

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## Stoke Court

November 2015



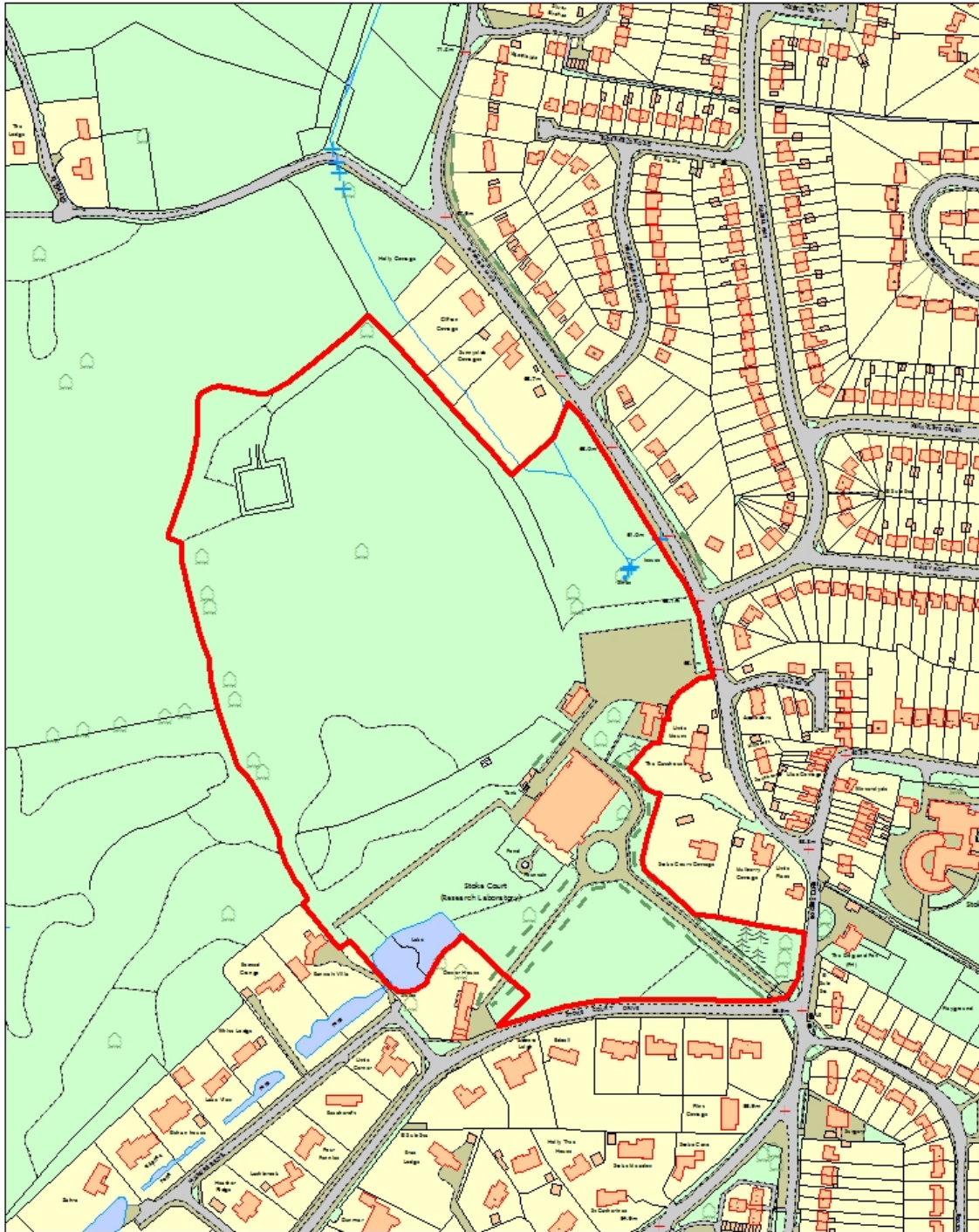
Bucks Gardens  
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Association of  
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# HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



