

# A Concise History of Trent Country Park

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Cover photo by Alan Mitellas. Guided walk at Trent Park.

Back cover photo by Christina Lee.



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# Enfield Chase and the Birth of Trent Park

Trent Park once formed a small part of Enfield Wood, a huge common land forest. The forest belonged to no one, and was therefore used freely by the people of all the surrounding villages, including Enfield. The inhabitants of these villages hunted wild game, brought their cattle there to pasture, fattened their pigs on beech mast and acorns, collected honey to brew mead, cut timber for building and gathered wood for fuel.



*Photo: Alan Mitellas*

In the ninth century, all common land became private property when Manorialism was enforced on the peasantry. However, landowners allowed them to continue using the land, understanding that their own prosperity relied on the commoners' wellbeing. They therefore continued to have rights of passage and could use the vital resources that the woodland provided for them.

The earliest known lord of the estate was Ansgar, staller to Edward the Confessor, who had inherited Enfield Wood from his Danish ancestors. After the Norman invasion of 1066, it passed to Geoffrey de Mandeville and his descendants, who included his infamous grandson, Geoffrey de Mandeville the 1st Earl of Essex (see appendix). It was he who first established a boundary around Enfield Wood in 1136, converting the area into a hunting park. Officers and keepers were appointed and the park was stocked with fallow deer. Commoners were allowed to continue using the land, but were strictly forbidden from taking the deer. Around this time, the recorded names for the area included 'The Park', 'The Great Park', 'The Park of Enfield' or 'Enfield Wood', and was only first recorded as a 'Chase' in 1322.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of its deforestation, Enfield Chase spanned an area covering 8,349 acres (34km<sup>2</sup>). Only four stretches of the original Chase now survive: Monken Hadley Common, Fir and Pond Woods, Whitewebbs Wood and Trent Country Park.

After the de Mandevilles, the estate passed by marriage to the de Bohuns. Mary de Bohun, daughter and co-heir of Humphrey de Bohun, 7th Earl of Hereford, was the first wife of Henry Bolingbroke, who became Henry IV in 1399. In 1419, the estate passed into the hands of his son, Henry V, and from 1421 was administered by the Duchy of Lancaster. Enfield Chase had passed into royal ownership.

For over 350 years the Chase served as a royal hunting forest. Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I all enjoyed hunting there. There is a record from 1557 that tells a story of a young Princess Elizabeth being escorted from Hatfield House to Enfield Chase by a retinue of twelve ladies in white satin, on ambling palfreys, and a hundred and twenty yeomen in green on horseback, so that she might hunt the hart. On entering the Chase, she was met by fifty archers in scarlet boots and yellow caps, armed with gilded bows, each of whom presented her with a silver-headed arrow, winged with peacocks' feathers. When a buck was captured, the Princess had the privilege of cutting his throat.

<sup>1</sup> As a general rule, 'parks' was a word used for privately owned hunting grounds and estates, completely enclosed with deer-proof fencing (Theobalds Park, Old Park etc). A 'chase' was a huge tract of hunting land where the rights of common applied. They had boundaries marked by deer-proof fencing (pales), hedges and ditches to prevent deer from escaping. Like parks, they could also be privately owned by a subject, but also had accessible pathways allowing commoners' right of way to enter (Cannock Chase, Cranborne Chase etc).

During the 1650s, the Cromwellian government started selling off plots of Enfield Chase, in order to clear arrears in army pay. However, as the rights of the commoners were not taken into account, they revolted, breaking into farms, smashing up the houses, and destroying hedges and ditches. By 1660, the Republican Government had come to an end and The Royal Chase was restored.

However, over the years, it proved more and more difficult to maintain order in The Chase, with poachers and unauthorised colonists settling within the boundary, and valuable timber being felled for unauthorised profiteering. The increasing population also meant a growing need for more farmland.

In 1777, George III deforested the 8,349 acres (34km<sup>2</sup>) that made up The Chase. Many areas were assigned to surrounding parishes and farms. The remaining area was divided into 'lots,' which were leased off for agricultural improvement to augment the revenue of The Crown.

One of the clauses of the Enclosure Act stipulated that an enclosed miniature hunting park be set up in the midst of the former Chase, and lots 21 and 22 were selected for this purpose. The lease for lots 20 (an agricultural lot), 21 and 22 were given to Sir Richard Jebb, physician to the royal household, for his services earlier that year to the Duke of Gloucester, the King's younger brother. He had travelled to Trento, a city in northern Italy, where the King's brother was staying in an attempt to recover from mental illness. Dr Jebb's efforts apparently brought him back to full health, greatly pleasing the King. In remembrance of this deed, it is thought that Dr Jebb, or possibly even George III himself, named the new estate Trent Place, later becoming known as Trent Park. It was Sir Richard Jebb who built the first house on the site where the mansion now stands.

*Photo: Alan Mitellas*





## Owners of Trent 1777-1912

The lease that was passed to Sir Richard Jebb stipulated that he had to spend at least £385 on erecting buildings, building a fence around the deer park and to lay drains. The rent of all three lots was £148 a year.



Dr Jebb's house

Jebb built a house on Noddingswell Hill, above the meeting point of three streams known as the 'Three Partings'. It was designed by the royal architect, Sir William Chambers, and was considered small and basic by the standards of the gentry at the time. An article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1787 reads:

*'It appears that the Enfield Chase villa, ill-contrived as it is, and more than once altered, consumed above £19,000.'*

The article continued with:

*'The loggia, for such it should rather be called than a house, being hardly calculated for a single man and his servants, is only about thirty feet by forty, and the largest room scarce twenty feet by sixteen, the best bed chamber seventeen by twelve and nine feet high, and the kitchen fifteen by eleven.'*

Sir Richard also commissioned a landscape designer, thought to be Sir Humphrey Repton, who created a lake where the Three Partings met. He spent ten years running his deer park and establishing a farm, before dying in debt in 1787.

After Sir Richard Jebb's death, the Earl of Cholmondeley bought the estate in 1787. He then sold it to John Wigston of Edmonton in 1793. Around this time the house was extended by the addition of an east and west wing.



Trent Place, north front, circa 1808.  
Image supplied by Enfield Local Studies  
Library & Archive.

In 1810, Trent Park was sold to Sir Henry Lushington, who swiftly went bankrupt and sold it to John Cumming, a London merchant, in 1813. Cumming made extensive improvements to the house, spending in the region of £35,000; a huge sum of money at the time. The house was extended on the south side of Jebb's original house (the south front of Jebb's house is still partially visible from inside the entrance hall). Several rooms were added, including a hall and an attic. This basic pattern of the ground floor remains to this day.

John Cumming died in 1832. In 1833, David Bevan, a banker and Quaker, bought the leasehold property. According to a family anecdote, he accidentally bought Trent Park while nodding in his sleep at auction.

Four years later, in 1837, David Bevan transferred the property to his eldest son, Robert Cooper Lee Bevan. During Robert Bevan's time at the head of a Victorian family, further extensions were added to the house, including a tower on the east side. A great deal of landscaping was also carried out, including the mass planting of oak trees. A double avenue of lime trees was also planted along the Main Drive in the 1840s, which is today one of the main focal points of Trent Park.

After Robert Bevan's death<sup>2</sup> in 1890, the estate passed to his eldest son, Francis, who decided to 'modernise' the mansion. He successfully applied to the Duchy of Lancaster in 1893 for a building grant of £10,000, and the work began shortly afterwards. Most of the exterior alterations were applied to the south side of the house, where an asymmetrical façade of Victorian mauve brick was constructed.

In 1908, five years after completing his re-building, Francis Bevan sold the estate to Sir Edward Sassoon. He was a baronet, an MP for Hythe, friend of Edward VII and the head of an international merchant banking firm. The Sassoons were descendants of Baghdadi Jews who had immigrated to India. They had recently decided to base themselves in London, and were quickly accepted into British high society. The Sassoons were also allied to the Rothschilds, the most powerful and wealthy Jewish family in the world at the time (Sir Edward was married to Aline de Rothschild). Sir Edward's purchase of Trent Park would enable him to entertain and impress his guests at a grand weekend country retreat.

In 1911, Sir Edward was involved in an automobile accident that he never fully recovered from, and died shortly thereafter in 1912 at the age of 56. The estate then became the property of Sir Edward's son, Philip, heralding the beginning of an extraordinary era in the history of Trent Park.



*Trent Park, north front, 1890.  
Image from Spacious Days by  
Nesta H Webster (published 1949).*



*Trent Park, south front, 1890.  
Image from Spacious Days by  
Nesta H Webster (published 1949).*



*The south front with Francis Bevan's  
façade of Victorian mauve brick.  
Image from Spacious Days by  
Nesta H Webster.*

<sup>2</sup> The Bevan family monument can be seen nearby in Christ Church graveyard, Chalk Lane. Christ Church was built in 1837-39 and was paid for by Robert Bevan. The woodland area within Trent Park known as 'Church Wood' apparently takes its name from the fact that the Bevan family used to walk through there every Sunday on their way to and from church. At the time of writing, Church Wood is now the location of the 'Go Ape!' zip wire activity.

## Sir Philip Sassoon

Sir Philip Albert Gustave David Sassoon, 3rd Baronet, (1888-1939) was a millionaire bachelor of 23 years when he inherited Trent Park.<sup>3</sup> A trendy, glamorous and well-known socialite and politician, he took over his father's seat as MP for Hythe. During World War I he became secretary to Field Marshal Douglas Haig; then, after the war, was appointed as parliamentary private secretary to Lloyd George. In 1924, he became Under-Secretary for Air, probably due to the fact that he was a pilot himself (he was honorary Commander-in-Chief of 601 Squadron). He held this position until 1929 and again from 1931 to 1937, before becoming First Commissioner of Works, designing monuments and the interiors of government buildings during Neville Chamberlain's administration.

