

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Castle Hill House, High Wycombe Wycombe Museum

July 2015



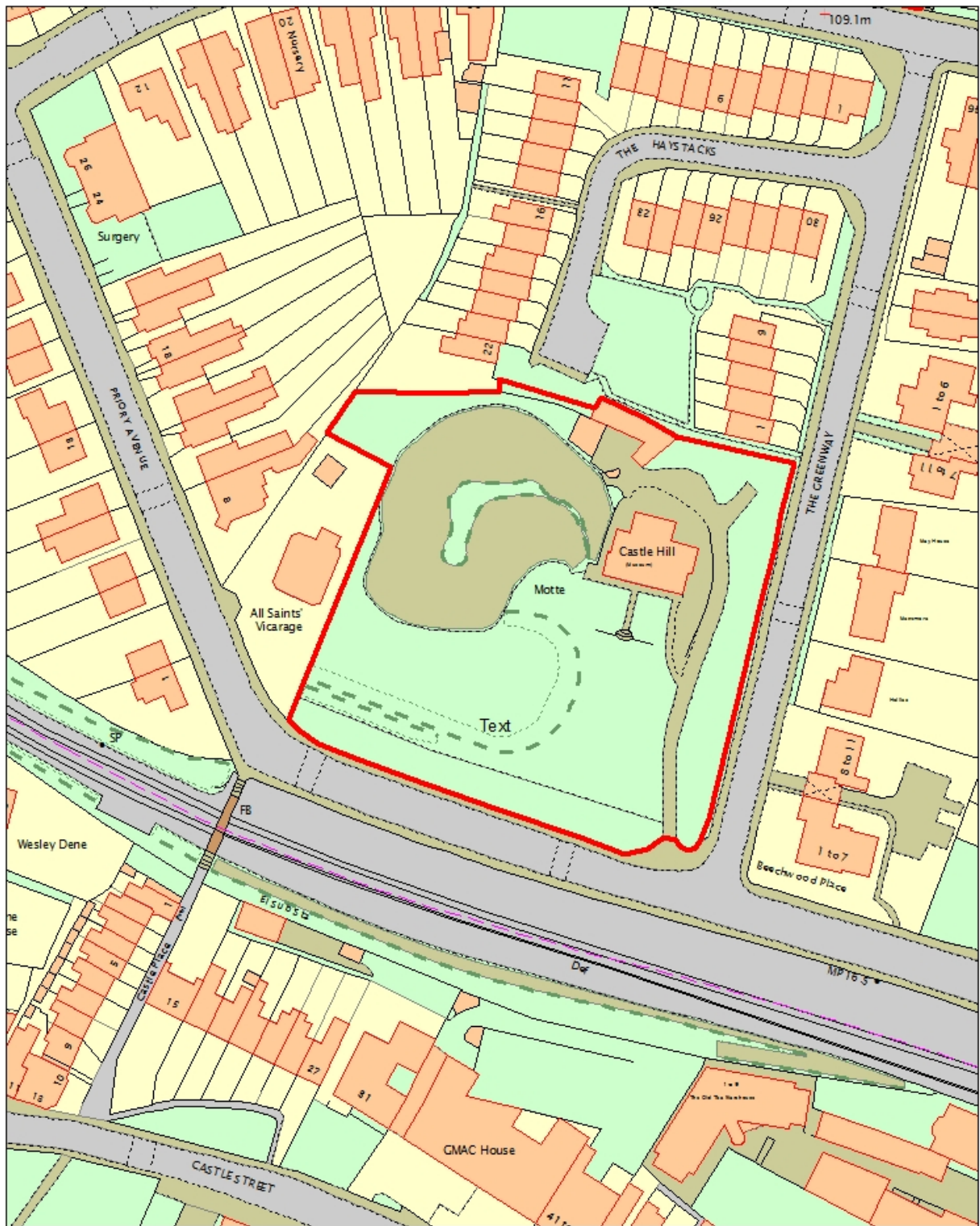
Bucks Gardens
Trust



Association of
Gardens
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HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Scale: 1:1,079 at A4



