



# West Lodge Park in the 1940's



A memoir by Trevor Beale



## *Moving in*

My father, mother and I (aged ten), plus Dusky the cat, moved on March 10th 1945 from our home in Oakwood to Cedar Lodge in the grounds of West Lodge Park hotel, which my father and his brother John had bought on a 22 year lease. (John and his family also lived in Oakwood, and never lived at West Lodge Park.)

My mother was not enthusiastic about the move from a modern three bedroom house to this much older, rambling house with inconvenient changes of floor level downstairs, and more than a hint of damp. My father saw trading possibilities in the hotel, though the family's main activity at that time was the bakery, restaurant and banqueting business centred on Beale's Restaurant and Bakery in Holloway, North London, which my great-grandfather had built in 1889.



# A Private Residential Hotel

Nowadays, only a multi-millionaire could afford to live in a hotel but in the 1940s it was not uncommon. About two thirds of the rooms at West Lodge Park were permanently let, including most of the best rooms. The remainder were let, as now, on short bookings of a day or more, to guests (known as "the casuals") who normally booked their rooms by letter the previous week. The receptionist's job was to open the letters and post a reply accordingly. Private hotels were unlicensed, so there were no drinks served in the dining room and no bar, but guests frequently kept a bottle in their bedrooms (some also kept a stock of wine in the cellar).

Some of the permanent residents went out daily to work but the majority were retired. They included some quite distinguished people - Sir Julian Foley had been a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Education, Professor Hargreaves had taught Spanish at London University, Sir Eldon Mannisty had been a Rear Admiral and Mr. Andrew Wishart was a current director of Belling & Co, a major national manufacturer of electrical appliances.

At the other end of the scale Miss Hollingsworth was distinctly dotty, renting a garage to store piles of old newspapers and sitting outside her bedroom in the corridor because there was a radiator there which provided free heat.



*The Lounge  
(now the King Charles Room).*



*The Drawing Room  
(now the John Evelyn Room).*

## *The Dining Room*

*(Illustrated next page).*

Somebody had been on a shooting expedition to Kenya in the 1920s, because the walls of the Dining Room (now called the Lancaster Room) were hung with native spears and heads of a variety of antelopes, a rhinoceros horn and even a lion's head. The animals glared down silently at the guests. Each of the permanent residents had their own table round the edge of the room, allowing them to stare at "the casuals" at tables in the centre. When the hotel first opened in 1925 dress for dinner was black tie, but this had been dropped during the war.



*The Dining Room  
(now the Lancaster Room)*





# The Food

Food rationing started during the war and did not end until 1952. Guests had to hand in their ration books weekly. Residents were entitled to three meals a day plus afternoon tea. Lunch and dinner, at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m., were announced by Ben the porter striking a gong in the lounge then going outside to pull a rope which swung a bell to summon any guests in the gardens. Guests were expected to arrive punctually and did, so lunch service was finished by 2 p.m. and in the evening the lights in the dining room were turned out by 8 p.m. Coffee was served in the lounge. Meals served in bedrooms incurred a surcharge of one shilling (20p) and were carried upstairs by the chambermaids.

The general shortage of food due to rationing was supplemented by vegetables and fruit from the gardens and eggs from the chicken house, though the quality of the vegetables was the subject of frequent bitter disputes between the cook and the gardener. A note in the files records ordering 200 crowns of rhubarb for the gardens which must have resulted in acute menu fatigue.

There was no choice of menu at mealtimes, and vegetarian options were unknown. A typical three course menu might be:

Vegetable Soup

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Boiled ham with caper sauce

Buttered cabbage

New potatoes

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Sultana sponge and custard

Considering the amount paid by the guests for food (a three course lunch was four shillings (20p) and dinner was five shillings and sixpence (27p), the hotel managed to cope remarkably well. One or two permanent residents, however, liked to complain. Our family table was by the door, so my father had to endure this. I remember Lady Manisty, the chief complainer, stopping on her way out and saying "I didn't think much of the fish tonight, Mr. Beale".

