

**BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
GREAT WARLEY**

WELL MEAD

Grid Ref: TQ 585 906

Former rose garden of Ellen Willmott, accomplished botanist, gardener, and horticulturalist, of the Warley Place estate. The gardens still retain many of Willmott's specimen trees and shrubs.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Well Mead in Ellen Willmott's time was the Gate House, thought to have been built by Ellen and accommodated some of her gardeners. William Walker's 1904 estate plan of Warley Place and surrounding area shows that behind the Gate House were eight well set out beds with pergolas dissecting the four quarters. Also marked on this plan are a dipping well, a fig wall, a gazebo, an apiary, and the stone steps leading down to the pond.

The *Essex Naturalist* for January 1912 to December 1913 gives a good description of the Well Mead garden at that time: "The Well Mead garden at Warley contains the collection of wild and ancient types of roses collected for study; it is one of the best collections of the kind that exists. Here are also Tea-roses, Hybrid Perpetuals, Moss-roses, and others raised before 1870. Many of these latter are so beautiful in themselves and so deliciously scented that it is a matter for regret that they should have been largely discarded by modern gardeners. It is interesting to see these old roses at Warley and to know that although so many of them are already forgotten, some at least are saved from oblivion. This garden, which is entered through a typical Essex red brick and timber gate-house, serves as orchard and as a vegetable and herb garden, and also as nursery for shrubs, whilst against the long south wall is a collection of Fig-trees, illustrating the comparative value of the different varieties which thrive and bear fruit in Essex. Different varieties of dessert-grapes are also grown here, such as Chasellas de Fontainebleau, Madeline Royal Norillon hatif, Malingris precoce, Charles Vibert and others. Although the crop is not so plentiful and the grapes have not the fine flavour of those grown under a Continental sun, they are, nevertheless, good, whilst some varieties, such as Grenache, are very beautiful in the autumn, when the foliage becomes brilliantly scarlet.. A notable feature is a double hedge of Lavender, with a foot-path between, two hundred and ten feet in length; a similar one of Rosemary may be seen in another part of the garden. The land slopes to the south-east, thus rejoicing in the early morning sunshine, and below are a few acres of wild land divided from the Well-Mead Garden by a valley (a natural depression) and a pool of water. On this land a large part of our British flora has been naturalized, to which has been added many interesting plants collected from the Continent by Miss Willmott. These have been planted in a natural way, so that, in wending along the little tracks, one could imagine oneself upon a botanical expedition, finding surprises at every turn, and coming suddenly upon a rare British plant or an interesting alien. Some species have "crossed" with other plants, affording most erratic results, extremely puzzling to the British botanist. This wild garden is beautiful at all times of the year, and the surroundings lend themselves charmingly to the natural effect. Bounded on the East by a wood, the view to the south is typically Essex, affording a

landscape such as Wimperis loved to paint, widening over a broad stretch of country away over the marshes and across the Thames to the Kentish Hills.”

Ellen Willmott’s unique collection of roses in the Well Mead garden led to the study and publication of *The Genus Rosa* published in two volumes in 1910 and 1914 and illustrated by Alfred Parsons A.R.A (1847-1920). Ellen Willmott’s collection of wild and species roses, both at Tresserve and in the Well Mead garden, are thought to have been started well before the turn of the century.

Audrey le Lièvre’s book *Miss Willmott of Warley Place* describes various aspects of the Well Mead garden. “Well water was pumped to Ellen Willmott’s gardens regularly by the water engineer.... The pump house lay on the other side of the road to Warley Place, through a white gate near the smithy, and down the path leading to the Well Mead garden: it was surrounded by bushes and the wells which served it..... From the pump house there was a glimpse to be had of the Well Mead garden, with its roses, grapes, figs and vegetables, and of the wild garden, where all the wild flora of Essex flourished and hybridized with wild flowers from all the countries of Europe, planted amidst the English grasses and left to acclimatize themselves.”

Despite Ellen Willmott’s financial problems Well Mead was still part of her estate at the time of her death. The estate had been mortgaged in 1907 and again in 1928. Following Ellen’s death the vendor for the 20th June 1935 sale was Robert George Berkeley, Ellen’s brother-in-law. Apart from the Well Mead cottage and garden, the 1935 sale also included the wild garden of 2.2 acres, now the woodland area; the garden ground, a third of an acre; the pond, one tenth of an acre; as well as the pasture, the smithy and cottages. The 1935 deed stated that the purchasers had to make good the post and wire stock proof fences on the northern and eastern boundaries of the estate. Well Mead estate was sold for £2,500. In 1948 a planning application was made by the owners to convert the Well Mead dwelling and fruit store into two units. Both the units retained the cellars which had been for loading/unloading produce. In 1959 the original archway to the gatehouse was bricked up to extend the house: the house becoming one dwelling. The house continues in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM & SETTING

Well Mead is situated in the village of Great Warley, set deep in its grounds from its entrance in Great Warley Street. The land slopes to the south-east and a stream in the grounds had been dammed to form the pond but continues along through neighbouring land to eventually join the Mardyke.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The first 55m of the driveway leading from Great Warley Street leads to a set of electronically operated gates on brick piers. One other property has the right of access over this first part of the drive. The remaining driveway leads to a tarmac parking area in front of the house and garages. In front of the house is a detached three car garage and ample parking. Immediately behind the house is a paved terrace retained by ornate stone pilasters. From the terrace there are long views to the south over the property's lawns and woodland.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The origins of the building are not known but it has always been assumed that it was built by Ellen Willmott and accommodated some of her gardeners. The Gateway archway was bricked up in 1959.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Le Lièvre, A 1980 *Miss Willmott of Warley Place* Faber & Faber

Shenstone, J.C. 1912 *The Gardens of Warley Place, Brentwood, Essex* in *The Essex Naturalist* pp 46-48

Maps and Images

1904 William Walker's map of the Warley Place estate

Archival Items

1920 Sales document for Warley Place Estate Essex Record Office (SALE/B921)

1935 Sales document for Warley Place Estate Essex Record Office (SALE/B1986)

Researcher: Jill Plater Site visit: 2006