

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



HORWOOD HOUSE

January 2019

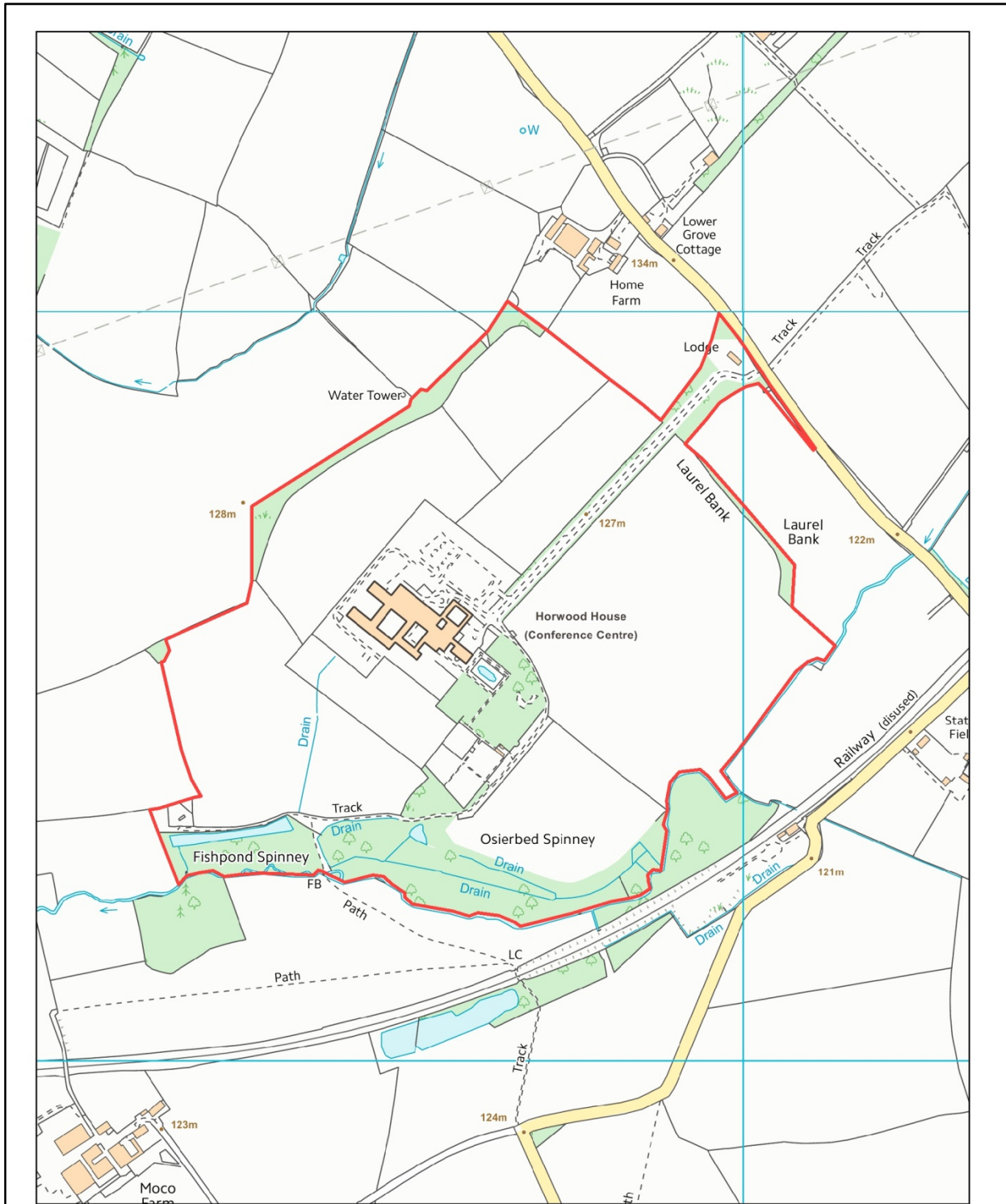


The Stanley Smith (UK)
Horticultural Trust



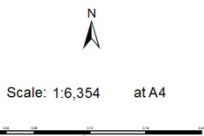
Bucks Gardens Trust

HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Horwood House: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service
December 2018



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Bucks Gardens Trust



Scale: 1:6,354 at A4



Horwood House: 2006 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 (now Historic England) (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 (now Historic England) on its Register Upgrade Project.

