

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Alscot Lodge

06 December 2015



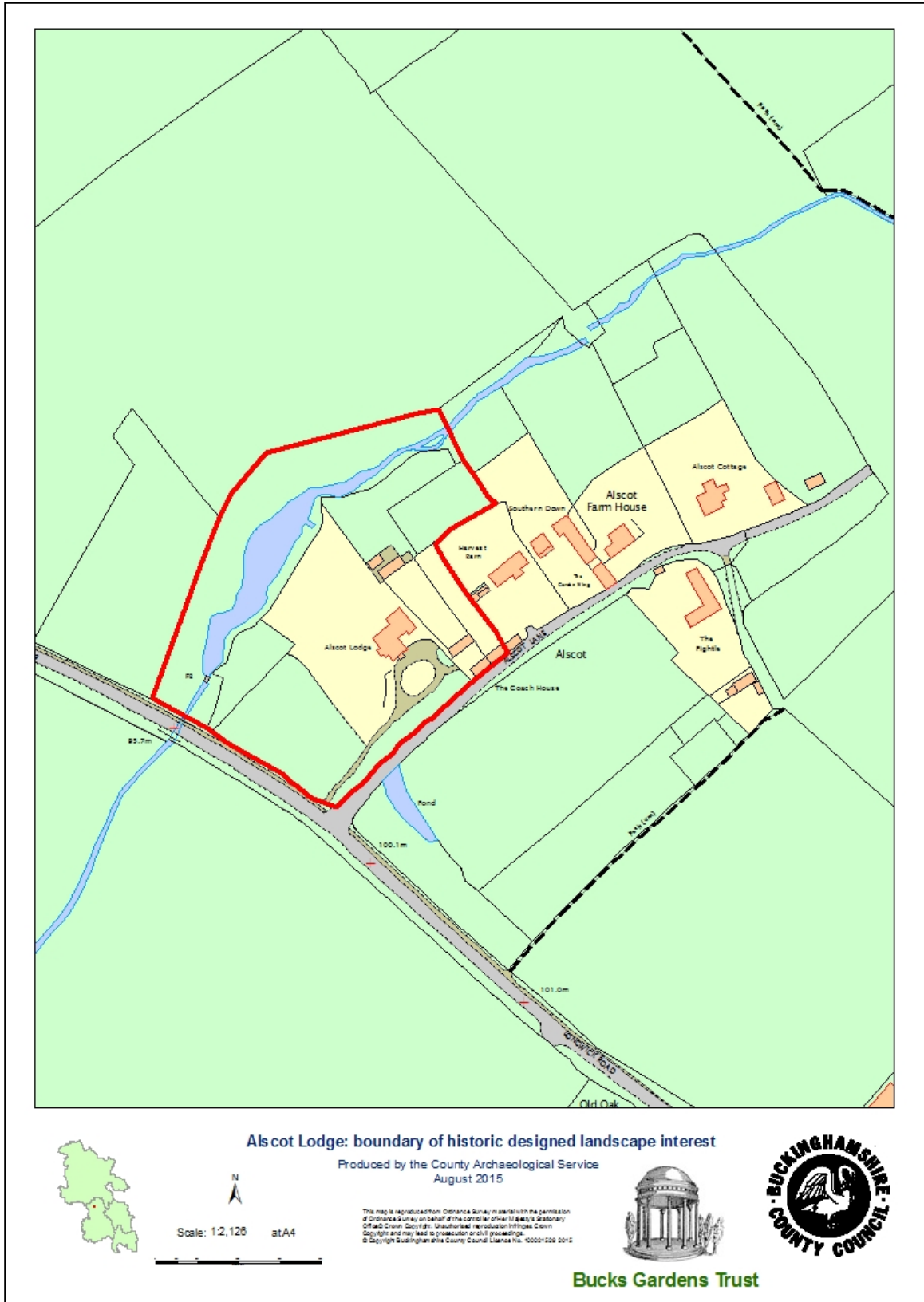
Bucks Gardens Trust

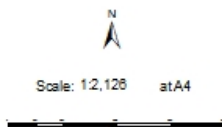


Association of
Gardens Trusts



HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY





Alscot Lodge: 2008 aerial photograph

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August 2015



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 Association of Gardens Trusts and funded by BGT with a significant grant from The Heritage Lottery Fund. 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	ALSCOT LODGE BCC HER 1301106000
DISTRICT:	Wycombe	
PARISH:	Princes Risborough	
OS REF.:	SP 801 044	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview:

