

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Repository Woods

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Name:	Repository Woods
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Greenwich (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.483905 Longitude: 0.051019023 National Grid Reference: TQ4251178100 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001717 Date first listed: 11-Mar-2011

Details

Military training landscape and pleasure grounds established in the very early years of the C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT Land at Repository Woods may have become available to the Board of Ordnance with a lease of Baywater Estate lands in c1773 but it is not until 1804 that there is definitive evidence of landscaping and development here. The landscape evolution was part of William Congreve the elder's (1743-1814) vision for artillery training at Woolwich. As its Superintendent, he developed the Royal Military Repository as 'a school of methods of mounting and dismounting ordnance', a vision which continued to be realised by William Congreve the younger (1772-1828) who succeeded to his father's position after his death. It was conceived as both a training landscape and picturesque pleasure grounds; the displays of military training to both British and foreign dignitaries as well as the public being an important component of display and confidence-building in the efficient might of the British Army in the early C19.

The history of Repository Woods is closely linked to the history of the Royal Artillery in the late C18 and early C19. Outgrowing its former facilities at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich (largely because of the expansion of manufacturing on that site), there became a need in the late C18 to provide more accommodation and training areas for the newly established (in 1741) military academy, hence a move uphill from the River Thames to Woolwich Common. The impressive new barracks (1775-82 extended in 1802 by James Wyatt, Surveyor General, Grade II*) and the Royal Military Academy (also by Wyatt, 1805-8, Grade II*) are perhaps the most visible components of the new training facility but considerable areas of land were also acquired. The Royal Military Repository at Woolwich was created in 1778 as an academy to teach its pupils the ordnance skills that they would need to be effective in military campaigns, including the manoeuvring of ordnance over difficult terrain. It is not entirely clear from the historical sources when the land now known as Repository Woods came into military hands; probably not before 1775 and some areas were not transferred until the C19. It appears to have been a phased process with the land purchases to complete the Repository taking place in 1809 (Newsome et al, 2009).

William Congreve the elder (1743-1814) had served in Canada as a captain during the Seven Year's War (1756-63) where the difficulty of manoeuvring heavy ordnance in difficult terrain had influenced his aspirations for the development of the

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Woolwich school. The topography of the land that became the Repository Grounds closely resembled the Canadian terrain he had experienced thus providing the ideal location for his Royal Artillery training ground.

In 1773 one Nathaniel Pattison (brother of General James Pattison) 'rendered to the Board a part of his Estate opposite to the south part of Woolwich Warren for the purpose of erecting Barracks'. Two years later, James Pattison, Nathaniel's brother, suggested to the Board of Ordnance that he carry out some experiments using Congreve's artillery exercises in another portion of his brother's lands in Woolwich to the east of the barracks, known as 'The Sandpits', but it is not known whether exercises were attempted there. This might suggest that the area that later became known as the Repository Grounds was not available for exercises until at least 1775.

The 1788 map does not show evidence of any immediate alterations to the landscape of the Repository Grounds and the main focus of activity appears to have remained at the Warren. Map evidence appears to suggest that major landscaping in the Repository Grounds took place between 1806 and 1808 although the Repository Sheds (now demolished) were in place by 1804, the impetus for the construction of which may well have been a fire in the Warren in 1802. Military exercises were certainly taking place here as early as 1808 when E W Brayley in his book 'The beauties of England and Wales' (cited by Newsome et al op cit, 9) writes that 'on the west side of the Barracks is a piece of water where experiments with gunboats, &c., are occasionally made'. Newsome et al, having assessed the historic map evidence equate this 'piece of water' to the main Repository Woods pond. Although the precise location is not specified, there are also notes of experiments with 'traversing platforms' taking place in May 1805 which may relate to Repository Woods. Records of exercises taking place here between 1820 and the 1840s are more detailed and enable us to associate particular features with activities. For example, the surviving 'Fieldwork near the Summerhouse Pond', also shown on contemporary plans, was used for bridge building and assaults on it as well as for hand-grenade practice (Newsome op cit, 10). Mid-C19 photographs of exercises taking place at the Repository are also helpful in understanding both the range of activity and the nature of the man-made landscape: they show the exercises step-by-step, rather like a manual, and therefore enhance our appreciation of the role the landscape played.

