

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



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Rignalls

MARCH 2016



Bucks
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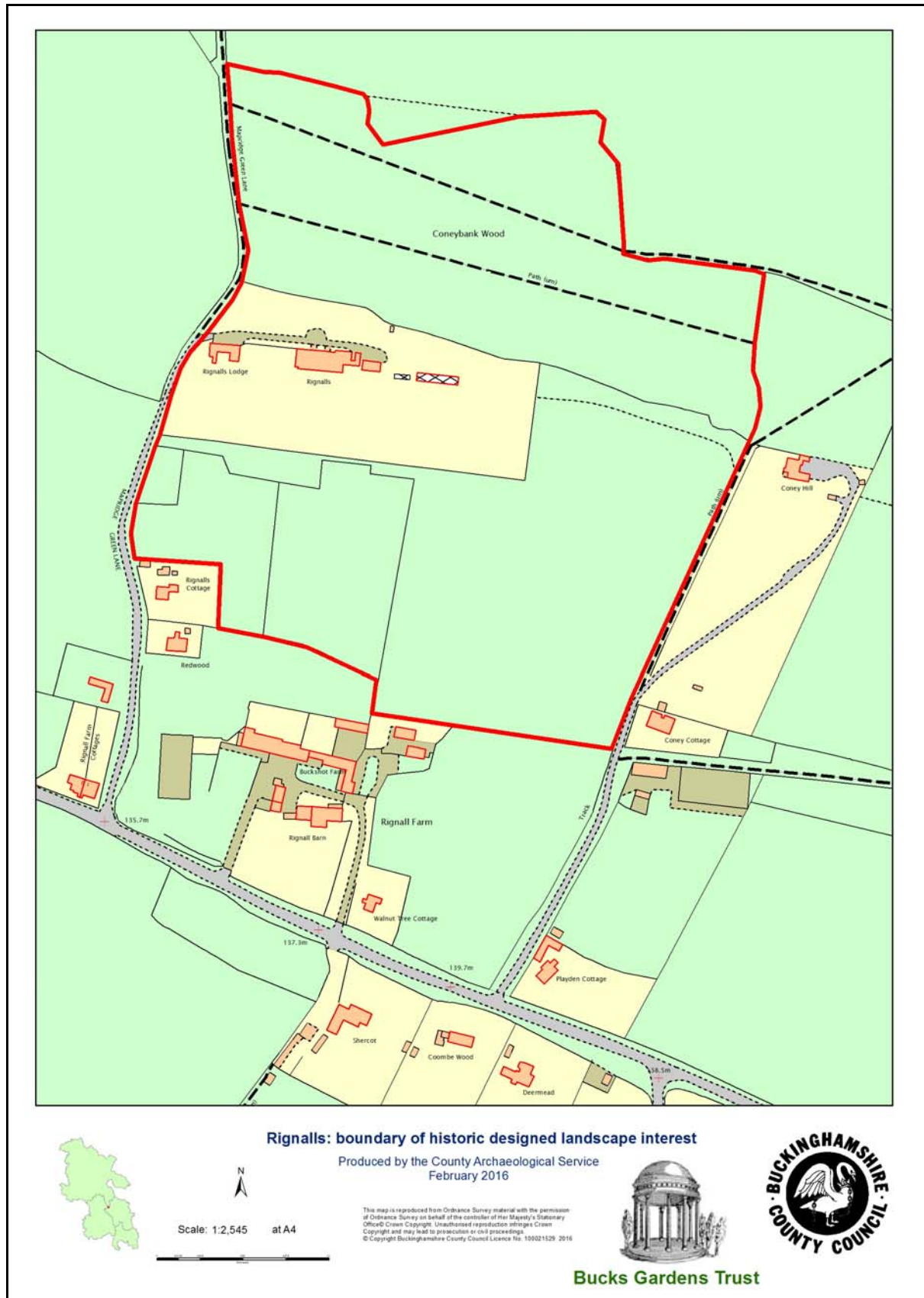
The Finnis Scott
Foundation