Sir Philip built his own private aerodrome within the grounds of Trent Park. He owned a string of private aircraft that he piloted himself, including a Percival Gull, a Percival Petrel, a de Havilland Leopard Moth and a de Havilland DH90 Dragonfly.

Despite being one of the most eligible bachelors in the country, Sir Philip never married. Whenever people pushed him on the subject, he would often reply, "I shall only marry when I find someone as lovely and perfect as my sister." The beloved sibling he referred to was Sybil, Marchioness of Cholmondeley, who lived a more private life.

Sassoon was legendary for his hospitality, generosity towards all walks of life, impeccable taste, flawless dress sense and extraordinary attention to detail. He had the drainpipes of the mansion gilded over because they 'offended his eye' and once ordered a servant to haul down the national flag and find 'something less garish' because it clashed with the sunset!



*Sir Philip Sassoon. Photo by Lady Ottoline Morell, 1925*

Sir Philip was arguably the ultimate socialite. He was the friend of princes, ministers, baronets and celebrities, and was himself famous for the extraordinary lengths he would go to entertain them. In 1923 he purchased the freehold of the Trent Park estate from the Duchy of Lancaster. This gave him complete freedom to use his huge wealth to convert Trent into a weekend entertainment centre for royalty, the rich, the famous, the fashionable and anyone who was in the public eye. Francis Bevan's alterations to the mansion were not to his liking, so he started working on re-building it as a Palladian style country house.

Devonshire House in Piccadilly, the last of William Kent's London palaces, was demolished in 1924. This gave Sassoon a well-timed opportunity to purchase huge quantities of 18th century rose-coloured bricks and stonework to reface the mansion at Trent Park, which was completely re-designed, along with the grounds, from 1925 to 1931.

Sir Philip wanted to make the house as symmetrical as possible. Initially, he carried out minor alterations to the south wall, then, on the east side, he removed the 19th century tower and replaced it with a flat wall with blank windows. On the north side, a floor was added to bring it in line with the rest of the house. All the north facing windows were then removed, including some which dated back to 1808. They were then replaced with a regular series of windows of classical proportions, irrespective of the internal floor

<sup>3</sup> Sir Philip Sassoon also inherited 25 Park Lane and other properties. He bought land at Lympne in Kent and built a grand house (Port Lympne), designed by the architects Sir Herbert Baker and Philip Tilden. The estate is now the Aspinall Wild Animal Experience.



levels. The west side, the servants' wing, was left relatively untouched, but was obscured by bushes to help preserve the illusion of symmetry.

The house was then covered with the 18th century bricks from Devonshire House, reconstructing the Victorian mansion of mauve brick into a Palladian country house of rose-red brick, as it is today.

The interior structure remained relatively unchanged. The three original rooms of 1780-1808 (library, salon and drawing room) were joined together to form a connected suite of apartments. The dining room at the front (south side) of the house was re-named the Green Room, while the original gentleman's room was retained as a second drawing room and re-named the Blue Room. The house was then decorated and furnished to Sassoon's taste. The ground floor and first floor were for the entertainment and pleasure of the guests, while the entire second floor and basement housed the servants' quarters and work facilities.

The grounds were also developed to Sassoon's exacting standards. 'Wisteria Walk', a long pergola of Italian marble, entwined with wisteria and clematis, was built next to the 18th century walled garden and points northwards towards the Japanese Garden (also known today as the Water Garden) by the lake.

In October 1928, Sir Philip removed the wrought iron gates at the Cockfosters main entrance and substituted oak ones adorned by the stone urns which had previously stood outside Devonshire House. In the late 1920s, he also planted thousands of daffodils and narcissi to the south of the mansion for his Easter guests, such as the then Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin.

A sunken garden (itself disguising a gravel pit) was transformed into an open air swimming pool, to the east of which an orangery was built. A terrace on the north side of the house was constructed, as well as a forecourt on the south side, which was built with stones from the old Westminster Bridge. The pattern was intended to represent the Union Jack Flag. Understandably, it was covered in sand during World War II, so as not to provide German bomber pilots with the ideal bullseye for their target practice.

Renaissance statues were acquired from Stowe and Milton Abbey and placed around the grounds. On the north side of the lake, a nine-hole golf course was landscaped; the evidence of which is still visible to this day. The lake itself was populated by rare and expensive waterfowl, including flamingos, pelicans, white and black swans, cranes, teals, ibises, spoonbills, Siberian red-breasted geese, ducks of every species and even a pair of king penguins. Specialised food was ordered in from London Zoo. Sir Philip would personally feed his two king penguins each morning and evening. Nobody else was ever allowed to do this while he was in residence.

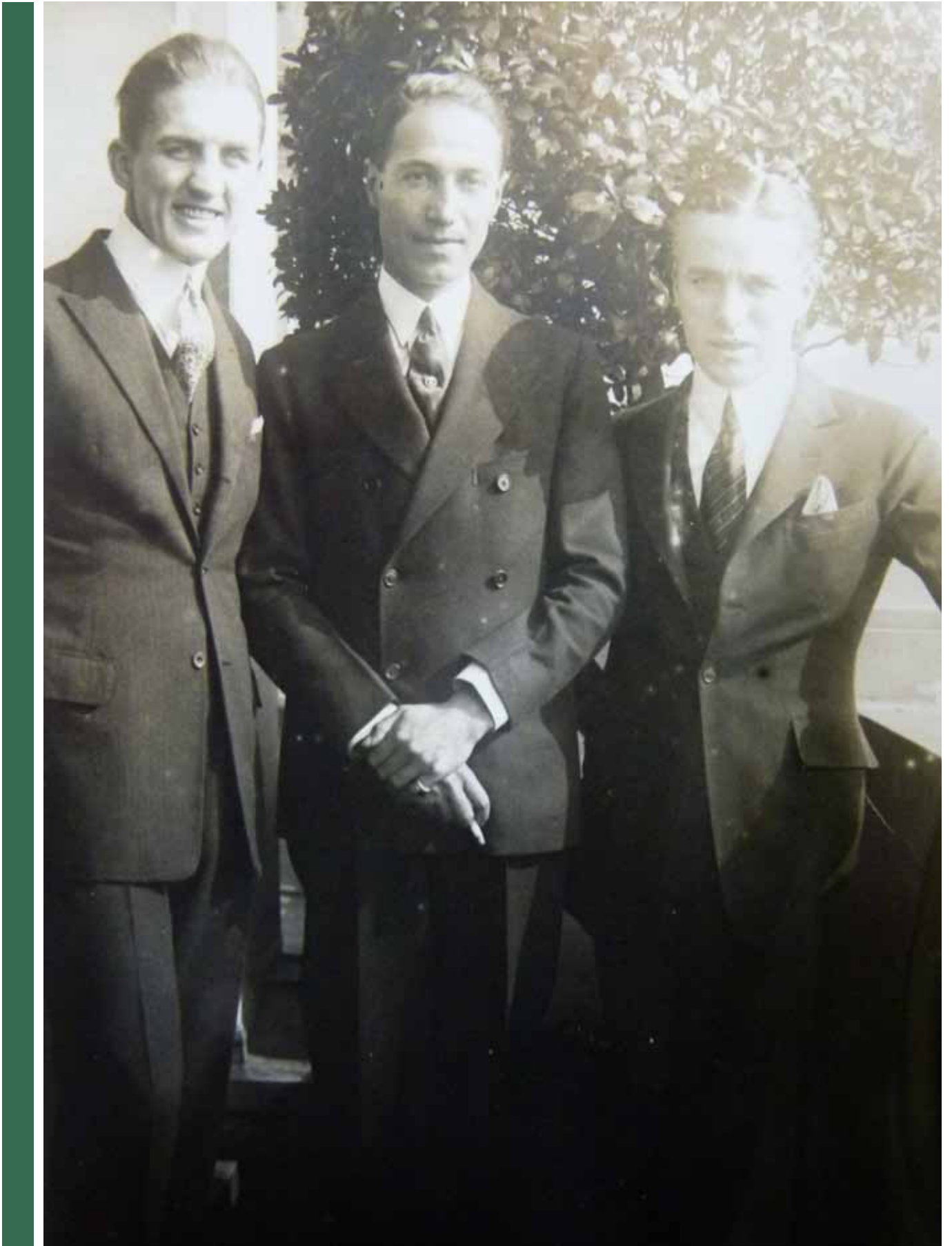
By 1931, Trent Park was ready for its new function as the quintessentially English country retreat. For the next eight years, anyone who was anyone went there to enjoy an incredibly extravagant and glamorous weekend, courtesy of Sir Philip, with his cousin, Hannah Gubbay, playing hostess.



*The Water Garden has recently undergone restoration work, made possible through the Friends of Trent Park and Enfield Council making a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Photo: Alan Mitellas*



*David Tothill Photography*



*Sir Philip Sassoon at Trent Park with Charlie Chaplin (right) and Georges Carpentier – the French boxing champion and actor. Image kindly chosen and provided by David Cholmondeley (Sir Philip's great nephew), 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley and Lord Great Chamberlain, from the Trent Park visitors books under his care at Houghton Hall.*

Winston Churchill was a regular visitor, producing several paintings at Trent; including *The Blue Room* in 1934 (Sir Winston was once asked why Sir Philip was given so many parliamentary jobs. He replied, in typical Churchillian fashion, “When you are leaving on an unknown destination it is a good plan to attach a restaurant car at the tail of the train”). Edward the Prince of Wales, later to become Edward VIII, as well as his mistress, Wallis Simpson, also visited on numerous occasions (later to become the Duke and Duchess of Windsor). Other regular visitors included Charlie Chaplin, Lawrence of Arabia, George Bernard Shaw (Irish playwright), Thornton Wilder (U.S. playwright), Rex Whistler (English artist), Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary and PM from 1955-57) and the Belgian King and Queen.