**Stoke Court: boundary of historic designed landscape interest**

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
July 2015



Scale: 1:3,256 at A4



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Stoke Court: 2011 aerial photograph

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**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* 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)

<b>COUNTY:</b>	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>STOKE COURT, STOKE POGES</b>  <b>BCC HER 1232001000</b>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	SOUTH BUCKS	
<b>PARISH:</b>	STOKE POGES	
<b>OS REF:</b>	SU 976 843	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

A pleasure ground laid out informally in the late C18 or early C19, as the setting for a rural cottage closely associated with the poet Thomas Gray. The owners sought to create a small-scale imitation of a landscape park in the style of a *ferme ornee*, imitating a working farm with a circuit walk through a belt of ornamental trees and hedgerows around a paddock, with views over Windsor and Eton from the upper levels that possibly inspired Gray's poem 'Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College'. This layout was developed in several phases in the mid- and late C19 and early C20, to include formal features, a maze, a chain of water bodies and parkland. The most important designed elements, those present by the mid-C19, largely survive. The later C19 and early C20 expansion phases to the south, west and east, were of lesser importance and have been lost or fragmented. The C20 housing around the garden has damaged the early C20 phase particularly to the south-west and south-east.

### Archaeological interest

The identified archaeology is of local significance as far as it is understood to date. The most important archaeological potential is connected with lost features of the ornamental layout, particularly evidence of Gray's Summerhouse, shrubbery walk, other lost structures, paths, etc

### Architectural interest

A typical late C19/early C20 country house ensemble (although the house was largely rebuilt in the late C20) incorporating earlier ornamental structures. Gray's summerhouse (gone), probably of early-mid-C19 date was the most important landscape feature as the climax of Gray's Walk. It occupied a commanding position overlooking the mansion and landscape, and its site remains open with the archaeological remains of the footings and mound. Historic images indicate its structure and style. The late C19 walled kitchen garden and associated structures have gone, but within the front garden of Lashbrook, Lakeside Drive (outside the historic boundary), stands a flint rustic arch (listed Grade II) with a semicircular alcove behind. The remains of an ice-house apparently survive in the grounds of Little Mount, Duffield Lane.

### Artistic interest

The grounds of a country house, enlarged in phases from a modest C18 and earlier cottage or farmhouse, to become by the early C20 a show house for entertaining the rich and influential of British life.

The most important features, Gray's Walk, and the paddock which it encloses, survive. Their origins are unclear: certainly pre-1811 and likely to date from the late C18 but perhaps from the time that Gray stayed here in the 1740s and 1750s. It is a good example of its type and a rare survival of a circuit walk sheltered by a narrow belt of trees with views into a paddock and out into the wider landscape in the style of a *ferme ornee*. The former Gray's Summerhouse was the climax of the design, set on a prominent ridge on an artificial knoll with the key view some four miles south towards Eton College and Windsor Castle. Although the building has gone its mounded site survives along with the wooded circuit walk and paddock. The views are obscured by vegetation. The garden close to the house with the pond and shrubberies retains the early-mid-C19 character, with various formal features (terrace and walk). Later C20 housing to the south-west and south-east has irreversibly damaged the early C20 phase.

### **Historic interest**

Culturally the site is of high significance for its close association with the internationally important mid-C18 poet Thomas Gray and his most important and influential work, the 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' (pub. 1751) which had a profound effect on the greatest cultural movement of its time in Europe: the Romantic Movement. Gray knew the area, its topography and rural character intimately and apparently drew on this for his poetry (although it is unclear whether the landscape features in place by the early C19 and which form the framework of the present layout had been put in place in his lifetime).

