

**BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
PILGRIMS HATCH**

PILGRIMS HALL

Grid Ref: TQ572 962

Early nineteenth and twentieth century landscaped gardens with sunk Italian garden.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Pilgrims Hatch lies on what was the main road from East Anglia to Canterbury. Pilgrims travelled along what is now the Ongar Road, coming from Cambridgeshire, the Fens, or further north. An ancient track carried generations of pilgrims on their journey from Waltham Abbey to the Shrine of Thomas-a-Becket at Canterbury and runs alongside the house.

According to the Lawrence family records (ERO D/DU1597/1/1) there are accounts of a property on the site, belonging to John Owen Wood, dating back to 1753, but say the earliest official records of Pilgrims Hall can be found on the County Archive Map of 1795. At that time the property was a square farm house of two storeys. It was then owned by John Keilly, a retired Colonial Administrator. The Hall was possibly built between 1801 and 1804 while John Owen Wood lived there. From 1814 until 1834 it was the home of Emmanuel Dios Santos, a wealthy Portuguese Roman Catholic priest who extended the property adding the two bow fronted wings. The Cupola with a bell at the top was also created although the bell has 1806 engraved on it: also created were the ha-ha, central lake, and water garden and a variety of trees. In 1818 he built a chapel within the house which he maintained for congregations of about two hundred and fifty. His death in 1834 left the Catholics of Brentwood and South Weald without a place of worship until 1837 when the church of St Helens opened. Pilgrims Hall became a private boys' boarding school for about sixty pupils until 1860 and then became a family home for successive owners. Pilgrims Hall acreage in the 1866 sales particulars is given as twenty-two (ERO SALE/B318) although by 1903 the sales particulars increase the acreage to twenty-six (ERO SALE/B1601).

At the time of the sale of Pilgrims Hall on 9th August 1866 (ERO SALE/B318) the mansion and grounds were in the occupation of Captain Arrow on lease for twenty-one years. Pilgrims Hall was described as being a desirable residence with ornamental grounds of twenty-two acres. The mansion was approached by a carriage drive through an avenue and had stabling, a small farm yard, and a 'capital walled garden'.

The six inches to a mile ordnance survey map published in 1881 shows a small amount of designed landscape around the house with trees bordering the driveway leading to the house as well as trees alongside one side of the second driveway. Trees or shrubs border the entire perimeter of the estate and specimen trees are dotted in the parkland. A square pond or lake straddles the field boundary in the parkland.

The 18th May 1903 sale of Pilgrims Hall (ERO SALE/B1601) by Alfred Savill & Sons describes the Hall as ‘moderate size mansion with lodge, capital stabling, attractive pleasure grounds, kitchen gardens, small farm, three cottages with the enclosures of well-timbered parkland. The size of the estate at this time was twenty-nine acres. The pleasure grounds were described as being ‘very tastefully laid out and well-timbered and shrubbed with lawns including first rate tennis lawn and a summer house’ and the kitchen garden was ‘very productive, and well stocked. There is a green house and cucumber frames. In the rear is an orchard well stocked with young trees’. There were also several enclosures of pasture land and in front of the house was a small park that was ‘well-timbered and there is a belt of well grown trees around the property screening it from the main road and Green Lane’.

James and Kathleen Lawrence acquired Pilgrims Hall in 1913 and their daughter, Lesley Lewis, describes her early impressions of the house in her 1980 book *The Private Life of a Country House 1912-1939*. “The house was approached by a short rhododendron lined drive. It had solid oak gates, terminating the quarter-mile or so of oak paling screening the home fields from the road. A lighter railed back gate gave access up another drive to the stable yard and back door. A four-roomed single-storey white lodge with a central chimneystack stood between the two drives and was occupied by the butler and his family. The date 1806 on the bell under a charming little cupola may provide a clue to the house’s origin and also to the tradition that there had been a chapel there’. A photograph of the exterior of Pilgrims Hall c1913 predates the construction of the pergola and sunken Italian Garden (Essex Record Office D/DU 1597/15/2). Lesley Lewis also describes her first impressions of the garden mentioning a huge deodar tree which died soon after their arrival and a monkey puzzle tree which was cut down, but some pampas grass survived for another forty years.

The Lawrence’s architect, Horace Farquharson, added another wing to the house and “built up the carriage sweep to the front door and made a forecourt enclosed by a brick and stone balustrade from which semi-circular steps led down to the lawn. Extending beyond the drawing-room bow window he built a pergola on square brick piers with heavy wooden superstructure, over one end of a flagged terrace on to which the French windows of all rooms on the west side opened. At the north end was a loggia Steps led from the terrace down to an Italian sunken garden. This had two square pools, lined with narrow bricks, and in the centre of each was a charming little bronze fountain, one a boy with a dolphin, the other a cherub. Beyond an outer low brick wall was a small wood, full of snowdrops, primroses, daffodils and bluebells in spring, and concealing an old thatched summerhouse of tarred boards, adorned by cross-crosses of artistically rustic logs’.