Each dossier includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage/ Historic England *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.
- A map showing principal views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was supported by The Gardens Trust (formerly the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society) and funded by BGT with significant grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the Finnis Scott Foundation. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	HORWOOD HOUSE BCC HER 0517702000
DISTRICT:	Aylesbury Vale	
PARISH:	Little Horwood	
OS REF:	SP796 295	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

An Arts and Crafts country house by renowned architects Detmar Blow and Fernand Billerey. The contemporary park and gardens incorporate C18 and C19 features, which were extended and remodelled in Arts and Crafts style c.1911 to complement the house. The 1911 layout, which survives largely intact except for areas north-west of the house, was influenced by Blow, but also expresses the vision of the owner's wife and her Head Gardener, Harry Thrower who was the father of Percy Thrower who grew up and began gardening there. The landscape design, which is integral with the house and Blow's other structures, includes a long formal avenue approach from an imposing gatehouse through the park to a large walled forecourt, and a sequence of garden compartments including terraces, lawns, an ornamental walled garden and the remains of an informal woodland garden, set in parkland overlooking the Vale of Aylesbury.

Archaeological interest

The archaeological interest and potential in part arises from evidence relating to lost buildings and features relating to the 1911 landscape and its predecessor, particularly elements of the garden and pleasure grounds, such as paths, drives, structures and borders, and for kitchen garden and orchard features, as well as former park drives and entrances.

Architectural interest

A typical ensemble of buildings by renowned Arts and Crafts architects, Blow and Billerey, for an early C20 country house and small estate including the house, garden and forecourt walls, lodge gateway, stable block, other service structures and garden structures. The success of the commission was due to the combination of 'The genial personality of Mr Blow and the comprehensive ability of Mr Billerey' (Hussey, 1923) who united the buildings and gardens. The ensemble survives intact but later C20 buildings have been erected in a group on the north side of the house, enclosing the former service buildings and yards.

Artistic interest

An early C20 Arts and Crafts-style garden and park forming the setting for a country house, which survives largely intact. The complex layout responds to the house, its site and the rural setting, with long views over the park. A series of formal and informal garden compartments extending south from the house includes a large formal pool, walled garden and the remains of a woodland garden. Blow probably designed some of the garden structures (but his exact contribution is unclear), perhaps responding to the vision of the owner and Harry Thrower. The gatehouse and lime avenue frame an imposing approach through the park, lightly planted with specimen trees and clumps, to the walled forecourt and house. While a considerable amount of structural planting survives in the form of hedges, belts and specimen trees the more ephemeral planting has altered and the walled garden is no longer productive. A further walled garden and orchard north-west of the house and stables have been lost to development.

Historic interest

The site is closely associated with one of the foremost Arts and Crafts architects, Blow and his partner Billerey. It is typical of the hundreds of significant commissions that they received (Drury). Drawings may survive in the RIBA drawings collection at the V & A.

Horwood House was the early home and first workplace of Percy Thrower (1913–1988), known as ‘Britain’s first celebrity gardener’, who was born at Horwood House and began his career there. He left Horwood in 1931 to work at the Royal gardens at Windsor, moving to Leeds, Derby and Shrewsbury Parks Departments, and first appeared on television in 1951. He became nationally known as a writer, broadcaster and presenter, the leading face and voice of British gardening, particularly via the television programme *Gardener’s World*, and was made an MBE in 1984.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Horwood House stands adjacent to the site of an earlier house demolished in 1911, Little Horwood Rectory (OSD 1813). It was referred to as ‘Rectory’ in 1881 (Census) but as Horwood House in 1877 (Kelly’s *Directory*), 1887 and 1908 (probate records CBS Wigley archive), and eventually as Old Horwood House (1911 Census).

Old Horwood House was built in the centre of a 55ha allotment, formerly part of the open fields, enclosed following the Little Horwood Enclosure Act of 1765. This land was awarded to Kidgell Sandon, Patron of the parish church of Little Horwood, in return for his giving up the right to collect any tithes within Little Horwood (Little Horwood Enclosure Award 1767). The award has no map, but a sketch-plan of the respective allotments was compiled by Ted Bull and Julian Hunt of the Bucks Archaeological Society in 1991.

The centre of Sandon’s land is clear in the 1770s (Jeffreys 1770; Andrews, 1774), and the land was still cultivated. It was sold by Kidgell Sandon to Stephen Langston of Berkhamsted in 1777 (*VCH*). In 1791, Langston appointed his son, also Stephen, as Vicar of Little Horwood. The Langstons built a new house in the centre of their estate and misleadingly called it ‘The Rectory.’ It was a five-bay, two-storey brick-built house with four dormer windows lighting the attics above, sited close to the south-east of the current mansion but facing towards Mursley church to the south-east (the current house faces north-east).