Gray's connection with Stoke Poges commenced in 1742, shortly before his mother and her sister Mary Antrobus came to live with their lately widowed sister, Mrs. Rogers, at West End Cottage. The 'Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College,' called in Gray's own MS. 'Eton College, Windsor, and the adjacent country,' was his first publication. It is descriptive of the views of 'distant spires' and 'antique towers' from the ridge between West End Cottage and Farnham Common which is incorporated into the circuit walk, and on which Gray's Summerhouse (its construction probably post-dating Gray's connection) formerly stood. It is likely that the views from the elevated northern area of the pleasure ground around the site of the former summerhouse inspired Gray. (VCH)



## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1660, the Salter family owned West End House (later Stoke Court) estate in Stoke Poges. During Elliot Salter's ownership (1721-70) the house was leased to a succession of tenants. In 1739 Jonathan and Anna Rogers (uncle and aunt of the poet Thomas Gray, 1716-71) became leaseholders of the house. In 1741, Gray returned from his travels in Europe with Horace Walpole. Around 1742, Gray began to stay with his aunt at West End House. His mother and her sister Mary Antrobus took up residence there after the death of Jonathan Rogers c.1742. Around this time Gray began his 'Elegy' which he completed in 1750 and circulated to friends. Also in 1750 the dowager Lady Cobham (d.1760) moved from Stowe in north Bucks to Stoke Poges Manor House. Gray became a frequent visitor to the Manor House and while there wrote the poem 'A Long Story'. Lady Cobham employed Lancelot 'Capability' Brown to work on the grounds at the Manor House, and he also worked on the adjacent Stoke Park and Stoke Place.

Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' was published in 1751. In 1758 Anna Rogers died, Gray shut up the house, gave up the lease (Rigby) and subsequently visited only occasionally when staying at Stoke [Manor?] House (VCH).

In 1771 Gray died. In the parish churchyard a brick table tomb with plain stone slabs marks the spot where he lies buried by the side of his mother and aunt. An inscription let into the wall of the church under the window opposite the grave alone denotes this fact. (VCH) The layout of the grounds during Gray's association with West End House in the 1740s-50s is unclear, but he wrote much in this period, some of it clearly inspired by Stoke Poges. The subject of his 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', written in 1742, was probably a view south from on or near the elevated site of Gray's Summerhouse some 300m north-west of the house.

By the 1750s Gray had become a nationally revered poet and places associated with him and his poetry were highly valued. The architect Wyatt completed Gray's memorial in nearby Stoke Park in 1799.

After Gray gave up the lease in 1758 West End House was occupied by various families including the Salters, the owners until 1828 (Rigby). Captain Elliot Salter RN (son of Elliot Salter) lived at West End House in the period between c.1774 and 1788. He was a renowned seafaring man of courage and humanity. Having captured the French frigate l'Amazone in 1782 during the War of American Independence, on being chased by the French fleet, he released his prize rather than sink her and kill all the wounded remaining on board. This episode was later recorded in oils and engraved by artist Robert Dodd (1782), possibly commissioned by Captain Salter.

(<http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/11941.html>). It seems Captain Salter enlarged West End House and may also have extended the grounds, perhaps creating what became known later as 'Gray's Walk' (the origins of this name are unclear). His son Christopher Salter (Sheriff of Bucks in 1812) owned the property from 1790 to 1828 and further extended the house. (1869 Sale Particulars plan of development of the house).

By 1811-12 (OSD), the grounds of West End House included what was later called 'Gray's Walk', a pleasure ground walk around a paddock north of the house leading to, at its furthest, most elevated point, the site of Gray's Summerhouse. In 1812 the public road was diverted east from immediately outside the front door. The 1822 Inclosure map shows Gray's Walk and Summerhouse in more

detail, also service buildings and spaces north of the house, and a long narrow pond extending south from the house.

In 1828, Henry Wilmer bought the estate from the Salter family, and in 1832 a further road diversion moved the public road still further from the front door. In 1844, Granville John Penn bought the estate (*VCH*) and views of Gray's Summerhouse and the house were published. Penn remodelled and enlarged the house in 1845 and renamed it Stoke Court because of the enclosed courtyard which he built in front (Rigby). He considerably developed the grounds, adding a new drive from the south-east and garden terraces to the south-west (1846 parish map). In 1851 Abraham Darby, ironmaster of Coalbrookdale, bought the estate and embarked on a major phase of works which included setting out the park and forming a string of pleasure ground ponds to the south-west of the garden (Sale Particulars 1869 & OS, 1875).