# The Staff

Because the war was still on, it was difficult to find staff, particularly men. Female staff lived in a seven bedroom bungalow opposite the hotel, one of them being a chambermaid called Elizabeth. She was German, but Germans were not popular during the war so she pretended to be Swiss. Male staff lived in various poky rooms in outbuildings, now demolished, behind the hotel. The manager (Captain Merson) and his family lived in Waggon Lodge. The cook, Mrs. Mead, lived with her husband and son in the entrance lodges at the foot of the front drive. Before these buildings were rebuilt to their present size their home was divided into two, one half being the two bedrooms and the other half everything else, so that sometimes at night one might see them in pyjamas crossing the drive from their bedroom to their bathroom. The hotel night porter had the following schedule of duty: Arrive 10 p.m., collect shoes left outside guests' bedrooms and clean them, sleep 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. finish 7 a.m.

Old Bert, the "outside man", had to sweep up around the place, and look after the bins and the boiler. In the first war his lungs had been ruined by poison gas, so one could always hear him coming by his wheezing. He made a serious mistake one Christmas Day by leaving a mattress to dry out in the boiler house. A spark jumped out of the coal boiler and set the mattress on fire, which set the boiler house alight. Fortunately the fire brigade put out the fire without serious damage.

## PROGRAMME.

### SATURDAY, December 23rd.

Welcome Dinner	...	...	7.30 p.m.
Dance	...	...	9 to 12 p.m.

### SUNDAY, December 24th (Christmas Eve)

Table Tennis Tournament	...	10.30 a.m.
Games	...	...
Luncheon	...	1 p.m.
Tea	...	4.30 p.m.
Dinner	...	7.30 p.m.
Cinema Show, Talkies	...	9 p.m.

### MONDAY, December 25th (Christmas Day)

Treasure Hunt - Other Games	...	Morning.
Luncheon	...	1 p.m.
Tea	...	4.15 p.m.
(Guessing the Weight of the Christmas Cake)		
Christmas Dinner	...	7.30 p.m.
Dancing	...	9 to 12 p.m.
Distribution of Presents from Christmas Tree.		

→ Christmas programme for 1949

# The Bedrooms

  
**West Lodge Park**  
 Residential Hotel

TELEPHONE  
 BARNET  
 0692

HADLEY WOOD  
 NEAR BARNET  
 HERTS

RESIDENTIAL TERMS include early morning tea, breakfast, luncheon, tea and dinner. There is no surcharge or service charge.

All rooms have a pleasant outlook over the hotel grounds, with hot and cold running water, gas or electric fires and Post Office telephones. Television in Drawing Room.

	DAILY TERMS	WEEKLY TERMS
FRONT ROOMS	33/- to 37/6	£11 : 11 : 0 to £13 : 2 : 6
BACK ROOMS	27/6	£9 : 9 : 0

(Special terms for bank holiday periods)

Room and breakfast terms 21/- to 24/- per person may be arranged for periods not exceeding four days.

Service of meals in bedrooms is charged 1/- extra per person per meal.

GARAGE 1/- per night.

MEALS for non-residents:	Breakfast 4/-	Luncheon 4/- (Sunday 5/6)
	Tea 2/6	Dinner 5/6 Coffee 6d.

Special terms for children occupying parents' room.

No allowance can be made for meals not taken in the hotel or for temporary absence. Rooms must be vacated by 12 o'clock on the day of departure. No dogs can be allowed in the hotel in any circumstances. No charge is made for use by residents of tennis court, putting or croquet lawns.

Of the 28 bedrooms, the top of the range was the suite (now the Magnolia Suite) occupied by Mr & Mrs Warren (he had made his money before the war as a diamond merchant in South Africa). There were sixteen decent sized double bedrooms and a dozen smaller single bedrooms. All the bedrooms had names instead of the present numbers. Most of the names were flowers or colours, but one was called Gay (later re-named) and the smallest (now the housekeeper's office) was called Little.

Hotel bedrooms in those days did not have en suite bathrooms (apart from luxury hotels in the West End). Instead, bathrooms were situated on the corridors at a ratio of about one to every five or six bedrooms. To have a shower or bath one therefore had to leave one's bedroom (remembering to take one's towel and room key) and wander the corridors in search of an empty bathroom. My mother once met a man carrying a towel who had taken a bath but could not find the way back to his room. The first en suite bathrooms were not installed at the hotel until 1951. Each bedroom did however have a wash basin.