A typical garden and pleasure ground for a small, Regency-style country villa developed in the 1830s from a farmstead with a small associated estate acquired by a local lawyer to become the focus of a Bucks hamlet. The mid-C19 2.5 ha. site is of a typical largely informal layout focussed on the detached villa set in the Vale of Aylesbury below the Chiltern scarp and on the Alscot Brook, widened in the mid-late C19 as a narrow lake (and since then further widened) and enclosed by a belt of mature ornamental trees. 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 including gateways, boundary wall, a walled kitchen garden and stable yard which survives largely intact.

Archaeological Interest: The archaeological interest and potential largely arises from evidence relating to previous agricultural and village uses, including those relating to the former Drovers Road that bisects the site. There is the potential for lost domestic buildings and garden features, which are likely to be largely of C18-C20 origin.

Architectural Interest: The site is focussed on the house (listed Grade II) standing towards the east corner of the site, combining a rear flint wing (the previous farmhouse) with a fine stucco-faced Regency-style villa, including a porch overlooking the Chiltern scarp to the east. Other estate structures are typical ancillary buildings in brick and flint including the boundary and garden walls and the service structures probably erected at the same time as the villa. These are of note as an ensemble whose consistency of style helps to unite the landscape design.

Artistic Interest: The garden for a farmhouse extended as a fashionable villa in the early C19. It is a typical informal layout of terraces and lawns focussed on the Regency villa and dominated by the sinuous lake that follows the course of the Alscot Brook. The kitchen garden is, unusually, divided by a central wall. Garden views are enclosed by the distinctive mature belt planting that also forms a major feature. External views over the Chiltern Scarp, east towards the Whiteleaf Cross monument, are obtained from the forecourt and front door of the villa, and from the main gateway to the site which also enjoys broad views south towards Bledlow Cop.

The garden was designed in the 1830s when modest 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. Alscot Lodge corresponds to the second class, which varied in extent from 4 to 10 acres including a paddock for a cow and a dairy and if possible a pond.

Historic Interest: The documentary evidence for the C19 development of the design is of considerable interest, associated with the development of the road adjacent.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Alscot was recorded in a C13 “feoffment” “with three dwellings situated by the highway on one side and the messuage of Henry Petypus, whose descendants were still present in the C18, on the other (BCLS D/42/B1/21 Mildmay/Penton Papers). Between the C15 – C19 the family names of Bristow, Blicke, Coker, Goodchild, Hawes and Loosley occupied the hamlet and reflected a close-knit, intermarrying community. By 1770 the hamlet was defined by the Drovers Road to the south and bisected by the village lane running south-west to north-east (Jefferys 1760). By 1812 (OSD) there were ten buildings at Alscot. There are seven dwellings today (2015).

The 1823 Enclosure Act and subsequent realignment of the Drovers Road further south-west (now the A4129) and the building over it of “Alscot Bridge” ordered by the Turnpike Commission meant that old road was extinguished and Alscot House and hamlet had a new boundary formed by the new road line. A wedge-shaped “meadow” was incorporated and part of the old road, a narrow descending enclosure running north-west through the grounds (IR/22/2 Enclosure Awards Map 1820). Part of the former Drovers Road, parallel to the A4129, survives to the south-east in the field, running north-west through the grounds of the Lodge and beyond into the field to the north-west.