In 1872 the estate was purchased by Christian Allhusen, an industrialist with chemical works on Tyneside. He, too, remodelled the house. Allhusen died in 1890 and his grandson, AHE (Henry) Allhusen succeeded him. From 1897 to 1923 Henry Allhusen embarked on a major aggrandizement of the landscape, alongside further extension of the house. The main result was the enlargement of the parkland and pleasure grounds on either side of a new avenue entrance from the south-west (OS, 1923/24). Notable guests to Stoke Court under Henry Allhusen's ownership included Joseph Chamberlain, W Churchill, FE Smith, Thomas Hardy, John Buchan, Somerset Maugham, J Galsworthy. Henry Allhusen died in 1926 and the 500 acre estate was sold for £15,000 (Sale Particulars JD Wood) and broken up. From 1927 to 1953 the house and gardens were used as Stoke Court Country Club and hotel. Meanwhile housing was being developed in various estates around Stoke Poges, including the environs of Stoke Court (OS 1938). In 1971 a major housing development was built in the kitchen garden and alongside the early C20 avenue approach from the south-west. In 1958, the house was due to be demolished, but it was bought and restored by Miles Laboratories as a corporate HQ, offices and laboratories. It subsequently became the HQ of chemical company, Bayer.

Stoke Court has, since the 1960s, been used as offices and laboratories; related buildings and car parking occupy land north of the house. An executive staff bungalow was built to the south by the lake in the 1960s/70s. The land south of this to either side of the former main drive off Park Road, an early C20 addition to the park, was in the mid-C20 developed, with various detached houses set in spacious grounds.

The house, garden, pond and Gray's Walk remain in corporate ownership; the former stables/coach house are in private ownership.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

Stoke Poges parish is set on the dip slope of the Chiltern Hills in a predominantly wooded area which leads south towards the Thames at Eton and Windsor. The area developed as a series of scattered villages and settlements in heathland and woodland (including the nearby Burnham Beeches), with considerable development in the C18 and C19. Within this rural setting close to the royal court at Windsor grew a group of significant country house landscapes in the C18 and C19 that survive largely intact, including Stoke Park, Court and Place, Stoke Poges Manor House, and others nearby including



Lancelot Brown's Langleigh, Chalfont, Latimer and possibly Ditton Parks, and Richings. In the C20 much residential development occurred, expanding Stoke Poges village, and encroaching on the park and other elements of the Stoke Court landscape including the drives.

Stoke Court lies 0.75 miles north of the parish church, the latter immortalised by the mid-C18 poet Thomas Gray in his highly influential 'Elegy Written in A Country Churchyard' (published 1751). The church and adjacent Stoke Manor House form the historic heart of the village, with the estates of late C18/early C19 Stoke Park to the west, Stoke Place to the east and Sefton Park to the north-east.

The 11 ha. site occupies a south-facing slope enclosed to the north and west by Brockhurst Park and a golf course, to the east by Duffield Lane and the C20 development beyond, and to the south by further mid-C20 development which occupies former parkland.

## **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

There are two main drives.

The present (2015) main drive enters at the junction of Stoke Court Drive and West End Lane, 160m south-east of the house. From here the drive leads straight to a turning circle below the entrance front of the house enclosing a panel of lawn. This approach was created in the later C20 but follows the line of an early C20 axial path linking the house with the former kitchen garden, laid out after the public road was moved east. The path was enlarged and landscaped in the 1960s by Waterers as the main approach to the house to replace the former south-west drive which had been largely developed. This south-west approach replaced the mid-C19 entrance to the east from Duffield Lane from where a short drive curved west to the turning circle. Its route has been obscured by houses (OS 1923-24).

