

Sweet Chestnut fruits

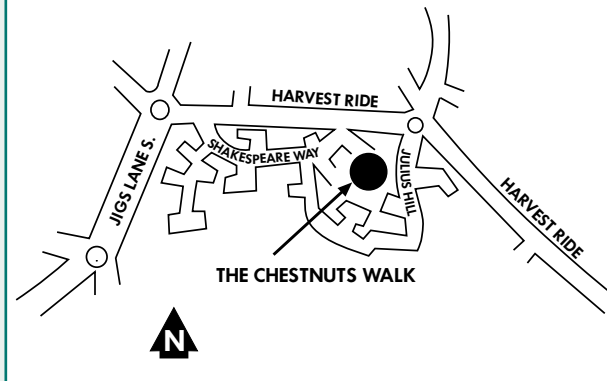
The American Army was housed there and nissen huts were erected over the once-elegant gardens. After the war, the parkland was turned over to a mobile home park. Over two centuries the glory that was Warfield Park had all but disappeared.

The Chestnuts Walk, a remnant of the great Park, once ran from the ice house near the walled garden to the woodland where John Walsh had envisaged hunting. Some distance to the north is the site of Warfield Park mansion.

The Chestnuts Walk is an oasis for wildlife. Grey squirrels feed on the Sweet Chestnuts, birds nest in secluded spots and the grassland is jewelled with the golden Bird's-foot trefoil and pink Musk Mallow.

Many wild species of shrub have also been planted, such as Hazel and Elder, to provide food for the birds and mammals that find shelter here. For most of the year the grass is left uncut to encourage butterflies to breed.

How to find The Chestnuts walk



Other leaflets available on local history, include the histories of Sandhurst, Crowthorne and Easthampstead Conservation Area, The Coming of the Railways, The Ancient Highways, and The Making of Bracknell New Town. Leaflets are also available on local churches and countryside parks and country walks.

For a full list ring 01344 354124 or visit our Website at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Leisure Services
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Time Square Market Street
Bracknell Berkshire RG12 1LR
Tel: 01344 354124

Compiled by Linda Carter

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BRACKNELL FOREST THE CHESTNUTS WALK



**OPEN SPACES, COUNTRYSIDE
& HERITAGE SERVICE**

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HE CHESTNUTS WALK

**Sweet Chestnut flowers**

The ancient Sweet Chestnuts, standing majestically in this quiet residential area of Bracknell, echo earlier times and a long history. The Chestnuts are not all the same age. The older trees are probably about 200 years old, perhaps dating to the time when a grand new mansion (or great house) was built. The youngest tree, for which a commemoration stone was found, dates it to 1871.

The Chestnuts walk did not exist in isolation but was once part of the great estate of Warfield Park. Warfield Park is a very old settlement. It was originally the Manor of Warfield and belonged to the Church. At the Dissolution, when Henry VIII declared himself Head of the Church of England, much ecclesiastical land was surrendered to The Crown, including the Manor of Warfield. Henry's son, Edward VI, then gave it to Sir Henry Neville and it remained with the Neville family until about 1740.

**Portrait of Colonel John Walsh**

the two men remained lifelong friends and served as Members of Parliament. Colonel Walsh decided to have his newly procured farmhouse, called Great Nuthurst, modernised and enlarged. Within a year, before the work was completed, disaster struck. Fire gutted the building and he lost valuable furniture and books. The site thereafter became known as Burnt House, and the grand new mansion of Warfield Park, was built on higher ground, near the centre of the park.

John Walsh envisaged inviting Clive to hunt on the estate, when Clive attended to his business in London. History does not recount if this happened but Walsh installed his mistresses at Warfield Park and would ride on horseback from London to visit them. On one occasion he was accosted by a highwayman, shot him and rode home. Less happily, one of his mistresses drowned herself, in a fit of despair, in one of the larger of the estate's ponds. This became known as Rachael's Pond and a cul-de-sac echoes this name.

In 1764 part of Warfield Manor was purchased by Colonel John Walsh, who had recently returned from India a rich man, or Nabob as they became known. East India Company employees were handsomely rewarded for their services. John Walsh received £56,250,

a huge sum at that time. He had served with Robert Clive, the founder of British India, and

**The new mansion of Warfield Park**

Despite his philandering, John Walsh produced no heirs and the estate passed to his niece.

The Walshes were gradually drawn into court circles and Sir Benn Walsh was created baronet in 1804. In 1868, his son was created Lord Ormathwaite. He became thoroughly disliked by Warfield inhabitants, who believed he was treating his wife badly. Over 400 people turned out to give him a 'tin-canning', banging together anything that would clash or jangle. The story goes that the ghostly rabble can still be heard marching.

In the latter years of the 19th century lavish entertaining characterised Warfield Park and its inhabitants. The cost of such gatherings, often with Royalty in attendance, greatly reduced the family fortune. This life-style came to an abrupt end with World War 1, followed by the death of Lady Clementine in 1921. During the 1920s the estate went into severe decline from which it never recovered. The estate was broken up and sold off. The house and garden was sold to a Dr Desire de Nagy, an eccentric Hungarian recluse. He left when local inhabitants suspected him of spying during World War II.