

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT
SEWARDSTONE GREEN**

GILWELL PARK

TQ386 964

Late C18 garden of circa. 8 hectares laid out with walks, a children's garden, small theatre and archery lawn. Possible Repton involvement. This site saw the beginnings of the Scout movement under Lord Baden-Powell and to many its historical worth lies as much with this knowledge as with the evidence of a late C18 garden.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The earliest record we have of the Gilwell area is contained in the Harleian collection, where it is stated that in 1407 John Crow owned several parcels of land called Gyldiefords. By 1422 the Court Rolls record a Richard Rolfe dying and leaving Gillrolfes, by now an estate of 8 acres, to his family. Following Rolfe's death the land was divided into two field areas known as Great Gilwell and Little Gilwell. Shortly after the death of Rolfe, Richard Osborne purchased an area of 14 acres adjoining the Gilwells and Osbornes Hall was built on what is now the site of the present White House.

It was not until 1754 that the estate began to grow when William Skrimshire bought Great and Little Gilwell, half of Osbornes and various parcels of land to form an area of 23 acres. The house was rebuilt c1760. Leonard Tresilian bought the estate from Skrimshire in 1771, extended the house and covered the exterior walls with slates: being butted and not overlapped they have proved troublesome for subsequent owners to this day. Tresilian died in 1792 leaving the estate to his eldest daughter, Margaret, who was married to William Bassett Chinnery. William and Margaret (who was sixteen years his senior) were members of London's fashionable scene, frequently giving and attending artistic and literary soirées. Nevertheless, on inheriting the estate they made the decision to leave London, and in 1793 they moved with their three children to Osborne Hall changing its name to Gilwell Hall.

Margaret and William Chinnery set about creating a lavish and extravagant lifestyle; William who was working at the Treasury had received promotion, becoming Agent General for the Colonies and was able to transform Gilwell into a considerable country estate. Initially he was encouraged to extend the estate when the Highways department applied to divert the Epping to Waltham Abbey road away from the front of the house. He very quickly bought up the created wasteland that became available and continued over the years to enlarge the estate by whatever means he could. Margaret took on the ornamental garden, creating rich plantings and walks around the estate. She introduced a children's garden, a small open-air theatre, an archery lawn and around the central portion of the estate, an extensive lime walk. A small engraving entitled '*Gilwell House, Essex – Seat of W.Chinnery Esq.*' shows the house enclosed by mature coniferous and deciduous trees. A circular bed of low planting is depicted within the lawn created by the turning circle. This engraving is included in Peacock's *The Polite Repository* (1807), which suggests that Repton had some involvement in the garden, since the engravings in *The Repository* were based on sites which Repton claimed to be involved with (although the degree of involvement varied widely).

Sadness touched the Chinnery family in 1802 when their youngest son, Walter Grenville, died of typhoid. A stone urn was placed in the children's garden in his memory. In 1812 their daughter, Caroline, was treated for whooping cough. A column of thanksgiving for her recovery was erected in the garden, but sadly she died shortly afterwards. These tragedies were compounded when Chinnery was found to be guilty of embezzlement and dismissed from the Treasury. He fled the country, leaving Margaret no alternative but to sign away the deeds of Gilwell Park.

The earlier maps of Gilwell are disappointing in that they do not show the garden or estate in any detail, but a map of 1847 made to accompany a sale catalogue by Winstanley & Sons shows more clearly the design of the garden. Dense areas of woodland are traversed by paths, creating a circular walk around a kidney shaped open [lawn?] area. Three linked circular beds are shown in an enclosed area to the east; each circle designed in a contrasting way. A sizeable kitchen garden of around a hectare lies to the south of the house divided into 8 distinct planting areas traversed by paths. By 1870 the 1st edition OS map shows greenhouses, a well, and randomly placed specimen trees.

The estate passed through various ownerships during the C19. Of note was one Thomas Usborne, who bought up some of the old sections of London Bridge when it was being rebuilt in 1826. These stone balustrades were brought to Gilwell and erected around the old archery lawn. In 1919 Gilwell was purchased by William F de Bois Maclaren, a generous publisher, for the Scout Association as a training ground for Scout leaders and is still in their ownership.

Evidence of Margaret Chinnery's garden is still discernible, albeit faint, after over eighty years of Scout ownership and the Association are showing their commitment to history in their intention to reinstate some of the historical garden features in their current round of improvements. In recent years their respect for the Chinnerys even extended to organising the return of Margaret and William's bones from Paris and after cremation, setting the ashes near Walter's urn.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Gilwell Park is midway between the hamlets of Sewardstone and Sewardstonebury. Generally the site is flat, but to the west the land falls away sharply to the Lee Valley. The pleasure grounds and associated woodland covers about 8 hectares. Piecemeal accumulation of the surrounding farmland and waste during the C19 and C20 has considerably increased the area of the estate, but these areas (altered to meet the requirements of the present owners, The Scout Association,) were not examined on the site visit.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The present main access is from the east along a drive with no obvious old features. This drive turns north about 150 metres south of the mansion to a mown oval carriage turning circle in front of the mansion. The east side of this short dogleg has a line of mature horse chestnut. There is access from the north along the line of the former public road (Silver Street). There is no surviving evidence of a lodge.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The mansion is a Grade II listed, white painted, two-storey building of late C18 or early C19 Gothic appearance, with unusual Coade stone chimney pots (date-stamped 1797). A modern matching extension has been added to the north end. To the south, a glazed timber link connects to a two storey building (dated 1926 on the clock turret) in stock brick with red brick dressings, and window lintels formed in red tile. Another glazed link on the south side of this building connects to a modern office block. There are modern geometrical box-edged beds between this range and the drive. These C20 buildings have replaced the stables, coach house and other domestic offices to the south of the mansion.

REFERENCES

Cowell, F and Green, G. *Repton in Essex*, 2000, Essex Gardens Trust.
Rogers, P. *Gilwell Park, A brief history and guided tour*, 1998, pub. Scout Association.
Stubblings, K. *Gilwell Park* Article in the Essex Journal, summer 1982

Archival Items

Road diversion 1793 Essex Record Office Q/SBb 356/20

Maps

1777 Chapman & Andre, Sheet 16
1842 Tithe Map, ERO: D/CT 381/2
1847 Map of Gilwell House, Sewardstone, Essex Record Office, T/M 499/1
1870 OS 25' 1ST Edition, Sheet 57.10

Pictorial Evidence

Engraving of Gilwell House, Essex Record Office, I/Mb 385/1/50
Engraving of Gilwell House from *The Polite Repository*, 1807

Researchers: J. & G. Hammond

Site visit: M. Leach, J. & G Hammond, 24 February 2004

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