By the early C20 the main approach was from the south-west via a drive flanked by an avenue leading through the former south park. Only the northern section through the pleasure grounds survives as the rest was lost to C20 development. This drive was a late feature created by Allhusen after 1897 (OS) as the formal principal approach to the house as part of the enlargement of park and pleasure grounds. It is seen in its completed form by 1924 (OS).

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDING**

Stoke Court is an extensive country house rebuilt as offices. It was developed in a number of phases from at least the C18 onwards, incorporating the cottage in which Gray stayed when he was composing his Elegy, and which he called his 'compact box of red brick with sash windows'. The house was refaced and greatly enlarged by Granville John Penn in 1845 with further additions by being undertaken by Christian Allhusen in 1873. The early C20 saw further enlargement then, in the late C20 the structure was almost entirely rebuilt as offices. It continues to form the focus of the landscape design. Its entrance front faces south-east along the former line of the path to the kitchen garden, now the main drive. The garden front to the south-west overlooks the remains of the garden including the terraces, and informal lawns linking it to the pond, framed by trees. Formerly this front enjoyed a longer view of the lower ponds beyond to the south-west, but this is truncated by mid-late C20 houses and their gardens.

The service spaces and buildings including the stables stood to the north-east of the house with access via a back drive off Duffield Lane (OS 1923-24). The buildings and service yards were partially screened by planting from Gray's Walk and the paddock to the west. Now (2015) the area is

bounded to the north by a large car park and contains mid-late C20 buildings. Formerly the area contained two small ponds and a stream (C19 plans) which has been culverted and presumably fed the string of pleasure ground ponds to the south-west. In the C19 this area was planted with screening trees. The area links the east side of Gray's Walk with the house.

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

The gardens and pleasure grounds comprise two main sections: a garden below the south-west front of the house and, to the north-west of the house, the early C19 or earlier Gray's Walk pleasure ground.

The garden to the south-west of the house was present by the early C19, and remains similar in its extent.

The formal rectangular terrace offers views over a central pond and fountain lying below the path along the south-west front of house. The terrace walk runs along the north-west edge of the garden lawns joining the house and terrace with Gray's Walk to the west; from it are views over the terrace and pond.

The pond, formed by the creation of a dam across the valley, is the main focal point of the garden. It has early C19 or earlier origins and was incorporated within the garden by the 1820s (Inclosure map), at which date it extended further north towards the house. The northern end of the pond was truncated in the mid-C19, the outline was reshaped, and by the late C19 it formed the topmost of a new chain of ponds set in pleasure grounds and with a circuit walk around them (OS). Around the late 1920s/early 1930s the southern half of the pond became a swimming pool (OS).

Woodland between the former south-west and existing south-east drives is a remnant of the wooded pleasure ground enlarged and developed in several phases since the road was first moved east in 1812. By the early C20 it had a network of paths, but with the creation of Stoke Court Drive to the south these were abandoned. It remains important as a screen from adjacent housing.

The south-west pleasure ground flanking the remains of the chain of ponds (outside the historic boundary) is largely developed with housing. It retains a number of ornamental features including remnants of the C19 ponds, and mature trees. Within the front garden of Lashbrook, Lakeside Drive, some 270m south-west of Stoke Court house, stands a flint rustic arch (listed Grade II). It stands some 40m south-east of the centre of the chain of ponds, on a slight rise. It comprises a semicircular alcove behind a tall, slightly pointed arch with abutments, facing north-west in the direction of the water. The flint rubble masonry is treated in a 'rustic' manner like natural rock. The structure was roofed, possibly a timber lean-to with rafters running from the top of the alcove wall up to the inward face of the arch. Although it is a picturesque garden building, its origins are obscure. Now set amidst modern housing, it formed part of the designed landscape associated with Stoke Court at least since the 1870s (OS) and possibly earlier, although it does not appear on mapping before this date.