Robert Boothby, the Conservative politician, once wrote:

*‘His hospitality was on an oriental scale. The summer weekend parties at Trent were unique, and in the highest degree enjoyable, but theatrical rather than intimate. He frankly loved success, and you could be sure of finding one or two of the reigning stars of the literary, film or sporting worlds, in addition to a fair sprinkling of politicians and, on occasion, royalty.... I remember one weekend when the guests, who included the present King and Queen, were entertained with an exhibition of ‘stunt’ shots at golf by Joe Kirkwood [Australian golfer – AM] after lunch, with flights over the grounds in our host’s private aeroplane after tea, with a firework display over the lake after dinner, with songs from Richard Tauber [Austrian tenor – AM], which we listened to on the terrace by moonlight before going to bed.’*

Upon returning from a trip to Austria with the Windsors in 1937, Sir Philip was shocked to find that swastikas had been crudely painted on the oak gates of the Cockfosters entrance. Typical of him, he was more irritated by the aesthetic outrage than the apparent insult towards his Jewish background.

Sir Philip’s health never fully recovered from an operation to have his tonsils removed in 1931. In the spring of 1939, his health declined further, resulting in being bedridden with influenza. The infection moved to his throat, causing his doctor to forbid him from going outside or the infection would spread to his lungs (this was before the age of antibiotics). It is thought that Sir Philip disregarded this advice and left his sickbed, resulting in a fatal infection. He died at his house in Park Lane on 3rd June 1939.

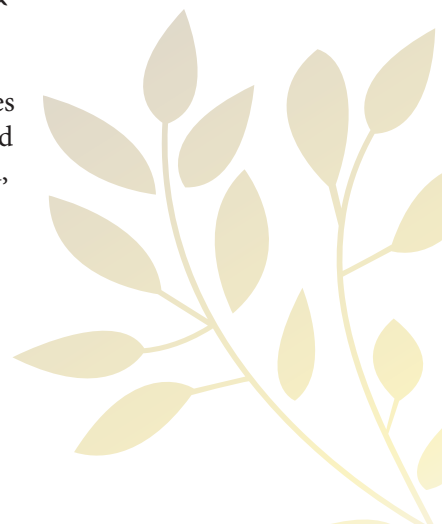
Sir Philip’s beloved sister, Sybil, replied to a letter from Queen Mary several days later on 6th June: ‘It helped me to bear what I felt was nearly too much for my heart to endure.... The pain is increasing – the aching longing to see him again, if only once more – but God who gave him to us for such happy years of perfect companionship has taken him back & we must wait to see him again.... We have such breaking hearts, Hannah and I.’

After a small private funeral at Golders Green Crematorium on 5th June, Sir Philip’s ashes were scattered from the air over Trent Park, while fighter aircraft from 601 Squadron circled and dipped in final salute over the mansion. Lord Boothby observed that ‘he was the end, not only of a line but an era. His death, like everything else about him, was well timed.’

Three months after Sir Philip’s death saw the outbreak of World War II.



*The main north and south doorways came from Chesterfield House, and are slightly too large (both overlap the windows above).*





## MI19 – The War Years

Soon after the beginning of WWII, Trent Park was requisitioned by the War Office to be used as a camp for POWs. But it was not to be just an ordinary German POW camp. It was to become a Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC), run by a top secret unit known as MI9, soon to be known as MI19. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Joseph Kendrick, a highly experienced and skilled British Secret Service operative, was appointed to set up and be the overall head of the unit. Trent Park would have a very special purpose, where highly sophisticated eavesdropping and passive manipulation techniques in intelligence gathering were employed for the very first time.



*Kendrick at his desk at Latimer House.  
Courtesy of Helen Fry from The M  
Room: Secret Listeners who Bugged  
the Nazis*

The techniques employed by MI19 would prove to be so effective that it was soon complemented by a centre in North Africa and, from the autumn of 1944, another in France, run by the US.

The UK interrogation centre, initially based at the Tower of London, began on 1st September 1939, two days before the outbreak of war.

The organisation then moved to Trent Park over the following months, after specialised bugging and recording equipment was installed in the mansion. Captured POWs who were suspected of having important knowledge were then diverted there for questioning and the secret monitoring, and recording, of conversations.

Various techniques were used to gain intelligence. Cooperative prisoners and Jewish German exiles were used as stool pigeons to get conversations moving in the desired direction. Manufactured magazines and newspapers, designed to trigger debate, were circulated. Prisoners of equal rank but from different units, or services, would be bunched together. Some prisoners would arrive fresh from the front line, and would still be suffering from the traumatic effects of their capture, perhaps having narrowly escaped death, and would be eager to spend time with their colleagues and share their experiences with them. The contrast from the horror of war to the beautiful surroundings of Trent Park, coupled with the relatively humane treatment at the hands of the British, further helped to loosen the tongues of the prisoners.



*Secret listener at Trent Park.  
Courtesy of Helen Fry from The M  
Room: Secret Listeners who Bugged  
the Nazis.*

Hidden microphones were connected to equipment in the 'M Room', the secret nerve centre of the operation where highly trained Jewish German exiles listened in on conversations. Whenever they heard information that could be useful to British Intelligence, they would record the conversation on gramophone records, later to be translated into documented transcripts.

It is commonly thought that Rudolph Hess was kept at Trent Park for a short time, although there does not appear to be any documented evidence to support this.

Oberleutnant Franz von Werra – the only German prisoner of war taken by the British during WWII who eventually managed to escape and get back to Germany – was taken to Trent Park on 7th September 1940 and kept there for four days. A feature film about his exploits called *The One That Got Away*, made in 1957 (starring Hardy Kruger and directed by Roy Ward Baker), was partly filmed on location at Trent Park.<sup>4</sup> It was based on the book of the same name by Kendal Burt and James Leasor – first published in 1956.

Before long, it was decided to increase the number of these specialised centres, to reduce the risk of losing everything in a Luftwaffe air raid (records show that a bomb once landed very close to the mansion, between the north terrace and the lake). Also, Trent could only house a limited number of prisoners, and space for the constantly growing number of MI19 staff was inadequate.

On 15th July 1942, MI19 expanded into a new CSDIC at Latimer House in Chesham, Buckinghamshire. On 13th December of the same year, a second centre, for Italian POWs, was opened at Wilton Park in Beaconsfield.

The new CSDICs meant that Trent Park could be converted into an even more specialised long-term POW centre for high-ranking German Officers. The first new prisoner, General Ludwig Crüwell, arrived at Trent Park on 26th August 1942. He was joined by General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma on 20th November 1942.

From August 1942 to its closure on 19th October 1945, 84 German generals, at least 22 officers of the rank of Oberst (Colonel/Captain) and an unknown number of other ranks spent time at Trent Park.

The POWs' quarters were located on the second floor of the mansion. Generals were allowed two rooms, a Generalleutnant (Major-General) had his own suite, and ranks below this shared two to a room. Not surprisingly, the prisoners were very pleased with the accommodation.

When describing Trent Park, Generalleutnant Erwin Menny noted in his diary:

*'Great lawns with marble statues, glorious woodland with cedars and great oaks. A golf course, large swimming pool, a fine pond with wild duck...'*

There was a common area with a radio, a hall in which billiards and table tennis were played, a reading room, a study for painting and music and a dining room. The windows were barred but prisoners were allowed outside in the courtyard on the south side of the mansion, as well as a 120 x 70-metre lawn on the west and north side. These areas were surrounded by barbed wire fencing. British guards would salute the German POWs smartly. Four days per week, a British officer would take prisoners for a ramble through the estate. One of the POWs ran a shop selling tobacco, beer, soap and stationery. A London tailor, who visited the camp fortnightly, would deal with laundry and any issues regarding the prisoners' attire.

<sup>4</sup> Despite many television productions being filmed at Trent Park to this day, the only other feature film partly shot there was called *I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name*, in 1967. It was produced and directed by the late Michael Winner and starred Oliver Reed, Orson Welles, Carol White and Harry Andrews. It is often named as one of the first mainstream films to use the 'F' word in its dialogue.

A 'welfare officer', named Lord Aberfeldy, lived in the camp with the generals from December 1942. He acted as an interpreter and his role was to see to the comforts and wishes of the prisoners, accompanying them on long walks, making purchases on their behalf in London and always being on hand as a valued and trusted conversational partner. In reality, Aberfeldy worked for MI19, his job being to steer conversations along the lines desired by British Intelligence. To this day, the true identity of 'Lord Aberfeldy' is unknown.



*German Generals relaxing at Trent Park. Courtesy of Dudley Bennett.*

The high-ranking officers were also treated to days out. On one occasion, Generals were driven to Lt. Col. Kendrick's house for tea in the quiet village of Oxshott in Surrey. There is also an amusing story of a Generals' day out to the seaside town of Whitby. The day did not go quite as smoothly as planned due to the Generals getting drunk. A fight almost broke out when a U-Boat Captain and his subordinate started shouting torpedo firing orders when they saw ships in the bay. When Churchill heard the stories, he was furious and ordered MI19 to stop 'pampering' the Generals. MI19 ignored the orders and continued with their strategy, confident that they knew what they were doing.

After a time, the POWs separated into two factions: the pro-Nazis, with General Ludwig Crüwell as their ring leader, and the anti-Nazis, led by General Wilhelm von Thoma.

