

Ashley Heath Proposed Conservation Area

1 Introduction

Conservation Areas are defined as “areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. Local planning authorities are required to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas and must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

The purpose of this report is to provide a basis for considering the merits of designating Ashley Heath as a Conservation Area.

2 Summary of Significance of Ashley Heath

Ashley Heath enjoys the highly unusual characteristic of comprising an area of housing containing a wide variety of architectural styles in large plots set in a largely sylvan environment. The Heath is served by narrow tree-lined un-adopted tracks with few streetlights and a network of long established public rights of way and for many limited mains services. However, this unusual character area is under severe threat from new development that is resulting in increased densification of development, the loss of trees, threatening the diverse wildlife and overloading the existing tracks which are unsuitable for handling more traffic. The increased densification of development will, if left unchecked, result in the loss of this highly unusual and attractive environment.

3 Location and setting

Ashley Heath adjoins the village of Loggerheads on its northern boundary and the village of Ashley to the immediate south west. Much of Ashley Heath is situated at an average of 220m (720 feet) above sea level, which combined with the local geology of underlying Triassic sands and gravels, overlain by thin mainly acidic soils, has helped to create a locally unique environment with a rich and diverse ecology. The “Heath” so named because of its situation and environment has for long been characterised by its heathland habitat that has gradually evolved to provide housing

in a semi woodland setting.

Its elevated situation gives rise to distant views to all points of the compass including Cannock Chase to the south east, The Wrekin and Long Mynd to the south, and Maer Hills to the north east. Views towards Ashley Heath reveal a prominent landform dominated by a mainly woodland landscape interspersed with detached housing. The local landmark feature is the water tower and telecoms mast.

Ashley Heath has a large number of trees, particularly within but also on the edges of the defined Area. A large part of the area is subject to an Area Tree Preservation Order (No.9) that was set in 1966. The combined effect of the trees, shrubs, gardens contribute towards the character of the Area. These features are cherished by the local community and are well cared for including private gardens and the public open spaces.

Conservation of the biodiversity afforded by the low density development and treed habitat is in keeping with the adjoining Turner Hodgkiss Nature Reserve and adjacent SSSI within the Burntwood.

It represents a highly unusual area of residential development in a rural situation comprising individually designed homes in large plots in a largely woodland setting.

Map A shows the boundary that is proposed for conservation.

4 Historic development

Ashley Heath was enclosed under an act passed in 1812.

In the early 1900s Ashley became a place of weekend pilgrimage for the people of the Potteries, to escape the smoke and the grime, known as “Switzerland in England”. In those days Switzerland was well beyond the pocket of the working class, they had to look to local places in the countryside to visit. Ashley was well placed for the tourist boom, set on high ground with many walks and vistas, it soon became a popular weekend location. The clear air of the pine woods would have

seemed like heaven after the smoke and dirt of the potteries. They came by pony and trap, later by charabanc to the Meynell Arms or the Loggerheads Hotel for ham and egg teas. The close proximity to Pipe Gate railway station ensured no one could be excluded from a visit here. Many visitors walked from Pipe Gate to Ashley such was the appeal of the area. As the area became popular more and more visitors wanted somewhere of their own to stay.

On nearby Ashley Heath, tucked away among the pines and birches, a certain pattern of permanent accommodation to suit all weathers better than the tent, resulted in sheds and similar units being erected along with old caravans and railway carriages being brought onto any suitable site, including old single deck buses. Water to the individual sites was provided from rainwater storage tanks and in suitable cases wells were constructed. Some were retreats for those suffering from the dreaded chest diseases contracted in the pot-banks or mines. They came for the pure clean air of the pinewoods. Later the sanatorium was built at Loggerheads to treat these diseases.

The temporary structures gave way to the weekend bungalow, many just simple wooden framed building on a brick foundation. A flat pack house was a cheap way of providing the family with a suitable residence in Ashley. The Heath was a particular popular spot for such bungalows. Pinewood Road had quite a few such dwellings offering outstanding views across Staffordshire. New tracks were cut across the once devoid heath land to provide even more living space. Tower Road, Pinewood Road and Birks Drive being good examples of this extended living space.

From 1939 and the beginning of the 1939/1945 War, some of the units on such sites provided permanent residential accommodation, providing a safer element than the towns because of potential bombing.

