

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## Green Park (Aston Clinton Park)

December 2014



Bucks Gardens Trust



Association of  
Gardens  
Trusts



## 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* 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)

# SITE BOUNDARY MAP



## Green Park, Aston Clinton: Boundary of Historic Designed Landscape Interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
December 2014



This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.  
© Copyright Buckinghamshire County Council Licence No. 10001228 2014



**Bucks Gardens Trust**

# AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH



Scale: 1:8,035 at A4



Green Park, Aston Clinton: 2006 aerial photograph

© Getmapping plc. [www.getmapping.com](http://www.getmapping.com)

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
March 2014



**Bucks Gardens Trust**

<b>COUNTY:</b>	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>GREEN PARK (FORMERLY ASTON CLINTON PARK)</b>  <b>BCC HER 0020402000</b>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	AYLESBURY VALE	
<b>PARISH:</b>	ASTON CLINTON	
<b>OS REF.:</b>	SP884 114	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Overview:** The remains of a mid-late C19 garden and park for a lost country house, forming an early element of a unique cluster of seven flamboyant C19 Rothschild country house landscapes in Buckinghamshire/ Hertfordshire (the closest comparable of which are nearby Halton House and Tring Park). The design incorporates features from previous C18/C19 design phases and a canal, with mid-C19 buildings by Stokes and Devey (who both worked on nearby Rothschild sites) and extensive mature ornamental tree planting. The 75 ha. site is contiguous with adjacent Halton House, also for the Rothschild family. Although many features and much woody planting survives including parkland, losses and change have been sustained in the C20, including during the 1960s adaptation to a training centre, included most notably the replacement of the lost mansion with a large recreational building, and residential development around the northern periphery.

**Archaeological interest:** Archaeological evidence of, and potential for, a multi-phase C19 country house landscape overlaying and adapting an earlier designed landscape. Significant survivals of damaged features from various phases, including the principal building; also considerable evidence of pre-designed landscape features (including ridge and furrow), and late C18 canal features.

**Architectural interest:** The partial survival of a notable mid-C19 country house group with a 1960s training centre complex. Major C19 buildings by Stokes/Devey. Surviving ornamental elements of the C19 Rothschild landscape design include the main gateway, steps, balustrading and a bridge, with earlier structures (e.g. grotto and canal).

**Artistic interest:** Characteristic complex Rothschild mid-to-late C19 landscape design, still clearly focused on the site of the lost principal building, retaining considerable design integrity despite later construction and adaptation for training centre use. Fine and extensive C19 exotic woody planting evident throughout the site, including conifers. Strong relationship with the contiguous Halton House via a former drive, and the largely undamaged Chilterns setting to south, although the village has encroached on the opposite side (to north).

**Historic interest:** Strong associations with the Rothschilds and their influential C19 social and political circle over a seventy-year period, as well as physical/visual links to other Rothschild estates. A landscape to a lost country house, which went through a number of changes (including a school in which Evelyn Waugh taught), before its demolition in 1956, and subsequent conversion to its current (2014) institutional use in the 1960s.

## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Aston Clinton predates the Norman Conquest (VCH), and there is evidence of a moated manor house (known as Church Farm) at north end of site near St Michael's church, later incorporated in the site of the Rothschild kitchen garden.

The manor was held by the Gerrards from 1614 to 1701, when Sir Charles Gerrard died. His heiress, Elizabeth, married Warwick Lake, and the manor descended to her heirs. In 1765 her grandson Gerard Lake (later Viscount Lake) was lord of the manor, and it is from his occupancy that the first evidence of a house in the southern portion of the current site dates (1793/4 Proposed Canal Survey map). After his death in 1808, he was succeeded by his two sons, in succession, the third Viscount Lake dying in 1848. It is from this period that the first evidence of a designed landscape dates. The 1813 OS drawing, 1814 pre-enclosure map and 1816 post-enclosure map reveals the layout of the garden and the water courses within the site.

The estate was purchased in 1851 by Sir Anthony de Rothschild. The house, which had possibly been rebuilt in the 1840s by the Duke of Buckingham, was remodelled by Sir Anthony in Italianate style including a new conservatory, and the entrance complex built (architect G. Stokes who also designed the Rothschild mansion Mentmore Towers nearby). It was one of the earlier of two groups of estate purchases of the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury and, while regarded as one of the less palatial of their residences here, it was still a major country house and grounds. It was the scene of various social entertainments, with the Prince of Wales a frequent guest.