The cost of running the MI19 operations at Trent Park, Latimer House and Wilton Park was huge. During early 1943, the organisation was made up of almost 1,000 members of staff. Between September 1939 to October 1945, 10,191 German and 567 Italian POWs had passed through the CSDICs. Between 1941 and 1945, 64,427 conversations had been recorded on gramophone discs, from which 16,960 transcripts from German and 18,903 transcripts from Italian POWs were produced.

Vital intelligence gained from the Trent Park interrogation centre included information on the Knickebein, X-Gerät and Y-Gerät radar system technologies that were used to assist accurate German bombing raids. The information assisted the British in counteracting and jamming their systems. Extremely valuable information on German U-boat tactics was also gained, from conversations between General Ludwig Crüwell and Oberleutnant zur See (Sub-Lieutenant – Navy) Wolfgang Romer. Some of the first evidence of war crimes and atrocities, including the mass killing of Jews, was also discovered. This included evidence that the German Regular Army were also taking part in the atrocities and were just as guilty of war crimes, which they had always denied till the information was recently declassified.

Another extraordinary example of vital intelligence gained was from a recorded conversation at Trent Park on 26th May 1943 which gave definitive evidence of the development of the V-2 rocket at an army research centre in Peenemünde on the Baltic Coast. The first attack was launched on the centre by Bomber Command on the night of 17th August 1943 and was codenamed Operation Hydra. It was the beginning of a much larger Anglo-American offensive called Operation Crossbow, which focused on any sites connected with the V-2 programme. This slowed down the production of this potentially devastating weapon that could have turned the tide of the war, and bought enough time for the allies to launch the D-Day offensive.



There is no exaggeration in claiming that were it not for MI19's bugging operations, the outcome of WWII may have been very different. Since the information was declassified in the 1990s, historians and writers are increasingly becoming more aware of the significance of the intelligence gained at Trent Park, Wilton Park and Latimer House, easily placing MI19 on the same par as the Enigma Code Breakers.

A BBC Radio 4 play on the subject called *Listening to the Generals* was first broadcast on 15th April 2009. It was written by Adam Ganz, a professional screenplay writer whose father, Peter Ganz, was a secret listener at Trent Park. More recently, he also worked on *The Secret Listeners*, a play that was performed at Trent Park on 22nd July 2012 and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. A Channel 4 documentary called *Spying on Hitler's Army: The Secret Recordings* was also broadcast on 2nd June 2013. As interest in the subject grows, and more books are published and more television documentaries are made, it is perhaps just a matter of time before a TV dramatisation is produced, or possibly even a major feature film.

Aside from the intelligence that was gained, the bugged conversations between German POWs at Trent Park also gave the British a unique insight into the mind of the enemy. While the Germans were employing eavesdropping techniques of their own, MI19's supremacy in the field was arguably due to the motivation and skill of the secret listeners, and also to the talents of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Joseph Kendrick, OBE. His unswerving ability in dealing with over-inflated egos (British and allied as well as German), bypassing bureaucratic processes and coercing various departments to work cohesively together was vital to the success of MI19, and is an example of what is achievable on the occasions when the right person is doing the right job at the right time.



## Hannah Gubbay's Dower House

After Sir Philip Sassoon's death, Hannah Gubbay, his cousin, tried to move into the mansion where she had hosted so many of the legendary weekend parties. When it was requisitioned by the War Office, she was told that she could only occupy a small area of the building. She then decided to leave the mansion and moved into the cottage on the grounds nearby. However, after hearing that MI19 were planning to convert the cottage into an officers' mess, she left Trent Park altogether and moved into a flat in Brighton, where the family owned property. Later in the war, she returned to the Cockfosters area, moving into a house nearby. When the war finally came to an end, she returned home to Trent Park.

In 1951, the entire Trent Park estate was purchased by Middlesex County Council by compulsory purchase order, to preserve the Green Belt. A piece of the estate was reserved for Mrs Gubbay for as long as she lived. By then, she was living permanently in the cottage, and had added a wing to both ends of the property. She used the extra space to store pottery, paintings and furniture from the extraordinary Sassoon collection, which she often referred to as her 'treasure'.

Even at the time, the furniture alone was estimated to be worth over £1,000,000. The porcelain collection was considered to be of a similar standard to the Royal Collection, and was admired by the Queen Mother, who frequently visited the house. Hannah Gubbay's visitors also included Princess Alexandra and the Duke and Duchess of Kent – Prince George and Princess Marina (Princess Marina had a particular liking for Trent Park, because she had spent part of her honeymoon there).

By the 1960s, Hannah Gubbay was an elderly lady. She would sometimes be seen strolling around the estate, aided by a walking stick. She would often sit at a curved marble seat that used to be at the end of the long pergola (Wisteria Walk), next to the entrance to the walled garden. She died in 1968, having spent her twilight years living within the campus of Trent Park Training College.

Hannah Gubbay's pottery, painting and furniture collection is now at Clandon Park, near Guildford. The remaining Sassoon collection is kept at Houghton Hall, in Norfolk, home of Sir Philip's great nephew, David Cholmondeley (7th Marquess of Cholmondeley), although some French objects and pictures were auctioned off at Christie's on 8th December 1994.

*Hannah Gubbay's cottage.  
Photo by Alan Mitellas.*



# Trent Park – Post War to the Present

Shortly after World War II, Trent Park was taken over by the Ministry of Education. In 1947, it was opened as an emergency training college for male teachers, as there was a great need for them due to the national shortage caused by the war. Students were rushed through six-month crash courses to attain education degrees.

In 1950, Trent Park became a residential training college for men and women, providing qualifications for teachers in various disciplines, including Art, Drama, Music, Dance and Handicraft (Design and Technology). Shortly thereafter, Geography, Maths, Science and English were also taught there. New buildings were eventually added to the campus, including an assembly hall and teaching block to the west of the mansion. The expansion continued into the 1960s and 70s, including two halls of residence called Sassoon Hall and Gubbay Hall. On 1st September 1974, Trent Park College was incorporated into Middlesex Polytechnic, later to become Middlesex University in 1992.

In the meantime, in 1951, Middlesex County Council bought the entire Trent Park estate, by compulsory purchase order, as Green Belt land. In 1965, upon dissolution of Middlesex County Council, the estate was divided between the London Borough of Enfield (college grounds) and the Greater London Council (parkland). In 1973, the GLC officially opened the 413 acre (167 hectare) Trent Country Park to the public. Following the end of the GLC in April 1986, the management of the park passed to the London Borough of Enfield.

Middlesex University left the Trent Park Campus and relocated to Hendon Campus during the summer of 2012. The following year, in July 2013, Middlesex University sold the 51.89 acre (21 ha.) site to the Alliances University College of Medical Sciences, a private higher learning institution based in Malaysia. At the time of writing, the AUCMS are starting the process of upgrading the campus, and plan to cater not only for their Malaysian students, but also for local and other international students.

*Trent Park Training College, 1965.  
Image courtesy of Blom Aerofilms.*





## Camlet Moat

Camlet Moat, on the northern boundary of Trent Park, is the largest moated site in Enfield, and has been made a Scheduled Ancient Monument by English Heritage; meaning that it is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The enclosed area measures approximately 200 feet wide and 250 feet long, and is reputedly the site of the original manor house of Enfield. It is thought to have been the home of Sir Geoffrey de Mandeville the 1st Earl of Essex, Constable to The Tower of London, who owned land in the area in the twelfth century (see appendix). However, the earliest of what few documented references there are regarding this monument come from the 14th century.



*Camlet Moat. Photo: Alan Mitellas*

It has been suggested that the site was moated in the 14th century, probably around a dwelling that already stood there, by Humphrey de Bohun, 6th Earl of Hereford and 5th Earl of Essex (1309-1361), who was the owner at the time (a descendant of the de Mandevilles), after being granted a licence in 1347 to crenellate<sup>5</sup> his manor houses. No solid evidence is known to exist which proves exactly what the site was used for; although it is possible that, from the 12th to the early 15th century, it was being used as an early 'operational headquarters' for the Chase. The building – or buildings – there would have served as quarters for the Head Forester of Enfield Chase, and may have also been used as a hunting lodge. There would have been a gaol for anyone caught breaking the forest laws, as well as stables and other buildings. The moat would have helped to keep offenders in and aggressors out, as well as providing drainage for the site. Its position, being at the very centre of the Chase at the time, adds plausibility to this theory.



*Photo: Alan Mitellas*

One of the few documented facts regarding Camlet Moat states that, in May 1439, instructions were given to demolish the 'manor of Camelot' and to sell the materials to pay for repairs to Hertford Castle. This information not only suggests that the building was at least fairly substantial, it also correlates with the fact that the Chase was divided into three areas for administrative purposes in the early 15th century (the earliest evidence of this is dated 1419). The administration may well have moved to the three lodges around this time: the West Lodge, the South Lodge and the East Lodge.<sup>6</sup> The building at Camlet Moat may therefore have been demolished due to it having fallen into disuse.

What the subject of Camlet Moat lacks in documented facts, it more than makes up for in mystery and legend. The word, 'Camlet', is thought by many to have been corrupted through the passage of time from the word, 'Camelot', which has triggered a great deal of debate and an increasingly popular belief that the site and surrounding area is somehow connected to the origins of Arthurian legend, and may even be the true location of King Arthur's castle and court. The moat has often been referred to as 'London's Camelot', partly in order to differentiate it from the various other sites around Britain that claim to be the true location of the legendary 5th century king's stronghold.

<sup>5</sup> Crenellate is a medieval word, meaning to fortify a building to make it battle-worthy (the gaps between battlements of castle walls are called 'crenels'). In addition to constructing battlements, moats were also often dug around buildings.

