

to Berkshire County Council for £5,800. In 1970 it housed Wokingham Branch Library. In 1994 John Lewis Partnership acquired land, including the garden of Montague House, to build the Waitrose superstore. Many of the old walls around the garden have been retained, including the remains of the elevated brick terrace at the north eastern end, from which the original garden could be enjoyed and splendid views of the countryside beyond could be seen.

The tree was included in a Tree Preservation Order in 2005 by Wokingham District Council officers who recognised its significance as a local landmark. As it grows in an area of high public use, it will require specialist management to safeguard its future. John Lewis Partnership has confirmed its intention to agree with Borough Council officers how this can be safely and effectively carried out through its Property Department. The firm has a serious, long-standing commitment to the environment and has promised to take every care with this very special tree.

Although the oriental plane is not as ancient as people thought, and certainly not as old as some oaks nearby in Milton Drive and Shinfield Park, it is still a most significant and well-loved feature of Wokingham's townscape. Oriental planes can grow to be the largest native broadleaf tree in Western Asia and Southern Europe, some having trunks with a girth exceeding 12 metres. We do not know how large the Montague House oriental plane will grow in the years to come, but future generations will watch the tree's growth with interest. It is an important part of Wokingham's heritage. A plaque naming the tree was unveiled on September 16th 2008 by the Wokingham Borough Mayor, Mrs Pauline Helliar-Symons.

These notes were prepared in 2008 with the help of Wokingham Local History Society and Wokingham Borough Council. Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association was established in 2007 to increase public awareness of the importance of veteran and other significant trees in the district and to ensure they are identified, protected and properly managed. For more information see:-

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Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association

Montague House Oriental Plane

Platanus orientalis



Waitrose Car Park, Wokingham, Berkshire

SU 81110 68720 Girth 6m (diameter 1.9m)

One of the most well-known trees in Wokingham town is the majestic oriental plane, *Platanus orientalis*, growing behind Montague House, an elegant Georgian property fronting Broad Street. When Waitrose opened its new establishment in 1995, this beautiful tree, with its broad trunk and wide-spreading limbs, came into full public view from the store's car park. People admired it and became concerned for its welfare.

Rumour spread it was 800 years old, but local historian, Trevor Ottlewski, pointed to a 1739 engraving of Montague House showing a formally laid out walled garden but no tree in this position. He thought the tree was no more than 200–250 years old, a view supported by Wokingham Borough Arboriculturalist,



Jonathon Matthews. He reported that although oriental planes were introduced into this country in the 16th century from Southern Europe and the Middle East, they were more commonly planted from around the early to mid 18th century. The Montague House oriental plane is very similar to a specimen in Kew Gardens, planted in 1762.

Montague House probably takes its name from the family of Henry Montague who left his house and garden 'in the high or Broad Street of the towne of Oakingham' to his son Ephraime in the late 1690s. (Imogene Dorey, Montague House, Wokingham Historian 4 1991) The

house had a number of occupiers during the 18th century including, in the 1790s, a 'Boarding School for Young Ladies'. It was substantially rebuilt in the 19th century and became the home of John Roberts and his family. In the late 1880s it was sold to Mr Isaiah Gadd, a local businessman, who let it out to various tenants including, in 1919, Grosvenor House School for Girls.



In 1929, the last year of the Grosvenor School's life at Montague House, before it moved to the White House School, Finchampstead Road, the editor of the school magazine wrote;

"As the memories come crowding up – comes always the picture of the old house and garden which will not be Grosvenor School any more. The younger girls, who are to carry on to the new Grosvenor the spirit which has made the old school so dear to us, will no longer see the familiar sights of the lilac tree in full bloom, the plane tree, giant of its race, and the line of pines looming against the sky".

In 1930 Montague House was bought by Mr Basil Readman, a master at Wellington College. On his death in 1951 it was sold