There was no central heating, but bedrooms had gas fires, which were cosy and warm. To pay for them, every room had a gas meter into which the guest had to put a shilling (5p.) coin. As now, all the rooms all had a delightful view over the country. Telephones in the bedrooms did not arrive until 1950. If an incoming telephone call came through for a guest the receptionist would go up to the guest's room and ask them to come downstairs, where there were two telephone cubicles. The hotel's telephone system consisted of a small box with a knob that could be pointed one of two ways -either to the reception or to the manager's office.



# The Lounges

Very extensive, the lounges included the Drawing Room (now called the John Evelyn Room), the Back Lounge (now the King Charles Room), and the Lounge Hall. The arch just inside the front door on the left is now blocked up, but originally was open, so that for dances, people danced from the hall into the back lounge and back again in a circle. Comfortable chairs were fiercely guarded by the residents, for example Mrs. Wright, the oldest inhabitant, had to have the chair next to the fire in the hall. She borrowed books from Harrods Lending Library, and liked to change her book every Tuesday. Another resident, Miss Davies, also had an account at Harrods but liked to change her book on Fridays, so twice a week the Harrods van would drive to West Lodge Park, carrying one book.



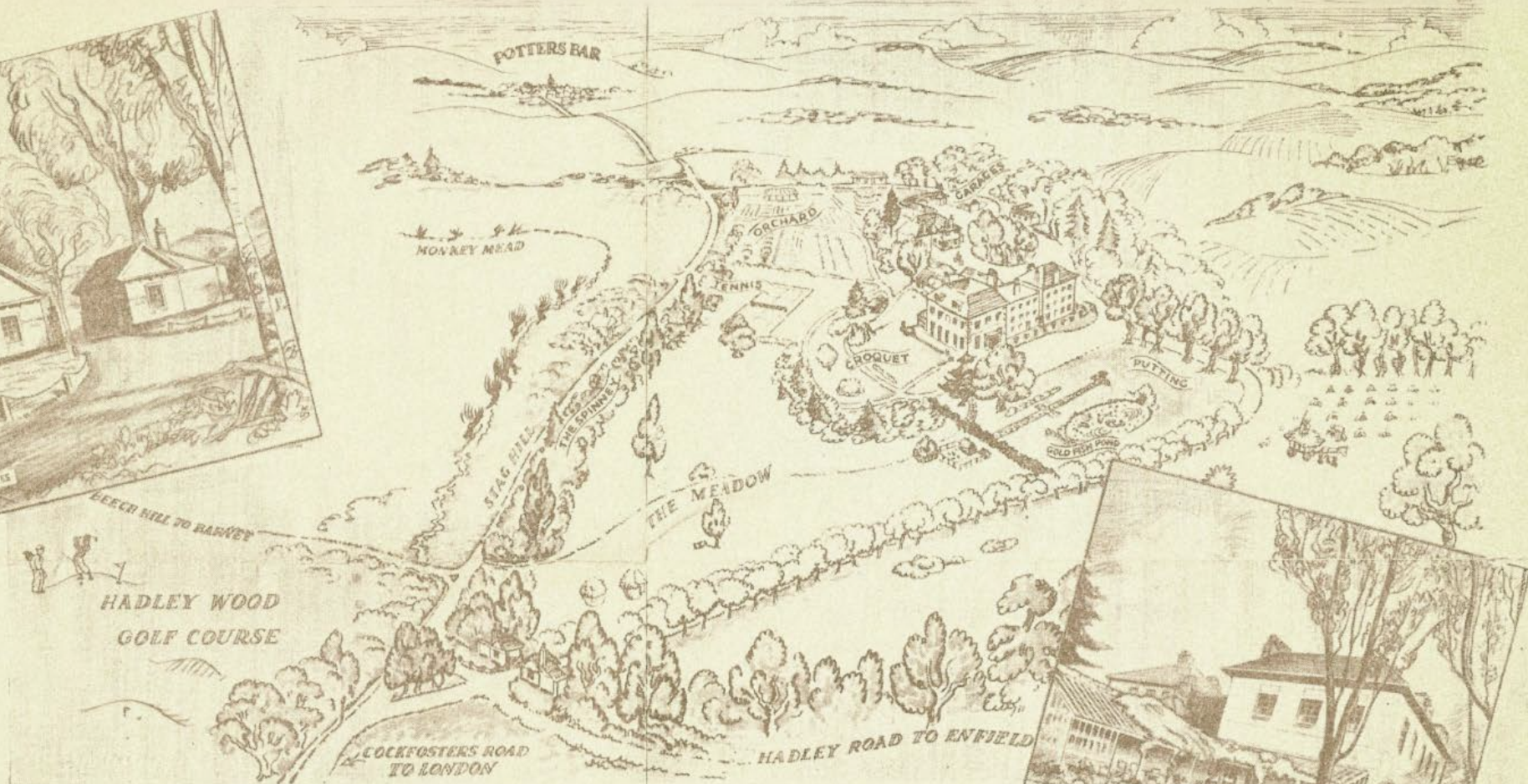
*The Back Lounge  
(now the King  
Charles Room)*