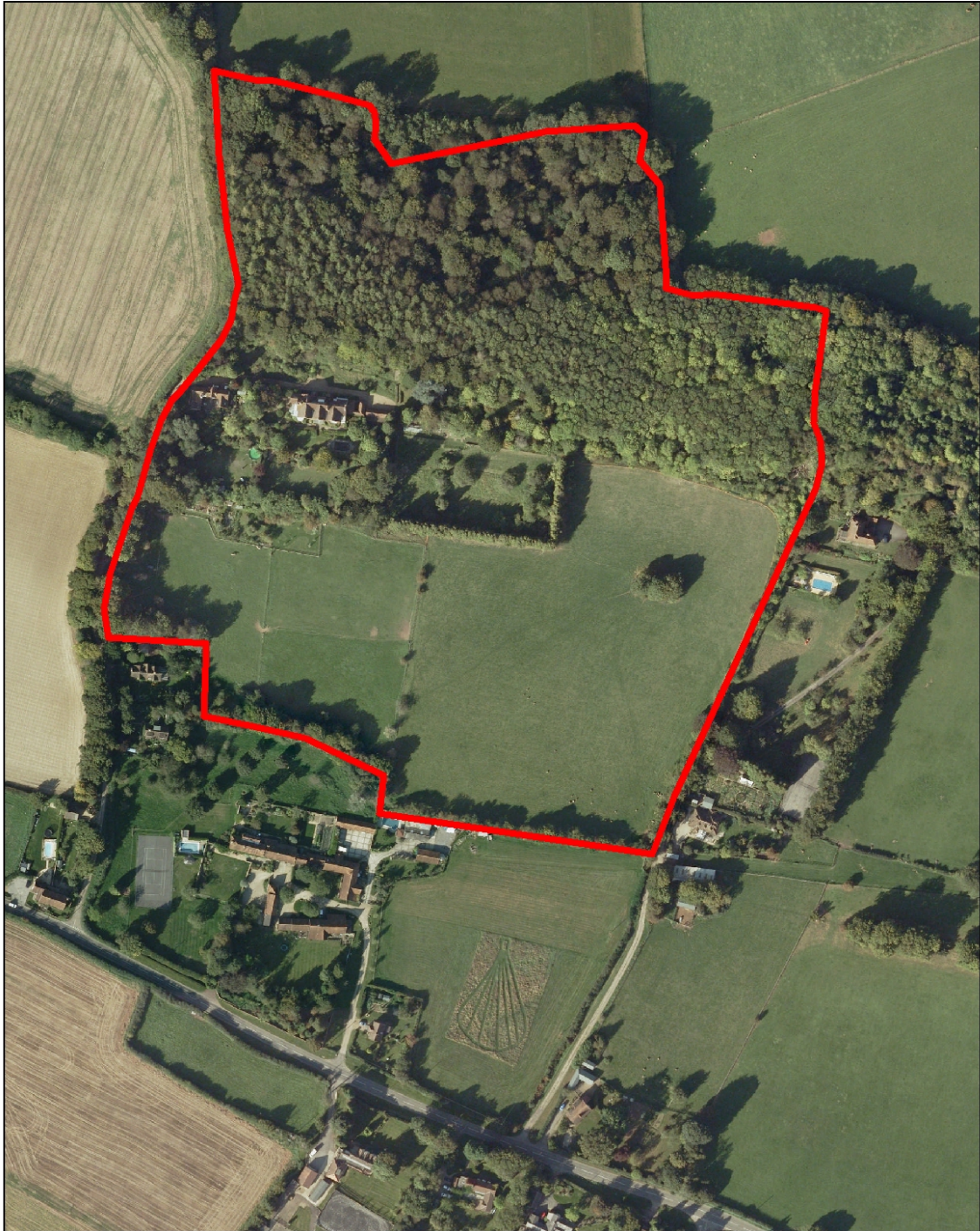


THE
GARDENS
TRUST

The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust

HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY





Scale: 1:2,548 at A4



Rignalls: 2008 aerial photograph

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Produced by the County Archaeological Service
February 2016



Bucks Gardens Trust



INTRODUCTION

Background to the Project

This site dossier has been prepared as part of The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust (BGT) Research and Recording Project, begun in 2014. This site is one of several hundred designed landscapes county-wide identified by Bucks County Council (BCC) in 1998 (including Milton Keynes District) as potentially retaining evidence of historic interest, as part of the Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review project carried out for English Heritage (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not conclusive and further parks and gardens may be identified as research continues or further information comes to light.

Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a dossier is prepared by volunteers trained on behalf of BGT by experts in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage on its Register Upgrade Project.

Each dossier includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.
- A map showing principle views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was supported by The Gardens Trust (formerly the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society) and funded by BGT with significant grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the Finnis Scott Foundation. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

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|------------------|-----------------|--|
| COUNTY: | BUCKINGHAMSHIRE | RIGNALLS, GREAT MISSENDEN BCC HER 1256801000 |
| DISTRICT: | CHILTERN | |
| PARISH: | GREAT MISSENDEN | |
| OS REF: | SP 881 023 | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A compact, complex Arts and Crafts garden for a smaller country house built to designs by Adams and Holden. Planting advice by Gertrude Jekyll is recorded in an extensive series of plans, but it is unclear to what extent these were executed. The layout includes formal terraced lawns and garden compartments, designed to accommodate the steep Chiltern slope, with a complex flight of stone steps and landings, and a brick and timber pergola leading to a summer house. The layout and garden structures largely survive but it is unclear whether any of the Jekyll planting survives.

Archaeological interest

The identified archaeology is of local significance as far as it is understood. Archaeological potential relates to the former agricultural use of the site and the Chiltern woodland in the northern section, as well as lost features relating to the early C20 layout, particularly the former stable yard, stable, coach house and Racquet court west between the lodge and house, and lost garden paths, structures and other features in the former kitchen garden.

Architectural interest

A largely complete ensemble of buildings for an early C20 smaller country house. It was designed in a single phase with the garden layout including walls, a pergola and summer house by notable architects Adams and Holden, with associated cottages, stable, and coach house.

Artistic interest

A complex Arts and Crafts style garden in a relatively compact area forming the setting for a smaller country house. The Adams and Holden layout responds to the steep valley slope with a series of formal terraced garden compartments below the house, contrasting with informal embanked lawns and woodland above the house, and the rural Chiltern setting. A number of planting plans were produced by Gertrude Jekyll, one of the most prolific and influential early C20 garden designers, but it is unclear to what extent they were executed or to what extent the early planting survives.

Historic interest

The site has been associated with various notable owners and occupiers including the physician Sir Felix Semon for whom it was developed, and a member of the free French Government in Exile in World War II, Alfred Boucher. The historic interest is considerably increased by the survival of at least 27 plans documenting the early development of the garden, 1909-10, with planting plans by Gertrude Jekyll as well as letters between the architects and Jekyll.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Rignalls was built on farm land formerly part of C18 Rignalls Farm (1812 OSD, 1877 OS & 1900 OS). The 1910 Valuation Map shows a plan of the land (the house not yet built) and records that the northern section of Coney Wood was owned by Arthur L. Liberty (CBS DVD 139). The land was valued at £1,820 for 20 acres 2 rods & 6 perch (8.2 ha.) and Plot 254 pasture or grazing land on the south side of Rignall Road of 15 acres valued at £1,075.

A new house and garden called Rignall Wood (later called Rignalls) was commissioned by Sir Felix Semon (1849-1921), a distinguished physician whose patients included the Kaiser, Queen Victoria and her son Edward VII. Semon commissioned architects Charles Holden & H. Percy Adams for the house and layout of the garden and the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll was asked to provide planting plans. Plans of 1909 show proposals for a house with a lodge, stables, coach house and racquet court; 27 plans survive, including Gertrude Jekyll's designs for the gardens and woodland (UC Berkeley, Environmental Design Archives, copies at Historic England Archive, Jekyll Microfilm). The architects had previously worked with Gertrude Jekyll on The King's Sanatorium, a private TB hospital in Midhurst, Sussex, opened in 1906 by King Edward VII. The structure of the May 1909 plan appears to survive largely intact.

