

Hardwick House and its estate

Updated June 2025

Hardwick House is believed by many to be the inspiration for Toad Hall in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. Toad himself is thought to be modelled on the author's friend Sir Charles Day Rose, who lived there from 1870, 'drove furiously' and whose descendants own the estate today.



There is detailed information on all aspects of the estate, including its history and its many businesses, on the [estate website](#).

Many of the enterprises and facilities on the 900 acre estate, which converted to organic agriculture in 1975, are mentioned below. The Hardwick Estate's vision is *"to support a thriving and resilient rural community which is in balance with nature, and provides quality produce and services for local needs, as well as preserving and promoting artisan crafts."*

Enterprises at Path Hill Farm

The area of Path Hill Farm, shown on the map at the foot of this article, is home to several companies following the principles of organic farming and sustainable living:

[Path Hill Farm](#) itself comprises arable and pasture land at Goring Heath as well as plots of chalk grassland on the Chiltern slopes and meadows in the Thames valley, on which pasture-fed cattle are reared.

(**Oxford Renewables**, at The Old Dairy, which installed and maintained sustainable energy systems, closed in 2024.)

[Path Hill Outdoors](#) offers educational programmes for children in an outdoor environment.

[Hempen](#) is a pioneering organic hemp cooperative, started in 2015, producing hemp and cannabidiol products.

Enterprises elsewhere

[Tolhurst Organic](#) is a 19 acre organic vegetable farm, delivering vegetable and fruit boxes locally every week, and selling produce at Lin's Veg Shed, near the entrance gate.

(**Hardwick Stud** (*right*) has for many years been an equestrian centre providing livery and schooling services, with 12 hectares of paddocks and grazing. This is due to close by 1st October 2025. No more horses are being taken on.)



[Greenbroom Growers Cooperative](#) is a fossil-fuel-free veg growing enterprise at Crays Pond.

[The Sticksmith](#), Dave Jackson, is a coppicer and green woodworker who creates woven chairs, fences and garden ornaments at Holmes Oak Barns in Collins End.

[The Outside Dyers](#) produce naturally died woollen items and give natural dying demonstrations at historic events.

Miscellaneous

Real Tennis

The indoor sport of Real Tennis has been played at Hardwick House since the time of Sir Charles Rose, who built no fewer than three courts. His first construction, in 1896, is still visible as the roofless building beside the Hardwick drive. He replaced it in 1907 with a state-of-the-art design, nearer the house, which remains in active use today ([email contact](#)). He also built a court at Suffolk House, Newmarket, when he was Member of Parliament there. The [website of the Newmarket club](#) has much to say about the indefatigable Sir Charles.



Art

In the 1890s, the celebrated painter Edward Burne-Jones drew inspiration from his muse May Gaskell, who lived at Hardwick House. In recent years the art history connection with the house has been rekindled by the residence of an art dealer/consultant.

Bear pit?

In the woods above the Hardwick Stud there is a puzzling hollow in the chalk hillside, sometimes referred to as the 'bear pit' or 'ice house'. Local historian Vicky Jordan teases out the facts in [this article](#).

Forestry

The 430 acres of estate woodlands are sustainably managed and have received several Royal Forestry Society awards. In recent years there has been extensive replanting in response to ash dieback disease. The new forest strategy is explained in an [information panel](#).

Walks

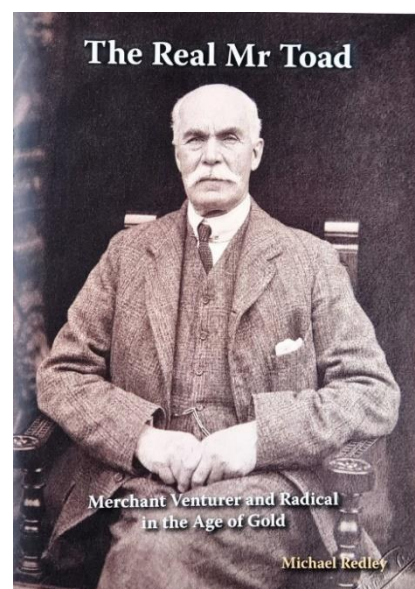
The woodlands are criss-crossed by public footpaths, bridleways and, thanks to the generosity of the estate, many permissive paths. Detailed routes for walkers, with maps, are available from [Eric's Walks](#) on this website.

Sadhama Rewild Retreats

Holistic wellbeing programmes are held at Hardwick from time to time, providing a connection with nature, community and self. See [website](#).

Book: *The Real Mr Toad*

A mini biography of Sir Charles Day Rose, *The Real Mr Toad: Merchant Adventurer and Radical in the Age of Gold*, by Michael Redley, 2016, can be bought from the [Estate Office](#) for £7, plus postage if applicable.