Between 1829-1832 John Evans Tarrant (1783-1848) a retired Solicitor of 44 Dean Street, Soho purchased land and buildings in Alscot for £250 (Manor Court Roll 8.6.1829 Deed 150) and was in residence from 1832 (1831 census, 1832 Poll Book for Princes Risborough). In April 1832 Caleb Stratton, a local schoolmaster and surveyor, after corresponding with Tarrant in Soho over the purchase and development of the “estate” was responsible for drawing the “Sketch of an Estate belonging to JE Tarrant Esq.” for which he charged three guineas (CBS D/BMT/104T-143a). The map shows the planned outline of the “house” and garden, the land and property purchased in the hamlet coloured in green and a separate numbered list with acreage. The house was item 14 “Allscot House Pleasure Ground Garden including Butts Orchard”. A new entrance led from the junction of the Longwick Road/Alscot Lane with a drive to the front of the house as survives today.

In October 1836 a fire occurred at the premises of Mr. Tarrant in Alscot, although the level of damage is unclear. [Wycombe District survey of Alscot in 1997 notes that “the foundation walls below the ground level of the present house are of brick and flint and have black markings that could be from fire damage”]. Alscot Lodge was apparently completed in its present form in 1838 (Sheahan 1862) in a style that reflects the Regency villas and buildings of Tarrant’s London, for example St. John’s Lodge in Regents Park.

On the deaths of John Evans Tarrant and Mathilda Tarrant (1st March and 29th January 1848; tomb in St Mary’s Churchyard, Princes Risborough) Emma their daughter married Horace John Brooke, younger son of Rev. Zachary Brooke, Rector of Monks Risborough and lived at the villa. By 1861 it

was a “genteel modern house situated in its own grounds. Plantations etc.” and was occupied by Miss Tarrant (Sheahan). By 1877 (OS) there were a coach house, stables, walled garden, pathways and a belt of mixed trees on the boundaries, with a “sluice” at the earlier brook crossing of the old Drover’s Road as part of a dam to create the lake to the north-west.

In the late C19 the Lodge was let to tenant farmers, including the Pursell family who purchased the estate in 1936 with little alteration to the grounds (1936 Sale of Alscot Lodge Farm Estate auction catalogue of 8 Lots including a plan). Frank Pursell lived in the hamlet until 1955. The 1936 sale of Alscot Lodge Farm Estate of some 147 acres included all the houses in the hamlet. Since the sale the site has passed through a number of owners and remains in private ownership.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM SETTING

The 2.5ha site is situated on the north-east side of the Longwick Road (A4129) linking Princes Risborough 1 mile to the south-east, to Thame 5 miles to the west, at its junction with Alscot Lane which serves the hamlet of Alscot to the north. It occupies a shallow valley, with a chalk stream, Alscot Brook, flowing from north-east to south-west through the northern section, amidst open farmland.

The south-western boundary, along the A4129, has a close-boarded fence set back from the road. It runs through a shelter belt of mixed planting including mature scots pine, yew, horse chestnut, lime and holm oak. Near the south-west corner of the site Alscot Brook leaves the site via a tunnel under the road. The north-western boundary to open fields has a modern post and wire fence with a ditch, hawthorn hedging and a similar shelter belt of mixed mature trees, including yew. A modern wire fence encloses the north-eastern boundary and the adjacent ménage area. The remainder of the east section of the north-eastern boundary is formed by the 3m high brick and flint wall of the kitchen garden.

The south-eastern boundary, alongside Alscot Lane, is marked by a flint wall with red brick dressings, with some sections replaced in the 1950s and 1960s after collapse (Historic Parks and Gardens review, 1998. BCC).

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Alscot Lodge is entered at the southern corner of the site some 80m south-west of the house, from Longwick Road (A4129), at its junction with Alscot Lane. Mature trees stand either side of the entrance where there are brick gate piers with an infill of flint, each surmounted by a stone slab, with low flint walls with brick crenellations to the sides. A pair of modern wooden gates are set back from the gate piers. From the entrance long views extend south, south-east and south-west across Princes Risborough to the Chiltern scarp, taking in Whiteleaf Cross monument and Bledlow Cop.

