Graveney Common, presumably the result of new planting taking place along the route of the Horse Ride.

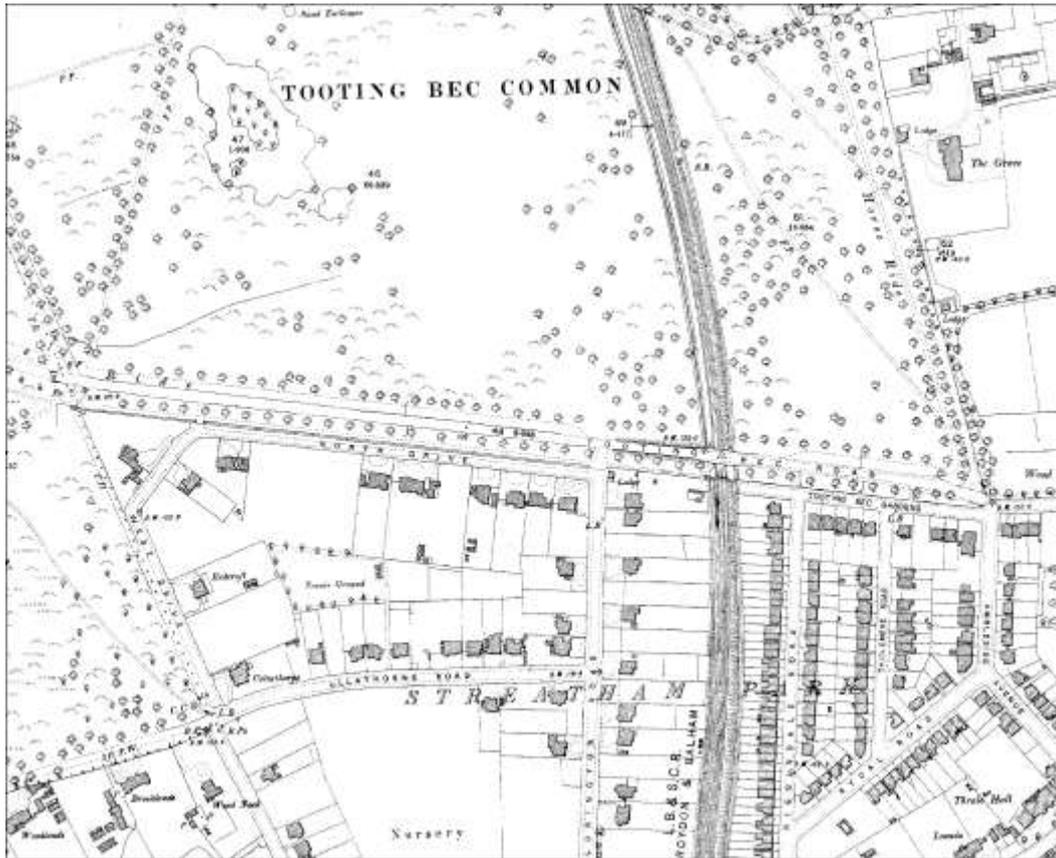


Figure 3.28 – Tooting Bec Road Avenue on the 1895-6 Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map.

- 3.9.5. In the early twentieth century the Tooting Bec Road Avenue therefore had a varied character. Elements of the original avenue seem to have survived to the east of Dr Johnson Avenue and early twentieth-century postcards certainly show this part of the avenue to have been composed of elm trees of considerable size (see Figure 3.26 above). Amherst, writing in 1908, referred to the 'grand old elms' which lined the road (Amherst 1907, 208). To the west of Dr Johnson Avenue the line of the older avenue was picked up by more recent planting which seems to have developed alongside the laying out of the horse ride.
- 3.9.6. The trees which mark the approximate line of the former avenue today are very varied in species, age and size, although the majority represent recently established or planted trees little more than a few decades (and in some cases a few years) old. The best represented species include hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), small-leaved lime, Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), horse chestnut, Turkey oak and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*).



Figure 3.29 – Recently planted trees at the western end of Tooting Bec Road. Tooting Graveney Common, looking east.



Figure 3.30 – The line of the former avenue on the north side of Tooting Bec Road picked out by a sparse collection of more recently planted trees. Looking east towards the junction with Garrad's Road.

3.10. Bedford Hill

3.10.1. Bedford Hill cuts across the middle of Tooting Bec Common, running approximately north-west to south-east. Although it does not have an avenue comparable to the others discussed in this section, a brief description is included here on account of the London plane trees (*Platanus x. hispanica*) which line the road on both sides. London planes were valued as a parkland tree in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and were frequently planted in urban contexts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in part because of their resistance to air pollution.

3.10.2. Stanford's 1862 map shows Bedford Hill but does not depict any trees along its length. The first edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1868-75 does, however, show a line of trees on both sides of the road, starting at the western edge of Tooting Bec Common and stopping before Bedford Hill crosses the railway line. The 1895 and 1916 editions of the 25-inch map show these lines of trees extending to the railway and continuing on the eastward side.

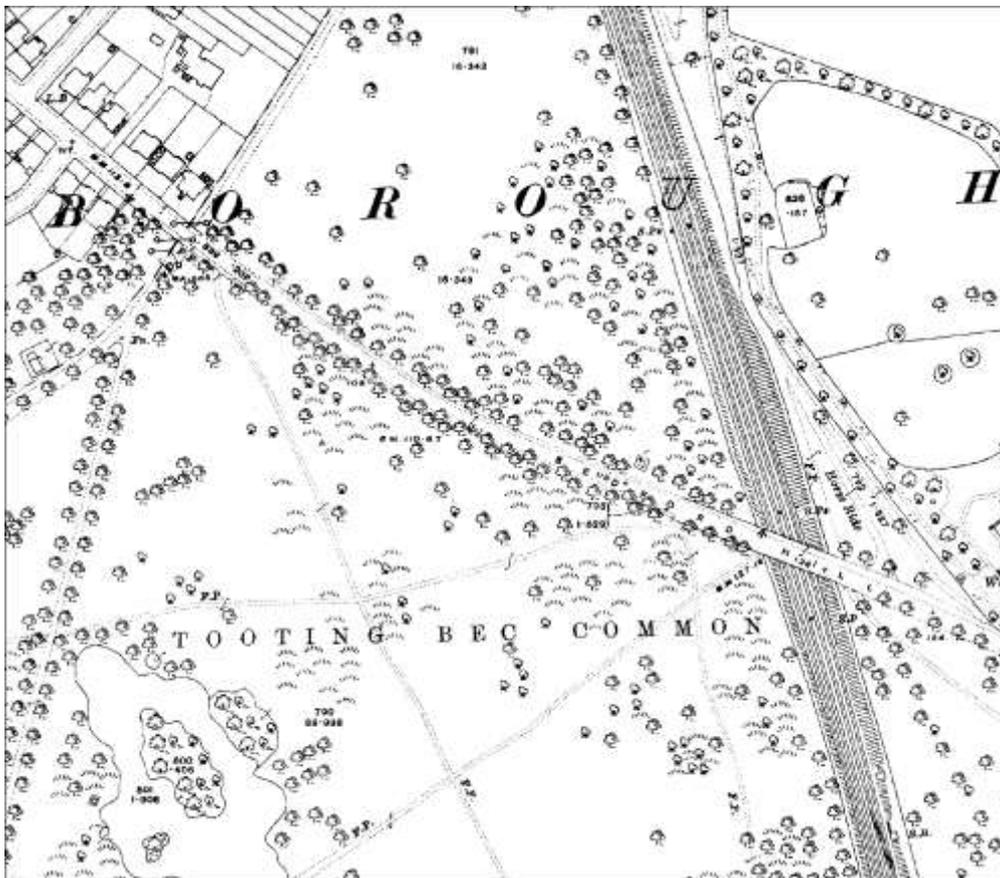


Figure 3.31 – Bedford Hill on the 1916 Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map.

