



WARLEY PLACE: HISTORIC ENGLAND REGISTER ENTRY (Edited version to concentrate on the 19th/20th centuries)

BRIEF: LISTED GRADE II (NB other features are on the HER separately)

Remains of the wild and natural garden created by the horticulturalist Ellen Willmott between the 1890s and her death in 1935.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the C16 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. . . . Between 1781 and 1784 Warley Place was held by Anthony Merry before it passed in 1784 to Samuel Bonham. Evidence for suggestions (Carter et al 1982) that Humphry Repton (1752-1818) worked at Warley Place during this period has not been found (Cowell and Green 2000).

Alterations were carried out to the house during the 1840s but the estate was put up for sale in 1875, at which time it was described in the particulars as being 'exceedingly well timbered'.

The purchaser of the house together with 11ha of land was Frederick Willmott, whose daughter Ellen was eighteen at the time. The Willmott family commissioned major additions to the house which almost doubled its size and began enlarging the estate, while Ellen set about creating a garden. On her father's death in 1892 it passed to her mother, and then to Ellen herself in 1902 when her mother died.

During her time at Warley Place Ellen Willmott (1857-1934) was described by Gertrude Jekyll as 'the greatest living gardener': she employed as many as 104 gardeners and developed complex grounds with an extensive collection of plants.

Following the First World War, Miss Willmott sold off outlying areas of the estate and on her death in 1934, the remaining c 30ha were divided into seven lots. 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 whose plans to develop the site for housing were prevented by the onset of the Second World War and the advent of Green Belt legislation.

The house was then pulled down and the grounds became derelict as they reverted to woodland. In 1977 Carter's son, Norman, leased 11ha to the Essex Naturalists' Trust (now the Essex Wildlife Trust) on the condition that the remains of Miss Willmott's garden were recognised and conserved. Since that time the Trust have been carefully clearing the area

to reveal much of the Willmott planting. The site remains (2000) leased to the Trust, in single private ownership.

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 11ha, 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. It is a mainly enclosed site although the landform to the west allows views out of the site across the countryside.

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 it survives as a track.

The main entrance is from Great Warley village at the southern tip of the site, through a wooden field gate set beside a single-storey lodge cottage (listed grade II) onto a track which runs north for c 50m to a parking area created by the Wildlife Trust. Known as the South Lodge, this timber-framed and weatherboarded building (originally thatched) has been linked to Humphry Repton (Carter et al 1982) although no evidence has been found to support this.

Cartographic evidence however suggests both the South Lodge and the North Lodge were built before 1875 (Sale particulars) when the Warley Road was moved further to the east, leaving the old road as a carriage drive. This may have occurred in the first half of the C19. The drive from the Trust car park continues north-east as a track through woodland, passes the east side of the remains of the house, then continues north-east to exit at North Lodge.

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

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The line of the late C19 drive forms a walk through woodland which runs to the east of the ruins of the house where an **Old English rose garden** created by Ellen Willmott no longer survives.

Between the house site and the gardens of North Lodge, the Wildlife Trust have created a series of paths through the woodland which has grown up over the area. These turn west past the gardens 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 of C17 origins** 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 an open area of lawn with paths leading south from here through more woodland, past a line of **ancient sweet chestnut** (dated by John White of the Forest Authority to have been planted in 1629) to the rocky ravine developed by Miss Willmott as an **Alpine Garden**. This was the first area of the garden to be created by her in the late C19 and the rockwork survives although the stream at its base is now (2000) dry. The paths run beside the ravine which terminates in a **small pool beside what Miss Willmott described as a 'filmy fern grotto'**, and then emerge to rejoin the main drive at the southern end of the site.

Ellen Willmott became interested in botany and horticulture from an early age and, following inheritance of her father's estate, she spent lavishly on the development of a widely acclaimed collection of plants and on an intensive plant-breeding programme. The garden she created at Warley Place was much admired and visited during the height of its popularity. During her career Ellen remained in close contact with Kew Gardens; she was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1897. Miss Willmott funded several overseas plant-collecting expeditions and produced a book on *The Genus Rosa* with watercolours by Alfred Parsons. 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 much reduced.

PARK The gardens are surrounded by three areas of open grass, planted with scattered trees some of which are very mature. These open areas were developed by Ellen Willmott as bulb lawns and survive much as she planted them. The field to the south-east was planted as an early crocus meadow, while that to the south-west was the daffodil field.

REFERENCES

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Maps W Walker, A plan of Miss Willmott's house and gardens and Great Warley, 1904 [copy at Essex Record Office]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1876
2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1920

Illustrations Bird's-eye view of the Willmott gardens at Warley Place, nd (Essex Record Office)
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