The Semon family sold the estate in 1926. The house was owned by James Mackenzie (1928-35) then Sir Edgar Sanders Christian (1936?-1942) author of a textbook *The Criminal Justice Act in 1914* and a Director of the Brewers Society. Sale particulars illustrate the well-kept garden in 1936, including the terrace, rose garden with sundial, pergola, tennis court and lodge. 20 Acres was for sale, including a chauffeur's cottage and garage, gardener's cottage and 'beautiful pleasure grounds' which were 'most tastefully laid out having been designed by Miss Gertrude Jekyll the eminent landscape garden designer.' They contained 'a choice collection of flowering shrubs and specimen trees.' A detailed description of the garden features was provided.

During World War II the house came into the ownership of a member of the free French Government in Exile, Alfred Boucher, formerly head of the French Chamber of Commerce (Electoral rolls R/E 1456 DD Great Missenden CBS. Chiswick Auction 1966- Lot 337 Personal letters and memorabilia relating to Charles de Gaulle sold by A.A Boucher and family). It is said that General Charles de Gaulle was a regular visitor during WWII (2015 Sales particulars).

After World War II the house was converted into two units, East and West Rignalls (Howard, Son & Gooch Sales particulars). In 1947 (AP Run 477 21.08.019) the layout of the gardens with Coneybank Wood to the north appeared broadly similar. In 1966 the property was offered once more as a whole (Sales catalogue). West Rignalls grounds were said to "have an overall width of some 140 feet on the north boundary and some 90 feet on the rear with an overall depth of some 300 feet. The Gardens have been terraced and are sheltered on the north by the Coneybank Wood which is protected woodland and the ground falls gently to the south in terraces" East Rignalls grounds, "to the house have an average of some 95 feet and an overall depth of about 280 feet. Also adjoining is a kitchen garden with extensive greenhouses which is rectangular in shape and has a width of some 245 feet and an overall depth of about 294 feet.'

The site remains in divided private ownership.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

The 10 ha site is set in an elevated position in the Hampden Valley on a south-facing slope of the Chiltern Hills amidst farm land, 1 mile west of Great Missenden, and 4 miles east of Chequers, on the Rignall Road.

The west side of the property is bounded by mature trees alongside Mapridge Green Lane and beyond this agricultural land. The northern boundary is along the brow of the hill through mixed woodland, beyond which is pasture land. To the east, a footpath bounds the perimeter of the property against agricultural land. The southern edge is bounded by Rignall Farm paddocks and barns and beyond this Rignall Road. Long views extend south across the rural valley beyond Rignalls Farm, and Rignall Road in the valley bottom, and south-west along the valley.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance is c.300m north of Rignall Road off Mapridge Green Lane to the north of Rignalls Lodge. There are views west and south-west across the valley from the gateway which is marked by an oak post c.1.5m high with chamfered corners and rounded top. The Lodge is contemporary with the house. A similar post marks the entrance into the Lodge garden.

From the gateway the gravelled drive leads 70m east below a walled embankment to the north, to reach the main entrance on the north side of the house. The entrance front of the house is enclosed by a semi-circular forecourt with a flight of 15 stone steps between 0.7mtr high capped stone pillars leading north up the bank through shrubs to a grassy lawn (Hamptons sale particulars 2015), which was initially intended as an orchard by Gertrude Jekyll in her plans. From here the drive continues a short way east to the service are, garages and kitchen garden. The forecourt was shown in two different forms on the architects drawing. (March 1909, and Revised Garden plan, May 1909).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Rignalls (formally Rignall Wood, listed grade II) stands part way up the valley side between Coney Bank Wood to the North and fields to the South. The entrance front is to the north, with garden fronts to the south and west and services and servants quarters attached to the east.

The house is in Arts and Crafts style designed by Charles Holden of Adams and Holden in 1909 (UC Berkley, Environmental Design Archives). It has rendered elevations, and distinctive timber clad gables facing south. It is of two stories with attics and prominent brick chimneys. The central main hall, which is two storeys high, leads out on the south front to the garden terrace. On the west front the conservatory garden room leads to the sunken garden and thence to the rest of the garden. When offered for sale in 1966 the house was divided into an east and west wing, however since then it has been reunited. (Sale Particulars CBS L396:12)

West of the house, adjacent to the south of the main gateway, is Rignalls Lodge, built at the same time and in the same style as Rignalls, as staff accommodation, with a stable yard, stable and coach house adjacent. The lodge is two storey, gabled and rendered to the north and east, and tile hung on the western side.

