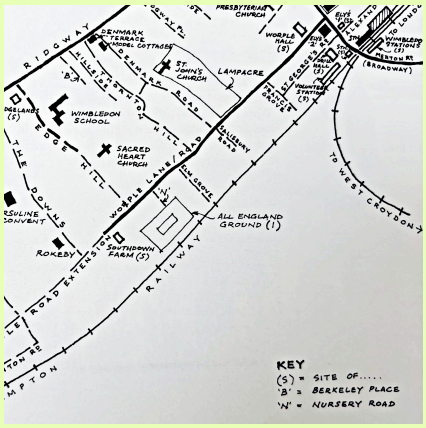
Berkeley Place

The History

Until the 1860s there were just fields to the south of the Ridgway and some allotment gardens on the site of Hillside and Berkeley Place leased by the Churchwardens of St Mary's Church. To the north side were the garden fences of the grand houses that had been built on Wimbledon Common. Berkeley Place and Hillside did not continue down the hill to join up with Worple Road and access the new railway station due to the steep incline (right). The houses built in Berkeley Place were large villas and terraces with "Alenhoe" at number 11 owning much of the land at the bottom of Berkeley Place. The tithe map of 1848 shows the Ridgway still as a country lane even though it was the main cattle route from Wimbledon to Kingston market and in Neolithic times was possibly a salt route linking Kingston to the salt marshes at Greenwich.



The Houses

Nos. 1 to 8: A terrace of eight locally listed three-storey houses built between 1879 and 1882 in stock brick with red dog-tooth brickwork to the first floor. **Nos. 9 & 10**: A pair of locally listed semi-detached double-fronted two-storey houses (below right) plus semi-basements and dormers, built in 1882 with ornamental red brick detailing around the windows and doors, including the two-storey canted end bays. The front entrance porches are approached up wide staircases and topped by broken pediments. **No. 11**: A detached two-storey house built in 1880 by FC Penrose in an Arts and Crafts manner. **Nos 11a, 11b & 12** were built in the 20th century with mainly red brickwork in keeping with the neighbouring houses. **Nos.13 & 14: G**rade II listed pair of contrasting houses (left) built in 1894 by James Ransome in the neo-Dutch style. **No. 13** was originally known as "The End House". **Nos. 15 to 18**: four detached three storey houses from 1883 with elaborate red bricks, ornate ridge tiles and terracotta finials.

The Residents

Oscar-winning actress **Dame Margaret Rutherford** (1892-1972) lived at **No.4** Berkeley Place from 1895 -1920. She was sent to Wimbledon from India aged three to live with her aunt Bessie Nicholson after her mother had taken her own life and her father, mentally ill having murdered his own father, was unable to look after her. Aunt Bessie encouraged her niece to become an actor and after working as a music teacher in Wimbledon, Margaret eventually made her West End debut aged 41 and became one of the finest actresses of her generation playing iconic roles such as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. A blue plaque was erected in 2002. Born Margaret Noble, social activist **Sister Nivedita** (1867-1911), trained as a teacher in Halifax and moved to Wimbledon in the 1890s to Kingsley Gate School at **No.10** Berkeley Place. She set up two Wimbledon schools then moved to India dedicating her life to educational reform and poverty relief. A statue in her memory was erected in Wimbledon in 2023. The eldest daughter of writer William Makepeace Thackeray, **Lady Anne Ritchie**, a novelist in her own right, moved into **The End House** with her husband **Sir Richmond Ritchie** in 1893. Writer Henry James, explorer Gertrude Bell and Peter Pan creator JM Barrie were visitors. Properties at Nos.11 (Alenhoe), where young writer Virginia Woolf and her extended family spent time, and 15 & 17 Berkeley Place were all owned by descendants of **Sir Henry Lawrence** of India and **John Lawrence** Viceroy of India.

Compiled by members of St John's Area Residents' Association (SJARA)