With the arrival of the Various Planning Circulars and preliminary Planning Items and the 1947 Planning Act permanent Planning permissions were obtained for existing and established "houses" and in the 1960's the replacement of holiday homes with permanent dwellings was advanced, being supported by the Local Authority because of the income received provided by good Rateable Values. Ashley Heath was a

perfect example, having noted that water supplies had been provided and all services were available, thus rendering such suitable development a most practicable proposition to the small Authorities. The houses were built within the large historic plots, generally large plots varying from 0.1ha to 0.8 - 1.2ha (0.25 to 2 – 3 acres) in size and containing individually designed houses, often single storey.

From the 1970's Loggerheads became the desired location for the greater residential development having regard to other matters that then existed being the Sanatorium, rather than cluttering Ashley Village proper.

Maps B to X show the development of the Heath from 1889.

5. Access & footpaths

The Heath is accessed via a series of narrow un-adopted roads or tracks with passing places many of which are un-metalled with no street lighting. A number of public footpaths traverse the Heath and they, along with the existing tracks, are considered to be an important part of the local recreation and amenity by residents and visitors including walkers and cyclists.

6 Quality and Character of Buildings

The quality and character of the buildings on the Heath has changed over time from what were once temporary structures scattered over the area that provided holiday single storey homes for the well off. Gradually these were replaced by more substantial and permanent homes found there today. There is no singular architectural style save for a common theme that each dwelling is situated in its own often large plot invariably nestling within a grassy glades surrounded by mature trees. Together these combine to create an unusual and attractive area of low density housing. The dwellings found here today are all detached and comprise a mixture of single storey 2/3 bedroomed bungalows with a significant proportion of two storey 4/5 bedroomed homes. Many also have garaging for 2-3 cars with ample "off street" parking.

7 Biodiversity

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8 Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council Policies

Much of the Heath has long been subject to Area and individual Tree Preservation Orders because of its woodland and in recognition the need to safeguard the habitat that has evolved. TPO 9 made in 1966 covers most of the Heath.

The Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan 2011 (adopted October 2003) Policy H7, "Protection of Areas of Special Character" states: In areas shown on the Proposals Map at Porthill Bank, Sandy Lane/Brampton, and Seabridge Lane, Betley (North) and Wolstanton, the Council will seek to preserve the unique character of the areas, consisting mainly of large houses in extensive plots, and will not permit development that would be detrimental to the overall character of the area or that would result in the further sub-division of plots or the loss of, or adverse effect on, visually significant trees.

Back in the 1995 version of the Local Plan policy R2 "Windfalls and retention of character of specified areas" included Ashley Heath in the areas of "special character". It is not known why Ashley Heath was left out of the areas covered by the later plan.

R2 stated: Planning permission will only be granted for additional dwellings in Porthill Bank; Seabridge Lane; Betley (North); Bryn Wood; Whitmore Heath; Ashley Heath; Madeley park Wood (all as defined on the proposals map) if amongst other things:

- (i) The development would not require the loss of healthy and visually significant trees; and
- (ii) The development would be of the density and character prevailing in the area.

There are currently 19 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough, the majority of which are confined to the urban area.

9 Proposed Boundary of a Conservation Area

The proposed boundary follows a similar line to TPO 9 and can be viewed on map A.

This can be described as A53 on north side; up the side of the housing development at Burntwood View and Hugo Way, along the school boundary, up Eccleshall Road on west as far as back of gardens on properties on Tower Road, cutting out Birch Rise and re-joining Pinewood Road after Heathcote Avenue as the southern boundary, along Pinewood Road, as far as the public right of way at the junction with Tower Road and following the line of the public right of way across to the A53 as the eastern boundary.

This proposal suggests that the key issues in the area are:

- Protection of the woodland scape and existing built features which would collectively form the Conservation Area including the trees, landscape and existing access tracks.
- Conservation of the low density of residential development that has given rise to the existing character and environment.
- Protection of significant trees.

The pressure for development in Ashley Heath is mainly for extensions to existing buildings and the subdivision of plots to create more housing. There is now limited potential for infill and back land development (usually in the gardens of existing buildings) some of which sit in spacious plots which will intensify and may harm the character of the Conservation Area and will increase pressure on the existing fragile infrastructure.