From the gateway a gravelled drive leads c.80m north-east between mature yew, horse chestnut and sycamore trees. At the northern end it is lined on the western side by shrubbery and a 3m high yew hedge hiding the villa, before it enters an oval forecourt with a central lawn and shrub area below the south-eastern front of the house. From this point, when the foliage allows, a long view extends east to the Whiteleaf Cross monument carved on the scarp of the Chiltern Hills some 1.25m

distant. The course of the drive is virtually the same as shown on the '1832 Sketch of an Estate for Tarrant' (CBS D/B MT/104T-143a).

Beyond the forecourt the drive continues north-east to the south-eastern section of the kitchen garden where there are garages and a further parking area. On the north-eastern garden wall is evidence of an arched entrance to the farm barns beyond. East of the entrance to the kitchen garden from the forecourt is evidence in the wall of an entrance to the Coach House, shown on the 1946 aerial view.

About 40m north-east along Alscot Lane from its junction with the A4129 one remaining of a pair brick piers and a pair of mature horse chestnut trees indicates the site of the former entrance from the pre-enclosure Drovers Road (Correspondence and plans concerning Thame to Princes Risborough Turnpike, 1795 – 1829).

The Coach House entrance in Alscot Lane is c80m north-east of the junction with the A4129, and is flanked by a pair of C19 3m high brick gate piers. A pedestrian access at the side of the former stable block at the rear of the coach house leads to the villa via the kitchen garden.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Alscot Lodge (listed Grade II) stands in the northern half of the site, which is itself on the south western side of the hamlet. The previous farmhouse was damaged by fire in 1836, (Hookham letters), and the present villa was built on a concrete plinth in the Regency style. It has a slate roof and the walls are of whitewashed render with three pane sash windows.

The central door, in the south-east front overlooking the turning circle, has a fanlight which is covered by a rendered porch with Doric piers and a pediment. The porch was perhaps added c.1850 (listing description), however, it was more likely built as part of the original villa as the moulding work on top of the supporting columns of the porch matches exactly those on certain ceiling cornices inside the house (pers. comm. owner).

The north-west and south-west fronts of the villa overlook the garden. On the north-east side the villa is attached to the earlier farm house of vernacular brick and flint forming an eastern wing, which was possibly built in the C18. A C21 extension has been added to the north of the farmhouse.

The Coach House stands 40m south-east of the villa and continues the line of the roadside wall against Alscot Lane. It and the parallel stable block to the north-west occupy the south-east part of the western half of the present kitchen garden. Access is through the C19 brick gate piers from Alscot Lane. It is a two-storey flint building with red brick dressing and a slate roof with gothic-style windows on the ground floor, and it was converted to residential use in the 1970s (Conservation Area survey). On the north-west wall the original brick arch over the coach entry is still visible, although now bricked in and a window inserted when the building was converted to residential use. A recent single-storey extension to the west side connects to the stable block detached to the north-west so that the buildings now enclose three sides of a small courtyard. It was probably built about

the same time as Alscot Lodge in 1838. It was not evident in 1832 (Tarrant plan), but was present by 1877 (OS).

Beyond the historic site brick and flint predominates in the other buildings in the hamlet, - the Farm House, Barn and Dairy, the Barn, Stables and End Cottage (all listed Grade II; Conservation area character survey 1997).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUND

The gardens and pleasure grounds are below the south-west and north-west fronts of the villa. They follow the framework of the 1832 "The Sketch of the Estate belonging to J.E.Tarrant Esq" (D/BMT/104T [143a]) developed by 1877 (OS) and are laid out in informal style comprising lawns, belts of mature trees and a narrow lake which is the focal feature.