Holden (1875 – 1960) initially designed buildings in the Arts and Crafts style, but later in his career simplified his designs and adopted a 'Modernist' style, in which he designed many notable London tube stations and public buildings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The garden is divided into several formal compartments to the south and west of the house, with informal lawns and woodland to the north. The main reception rooms, hall and bedrooms face south overlooking the formal gardens, enjoying views across the valley, agricultural land and to the far ridge of the Hampden valley. Above the forecourt north of the house the garden is banked with shrubs and central stone steps lead to an informal lawn rising to the north, with a footpath winding east to a small thatched wooden building. Beyond to the north the lawn is framed by Coney Wood. This area leading up to the Wood was initially intended by Miss Jekyll as orchard (plan, May 1909).

From the hall 2 central doors lead south to the stone-paved upper terrace running west to east, edged with shrubs. At the east end the hedge-flanked terrace terminates with a stone seat backed by a mature weeping ash. Central steps lead down from the upper terrace to the upper lawn, which was planned by Miss Jekyll as a rose garden (Rignalls Wood Revised Plan, 1909). A swimming pool on the eastern side of this lawn was installed in the late C20. A flight of stone steps, 10' wide, lead south from the western corner of the house linking the garden terraces to west and east of it with a series of turns and landings. It passes a lower lawn (formerly a tennis lawn) to the east, and further terraced lawns to the west, before terminating at the west end of a pergola below the south side of the lower lawn. The lower lawn is retained by a high wall to the south above the length of the pergola. The pergola comprises 14 brick piers surmounted by timber cross-beams linking them to the retaining wall to the north, running west to east to the summer house. The summer house is timber built with ships timber pillars possibly from Stewart Liberty (Gunn, p. 125). The terraces and pergola enjoy southerly views over the former orchard, now a paddock.

To the west of the house steps lead down from the upper terrace and the conservatory garden room to the former sunken garden which was described thus "the site with its stone steps appears exactly as it does on Jekyll's plan but a rill garden has been constructed here instead of the rectangular borders proposed by Jekyll. Today the elegance of the site has been marred by having this garden divided in two. One half of the watercourse runs under a fence into the garden of the lodge next door." (Gunn, 1991) Below this to the south are the two terraced western lawns.

The gardens were designed at the same time as the house. It seems that the architects Adams and Holden designed the layout and that Gertrude Jekyll provided planting plans in 1909-10. As with many of her commissions, she never visited, but was informed by the architects of the soil, chalk overlain by a shallow layer of topsoil, and the steepness of the site and advised upon terracing. Gunn visited the gardens, and compares the original plans and planting to the time of her visit, including the sunken garden, pergola, terrace and the swimming pool now on the site of Jekyll's rose garden. She commented on it being "maintained and planted so that its period character has been preserved". Bisgrove (1992) also describes details of the plans and planting.

The site plan dated March 1909 includes the house, lodge, stables & coach house, racquet court paddock/orchard and a kitchen garden on the north bank, gardens and upper and lower terraces

with a seat at each end. Plans of May 1909 give an overview with an outline of the house and buildings and detailed plans of the gardens with alphabetical letters and numbers from 1 to 12 for each section of the garden on the south and west which cross reference with the detailed individual plans. 1 A-N is the sunken garden and north borders against the house, 2A-B the two borders against the west house conservatory, 3 & 4A-C the borders against the house on the south side and the terrace alcove seat, 5 & 6 the long terrace borders, 7 A- C borders & wall with seat and view across the valley, 8 A-G the steps, terracing and rose garden, 9 the steps, pergola, bank and summer house, 10, 11 and 12 the designs for the borders of the "playing lawns (east and west)" (Correspondence 02.02.1910 Holden to Gertrude Jekyll, copies at Historic England Archive). Three letters from the architect Charles Holden to Gertrude Jekyll in February and March 1910 refer to the problems with the gradient of the site and the suggestion to remove 500 loads from "North side of the house....very steep bank" to fill in "garden beyond the summer house marked with x seems to be in a hole" at a cost of £45.