<sup>6</sup> The 'West Lodge' still exists today as the West Lodge Park Hotel. The South Lodge and East Lodge no longer exist. Boxers Lake, south of Enfield Road, is all that remains of the South Lodge grounds and lies within a 1930s development known as the 'South Lodge Estate'. The site of the East Lodge is now behind the East Lodge Village Business Centre, East Lodge Lane (there is a 19th century house on the original site, but it is not the original East Lodge).

There is a fanciful theory regarding a 14th century stonemason named William Ramsey, who worked on the round table building at Windsor in 1344 for Edward III, a follower of Arthurian legends. Ramsey is recorded to have purchased property in Enfield in 1348. It is thought that he may have carried out work on the building that once stood on the moat, and light-heartedly called it 'Camelot' while he was there, which then stuck.

It is worthy of note that the word, 'Camlet', actually existed in the Middle Ages. The following entry can be found in *A Dictionary of Medieval Terms and Phrases* by Christopher Coredon and Ann Williams, published by Brewer in 2004:

**'Camlet.** *A luxurious material from the East, light in weight and used for cloaks; possibly of mohair (angora wool) among other materials. From the Arabic Kamlat=the nap or pile of velvet.'*

In recent years, Christopher Street, a local author and a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, has been spearheading the argument that Camlet Moat and surrounding area is connected to the origins of Arthurian legend. In his book, *London's Camelot and the Secrets of the Grail* (published 2009), he refers to a 1658 map of Enfield Chase, kept at the public records office, that not only calls the moated site Camelot<sup>7</sup>, but also shows the moat surrounded by four regions called North Camelot, East Camelot, West Camelot and, to the south, Camelot Hill (now within Trent Park and known as Camlet Hill). The map forms part of a survey of the Chase, carried out from September 1656 till November 1658, which claims that the name dates from the 11th century when the site was owned by Geoffrey de Mandeville (grandfather of GdM 1st Earl of Essex – see Appendix), during the reign of William the Conqueror, whose '*seat and habitation, at that time called Camelot, was situated on the Chase near unto Potters Lodge, the ruins whereof are yet remaining, and being moated, is this day called Camelot Moat*'.

Mr Street's work comes from a mystical perspective and claims that the site that is now Camlet Moat is extremely spiritually significant, is a place of inspiration and healing, and may have once been the site of an ancient oracular shrine. In his book, *Earthstars* (published 1990), he claims that Camlet Moat marks one of the corners of 'The Barnet Triangle', the two other sites being The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin in east Barnet, and The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin in Monken Hadley (drawing a straight line between these sites on a map will give you a near perfect equilateral triangle). The belief is that The Barnet Triangle is a powerful conduit of earth energy that, in turn, feeds into a complex 'sacred geometry' of ley-lines<sup>8</sup> throughout the London area and beyond.

In 2011, The Organisation for Mythical Protection and Promotion launched a competition to design an attraction to be built on the site of Camlet Moat (a protected Scheduled Ancient Monument). The following year, Råk-Arkitektur, a Swedish studio, was announced as the winner with their concept called, 'The Stone'. They proposed a 36 metre-high stone shaped building with a reflective surface, representing the stone from which



Photo: Alan Mitellas



Photo: Alan Mitellas

<sup>7</sup> The name, Camelot, is believed by some to be Celtic in origin and has often been associated with the place name, Camulodunum, one of the first capitals of Roman Britain (now Colchester), which was itself an ancient Celtic settlement before the Roman Conquest. The Celtic name was 'Camulodunon', meaning 'The Fortress of Camulos'. Camulos was a Celtic war god, often equated with the Roman war god, Mars.

<sup>8</sup> Ley-lines are perfectly straight alignments through the landscape of ancient and/or sacred sites, standing stones or churches (many churches having been built over earlier sacred sites of pre-Christian belief systems). They were 'rediscovered' by Alfred Watkins, a Herefordshire magistrate, in 1920. Generally, archaeologists and others of a scientific persuasion do not accept the existence of ley-lines, while many dowsers claim that they are genuine paths of energy.



King Arthur pulled his sword, Excalibur. The proposed building would be a cultural centre and a meeting place for various faiths. At night, a beam of light would be shone from a glass structure at the top of the building, illuminating the night sky above Trent Park. The proposal attracted a great deal of local media attention at the time, and the OMPP have apparently since been working to deliver the project, which, not surprisingly, has not materialised to date.

Slightly differing from the belief that the moat radiates a sublime and enlightening energy, some mystics believe that it is more accurately described as raw earth energy. For this reason, some people believe that the moat's power can be manipulated one way or the other (good, evil, selflessness, selfishness, etc.). It is possibly due to this concept that, in addition to the Neo Pagan and New Age folk, who are pacifists and genuinely care about the site, the moat has also attracted black magic and Satanic cults from time-to-time.

There are various other legends and ghost stories connected to the site. The infamous highwayman, Dick Turpin, is said to have used Camlet Moat as one of his hideouts. After robbing his hapless victim, he would ride Black Bess to The Rose and Crown pub on Clay Hill, where the landlord, Mr Knott (Turpin's grandfather), would give him shelter.<sup>9</sup>



Tree adorned with charms at Camlet Moat.  
Photo: Alan Mitellas

The February 21st 1903 issue of *Country Life* tells of a story about the 'last owner of The Chase', who, having been accused of treason, hid in a hollow tree. Later that night, he sneaked out to make his escape but then fell down the well at the north-east corner of Camlet Moat and 'perished miserably'. The ghost of this last owner is said to haunt the moat. Another version of the story names Geoffrey de Mandeville as the ghost of the unfortunate owner.

There is indeed a steep crater at the north-east corner of the moat, thought to be the remains of a well. Legend has it that, under the paved bottom, there is a huge chest of treasure that no one is able to tamper with because it is bound to the moat by a magic spell. Again, another version of the story names Geoffrey de Mandeville as the owner of the treasure, and that his ghost haunts Camlet Moat, and Trent Park itself, guarding his wealth from would-be thieves to this day.

In addition to Geoffrey de Mandeville's ghost, there is also a female spectre that is said to haunt the moat, known as 'The White Lady' (also known as 'The White Goddess') by the Pagan and New Age groups who frequent the site. There is also an old legend regarding the gates of the moat house. It is said that when the gates were pulled shut, the noise they made could be heard as far away as Winchmore Hill – two miles away.

Camlet Moat was also used as the location for Lord Dalgarno's murder in Sir Walter Scott's novel, *The Fortunes of Nigel* (published 1822). More recently, the moat was used for a literary murder scene yet again; the murder of Gabrielle Tennyson in *When Maidens Mourn*, a mystery novel involving Arthurian legend by C.S. Harris (published 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, a Mr Robert Knott was listed as the licensee at The Rose and Crown pub in a record dated 1752; thirteen years after Turpin was hanged.



Two amateur excavations have been carried out on the site, the first of which was in the late 1880s. Robert Bevan's daughter wrote of it in her autobiography, *Spacious Days* by Nesta Helen Webster (published 1949). While helping her mother dig, with the help of some of the estate labourers, they revealed 'a whole dungeon with a chain attached to the wall'. Timber from the drawbridge, 'now turned black as ebony', was also found, as well as red roof tiles, silver coins of Edward IV (1470-1483), a lady's thimble and glazed tiles adorned with knights on horseback. All of these artefacts have since vanished. No documented plan of the work carried out is known to exist. Digging ceased on the death of Robert Bevan in 1890.



*Prayer rags at Camlet Moat.  
Photo: Alan Mitellas*

The second excavation, arranged by Sir Philip Sassoon, was carried out in 1923. Earlier that year, he had been present when the burial chamber of King Tutankhamun's tomb was opened. After witnessing the priceless treasures that are sometimes discovered through excavating ancient sites, Sir Philip was possibly inspired to try his luck with an ancient site on his own land.

On the western side of the moat, one-foot square oak beams from the drawbridge were found after it was drained. These were pulled out of the moat and recorded. It was discovered that, when functional, the drawbridge was an impressive 17 ft. wide on the inner side, 8 ft. 6 inches wide on the outer side and 38 ft. in length. A large wall of stone and flint, some forty feet long and five and a half feet thick in places, was found two feet below the surface, and went down to a depth of eight ft. Sandals, thought to be Roman, were also found, as well as daggers and some ancient horseshoes. As the excavation progressed, it was reported that 74 ft. of the walls of the old Manor House had been found about five feet below the surface of the ground.

Sassoon's excavation of the moat attracted a great deal of local and overseas media attention at the time. For instance, on 6th April 1924, the Zanesville Times-Signal, based in Ohio, USA, ran a full page story with the headline: 'The Ghost that Guards the Treasure in the Well'. Rather than elaborating on the archaeological finds, the article was more concerned with the legendary treasure at the bottom of the well, and the hazards involved with upsetting Geoffrey de Mandeville's ghost.

Upon visiting the site in 1949, the archaeologist and author, D. F. Renn found that the recovered timbers of the drawbridge had been left to decay. Only fragments remained. The other mentioned artefacts have also since disappeared into the ether of private collectors. Perhaps Sir Philip lost interest in Camlet Moat after failing to discover de Mandeville's treasure, and left his amateur excavations unfinished.



*Dreamcatcher at Camlet Moat.  
Photo: Alan Mitellas*

Towards the end of the 20th century, the moat was in a state of neglect. In 1997, English Heritage came to a management agreement with Enfield Council to return the site back to a condition where the outline of the monument could be clearly seen. While desilting work was being carried out on the moat, a surviving fragment of the drawbridge was discovered; the remains of a pegged tenon joint. The ancient piece of timber was then sent for dendrochronological dating. The results revealed a felling date of sometime after 1357, correlating with Humphrey de Bohun's 1347 licence to crenellate his manor houses.