South-west of the house a gravel path leads to the Rose Garden which is bordered by a semi-circular hedge of yew, shrubbery and mature box with arched entrances to the south-west and north-west surrounding a lawn. An arbour of roses and clematis with a box parterre is set in the centre of the lawn. Part of the late C19 path has recently been reinstated to the south-west (OS 1877) along the bank of the former Drovers Road. The south-west roadside boundary is lined by a belt of trees including mature *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots pine), *Quercus ilex* (Holm Oak), *Quercus robur* (English Oak), *Tilia platyphyllos* (Broad leaved lime), *Aesculus hippocastanum* (Horse Chestnut). This belt forms a distinctive and varied part of the gardens, screening them from the public road beyond.

The north-west wing of the house opens via steps onto a terraced lawn leading to the lake, with a mature sycamore tree c.10m from the arch and gate entrance to the walled pool garden. The lake has three islands and is enclosed to the north-west by the boundary shelter belt of mature mixed trees, similar in character to the roadside belt but including many mature yews. The lake has two bridges giving access to the paths along the north-west shore through the north-west belt of trees which lead to open fields, and give views back to the house. The Brook was not broadened until the mid-late C19 (OSD 1812; 1820 Enclosure map (IR/22/2)). By 1877 (OS) it had been widened to form an ornamental sheet of a water with the addition of a dam and sluice at the south end. It was further enlarged in the 1990s to 8m wide in places. Four perennial beds were created in 2011 running north-west from the house to the lake. A late C20 stable block and ménage stand north of the house and the north-west walls of the kitchen gardens.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The kitchen garden (c75m x 26m) lies adjacent to the north eastern side of the villa. The 3m high boundary walls are constructed of brick and flint, similar to the boundary wall with Alscot Lane, with buttresses. The walls are mostly capped with rounded coping stones and have matching support pillars, except for the eastern boundary wall which is capped with angled coping stones.

By 1877 (OS) the kitchen garden was divided into two narrow sections by a dividing wall. This central 2m high dividing wall running north-west to south-east is of similar brick and flint construction to the enclosing walls. Gravelled pathways enclose the perimeters of both sections of the kitchen garden as per the late C19 layout (OS).

The broadest, western part of the kitchen garden, nearest to the villa, is c15m wide and known as The Pool Garden. In the centre is a late C20 swimming pool surrounded by a terrace. The area also contains a herb garden, and a cutting garden. A recent brick arched entrance with a wrought iron gate on the west side of the garden provides an entrance to the terraced lawn.

The narrower, eastern section of the kitchen garden, c11m wide, contains a modern greenhouse, workshops and raised beds, and is planted with a variety of vegetables. Access to the orchard and ménage north of the house is via a gateway with a C19 3m brick gate pier in similar style to those that flank the entrance off Alscot Lane to the coach house.

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1870-8, (sheet 37)
25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1877
6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900
6" to 1 mile: published 1920
6" to 1 mile: National Grid provisional 1950 (SP 801 044)

Archival Items

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- Census data 1831
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Poll Book for Princes Risborough 1832
Graveyard Registers Parish Church Princes Risborough (Book 13, Entries 898 & 900)