3.10.3. The cartographic evidence would therefore suggest a planting date of the late 1860s, although it is possible that some of the trees were already in existence but not shown by Stanford. The clarity with which other trees are shown on the same map casts some doubt on this interpretation however. Today most of the surviving trees have stem diameters in the range of 80 to 100cm (circumferences of 2-3m), which seem consistent with a planting date in the second half of the nineteenth century.



Figure 3.32 – London planes at the north western end of Bedford Hill.



Figure 3.33 – Bedford Hill, looking towards the western edge of Tooting Common and showing the rows of plane trees on either side of the road.

4. Ancient and Veteran Trees

4.1. Ancient and Veteran Trees – Definitions

4.1.1. Various terms are applied to those trees which are particularly significant in terms of their age, size, appearance, landscape context and historical associations. ‘Ancient’ and ‘veteran’ are the most commonly used, and while definitions of each term can vary, trees described in this way would be expected to display some combination of the following characteristics:

- Significant age or size for a given species
- Part of a wider historic landscape (e.g. parkland trees, former hedgerow trees, churchyard trees).
- Evidence of past management practices (e.g. outgrown pollards or coppice stools).
- Signs of damage and decay (branch loss, dead wood).
- Historical associations (connection to a particular place, person or event).
- High ecological value (important habitat for specialised species).

4.1.2. The characteristics of ancient/veteran trees vary according to species, so a veteran oak may be several hundred years old while a tree with a shorter life span, such as a silver birch, may be considered a veteran after one hundred years. Other species, such as hawthorn and field maple, may live for a long time but not attain a particularly large size (Barnes and Williamson 2011). The size of a tree is therefore not necessarily a good indicator of its ancient or veteran status. Different species grow at varying rates, and the growth of an individual tree may be affected by historic management practices (e.g. pollarding) or local growing conditions.

4.1.3. Ancient Trees

An ancient tree is generally agreed to be in the final stages of its life. However, this can vary considerably according to species, and some trees (such as oak or yew) have a lengthy final stage compared to other, shorter lived trees. Ancient trees often have a wide trunk and may have a smaller canopy, as a result of dieback and branch loss, than other trees of the same species. They are also very likely to be hollow (Woodland Trust 2008). An ancient tree would be expected to show all or most of the following characteristics:

- Biological, aesthetic or cultural interest, because of its great age
- A growth stage that is best described as ancient or post-mature
- A chronological age that is old relative to other trees of the same species (Lonsdale 2013, 4).

4.1.4. Veteran Trees

A veteran tree is typically a mature tree which is beginning to show signs of age, including large limbs, signs of damage or decay, and perhaps some signs of becoming hollow. A veteran tree is not necessarily also an ancient tree, as these indicators may be the result of management practices, such as pollarding, and local conditions rather than a straightforward reflection of the age of the tree (Read 2000, 13-15; Woodland Trust

2008). The Ancient Tree Forum defines a veteran tree as one that ‘has survived various rigours of life and thereby shows signs of ancientness, irrespective of its age’ (Lonsdale 2013, 6).

4.1.5. **Other Definitions**

The Woodland Trust has adopted a further three terms, covering champion, heritage and notable trees. These terms can also be applied to veteran and ancient trees (Woodland Trust 2008). In brief:

- A **champion** tree is one which is the tallest or has the largest girth for its species, either nationally or regionally.
- A **heritage** tree is one with strong archaeological, historical or cultural connections.
- A **notable** tree is one that stands out in its local area as being particularly significant on account of size or species, but which does not have veteran or ancient characteristics.

4.2. Significance and Importance of Ancient and Veteran Trees

4.2.1. Ancient and veteran trees are incredibly important features in the landscape, both individually and where they occur in groups. They contribute to the character of local landscapes, represent tangible evidence of past management practices and land use and provide important habitats for a range of other species. Interest in these trees has increased substantially in recent decades, helped by the work of organisations such as the Woodland Trust and Ancient Tree Forum and through initiatives such as the Ancient Tree Hunt (www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/).

4.2.2. The veteran and ancient trees identified at Tooting Common have an added significance as a result of changes that have taken place in the surrounding landscape. They provide a link to an older landscape in an area which is dominated by urban development of the nineteenth and twentieth century, in addition to playing an important role in terms of biodiversity and contributing to the visual character and distinctiveness of the landscape. They can also potentially shed light on the ways in which the Common was used when it still functioned as part of the agricultural landscape.

4.3. Ancient and Veteran Trees on Tooting Common

4.3.1. A tree survey carried out in March 2015 identified 97 trees which could be classed as ancient or veteran. On the basis of the size, landscape context and likely age of many of these trees it is clear that for many of the 97 the term ‘veteran’ is more appropriate than ‘ancient’ and will be used as a shorthand here when describing all 97 trees as a group. However, such an interpretation is inevitably subjective, and it is to be hoped that among the veteran and mature trees of Tooting Common lie the ancient trees of the future. Some trees, although not veterans, could still be considered to possess significant heritage value as a result of their location, for example the younger trees within the historic avenues.

4.3.2. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of veteran trees across Tooting Common and highlights the fact that they tend to be found in one of four clusters, discussed in more detail below:

1. Between Emmanuel Road and the railway line at the northern end of the common (parcel name: *Emmanuel Road*).
2. To the north of Bedford Hill to both the east and west of the railway line (*North of Bedford Hill, The Triangle, Spinney Hill Path*).
3. The south eastern corner of the common from the Lido to Garrad's Road (*Lido Playing Field, Lido Car Park, Streatham Woods*).
4. The western edge of the Common to the south of Hillbury Road (*Café Woods*).

