

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Woodrow High House

July 2016



Bucks
Gardens
Trust

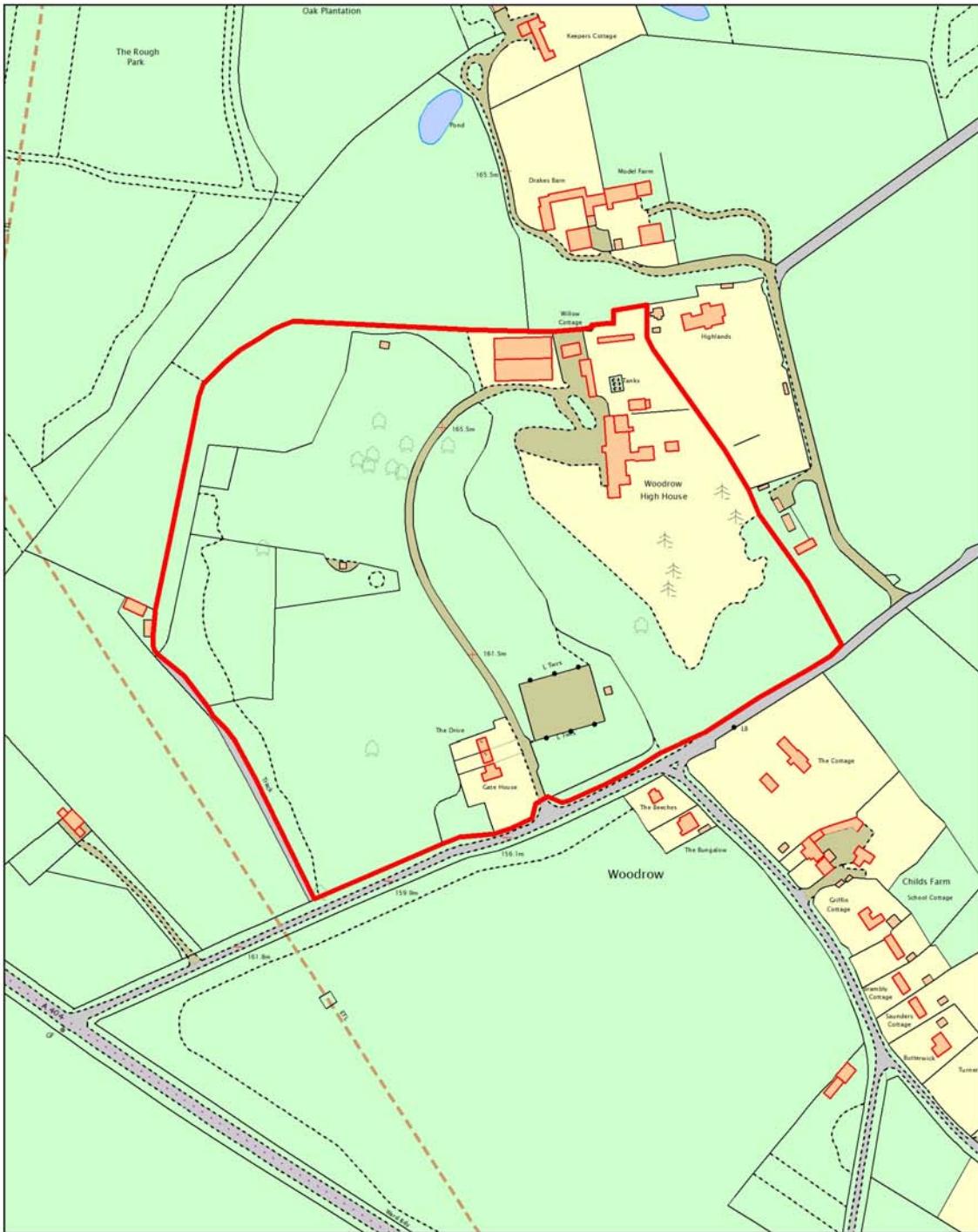


The Finnis Scott
Foundation



The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust

HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Woodrow High House: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service
February 2016