As previously touched upon, Camlet Moat is considered to be a sacred place by a Pagan and mystic network that stretches out far beyond the local vicinity, and, indeed, the country. Local Pagans who regularly visit the site occasionally build bender huts from the surrounding branches and brushwood, complete with shrines. In particular, the well is considered to be sacred. Followers have adorned a partially felled hornbeam tree that leans over the well with prayer rags, symbols and trinkets.

The information boards that greet visitors to the moat have also triggered some debate. The accuracy of some of the information has been questioned by Camlet Moat enthusiasts. One of the boards offers some general information about moats, of which there are many around the country. Camlet Moat's Scheduled Ancient Monument status is also mentioned in the information; however it has been suggested that not enough information has been given relating to the site's archaeological and historical value, not to mention the mystical and Arthurian connections, and the general belief that it is not an 'ordinary' moat.

Camlet Moat has reached an international cult status, and the interest appears to be increasing. If there is one issue that Druids, Pagans, mystics, archaeologists, preservationists, historians, English Heritage and the owners, Enfield Council, all agree on, it is that the moat should be protected. Its Scheduled Ancient Monument status means that the use of metal detectors, unauthorised digging or causing any damage is a criminal offence.

*Photo: Alan Mitellas*





In spite of Camlet Moat's archaeological value, no professional, or credible, modern archaeological excavation has ever been carried out on the site. It is unlikely that the Enfield Archaeological Society would object to being given an opportunity to investigate the five and a half feet thick stone walls, not to mention Nesta H Webster's 'dungeon with a chain attached to the wall', that apparently lie beneath the ground. However, to date, no funding has been made available to launch a credible archaeological excavation. Whether Camlet Moat was once the site of the original Manor House of Enfield, or had a more official use as an early 'Enfield Chase HQ', or was an even more significant fortification, or perhaps, still further into the site's past, had a spiritual purpose and is somehow connected to the origins of Arthurian legends, are questions that will have to remain unanswered for now. It is for the readers to decide, if, indeed, they wish to.

It would seem that, regardless of what perspective the visitor approaches from, there is something undeniably compelling about Camlet Moat. After all, in an age when many answers are just a left-click away, everyone loves a mystery.





# The Memorials

There are three stone memorials within Trent Park, the most well-known being the needle obelisk on the edge of the northern boundary. Contrary to popular belief, they were not originally built in Trent Park. Sir Philip Sassoon purchased them from Wrest Park in Bedfordshire and re-erected them in Trent Park in 1934.

Although the memorials are not directly related to Trent Park's pre-Sassoon history, there is a story that connects the three structures together.

## Memorial 1 – The Duke's Pyramid

'The Duke's Pyramid', near the Cockfosters Road<sup>10</sup> entrance, is one of the three memorials that Sir Philip Sassoon purchased in 1934 from Wrest Park, the former home of the de Grey family. The inscription reads, 'To the memory of Henry Duke of Kent'. The memorial commemorates Henry Grey, a non-royal Duke of Kent, who died on 5th June 1740, after holding high offices of state between 1704 and 1720. The second inscription reads:

*'These gardens were begun in the year 1706 and at several times enlarged altered and adorned to this year 1740'*

This inscription refers to Wrest Park, the original home of the memorials.

## Memorial 2 – The Emma Crewe 'Pineapple'

The 'Pineapple', at the eastern end of The Main Drive, is a cylindrical column with a pineapple finial<sup>11</sup>, holding the inscription:

*'To the memory of Emma Crewe, Dutchess [sic] of Kent'*

This commemorates Jemima Crewe, daughter of Thomas Crewe (2nd Baron Crewe), who was the wife of Henry Grey from the previous obelisk. It was the Duke's great desire to have a son who would inherit his title, but, unfortunately, Jemima died on 2nd July 1728, leaving behind only daughters.

## Memorial 3 – Sassoon's Obelisk and 'The Vista'

The avenue lined by woods, on the approach to Sassoon's Obelisk, is called The Vista. Pheasants would be scared into taking flight from the edges of these woods at both side of this area, where Sir Philip Sassoon's A-List guests would assemble, out for a spot of shooting.

Sassoon's Obelisk is perhaps the most notable of the three obelisks, and certainly the tallest at 20 metres, or 65 feet. This Obelisk has become integral to the overall image of Trent Park. The inscription reads:

*'To the memory of the birth of George Grey, Earl of Harold, son of Henry and Sophia, Duke and Dutchess [sic] of Kent, 1702'*



Memorial photos by Alan Mitellas

<sup>10</sup> The place name, Cockfosters, was first recorded in 1524 and is thought to be derived from Cock Forester – meaning Chief Forester – or Chief Forester's place or estate. It is thought to have been a reference to a house that once stood in the area, owned by the Head Forester of the Chase.

<sup>11</sup> In previous centuries, the pineapple was the symbol of wealth, luxury and hospitality.

Eight months after the death of Jemima Crewe, Henry Grey's wife from the previous memorial, he married Sophia Bentinck, daughter of the first Earl of Portland, in March 1729. His hopes for a son who would inherit his title were soon answered, as Sassoon's Obelisk hails the birth of their son, George Grey, who was born on August 22nd 1732. The year inscribed on the obelisk is incorrect. The reason for this is unknown.

Sadly, little George Grey died a few months later on 3rd February 1733, ending the line.

Sir Philip Sassoon purchased the three memorials from Wrest Park, and had them rebuilt in Trent Park, in order to impress Prince George and Princess Marina. They were married on 29th November 1934, so he lent them Trent Park, complete with the recently installed monuments, to spend part of their honeymoon there from 12th to 18th December 1934. They had been bestowed with the title of Duke and Duchess of Kent, so it was possibly no coincidence that Sir Philip chose the three memorials, which were connected to an 18th century non-royal Duke of Kent. He probably wanted to make the newlyweds feel at home.

Shortly after its official opening, Trent Park was in danger of losing two of the three memorials: The Duke's Pyramid and The Emma Crewe Pineapple.<sup>12</sup> Wrest Park, the memorials' original home, was undergoing restoration work. For this reason, the Greater London Council, who managed Trent Park at the time, had applied to Enfield Council for listed building consent to remove the monuments and take them back to their former home. Enfield Council refused the request, arguing that the two memorials were historically linked to the needle obelisk, the one we now call Sassoon's Obelisk. The Council's stance was that all three memorials form attractive and well-known focal points in Trent Park, and the removal of any of them would detract from the historical significance of the monuments, and would adversely affect the character and interest of the park.

It was also realised that baby George's mother, Sophia, was the daughter of the First Earl of Portland, and so obviously lived for some time on the Portland estate at Theobalds Park, which in those days included a part of Enfield Chase. If the Bentinck family had continued to hold these estates to the present day, then Sassoon's Obelisk, commemorating the birth of the son of Sophia and nephew to the First Duke of Portland, would have actually been very close to family territory.

After several years of wrangling over the issue during the 1970s, the GLC finally backed down. The memorials would remain at Trent Park.

<sup>12</sup> Sassoon's Obelisk was also originally required to be returned to Wrest Park, but the idea was dropped when it was realised that the labour costs would be far too great. During the wrangling, Enfield Council were first to point out that the date on the monument, 1702, was incorrect.

## End Note

In many ways, Trent Country Park is a fine example of the end product of good decision making; in particular, the decision made in 1777, during the deforestation of Enfield Chase, to appoint lots 21 and 22 to be developed as a miniature hunting park called Trent Place. This decision perpetuated a timeline that today features some genuinely startling, even world-shaping, examples of local history.

The end product is a stretch of countryside that anyone is free to explore and learn from; and a reminder that, in preserving just a little of the past, we often create the foundation upon which to build a big future.

*View from the north terrace of Trent Mansion.  
Photo by Suzanne Linsey.*





## Appendix

# Geoffrey de Mandeville and the Nineteen Year Winter

*'And there are yet to be seen in the midst well neare of this Chase, the rubbish and ruins of an old house which the vulgar sort saith was the dwelling place of the Magnavills, Earls of Essex.'*

-Early description of Camlet Moat, from Camden's Britannia, 1610 edition.

Although, in the main, sadly forgotten by recent generations, Geoffrey de Mandeville the 1st Earl of Essex (1092-1144) was, and still is, a huge figure of our local history. On a scale of 'hugeness', he is as significant to our local area as Robin Hood is to Nottingham; and while Nottingham tourism continues to cash in on an historical character that many historians argue may never have existed, let alone stole from the rich and gave to the poor, Geoffrey de Mandeville was a real person. However, his cold-blooded reputation could not be any more dissimilar to Robin Hood's.

Geoffrey de Mandeville is tied to Trent Park not only because it was once at the heart of his great hunting park, later to become Enfield Chase, but also because Camlet Moat is thought by some to be the site of his manor house. His ghost is believed to haunt the moat, as well as Trent Park itself, apparently guarding his mythical treasure at the bottom of the moat's well.

De Mandeville is also believed to haunt East Barnet Village. One of the stories is that his ghost appears every six years on Christmas Eve in Oak Hill Park. Public interest reached a peak when, on Christmas Eve 1932, many hundreds of people gathered there, hoping that he would make an appearance. Brookside, a road adjacent to the park, was apparently almost blocked with cars, and during a time when not many people owned them.

In Enfield, the name lives on in place names such as Mandeville Road or De Mandeville Gate Retail Park; although, aside from academics and local history enthusiasts, the significance of the name seems to have faded from the memory of local popular culture, compared to the ghost frenzy of 1932.

So who was this man – the infamous 'Robber Baron' whose ghost is said to haunt Trent Park and the local area?

Geoffrey de Mandeville was the 1st Earl of Essex in the twelfth century, during a power struggle between King Stephen and his cousin, Empress Matilda (also known as Maud), who was Henry 1st's daughter.<sup>13</sup> He had named Empress Matilda as his heir in 1127, but immediately after his death, in 1135, Stephen of Blois seized the throne while Matilda was in Anjou, France, pregnant and unable to travel.