Castle Hill House: boundary of surviving historic gardens

Produced by the County Archaeological Service
March 2015

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Scale: 1:1,079 at A4



Castle Hill House: 2008 aerial photograph

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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 | CASTLE HILL HOUSE (WYCOMBE MUSEUM) |
| DISTRICT: | Wycombe | |
| PARISH: | High Wycombe | |
| OS REF.: | SU86719323 | |
| | | BCC HER 0060705000 |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview: A Regency villa garden for a C16/C17 Chiltern farmhouse remodelled and extended in the early C19, with considerable significant archaeological evidence identified and varied potential. The garden is a typical layout focussed on a modest villa, with formerly extensive views south and west. The relatively small site was previously considerably larger, including the adjacent C20 vicarage and the Haystacks area to the north, and south down as far as Castle Street. It is dominated by the extraordinary 10m high Mound, believed to originate as a medieval defensive structure (SAM). This was incorporated into the early C19 garden design as the most important feature, crowned by the lost Regency flint gothic folly viewing pavilion, whose site survives.

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, as well as the Mound. It is one of a group of C19 villas and country houses located on hillsides around High Wycombe, developed to take advantage of an elevated position and extensive southerly Chiltern views, others nearby including Hughenden Manor, Rayners, and Brands House.

Archaeological Interest: The archaeological interest and potential are considerable and varied throughout the site. An Anglo-Saxon burial (at the entrance near to the drinking trough) included a skeleton of a woman with a bead necklace and pendant. The site has an exceptional length of documentation, early on as part of the Rectory Lands given to the Abbess and Convent of Godstow by Henry II in 1170. The oldest part of the house dates from the C17 and archaeological discoveries suggest the site has been occupied continuously since the early middle Ages. Potential for evidence relates to the origin of the Mound (unclear but probably a defensive structure, a SAM), its occupation, and the medieval use and cultivation of the wider site. There is the potential for lost domestic buildings and garden features since the C17, which are likely to be largely of C18-early C20 origin, particularly the foundations of the early C19 building on the Mound and related structures.

Architectural Interest: The site is focussed on the house (listed Grade II) standing towards the north-east corner of the site, combining a C16/C17 rear timber-framed wing with a fine flint-faced Regency front wing including a recessed flint-work porch overlooking the Wye Valley and town below. Other structures are typical ancillary buildings including the service structures. The lost flint viewing folly was a high quality structure, apparently contemporary with the flint wing of the house and reminiscent of the flint garden buildings of nearby West Wycombe Park, as documented by photographs before its demolition. It probably also served an eye-catcher from the town and Wye Valley.

Artistic Interest: A modest villa garden for a C16/C17 house remodelled and extended in the early C19. The typical layout of terraces and lawns is focussed on the Regency villa, with formerly extensive views south and west over the Wye Valley over the town towards Wycombe Abbey park and perhaps towards West Wycombe Park (these views now partly obscured by trees and buildings). The relatively small garden is dominated by the extraordinary 10m high Mound incorporated into the early C19 design, with a path encircling the base and paths to the summit where it was formerly crowned by the now lost Regency flint gothic folly as a viewing pavilion, whose site still survives. The planting clothes the garden, particularly commonly used mature trees including lime, horse chestnut and beech.

Historic Interest: Several notable local families have lived in the house including Welles, Nash, Carrington, Pearce and Clarke. Since 1962 it has housed the local museum. The documentary evidence for the C19 development is of considerable interest, associated with the development of the railway adjacent. The garden in the early C20 together with the formerly extensive views are recorded by Edith Andrews in watercolour views (Wycombe Museum).

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The castle mound, the Norman defensive earthwork or motte lying immediately west of the house, was probably constructed between 1135 and 1154 during the civil war after the death of Henry I in 1135. The site was part of Wycombe Rectory which was given to the Abbess and Convent of Godstow, near Oxford, by Henry II in the 1170s. The nuns of Godstow rented the lands out to tenant farmers until the 1530s during the Reformation when the land was seized by Henry VIII. After the Reformation the land was leased to William Greene. By 1609 the land was again in the hands of the crown as James I leased it to Frances Phelps and Richard More in that year.