Scale: 1:3,000 at A4
N
165.5m
166.5m
167.5m
168.5m
169.5m
170.5m

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.
© Copyright Buckinghamshire County Council Licence No. 100021529 2016



Bucks Gardens Trust



Scale: 1:2,966 at A4



Woodrow High House: 2008 aerial photograph

© Getmapping plc. www.getmapping.com

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 (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not definitive 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/Historic England 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 (now Historic England) *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.
- A map showing principal 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

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	WOODROW HIGH HOUSE, AMERSHAM BCC HER 0423202000
DISTRICT:	CHILTERN	
PARISH:	AMERSHAM	
OS REF:	SU 934 966	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A typical early-mid-C19 country villa landscape with C18 origins in a Chiltern setting comprising formal and informal gardens and pleasure grounds and a small park, including a fine collection of ornamental trees. The most notable feature is a detached pleasure ground comprising a dell, with a fine sunken grotto, leading to a Yew Walk affording views across the site. The layout of the 10 ha. site survives largely intact with few alterations since the 1870s, although the grotto is fragile and areas of the grounds have been adapted for a recreational centre. The extent and survival of villa gardens is not well recorded and this is a good example at this scale, with an ensemble of typical features many of which survive, its most notable feature being the grotto and dell. It is one of a group of Chiltern villa gardens including Brands House and Castle Hill House (Wycombe Museum).

Key feature: The grotto in the dell, and ensemble of trees framing the whole landscape design.

Archaeological interest

The identified archaeology is of local significance as far as it is understood to date. The site has been occupied since at least 1600. The ditch on the western boundary of the garden may be a pre-existing enclosure ditch that was re-used in the ornamental design, which may continue to the north, east and south. Archaeological potential exists for lost ornamental features including former approaches south of the house, also garden paths, walls and other built elements.

Architectural interest

The site is focussed on the C18/early C19 Regency-style house (listed Grade II). Other estate structures are typical ancillary buildings including the garden walls and the service structures. The most notable structure is the unusual sunken grotto (listed Grade II) which, although neglected, retains much of its structure, character and complex and unusual internal decoration in its original setting. The origins of the grotto are unclear and it may be of C18 or early C19 construction.

Artistic interest

A typical example of an early-mid-C19 villa landscape surrounded by a variety of formal and informal gardens and pleasure grounds, modest park and kitchen gardens, whose notable mature tree planting includes a variety of ornamental species including a large specimen yew. The climax is a pleasure ground comprising a dell, with a fine sunken grotto, leading to a raised Yew Walk affording views within the site. The grotto is typically placed in a sunken setting, intended to be encountered as a surprise in a gloomy wooded dell before returning to the wider views along the Yew Walk.

The garden was designed in the early-mid-C19 when villa gardens were becoming a major part of garden design, both in rural and urban situations. At this time the prolific writer JC Loudon published much advice for the expanding middle classes on designing villa gardens at various scales, principally emulating at small scale the pleasure grounds

of country house landscapes. In his *The Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion* (1838, pp.170-71) he set out four classes of villas and how the gardens of each should best be laid out. Woodrow corresponds to the first class, which varied in from 10 acres upwards including a lawn and pleasure-ground and also a park (or farm) with the house standing at some distance from the entrance gate.

Historic interest

The documentary evidence for the C18 and C19 development of the design is of considerable interest. There is a strong geographic link with the adjacent Shardeloes Park, but it is unclear how close the historic and design links were.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site is first mentioned in 1595 when William Tothill bought the estates at Woodrow and Shardeloes (Hunt 2001). These estates' value lay in grazing rights on Wycombe Heath Common. Tothill took up residence at Shardeloes and in 1637 William Drake (grandson of William Tothill) bought the manor of Amersham from Francis, Earl of Bedford. The site was allegedly the residence of Mrs Oliver Cromwell during the Civil War and later Captain James Thompson (Lavery); the area was described by Jeremiah Wharton as 'the sweetest country that ever I saw, and as is the country, so also are the people' (VCH). The copyhold (a form of leasehold tenancy now defunct) of High House was held by James Mallors of St James Westminster, builder between 1753 and 1768 (Deeds of a Leasehold Messuage). The site was also known as Darby Hall (Roque, 1761; Jefferys, 1770).