Source: Stothard, Charles Alfred. 1876. *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*. Pg.10. London: Chatto and Windus.

<sup>13</sup> King Stephen and Empress Matilda were William the Conqueror's grandchildren.

The civil war between King Stephen and Empress Matilda ran from 1135 to 1154, and is a period of time known by historians as 'The Anarchy'. It was an era of English history of unparalleled lawlessness, whereby King Stephen's apparent soft approach to Kingship inspired many nobles to plot against him. Whenever they were discontent, having an opposing figurehead to rally behind in Empress Matilda served only to exacerbate the unruly state of affairs. Today, these plotting nobles are often referred to as the 'Robber Barons', and Geoffrey de Mandeville is the most infamous Robber Baron of them all due to his treachery, violence and swapping allegiance to suit his own ends during this time.

Geoffrey de Mandeville's grandfather, also named Geoffrey, came to England with William the Conqueror and fought at the battle of Hastings. He was later granted huge tracts of land, including Essex and Middlesex. In 1101, his son, William de Mandeville, lost much of this land when he displeased King Henry I by allowing a political prisoner to escape from the Tower of London. In order to earn these lands back, he had to pay off a huge debt. He died in 1129, and the debt then passed to his son, Geoffrey.

Geoffrey de Mandeville soon made a name for himself for his educated demeanour, fighting skills and knowledge of military tactics. During the time of The Anarchy, he began clawing back his lost lands and titles by switching his allegiance between King Stephen and Empress Matilda, who both coerced him into staying loyal.

De Mandeville initially changed sides from King Stephen to Empress Matilda in 1141, when Stephen was imprisoned after the battle of Lincoln. He then changed back to Stephen upon his release later that year, who had pledged him even more power, land and wealth for his allegiance.

However, by 1142, de Mandeville kept his options open by continuing to plot with Empress Matilda. By that time, he had already regained all his lost lands, had married Lady Rohesia de Vere, had been made Earl of Essex, as well as Sheriff of London, Middlesex, Essex and Hertfordshire, and was the most powerful man in England after the King.

However, during his earlier time of allegiance with Empress Matilda, de Mandeville had imprisoned Stephen's daughter-in-law, Constance of France, against her will in the Tower of London. Some believe Stephen never forgot this insult, and held a grudge against him. Some also believe that the Earl's power had become so great that the King had become wary of him, and was tired of his treacherous ways, particularly as he was rightly suspected of still being in league with Empress Matilda.

At Michaelmas (29th September – a holy day during the Middle Ages), in 1143, King Stephen assembled his court at St. Albans, where an unsuspecting Geoffrey de Mandeville was arrested for high treason.

He was then told that he had a choice of either giving up his castles, as well as his primary asset – the Tower of London – the seat of his power, or be executed. Not surprisingly, de Mandeville chose the former. Stephen then made the grave error of releasing the Earl from custody.



Empress Matilda.  
Image from 'History of England' by  
15th century St Albans monks.

On his release, de Mandeville was enraged. He assembled an army of supporters and mercenaries, and then left for the Fenlands of eastern England. In the dead of night, they descended upon Ramsey Abbey, near Cambridge, and threw out the monks. De Mandeville then seized the abbey's treasure and converted the buildings into their military headquarters.

The Earl and his army then plundered, ransacked and burned property, including Cambridge itself. Men, disguised as beggars, would be sent out to kidnap the local inhabitants. They were then tortured, to force their families to pay huge ransoms. A serious famine descended over the area to add to the already enormous death toll.

It is due to this reign of terror that Geoffrey de Mandeville achieved legendary status. The Church was so appalled by his actions that he was excommunicated, which was not to be taken lightly during the Middle Ages. It meant that the rebel Earl's soul was damned for all eternity, and that his body would be refused Christian burial in case it polluted the earth. Normally, the only way someone could escape this fate was to obtain a pardon from the Pope himself.

De Mandeville's stronghold continued to get stronger, forming an alliance with Hugh Bigod, Earl of Norfolk. King Stephen knew that he had to deal with his former ally, and built a series of motte and bailey castles around the Fens, boxing him in.

In August 1144, de Mandeville was attacking one of these castles (Burwell Castle) when an arrow hit him in the head, a lucky shot from one of the soldiers within the castle. After a few days the wound became infected, so he was taken to Mildenhall where he owned property. It soon became apparent that he was not going to survive.

As de Mandeville lay dying, it is thought that he was visited by the Order of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, commonly known today as the Knights Templars. Many fashionable publications of late accredit the Knights Templars as the guardians of the Holy Grail. Geoffrey de Mandeville was an ally, and probably at least an associate, of this Order.

The Templars took de Mandeville's body to the 'Old Temple' in Holborn, their England headquarters at the time. The story goes they put his body in a lead coffin and hung it from a tree in their orchard, so that it would not pollute the ground. Then, in 1163, Pope Alexander III granted absolution for de Mandeville's soul, whereupon the Templars finally buried his body at their new London Temple off Fleet Street.



*King Stephen. Image from Matthew Paris's 'Epitome of Chronicles', 1255.*



*Geoffrey de Mandeville's effigy (fire damaged during World War II) at the Temple Church, London.  
Photo by Rex Harris.*



The Anarchy has also been called the time ‘When Christ and His Saints Slept’ and the ‘Nineteen Year Winter.’ These phrases were inspired by the Peterborough Chronicle, a monastic record that contains some explicit information about The Anarchy. Although not mentioned by name, it is thought that de Mandeville’s actions were the main source of inspiration behind the author’s detailed account:

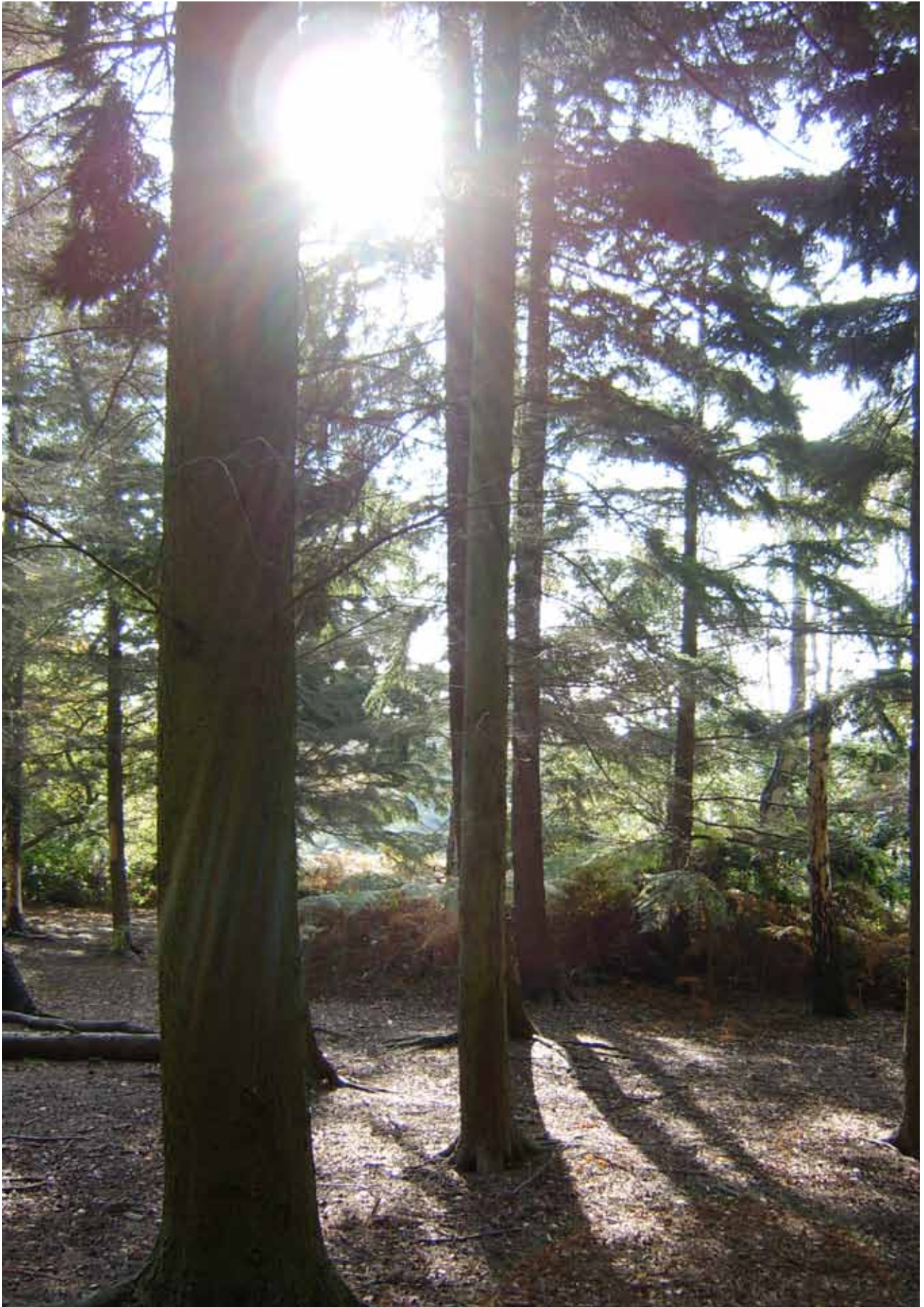
*“When the traitors saw that Stephen was a mild good humoured man who inflicted no punishment, then they committed all manner of horrible crimes. They had done him homage and sworn oaths of fealty to him, but not one of their oaths was kept. They were all forsworn and their oaths broken. Every chieftain made castles and held them against the king; and they filled the land full of castles. They viciously oppressed the wretched men of the land with castle-building work; when the castles were made, then they filled the land with devils and evil men. Then they seized those who had any wealth, both by night and day, working men and women, and threw them into prison and tortured them for gold and silver with unspeakable tortures... They hung them up by the feet, or by the thumbs, or by the head, loading their feet with heavy weights. They tied pieces of cord with knots in them round their heads and twisted and turned them until they bit into the brain... Some they put into a ‘cruet house’ – that is, a chest, short, narrow and shallow. They put sharp stones in first and by pressing a man down hard into it, they broke his bones. I neither can nor may recount all the atrocities nor all the tortures that they did on the wretched men of this land. The bishops and the clergy were forever laying curses on these men, but little did they care, for they were all accursed and forsworn and lost – men said openly that Christ slept, and his Saints. Such things, and more than we can say, suffered we nineteen winters for our sins.”*

Geoffrey de Mandeville – The Robber Baron – has certainly had some bad press. There are some who say that he was brutal because he lived in a brutal era, and that he was no more, or less, than a man of his time.