*Note the gong  
(sounded for meals)  
and the 17<sup>th</sup> century  
panelling (saved from  
the earlier house)*

In those days only the manager could afford to run a car, so other staff depended on the number 29 bus (which in 1945 had an outside staircase). The buses were reliable, coming about every 15 minutes, but sometimes came along full. I went to school in New Barnet by cycling up to Hadley Wood station, leaving my bike in the waiting room and getting on the train. It was possible to open the window of the compartment and stick your head out, but you risked getting a smut in your eye from the smoke of the coal fired engine. The lights on Hadley Wood station were lit by gas, so that if the porter put on a kettle to make some tea the gas pressure went down and the lights started to dim. Hotel residents who had cars insisted on having a garage, and the hotel had about a dozen garages to let. My father had one of the oldest garages with very high doors, which must have been built for a horse drawn carriage.





"Few districts in the vicinity of London retain so much of rural and sequestered character. The beauty and variety of the scenery of the upland Chase, still so nobly timbered . . . are drawing the attention of the country-loving public to this picturesque and interesting neighbourhood."

Edward Ford's History of England.

From an early brochure, showing the former entrance lodges.

The tiny figure behind the hotel is Trevor Beale, riding his bike.



# The Grounds

The size of the estate was the same as it is now (35 acres) but the gardens were smaller. The field on the right hand side of the front drive was leased to a farmer and the land on the left hand side was let to another tenant who kept horses. I can remember being called out in the night to help my parents and the night porter chase a cow that had got into the hotel gardens back into its field. William, the maintenance man, also looked after the gardens, but he only had time to mow the lawn outside what is now the John Evelyn room, which was used for croquet. The rest of the lawns were left rough for five years during the war and had to be slowly reclaimed. Down the back drive were a number of semi-derelict buildings, some of which had been staff cottages. One had been the stables for the hotel's own pack of beagles, which flourished between the wars. For me as a boy it was a paradise exploring the grounds, cycling round the drives and rowing round the lake in a little wooden boat.

*View in the gardens*



*The Terrace (now the site of the Mary Beale restaurant)*



## Games

In the grounds a lawn tennis court was kept up, and later on a putting green. Table tennis was available on the covered terrace, and the room now called the Coventry Room was equipped with a bar billiards table. The nearby Hadley Wood Golf Club allowed visitors for a fee of £2 per month "with special terms for Regular Officers and members of the Colonial Civil Service home on leave".

## Upgrading

There were no major developments in the nineteen forties. The hotel would make a small profit in one year, usually followed by a small loss the next year. At one point the losses were reduced by selling the goldfish in the lake to a dealer. It was not until 1958 that my father decided to change the private residential hotel model, get a licence and a bar, upgrade the restaurant, put in central heating and develop banqueting. The permanent residents were given three months' notice to leave, which caused a very frosty atmosphere, but most of them moved together to the Oaklands Park Hotel, near Weybridge.



West Lodge Park then blossomed into the busy, up-market hotel it has now become, but I look back with nostalgia at the quiet, peaceful place of my boyhood, where everybody knew each other and nothing much ever happened.

Trevor Beale





West Lodge Park  
Hadley Wood, Barnet, Herts