Ashley Heath in the 1960s

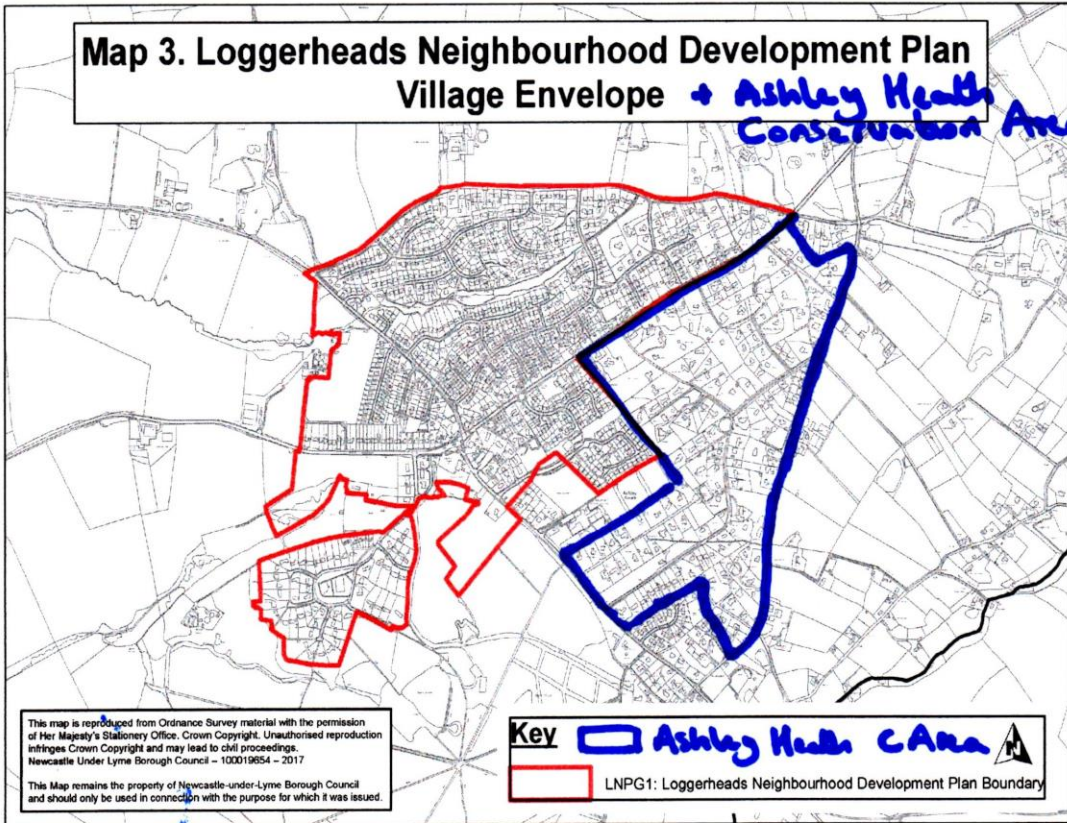


The Crescent, Pinewood Drive, circa 1910, before trees

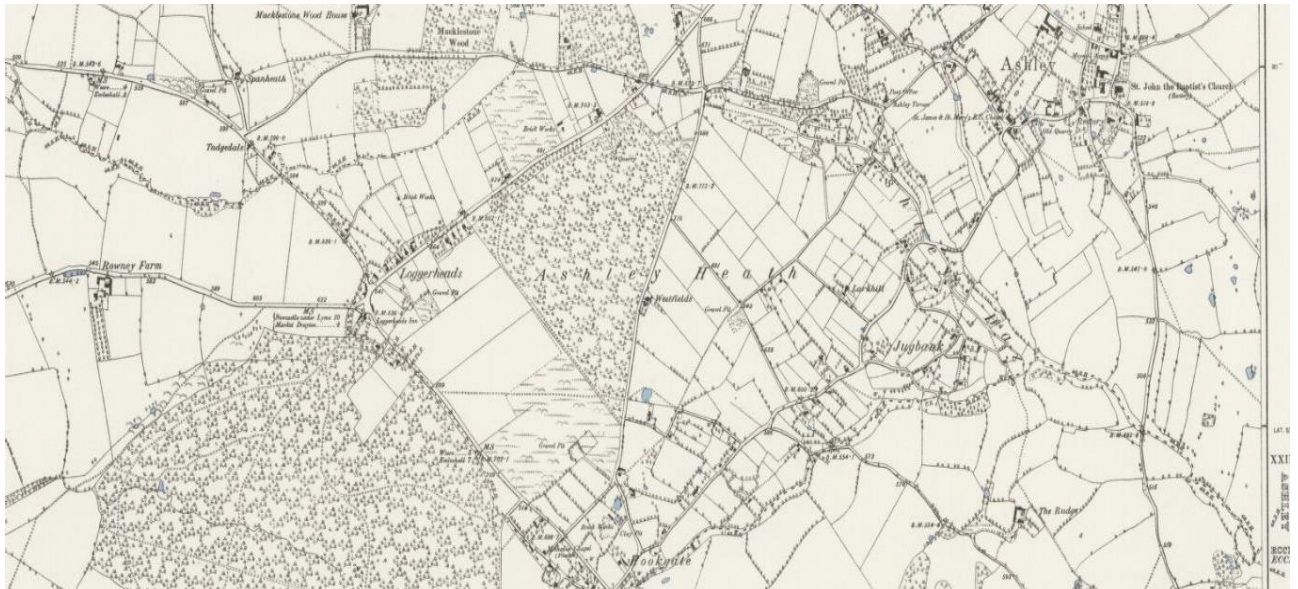


