

# Priory Park

## Reigate Priory and Priory Park Time Line



Augustinian Canon



Humphrey Parsons



Reigate Priory 1895



Vogan Memorial

### 1201 to 1536 The Augustinian Period.

William de Warenne, the sixth Earl of Surrey, founded Reigate Priory for the Augustinian Canons who worshipped and worked here for 300 years.

### 1536 Dissolution by Henry VIII

The Priory was dissolved, its value assessed at £65.  
Lord Edmund Howard, the father of Catherine Howard, Henry VIII's fifth wife, was appointed as steward to manage the Priory property and collect all rents and tithes.

### 1681 to 1766 Parsons Ownership

John Parsons purchased the Priory in 1681. Knighted in 1687, Sir John Parsons was a brewer who owned the Red Lion Brewery Company. He was Lord Mayor of London in 1703 and represented Reigate in Parliament for almost 30 years.

1717 Humphrey Parsons, twice Lord Mayor of London, succeeded his father John.

During the Parsons ownership the Park became more elaborate, boasting grand entrances, tree lined avenues, and landscaped parkland.

### 1807 to 1921 Somers Ownership

John Somers Cocks, later Earl Somers, purchased the Priory in 1807 thus securing his parliamentary seat. Although Earl Somers' main home became Eastnor Castle, he made a significant contribution to the geography of Reigate by creating Tunnel Road.

1842 The second Earl Somers (also John) succeeded his father and spent most of his married life at Reigate Priory.

1852 Charles Somers Cocks became the third Earl Somers. Charles, an art connoisseur, added the great library to the Priory.

1883 Lady Henry Somerset (nee Somers) inherited the estate from

Charles Somers. The house was extensively altered and new garden areas were developed, including the Sunken Garden and Monks Walk.

On occasions the Priory was let to socialite Mrs Ronnie Greville, becoming a social destination for elite society. Mrs Greville later went on to purchase Polesden Lacey in 1906.

During the 1st World War the Priory was used briefly as a hiding place for the future Kings Edward VIII and George VI.

1920 Randal Vogan paid £15,000 for Reigate Park (the woodland and ridge in the south of Priory Park) and presented the area to the people of Reigate 'for their quiet enjoyment'.

1942 Mutual Property Life and General Insurance Company purchased the Priory and sought planning permission for building development.

1944 Under the Greater London Plan the whole borough, including the Priory, was designated as local Green Belt.

1200

1300

1400

1500

1600

1700

1800

1900

2000

### 1541 to 1681 Howard Ownership

Whilst Catherine Howard was Queen, the Priory was granted by King Henry VIII to the Howard family. The Priory manor was adapted to become a fine Tudor home.

1623 The grounds were described as an ancient deer park "well stocked with timber trees, replenished with

deer, having also a fine pond well stocked with fish".

Notable Howards include: Charles Howard who led the fleet to victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and Elizabeth Howard, Countess of Peterborough [1639-1671] who was a celebrated 17th century beauty, painted by Van Dyck.

### 1766 to 1780 Ireland Ownership

Richard Ireland, a cheesemonger, paid £4,000 for the mansion and its 76 acres of parkland at auction. A devastating fire badly damaged the west wing and significant changes were made to the Priory building, shortening the east wing and refacing the south front in its present Georgian style.

### 1780 Jones Ownership

Ann Jones, the niece of Richard Ireland, inherited the Priory. Ann's son Arthur (one of thirteen children and father of ten) later took over the Priory.

### 1801 Mowbray Ownership

George Mowbray, a businessman, paid £8,350 for the Priory at public auction in London. Just six years later he sold the Priory for double the price at over £16,000.

### 1921 Beatty Ownership

Admiral and Countess Beatty purchased the Priory and 68.5 acres of land for £35,000.

1936 The Hon Peter Beatty inherited the Priory and was its last private owner. Peter Beatty built the

stables near the Park Lane entrance. He bred and trained race horses and achieved wins at the Derby and Ascot.

1939 Joseph Rank Ltd, Millers (now owned by Hovis) used the Priory for emergency offices during World War Two.

### 1947 to 1974 Reigate Borough Ownership

The whole of the Priory estate was acquired by the Borough of Reigate for £47,500 and was opened for enjoyment by the general public.

1948 The Priory building was leased to Surrey County Council for use as a school.

### 1974 onwards, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council Ownership

Developed for use as a public park, the heritage value of the site was unrealised. In 2007/08 the Heritage Lottery Fund supported a major project to restore the Park and create new facilities such as The Pavilion.



