

A History of the local hotel chosen by Kings, Queens and Footballers

The Enfield Chase, an area of 8,000 acres stretching from Barnet to Edmonton, was enclosed in 1136 by Geoffrey de Mandeville, and stocked with fallow deer. In 1419 it was divided for administrative purposes into three parts, and it is believed that the three lodges, East, South and West Lodge, were originally built about this time. The lodges provided residences for the bailiffs whose duty was to protect the Chase from local people poaching the deer and cutting down the trees for firewood.

The Chase passed to the Crown in 1421 after Mary de Bohun had married King Henry IV, and remained part of the Duchy of Lancaster for five centuries. In Tudor and Stuart times it was used for hunting deer and sometimes wild boar. King Henry VIII, who loved hunting, once stayed for a week at West Lodge with his Queen, Catherine of Aragon, and the keepers who were accused of cutting down too many trees explained that large fires had been lit to keep warm the company of noblemen and gentlemen waiting for the king to return from his hunting.

When in 1557 Queen Elizabeth I was living as Princess Elizabeth at the Bishop's Palace at Hatfield, it is recorded that she was escorted from Hatfield to Enfield Chase by a retinue of twelve ladies in white satin, on ambling palfreys, and a hundred and twenty yeomen in green, on horse back, 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 peacock's feathers.

It is also recorded that within a week of his coming down to London from Scotland to be crowned, King James I dined at West Lodge which, it was said, had been "very prettily trimmed up" by John West, the keeper. His son Charles I is the last monarch recorded to have stayed at West Lodge and to have hunted in the Chase.

One of the more famous occupants in the 17th century was the Hon. Henry Coventry. A loyal friend of Charles II during the Cromwellian period, he went into exile with the King and on his return was appointed Secretary of State - the office which is equivalent these days to Prime Minister. History records that he was one of the few Secretaries of State during Charles II's reign who served the King and country really well, and he held the office for eight years. Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary in November 1667 - "Harry Coventry hath got more fame and common esteem than any gentleman in England hath at this day and is an excellent and able person".

In 1673, Henry Coventry took West Lodge as his country residence, and began to replant the trees, many of which had been cut down during the Commonwealth. In 1677 he had his portrait

painted by Mary Beale. This portrait now hangs in the state dining room at Longleat, Wiltshire, the seat of the Marquess of Bath, who kindly gave permission to have the copy made which now hangs in the hall at West Lodge Park. Henry Coventry died in 1686.

John Evelyn a writer of some three dozen works, the most famous being his Diary, which was not discovered and published until over a century after his death. He also wrote Sylva, a treatise on practical arboriculture, which generated interest in trees and landscape gardening. A friend of Samuel Pepys and Sir Christopher Wren, he was active at the court of Charles II and was elected secretary of the Royal Society in 1672.

John Evelyn travelled to West Lodge on 2 June 1676 to visit Henry Coventry, and wrote in his diary:

"2 June. I went with my Lord Chamberlaine to see a garden at Enfield towne; thence to Mr Sec. Coventry's lodge in the Chase. It is a very pretty place, the house commodious, the gardens handsome, and our entertainment very free, there being none but my Lord and myselfe. That which I most wondered at was, that in the compass of 25 miles, yet within 14 miles of London, there is not an house, barne, church, or building besides three lodges. To this Lodge are three greate ponds and some few inclosures, the rest a solitarie desert, yet stor'd with not lesse than 3000 deere. These are pretty retreats for gentlemen, especialy for those who are studious and lovers of privacy."

From 1694 to 1716 West Lodge was owned by the disreputable Sir Basil Firebrace, who was at one time sentenced to imprisonment in the Tower of London for bribery and fraud. He managed to sell the office of the Keeper of the Chase in 1716 to Major General John Pepper by assuring him that it would bring in profits of £964 per year. In reality, General Pepper had to spend £2,000 of his own money on repairing and restoring West Lodge, described as a large house with barns, stables for more than 30 horses, and 8 acres of fruit trees and vegetables, and he never recovered his investment.

The next owner of West Lodge was James Brydges, the first Duke of Chandos, who had made his fortune in only a slightly less disreputable way than Sir Basil Firebrace, by being Paymaster-General to the Army from 1706





whole year's trading was only nine pounds.

Residents in the 1930s and 40s paid an all-inclusive sum ranging from £5 to £15 per week for accommodation and full board, including breakfast, morning coffee, luncheon, afternoon tea and dinner. The hotel was not licensed, but guests were allowed a bin in the cellar for their own wines. At 1pm and 7pm the waiter on duty sounded a gong on the front staircase and pulled a rope ringing an outside bell to summon guests for lunch or dinner. Until the Second World War, gentlemen were expected to wear dinner jackets in the evenings.

In the dining room, adorned with hunting trophies from Africa, permanent residents had their regular tables around the walls, leaving a few tables in the middle for occasional visitors, who were scrutinised carefully by 1999 had risen to the residents. A wages list dated 28th October 1944 reveals wage rates which were not exactly glittering. Several staff, including maids, porters, waitresses and waiters, were paid only one pound per week, though they were provided with full board and lodging, and a note in the ledger states "participates in gratuity".

In 1944 the total wages bill for the whole hotel staff, which included a scullerymaid and a land girl, was £45.13.0. By comparison, the weekly wages bill in £22,000.

In the bedrooms, however, there was no central heating and guests had to put a shilling in the slot of their meter to make their gas fires work. One eccentric lady preferred to sit outside her bed-room in the corridor where there was a radiator providing free heat.