De Mandeville’s body is buried at the Temple Church, London, between Fleet Street and the River Thames. His tomb effigy can also be seen there.

In 1153, the Treaty of Winchester named Empress Matilda’s son, Henry, as heir to Stephen. The King died the following year, on October 25th 1154, and so Matilda’s son became Henry II, the first King of England of the House of Plantagenet.





*Photo: Alan Mitellas*

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Illustration of Geoffrey de Mandeville's effigy (p.25) obtained from [effigiesandbrasses.com](http://effigiesandbrasses.com)

Country Life issues:

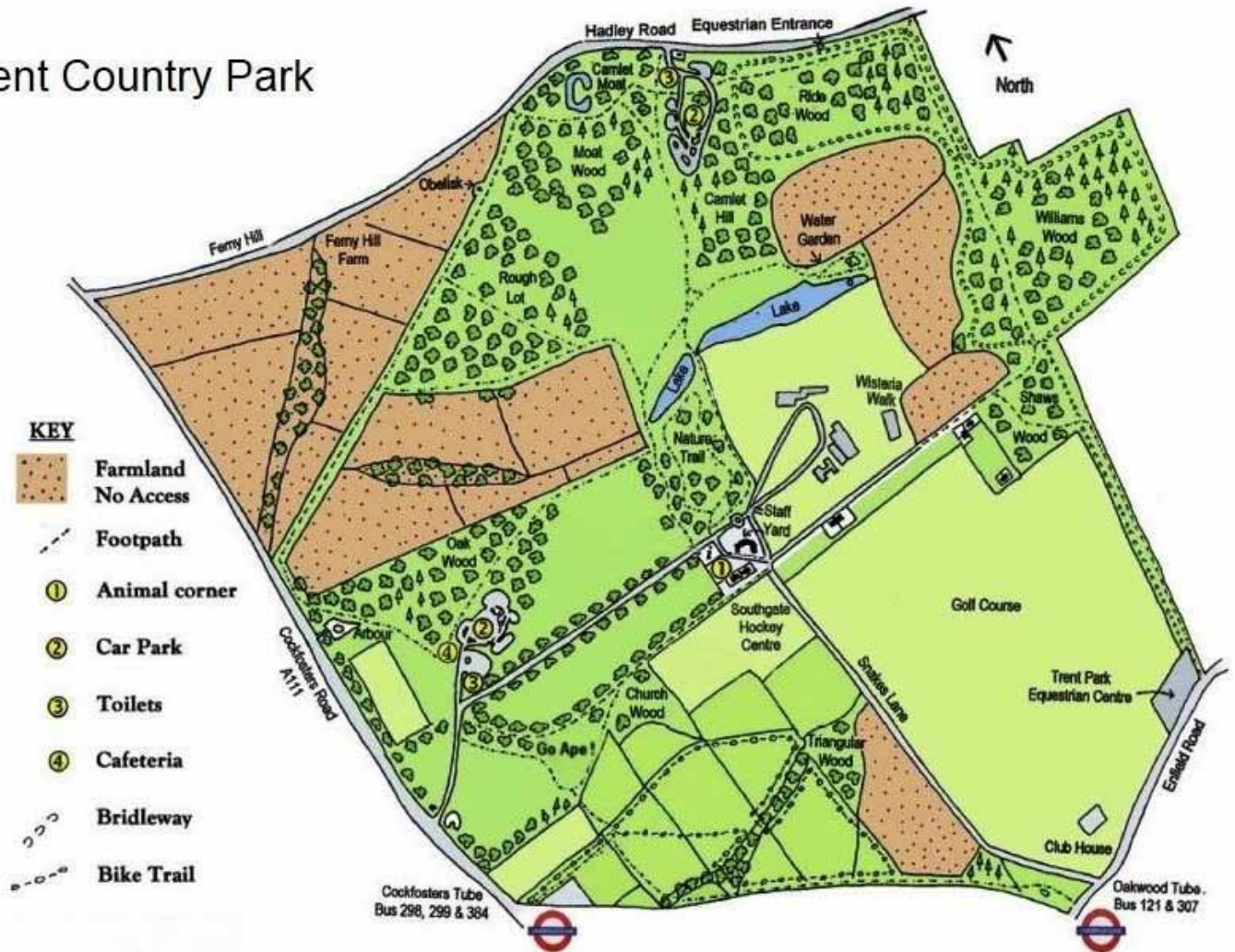
- Feb 21st 1903
- Jan 10th 1931
- Jan 17th 1931
- May 8th 1937
- May 15th 1937





# Map of Trent Park

## Trent Country Park



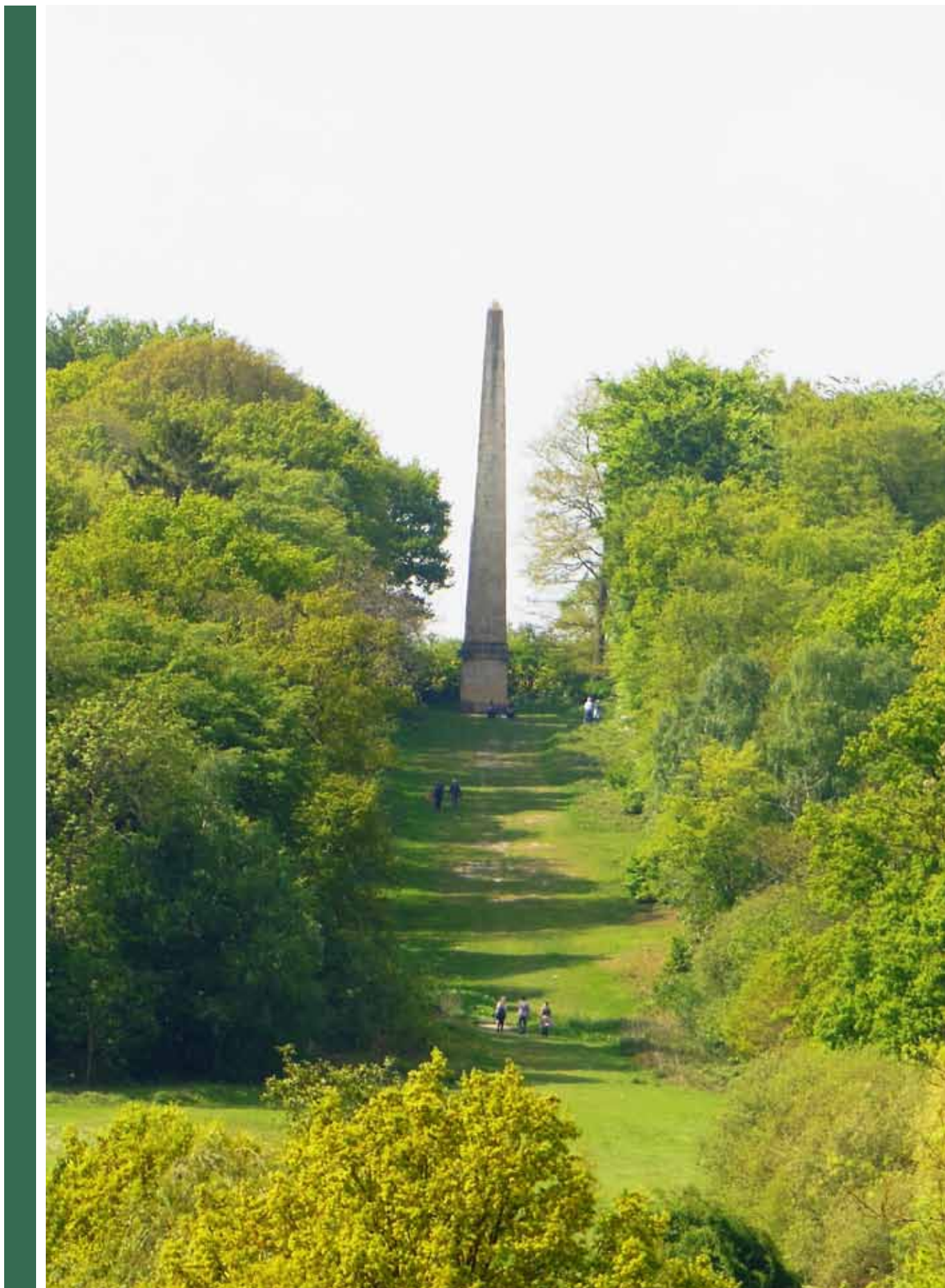
*Map of Trent Park by Christina Lee and Helen Litherland*

Also acknowledging the work of Ian K. Jones, A. Smith and J.D. Sykes, M.A.

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*Photo: Alan Mitellas*

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