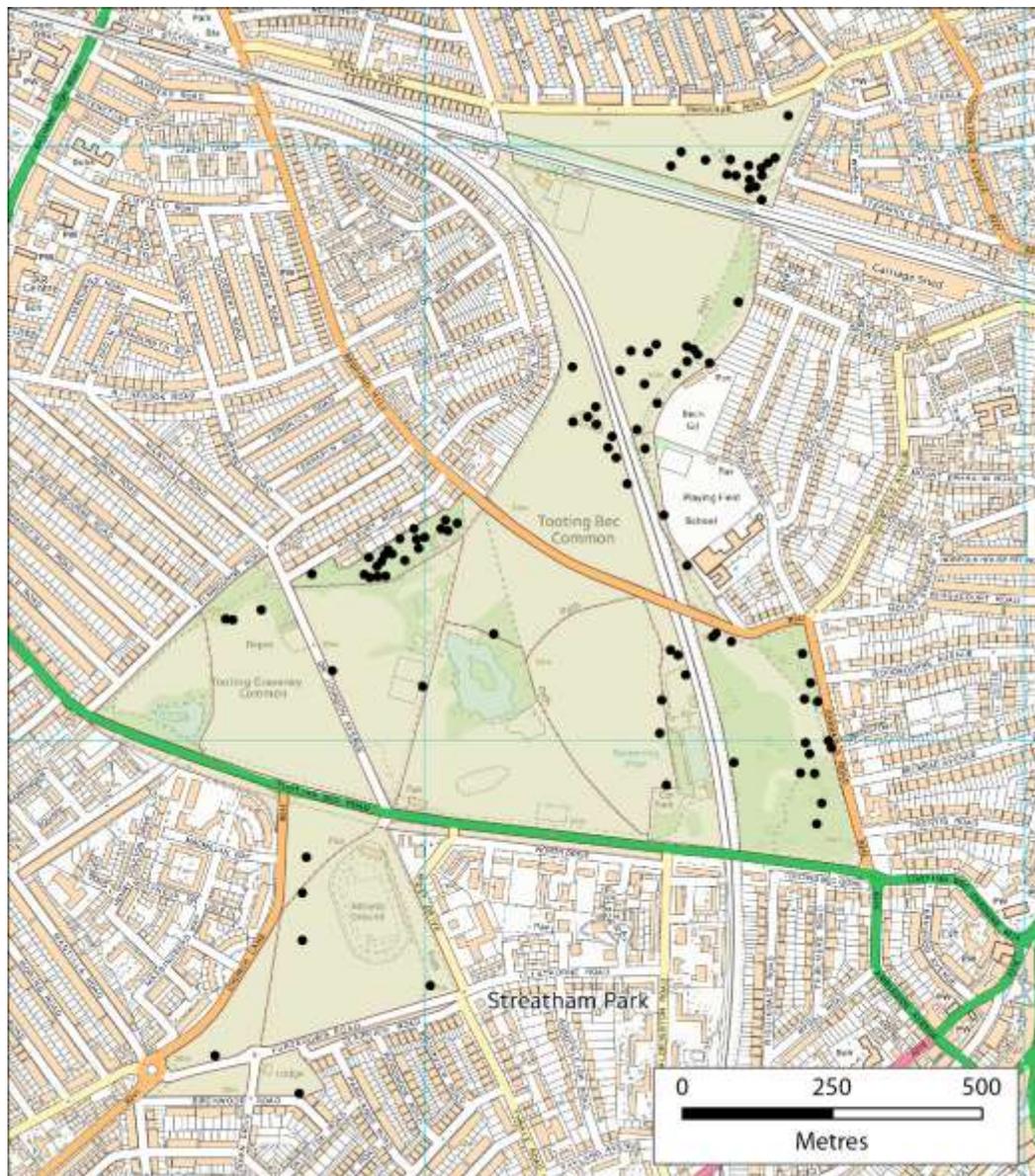


Figure 4.1 – The distribution of veteran trees on Tooting Common (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2015).

4.3.3. Veteran trees can be found in a number of landscape contexts on the Common, which can be broadly divided into three categories:

- I. Woodland – trees growing in densely wooded areas
- II. Parkland/common – trees growing in more open areas
- III. Avenue trees

4.3.4. The context of some trees will have changed over time, particularly as a result of the emergence of areas of secondary woodland in the twentieth century, which has undoubtedly engulfed some veterans that would once have stood in a more open setting (as suggested by their wide branching habit which implies little competition for light when they were becoming established). This is the case, for example, alongside the railway to the north of Bedford Hill.



Figure 4.2 – Veteran oaks surrounded by younger trees which represent the regeneration of woodland in the twentieth century.

4.3.5. The following table summarises the location and age of veteran trees at Tooting.

Category	Description	Age range	Examples
Common Trees	Trees that would have been part of the landscape of the functioning common. Primarily oak pollards which would formed part a woodpasture landscape in some areas.	19 th century 18 th century 17 th century	Oak pollards to the north of Bedford Hill. Hawthorns to west of Dr Johnson Avenue.
Avenue Trees	Potentially broadly contemporary with some of the trees in category 1, these trees are distinguished by having been deliberately planted for aesthetic reasons.	19 th century 18 th century	Veteran oaks in Dr Johnson Avenue and Garrad’s Road Avenue.
Amenity Trees	Trees planted as part of schemes to improve the appearance of the Common following its acquisition by the Metropolitan Board of Works in the 1870s.	1870 onwards	Horse chestnut on Chestnut Avenue, Red Oak near Athletics Track.

4.3.6. The majority of veterans fall into the first category. A number of veterans can be found in the older avenues (1 in Dr Johnson Avenue, 6 in Garrad’s Road Avenue, all English oaks) but most of the trees in the avenues represent more recent replanting. As would be expected, only a very small number of trees planted since 1870 have achieved veteran status.

4.3.7. When analysed by species it is immediately clear that veteran trees on Tooting Common are primarily English oak (79 of 97). This is unsurprising given that this species accounts for 25% of all trees on the Common (Treework Environmental Practice 2015, 9). Other factors which account for its predominance as a veteran tree here include the fact that there are numerous pollarded oaks, a reflection of the historic management of parts of the common as woodpasture. Pollarding trees (cropping the branches at a height of 2-3m) provided a source of wood and small timber while protecting the regrowth from grazing animals. It has been suggested that it has the effect of prolonging the life of the tree by altering its growth pattern, although an additional significant reason for the long-term survival of pollards is that they had little value as timber trees (Lennon 2009; Barnes and Williamson 2011, 65).