Rothschild's daughter, Constance continued to live in the house from his death in 1876 until 1910, when her mother died and Aston Clinton fell back into the estate of Lionel Rothschild. She was responsible for alterations and extensions to the house and garden, including re-designed stable block and water features including a Fairy Glen (see 1923 sales catalogue and OS 1877). During this period, including when William Warren was Head Gardener from 1895 (*Rothschild Review*, 2013), the kitchen garden was relocated from the southwest of the house to the site of the old manor house in the north of the park: a new parterre was built in its place (OS 1900). Warren retired in 1924. The period between 1877 and 1900 also saw changes to the drive and approaches (OS 1920/25).

The house was occupied by the military during World War I, and the estate was put up for sale by the Rothschilds in 1923, garden statuary and seats being sold separately in the same year. Since then the house has had a number of owners. The house was occupied by Aston Clinton School from 1924 to 1930 (during which time the teaching staff included Evelyn Waugh), and reopened briefly as a hotel (the Aston Clinton Country Club) in 1931. The estate was divided into lots and sold again in 1932, and the house reopened as the Howard Park Hotel in 1933, before being demolished in 1956. The estate was acquired by Buckinghamshire County Council in c.1959 and operated as the Green Park training centre, with a sports complex built on the platform of the former house which forms the core of the site currently (2014). The periphery was subject to development to the north and northeast of the site.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING**

The village of Aston Clinton lies 4 km east of Aylesbury and 6 km west of Tring (Hertfordshire). The site lies immediately south of the London Road (former A41) as it runs through the village of Aston Clinton, and to the west of Stablebridge Road, which crosses the Grand Union Canal via a bridge to the south east and joins the London Road 250 m to the north east.

Aston Clinton Park lies at the foot of the Chiltern Hills to the south, including nearby Wendover Woods and Aston Hill. The ground is almost flat at the site of the former house, sloping gently to the north-west, and rising beyond the canal to the south-east towards the wooded hills outside the site.

The roughly triangular 75 ha. site is bounded to the south-east by the tree-lined Wendover Arm of the Grand Union canal (disused) and to the south-west by post and wire farm fencing and intermittent hedging. The north boundary formerly ran broadly parallel with the London Road but C20 development has largely eradicated this line. The eastern boundary follows the rear fencing of C20 and C21 development, and is within the park's former boundary tree belt (within which short sections of a pleasure walk survive, now part of a public footpath leading from the park).

The eastern boundary is defined by modern fencing, and runs from the London Road to the south and east of the Old Rectory Grounds, before following the course of the Wellonhead stream south-east to the main entrance to Aston Clinton Park on Stablebridge Road, and then following the road beyond to the south-east to the canal bridge.

A former service entrance to the site is situated at the canal some 150m south-east of the house site. This gave access from the canal (canal opened 1799; Pettigrew). Coal and other supplies were delivered to the house along a track through the pleasure grounds via this route across a swing bridge seen in Callow's view of 1859. The remains of a wharf and groundworks consisting of engineering bricks as part of the swing bridge are visible. The track continues south from the canal to Cobblers Pits and possibly to The Chalet (formerly belonging to the Rothschilds) in Halton Woods, part of Halton Park. Access to this track from Stablebridge Road is shown on the pre-enclosure map of 1793.

The site is broadly flat, being located in the Vale of Aylesbury at the foot of the Chiltern Hills, which rise steeply to the south, dominating the park. Its proximity to the Chiltern Hills is evidenced by the fact that it straddles the geological boundary between chalk and cretaceous gault clay, creating the spring line within the site which has influenced its overall design. To the north is the fringe of Aston Clinton village. To the west is an airfield and forestry plantations. The park enjoys long views over the Vale of Aylesbury.

Aston Clinton Park is one of seven estates in the area developed by the Rothschild family in the C19, the rest of which are all on the EH Parks and Gardens Register. Of these Mentmore is visible on a clear day and Halton, which abuts Aston Clinton to the south, was formerly physically connected by a drive. The relationship between the site and Aston Clinton is further evidenced by the estate buildings erected in the village by the Rothschilds.

## ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance to the site lies on the west side of Stablebridge Road, 200m from its junction with London Road and 350m north-east of the house site. It consists of two, large, double-gated entrances with ornamental iron gates hung on brick piers with carved stone caps, the piers flanked by concave brick walls with stone footings and balustrades. On the either side is a pedestrian gateway and, north of the gateway, is the brick-built East Lodge. On the south side is a brick stable block with an integral three-storey water tower. The entrance complex was apparently designed by George Stokes c. 1851 as part of his rebuilding of the main house for Sir Anthony de Rothschild (Pevsner, Gulland, 2003). Immediately inside the entrance gates, and overlooked by East Lodge, the Wellonhead Spring rises to form a long narrow pond in a deep ravine, bounded on the south side by a parapet made of Portland stone.

This entrance predates the Rothschild ownership (1793–94 Proposed Canal Survey map), mapping indicates a 'track' running parallel to the proposed canal, in the direction of Halton, it follows a route further east than the present approach.

A tarmac drive leading from the entrance branches sharply south into a stable yard while the main route continues in a gentle curve to the south-west, passing after 50m a range of car parks to the south laid out within a mixed woodland pleasure ground and a cluster of buildings comprising Bucks County Council's training centre, built in the 1960s.

The drive continues south-west for 250m, offering views north over parkland, to arrive on the south-east side of a large sports building standing on the platform of the former Aston Clinton House. The drive reaches an oval turning circle around a grass plat, the site of a former fountain and balustrade (OS, 1877). Evidence of its former course survives in part in gravel surfacing under the turf. This turning circle lies adjacent to the south-east of the site of the former entrance front of the Rothschild house.

The drive continues from the turning circle for 150m south-west to a formerly balustraded stone bridge over a ravine (now, 2014 in a ruined state), formerly known as the Fairy Glen. Beyond this the drive continues for a further 500m parallel to the canal, through mixed mature ornamental woodland including yew, box and beech, to the western boundary with Halton. The drive formerly continued into Halton Park to Halton house, thereby connecting the two parks during the Rothschilds' ownership and was ornamented by sculpture including urns (OS).

The Rothschilds built a further entrance some 800m further north-west on the London Road (OS 1877) at West Lodge (Devey c. 1874; listed grade II), now a hotel (sale particulars, 1923). From West Lodge the north drive runs south initially as a tarmac road, passing after 100m Park Lodge (c. 1900) on the east side, then traversing a recreation ground (occupying part of the park). It continues as a grassed-over gravel track through rough pasture into the inner park. After 450m the north drive turns southeast and is joined by the remains of a path from the northwest. This previously gave access to the park from the parish church adjacent to the northwest boundary and from the former kitchen garden area immediately southeast of the church (OS 1877). This would have formerly been



part of the pleasure ground walk to the glasshouses in the kitchen garden. The carriage track enters the pleasure grounds, at a point marked by surviving ornamental oak gateposts flanking a modern gate and by the remains of a timber and iron pedestrian gate in a distinctive design.

A path (gone by 1900, OS) shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map connected these entrance gateways to the south-west side of the former Aston Clinton House. The 1877/1900 OS maps indicate a path from the southwest side of the house leading in a northwest direction before turning 90 degrees in a southwest direction in a straight line along a 'boundary' ending at the West Lodge track. The gate and posts appear to be located at the point where the path met the track. On post-1900 maps the path no longer appears and a parterre is shown on the southwest side of the house. The West Lodge track then curves eastwards from the gates to join the drive to Halton 100m northwest of the Fairy Glen.

Prior to West Lodge being built access was via Church Lane 150m further along the London road (Bryant map 1822) this entrance ceased to be used when the West Lodge drive was constructed in the late C19. Surviving now (2013) as a road, it passes the church (and the site of the later kitchen garden) and skirts the cricket ground becoming a track to the south of the cricket ground where it turns 90 degrees southwest after 400m it joins the track to Halton.