North-west of the house, Gray's Walk pleasure ground is an informal 900m long circuit walk in a narrow belt, around a parkland paddock. Its origins are unclear but it is first recorded in 1811 (OSD). If it was in place when Gray was in residence in the mid-C18, then this is of the utmost importance. It

is unclear when it was first called Gray's Walk. The oaks in the belt were replanted c.1963 (Bisgrove). The walk enjoys varied views into the paddock and out to surrounding gardens and former parkland. As laid out, this surrounding land would have been estate agricultural land until the later C19. Formerly the walk enjoyed elevated views south towards Eton College and Windsor Castle, but these are now obscured both within and beyond the estate.

Gray's Walk circuit path leads on either side of the paddock to the highest point of the site, 300m north-west of the house. This was formerly the site of Gray's Summerhouse. The building has been demolished, but the mound on which it stood, south of the path, and some rubble remains. Its form is recorded in engravings and photographs. It was a single-storey structure with a pitched tiled roof with an open archway facing south over the paddock and towards Eton and Windsor. A maze was created adjacent to the south in 1893. This has since gone and its site is overgrown obscuring the view.

Gray's Walk paddock within the circuit belt is laid to pasture with the remains of informally scattered parkland trees; additional woodland and scrub growth have blurred the original outline. It comprised the early extent of 'parkland' before late C19/early C20 agricultural areas to the west were laid out ornamentally as parkland.

Gray's Walk is similar in scale and style to the 950m long circuit walk at nearby Denham Place (landscape possibly by Lancelot Brown; EH Register description). Here an open meadow is surrounded by a shelter belt on all but the south side, with a circuit walk through it and glimpses of the house to the south. The belt comprises mature trees including several pollarded sweet chestnut trees of great girth under-planted with evergreen shrubs including holly, yew, box and ruscus.

The remains of an ice-house are believed to survive in the grounds of Little Mount, Duffield Lane, 120m north-east of the house (HER 0523400000 - MBC1349). It was reported in 1983 to be of typical design, of c.5m height and domed, its entrance via brick passage, but had been sealed.

## **PARK**

The former park (outside the historic boundary) was established during the C19 to the west and south of the core of the site. By the 1920s (OS) it was divided into two sections: the northern section to the west of Gray's Walk and paddock, and the southern section to the south of the garden and pleasure ground. These areas were divided by the pleasure ground with its chain of ponds. The northern half of the park remains open, the northern section being paddocks and its southern section, a golf course. Together this former parkland remains an essential setting for views west from Gray's Walk. The southern half of the park has been lost to mid-late C20 development south of the late C20 Stoke Court Drive and Lakeside Drive. Allhusen's early C20 south-west drive ran through this area, flanked by an avenue (OS 1923/24).

## **KITCHEN GARDEN**

The site of the former kitchen garden (outside the historic boundary) lies 140m south-east of the house beyond the pleasure ground and Stoke Court Drive. It has been lost to development and contains a number of houses built c.1971. The kitchen garden was laid out in this area after the

public road was diverted further to the east, in the mid-C19. The kitchen garden was reached from the house via the present main drive which originated as an axial walk south-east from the main entrance.

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## Maps

- 1760s, Jefferys, Map of Buckinghamshire (CBS)
- 1812, Road Diversion Plan (CBS Q/H 35)
- 1822, Inclosure Map, Stoke Poges and Wexham (CBS IR138 Q)
- 1824, Stoke Poges (CBS Ma/198/I.R.)
- 1824, Bryant, Map of Buckinghamshire
- 1832, Road Diversion Plan (CBS Q/H 82)
- 1839, Tithe Map, Stoke Poges (CBS 363).
- 1846, Plan of Stoke Poges Parish (CBS PR 198/28/2/R)
- 1851, Estate Map, Stoke Poges (CBS PR 198/28/3)
- ?1869, Stoke Court Estate, Ground Plan of Mansion (copy in Stoke Court archive)
- 1927, Sale Plan, Stoke Court Estate (in Rigby, 2000 and copy in Stoke Court archive).
- Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, sh. 153, 1811-12 (British Library)



OS 6" & 25" to 1 mile    1st edition surveyed 1875  
   2nd edition surveyed 1897  
   3<sup>rd</sup> edition surveyed 1923/24  
   1938 revision.

1: 2,500 scale, published 1971.

## **Images**

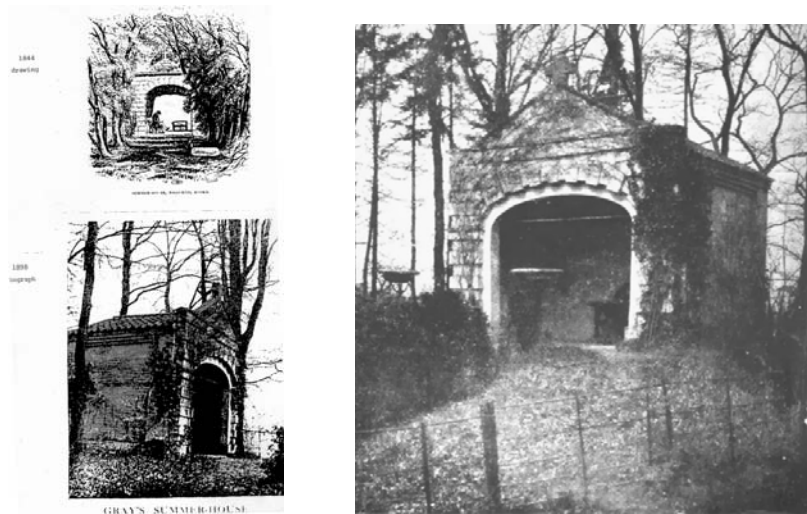
### **Photographs**

Entrance front (1869 sale particulars)  
South-west (garden) front (1869 sale particulars)  
South-west (garden) front (Pike, 1907)  
South-west (garden) front in 1921 (in Rigby)  
Entrance front (1927 sale particulars)  
Lakes from garden (1927 sale particulars)  
South-west (garden) front mid-C20 when country club (in Rigby, 2000)

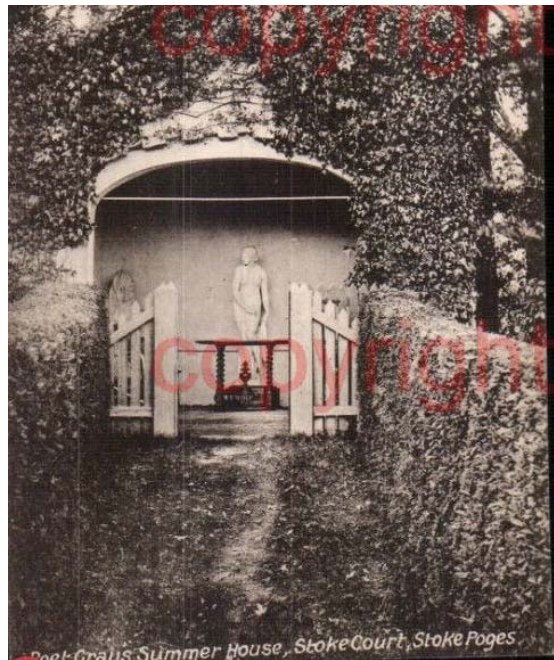
SR, 08 July 2015

Edited: August 2015

## HISTORIC IMAGES



Gray's Summerhouse before it went.



Stoke Court House published 1845 (left) and 1869 (right).



South-west front of house across garden and upper pond, 1907 (left).  
South-east front along kitchen garden walk (now main drive), 1921 (right).