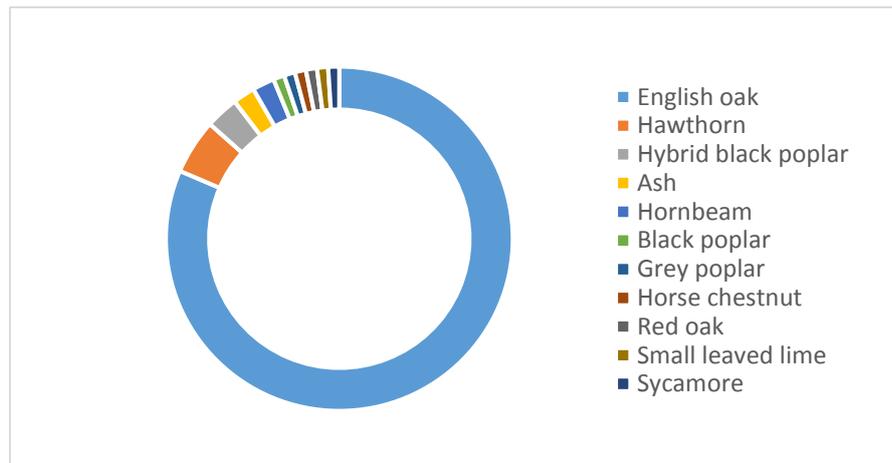


Figure 4.3 – Veteran trees on Tooting Common by species

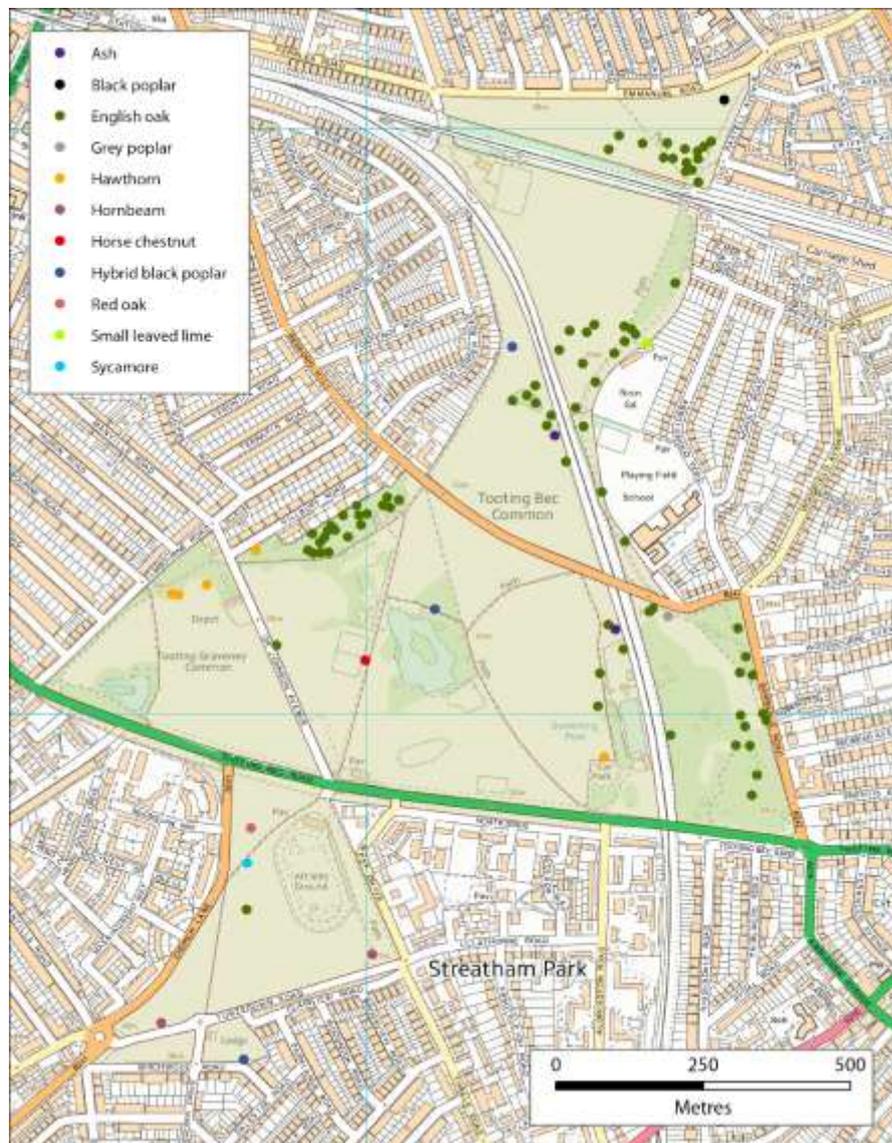


Figure 4.4 – Distribution of different species of veteran tree on Tooting Common (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2015).

4.3.8. The present distribution of veteran trees relates closely to the patterns of trees shown on nineteenth-century maps of Tooting Common. The 25 inch to 1 mile Ordnance Survey maps of 1868-75 and 1895-6 both depict a similar pattern. The Common is shown as a largely open landscape with areas of furze and rough grazing typical of a heathland common of this nature. At this date there were no significant areas of woodland cover, but there are several particular concentrations of trees shown. These are found alongside both railway lines in the northern half of the Common, in Streatham Woods and the area that was to be later occupied by the Lido and in the far south-western corner of Tooting Graveney Common.

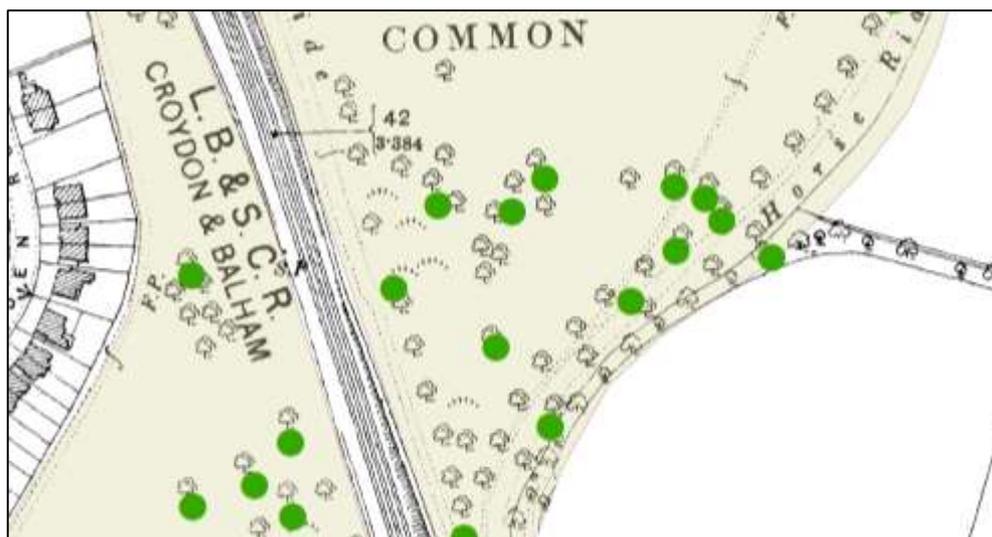


Figure 4.5 – Extract from the Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map of 1895-6 showing the distribution of trees on part of the Common (north of Bedford Hill). Green dots represent veteran trees identified in 2015. Some trees shown on the map correspond exactly with surviving trees.

4.3.9. The distribution of trees as shown on nineteenth-century maps, and reflected today in the location of veteran specimens, can be seen to relate closely to the broad divide in soil types which is evident across Tooting Common. To the north of Bedford Hill and to the east of the railway line the Common is characterised by water retentive clay soils, more suited to the growth of trees and woodland. To the south and west the soils are dominated by sands and gravels, giving rise historically to a landscape of acid grassland and heathland vegetation, used for gravel digging and kept open through sustained grazing pressure.

4.3.10. The 97 veterans display a range of sizes, relating partly to species. The veteran oaks have an average stem diameter of 104cm compared to 68cm for the veteran hornbeams and 39cm for the veteran hawthorns. Of the ten largest trees, measured by stem diameter, 8 are English oaks, 1 is a red oak and 1 a black poplar. These trees all have circumferences in excess of 4 metres and most are found in the south-eastern corner of the Common.



Figure 4.6 – Veteran hawthorns near Dr Johnson Avenue. Even very old thorns have relatively modest girths compared to other species of similar age.

