

Lauderdale House

Grade II* listed 10 May 1954

The original house was thought to have been built by Richard Martin in 1582 with extensive later additions and alterations made, particularly by the next owner, Countess of Home and her daughter Anne, who married the man who gave the house its name: the Earl of Lauderdale. The original structure is timber framed with later rendered brick additions and some of those original timbers are still in evidence.

During the Lauderdale's tenureship in the reign of Charles I the house was a magnet for the *bon ton* where guests could enjoy the beautiful formal gardens and exotic events laid on by their hosts. But as a close ally of the king and committed Royalist, the Earl of Lauderdale was imprisoned during the Commonwealth and only released during the Restoration. His association with the next king, Charles II, was just as close and his hosting of the king's rather dubious entourage was a little more risqué. He was even rumoured to provide accommodation to the king's mistress, Nell Gwynn. Lauderdale's fortunes flourished under Charles II, enough for him to leave Lauderdale House and move into his newly built home, the opulent and maybe a little ostentatious Ham House.

The new proprietors, the Knapp family, were probably responsible for transforming Lauderdale House into how we know it today, with elegant porticos and pebbledash render. Certainly, by the time the next owner, James Yates, bought the freehold, it had gone through major restyling into a Georgian home.

As an academic, theologian, antiquarian and botanist, James Yates' circle of acquaintances was somewhat different from the Lauderdale's. Gone were the roués and the Nell Gwynns in pursuit of pleasure and in came the Darwins and the Bentham's in pursuit of knowledge. The formal gardens were gone and in their place was an arboretum of exotic trees still in evidence today. A glass palmhouse sprang up in the estate to house and nurture Yates' rare plant collection.

After Yates' death in 1871 Sir Sydney, who by now was the primary landowner in the area, took over Lauderdale House. Waterloo himself was living in Fairseat (Channing School) and had no use for it for himself so he gave Lauderdale House rent free to Barts hospital as a convalescent home with 34 beds.

In time, Sir Sydney's focus was more on the City of London (of which he had been Lord Mayor) and his ties with Highgate loosened. Lauderdale House fell into disrepair and Fairseat was leased out. By the late 1870s he decided at first to sell his estate, then, perhaps because of the public green spaces movement of the day decided to donate estate and Lauderdale House to the London County Council. It was during the conversion of the estate into a public park that Lauderdale House was restored and renovated. Sadly in 1963 a fire destroyed much of the original timber framework but it has undergone major restoration work recently which has transformed it into the building you see today.