Reigate Priory after 1541



Richard Ireland Map c.1770



Portrait of Admiral Earl Beatty



Construction of The Pavilion

# Priory Park

## The Priory's Nautical Heritage

Two of Britain's famous admirals were owners and residents of Reigate Priory:  
Lord Howard of Effingham and Admiral Earl Beatty.

### Lord Howard of Effingham 1536 - 1624

- In 1541, at the time of the Dissolution of the monasteries, King Henry VIII granted Reigate Priory to Lord William Howard, uncle of Catherine Howard. The Priory was then adapted into a Tudor home.
- Charles Howard was born in 1536 and from the age of five spent the majority of his childhood at Reigate Priory. Charles inherited the Priory in 1581 and retained ownership throughout his life. Although Charles Howard had 'seven standing houses', Reigate Priory was most used.
- A favourite at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, Charles Howard became one of the most powerful men in England.
- Despite having only limited experience at sea in 1585 Charles Howard was appointed Lord High Admiral by his cousin Queen Elizabeth I. Thus, when the Spanish Armada sailed to attack Britain in 1588 Howard was in charge of the navy. Howard was a skilled commander of men but he also benefited from the talents of his second in command, Sir Francis Drake.
- In the aftermath of the Armada campaign, there was a dispute over who should pay the sailors. Lord Howard was concerned for his men and lobbied for payment from Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen was unwilling to pay and many of the sailors died in pitiful conditions. Lord Howard was so moved he helped to set up a fund known as the "Chatham Chest" for the relief of seafarers.
- In 1596, Lord Howard and the Earl of Essex were sent to forestall another Spanish attack, with an assault on Cadiz. The attempt was successful, and Howard was created Earl of Nottingham in recognition of his services.



Portrait of Charles Howard



Reigate Priory after 1541

- After the Queen's death Howard went on to serve her successor, King James I. Howard died in 1624 aged 88 years and, as he wished, was buried at Reigate Parish Church.
- After Charles Howard's death the Howard family fortunes declined and in 1681 the Priory was sold to John Parsons.
- Since 1988 a beacon has stood in the Priory grounds to celebrate Lord Howard's Armada success.



Armada



The new ship in the playground

### Admiral Earl Beatty 1871-1936

- David Beatty was a charismatic and courageous leader who fought in most major engagements during the First World War. Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet from 1916-1919 and First Sea Lord for an unprecedented period between 1919-1927, Beatty was an influential figure in the Royal Navy in the twentieth century.
- Beatty joined the Navy in 1884 aged 13. After a meteoric ascent he was promoted to Commander aged 27 and was a leading British naval officer in World War I. He led many battle cruisers to victory from his famous flagship HMS Lion.
- Beatty succeeded Admiral Jellicoe as Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet at the end of 1916. His finest hour came at the surrender of the German High Seas Fleet on 21 November 1918, when he signalled 'The German Flag will be hauled down at sunset today, Thursday, and will not be hoisted again without permission.'
- In 1919, in recognition of what he had contributed to his Country, the Government rewarded Beatty with the sum of £100,000 and he was created an Earl and became the youngest officer to hold the rank of Admiral of the Fleet at the age of 48.
- After retiring from active service, Admiral Earl Beatty continued to work for the Admiralty. It was at this time, 1921, that he and his wife Ethel, an American millionairess, purchased Reigate Priory as a family home, in easy reach of London.
- On his death in 1936 Beatty was given a state funeral and laid to rest alongside Lord Nelson at St Paul's Cathedral.
- The Beatty's son, Peter, inherited the Priory in 1936 and was the last private owner.



Admiral Earl Beatty



HMS Lion

Sources: Discovering Reigate Priory, Audrey Ward

For further information on Lord Howard of Effingham and Earl Beatty please visit the Reigate Priory Museum.

# Priory Park

## The Restoration of Priory Park

### Background

- In 2000, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council undertook a Historic Landscape Survey of Priory Park. The survey highlighted the hidden heritage of the Park but also raised concerns about the deterioration that had been taking place over many decades.
- After consultation with the public and a rigorous application process, the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant of £4.2 million towards the restoration of Priory Park. The grant was supplemented by funding from the Borough Council and corporate sponsors, Legal & General, Parador Properties, Canon, Watson Wyatt, Fidelity and Charles Church.
- Restoration work was undertaken in 2007 – 2008. Crispin & Borst were the main building contractors, working under the direction of landscape architects Land Use Consultants.