The lawn on the bank north of the house was planned to be bisected by path/avenue and turning half circle opposite the main entrance to the house to the woodland with a retaining wall, border of roses and fruit trees to the woodland boundary (plan May 1909, sheet 37).

The 1936 sale particulars amplify this. They noted the terraced orchard to the north with steps to the drive, and to the west of the house a paved garden with pool and flower beds. The broad stone flagged terrace below the south front was flanked by a brick retaining wall with stone steps leading to the brick and rose covered pergola with summerhouse. Below this, reached by further stone steps was the tennis or croquet lawn and the hard tennis court flanked by a dry stone retaining wall. A 'Garden House' adjoined and there was a rock garden. The enclosed kitchen and fruit garden was well stocked, and contained a three-division peach and plant house, and two-division plant house, with potting shed and other sheds, etc. The two winter photos of the garden show much of the structure as the garden stepped down the hillside. This survives largely intact.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The rectangular kitchen garden, measuring some 90m west to east by 50m north to south, lies east of the house and terraced gardens below Coneybank Wood to the north. It is bounded by mature trees and laid largely to lawn with occasional specimen trees.

South and east of the gardens is an L-shaped area of paddocks with occasional specimen trees, formerly including an area of orchard (OS 1950s, and 1960s).

Initially the kitchen garden was planned to be sited north of the house, on the present sloping lawn (plans March 1909), but instead it was constructed on its present site south of Coneybank Wood, east of the house. In the mid-late C20 the kitchen garden contained several greenhouses along its northern side (OS 1950, 1960 and 1978), but the detail of the layout is unclear. Sale particulars (1966) detail the kitchen garden being '245' wide and 294' deep with extensive greenhouses'. The greenhouses appear on aerial views of the site (1947, 1985, 2008), and the aerial view of 1947 shows the layout of various beds.

ADAMS AND HOLDEN AND MISS JEKYLL

Although so often associated with the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, the Surrey-based Gertrude Jekyll worked with nearly 50 other architects including prominent names such as Adams and Holden. She collaborated with them on another, considerably more extensive commission, for the King Edward VII Sanatorium near Midhurst, West Sussex in 1908, for which a number of plans also survive. Miss Jekyll provided designs for a number of other sites in Buckinghamshire including Woodside Place, Chenies (her first commission with Lutyens, 1893), Cheswick, Hedgerley (1902), Pollard's Park, Chalfont St Giles (1906), Barton Hartshorn (1908 architect Robert Lorimer, qv), Nashdom (Lutyens, 1909), Chalfont Park (architect Lutyens, 1912, qv), Fulmer Court (1913), Bramleys, Great Missenden (architect E Willmott, 1913), Pednore House, Chesham (architect Fobes & Tate, 1919), Little Haling, Denham (1927, architect W Sarel), Ponds, Seer Green (1928). As at Rignalls, it was common for her to provide planting plans without having visited the site, based on information and plans supplied by the architects.

GM, JT, RH

Edited SR 29 March 2016

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Maps

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2nd edition published 1900

National grid provisional edition late 1950s

National Grid provisional edition revised 1960

1:10 000 OS map SP80 SE 1978

Illustrations (Bucks County Council HER)

1947 aerial photo

1985 aerial photo (run 513) RC8-HD

1988 aerial photo (run 477) 21 88 019

Archival Items

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Bucks Biographies: (CBS) Sir Felix Semon, Sir Edgar Sanders (Christian)

