

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT  
LOUGHTON**

**HOLMEHURST**

**TQ 409 950**

The home and gardens of Theophilus Westthorp (born Harwich 1814). Westthorp employed Messrs Veitch and Co. Chelsea to landscape the grounds during the two-year building period of the house, 1864-1865. Still in excellent condition with much remaining planting, as well as structure. In addition a considerable amount of detailed research has been carried out by a recent owner, allowing a full history to be built up.

The site also benefits from forming a 'group' with Warren Hall to the north.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

Epping Forest was originally part of the Royal Forest of Essex which by the C14 was limited to the southwest Essex corner of the county. The Lord of the Manor of Loughton, John Whitaker Maitland enclosed over 1000 acres of Epping Forest in the mid C19 and sold much of it for building plots and private use. This included 15 acres of forest waste which now forms the Holmehurst estate. The 1878 Epping Forest Act ensured that Holmehurst remained surrounded by forest land with no other building development permitted.

Theophilus Westthorp is described by the London Directory of 1862 as a ship owner, ship rigger, ship chandler and patent machine-picked oakum manufacturer of West India Dock Road, Poplar. He chose the name Holmehurst, roughly translated from the Norse/Anglo-Saxon meaning "wooded hill by the side of a lake". This is entirely appropriate since the house was built on the high ridge of Warren Hill with far reaching views over Epping Forest. The 1777 Chapman and André Map of Essex shows the land as not heavily wooded and consisting of some scrub and grazing land. The fine country house was built in the Victorian Gothic Revival Style, probably by local builders the Egan Brothers.

Veitch made clever use of the forest waste on the sheltered land sloping to the southwest of the house creating Pleasure Grounds around the existing ornamental lake and mature woodland. Four islands were created on the lake and winding gravel paths were laid throughout the grounds, carefully designed to control what walkers saw of various vistas. Veitch planted a large variety of choice ornamental shrubs and trees. He created spacious lawns, a small orchard and an enclosed kitchen garden. There were numerous glass houses including peach and camellia and a range of vineries. A small home farm existed to the south of the house consisting of poultry, cow house and pig sties. A lodge/gatehouse was built with the house in 1865 along with a stable block, coach house, granary, chain house and carpenter's shop.

An inventory dated 16<sup>th</sup> February 1886 by Richard Ellis & Son, Auctioneers and Valuers of 49 Fenchurch Street, still exists and lists all the plants in the greenhouses.

The next owner of Holmehurst from 1886-1907 was Frederick Lewis Edwards, an Australian paper merchant who acquired an extra acre of land on the eastern boundary which included a gardener's cottage and a small pond.

The next significant years of the garden were during the ownership of Edmund Rochford from 1907-1919. Edmund was one of the grandsons of Michael Rochford, founder of the market gardening dynasty. In 1898 the four eldest grandsons, Tom, John, Edmund and Joseph owned 86 acres of greenhouses in the Lee Valley. Edmund created a new kitchen garden on the north eastern boundary. He created a large orchard of about 1 acre to the south of the house and planted many more trees and shrubs. He built more ancillary buildings including experimental greenhouses, a boat house on the lake and a small aviary near the enclosed orchard.

During the Second World War a V2 rocket destroyed the gardener's cottage and caused damage to the main house. A bomb also landed in the lake, blocking a culvert and causing the lake to flood, ultimately destroying the more vulnerable shrubs and trees to the south of the house.

By 1965 the Pleasure Grounds and Parkland were very overgrown, and the estate was split up and sold. The bulk of the Pleasure Grounds and lake remained with the house – some eight and a half acres – and was purchased by the Brown family in 1990. Mr. and Mrs. R. Brown embarked on a ten year garden restoration programme.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

Surrounded by Epping Forest on all sides, Holmehurst is approximately 1 mile from Loughton and Buckhurst Hill stations on London Underground's Central Line. The A104, Epping New Road, runs alongside the western boundary and the Manor Road runs alongside the northern boundary. Woodland belts of trees and hedges along all boundaries. The sixteen acre parkland and gardens surrounding the house remain largely intact although the home farm, lodge, estate cottages, and outbuildings and seven and a half acres of land were sold in 1965.

Views are largely contained within the property, although the lake and parkland can be seen from the home farm, now Connaught Farm Nursery.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

A single approach is from the north, off the Manor Road. Woodcote Lodge stands alongside the entrance and the house is approached by a long tree and shrub lined drive to a large forecourt. A spur of the drive passes north of the house to a new garage block.

### **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

The c.1865 house is well preserved both inside and out. It features painted stuccoed exterior walls, high gables, decorative barge boards, wooden finials, chess piece chimney pots, Tudor rose quatrefoil detail over bay windows and patterned roof tiles. Victorian palm house to the south of the house

converted to a billiard room in the 1930s. Domestic quarters adjoining north of the house converted to separate annex and new garage block built in the 1990s.

#### REFERENCES

*London Directory*, 1862

M Allen, *Tom's Weeds – The Story of the Rochford's and their Plants*, 1970

Sir W Addison, *Portrait of Epping Forest*, 1977

M Brown, *History of Holmehurst*, 1999 (Essex Record Office: T/P 657 acc No T1953)

W C Waller, *Loughton. A Hundred Years Ago*, ed. R Morris & C Pond, 2001

#### Maps

Chapman and André, *Map of Essex*, 1777

OS 6" to 1 mile scale                      surveyed 1879

OS 25" to 1 mile                          New Series, surveyed 1920

Research and writing by: Margaretha Pollitt Brown, September 2004, former owner of Holmehurst, description as at September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000.