

The Belvedere Estate

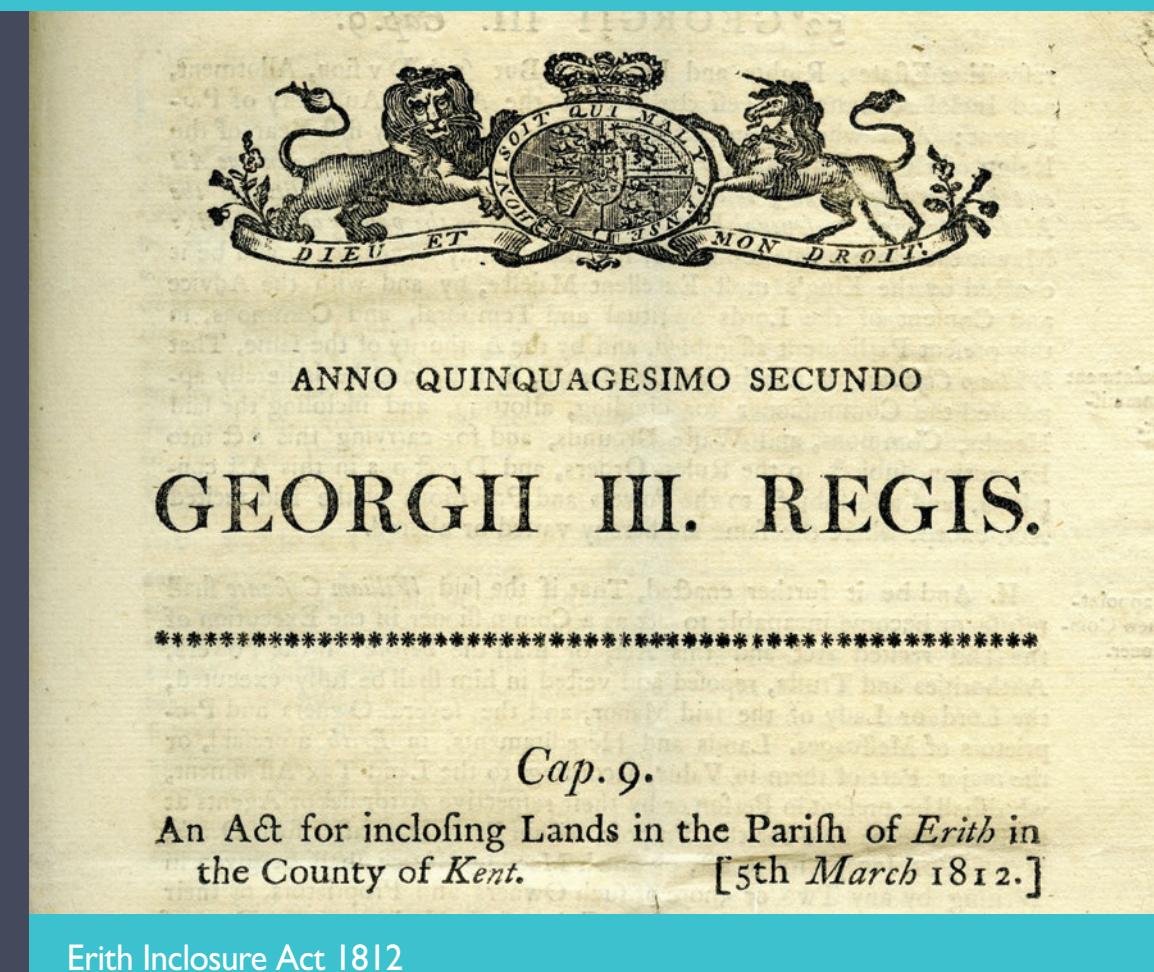


Belvedere House 1777

Belvedere takes its name from ‘Belvedere House’ built by Sir Sampson Gideon, later Lord Eardley, in 1765. Lord Eardley, engaged James ‘Athenian’ Stuart, a fashionable architect, to rebuild an existing house on the site to a much bigger scale. This new country house took the name ‘Belvedere House’, which from its elevated position, enjoyed extensive views over the River Thames – in Italian ‘Belvedere’ means ‘beautiful view’. Later in 1864 Sir Culling Eardley broke the Belvedere estate up and the house was sold to the Shipwrecked Mariners’ Society as a seamen’s home. The 18th century house was finally pulled down in 1959.



Belvedere Lake 1911



Erith Inclosure Act 1812



View of Erith and the River Thames 1795

Common Land

Lord Eardley promoted a bill in Parliament to enclose the Commons of Erith. As a result he obtained 32 acres of land on Lessness Heath when the Act came into effect in 1815. Some 9 acres were retained and formed part of the common lands of Erith to be used for grazing animals.

A Park for the People of Belvedere

In 1888 *The Erith, Belvedere and Abbey Wood Times* noted that activities on Lessness Heath had got out of control and were a “nuisance” with the “reoccurring there of musical roundabouts, shooting galleries and such like gipsy amusements being allowed to settle on the Heath to the annoyance of residents near it.” The Erith Local Board demanded that something must be done.

In 1896 Erith Urban District Council bought the remaining 9 acres of common land for £5 to use as a recreation ground. Initially the north side of the park opposite the Eardley Arms was kept as wilderness.

Ornamental Lake

An ornamental lake was dug around 1910 in the centre of the wilderness. When lidos became fashionable in the years after the First World War this lake was adapted to become a paddling pool.



Belvedere Paddling Pond 1979



Children enjoying paddling in the lake 1930s

Amenities

In 1902 public toilets were built opposite the Eardley Arms and a drinking fountain, built by a bequest of Miss Eileen Rearden outside All Saints Church was moved to the site sometime before 1931.



Eardley Arms, Upper Belvedere. c1903



Map of Recreation Ground 1931

Belvedere Beach

In 2005 the Recreation Ground was renovated and reopened as Belvedere Splash Park. However, due to environmental concerns the Splash Park was closed in 2014. In 2016 plans were drawn up to create a ‘beach playground.’ Opened in 2017 the ‘beach playground’ includes sensory and educational play areas, and reflecting the park’s former aquatic features, there is also an interactive water play area. The new Belvedere Beach was supported by funding from the Cory Environmental Trust in Britain.