Lesley Lewis also writes of the screen of mixed timber – oak, elm, lime, horse-chestnut – planted, possibly when the house was first built, round the eight acres or so of the two front fields. At the far end of the first field and in view of the house, was a large deep pond. Three carefully placed groups of horse-chestnut and fir had been planted and a fine Turkey oak stood by itself: also eight Spanish chestnuts near the house. The second field was not ornamentally planted but a hay meadow. A viney was grown outside the walled garden with its roots covered in manure. Greenhouses were within the walled garden sheltering peaches, nectarines, melons, and grapes: while gooseberries, raspberries, red and black currants grew at one end of the walled garden. Plums and cherries grew on trees trained against the walls. The kitchen garden adjoined the Italian garden but was screened from it by a trellis covered in roses.

Lewis's reminiscences include describing the front drive emerging between ten feet high hedges of mauve ponticum rhododendrons backed by laurel and the large area of lawn in front of the house. A thatched summer house was built to watch tennis and the old rose beds were removed and a new garden made for them further west, enclosed by yew hedges and a stone pergola. This led to the wooden Japanese bridge erected by earlier owners and the wild garden full of unusual plants and roses, such as the red and white striped 'York and Lancaster' roses.

Rex Whistler painted Pilgrims Hall in 1936, sitting all one grey and icy day making a very detailed pencil drawing from which he did an oil painting in his studio. Lesley Lewis remembers the arrival of the painting 'house and garden just a little more perfectly composed than in real life and bathed in evening sunshine such as I am afraid he never saw'. James Lawrence died in 1939 and his wife Kathleen continued to live at Pilgrims Hall until 1968. In 1968 Pilgrims Hall was sold to a Christian training centre.

The grounds of the mansion with its eighteen acres of beautiful parkland were described in an article in the 1969 *Essex Countryside* magazine following the sale by the Lawrence family. '...the croquet pitch, the front lawn overlooked by hedges of roses, the covered walk where the wisteria hangs, and the two fountains in the pond'. The Regency mansion was described as 'one of the most charming buildings in the South Weald of Essex, with eighteen acres of beautiful parkland, stables and a lodge'.

Alfred Savill, Curtis & Henson held an auction on 30 April 1969 for eleven separate lots of the Pilgrims Hall Estate (ERO SALE/F112) comprising sixty-four acres in all. The lots included the Pilgrims Hall cottages, farm buildings, a seven and a quarter acre orchard of plum and damson trees, over 12 acres of pasture land, and a paddock of over eight acres accessed from Green Lane.

The property was bought for the sum of £30,000 by Pilgrims Hall Fellowship Ltd, a Christian charitable trust. The vision given to Roy & Shirley Willis for a Christian teaching, caring, counselling and retreat centre remains very much to this day.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

Pilgrims Hall is located off the A128 Ongar Road 2.3 miles from Brentwood and in the parish of Pilgrims Hatch. Immediately to the rear of the house and grounds is Green Lane, a narrow track. Alongside the grounds is the Straight Mile Nurseries and the lakes behind the Hall are used for carp fishing.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Pilgrims Hall is approached from the A128 with one entrance by the lodge leading up to the hall and another immediately behind the lodge leading to car parking areas.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Pilgrims Hall is a Grade II listed building of eighteenth century origins with early and mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century additions. The house is stuccoed brick and plain red brick. The

central block has Regency bowed walls at the north-west and south-east ends. The early nineteenth century wing to the south-east has a hexagonal bell turret with ogee cupola dated 1806.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Brentwood Urban District Council 1936 *The Official Guide to Brentwood*

Lewis, Lesley 1982 *The Private Life of a Country House 1912-1939* Macdonald & Co

Pevsner, Nikolaus *The Buildings of England Essex* 1954 p330

Simpson, Phyllis *A Stately Essex Home paid for through faith in Essex Countryside* October 1969 pp 34-36

Ward, Gladys A. 1961 *A History of South Weald and Brentwood* p24

Ward, Gladys A., the late, 1963 *A History of South Weald and Brentwood* pp78-79, 89, 103 *Victoria County History of Essex* 1983 Volume VIII edited by W R Powell p78

Maps and Images

1862-1878 1st edition 25" to the mile ordnance survey map sheet L1X 14

Archival Items

1866 Sales particulars of farms including Pilgrims Hall ERO SALE/B318

1903 Sales particulars of Pilgrims Hall ERO SALE/B1601

1904-39 Lawrence Family Records Essex Record Office D/DU 1597/1/1

1969 Sales particulars of Pilgrims Hall ERO SALE/F112

Websites

www.britishlistedbuildings

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