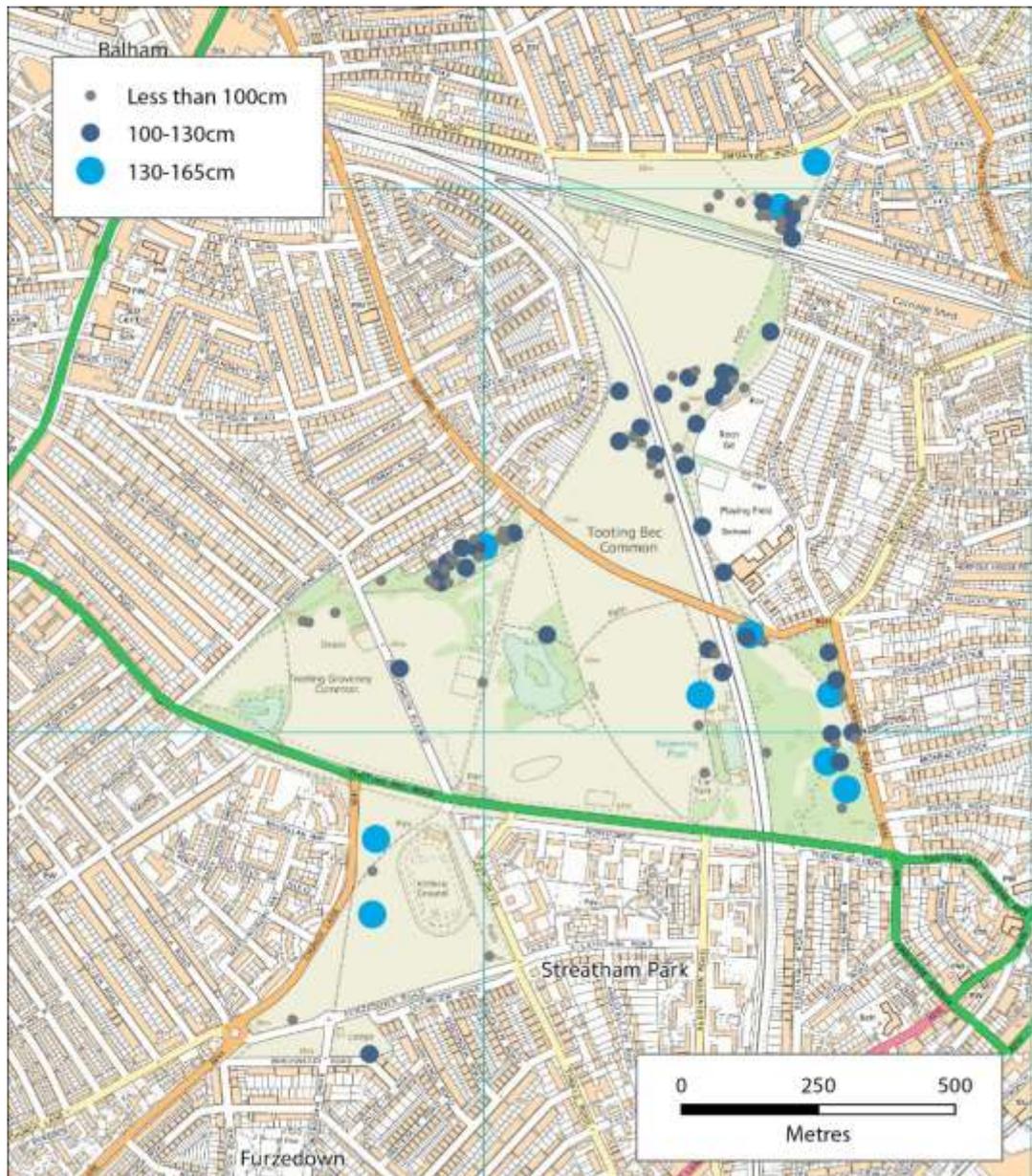


Figure 4.7 – Veteran trees by stem diameter size. The largest ten veterans all have stem diameters of 130cm or more (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2015).

4.4. Veteran Trees by Area

4.4.1. Veteran Trees – Emmanuel Road

The veteran trees here include a very large black poplar (T27) with a recorded stem diameter of 160cm. The 1895-6 OS 25 inch map suggests this may have been one of a line of trees following a path on the edge of the common. Black poplars of this size are comparatively rare trees and this is therefore an interesting and important example (Barnes and Williamson 2011, 70). The veteran oaks here match the pattern of trees shown in the nineteenth century, representing at least some trees that would have formed part of the working landscape of the Common.

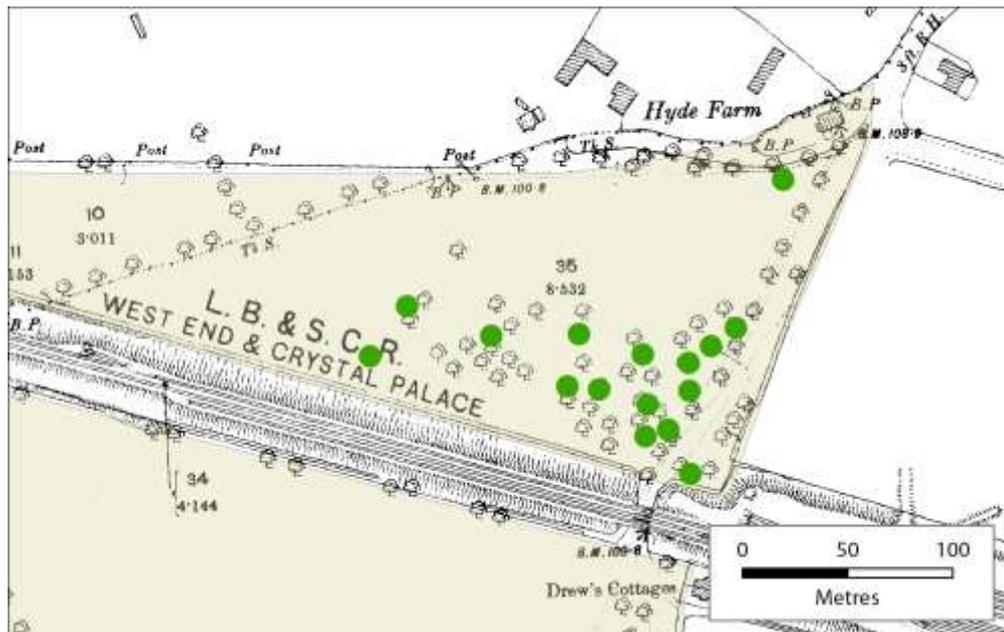


Figure 4.8 – Veteran trees near Emmanuel Road, overlaid on the Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map of 1895-6. The tree nearest to Hyde Farm is a black poplar.

- 4.4.2. Some, but not all, of the oaks here show some signs of having been managed as pollards, although the form of the trees suggests they were not managed in this way for any considerable length of time, especially when compared to examples near the Lido (See Figs 4.13 and 4.14). Some appear to have been cropped quite high, at around 3-4m. The existence of standard oaks here suggests they may have become established only after the common had ceased to be used and grazed intensively.



Figure 4.9 – Veteran oaks near Emmanuel Road, including some examples which appear to have been managed as pollards.

4.4.3. Veteran Trees - North of Bedford Hill, The Triangle and Spinney Hill Path

The veterans in this area are almost exclusively oaks, with isolated examples of other species including ash (T555) and small leaved lime (T388).

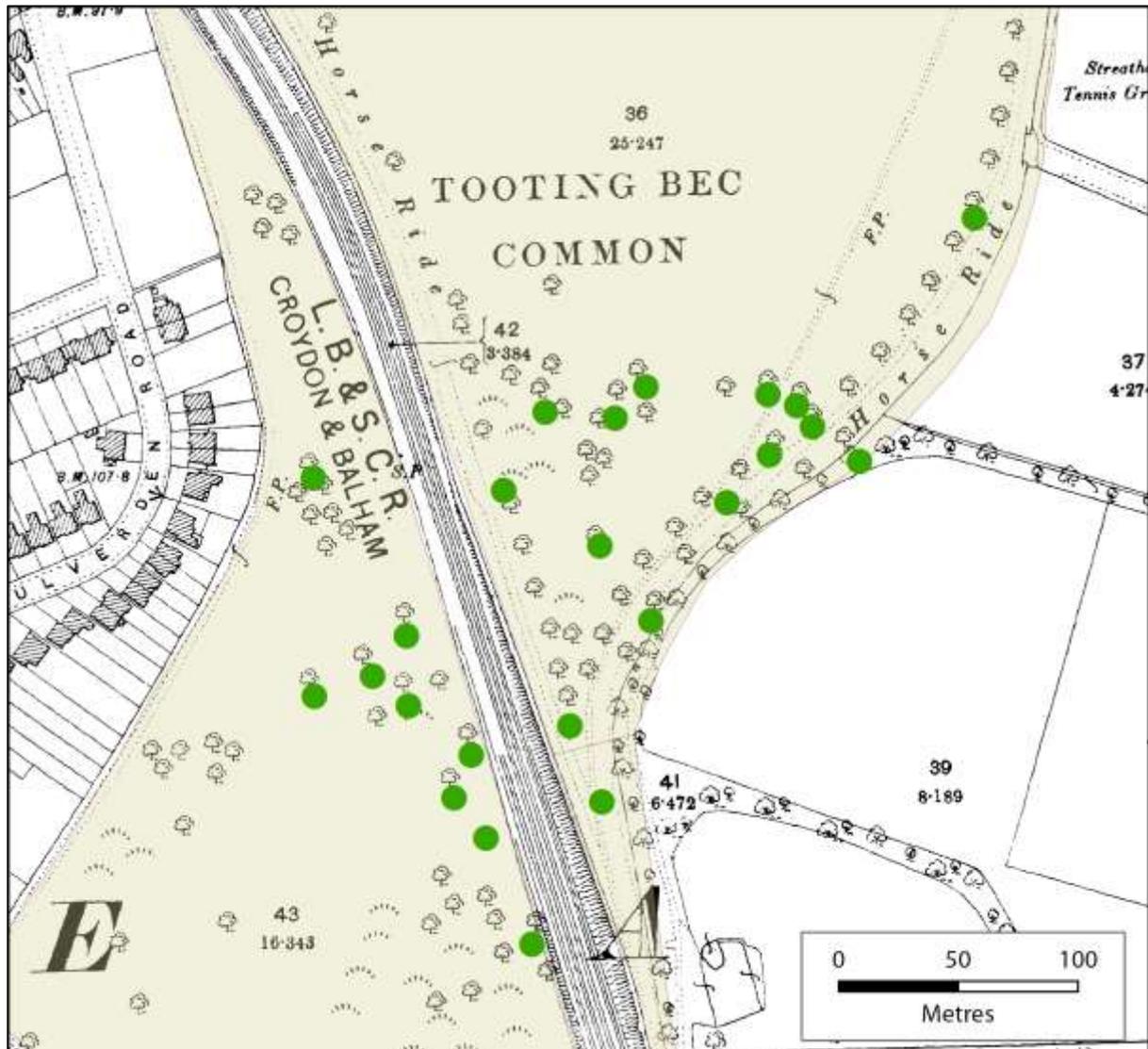


Figure 4.10 - Veteran trees to the north of Bedford Hill, overlaid on the Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map of 1895-6.