The oldest part of Castle Hill House was built in the C17. In 1666 the (Rectory) land was mortgaged for the first of several times until it was inherited by John Doble in 1687. It was then sold to Samuel Welles in 1709. The land passed through the Welles family until 1807 when Samuel Welles III died. Castle Hill House was rented out during this period to amongst others, Joan Brooks in 1733, Madam Shrimpton in the late 1730s and a Mr Zachary in 1780. The folly was built on the mound c. 1805. Robert Nash was renting the house in 1807 and bought it in 1808. The building was nearly doubled in size in 1809 when the front section was added plus a rear extension to the north. Bryant (1825) shows Castle Hill House as a small enclosure set back from Amersham Hill.

After Nash's death in 1833 the House was bought at auction by the Carrington family. In the conveyancing of Lord Carrington's land in 1854 footpath runs around the mound with a parterre below the south, entrance front of the house. A spring is clearly marked to the east, with access from the east to the rear buildings to the north. A building, presumably the gothic flint folly, is shown on a clearing at the top of the mound. Deeds dated 1854 mention that 'the pleasure grounds are full of luxuriant and beautiful shrubs and clumps of box affording a delightful seclusion to the house'.

The Carrington family sold the land south of the garden to Wycombe Railway Company in 1862. The 1877 OS map shows Castle Hill House with the octagonal folly and prospect area, wooded with a clearing at the top. To the north lay the kitchen garden (now developed with houses as The Haystacks, 2015) and the outbuildings. Below the south front of the house was a lawn. The tree-lined bank was evident.

In 1881 Castle Hill House was rented by Lord Carrington's estate to JG Peace, a clothier and Mayor of Wycombe. He bought the property in 1892 and sold it in 1909 to Daniel Clarke, his daughter's father-in law. During the wedding of Mr Peace's daughter and Mr Clarke's son, Arthur, in 1901 the Anglo-Saxon burial site was found near the main entrance gate. One of the objects found was an intricate gold pendant which is in the British Museum in London.

In 1925 (OS) the castle mound was still evident with the folly and the raised bank. The Clarkes were the last family to own the site. In 1961 it was bought by the Borough of High Wycombe and in 1962 the Wycombe Museum moved in, in which use it remains (2015). The folly was demolished in 1962.

By 1970 (OS) the house and mound remained with and the recently built vicarage for All Saints parish church occupying the south-west corner of the garden in its own garden. By 1979 (OS) the footpath surrounding the mound had been removed. The bank was still in evidence with a viewing area laid to lawn below the south front of the house. The rear boundary was truncated with the loss of the kitchen garden to The Haystacks to the north.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Castle Hill House is situated 600m north of the heart of High Wycombe, immediately west of the Greenway and beyond this to the west of Amersham Hill, and to the north of the London to Birmingham railway line in a deep cutting. The historic area covers some 0.8 hectares.

The southern boundary is on Priory Avenue and is marked by a brick wall with dark glazed brick coping stones. The east end of the wall is marked by the main gateway to the site, with wrought iron metal gates on brick piers. To the west the boundary is marked by a C20 wooden fence. The north boundary is enclosed largely by a flint and brick wall with railings behind and double wooden gates with brick pillars, and partly by a wooden fence. The eastern boundary is a low yew hedge in front of metal railings. In the south-west corner thirteen steps lead down to a disused gate. This entrance is in line with the foot bridge over the railway line and so apparently dates from 1877.

The site lies on the upper slopes of Amersham Hill, in the heart of the Chiltern Hills close to the summit, and overlooking Wycombe town centre in the Rye valley and beyond this Marlow Hill and Wycombe Abbey Park. The site slopes gently to the south. The underlying geology is chalk with areas of clay with flints. An elevated section to the west rising some 10 metres is known the castle mound. A spring immediately to the east of the house feeds a pool.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance lies 60 metres south-east of the house. Late C20 double metal gates on brick piers are set back from the road on the corner of The Greenway and Priory Avenue. The approach is a metalled drive that leads up to the rear car park on the north side of Castle Hill House. Just inside the gates to the west is a red syenite (granite) water trough for horses, cattle & humans, possibly on the site of the Saxon Burial. The water trough was taken from Frogmore in the town centre in the 1990s and put into the museum gardens for safe keeping. The drive is tree lined with mature yews, limes and copper beech in the manner established by the late C19 (OS 1877).