In 1774 the copyhold of High House 'a modern new-built Brick Mansion-House commanding various extensive Prospects' was auctioned. The house contained 4 rooms on each floor with associated service rooms, 2 coach houses, 2 stables, a paved yard, a Grainery, a dove-house, brewhouse and was surrounded by 'three gardens, an orchard, and pleasure ground, well-cropp'd and stock'd with all kinds of walk and other fruit trees, now in their greatest perfection, with 2 ponds'. Also auctioned as separate lots were 2 adjoining farms (Woodrow Farm and Childs Farm) (Auction Notice 1774). The purchaser was a Richard Scrimshire (Deeds of a leasehold Messuage, 1774).

In 1815 the Inclosure Act allotted a modest part of Wycombe Heath Common to Thomas Windsor of Woodrow High House but the majority of the land was allotted to Thomas Tyrwhitt-Drake as lord of the manor of Woodrow (Inclosure Map & Award). The area marked as 'Old Inclosure' within the site was limited to the area immediately around the house which corresponds with the area marked on an OS draft map of 1812 (Ordnance Surveyor's Draft, 1812). The allotment to Thomas Windsor added the land to the south and west and some land to the south of Cherry Lane. Named as Woodside Lodge (Bryant, 1825) the site was noted as parkland and occupied the same area as today. In 1839 the site (by then again named High House), whose owner was Ellen Frances Oldham, was limited to the house and, lawns, gardens and paddocks to the south east and west (Tithe Map). Subsequent owners included Lieut-Gen. Sir Francis Ward 1864 to 1899 (PO Directory, & Kelly), Sir Charles Pelham-Clinton 1907- 1911 (Kelly) and Mrs Pelham Clinton 1911-1919, Brig Gen Sir Alexander Gibb (1920-1927) (Kelly) & G.F.Rawlins (1927-1930).

By the 1870s the substantial basis of the present gardens had been laid. The formal gardens lay adjacent to the east and south of the house, with walled areas to the north. Beyond the formal gardens to the south and south-east were specimen trees, and the area extended to a boundary (now a ditch) in the south-west. In the south-west the area contained various walks. The drawing room in the south wing enjoyed a vista westwards to the park. In the north-west corner of the site was a wooded dell (OS 1876). From here a Yew Walk led south which enjoyed a view east to the house.

By 1931 the house had been sold to Sir Nigel Leslie Campbell (Kelly 1931). In 1945 the site was purchased by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths who donated it to the London Federation of Boys Clubs, since when it has been used as an outdoor activity centre. By the 1950s the range on the east of the house had been demolished and an extension to the east was added in the 1960s. By 1950 the vista due west to the Park was being encroached upon by trees ((RAF Aerial 1950) and had grown over by 1979 (Aerial photo 18/10/79).

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The 10h.a site lies on the northern edge of the hamlet of Woodrow, some 2.5km south-west of Amersham, 5 km north of Beaconsfield and 8 km north-east of High Wycombe. To the south-west lies the former turnpike road between Amersham and High Wycombe (now the A404). The hamlet consists of the site, two farms to the south west (Woodrow and Childs Farms), and several associated cottages and farm buildings (since converted into dwellings). Adjacent to the north of the site is the Model Farm, part of the Shardeloes estate, and beyond this the parkland of Shardeloes itself. Shardeloes House stands a mile or so north of the site set in c.400 ha of park that wraps around Woodrow High House.

The site lies on a flat, secluded Chiltern plateau of about 160m AOD. Currently external views are screened by trees. The 'various extensive Prospects' noted in the 1774 sales particulars are no longer evident, but may have extended north and east. The soil is clay with flints overlaying chalk.

