

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT
LOUGHTON**

WARREN HOUSE

TQ 409 955

Former Tudor hunting lodge, converted to a famous tavern, 'The Reindeer Inn' by the 18C, and surrounded by an extensive rabbit warren. The grounds and house were re-designed by Humphry Repton in the early 19thC after conversion to a private house. Used since 1880 as the house and grounds of the Superintendent of the Forest.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Warren House is believed to be developed from (and incorporates) a 16thC hunt standing, similar in function to the more famous Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge. The building was known as the 'Little Standing'. Probably visited by Henry VIII, the site now overlooks Epping Forest, with fine views from its elevated position. Although in the early 19thC it is described as laying 'within the centre' of Epping Forest.

Subsequent to the 17thC the site was converted to a private dwelling, and in the 18thC it became a well-known Inn. The Reindeer Inn, as it was known, was a convenient distance from London, and attracted wealthy clientele on Sunday outings. The Inn itself was known for rabbit pie, provided by the nearby Rabbit warren. Descriptions of the site just after this period refer to the 'dirty ponds, numerous puddles, barren mounds of clay and unsightly palings' (Repton 1816).

In 1800 the tavern was re-built and again converted to a private house. A Press Report of 1813 records the sale of the 'Rein Deer', with stabling, barns, granary, outbuildings, pleasure ground, three kitchen gardens, a field and 'three hoppets of pasture', in addition to a productive rabbit warren. In 1815 the house was engraved by Storer for Cole's 'Residences of Actors' (Green 1999). At that period it was being lived in by the widow of the late H.P. Engstrom Esq. The front grounds are shown, with a turning circle, and wooden trellis fence, with lawn. By 1820 the house itself was tenanted by Field Marshall Thomas Grosvener, who was involved in horse racing locally, training at Fairmead Bottom, close to the warren, and racing at Newmarket. Grosvener erected the obelisk which serves as an eyecatcher in the grounds, to a horse supposedly ridden at Waterloo. There is however some doubt about the authenticity of the claim.

In the early 19thC Humphry Repton was commissioned by Grosvener, by then the Lord of the Manor of Loughton to carry out improvements including re-styling the buildings itself, with additional windows and conservatory. Repton is also supposed to have carried out work in the grounds. The site is recorded in Repton's 'Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape gardening' (1816). Here he describes the 5 acre garden and 20 acre rabbit warren, and the difficulties (numerous!) which the design presented him with. He includes within the 'peculiar circumstances' the fact that the house had been a tavern and, additionally, was in the 'centre' of the forest. He refers to the 'felicity hunters' who flock to the Inn every Sunday in the summers. However when making his design suggestions he supposes that a family might live her in the winter at some future date, and thus suggests a window

on the staircase to let in more light, and opening windows on the ground on the south side. He also refers to the inconvenient situation of the grounds and the 'rapacious animals' that live in the surrounding warren. Repton gives several proposals for the landscaping of the site. These include: the securing of the whole of the garden site by a tall effective fence and a brick sunken wall (in his illustration giving the appearance of a ha-ha); the next is to allot an area for fruit and vegetables within this, accessed by a road that divides the garden area from the melon ground; finally he suggests that part of the remaining area should be planted with neat gravel walks, shrubs and flowers. The area that would remain within the new enclosed area after these plantings were carried out would amount to some 2.5 acres on the north side, which would be used as a grazed lawn area. In a summing up typical of Repton, he describes this as 'neatness and comfort without waste of land'. No Red Book survives for the site and the entry within 'Fragments' is thus the only description of Repton's proposals.

In 1878 the Epping Forest Act was passed, and the Warren House became the residence of the superintendents of the Forest Conservators. Since 1880 all Superintendents of the Forest have lived on the site. The conservatory appears to have been re-built at some period subsequent to the 19thC, but elaborate trellis work survives within it.

Superintendent Alexander McKenzie was of particular importance in establishing shrubs and trees on the site, supplied by local nurserymen George and William Paul. His planting included Rhododendrons, Hollies, Holm Oak, and Cedars, Austrian Pine, and Weymouth Pine. In addition he planted a fine avenue of Black Italian Poplars along the east carriage drive (now replaced with Large-leaf Lime). A tree nursery was created on the eastern boundary of the garden, for which some evidence still exists. In 1946 an oak within the grounds was still known as 'Wellington's Oak' supposedly after the frequent visits by Wellington to the grounds (Addison, 1946)

From 1949-78 Superintendent Alfred Quist continued the tradition of planting, including establishing a Mulberry, Weeping Ash, Fern-leafed Beech, Hornbeam, Indian Bean Tree, Tulip Tree and winter-flowering cherry. The present superintendent (John Besant) has supplemented the existing mature trees with Scot Pine, Alder and Sweet Gum, as well as red Oak. He has also re-established areas of shrubs and heather beds.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site has been recently visited by the Essex Gardens Trust as a group visit. The following notes have been based on this visit combined with the record of Georgina Green (1999). The site was not visited again during Inventory research.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Lying to the north of Loughton, the Warren is currently situated overlooking the Forest, although up until the early 19thC it was described as being 'within' the Forest. It is sited to have views over the Forest and is on a highpoint (c69 mod). Originally containing 5 acres of garden, and 20 acres of warren, the grounds are largely now reduced to the garden area. Considerable development has taken place to the east and Victorian villas (including Warren Hill House and Holmehurst) lie to the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Entrance is from the west side, off the A104 Loughton road. Two Horse Chestnuts flank the entrance, with further Scots Pine on the boundary. There is no lodge at the junction with the drive. A curving drive leads via the Car Park and west Lodge before bifurcating around a small oval containing a Lawson's Cypress. A further oval to the south contains a Red Oak. A routeway continues around the north-west of the house to the rear and, eventually leads to the Centenary Avenue on the east (now planted with large-leaf lime). This avenue connects with Warren Hill and on to the A121 (High Road).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The Warren House is a Grade II* listed building owned by the Corporation of London. The central core is a timber framed building of the mid 16thC. Substantial additions were made by the 18thC, when the building became an Inn. In the early 19thC the house was partly re-built, and alterations made by Humphry Repton. A conservatory was also added at this time. Further alterations, and repairs to the conservatory, have been undertaken subsequently. An engraving of c1815 shows the house front in some detail.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Addison, W 1946. *Epping Forest its Literary and Historical Associations*. London.

Corporation of London, Epping Forest Information and Museum Service. c.2000? *An Introductory Guide to the Gardens at The Warren*. Information Leaflet.

Green, G. 1999. *The Warren, formerly The Reindeer Inn*.

Ramsey, W. (ed.). 1986. *Epping Forest Then and Now. An Anthology*. Battle of Britain Prints.

Short, P 1999 A Guardian of the People's Forest (Warren House) In *Essex Countryside*. April 1999 pp35-38

Maps

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25inch. Sheet 57

Pathfinder TQ 49NW (1974)

Pictorial Evidence

Engraving of 'A house in Epping Forest, formerly the Rein Deer Inn' c1815 In Storer, H. 1815. *Cole's residences of Actors*. Copy Held ERO.

Photographs taken by members of the EGT.

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