

The Grange: Woodthorpe Park's Curio

Paul R. Swift, Chair FoWGP



Of the times I have given a talk in the Grange on Woodthorpe Park, apart from it being the offices for the Nottingham City Parks and Recreation Department, audiences for the talks I give are always well attended. They are well attended for one thing, apart from wanting to hear and see images of the history of Woodthorpe Park, the one thing that draws in a full house is curiosity. In other words, wanting to know what it looks like inside the Grange.

Having lived all my life facing Woodthorpe Grange Park, until I became involved with the Friends of Woodthorpe Grange Park, I too was always curious as to what it looked like inside the Grange.

On the National Heritage List for England, Woodthorpe Grange was first listed on the 22nd of August 1994 as a Grade 2 listed building number 1255290. However, like a lot of grade two listed buildings, apart from its outward appearance of grandeur and its inside features of Pitch Pine Doors at the entrance lobby and the roof supported by two marble pillars and a staircase leading to what were once four principal bedrooms.

With the building a working environment where rooms that were once drawing rooms or breakfast rooms that have been converted into offices and meeting rooms the building has been functionalised. Therefore, as a consequence, because of later internal redevelopments some of the building's inside features have been obscured or, indeed, covered over.

Apart from the huge staircase with an oak bannister and balustrades, which would have been the domain of the Grange's owners, to the rear of the Grange it is still possible to see the staircase that would have been used by the servants, as the first owner of the Grange, Henry Ashwell, had four servants. Also living in the Grange were Ashwell's wife, Sarah, his two daughters Mary and Francis and four nieces.

When the Nottingham Corporation first took ownership of Woodthorpe Grange in 1921 after the Grange's third and final owner put the Grange and the Woodthorpe Estate up for sale by auction to build houses on the estate but was able to purchase the whole of the estate following a £10,000 donation from Sir Jesse Boot on the assumption that it becomes a public park. Apart from the Grange becoming offices for parks and open spaces, the idea was to convert it into a natural history museum¹, a health spar or refreshment rooms.

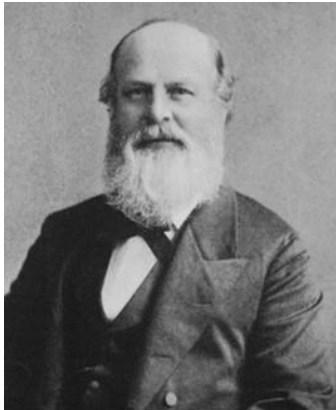
The Grange did become a refreshment room or café, which occupied the whole of what was once the Grange's Drawing Room and is now an open plan office.

How I remember, as a child, seeing people all dressed up on Sunday afternoons queuing up to be served teas, coffees, sandwiches and ice creams in the park's café. Why it was closed, is as yet, unknown. Even so, I remember it well.

¹ When Woodthorpe Grange Park was opened on the 1st of June 1922 Wollaton Hall was still lived in by the 10th Baron Middleton Godfrey Ernest Percival Willoughby and from 1924 to 1925 by Michael Willoughby, the 11th Baron Middleton who sold Wollaton Hall and the estate to the Nottingham Corporation where in 1926 the estate was opened as a park and the hall as a natural history museum.

What also gives the Grange its curiosity is that during World War Two part of the Grange was used by the Home Guard. To this day, there is evidence remaining that it was used by the Home Guard by the telegraph pole electrons that are still attached to two tree trunks a pine tree and a beech tree that were installed by members of the Royal Signals.

Finally, with history of its own with still more to be discovered, whenever I give a talk in the Grange it will always be well attended. Partly, because those who attend all want to know what the Grange from the inside looks like. Therefore, for those who work inside the Grange, Woodthorpe Grange, because of the general public's curiosity is Woodthorpe Park's curio!



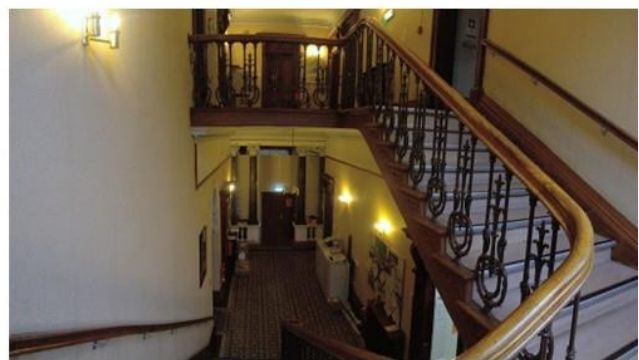
Henry Ashwell



Opening of Woodthorpe Park 1st June 1922



Circa 1950s: Woodthorpe Grange



2018: Inside the Grange



The view from the first-floor meeting room