The future of the Hardwick estate

Miriam Rose, who manages the Hardwick estate together with her father Sir Julian Rose and her brother Lawrence, provided a glimpse of its future in an article that appeared in the Autumn 2022 edition of the Whitchurch Bulletin:

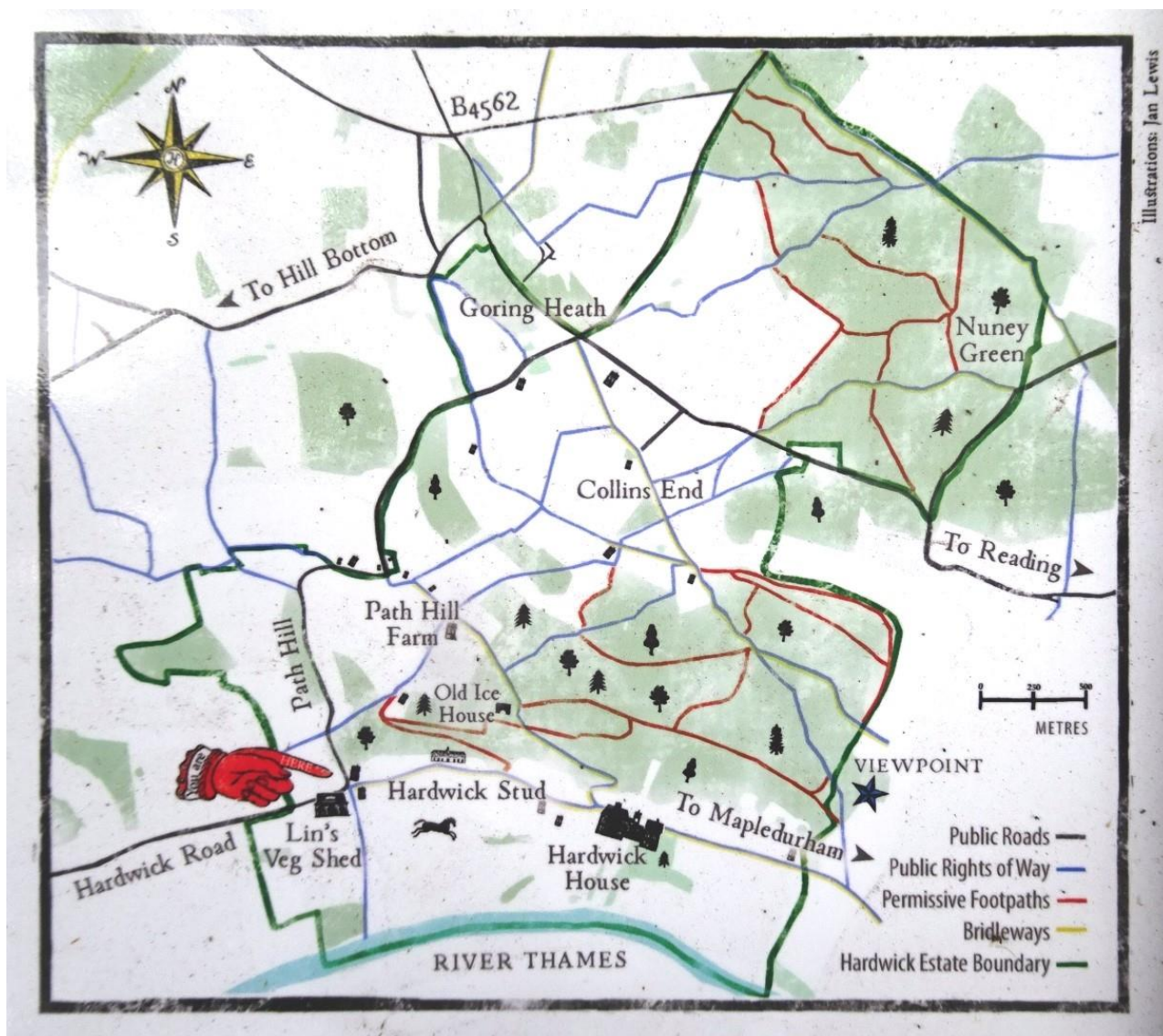
“As ever there has been much activity on Hardwick since the last bulletin. The Squash and Pumpkin festival at Tolhurst Organics on 2nd October was a great success again, attracting around 1000 people who enjoyed the bar, live music, kids workshops, wonderful organic food and crafts, as well as loads of beautiful squashes in a stunning setting.

The following weekend a whole community meeting was held, as part of the Estate's transition to a community led charity, to begin developing an energy strategy for the Estate. This includes looking at best practice energy efficiency options for our old cottages and business units, as well as renewable micro-generation options on buildings, or larger scale community energy generation options (such as a community wind turbine or solar farm). This issue affects all of us in terms of increasing energy prices from the national grid, as well as the imperatives of the climate emergency. A working group was formed from community members, some of whom had a wealth of knowledge in the area, to take forward research and recommendations. We would be happy to share our findings with the local community where they could be applicable and relevant.

Our work developing a vision for the Estate over the last few years made it very clear that addressing the food security crisis by producing quality organic food and other products, was at the core of Hardwick's ethos. This crisis was illustrated during the pandemic when supermarket shelves were empty and the Tolhurst Organic veg shed had queues of customers, and even had to ration produce! As a result, we are now in the slow process of transitioning our extensive areas of horse grazing over to agriculture over the coming years. The fields currently used as a livery business at Hardwick Stud are the best quality for agriculture on the Estate, and the only soil similar enough to the walled garden for more horticulture or soft fruit production. Therefore, the difficult decision has been made to convert this area, after two years notice, back into a farm growing produce for local needs. The horses and all those who work with them will be very much missed but we hope that the wider community will also appreciate the need for this change.”

Estate map

A map of the Hardwick estate, on display at the entrance gate, is shown below.



Richard Wingfield, Whitchurch Web News Editor, June 2025