4.4.4. The relationship between these trees and the railway supports Sexby's claim that the building of the railways had caused a great loss of trees across the Common (Sexby 1905, 221). As with the trees near Emmanuel Road, some of the oaks here appear to have been managed as pollards. The size of the surviving veterans (typical girths of between 3 and 4 metres) suggests that most date to the eighteenth or nineteenth century.



Figure 4.10 – Veteran oaks north of Bedford Hill, close to the railway line.



Figure 4.11 – Veteran oaks in the south of ‘The Triangle’, between the two railway lines. The pattern of branches suggests the trees may have been pollarded at some point.

4.4.5. Veteran Trees – Lido Car Park, Lido Playing Field, Streatham Woods

Veteran trees here include trees that would once have stood on the open common, trees within Garrad’s Road Avenue and trees that now lie within a relatively dense area of woodland to the east of the railway line. Nineteenth-century maps show this to have

been one of the more well-wooded areas of the common. Five of the ten largest surviving oak trees on the common (with girths of 4-5 metres) are found in this area.

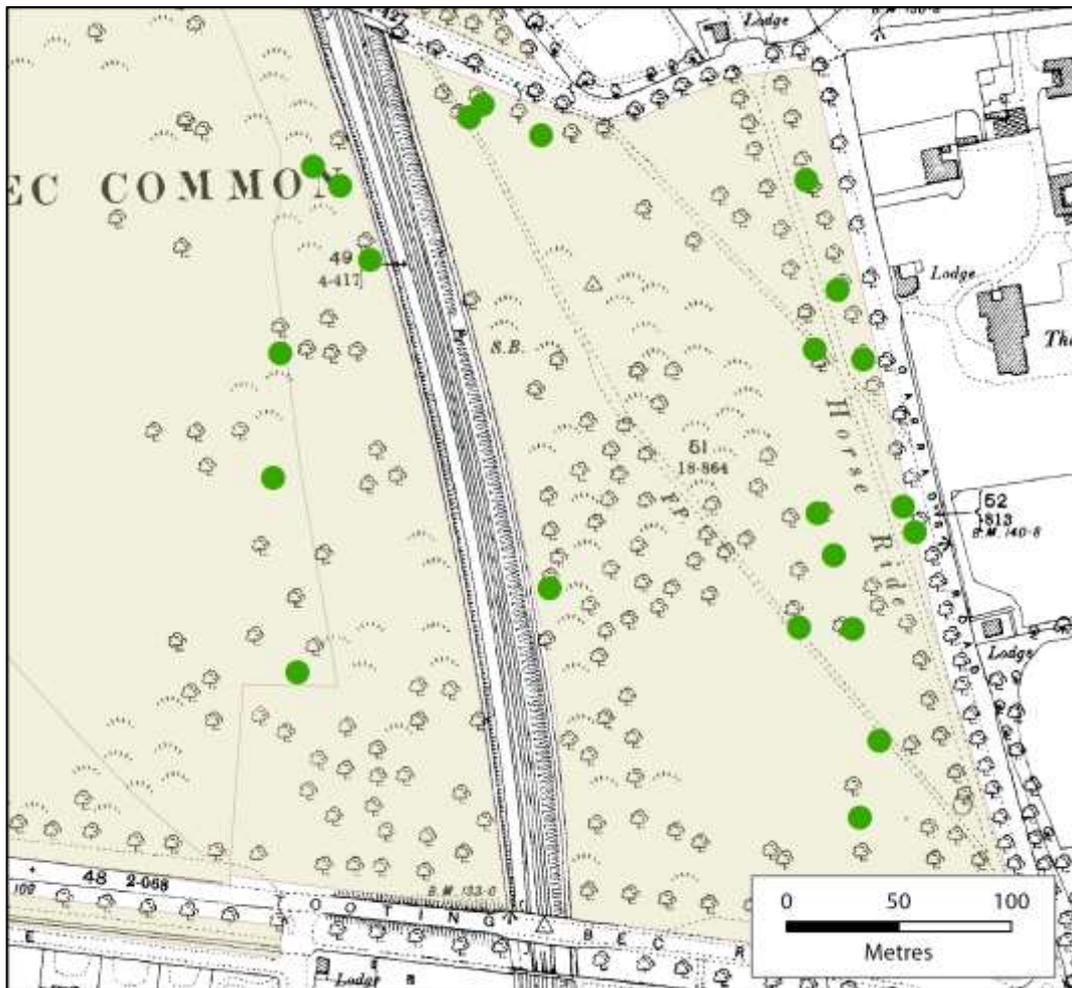


Figure 4.12 - Veteran trees in the south-east corner of Tooting Common, overlaid on the Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map of 1895-6.

- 4.4.6. One excellent example of an English oak pollard which is clearly a survivor from the earlier Common landscape can be found close to the path that runs to the west of the Lido. This has a much more gnarled appearance than many of the other veteran oaks, although a girth of about 3.5 metres suggests that it may date to no earlier than the eighteenth century. Pollards of the same age can, however, display a wide variation in size so it is difficult to offer a precise date (Barnes and Williamson 2011, 40-43). This example is clearly rather older than some of the other pollards found nearby (Figure 4.15), although these smaller pollards are interesting in suggesting that pollarding may have continued until quite a late date in the history of the Common.



Figure 4.13 – A gnarled oak pollard on the path next to the Lido, likely to be one of the oldest surviving trees on the Common.



Figure 4.14 – A closer view of the same oak pollard.



Figure 4.15 – Veteran oak pollard in Streatham Woods.

4.4.7. Veteran Trees – Café Woods

A cluster of 20 veteran oaks was recorded on the edge of the Common near Hillbury Road. These are all broadly similar in size and appearance, with girths of between 2.5 and 3.5 metres. The 1895-6 Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile map suggests that the concentration of trees here was even greater in the late nineteenth century. The trees are not shown on Stanford's 1862 map, but they do appear on the first edition 25 inch map of 1875. This shows a dense group of trees, forming the boundary between the grounds of Bedford Hill House and Tooting Bec Common.



Figure 4.16 – The eastern end of Café Woods, shown as a much larger area of woodland on the edge of the grounds of Bedford Hill House. OS 25 inch to 1 mile map, 1875.



Figure 4.17 – Veteran oaks in Café Woods.

