

**BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**GREAT WARLEY**

**WARLEY PLACE**

**Grade II**

**Grid Ref: TQ 583 909**

Warley Place was the garden of Ellen Willmott (1858 – 1934) who gardened intensively in a natural style from 1875 until her death. It is now leased to the Essex Wildlife Trust and managed as a nature reserve which respects the garden's history.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

In the sixteenth century the site of Warley Place formed part of a much bigger estate which, following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, came into the ownership of the Gonson family. The estate passed through several generations of the family until, in 1627, it was split between four sisters. The title of the manor of Warley and some land went to Sir Richard Browne, the son of Thomasine Fenton, who was one of the sisters. In 1647 Sir Richard's daughter Mary married John Evelyn (1620-1706) who purchased from his father-in-law the lordship of the manor of Warley. There are unsubstantiated beliefs that Evelyn wrote *Sylva* while he was living at Warley Place. At the time that Evelyn presented *Sylva* in February 1664 to the restored king, Charles II, he was living at Sayes Court, Deptford. Warley Place, however, was left to the heirs of Anne Fleming (another sister)'s family. After being held by the Fleming family, the Warley Place estate passed through several ownerships. In 1728 Thomas Jackson of Gray's Inn was the occupier (Victoria County History) and on his death in that year he left the estate to his son George Jackson and his sister Winifred Jackson. In the 1760s and 1770s Warley Place was owned and occupied by Thomas Adams. Between 1781 and 1784 Warley Place was held by Anthony Merry before it passed in 1784 to Samuel Bonham.

The next notable owners were the Willmott family who purchased the then 33 acre estate in 1875, at which time it was described in the particulars as being 'exceedingly well timbered'. Their daughter Ellen Willmott reputedly grew 100,000 different plants (Shenstone p.41). She received from the age of seven a £1,000 birthday gift each year from her godmother, Countess Tasker who died in January 1888 and left Ellen Willmott and her sister Rose (later Mrs. Robert Berkeley of Spetchley Park) £140,000 in her will.

The garden Ellen Willmott created at Warley Place was much admired and visited during the height of its popularity. Visitors included Royalty, Sir Norman Moore, the Rev. G. Engleheart, the renowned daffodil breeder, and most of the eminent horticulturalists of the day. Narcissus 'Ellen Willmott' was bred by Engleheart in 1897 and it received FCC (First Class Certificate) in the same year. During her career, Ellen remained in close contact with Kew Gardens and most other botanic institutions. She and Gertrude Jekyll were the only two women out of 60 recipients of the first Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1897 and Gertrude Jekyll described Ellen as "the greatest living woman gardener". Ellen reputedly had 104 gardeners.

Miss Willmott was also an accomplished photographer and many of her photographs appeared in contemporary garden journals. (Sewell 2014)

Charles Sargent, the dynamic first director of the Arnold Arboretum greatly admired Miss Willmott and used her to persuade the plant hunter Ernest H. Wilson to return to China to find plants for the Arnold Arboretum. In gratitude, Miss Willmott was allowed first choice of many plants being sent back by Wilson from China. 5,000 lilies were sent in one consignment. Ellen Willmott was able to propagate many plants, e.g. *Ceratostigma willmottianum*, where other botanical institutions failed to do so. Sargent also asked Miss Willmott to stress to Wilson the importance of good photography. Although she has been credited with funding several overseas plant-collecting expeditions, no proof of this has yet been found. However many plants such as irises sent back by plant hunting expeditions, e.g. van Tubergen, were named after her by gardening colleagues such as Sir Michael Foster. She produced a monumental book *The Genus Rosa* with watercolours by Alfred Parsons. She took great delight when some of Wilson's roses flowered for the first time in Britain at Warley Place.