The Crescent, Pinewood Drive, 2019, with trees

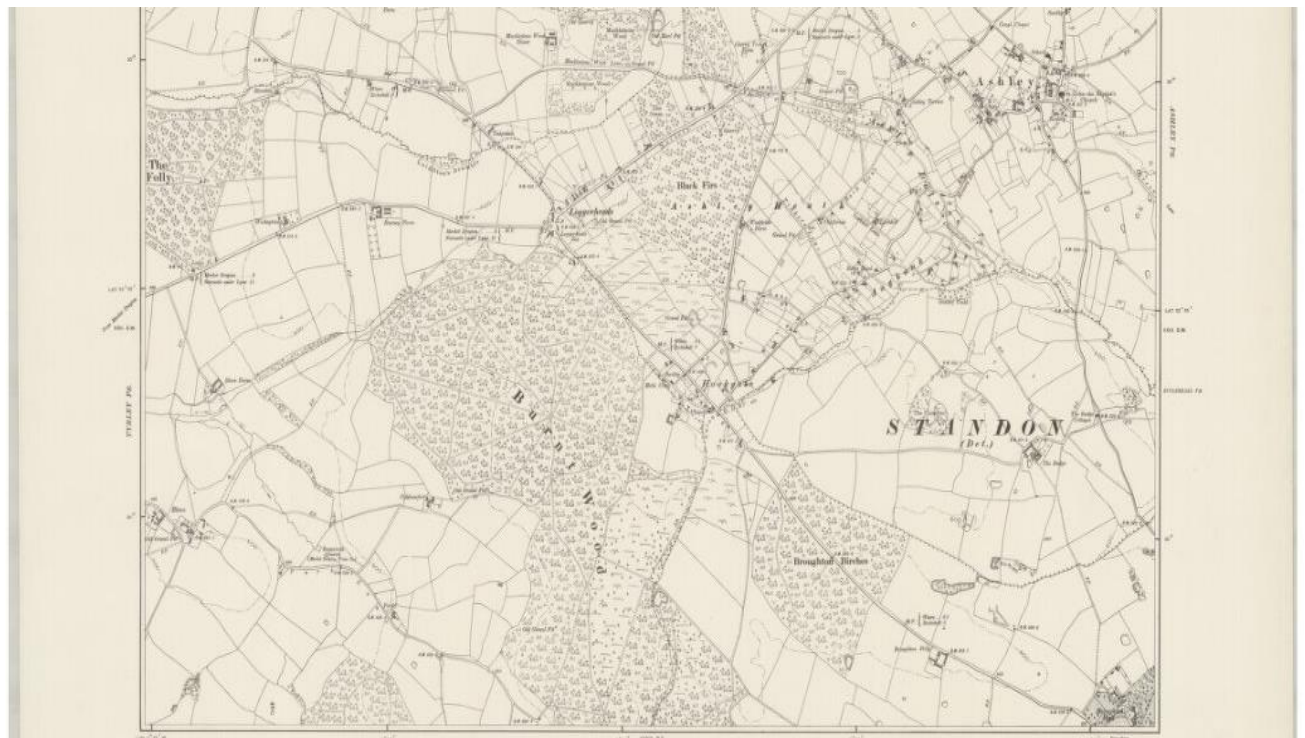
**Map 3. Loggerheads Neighbourhood Development Plan
Village Envelope + Ashley Heath Conservation Area**