To the north-west is The Rough Park, ancient woodland at the south-west corner of Shardeloes park, which now houses Mop End electricity substation. Arable fields enclose the site to the north-east and south-west. The south-east boundary is formed by Cherry Lane linking Woodrow directly with Old Amersham to the north-east. Cherry Lane runs south west from the High Street Amersham to the A404, north-west of the site but was severed by the Amersham bypass in 1987. In 1812 it stopped at the south boundary of the site (OSD). The roadside boundary is marked by an early C20 iron railing. Aligned on the centre of the south-east boundary a lane leads south-east to the rest of the hamlet of Woodrow. The east boundary against a private garden is marked by a boundary bank and ditch and belt of mature trees. The northern boundary consists of a belt of mature trees mainly beech against another private garden. The western boundary, against agricultural land, is marked by a belt of hornbeam and ash and the Yew Walk, outside which is a boundary bank and ditch and remnants of iron park railing on this boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to the site lies c.100m south-south-west of the house giving access from Woodrow and Amersham via Cherry Lane. The entrance is marked by two stuccoed pillars in a neo classical style (C19) similar to that of the house. From here the drive sweeps 300m north-north-west and then curves to the east to approach the house from the north-west arriving at the front door on the west front. A car park has been built in the area amongst existing mature trees to the immediate west of the house, bounded by the drive to the north and east. Formerly this area was planted with conifers and deciduous trees (OS 1876), some of which survive. The drive is lined to the east by recently planted Dawn Redwoods.

Adjacent to the west of the main entrance is a group of houses (1960s) standing adjacent to the site of former cottages & a lodge set in their own gardens since 1825 (Bryant).

Circa 100m south of the house a pedestrian entrance off Cherry Lane lies in a gap in the belt, opposite the lane to Woodrow. From this gate a path leads 60m north-north-west, to a point where it divides into two. The westerly arm runs parallel to the main drive stopping at a Cedar of Lebanon tree adjacent to a C20 bridge over a ditch due west of

the southernmost part of the house. The easterly arm continues north, meeting the main drive by the house. Both arms of what is apparently a former approach drive are on slightly raised banks in part and their line can be followed within mature trees. The westerly arm is partly edged by a ditch, possibly for a sunk fence, which would have afforded views over the park to the west. This route and gateway appears on maps between 1812 and 1900 but may have been an earlier approach superseded by the present drive.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Woodrow High House (Listed Grade II) is a villa which stands in the north-eastern half of the site and incorporates the fabric of an earlier house, possibly of C16 origin (Pevsner). The central west-facing 3-storey block has two full height canted bays flanking the front door. It is flanked to north and south by late C18 single-storey wings, the northern one, raised and extended in the early C19 (Listed Building Description), leading to a service wing. It is rendered with white stucco. The main entrance is on the west front, with a second door to the west from the central portion of the house (before C19, the main entrance door). Further doors lead into the garden from the east and north. A C20 recreational building for the activity centre, housing a swimming pool, stands 15m north-west of the house on the north side of the drive adjacent to the northern boundary.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens and park enclose the house to the west, south and east. They form part of the area used by the outdoor activity centre and have been modified to provide low ropes courses, pond dipping, archery and other activities. Adjacent to central part of the western front of the house is a terrace bounded by a low rendered wall topped by tiles (0.3m high). West of the terrace a lawn extends for 100m to a belt of trees. Formerly a vista extended westwards from here to the Yew Walk (OS 1876 to RAF aerial photo 1950). Some 15m south of the house is a path running west – east, from which the ground falls away to the south by some 0.3m down a grassy bank. Immediately beyond this lies a sunken garden bounded to the west by a low box hedge with yew trees (date unknown) in three corners. This leads to a large lawn to the south planted with scattered mature specimen trees with copses of mixed trees in the south-east and south-west corners. The specimen trees include a variety of species including *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula' (Weeping Beech, introduced 1836), *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots Pine), *Cedrus deodora* (Deodar cedar, introduced 1831), *Sequoia sempervirens* (introduced 1843), *Cedrus atlantica* (introduced c.1840) *Cedrus libani* (Lebanon cedar) *Quercus ilex* (Holm Oak), *Aesculus hippocastanum* (Horse chestnut), *Robinia pseudoacacia* (False acacia), several *Castanea sativa* (Sweet Chestnut), various Japanese acers and *Tilia x europea* (European lime). Boundary walks to the south and north of the lawn are shaded by mature trees, mainly ash, sycamore beech and oak.