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Castle Hill House (listed Grade II) is late C16 or early C17 in origin, with later remodelling. It stands towards east of site, its front south block, remodelled c. 1809, and is of 3 bays. The house is built of flint rubble with pilasters at the angles and between bays with a hipped Welsh slate roof with wide eaves cornice. The house has two storeys and attics with sash windows and is entered on the south front via a central door with a traceried elliptical fanlight in a deeply recessed segmentally arched opening and surround of slim panelled Doric pilasters. It is dated on a panel on the west side elevation: 1809. The earlier, parallel C18 rear wing is roughcast and overlooks the service yard to the north.

The front door also provides the main access to the garden and formerly enjoyed long views south to Wycombe Abbey and its park on Marlow Hill as depicted by Mrs Edith Andrews in her watercolour views of the 1930s (Wycombe Museum). These views are now (2015) largely obscured by yews and other trees on the southern boundary.

A detached L-shaped service block to the rear (north-west) of the house possibly formerly included stabling (probably the central part) encloses a small yard. This will (following forthcoming refurbishment) contain education space, a workshop, museum storage and utilities space. A low flint wall, west of the outbuildings, topped with bricks is believed to represent the remains of a Victorian dovecote demolished in storms in 1990.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUND

The gardens lie to the south and west of Castle Hill House and consist of lawns, bowling green, an area for croquet, tennis court, banks and a mound. Paths are paved with irregular slabs of stone. At the front of the house at the south end of the terrace path aligned on the front door is a small cross terrace with benches and stone balls on plinths either side of the main path with a viewing area. The historic views are to the south, of the wooded hillside of Wycombe Abbey park and the Wye Valley, but are obscured by an outgrown yew hedge. The mound to the west has a path to the summit. The planting is informal to the front and sides of the house (south, west and east) and at the base of the mound with ornamental grasses, perennials and shrubs.

A raised bank running parallel to and above the south boundary is also tree lined with horse chestnuts, lime and beech but these currently obscure former views south. A natural spring in the garden to the east of the house forms a small pond.

Castle Hill Mound (SAM) is the most significant feature of the garden and lies 15 metres west of the house and rises some 10 metres. It is currently heavily wooded with a mix of mature trees including beech, oak, yew and sycamore. The mound has a low retaining flint-work wall surrounding its base. This Norman defensive earthwork or motte beside the house, which possibly gives the site its name, was probably constructed between 1135 and 1154 during the Civil War following the death of Henry I. Formerly it had good views over the Wye Valley to the west, south and east.

There is some dispute as to the origins of the mound; one opinion (BCC, 2014) is that the hollow earthworks in the grounds were brick pits and the mound a spoil heap. However there is such extensive historical documentation and research to bring this into question. Another theory is that it originated as prospect mound. In any case it had become used as such by the early C19 as an important garden feature for Castle Hill House as a garden viewing mount with extensive elevated views over and across the Wye Valley and thriving town below.

Although the C18 or early-C19 folly on the summit of the mound was demolished in 1962 photographic evidence of 1890 and 1900 shows that it was of a single storey with gothic glazed windows and tessellations, octagonal in shape with paths leading west to the summit of the mound and east to Castle Hill House. It apparently had a south-facing gazebo with three open arches facing to the south-west, south and south-east in front of a room with glazed windows behind. It was of considerable sophistication echoing garden buildings of Sir Francis Dashwood's West Wycombe Park some 2.5 miles to the north-west. It enjoyed framed views from the windows including perhaps west towards distant West Wycombe Park and the Golden Ball on the top of the parish church on the West Wycombe Hill. The folly was probably prominent from various parts of the Wye Valley, particularly the slopes of Wycombe Abbey park and The Rye public park in the valley bottom with the C18 lake, formerly part of the Abbey park. The folly survived until 1960 just before Castle Hill house became the museum in 1962.

Kitchen Garden

The former kitchen gardens occupied land to the north rear of Castle Hill House and grounds, bounded to the east by the Greenway and adjoining Priory Road to the north. This land is now housing called the Haystacks built in 1960s.

