

Hurst House - The Finest House in Woodford



HURST HOUSE WOODFORD GREEN

Woodford has more than its fair share of stunning properties within its boundaries, but none stand out more than the magnificent Hurst House. Situated in Broomhill Walk – just behind the famous statue of Sir Winston Churchill – the landmark building recently celebrated its 300th anniversary, surviving changing times and a ravaging fire in the mid-1930s.

A plethora of wealthy businessmen, bankers and merchants kept homes in Woodford during the 18th century, treating the area as a getaway from the grimy and overcrowded streets of central London. It's hard to imagine now, but back then Woodford was considered the countryside; with Hurst House and the many other properties of the day situated right on the edge of Epping Forest.

Built in 1714, Hurst House – or The Naked Beauty, as it was originally known - harks back to a time when the area was made up of mansions and villas on what was then known as Woodford Row. The curious name, The Naked Beauty, is thought to have been taken from the estate upon which the property was built. However, many have attributed the name to a risqué statue that once stood in front of the house.

Originally commissioned as a rural retreat for East London Brewer Henry Raine, the grade II

listed building is thought to have been designed by renowned architect Nicholas Hawksmoor. Built in the English Baroque Style, which was brought here from the continent by Sir Christopher Wren, Hurst House was even grander then than it is today. Wings were added to either side of the home soon after construction to enlarge the house and join up the stables and outbuildings. The additional wings gave the property an impressive façade and the house was described in an advertisement published by The Times in 1811 as:

'An elegant family residence with coach houses and capital stabling standing on three acres of ground with choice fruit trees, grapery, greenhouse and melon ground. It is situated in the rural village of Woodford, distant from London 8 miles. The house commands rich and delightful prospects of the surrounding country.'

Since then, the house has changed considerably with a number of modifications being made over the years – most notably after a devastating fire tore through the building, destroying the roof, in 1936. The grounds on which the house stands were also reduced from three acres down to one in 1939 to make way for the construction of 18 new homes on Broomhill Walk, Wensley Avenue as well as the north side of Forest Approach. The changes, however, did not dampen people's enthusiasm for the property. The late English architectural historian, writer and TV broadcaster, Alec Clifton-Taylor, described Hurst House as 'the finest house in Woodford'.

Although Hurst House has predominately been a private home for the majority of its 300 year history, there was a period in the late 19th century when the building was used as a school (Woodford House). However, shortly before the First World War began, the property was once again made into a private residency and has remained that way ever since. Hurst House is very much a part of Woodford's history, and a reminder of a bygone age.



HURST HOUSE.
circa 1714.
THE NAKED BEAUTY