Major landscaping took place between 1806 and 1808 in order to create water bodies and topography suited to training needs. The main pond had been constructed by 1808 as had two smaller ponds to the south (now visible as earthworks) with the main pond enlarged in 1815. By 1827 the two subsidiary ponds which survive today, the Summerhouse Pond and Lower Pond, had been built. The 1808 and 1815 maps show other significant developments such as the construction of a network of paths and tracks around the grounds and features that represent batteries or other artillery training structures, such as earth and wood casemates (fortified gun emplacements) shown on later photographs. The boundary of Repository Woods was largely laid out by 1811. The construction of the northern wall was discussed and recorded in the Board of Ordnance papers from the period 1807-9 (TNA WO 55/756) and the boundary of the whole site is shown on a plan of 1811 (TNA MPH 1/32/2). The north wall is of multi-coloured stock-brick and is listed at Grade II. The only alteration to this northern boundary was in the 1950s when a land-parcel in the extreme north-west part of the site was taken for housing. The eastern boundary of the Repository Woods bisects an early C19 linear training earthwork which includes spurs and bastions (projecting structures to aid defence) and embrasures (openings in the line to allow the firing of artillery) to enable training in the Repository exercises: the manoeuvring of heavy ordnance for the Royal Artillery. It therefore appears that very early in the C19, a concerted period of landscaping established the Repository largely in the form that it takes today, although it was added to and enhanced over the remaining decades of the C19. In 1838 the Saturday Magazine described Repository Woods as being 'beautifully diversified and unequal in its surface, and interspersed with several pieces of water, this condition of the ground affords excellent practice to the men in dragging the guns up steep acclivities, or lowering them down rapid descents, turning pontoon bridges to transport them over water and imitating all the operations of actual war' (Newsome op cit, 18).

As well as its military training function, Repository Woods was also laid out with formal planting and paths and functioned from an early date as a publicly accessible pleasure ground and showcase for the modern military. There are many contemporary accounts of this as well as illustrations indicating that the land was used for grazing and informal leisure as well as a place to view exercises in a more formal manner. The re-erection of the Rotunda here in the early C19 can be seen as an enhancement of a pre-existing picturesque landscape. The dismantled materials of the Rotunda (originally a John Nash designed marquee

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erected in the garden of Carlton House, London, for a ball given in honour of the Duke of Wellington by the Prince Regent in July 1814; Grade II*) had arrived at the Repository by 7 December 1818. This is demonstrated by the fact that on this date Sir William Congreve the younger wrote to R H Crewe to ask the Board of Ordnance to instruct the Commanding Engineer - Lieutenant-Colonel John J Jones - 'to make the necessary arrangements for its erection on the brow of the Hill at the east boundary of the Repository Grounds, that spot being the most convenient as well as the most picturesque situation for it'. He also requested the construction of the linear training earthwork at this time.

It was only in the early C20 that public access to the site was restricted. Prior to this, the opportunity to showcase the skills of the modern army to the C19 public was fully exploited. In the early C19 the Royal Military Repository provided the perfect demonstration of Britain's growing military strength and prowess. Woolwich was already becoming part of a long tradition of promoting military activities and facilities to members of visiting royal families. In June 1814 the Prince Regent invited the Allied Sovereigns to the Repository Grounds highlighting the importance of the landscape and its military training use. Regular tours of the area became the norm for both British and foreign dignitaries.

The use of Repository Woods probably declined somewhat in the late C19 with the establishment of the School of Gunnery at Shoeburyness, Essex in 1859 and the gradual development of training facilities there, although the records are clear that Repository Woods did continue to perform its military training function. In the C20 to the present (2010) military training continues but in private, rather than in public view.

DESCRIPTION LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Repository Woods are located in Woolwich in the London Borough of Greenwich. They are situated in the west of Woolwich parish on its boundary with Charlton parish (a parish boundary marker is located within the southern part of the site) to the west of Woolwich Barracks and to the north of Woolwich Common. The site boundaries are marked by both fence lines and brick walls. The north, west and east boundaries are marked by a boundary wall; that stretch of wall to the north is in stock brick and is Grade II listed. The historic boundary has been interrupted at its north-west corner given the intrusion of 1950s housing at this location. In the north-east corner, north of the Dell Gate, there is a modern boundary fence but on a historic line. To the south of the Dell Gate the boundary is a stock brick wall topped with railings. Some of the wall appears to be a C20 stock brick rebuild but it also incorporates some remains of the early C19 linear training earthwork's brick revetment wall. The south and south-eastern boundaries are less visible, largely because of dense undergrowth in these areas, but follow a security fence line to the west and south-west of the Rotunda.

To the immediate north and west of the site is housing, to the south Charlton cemetery and to the east and south-east lie the Rotunda and Napier Line army depot respectively.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Woods are entered at their north-east corner through the Dell Gate. This is a modern gate through a modern security fence.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING There is no principal building within the Repository Woods although the Grade II* listed Rotunda (originally a John Nash designed marquee erected in the garden of Carlton House, London, for a ball given in honour of the Duke of Wellington by the Prince Regent in July 1814 and moved to the Repository by December 1818) is a prominent and related building immediately outside the Repository Woods landscape but intervisible with it.

