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LAND OF THE FANNS

# Teacher Briefing

Warley Place

*From, Land of the Fanns Online Resource*

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## Warley Place

Warley Road,  
Great Warley,  
Brentwood  
CM13 3HU

<https://www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/warley-place>

## Summary

- 25 acres (10.2 hectares)
- Remains of an Edwardian garden created by the horticulturalist Ellen Willmott between the 1890s and 1935.
- Now maintained as a nature reserve by Essex Wildlife Trust.
- Part of the historic buildings and garden features remain.
- Some areas are dangerous because of hidden cellars, water holes and decaying walls.

## History

- The Willmott family - Frederick and Ellen Willmott, and their daughters Ellen Ann and Rose - moved to Warley Place in 1875. Ellen Willmott was 18 years old at the time.
- They commissioned major additions to the house which almost doubled its size and began enlarging the estate.
- The three Willmott women were all keen gardeners.
- Rose moved away when she married, but Ellen Ann stayed and turned Warley Place into one of the most celebrated gardens in the country. She was described at the time as “the greatest living gardener”.
- Warley Place employed as many as 104 gardeners
- Ellen developed complex gardens with an extensive collection of plants.
- In 1882 she started to create an alpine garden. It was a major undertaking, involving building a ravine with a stream running along it and a special cave for her filmy ferns. The skeleton of this still exists today.
- Ellen Willmott helped to finance expeditions to acquire new plants.

- Queen Mary, Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria visited Ellen Willmott, and her garden became famous throughout Britain and beyond.
- She spent all her money on the garden and her musical and other interests.
- She died almost penniless in 1934.
- The house was sold and permission sought to turn it into a housing estate, although this failed partly because of the start of the Second World War and partly because it became protected as new Green Belt land.
- The house was demolished in 1939, and the garden fell into a wilderness.
- Essex Wildlife Trust leased the site from 1977 (then known as the Essex Naturalists' Trust).
- Volunteers have cared for Warley Place as a nature reserve, but also retaining features of the original garden.

## **Wildlife & Insects**

- A wide variety of birds, including the Nuthatch
- Good selection of invertebrates including stag beetles.
- Bats

## **Plants & Trees**

- Spring flowers such as snowdrops, daffodils, crocuses.
- Winter Aconites, Anemones, Cranesbills and Ferns.
- A variety of trees, some exotic
- Line of huge Sweet Chestnuts.

## What you might see

- There is a line of ancient sweet chestnut, estimated to be planted in 1629.
- The house for Warley Place was demolished in 1939, but you can still see some ruins. Please note: some areas pose a risk with hidden cellars, water holes and decaying walls.
- The 19th century drive now makes a walk through woodland.
- The edge of a ha ha (a hidden ditch to keep animals out of the garden) leads to the remains of lots of coldframes and glasshouses.
- A walled garden dating back to the 17th century.
- Ellen Willmott's Alpine Garden rockwork survives, and you can see how the paths run down it and end in a small pool beside what Miss Willmott described as a 'filmy fern grotto'.

## Archive Material

### Articles:

- Country Life, 37 (8 May 1915), pp 613-17; 76 (6 October 1934), pp 358-9
- Victoria History of the County of Essex VII, (1978), pp 167-8

### Maps:

- W Walker, A plan of Miss Willmott's house and gardens and Great Warley, 1904 - Essex Record Office <https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk>
- OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1881 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1876 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1920 - - <https://maps.nls.uk/os/>

### Illustrations:

- Bird's-eye view of the Willmott gardens at Warley Place - Essex Record Office <https://www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk>
- <https://www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/warley-place/literature>