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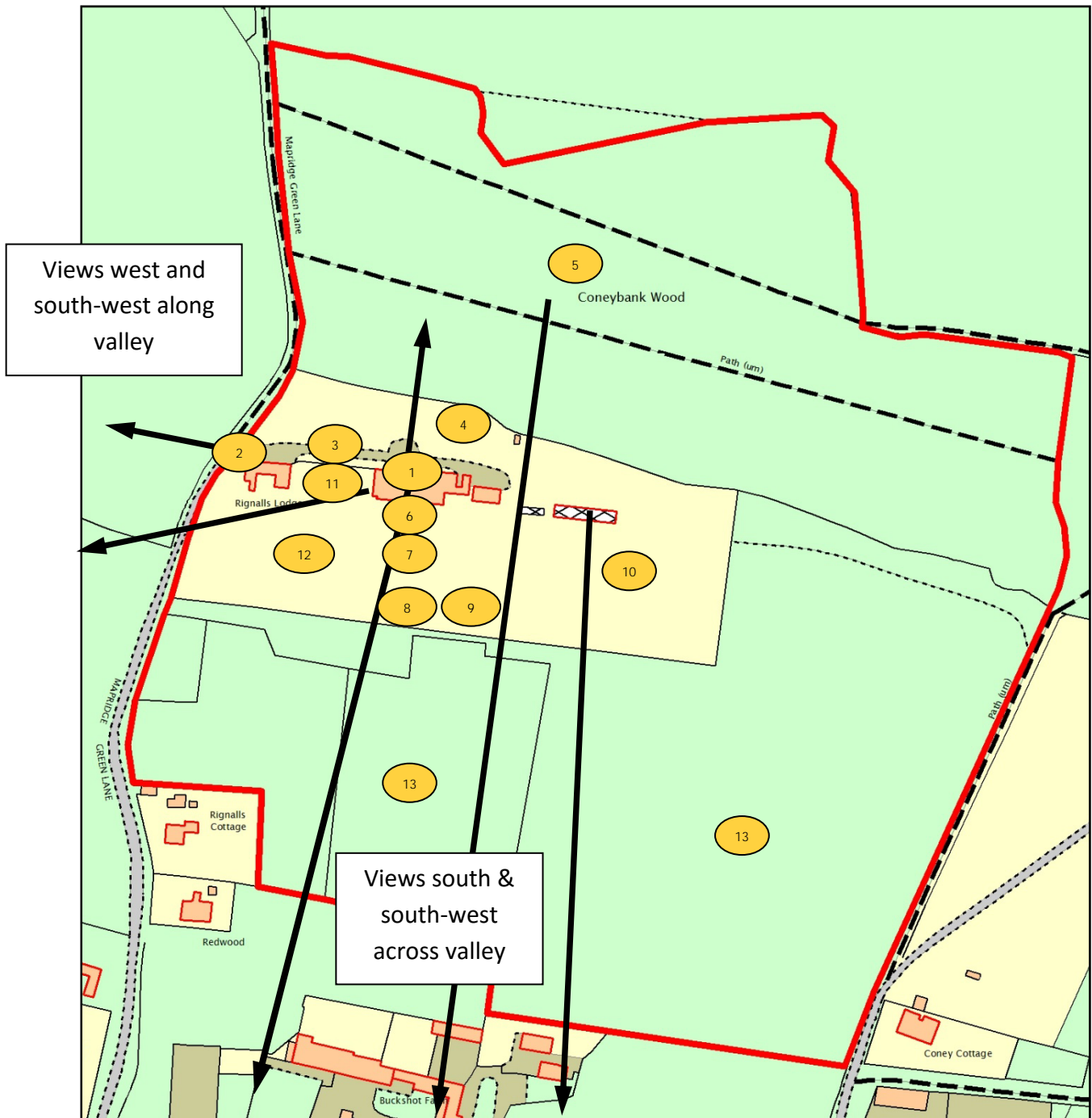
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Alfred Boucher. Lot 337 – a highly important collection relating to Charles de Gaulle. The following lots are the personal collections of letters and memorabilia concerning Charles de Gaulle by Alfred Boucher. Accessed 29/10/2015

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KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES



Key to numbered features

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. House & forecourt | 2. Main entrance, gateway & lodge |
| 3. Drive | 4. Steps & bank up to Coneybank Wood |
| 5. Coneybank Wood | 6. Upper terrace |
| 7. Upper lawn (formerly rose garden) | 8. Pergola |

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 9. Summerhouse | 10. Kitchen garden |
| 11. Conservatory terrace | 12. Sunken garden |
| 13. Paddocks | |



The south front, terrace and rose garden, 1936 Sale catalogue (Julian Hunt).