ANCILLARY BUILDINGS There are few buildings within Repository Woods although some ruined remains and building platforms are described by Newsome et al (2009). There are two extant buildings in the centre of the site:

The Respirator Training Room is a stock brick rectangular building with a slate pavilion roof with sprocketed eaves. There is an enclosing verandah supported on wooden posts, which has been part-infilled in red brick on the north, east and south sides. It is presumed that this modification was to enable its respirator training function as its original form and prominent location is more suggestive of a garden building. The construction date is not known but it was built at some time between 1916 and 1945.

The Rifle Range was also constructed at some time between 1916 and 1945 and comprises a pentagonal fenced area with a single storey flat-roofed rectangular building in its south-east corner. This is of stock brick with a concrete roof and of three bays, one of which has been subsequently enclosed to form a small room. There is also a low brick wall immediately north of the building.

MILITARY TRAINING LANDSCAPE AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The site is undulating deciduous woodland of approximately 7ha with narrow valleys, the land falling from south to north (from 45m to 25m above Ordnance Datum). A

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stream has been manipulated to feed the man-made lakes and ponds on site, and enters Repository Woods from the south. The underlying geology is both Blackheath Pebble Beds and Woolwich Beds

The landscape is bisected by a string of water features linked by the diverted stream, the distinct shapes of which probably reflect how these different water bodies were used. The most prominent is the large man-made lake or pond in the centre north of the site which contains a circular man-made island as well as substantial training earthworks at its northern end. This pond was constructed by 1808 and later enlarged. Two further extant ponds to the south were constructed by the 1830s: the central pond of the group is known as 'Summerhouse Pond' after a now demolished summerhouse on its north bank, the third (south) pond is called 'Lower Pond'. Earthwork remains of further ponds are also evident to the south and north of this string of water features. There are a series of tracks and pathways around the landscape, deliberately laid out in the first half of the C19 and some of which are terraced. Further terraces, particularly along the northern and western boundaries, are remnants of a formal planting scheme of lines of trees evident on maps between 1839 and 1860. Surviving specimens indicate that these were horse chestnuts. Other evidence of deliberately formal planting can be seen in the line of oaks along the eastern edge of the stream; also concentrations of oak, horse and sweet chestnut. Planting was both formal and informal as the historic maps and surviving trees attest. There are also features associated with pleasure ground use including the ponds but also a pair of mid-C19 croquet lawns. The respirator training room building probably also started life as an early C20 garden building as it has clearly been modified for its current use.

Military features are numerous and include: the man-made ponds and practice earthworks of various dates (such as slit trenches which are found in three groups in the north-east, south and west of the site); training earthworks (such as the large earthwork west of Summerhouse Pond, remains of batteries to the south-east of the respirator training building and the earthwork to the north of the large pond which has been disturbed and partially covered by dumping); building remains (possibly for dispersed storage in the east of the site); an assault course (along the eastern boundary); an early-mid C20 rifle range and early C20 respirator training room (centre south) and an underground trench shelter (in the centre of the site). Along the eastern boundary of the site is an early C19 linear training earthwork which has been recognised for its significance by its scheduled monument status: SM 36206). It continues beyond the eastern and southern boundaries of Repository Woods but at its northern extent the rear (west) of the linear fortification lies within Repository Woods and can be identified as an earthwork.

In the extreme south of the site is a boundary stone marking Charlton Parish boundary and dated 1827; also a dressed stone circular structure may relate to C19 site drainage. There is also evidence of allotment gardens here and a piggery is recorded in the late C19.

The landscape and military training features demonstrate a continuity of use and development from the very early C19 to the early C21.

LAND BEYOND THE SITE BOUNDARY RELEVANT TO THE HISTORIC INTEREST OF THE SITE The aforementioned Grade II* Rotunda is located in a prominent position to the immediate east of Repository Woods on a site deliberately chosen for its convenience and picturesque qualities.

The aforementioned C19 linear training earthwork (Scheduled Monument 36206) is part within and partly outside the boundary of Repository Woods.

SOURCES S Newsome, J Millward & W Cocroft, Repository Woods, Woolwich, Greater London: An Archaeological Survey of the Royal Military Repository Training Grounds (2009), English Heritage Research Department Report Series no. 14-2009 E Cole, S Skedd, J Clarke & S Newsome, The Woolwich Rotunda, Former Royal Artillery Museum, Woolwich Common, London Borough of Greenwich (2009), English Heritage Research Department Report

REASON FOR DESIGNATION Repository Woods is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Function: the landscape was designed to fulfil both a military training and pleasure ground function. It is also the earliest known purpose-built military training landscape nationally if not in Western Europe; * Survival: numerous features of the early C19 survive which evoke both its training and pleasure ground functions; * Military displays: a landscape which was a regular fixture on tours for British and foreign dignitaries allowing the public display of the modern, efficient British army in training; * Group

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value: the landscape has group value with other heritage assets such as the Grade II* Rotunda by John Nash (1814 but relocated to Woolwich in 1818) and the Woolwich Lines Training Fortification (Scheduled Monument).

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.