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDING**

The current principal building is a sports complex in the south of the site. It is built on the platform of the C18/C19 Aston Clinton House (demolished in 1956), which was the focus for the designed landscape. Constructed in the late C18 by the Lakes (1793/4 Canal Survey; Gulland), it was modified and extended in the mid- to late C19 by the Rothschilds, in Italianate style (Pevsner), following a possible alteration by the Duke of Buckingham in the 1840s. At this time the porch was altered and an additional wing constructed (Gulland), and steps to the formal garden and pleasure grounds added to the outside of the drawing and dining room windows. The entrance to the building was on the southeast side. The house platform, the base of the balustrading to the turning circle lawn in front of the house (to the south-east of the platform), and a number of garden features survive (see below).

Before the Lake period the principal building occupied the mediaeval moated site in the north of the site, later overlaid by the Rothschilds' kitchen garden.

The site was acquired by Buckinghamshire County Council in 1959, and has since been used as the Green Park training centre. This use has involved the conversion of the stable block to conference use, the erection of the sports complex on the house platform (the largest existing structure within the site), and the construction of a group of one- and two-storey training centre buildings in the pleasure ground some 200m to the north-east of the sports complex. These last were designed by the County Architect, F. B. Pooley in 1964 (Pevsner) they are now (2014) the functional focus of the site.

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

The gardens and current pleasure grounds enclose the sports buildings which stand on the site of the former Aston Clinton House, some 400m from the main entrance gates on Stablebridge Road.

Immediately to the southwest of the house platform, now (2014) surviving as low grassed banks, is a sunken, fenced recreation area with a climbing wall. This occupies the site of a former quartered parterre (6" OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1900) which was laid out during the time of Sir Anthony Rothschild with formal bedding and statuary and surrounded by mown grass (CBS images). On all four sides evidence remains of Portland stone steps (the south-west ones are most evident steps remaining) which led down from a surrounding path on the banked area. There are also sections of stone edging, all in poor condition. The former parterre partly occupies the site of a kitchen garden laid out adjacent to the site of an earlier house built by General Lake (Pre-enclosure map 1814).

Some 100m south-east of the house platform and facing northwest onto the drive around the turning circle is a yew-enclosed spring fed grotto with a domed, brick built well head and a pool, set into the wooded bank (date is not known and it is not recorded on maps). Its origin is unclear but stylistically it may be of the early C19 (i.e. Lake period).

On the north-west side of the former parterre a gravel path leads southwest for 150m into wooded pleasure grounds which comprise of mostly mature ornamental species (including, holm oak, cedar, yew and a champion weeping beech) and to the deep, narrow north/south valley with a small stream and, to the south-east a pool. A path runs alongside the water course with a view northwards to the Fairy Glen bridge carrying the drive to Halton House.

From the bridge there are views to the northwest and southeast, there is evidence of the four pilasters and plinths that would have held statues (photograph 1900 CBS). The valley, known to the Rothschilds' as the Fairy Glen (photograph 1900 CBS) is spring fed and was planted with ferns, many surviving, and overhanging trees including an impressive Weeping Beech (*Fagus sylvatica 'Pendula'*).

The gardens and the pleasure grounds were renowned for intensive ornamental horticulture during the late C19 and early C20 as were the other Rothschild gardens.

## **PARK**

The park lies to the northwest of the pleasure grounds. The inner park is grazed, with trees, individual and in groups; the outer park is largely mown and given over to recreational uses now, with some C20 buildings, as well as an area of allotments.

The park was laid out during the period the Lake family were in residence (1760 -1808), and evidence of ornamental planting can be seen on the 1814 pre-enclosure map. This consists of woodland, coppice, clumps of trees, and specimen trees. The planting is denser near to the house and a 'wilderness' of trees and shrubs lies to the south west of the house in which the 'Fairy glen' is hidden.

The Rothschilds added belts of evergreens, typically yews and pines, along the drive to the east gates, screening views to the north (the village) and along the south-west edge of the kitchen garden. These evergreen plantations, which survive well, are typical of the Rothschild estates.

Along the south side of the London road, the northern perimeter of the park, is a belt of mixed boundary planting, chiefly yew and sycamore, screening the road from the park. Many incursions of C20 development into this tree belt disrupt it and hence it is discontinuous.