References

Pamphlets from the Green Collection (High Wycombe Library)

Pamphlet; 'A brief History of Castle Hill House' (Wycombe Museum).

Sharing Wycombe's Old Photographs <http://www.bucksc.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/centre-for-buckinghamshire-studies/online-resources/swop/>

Mrs Edith Andrews, watercolours of the garden, 1930s (Wycombe Museum).

Maps

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

1854 Lord Carrington Estate Map (CBS?)

1878 John Parker, Town Map, site of old castle (Rattue)

Great Western Railway Map 1877

Conveyancing Maps (High Wycombe Library)

Ordnance Survey

1:500 scale High Wycombe town plan, 1860

1st Edition 25" scale 1875 published 1880 (sheet SUX1V11.1)

25" scale Surveyed 1894 revised 1897 2nd edition published 1899 (sheet XLV11.1)

6" scale 1920

6" scale Surveyed 1874 revised 1924/25 (Sheet XLV11)

6" scale Surveyed 1956 Revised 1961 (sheet SU89S)

1:10,000 scale 1965 (sheet SU89SE) National Grid 1977

1:1250 scale surveyed 1965 (sheet SU8693SE) 1979

C Balsdon and C Clark 01.04.2015, edited SR 14 April 2015



Castle Hill House, mid-C20: Folly and Gothic conservatory (both gone) (copyright Wycombe Museum)