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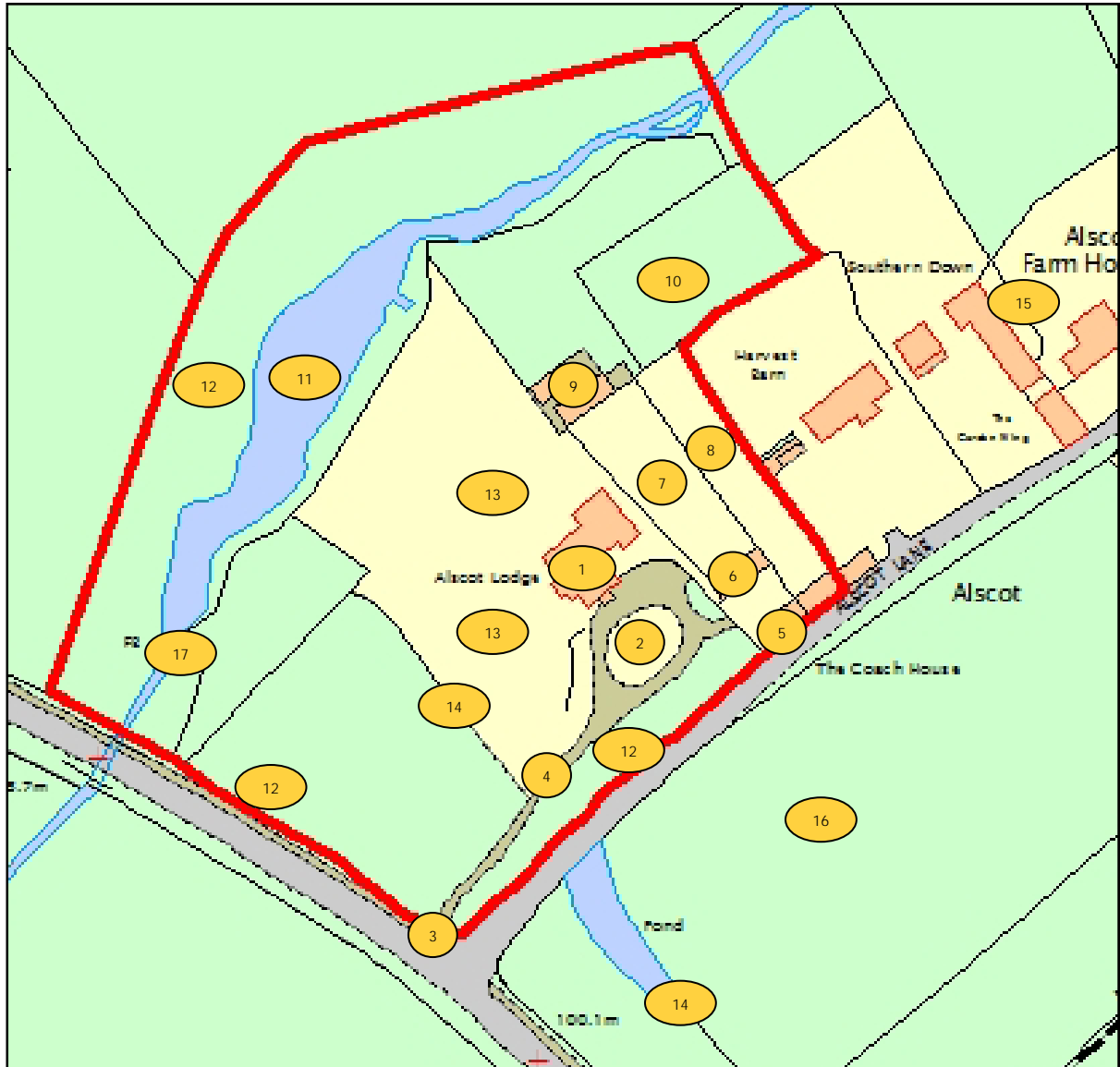
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Illustrations