The 'Ladies Path' was a circular walk around the edge of the park, often through the sheltering trees and can be traced on the OS maps of 1877 and 1920-25. The path, although now broken in places in other places still follows the original course from the main drive near the Wellonhead spring, north and north-west to St Michael's church, then returns via a track near the western boundary of the estate.

Many areas of ornamental woody planting survive including remnants of a lime avenue alongside the north drive; several 'roundels' of trees including Wellingtonias, some fenced, others open to grazing animals; and bounding the drive from the east and screening the (former) house is a dense plantation of yews and deciduous trees, notably a chestnut-leaved oak (*Quercus castaneifolia*).

### **KITCHEN GARDEN**

The Rothschilds' kitchen garden was laid out 650 metres north-west of their house next to the church on the manorial site (1877 OS). It is now mainly a cricket ground, bounded by a stream to the west, Church Lane to the north, and the recreation ground to the east. The 1900 OS shows two discrete areas. To the west was a roughly rectangular kitchen garden with a grid pattern of paths and an extensive range of glass houses and other buildings (demolished 1932, *Rothschild Review*, 2013) at the northern end, aligned parallel to Church Lane. The buildings included living quarters for staff, a fig house, vinery, peach and cherry houses (Gulland, 2003). A more wooded area slopes gently upwards to the north-east as far as West Lodge, the former home of the Rothschilds' head-gardener, (Gulland 2003) and a circular feature, probably a pond, lay between the two parts of the garden. The garden could be entered from the north off Church Lane (at the current cricket ground entrance), also from the south-west corner, and from the public path which runs from Church Lane to the north drive along the eastern edge of the churchyard and behind West Lodge.

A dual character has persisted as the flat, rectangular western end is a cricket ground with cricket pavilion, whilst the eastern end is overgrown and disused.

Whilst none of the formerly extensive and elaborate garden structures survive, the substantial shelter belt including evergreens remains to define much of the boundary, raised on a bank along the southern boundary. Much iron park fence divides the kitchen garden from the recreation ground to the south. Unusually, the garden was not walled.

### **REFERENCES**

- Bucks Herald*, Obituary: William Warren, Head Gardener (16 March 1928).  
Callow, William, 3 watercolours of the grounds (1859) (BCC Museum)  
Cavernlis-Frost, J. 'Mr Warren's photograph album – memories of a vanished Rothschild Estate', *The Rothschild Archive Trust Annual Review 2012-13* (2013), 38-46.  
Gulland, D. 'Aston Clinton Manor House: from moated site to classical mansion', *Recs Bucks*, 43, 196-207 (2003).

Gulland, D. 'Aston Clinton House 1923–1932', *Recs Bucks*, 48 (2008), 255–273.

Gulland, D. 'Aston Clinton House, Buckinghamshire' *The Rothschild Archive Trust Annual Review 2002-03* (2003), 32-37.

Page, W. (ed.), *A History of the County of Buckingham*, 2 (1908), 312-19.

Petticrew, I., Austin, A. and Martin, B. (n.d.) 'The Wendover Arm and the Tring Reservoirs, a brief history', [http://gerald-massey.org.uk/tring/b\\_wendover\\_arm.htm](http://gerald-massey.org.uk/tring/b_wendover_arm.htm) (accessed 20/11/2013)

Pevsner, N., Williamson, E. *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994), 145-46.

Rothschild Bank Archive, Mr Warren's Photograph Album, early C20.

Sale catalogue, Aston Clinton Park Estate (1923). (CBS 947/40)

Bucks County Council Museum web site: photographs and postcards, late C19/early C20.  
<http://www.bucksc.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/centre-for-buckinghamshire-studies/online-resources/historic-photographs/> (accessed 17 March 2014)

### MAPS

1760s, Jefferys, Map of Bucks.

1793-4, Canal survey (CBS P/U/A 9/2).

1813, Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, 2" scale.

1814, Enclosure map: pre-enclosure (CBS Ma/8/1.R).

1816, Enclosure map: post-enclosure (CBS IR51).

1822, Bryant Map of Buckinghamshire.

1925, West Lodge conveyance plan.

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition, surveyed 1877, published 1884  
2nd edition, surveyed 1898, published 1900

OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition, surveyed 1898, published 1899  
3rd edition, published 1920/25.

C de C

March 2014

Edited SR: 16 Dec 2014

# KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES

