

5.12 U. Ash Grove

Character Area Assessment

Location

The Ash Grove Character Area relates exactly to the Ash Grove conservation area. It chiefly comprises the southern side of the street of Ash Grove, located off Wrexham Road in the south of the City. It also includes the former Ash Grove farm (now a nursery) on the opposite side of Wrexham Road.

This is a very small Character Area and consequently it comprises only a single sub-area. It is surrounded by modern suburban housing of no special architectural merit.

Historical Development

The land, prior to the building of Ash Grove, was owned by the Marquis of Westminster and is shown on a map of his properties dating from 1847, at which time only Five Ashes Farm, (no longer existing) is depicted. It can only be assumed that the origins of the name derived from the local tree species.

Ash Grove was built soon after in the 1850s, and is first mentioned in the 1861 Census. The similar architectural style of the houses would suggest that they were built at the same time and then individually sold forming a short residential street among fields. Only the southern side of the street was developed; from looking at the historic maps this seems to relate to the broad and narrow field pattern in the area.

One of the houses, 2 Ash Grove, was once the home of the noted Victorian artist Louise Rayner. Louise J. Rayner (1832-1924) was a gifted

and prolific artist noted for her water colours of Victorian streetscenes. She moved to Chester in 1865 and lived in Ash Grove for many years until she moved in 1910. She produced many fine paintings of Victorian Chester (see following page), amongst other towns and her former house is marked today with a blue plaque.

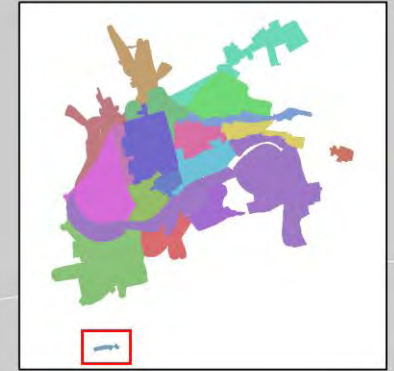


Above: Louise Rayner and a sketch of her home (2 Ash Grove) by her brother Richard in 1892, captioned by him: "from the road, showing Lou's house and the Welsh Mountain Moel Famman". Below: the house today and its blue plaque.




Location Plan U. Ash Grove

Figure 5.1.1



Key

 Sub Areas



Above: two of Louise Rayner's water colours of Chester. Left: Foregate, right: Bridge Street.

The first edition OS map of 1872 shows Ash Grove as a row of eight houses separated from a ninth by Wrexham Road. Two further plots appear to have been laid out at the end of the street, but seem never to have been built upon, forming an extended garden for number eight instead. The whole was surrounded by fields and dispersed properties.

By 1911 the Edwardian semi-detached houses Dyreham and Ashfield had been added on the Wrexham Road frontage, as can be seen on the third edition OS map of that year.

The northernmost farm buildings on the Ash Grove Farm site appear on the OS maps from 1872 onwards, with another large agricultural building appearing by 1911. This later building has now been converted to a day nursery with the older farmhouse buildings being retained in agricultural and farmhouse use.

Today, two modern houses have been added in the remaining plot at the eastern end of the street but these are now accessed off Manor Road to

the rear, and do not address Ash Grove (and are outside the conservation area boundary). The fields that surrounded the area historically are now fully occupied with suburban housing to the east of Wrexham Road, including the north side of Ash Grove where houses back onto the street. The land east of Wrexham Road is still open farmland. The setting and integrity of Ash Grove is thus fundamentally altered. The development of Ash Grove into the recognisable character of today occurred during mid 19th century until early 20th century.

Land-uses

Ash Grove is wholly residential. The Ash Grove Farm site is now divided into a day nursery and agricultural use.

Urban Form

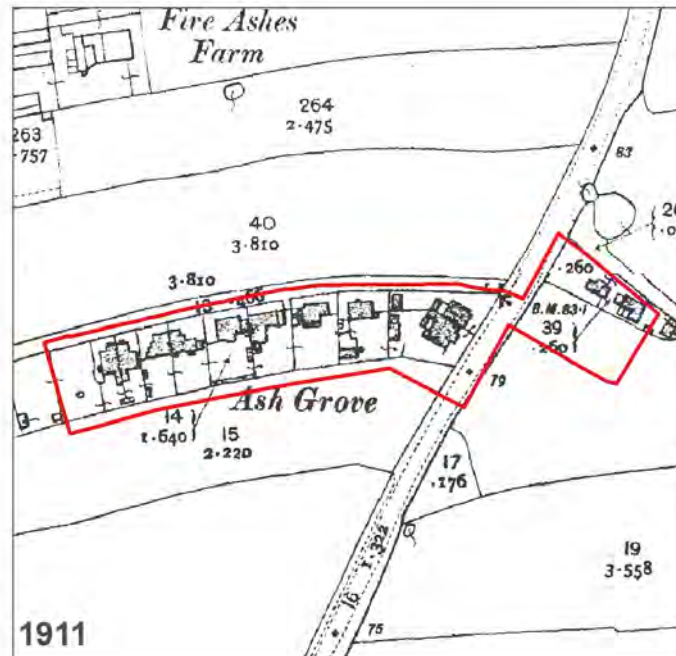
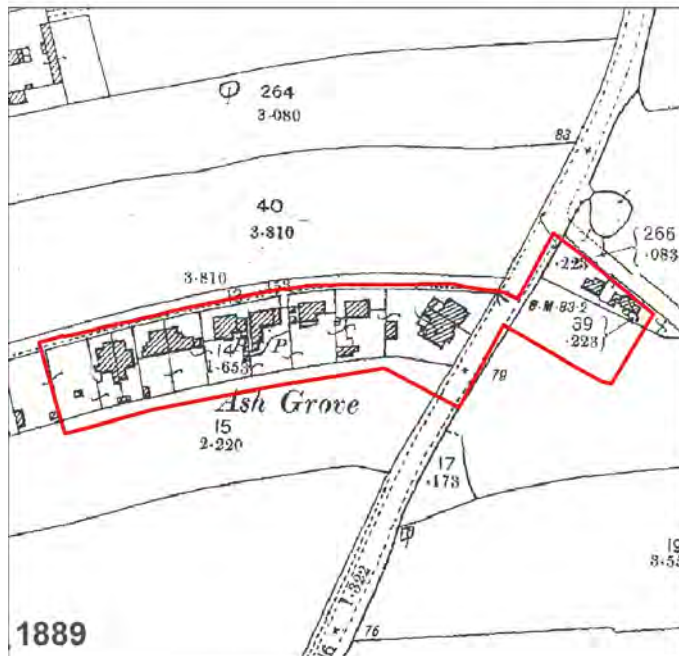
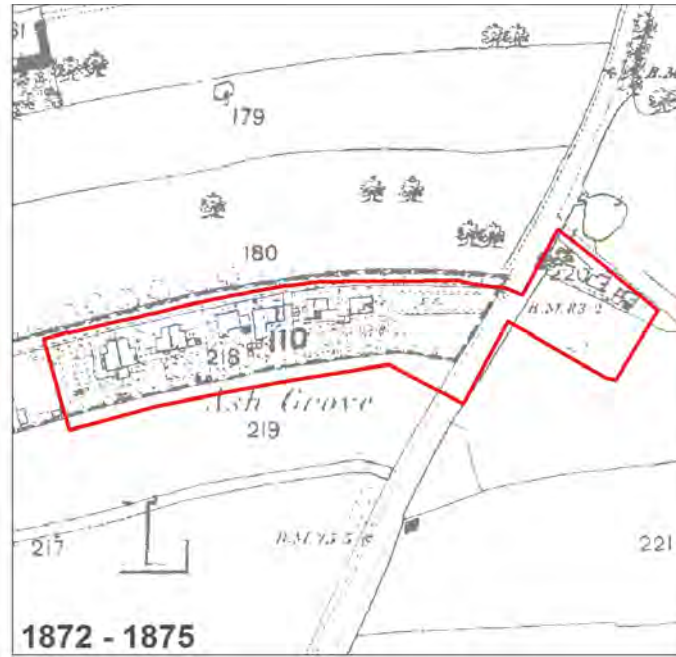
Ash Grove has the feel of a semi-private street. It is a narrow road that does allow vehicular access but it is not a through-route. It is fronted only on the southern side, with modern housing to the north and east backing onto the street with tall boundary treatments. The houses on Ash Grove are either detached or semi-detached, although some adjoin one another. Several have later extensions to their original form. The houses are all two storey, of an average domestic scale and set back from the street behind low walls, with reasonably sized gardens to the rear.

The Edwardian semi-detached property on the junction with Wrexham Road is taller, with a half-storey in the roof level. It also sits back from the road behind a boundary treatment within its own plot and with a rear garden. These gardens include timber sheds. The shed behind Dyreham fronts Ash Grove and presents an untidy appearance.

The Ash Grove farm buildings are arranged in a typical agricultural loose courtyard arrangement. The nursery is now subdivided from the agricultural buildings and the courtyard is used for its parking.

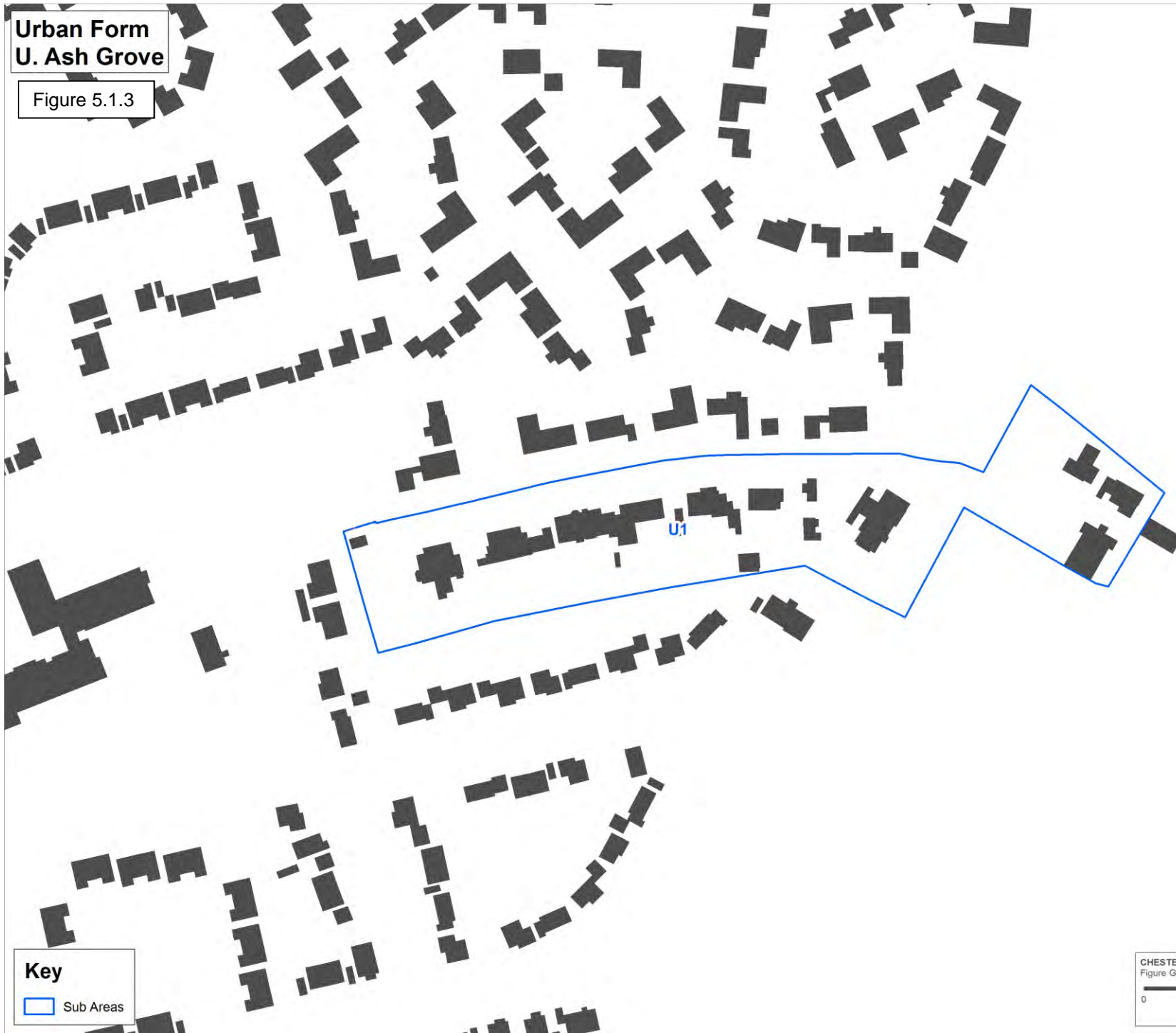
Historical Development U. Ash Grove

Figure 5.1.2




Urban Form
U. Ash Grove

Figure 5.1.3



Key

 Sub Areas

Townscape Character

There are three distinct types of building in the area. The first, and most dominant in terms of character, are the early Victorian cottages on Ash Grove. These are simple in style and largely follow the pre-existing Georgian style of well proportioned frontages with sash windows, with white-painted door frames, window lintels and cornices. The properties are all two storey, with traditionally pitched roofs in shallow pitch. They sit behind low brick walls with white coping stones and gate piers.



Additions include hexagonal-section bay windows at ground floor. Victorian characteristics include hipped slate roofs to these bays and pitched slate door canopies with barge boards and finials. There are considerable differences between the cottages within this broad palette. There are

also a considerable number of later additions and extensions. The end property, number 8, is notable for having two double-height octagonal-section bays, with the lower half rendered, on the south-facing side elevation.