### Restoration Aims

- The restoration of the Park has drawn heavily from two time periods in its history. Work on the wider landscape in the Park has focussed on preserving and restoring the 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape. The key features of this landscape are the sweeping vistas, tree lined avenues and the lake.
- Closer to the Priory, the focus has been on restoring the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century gardens to create a suitable setting for this Grade I listed building.
- Restoration of the formal gardens meant that the modern facilities close to the Priory (playground, tennis courts, skate park) needed to be relocated. This has provided an opportunity to update and improve these facilities that are vital to a public park in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



Priory Park, Jan 2007



Priory Park, Jan 2008



Richard Ireland Map c.1770

### An Historic Landscape

- The importance of Priory Park relates to its extensive and complex landscape history, and in particular the survival in part of some of the features from the early period.
- In developing the restoration proposals, particular reference was made to the survey made c.1770 shortly after the estate had passed from the Parsons family to Richard Ireland.
- Avenues and tree clumps were a particular feature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century park. The planted knoll appears on historic maps dating to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and remains an important visual feature.
- The restoration work involved reinstatement of the Broadwalk on the line indicated on the C18<sup>th</sup> survey. Remaining trees from the old path to the lake were transplanted to supplement existing tree clumps. Lime trees were also planted along the line of the Causeway, formerly the Carriage drive leading from the entrance at Park Lane.
- Priory Lake - Ponds have been recorded in this area of the park throughout the history of the Priory. The current lake appears to have been formed from a large fish pond and a thermometer shaped pond recorded in the c.1770 map. This map also records a number of small fish ponds to the west of the area which had disappeared by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Restoration work on the lake involved the removal of over 7000 cubic metres of silt to restore the water depth. Improvements were made to the water flow, lake edges and planting shelves to support improvements in biodiversity within the lake.
- The **Landscape Heritage Trail**, recreated as part of the restoration project, provides the route of the formal walk that would have been undertaken by Priory residents in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. A leaflet giving details of the trail is available in The Pavilion.



Play area installation



Priory Lake



Dredging the Lake

Source: Land Use Consultants  
Reigate Priory Museum, Estates Survey Plan of Priory and lands 1770.

# Priory Park

## The Restoration of the Formal Gardens in Priory Park



Reigate Priory 1895

- The restoration of the formal gardens around the Priory has focussed on the style of the gardens at the time of Lady Henry Somerset.
- The gardens are an interesting, if minor, example of late nineteenth century garden design. They demonstrate the rejection of High Victorian bedding and ornamentation, and its replacement by more formal gardening designed to complement, or to 'curtsey to' the house.
- The formal gardens were laid out for Lady Somerset between 1878 and 1885. The area south of the house became available for a formal garden by the rerouting of the drive from Bell Street and the construction of the ha-ha. The main entrance of the Park was moved away from the temptation of The Castle public house in Bell Street to the Park Lane entrance through 'the Pineapple Gates'.
- The 1895 photograph shows the sunken garden with formal beds, grass banks, simple clipped standards, stone balls and steps.
- The Monk's Walk, first recorded on the 1896 Ordnance Survey, was laid out as a herbaceous border during Lady Somerset's period. Such borders were growing in popularity in the late nineteenth century, and had 'historically revivalist associations,' which would be in keeping with the formal character of the sunken garden.

### Lady Henry Somerset (Priory Ownership: 1883-1905)

- Isabel Caroline Somers was born in 1851 and spent much of her childhood at the Priory and Eastnor Castle in Hertfordshire.
- After her unsuccessful marriage to Lord Henry Somerset, Lady Somerset settled at the Priory with her son, Henry. In 1883 she inherited the Priory estate, as well as Eastnor Castle.
- Lady Somerset did much charity work and devoted herself to the temperance cause, becoming President of the British Women's Temperance Association in 1890. Under her leadership the BWTA grew rapidly, extending its work to campaigning on prostitution, peace, labour reform and women's suffrage.
- The establishment of Duxhurst in 1895 (an industrial farm colony for inebriate women) initiated Lady Somerset's gradual withdrawal from the Priory.



Lady Somerset in Priory Drawing Room



Sunken garden under construction 2007



Monk's Walk facing West 1918



New Monk's Walk 2008

For further information on Lady Henry Somerset please visit Reigate Priory Museum.

Source: Linking Document, Land Use Consultants  
[www.francisfrith.com](http://www.francisfrith.com)

Archive material courtesy of Reigate Priory Museum.