The south front, pergola and tennis court, 1936 Sale catalogue (Julian Hunt).

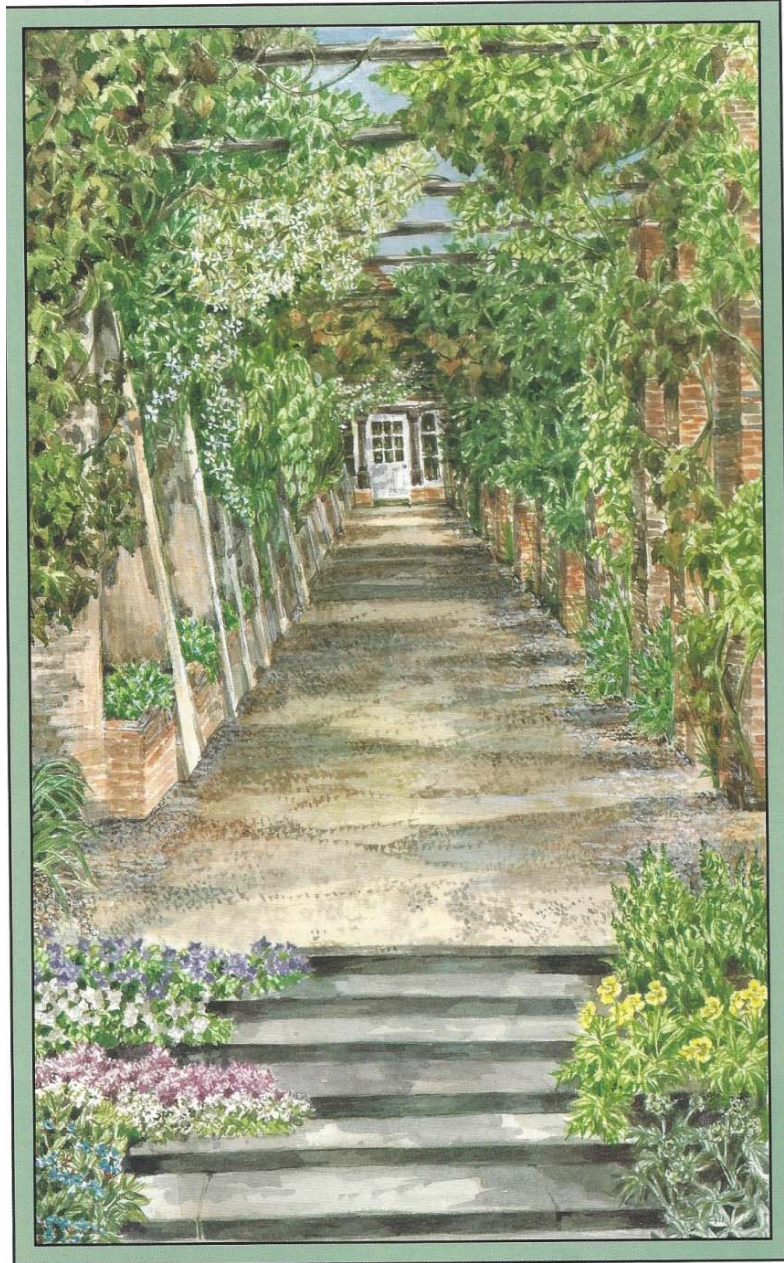


The south front and terrace, 2013 (Julian Hunt).



The south front and terrace, 2013 (Julian Hunt).

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XXXII. Rignall Wood Pergola and Garden House

The terraces up to the house are to the left. South is to the right.



The colour scheme was a typical Jekyll blend of purple-blues, grey, pink, white and pale yellow. Stone steps lead down to the paved area surrounding a rectangular border which has its centre *Magnolia stellata* flanked by blue delphiniums and pale yellow verbascum (which both flower much later). The rose Zephirine Drouhin is planted at either end of the border. China roses were planted among lavender and rosemary.