Aerial views 1946 RAF (106G UK 1379 F20"/541 SQDN)
 1988 Bucks County Council

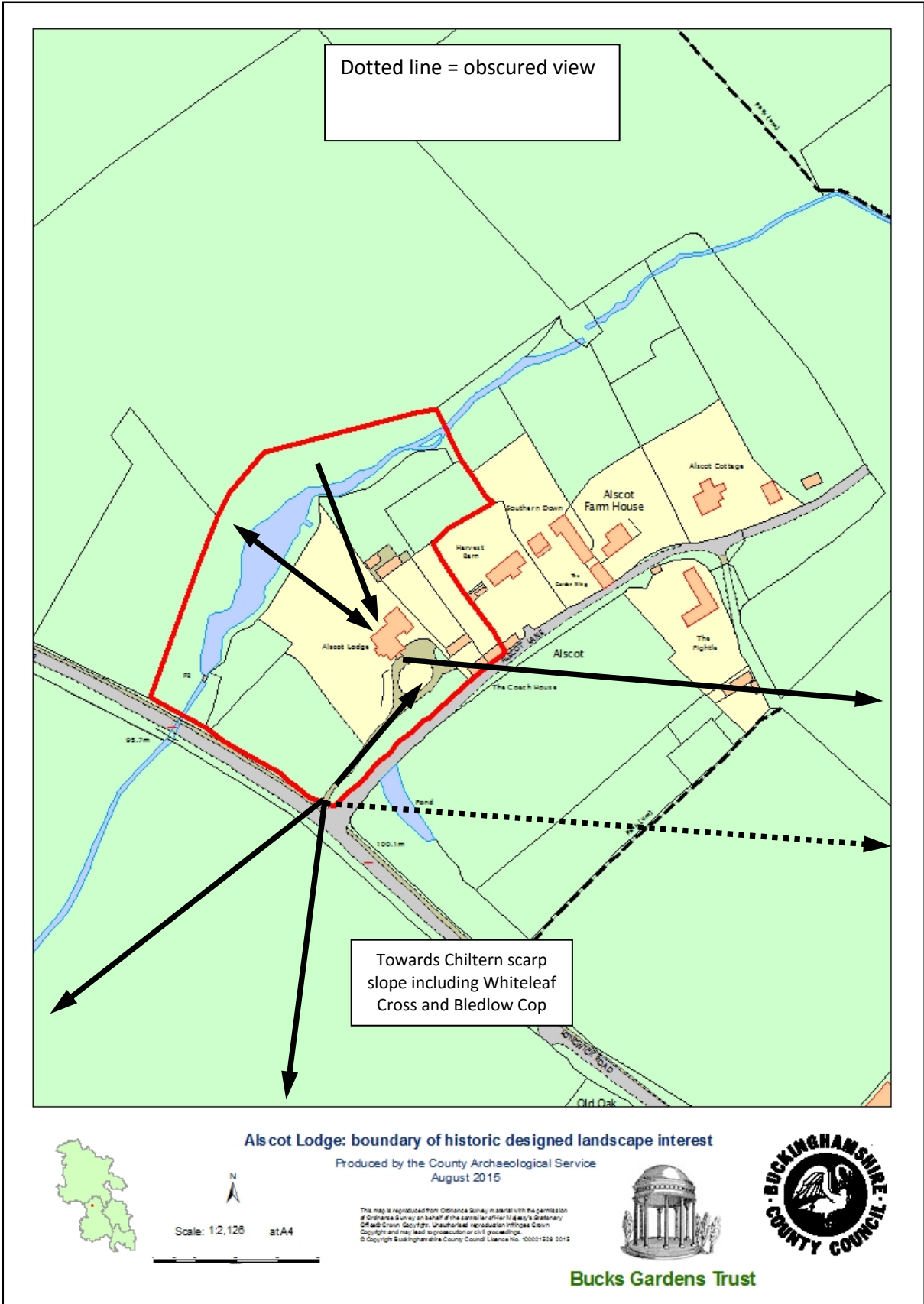
G Miles, R Haigh, J Timms June 2015; edited SR 28 August 2015

KEY HISTORIC VIEWS AND FEATURES



Key to numbered features

1. Alscot Lodge	2. Forecourt
3. Main entrance	4. Main drive
5. Coach house	6. Stable block
7. Kitchen garden, west half	8. Kitchen garden, east half
9. Modern stables	10. Modern menage
11. Lake	12. C19 boundary belt
13. Garden Lawns	14. Former Drivers Road
15. Alscot hamlet	16. Field, site of former houses in hamlet
17. Sluice /late outlet	



KEY IMAGES



Main gateway off Longwick Road (left); drive (centre); stable yard gateway (right).



Boundary wall, Alscot Lane (left); forecourt (centre); entrance front (right).



View from forecourt to Whiteleaf Cross (left); west, garden front and terrace (centre left); south, garden front (centre right); lake outlet below Longwick Road (right).



Views across lake (left, centre); view north along lake over sluice (right).



Coach house (left); kitchen garden (centre), kitchen garden gate pier (right).