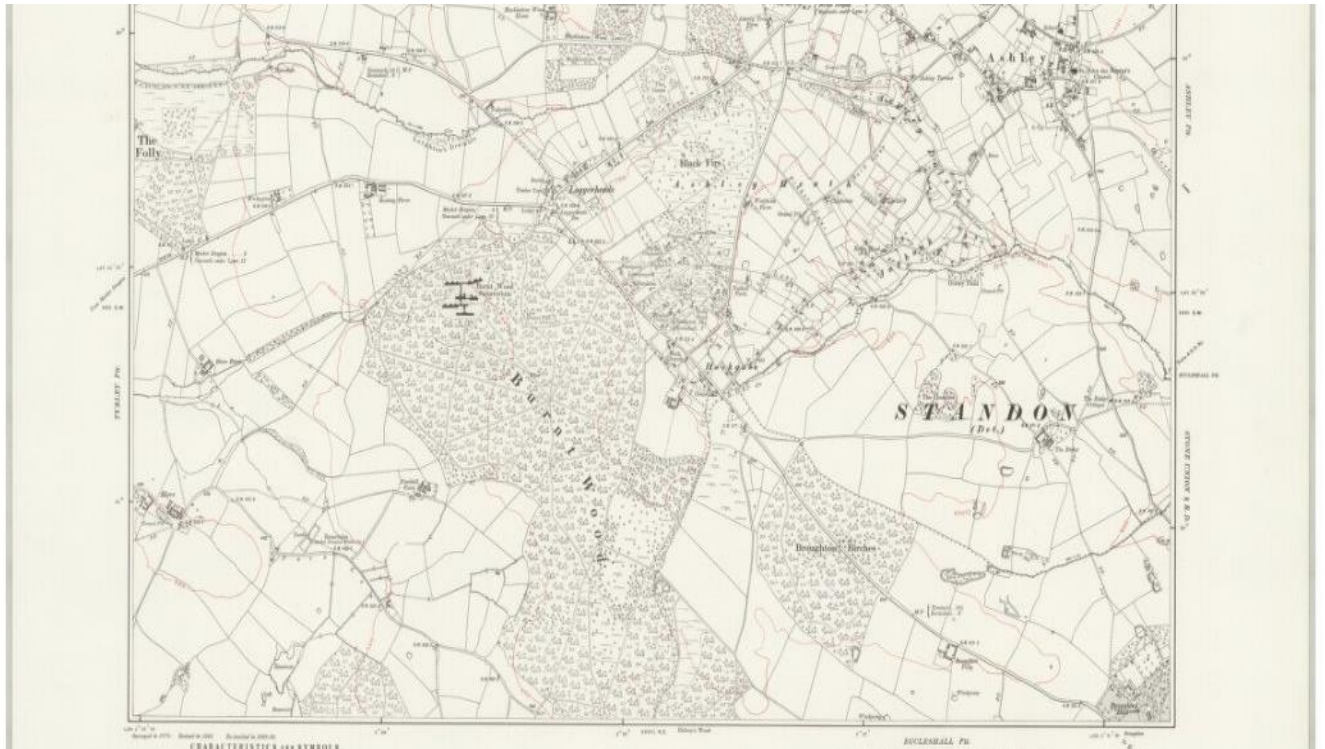
Map B: Ashley Heath 1889



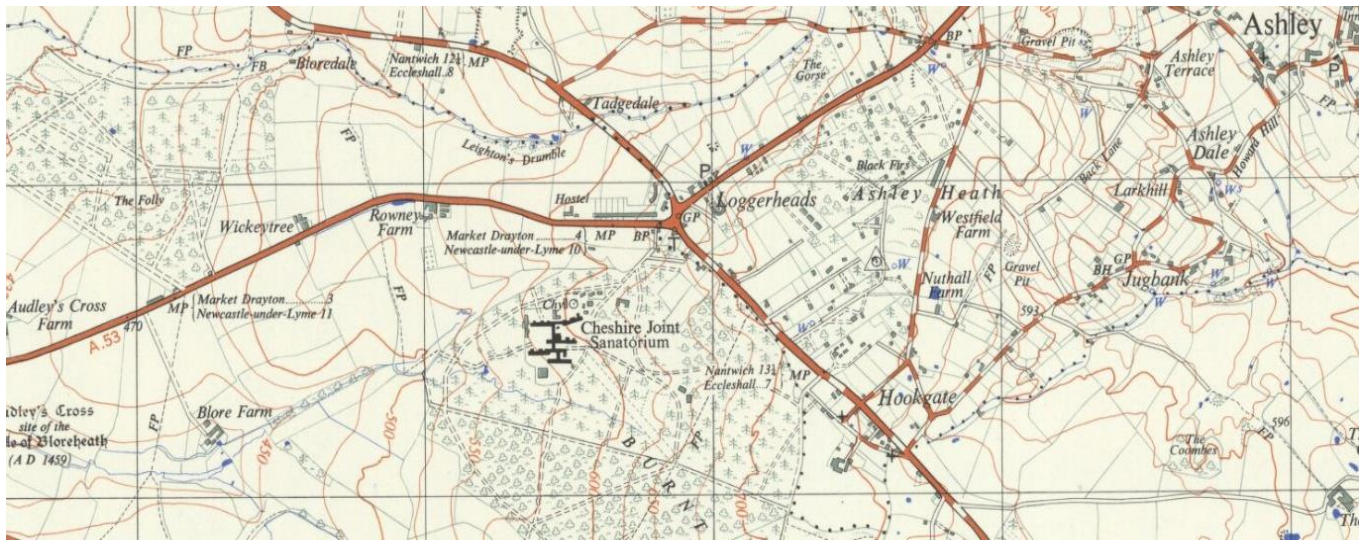
Map C: Ashley Heath 1901