Edward Beale bought West Lodge Park in March 1945 and moved there with his wife Betty and son Trevor. He was then 41, and had rescued his family bakery and catering business Beale's Ltd., which dated back to 1769, from near closure during the depression of the 1930s. For some years the hotel continued to operate as a private unlicensed hotel serving mainly permanent residents, and making little or no profit. Then in 1958 Edward Beale, aided by his brother John, decided to raise the standards. The permanent residents moved elsewhere, central heating was installed, and a start made on building private bathrooms en suite. A bar was added, an expensive chef hired, the restaurant opened to non residents, and banqueting for weddings and other functions encouraged.

Edward Beale lived at West Lodge Park for over fifty years, pursuing his vision of achieving the highest possible standards for the hotel with energy and enthusiasm. He formed the hotel's collection of pictures and took particular pleasure in creating an arboretum out of a ten acre field that was

originally let out to a farmer. The arboretum became his pride and joy, and he never tired of showing it to visitors. Edward Beale devoted much time to public affairs, and was awarded the C.B.E. in 1966. He died in 1998 at the age of 94.

The spacious grounds around West Lodge Park extend for over thirty five acres, and include lawns, open parkland and woods. A major development took place in 1963 when Edward Beale, acting on a suggestion by Derek Honour, then trees advisor to the Greater London Council, decided to create an arboretum. Taking advice also from Frank Knight, formerly director of R.H.S. Wisley, he laid out ten acres of parkland with two main grass rides leading through groupings of specimen trees and shrubs of the same family - oaks, limes, pines, larches, rowans, dogwoods, birches, magnolias etc. At one end a maple glade was formed, and collections of ceanothus and buddleia add colour. Specimens of particular interest include a fine swamp cypress, a 200 year old strawberry tree, a weeping Brewers' spruce and a rare Kentucky coffee bean tree. There are now over 800 varieties of trees and shrubs in the Beale Arboretum, including national collections of hornbeams and taxodiums. A full list and plan is available at the hotel.

The lake in front of the hotel was created originally as a fish pond to vary the diet of venison served to the members of the royal party returning to West Lodge after a day's hunting in the Enfield Chase. Nowadays it is a home for goldfish and moorhens, and is a popular background for wedding photos.

Under John Phillips, who managed West Lodge Park from 1969 to 1992, the hotel rose from three to four star status. It also became well known when the England football team began to use the hotel as the team's base to train before international matches. West Lodge Park is still used by top football clubs playing in the F.A. Cup Final and other London matches. Trevor Beale came to live at West Lodge Park as a boy of ten. After attending Cambridge and qualifying as a barrister, he joined the family firm of Beale's Limited in 1958, becoming managing director in 1970 and chairman in 1990. He retired in November 1999.

Today West Lodge is run by Andrew Beale the eighth generation of the family to enter the firm.

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- 1712, during the War of the Spanish Succession, and getting rich on the profits. He built himself a magnificent house at Edgware called Canons, and maintained a private orchestra of 27 players for which Handel wrote the Chandos Anthems. Like General Pepper, he hoped to make profits from his position as Chief Ranger to the Enfield Chase but struggled for years against poachers and thieves, including some of his own servants.

On his death in 1744 the property passed to his son Henry, the 2nd Duke. Like his father, he did not live at West Lodge but at his main residence in Edgware. His estate passed in 1759 to his son, the third Duke of Chandos, and his widow held the lease of West Lodge until 1808.

In 1776 the Duchy of Lancaster split up the Enfield Chase. About 60% of the land was granted to adjoining parishes, the Duchy keeping the remainder. Most parishes then sold their entitlement to local farmers, who used it for agriculture. Only at Hadley was the parish allocation preserved intact and run by trustees for the benefit of the parish, which it still is (Hadley Common and Hadley Wood).

Thus, after nearly 650 years, the Enfield Chase ceased to exist as a hunting forest and West Lodge became a gentleman's country seat, losing the responsibilities for the protection of the Chase.

The old house had been extensively repaired twice, in 1583 and in 1720, but it was over 400 years old when, in 1832, the walls moved several inches in one night to the great alarm of the occupiers and it had to be demolished. The tenant, Archibald Paris, had taken a lease of West Lodge in 1827 with a covenant to rebuild. He carried out the terms of the covenant and rebuilt West Lodge in an attractive Regency style. The new building was complete by 1835, incorporating Tudor

panelling from the old house around the main staircase. Archibald Paris lived at West Lodge until 1850.

John White Cater took the lease of West Lodge in 1850 and lived there till his death in 1889. He was a distinguished banker, becoming Chairman of the London and Brazilian Bank. In his time many fine specimen trees were planted, including the sequoias which dominate the skyline.

A census survey of 1851 shows that, apart from six members of the family, there were five indoor servants plus a gardener, two coachmen and a farm steward living at West Lodge, in addition to non-resident staff.

Six gardeners were employed in Victorian times to look after eight acres of grounds, including orchards, vegetable gardens, a nut tree walk, large greenhouses, a vinery and a peach house. The front drive was originally an avenue of elms, replaced in the 1920s by the present lime trees, while the fine oak tree in front of the hotel has been dated to 1840.

The first man to convert West Lodge into a hotel was Ernest North Lewis. Taking a lease in 1921, he built an extension three years later containing a dining room and eleven bedrooms, which raised the total number of rooms, to 28. The hotel was described in its brochure as being run by "gentlepeople for gentlepeople". Many guests were people retired from the professions or the services and their wives, but those who were still in business were driven in the hotel car to catch the 9.08 and 9.45 am trains from Hadley Wood Station, and were met on their return from the City in the evening. Ernest North Lewis also added the word 'Park' to the name 'West Lodge' to add dignity. He sold the hotel in 1938 and moved to Burford, when he acquired the Lamb Inn. Edmund Victor took over West Lodge Park and ran it during the second war, maintaining the standards in spite of great shortage of staff. In 1942 the profit on a