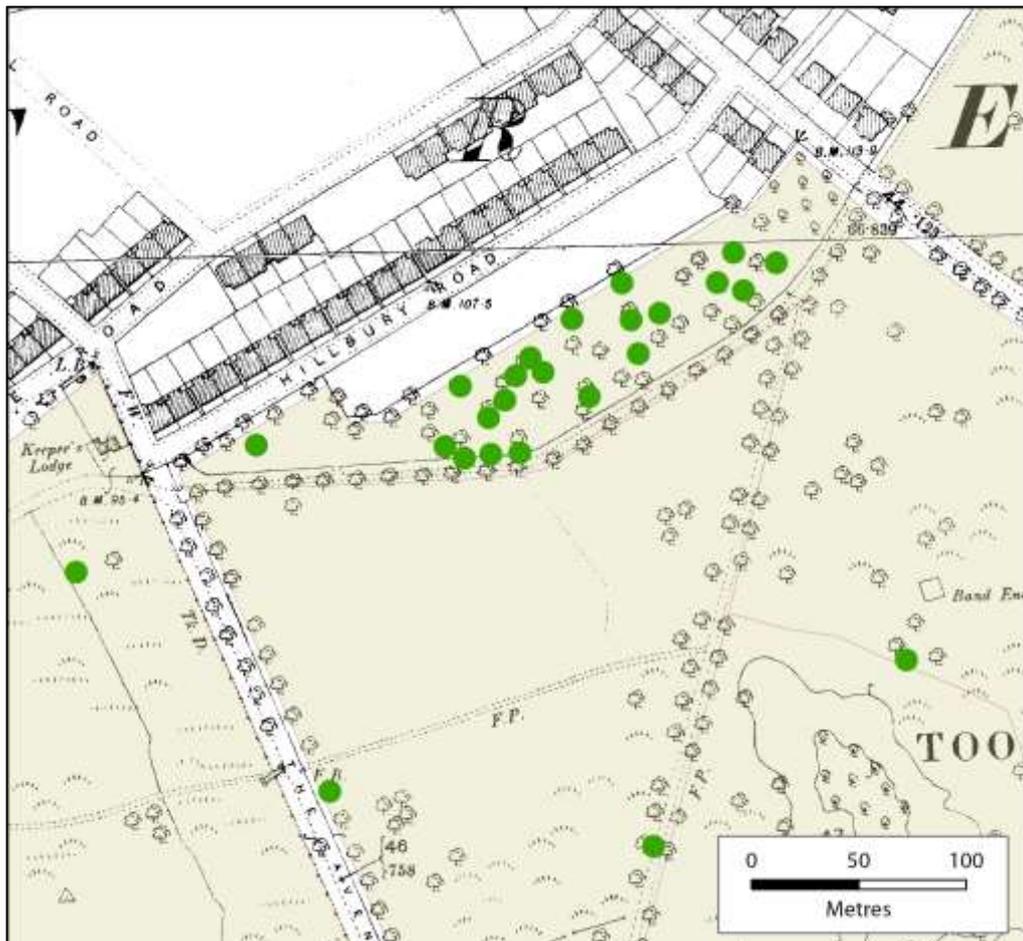


Figure 4.18 – Veteran trees in Café Woods.

4.4.8. These trees therefore appear to relate to planting taking place for aesthetic reasons on the edge of the common in the nineteenth century, at a time when there were increasing tensions between those seeking to preserve the common and those attempting to encroach on its boundaries. In this respect it is notable that Stanford shows this area as lying outside the boundary of the common.

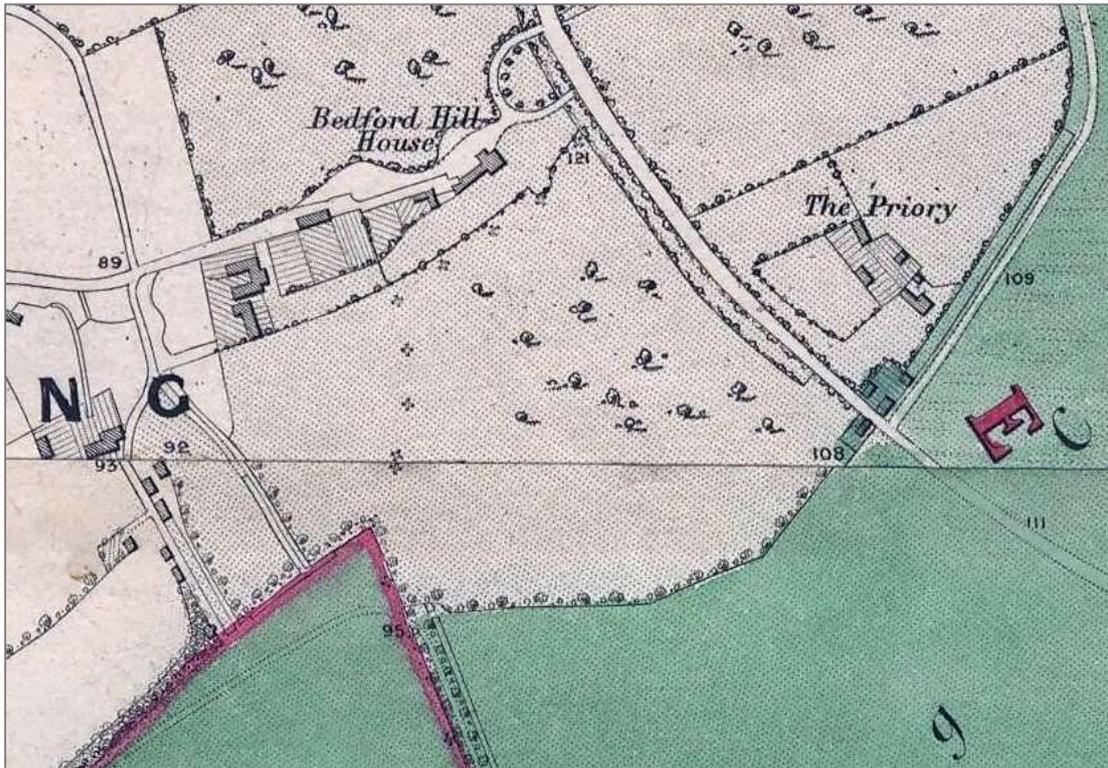


Figure 4.19 – Bedford Hill House and the area now occupied by Café Woods as depicted on Stanford's map of 1862.

5. Heritage Trees and Woodland – Future Management

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. The landscape character of Tooting Common is shaped by the distribution of, and variations in, trees and woodland across the site. Many of the trees have significant heritage value, both as individual specimens and where they contribute to important features of the historic landscape of the Common, such as the avenues.
- 5.1.2. This landscape has emerged as a result of several centuries of change. Particular trees, groups of trees and areas of woodland are therefore representative of key periods in the history of the Common. These include those trees which predate the purchase of the Common in the 1870s, which can be divided into those which formed part of the working landscape and those in the avenues which were planted with more aesthetic purposes in mind. The more recent history of the Common is represented in the diversity of planting which has occurred since the 1870s, including both native and non-native species. Other areas have emerged less intentionally, such as the patches of secondary woodland which have developed since the early twentieth century. Future management should aim to maintain, enhance and plan for the succession of these.
- 5.1.3. As with any area which possesses a significant number of trees of varying dates and species, Tooting Common faces a number of challenges relating to the future management of trees and woodland. The problems posed by aging trees, continuing regeneration of scrub and woodland and the threat of diseases such as Acute Oak Decline and Bleeding Canker will all need to be addressed in the coming decades.
- 5.1.4. The recommendations which follow set out a vision for the future of heritage trees and woodland at Tooting Common. They should be considered in conjunction with the more detailed and specific recommendations included in the 2015 Tree Condition Survey report (Treework Environmental Services 2015). This document also includes four overarching management objectives which are summarised below. More detailed information is given for the fourth point which is of particular relevance here:
1. Balanced Tree Risk Management
 2. Maintaining a Sustainable Tree Population
 3. Improving biodiversity
 4. Curating the historic tree heritage
 - Manage veteran trees to ensure long lifespan and habitat continuity
 - Collect seeds from historic oaks to propagate new specimens
 - Develop plan for ongoing management of ageing avenues
 - Reinstate Tooting Bec Road avenue
 - Ensure that new planting reflects historic species mix of native and non-native trees

(Treework Environmental Practice 2015, 26).