Stephen Langston died in 1797 (monument in Little Horwood Church). By 1813 (OSD) the park was rectangular aligned north-west to south-east, c.375 x 500m, with the house and garden roughly in the centre. The south boundary was Swanbourne Brook. The other boundaries persisted as remnants of lines of trees in the later C19 (OS). The east boundary was parallel with the Little Horwood–Mursley road but c.300m west of it (c.200m east of the house). A rectangular kitchen garden occupied the west half of the north-west park boundary.

In 1844 when Whaddon Chase was enclosed small parcels of land on the west side of the Mursley road were bought by Philip Dauncey, at the ‘Rectory’ since at least 1831 (Pigot’s *Directory*). He extended the ‘Rectory’ park east by c.200m towards the Mursley road with direct access from that road along the line of the present drive. The park was extended to the west and north by the same distance between 1825 and 1880 (OS) so presumably at the same point. The south half of the north-east boundary, called Laurel Bank by 1900 (as it still is), perhaps sheltered game birds.

By 1880 the gardens surrounded the house with mixed tree planting traversed by walks. By 1923 (*Country Life*) the bounds of a south-east-facing lawn belonging to the earlier house were still marked by an irregular rectangle of full-grown trees, and the boundary follows the same line today. In the C19 a level lawn was flanked by mature trees in front of the house (photo BCC).

By 1862 (Sheahan) the ‘ancient and spacious’ Rectory House stood on a hill, surrounded by ancient trees, with 400 acres [162 ha] of park-like grounds. The rich grazing land had two farms which supplied dairy produce to Queen Victoria’s household via Swanbourne station. The Dauncey family reputedly planted Osierbed Spinney on the south boundary of the grounds to shield the property from the railway line when it was built in 1850 (Wikipedia, Swanbourne Station). The Daunceys opposed the railway’s construction. It was moved from its original proposed route through Little Horwood, but they must have found it advantageous since by 1900 a footpath led from the station to the gardens (OS).

The estate, comprising two farms and eleven cottages as well as the Rectory, was bought in 1911 as a country residence by Frederick Anthony Denny, an Irish meat millionaire married to Maude Quilter, who was a baronet's daughter and the sister of the composer Roger Quilter. Denny, who also had two London houses, immediately commissioned his new mansion in a style variously described as William and Mary and Jacobethan (Pevsner) from society architect Detmar Blow (1867–1939), with interiors by Blow's French associate Fernand Billerey (1878–1951). Blow was a disciple of such mentors of the Arts and Crafts movement as John Ruskin and William Morris, and the architects Philip Webb and Edwin Lutyens. Working mainly for aristocratic clients, he had many commissions to build or, more usually, alter country houses, but is not known to have worked elsewhere in Bucks. *Country Life* (1923) quoted Roger Fry, the best-known critic of his day, in saying of Blow's work that 'a peculiar charm resulted from the unstinting care with which every piece of material was chosen and the whole fitted together', and opined that as far as Horwood was concerned, this description was not inapt. The brief given by Denny was that the 14-bedroom house should be reasonably imposing but compact enough to be comfortable, and it was supposed to be a copy of a house that he had seen in the West Country (Wikipedia). There were nine servants' bedrooms. It was built by Holland, Hannen & Cubitts, a London firm responsible for well-known buildings such as the Prudential Assurance building in High Holborn (1906).

An adjoining thatched stable block (the family were very keen on hunting) was constructed on the north-west side of the house, with staff accommodation and service buildings, and a lodge thought to be also by Blow at the main entrance on the Little Horwood–Mursley road to the north-east entrance. A formal lime avenue linked the lodge gates to the forecourt.

Routes through the park were altered to accommodate the changed orientation of the house: the main drive now ran straight to the new house forecourt. The footpath from Swanbourne station was realigned to run straight to the front of the house and join with the one running north to Little Horwood. Two small buildings, one an engine house, were constructed next to the kitchen garden to the north-west of the house. The other, Tor Cottage, built for the head gardener, was still there in 1985 (OS 1:10,000). A building at the south-west corner of the garden, 'a picturesque old barn' (1936 sale catalogue), present in 1813 (OSD), survived until at least the 1950s (CBS aerial photo) but had gone by 1985.