To the east front lawns and a walled area are laid to lawn with small raised beds along the northern boundary against the kitchen garden. This area was formerly laid out with a pattern of paths (OS 1876).

West of the eastern branch of the former entrance is a pleasure ground formerly encircled by a circuit path and edged on the west by a ditch and then lawn to the drive. The planting is of cherry, sweet chestnut, and specimen trees.

A detached pleasure ground lies 175m north-east of the house, linked to it by a path leading north-west from the pleasure ground, around the northern boundary. The area comprises a copse within a dell created from a former chalk pit leading to a raised walk on the boundary of the site.

Within the dell, set into the north-east bank, is an octagonal grotto (Listed Grade II). The grotto is approached from the north-west via a narrow path between two raised beds, both lined by flint, with the remains of a circular forecourt. The south-west-facing grotto is of knapped flint and pebbles with a chimney and fireplace. It has a vaulted

roof with an oculus at the apex. The internal decorative pattern uses rounded stones, the symbols, possibly religious, being a chalice, keyhole, circle, triangle and arrow. There is said to be a brick vaulted chamber below ((Listed Building Description). Little planting survives around it although the area has been colonised by Hart's tongue ferns. The dominant species around the dell in 1994 were beech, larch and Scots pine (Debois). The origins of the grotto are unclear but it is probably of C18 or early C19 date.

Linked to the west side of the dell, and marked by two oaks at the northern point adjacent to the dell, is the raised Yew Walk on the western boundary of the site, bounded to the west by a Yew hedge. The 120m long Walk runs south from the dell on a raised bank c.5 metres wide which affords views east, of the house. At the south end of the Walk was formerly (1994) a hornbeam under which was growing the ornamental creeper *Vinca minor*, indicating that this was possibly the site of a seat, which would provide excellent distant views of the house across the park (Debois).

By 1925 tree plantings south-south-east of the house were reduced (OS Map 1920). However since 1945 trees have self-seeded and established themselves and others have been removed to provide areas for activities.

PARK

The small park lies to the south and west of the gardens. It is laid to grass, contains a mature oak and a horse chestnut, and much of it is now devoted to outdoor activities. In 1870 there were some 20 trees scattered within the park (OS, 1870), which were reduced to five by the 1950s (OS, 1950), and 3 by 1999 (Aerial photo). The area did not form part of the property in 1816 (Inclosure Map & Award) or 1839 (Tithe Map) but had reached its present layout by 1870 (OS), probably laid out for Lieut-Gen. Sir Francis Ward.

KITCHEN GARDEN

By 1870 the kitchen garden was divided into two areas, one east of the house and the other to the north (OS). Now (2015) the irregularly shaped area north of the house is bounded on three sides by 2.5m high walls. The unwallled eastern boundary is marked by a shrubbery and mature trees. The western wall curves towards the northern end of the house reducing in height to one metre, and stopping c.1 metre from the house. To the south of the northern wall are raised beds, possibly the remains of former south-facing greenhouses. Evidence of metalwork remains in the north wall. The northern wall was erected between 1897 and 1925 (OS 1897 and 1925). To the north and west of the walls are associated buildings. The area contains poly tunnels and is laid to grass.

The southern area, east of the northern wing, is laid to lawn with some flowers planted in the raised beds. Only one wall, that abutting the northern wall of the house remains. In 1925 there was a range of greenhouses attached to the south side of this (OS 1925). In 1876 a further walled area lay to the south of this (OS).

REFERENCES

Auction Notice by Samuel Martin: Copyhold Estate High house (1774) D/Or/2/253

Deeds of a Leasehold Messuage and lands called High House in Woodrow 1595-1961 CBS D/DRD/2/48

Hunt, J, *A History of Amersham* (2001) 23,25,72.