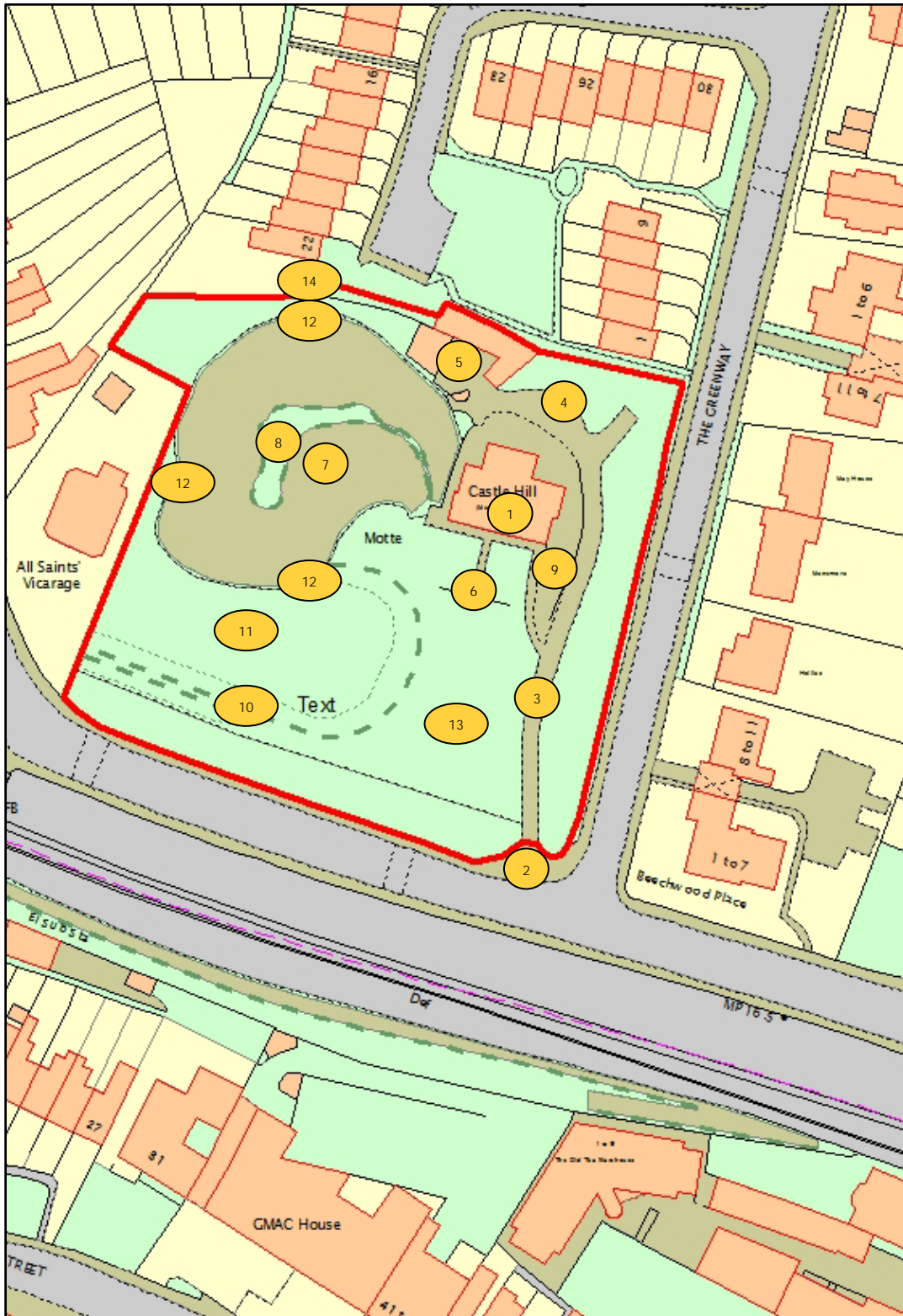


Folly at the top of the Mound, early 1900? (copyright Wycombe Museum)

KEY HISTORIC VIEWS AND FEATURES

Key to numbered features

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Castle Hill House | 2. Main site entrance |
| 3. Main drive | 4. Car park |
| 5. Rear yard and stable block | 6. Garden terrace |
| 7. The Mound | 8. Site of gothic folly |
| 9. Spring and rockery | 10. Viewing terrace |
| 11. West lawn | 12. Path around the Mound |
| 13. South lawn | 14. Entrance to former kitchen garden |



Castle Hill House: boundary of surviving historic gardens

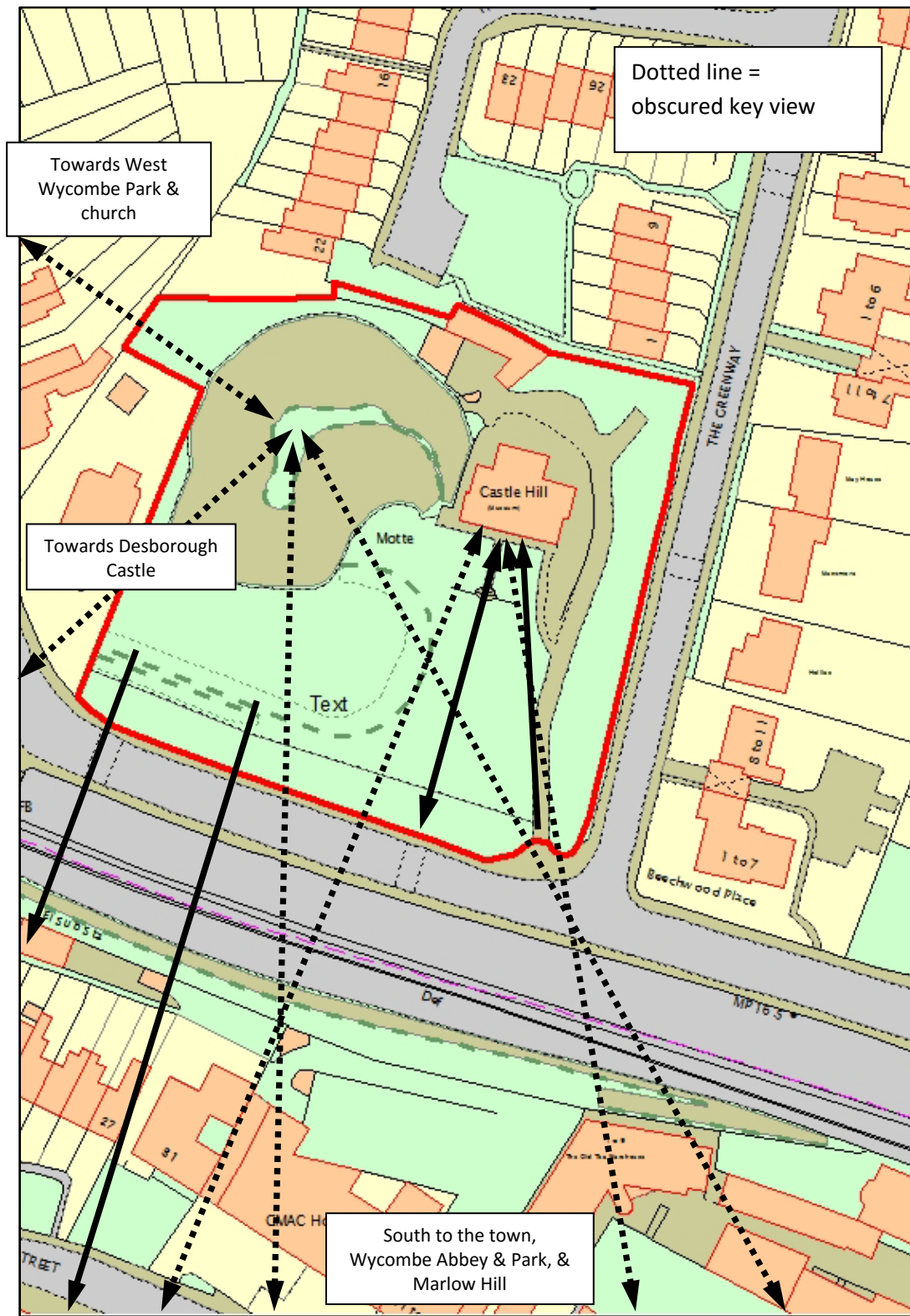
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KEY IMAGES



