

History Corner

The Orangery of Woolverstone Hall, by Naomi Limer, Head of English

Nowadays the Orangery is one of the busiest parts of the school, full of the chatter and clatter of lunchtimes and often in use for events, prep and meetings but prior to the sale of the Woolverstone estate in 1937, it was full of an entirely different sort of life.

Woolverstone Hall was built in 1776 for the Berners family and remained a private residence until 1937. The orangery was not part of the original building but was commissioned by Charles Berners and built in 1923 by the architect Thomas Hopper as part of a series of renovations and additions to the existing house. Hopper designed and remodelled many stately homes across England and was popular with King George IV who employed Hopper for numerous revisions to his own properties.

The Orangery stands 18 feet high and 70 feet long and as the pictures below reveal, was once filled from top to bottom with a range of beautiful plants. Heated by a network of hot water pipes along the underside of the span roof, and fed by water channels below the floor, the conditions enabled the growth of a range of exotic plants and trees that were recognised as being some of the finest examples in England.



The technology was advanced for the Georgian age, and Mr James Sheppard (previously of Longleat) and his successor Mr William Messenger as Head Gardeners were famed for their expertise on the growth of peach trees, grapes and camellias and many other varieties of plant and tree.



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The drawing taken from *The Gardeners' Chronicle* of 1874 (for which Mr Sheppard was a columnist for over 25 years), shows the celebrated camellias which held over 400 blooms. Interestingly, many of the planters pictured here are still on site, with the large planter to the right of the foreground having recently been moved from the stable block to the front of Woolverstone Hall.

With the sale of the property and its eventual use as a boarding school for boys, the orangery was partitioned and used as a dormitory for many years. Whilst it has not returned quite to its original purpose, the orangery was restored when Ipswich High School purchased the property in 1992 and is regarded as one of the finest rooms of the estate.