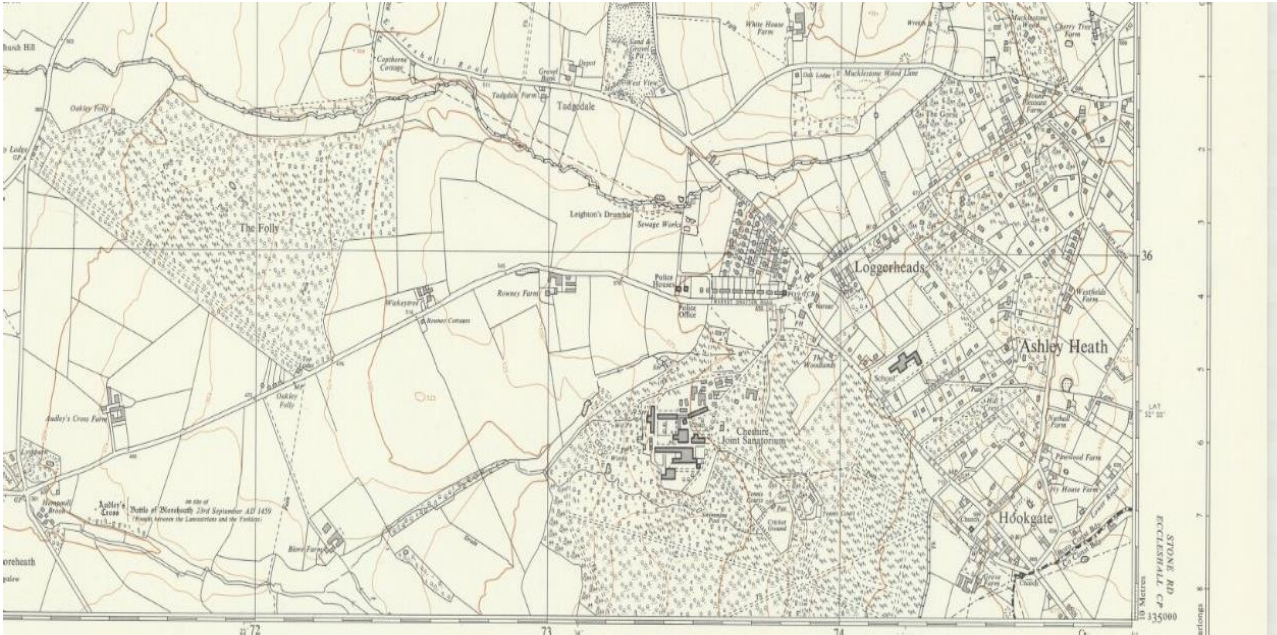
Map D: Ashley Heath 1925



Map E: Ashley Heath 1960



Map F: Ashley Heath 1968



Map G: Ashley Heath 2000