A clearly different type is the semi-detached Edwardian property of Dyreham and Ashfield. This is a much more dominant building, at two and half-storeys, chamfered in its positioning to half-face Wrexham Road. The properties have a complex plan form and roofscape with traditionally pitched, hipped and dormer elements. The ground floor is brick and the first floor is rendered in white with brick quoins. Black and white timber facing and detail enliven the elevations, especially around the typically Edwardian door canopies, which also includes Latin inscription plate.

This is an appropriate scale gateway to Ash Grove, though wholly different in character.



Ashfield

The farm buildings on the opposite side of Ash Grove are traditional buildings of their type. The farmhouse is a simple Victorian domestic-style cottage at two storeys in brick with a traditionally pitched and gable-fronted roof and simple. The building now occupied by the nursery



is a large-plan former agricultural building with a hipped-roofed, square plan two-storey element and a longer single-storey element with a very steeply-pitched slate roof. The building is plain and agricultural in its appearance.

U. Ash Grove: Typical Materials and Details



Townscape & Landscape Analysis U. Ash Grove

Figure 5.1.4



Key

- Sub Areas
- Public Open Space
- Negative Environment
- Positive Environment
- Strong Frontage
- Weak Frontage
- Strong Node
- Weak Node
- ↔ Pedestrian Linkage
- Key View
- Key Vista
- ▶ Negative Vista
- ▶ Gradient (Downhill)
- ▶ Strong Gateway
- ▶ Weak Gateway

Landscape Character

Landscape plays an important role in the character of this area. Firstly, the open fields on the opposite side of Wrexham Road provide a reminder of the origins of Ash Grove - as a single street of houses surrounded by open farmland. The fields also still clearly relate to the existing Ash Grove farm and the former agricultural buildings and play an important part in their setting.