Kelly's Directory (1877) (1903)(1907)(1911)(1915) (1920)(1924)(1928)(1931)(1935)(1939)

Jones,B. *Follies & Grottoes* 290

Laverty, JH, *Amersham Parish Chest*, 132.

Page, W. (ed.), *A History of the County of Buckingham, 3* (1925), 141-155 (Victoria County History).

Pevsner, N. *The Buildings of England Buckinghamshire* (1960), 617.

PO Directory (1864) 418

Debois Landscape Survey Group, 'Register Review Programme Theme Study Villa Gardens' (February 1994).

Sheeahan, J.J. *History & Topography of Buckinghamshire* (1971), 804.

Maps

Bryant, A *Map of the County of Buckinghamshire from an actual survey in the year 1824* (1825)/

Inclosure Map & Award 1816 (IR/12A.Q)

Jefferys, T. *Map of the County of Buckinghamshire surveyed in 1766-1768* (1770).

Roque's Map (1761)

Tithe Map Amersham (1839).

OS Draft Map 1812

OS 6in to 1mile 1st edition published 1883

2nd edition published 1900

3rd edition published 1920

Emergency edition 1938

Provisional edition 1940s

National Grid provisional 1950s

National Grid provisional 1970s/1980s

1:10000 1970s

OS 1:2500 1876

1897

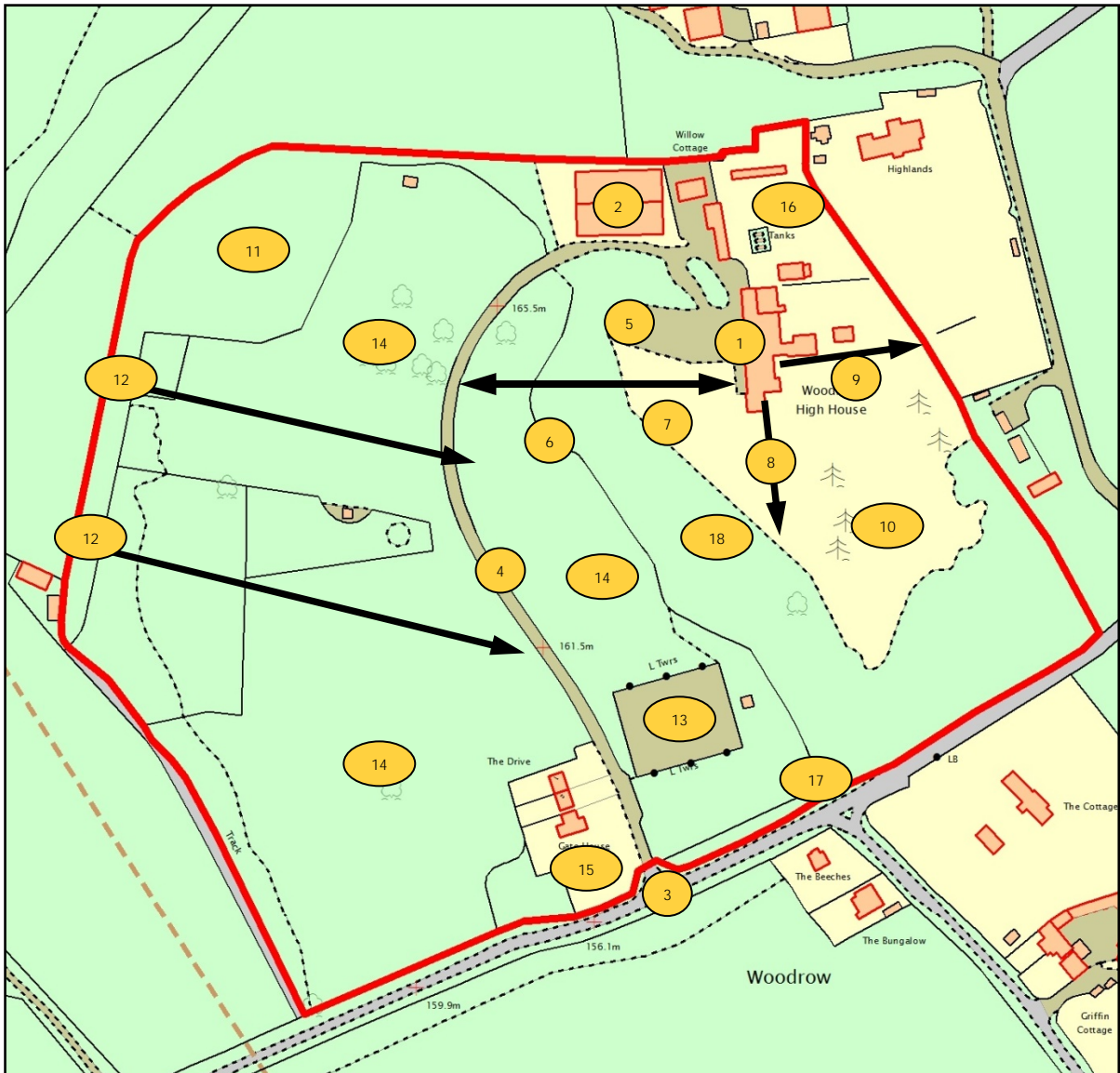
Images

Colour aerial photographs 1947, 1950, 1969,1975,1985,1989,1995,1999,2003 and 2008. (Buckinghamshire CC)

ST 29 September 2015

Final edit: 23 July 2016

KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES



Key to numbered features

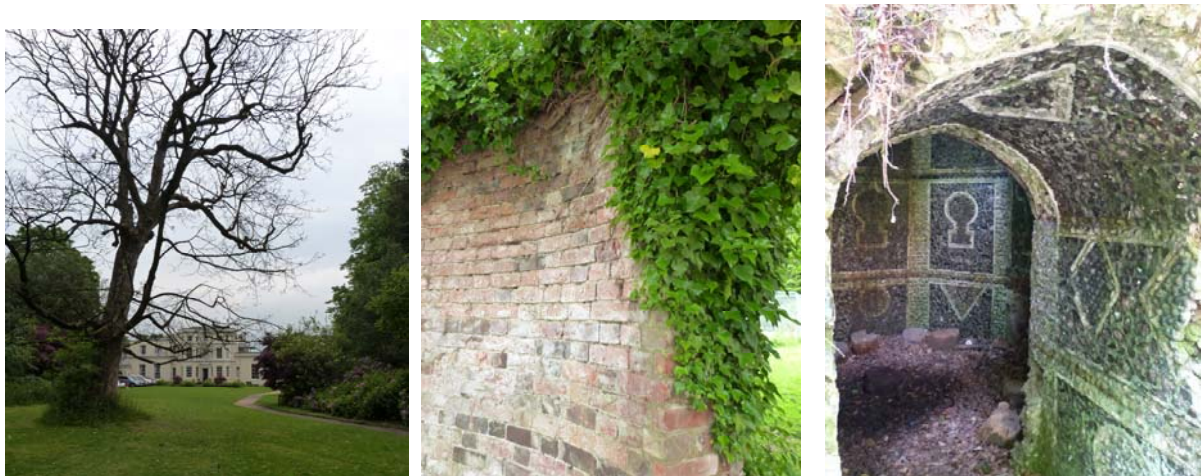
1. House & forecourt	2. C20 swimming pool
3. Main entrance & gateway	4. Drive
5. Wilderness & car park	6. Ha-ha
7. West lawn	8. South lawn and sunken garden
9. East lawn	10. Arboretum
11. Dell & grotto	12. Yew Walk
13. C20 sports pitch in park	14. Park
15. Site of former lodge	16. Kitchen garden
17. Site of former entrance	18. Site of former drive



Main entrance (left); west, entrance front (centre); east, garden front (right)



Pleasure ground south of house (left); iron pedestrian gateway (centre); surviving iron fencing around Dell (right)



West, entrance front (left); kitchen garden wall (centre); grotto (right)



Grotto (left); yew walk and fencing (left).