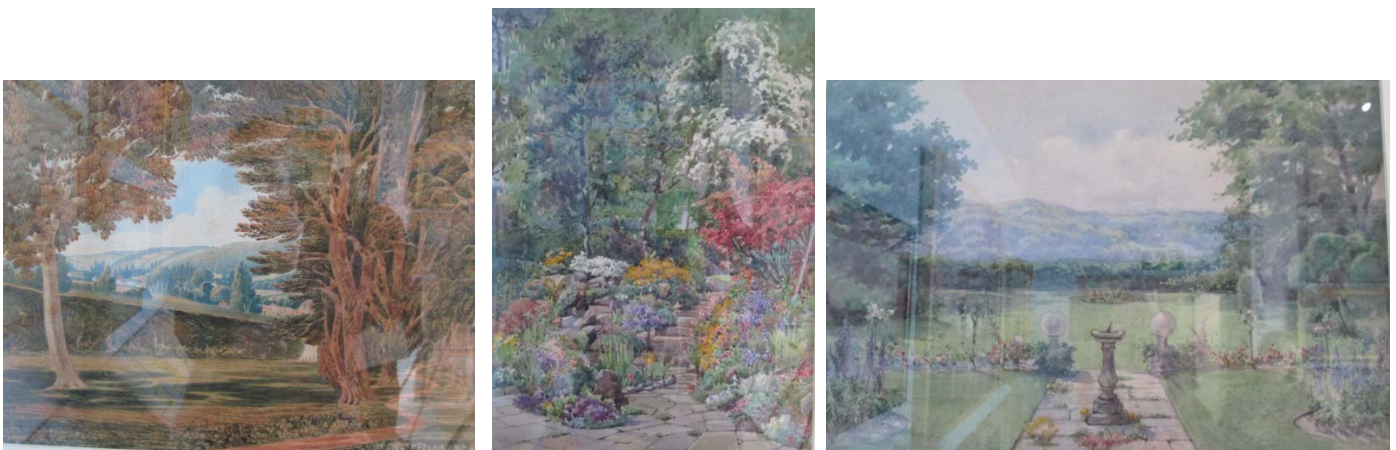
Gateway (left); south, entrance front of house (Centre); view over garden from house to High Wycombe valley (right).



The south garden, views from upper floor of house, to south-east (left), south (centre) and south-west (right).



The Mound/Motte (left); the slope of the mound (Centre); view south from the Mound towards Wycombe Abbey woodlands and Marlow Hill (Right).



Mrs Edith Andrews 1930s views to south-east (left); rock garden by house (centre) and south (right).

(copyright Wycombe Museum)