With houses in France and Italy where she also gardened enthusiastically, Miss Willmott's fortune came under strain during the First World War and by the time of her death the gardens at Warley had been very much reduced. After her death, many of her plants and her archives were moved to Spetchley Park. The house, together with c 18ha, was bought by a Mrs. Gray but she did not live at the house which together with its gardens were neglected and plundered. She in turn sold in 1938 to Mr. A.J.T. Carter, who pulled the house down. His plans to develop the site for housing were prevented by the onset of the Second World War and the advent of Green Belt legislation. In 1977 Carter's son, Norman, leased 11ha to the Essex Naturalists' Trust (now the Essex Wildlife Trust) for the benefit of wildlife. Since then, Norman's son Paul gave the Trust two short term leases. In March 2002 Paul Carter was instrumental in ensuring that a new lease was dependent on a management plan "to uncover and restore the garden layout and to preserve garden plants while maintaining as a backdrop the wildness that has developed since Miss Willmott's time". The Carter family have now given EWT a 99 year lease with the EWT taking on the additional responsibility for the management of the east and west meadow.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING**

Warley Place lies just to the south of Brentwood in a busy rural setting, now very close to the edge of the town. The site, which falls away to the west, covers an area of c 32 acres bounded to the north by Green Lane, to the east by Warley Road, to the west by Dark Lane, and to the south by Great Warley village. The landform to the west allows views out of the site across the countryside to London.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

There were two lodged entrances to Warley Place. North Lodge lies at the northern end of Warley Road. It is now a private dwelling and is no longer linked by a drive to the remains of the house, although part of this survives as a track. The current main entrance is from Great Warley village at the southern tip of the site, through a wooden field gate past South Lodge onto a track which runs north for c. 50m to a parking area created by the Essex Wildlife Trust.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Warley Place, which stood slightly to the east of centre of its grounds, was demolished in 1939, leaving only some fragmentary remains.

The main house and lodges (Written by Michael Leach):

There have been at least two houses on the site. The first was probably built when the manor of Great Warley was split by inheritance into two parts in 1627, leaving the original manor house close to the medieval church in the southerly end of the parish. Little is known of the new manor house of Warley Place which was described in about 1725 as an 'ancient house', and in 1774 as 'a good old red brick embattled mansion, modernised'. Examination of a map of the encampment on Warley Common, dated 1778, suggests that the site of this house was slightly to the north of its replacement, roughly where stables, coach house and service buildings were later constructed. No vestiges of the building remain, unless a few moulded window mullion bricks found recently in the walled garden at Warley Place came from the demolition of this house.

The date of the second house, built above cellars in a pale gault brick, is unknown. The Chapman & André map of 1777 is of too small a scale to be helpful, merely showing that the property was then owned by Captain Thomas Adams. In the same year the architect James Gandon exhibited at the Royal Academy a drawing entitled 'the elevation of the principal front of Warley Place'. This drawing no longer exists and there is no other surviving documentary evidence but, in the opinion of the architectural historian James Bettley, photographs of the seven bay house demolished in 1939 suggest that Gandon could indeed have been the architect.

The house was later extended with a billiard room to the rear. This in turn was demolished when Frederick Willmott extended the house to the west after his purchase in 1875, nearly doubling the size of the house. The conservatory to the southwest, and the cellar kitchens to the north were subsequent additions. The surviving remains of the conservatory were stabilised by the EWT in 2006.

South Lodge, single storeyed, weather boarded, and timber framed, and originally with a thatched roof, is in the 'cottage ornée' style popularized by picturesque movement, and in vogue between about 1790 and about 1820. Though a Humphry Repton association (Carter et al. 1982) has been claimed, no evidence has been found to support this. (Wildig 1997 Appendix B p.ii). Renovation work is currently (2018) being undertaken on this Grade II listed building.

North Lodge is likely to be several decades later but built before the first edition of the 25" OS map of 1876. It is single storey with attic, built in red brick with blue brick detailing under a steeply pitched slate roof. It is well set back from the present road and is therefore likely to date from before the highway diversion of 1866. North Lodge had new owners recently (about 2016) and they have subsequently applied for planning permission to extend the lodge. Although the lodge is not currently listed the application was refused. Given its historic setting there are now plans to apply for listing for the property. No documentary evidence for either lodge has been found.

## GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The line of the late C19 drive runs to the east of the ruins of the house in an area described in the 1904 Walker plan as “Old Orchard Area, now Flower Garden”. This area has recently been partly uncovered and was discovered to have been a Rockery. Between the house site and the gardens of North Lodge, the Essex Wildlife Trust has created a series of paths through the woodland which has grown up over the area. Many of the paths used now are those created by the Essex Wildlife Trust as they hacked through the overgrown garden rather than those used in Miss Willmott’s day. These paths turn west of North Lodge and run south-west along the edge of a ha-ha to the remains of the extensive area of frames and glasshouses which lay to the north of the house. From here further paths lead into a walled garden which survives on the west side of the ruins. Beyond the walled garden to the north-west is another large area of woodland which includes the north pond and an extensive daffodil bank along its northern boundary. To the south of the house ruins are the remains of what was until recently (c. 1990s) an open area of lawn (Pers. Comm. Jim Jarmy) but has now (2018) been encroached by seedling trees. Paths lead south from here through more woodland, past a line of ancient sweet chestnut, the largest of which was dated by John White of the Forest Authority to have been planted in 1629 (Wildig 1999 Appendix B p. x). John White also supplied the estimated dates of planting of the following trees. *Quercus cerris* -1847 and *Quercus robur* -1790.

From the sweet chestnuts the path leads to the rocky ravine developed by Miss Willmott as an Alpine Garden. The rockwork survives although the stream at its base has been dry for many years. To the south of the modern bridge can be seen what Miss Willmott described as a ‘filmy fern grotto’.

## PARK

The gardens are surrounded by three areas of open grass, planted with scattered trees some of which are very mature. The field to the south-east was once a Site of Special Scientific Interest on account of the *Crocus vernus* growing in sheets there. Current management is encouraging the crocuses to return. The field to the south west is now a splendid bank of daffodils. These two fields have been managed since the 2002 by the EWT, whereas the field to the north is in private ownership.

## REFERENCES

### Books and Articles

- Burnell, J. and Carter, R., Carter Ecological Ltd, *Warley Place Management Plan* (2002)  
Country Life, 37 (8 May 1915), pp 613-17; 76 (6 October 1934), pp 358-9  
Carter, G. et al., *Humphry Repton* (1982), p 152  
Cowell, F. and Green, G., *Repton in Essex* (2000), p 176  
Essex Gardens Trust Newsletter 7, (Autumn 1999)  
Hobhouse, P. and Wood, C., *Painted Gardens* (1995)  
Le Lievre, A. 1980 *Miss Willmott of Warley Place*  
Sewell, P., Miss Ellen Willmott of Warley Place: Eminent Gardener, Horticulturist and Garden Photographer, *Journal of Garden History*, 42:1, Summer 2014, pp89-105  
Shenstone, J. C., ‘The Gardens of Warley Place, Brentwood, Essex’. *Essex Naturalist*, vol xvii The Garden June 1979 pp 241-6

*Victoria County History of Essex VII*, (1978), pp 167-8

Wildig, A. *'Wildlife in Historic Gardens?'* Architectural Association, (1997)<sub>1</sub>

### **Maps and Images**

1777 Chapman & André's Map of Essex Plate XVII

1838 Tithe Map

1866 Ordnance Survey map 25 inch to the mile:

LHS surveyed 1866, 72, Revised 1895

RHS surveyed 1866, 67&72. Revised 1895

1875 Map in Warley Place sales particulars

1881 Ordnance Survey map 6" to 1 mile 1st edition

1896 Ordnance Survey map 6" to the mile 2nd edition

1904 W.Walker, *A Plan of Miss Willmott's house and gardens and Great Warley* (copy at Essex Record Office)

1920 Ordnance Survey map 6" to the mile 3<sup>rd</sup> edition

1935 Map in Warley Place Sales Particulars

1947 Aerial Photograph 17 April

### **Archival Items**

1992 Essex Wildlife Trust Management Plan Map

Researcher: Ailsa Wildig

Site visit: numerous