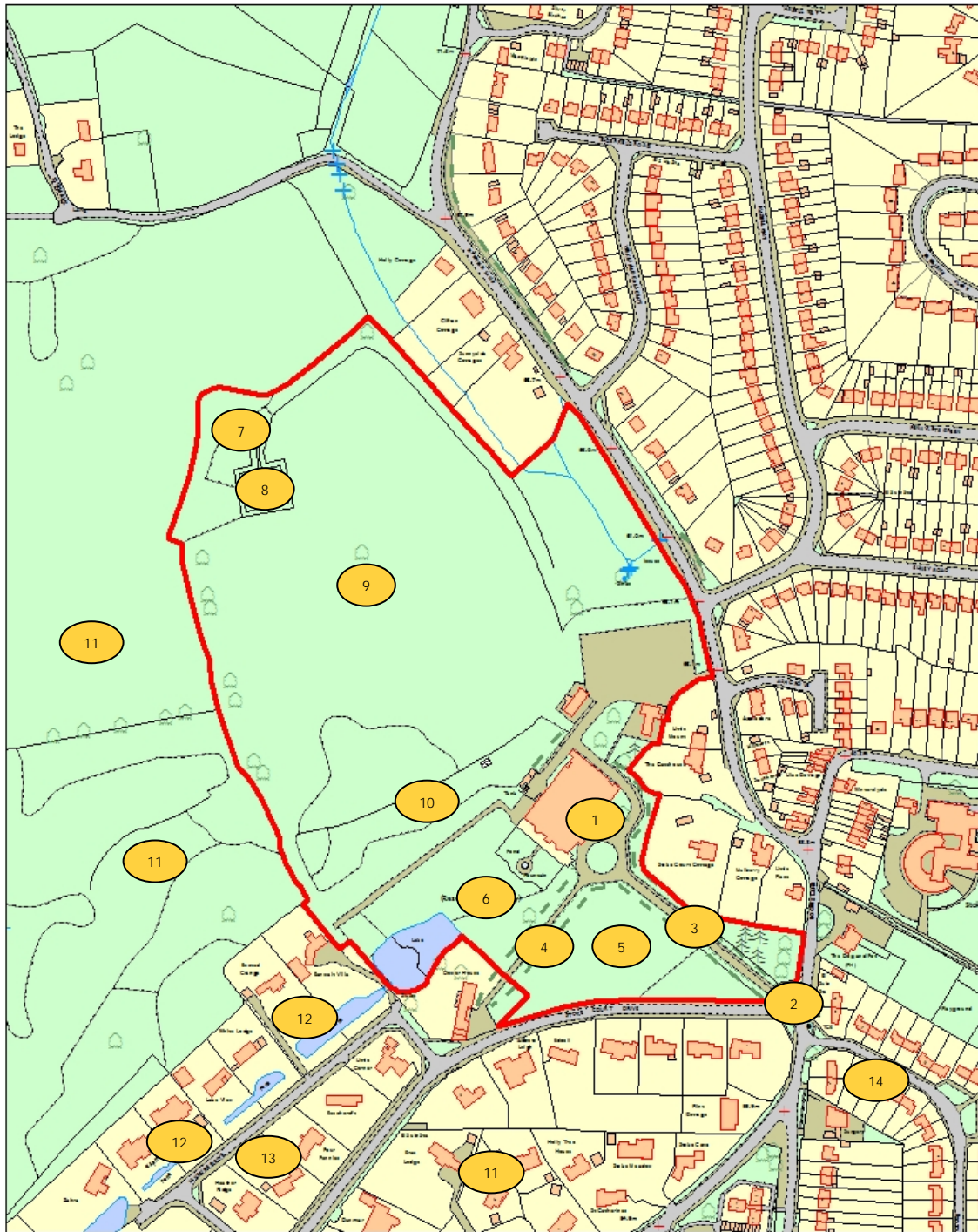
1927 view south-west over lower ponds (left) and turning circle with former drive from NE (right).



The Rustic Arch



## KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES



Stoke Court: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
July 2015



Scale: 1:3,256 at A4

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### Key to numbered features

1. House & forecourt	2. Late C20 main entrance (within site of former kitchen garden)
3. Late C20 drive following garden route to former kitchen garden	4. SW drive
5. Pleasure ground woodland	6. Garden & pond
7. Site of Gray's Summerhouse	8. Maze (site of)
9. Paddock surrounded by Gray's Walk	10. Wooded shrubbery separating garden from paddock/Gray's Walk
11. Former parkland	12. Former pond garden
13. Gothic Arch in garden of Lashbrook	14. Former kitchen garden