5.2. The Avenues

5.2.1. Dr Johnson Avenue

In general the condition of trees here is good. Variations in the age of trees, and a preponderance of relatively young specimens, will provide for succession and maintain the avenue into the future.

Issues	Suggested Actions
Uneven spacing between trees	Replant gaps with English oak and monitor health of newly planted specimens. In the medium term some thinning of closely spaced younger specimens may be necessary.
Tree damage caused by traffic	Investigate feasibility of closing road to traffic.
Potential long term problems associated with Acute Oak Decline	Continue to monitor trees for signs of AOD In the long term consideration might be given to planting an outer avenue with a related species more resistant to climate change (Hungarian oak – <i>Quercus frainetto</i> or Downy oak – <i>Q. pubescens</i>).
Historical context of Avenue	Continue to research history of Avenue to shed light on its origins and development.
Problems relating to specific trees	Follow guidance in 2015 Tree Condition Survey.

5.2.2. **Garrad’s Road Avenue**

At present Garrad’s Road is a mixed Avenue containing a range of species of different ages and sizes. It seems likely that this Avenue is broadly contemporary with Dr Johnson Avenue and in the long term the aim should be to return it to an avenue of English oak. Particular attention will need to be paid to the horse chestnuts at the southern end of the avenue given the various threats this species currently faces.

Issues	Suggested Actions
Uneven spacing between trees	Where conditions are favourable replant gaps with English oak and monitor health of newly planted specimens.
Range of species in present avenue	In the long term, replace with English oak where possible.
Potential long term problems associated with Acute Oak Decline	Continue to monitor trees for signs of AOD In the long term consideration might need to be given to replanting with a related species more resistant to climate change (Hungarian oak – Quercus frainetto or Downy oak – Q. pubescens).
Problems associated with horse chestnut Reduced aesthetic appeal of leaves affected by fungus and leaf mining moths.	Continue to monitor trees for signs of leaf miner, bleeding canker and other threats. Monitor for signs of structural weakness and decay Inter-planting will be difficult due to shade cast by mature trees, so a preferable policy would be to monitor trees and fell and replace in blocks where necessary. This would have a less dramatic negative impact on the appearance of the avenue while still contributing to its long term viability.
Problems relating to specific trees	Follow guidance in 2015 Tree Condition Survey.
Historical context	Continue to conduct research into history of Avenue, its origins and development.

5.2.3. **Chestnut Avenue**

Chestnut Avenue poses a number of problems due to the current threats to the health and viability of the horse chestnut trees which make up most of the avenue. Parts of the avenue are already very uneven in planting and in the age and size range of specimens. Many trees here are showing signs of bleeding canker.

Issues	Suggested Actions
<p>Health and viability of horse chestnut.</p> <p>Older specimens showing structural weakness and decay</p> <p>Reduced aesthetic appeal of leaves affected by fungus and leaf mining moths.</p>	<p>Given its current condition and the likelihood of further problems in future serious consideration should be given to replanting of the avenue with another species.</p> <p>Careful thought needs to be given to the question of what to replant with. Planting with sweet chestnut would provide some degree of continuity, and it has a long history of use as an avenue tree.</p> <p>Small-leaved lime might also be considered as an alternative.</p>
<p>Historical context</p>	<p>The history of this avenue is better understood than the others given its more recent origins, but further research could be conducted into exactly when and why it was planted and how it developed.</p> <p>The existing avenue should be recorded and documented before any significant work takes place. A list of trees currently in the Avenue has been recorded as part of the Tree Condition Survey. This could be supplemented with a photographic survey recording views of the Avenue at different points. These should include images taken from within the Avenue, and from surrounding areas looking towards the Avenue.</p>

5.2.4. Tooting Bec Road Avenue

From the early eighteenth century to the twentieth century the avenue along Tooting Bec Road was a very significant feature in the landscape of the Common. Eighteenth-century maps suggest it was both longer and more complex than Dr Johnson Avenue or Garrard’s Road Avenue, comprising four rows of trees forming a double avenue. The reinstatement of an avenue here would be a very worthwhile endeavour which would enhance the Common, provide a degree of insulation from the busy road and recreate something of the historic character of the landscape here.

Issues	Suggested Actions
<p>Replanting Tooting Bec Road Avenue</p>	<p>The replanting of an avenue here should be given serious consideration as a means of enhancing the current landscape and respecting its historic appearance.</p> <p>The avenue should be extended to the west of Dr Johnson Avenue. It does not appear that it originally did so, but a good case could be made for extending it along the whole length of Tooting Bec Road across the Common.</p> <p>A double avenue would make for an interesting (and historically accurate) feature, but constraints of space and funding may mean that a single avenue is a better option.</p> <p>Existing trees should be removed and new planting carried out in stages to lessen the initial impact on this part of the site, and to ensure trees of varied ages have a chance to establish.</p> <p>Hornbeam should be considered for the avenue. Its existence on the site already (e.g. in Streatham Woods) means it would continue the sense of place. It also has a strong visual appeal and would create an unusual and attractive feature.</p> <p>Small-leaved lime could be considered as an alternative. The Tree Condition Survey noted that this species was establishing well here (Treework Environmental Practice 2015, 22).</p>
<p>Historical context</p>	<p>Continue to conduct research into history of Avenue, its origins and development. This might also be broadened to a consideration of planting on and around Commons in the London area more generally to assess how unique, or not, this feature was in terms of date, form and location.</p>

5.3. Veteran and Ancient Trees

- 5.3.1. Tooting Common possesses a valuable collection of veteran trees, mostly English oaks (including some historic pollards). These should be carefully managed to ensure they continue to enhance the visual and historic character of the landscape. Attention should also be paid to those trees at the mature stage which will form the next generations of veteran, and eventually ancient trees.
- 5.3.2. The age and growth patterns of veteran trees can mean they are vulnerable to environmental changes and thus need to be managed sensitively to maximise the benefits of biodiversity, historic character and visual appeal which they add to a landscape.
- 5.3.3. Specific management recommendations relating to individual trees have been provided in the 2015 Tree Condition Survey. This also identifies more general issues, summarised below.

Recommendations for management of veteran trees from 2015 Tree Condition Survey (Treework Environmental Practice 2015)	
Issue	Action
Crowding of veteran trees	Phased halo thinning around affected trees
Soil compaction and waterlogging	Soil amelioration and exclusion around vulnerable trees
Risks posed by tree health and condition	Set up inspection programme (involving volunteers) to inspect trees every two years.

- 5.3.4. In addition to these recommendations we would suggest the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with volunteers to gather information to enhance public understanding of the veteran trees on the Common. This could inform new interpretation materials and trails linked to historic trees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct further research into the history of the Avenues and the role of trees and woodpasture in the history of the common, and possibly other nearby commons, (see 5.3.5. below).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a long term plan for planting in those areas where the landscape is currently dominated by veteran oaks to ensure the character of the landscape is maintained in future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider extending the use of traditional management techniques – e.g. rotational coppicing in suitable areas of woodland (such as Streatham Woods) and consider creating some new pollards.

5.3.5. **Further Research**

There are a number of questions relating to the history of Tooting Common's trees which would repay further research.

For the avenues, research into the dates of planting and the individual's responsible should focus on the estates and landowners bordering the common. Archival research may reveal details about planting and estate management in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

For trees and woodpasture on the Common research should focus on documents relating to the management of the Tooting Commons in the eighteenth century and earlier. If these are rare or non-existent then research into other nearby commons may shed light on the role that trees played in the landscape and management of common land.

A fuller survey of secondary works may also reveal details relating to the landscape of Tooting Common in the form of descriptions such as those in section 2.6. above. These may include useful references to trees and woodland.

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School of History
University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich
Norfolk
NR4 7TJ

(01603) 597170

info@landscape-group.co.uk

LandScape
group

