

Stansted House



THE OCTAGON TRAIL



Rebuilt in 1903, after a catastrophic fire, Stansted House was redesigned by Arthur Conran Blomfield, the same architect used by King Edward VII for Sandringham in Norfolk.

The fine Edwardian House we see today uses local Rowlands castle brick and Portland stone dressings. Stansted is now similar to the Dutch style design used by Talman in his original 'modern seat' Stansted House of the 1680s.



Modern additions to the new Stansted House included electric lights, running hot and cold water and a lift which continues to be used to this day, a similar design as used in the ill-fated Titanic!

Stansted House has changed dramatically over the centuries, reflecting the differing tastes and needs of its many owners and it has a long history associated with the aristocracy.

A hunting lodge was built in Stansted Park for Norman Roger de Montgomery, first Earl of Arundel, between 1066 and 1094. There is an old Sussex saying, "Since William rose and Harold fell, there have been Earls of Arundel." Stansted probably originated as a park in the Royal Forest of Bere.

Stansted's overlords, during the early medieval period, were the Earls of Arundel, and it was used by several monarchs as a hunting ground. In 1177, King Henry II visited Stansted then, in the following century King Richard I hunted boar here in 1194 and King John visited in 1214 and 1215. Stansted Park was also used for timber production and, in 1327, a survey of buildings of the Manor of Stanstead included a hall and a chapel. In 1552 the Park was also visited by King Edward VI.

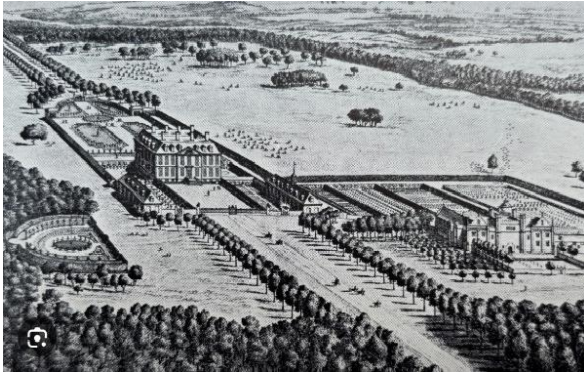
For 500 years, since the first hunting lodge was built, it remained in the tenure of the Earls of Arundel. Then in 1579, on the death of Henry Fitzalan the 14th and last of the Arundel Earls, it passed to his daughter Jane, and thence into ownership of the House of Lumley.

Jane had married Lord John Lumley at the end of the sixteenth century. So, for the next 200 years, it remained in Lumley ownership. One legacy from the period is 'Lumley Seat' built to the right of the main house. Converted to a family home in the 20th century, it was originally conceived as a Georgian landscape folly. In 1782, it was described as a temple with 'a handsome saloon ornamented with paintings and a front portico, framing views down to the sea'.

The initial 12th century hunting lodge was one of the residences of the Earls of Arundel, from which they hunted and even held 'forest courts', brought in by the Normans to protect deer 'for the Kings pleasure'. The associated restrictive 'forest laws' were universally unpopular among local people as grazing livestock, cutting or collecting timber, hunting game without permission and land alterations, including crop cultivation, were all forbidden.

In 1480 the small manor house, associated with the hunting lodge, was rebuilt and enlarged to create a substantial castellated and turreted building near the site of present Chapel of St Paul. This was known as the Old House. On 16 April 1644, Stansted House was attacked by Parliamentary forces. By the end of the day, the Old House' was in ruins. So, in 1688, Richard Earl of Scarborough Viscount Lumley abandoned the house, and it was downgraded to providing stables, stock sheds, barns and a brewery, to make way for and to support the needs of a more 'modern seat'.

The new Stansted House was designed by architect William Talman, in the Dutch style. Built on the site of the present main house, it was lavishly furnished, including nine magnificent tapestries depicting the 'Art of War'. Three of these can still be seen on display in today's house, but the original 'modern seat' no longer exists. Today, the only legacy of this 1680s house is the vaulted crypt and undercrofts under the current house.



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The house was depicted by Dutch painter and draughtsman Leonard Knyff (1650-1722), included in the 'Nouveau Theatre de la Grande Bretagne' published in 1722 by Johannes Kip (1653-1722). His picture clearly shows the upright Dutch style and its position away from the Chapel and Old House.

In 1781, Richard Barwell bought Stansted. He lavished money on Stansted and first employed renowned landscape architect Capability Brown to draw up plans for both house and grounds. It may have been at this time that the magnificent avenues, that radiate away from the house, were cut through the forest. However, Brown died in 1783, before his work was complete.

Barwell employed architects James Wyatt and Joseph Bonomi to finish it with a visually dramatic and stylish design, which encased the earlier house in white brick and added double porticos to the east and west elevations. These were similar to those at nearby Goodwood House, which Wyatt also designed. Each portico had sixteen Doric and Ionic columns. The old stables and offices were replaced by two new pavilions connected to the main house by curving Doric colonnades.

In 1826, Stansted was bought by Charles Dixon, who then employed the architect Thomas Hopper to pull down Wyatt and Bonomi's pavilions and erect the present stables and offices. Hopper may also have built the three lodges.

George Wilder had recently inherited Stansted House and Park from his deceased father, when disaster struck in August 1900. On the last night of the Goodwood Races, the Wilders had sat down for dinner when the alarm was raised for 'fire!' The inferno from the burning house lit up the countryside for miles around. The Havant Fire Brigade arrived within 30 minutes, just after 9:00pm, and the Emsworth Fire Brigade at 9:40pm. Both came to the decision that the house was beyond saving. The house was burnt to the ground and many treasures in the house were destroyed, including carvings by Grinling Gibbons. However, the valuable 'Art of War' tapestries were saved.

By 1903, Stansted House had been redesigned and fully rebuilt into the fine Edwardian House we see today. During the rebuilding, George Wilder and his family stayed in nearby Aldsworth House.

Stansted House holds many events and concerts throughout the year in its gardens, such as the annual flower show and music Proms, and the lovely interior of the house can also be visited.