# Priory Park

## Park Wildlife

### Birds

Priory Park is home to 13 bird species of national conservation concern: Linnet, Song Thrush, Starling, Mute Swan, Kestrel, Kingfisher, Stock Dove, Cuckoo, House Martin, Green Woodpecker, Dunnock, Willow Warbler and Goldcrest.

Birds found on the lake include the commonly observed Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Canada Goose. Sightings have also been recorded of the Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Egyptian Goose, Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Mandarin Duck and Mute Swan. Please help to protect the lake as a haven for wildlife by keeping dogs under control in the lake area.



Greater Spotted Woodpecker



Priory Lake



Kingfisher



Egyptian Geese

### Mammals

In previous surveys six mammals have been found in the Park: fox, roe deer, mole, grey squirrel, field vole, and rabbit, although smaller mammals such as mice and shrews are also likely to be present.



Field Vole



Roe Deer

### Bats

There are at least 6 different types of bat in the Park, including the comparatively rare Serotine Bat. Bats can be quite clearly observed in significant numbers at dusk in the summer months. Species vary in their preferred locations, with the lake environs and the southern slope of the wood the most populated.



Serotine Bat



Click Beetle  
[Athous subfuscus]

### Invertebrates

330 species of insects and other invertebrates have been recorded in Priory Park. These include a number of notable and rare species such as the cuckoo wasp, a rare bee [Andrena florea] and a click beetle [Athous subfuscus]. 15 species of butterfly were found, 92 species of beetle and 66 types of bee, wasp or ant.



Cuckoo Wasp



Mining Bee [Andrena florea]

### Flora

Over 207 types of plant species have been recorded on the site.

Of general interest but also of botanical importance are the bluebells, which bloom in the woods each April/May.



Bluebells



Woodland

### Trees

Priory Park is home to several champion trees including the tallest recorded Hornbeam in the country [31m], the second tallest Ash [36m], and a Downy Birch with the largest girth in the country [4.1m].

For more information please see the [Nature Trail and Tree Leaflets](#) available in [The Pavilion](#).

Sources: [Priory Park Wildlife Survey](#)  
[Surrey Wildlife Trust](#)

# Priory Park

## The Pavilion



Artist's impression of The Pavilion

- The Pavilion in Priory Park was opened in 2008 as part of the Priory Park restoration project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- The striking design was selected following an international design competition organised by the Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA). The winning architect, Dominique Perrault is best known as the architect of the French National Library in Paris. The Pavilion is Dominique Perrault's first building in the UK.
- The following is an extract from the architect's vision:

*"The Pavilion is searching for a dialectic between the artificial and the natural.*

*The full height glass panels are turned away from the direct exposure of the sun and their position focuses the view diagonally, over the lawn, and outward to the distant forest. The rectangular columns, supporting the roof ring, are clad in highly polished metal, dematerialising their existence while reflecting the surrounding landscape into the interior. A blurring of the borders is created, between inside and outside, between appearance and being, desire and reality."*

- The design of the building draws heavily from visual art. The outline and context of the building echoes Vassily Kandinsky, *Diversi cerchi* 1926. The pattern on the floor is inspired by Walter Oberholzer's "Bloodstream".



Artist's impression of the inside of The Pavilion



Walter Oberholzer's "Bloodstream".



Vassily Kandinsky, *Diversi cerchi*

### A Green Energy Supply

- Reigate & Banstead Borough Council is committed to reducing its energy consumption in its buildings so we looked at ways in which we could incorporate a sustainable energy solution into the new Priory Park Pavilion. As a result the heating and hot water supply are provided through a ground source heat pump.
- Using a ground source heat pump is expected to save around 13.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, when compared to a conventional gas boiler heating system.
- The technology works a bit like a household refrigerator in reverse. 320 metres of coiled tube are buried in trenches (1.8 metres below the ground) under The Pavilion lawns. Water (with a bit of anti-freeze) is run through the tubes to collect the earth's heat, which remains pretty constant at around 8-13 degrees centigrade throughout the year. Compressors then put the liquid under pressure to extract the heat, which is transferred into the building through under-floor heating pipes. As a result of this process, each unit of electricity that is used to run the system generates three to four units of renewable heat energy.
- In summer the outside ground temperature is cooler than the building. The system can then be run in reverse to provide passive cooling for the inside of the building.
- The Council secured £15,000 funding from the government's Low Carbon Building grant scheme towards the cost of the ground source heat pump and its installation. For more information on using ground source heat pumps and available grants go to [www.gshp.org.uk](http://www.gshp.org.uk).



Archaeological site of the new building



Building in progress



Under-floor heating pipes