At the gateway to the street, a distinctive feature are the two stone piers, encribed with "Ash Grove". These clearly mark the entrance to the street and reveal its origin as a separate, planned small residential enclave. Unfortunately the modern concrete and timber panel boundary to Dyreham then forms a rather un attractive gateway before one reaches the first properties on Ash Grove.

On Ash Grove itself the boundary treatments play an important role in the streetscene. On the northern side, a tall hedge provides the rear boundary to the modern housing that backs onto Ash Grove to the north. Fortunately this does largely hide the rear of these unsympathetic buildings but unfortunately the maintenance of certain sections of this hedge is poor and creates an untidy appearance on the street.

The boundary treatment to the houses on Ash Grove is often marked by low hedges, set behind the low stone walls. There are also taller hedges between properties and other planting within the front gardens. All of this is generally in good order and makes a positive contribution to the streetscene.



Designated Heritage Assets

The whole site is within the Ash Grove conservation area but there are no listed buildings in the area nor any other heritage designations.

Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

Three un-listed Buildings of Townscape Merit of been identified in the area.

- **U1a: 1-6 Ash Grove** - six early Victorian houses. It is these properties, more than anything else, that defines the character of this Character Area. Included for group value.



- **U1b: 7-8 Ash Grove** – the end pair is worth including separately due to the two double height bays on the eastern elevation of 8 Ash Grove.



- **U1c: Dyreham & Ashfield** – semi-detached pair of large Edwardian suburban houses.



Key Detractors

There are three features that currently detract from the character of the area, as mentioned previously in this assessment. The first is a rather dilapidated garden shed in the grounds of Dyreham that is located on the Ash Grove frontage. The second is a simple, though somewhat sympathetically designed, garage that has undue significance by being located at the termination of Ash Grove. There is also the previously mentioned fence boundary to Ash Grove, which presents a poor first impression upon entering the character area.



Dilapidated shed at Dyreham



Garage at the end of Ash Grove



Fence boundary of Dyreham

Heritage Assets U. Ash Grove

Figure 5.1.5



Key

Sub Areas	Listed Buildings
Buildings of Merit	I
Key Detractors	II
Registered Parks and Gardens	II*
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	Article 4 Direction

"NB. Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development."

Summary: Character Assessment

In summary, the character assessment for the sub-areas is as follows:

- **U1. Ash Grove: Positive**

Character Statement

“Ash Grove represents the survival of a small, semi-planned housing development as a single street in the surrounding farmland. This principally includes early Victorian middle-class housing with a later Edwardian property. It also includes adjacent farm buildings on Wrexham Road. Ash Grove also has an historical connection as the former home of the artist Louise Rayner.”



Management and Policy Recommendations

The character of the area remains identifiable although there has been some erosion. Twentieth century additions and alterations are starting to prejudice the historic character of some of the Victorian houses on Ash Grove. It is recommended that Article 4 Directions are applied to prevent further harm. The area would also benefit from action, in partnership with landowners, to address the two detractors identified previously. These discussions should also explore the opportunity to provide a more appropriate and attractive boundary treatment to the Ash Grove frontage of Dyreham. Better maintenance of the hedge forming the boundary treatment on the north side of Ash Grove should also be a priority.

The former Ash Grove farm buildings on the opposite side of Wrexham Road have little relationship or shared character with Ash Grove and do not appear to be of any great historical or architectural significance. Consideration could be given to removing them from within the conservation area boundary.

Capacity to Accommodate Change

There are no development opportunities within this small, tightly-defined Character Area.

Design Principles for New Development

Any subsequent alterations to properties within this area should be carefully designed to protect the significant period features. Opportunities should be taken to restore houses to a more historically accurate form where possible.