Denny's head gardener was Harry Thrower, father of broadcaster and writer Percy Thrower (1913–1988). Thrower snr. worked closely with Mrs Denny on the design of the remodelled and extended garden, and executed it (*Country Life*). Even so, Blow would have had some influence on the layout of the grounds, if only in the environs of the new buildings such as the forecourt, but the extent of his contribution is unclear.

The estate was put up for auction in 1936 (sale catalogue), the house, ancillary buildings and grounds then consisting of 159 acres [64 ha]. Not all lots were sold: the house, grounds and Home Farm were valued for Denny's probate in 1941; the Dennys are said to have moved out to another house on the estate (the quite grand Old Laundry) in Little Horwood at the beginning of the war when the house was taken over by a girls' school, the Upper Chine School, evacuated from the Isle of Wight (Wikipedia, De Vere Horwood Estate).

Much of the estate but not the house was sold in 1951 (Ronnie Smith, pers. comm.). Post-war it housed a boys' prep school, the Old Ride School, until 1962 when it was bought by British Rail, who intended to build a marshalling yard at the adjacent Swanbourne station; the Beeching cuts put paid to that and in 1966 BR sold Horwood House to the GPO. The house and grounds were then 38 acres [15ha] (sale catalogue), suggesting Home Farm had been disposed of previously. The mansion had had little structural alteration since it was a private residence; the gardens, which matched the 1923 *Country Life* description, were well maintained with the kitchen garden in a good state of cultivation, although the gardeners' bothy (adjacent to the gardener's house) was in poor repair. The lodge, staff cottages and stable yard were as built by Denny.

The GPO used it as a College of Engineering Studies and built a wing on the north-west side of the house in the 1970s. BT, as the GPO had become, increased the accommodation and added leisure facilities in the same area in the 1980s. These extensions have overlain the orchard and tennis court, and an extensive car park has been added on parkland north of the mansion adjacent to the drive. BT sold the property c.1992 to a hotel chain as a conference centre, which remains its function.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM SETTING

Horwood House lies in the northern half of the Vale of Aylesbury, 1km south-east of Little Horwood, 2km north-east of Winslow, 7km south-east of Bletchley and 3km south of the A421 Buckingham–Bletchley road.

The 45 ha. site is bounded to the north-east by the Little Horwood to Mursley road, to the south-east by a disused railway line, to the south by Swanbourne Brook, which runs in part parallel to the railway line, but then takes an east-west course, to the west by a short stretch of hedging separating grassland from arable fields, and to the north-west by a shelter belt. The rural setting is gently rolling clay arable and pasture land, the house being in a slightly elevated position on the 125m contour with a view south-west towards Winslow (although now obscured by tree growth), the gardens sloping slightly to the south-east and south-west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main drive from the Little Horwood–Mursley road (the only vehicular access) is straddled by The Lodge (listed Grade II, in neglected condition in 2018). The substantial gatehouse adopts the same red-brick Arts and Crafts style as the house and is probably by the same architect, Detmar Blow. The route was enabled by the expansion of the park towards the road in 1844. The Lodge is set back c.20m from the road. By 1925 (OS) two entrance roads converged on a small forecourt in front of the lodge before passing through/under it: the east and west sides are connected at first floor level. It built as two cottages, East and West Lodge (although more accurately they are north and south), flanking the archway. In around the 1970s (APs 1964, 1985, OS1:10,000 1985) the outer end of the drive was moved 50m south-east to avoid the lodge, so now loops round it.

Once back on alignment beyond the lodge the drive runs 500m south-west to the house through an avenue of lime trees. These were planted by Harry Thrower soon after 1911 (Wikipedia, de Vere Horwood estate), but a few older trees can be seen on the south-east side, remnants of an earlier line of trees (1880s OS). Both before and after the lodge was built the first 150m of the drive was flanked by wider strips of mixed planting, now sparser, and containing a garden for the lodge on the north side.

In front of the forecourt the drive widens to cross a path with a car park on the west side and a small spinney to the east. Extensive modern brick buildings and car parking to the north-west are accessed immediately beyond, along the line of the previous orchard wall (about 25m of which remains). The drive terminates at a tarmacked forecourt in front of the house, square but narrower in front of the house with a central roundel planted with topiarised shrubs (a recent addition).

The forecourt is entered through a pair of square brick gate piers (gates missing) with round arched niches, stone benches and stone caps (the service wing, stable block, gate piers and forecourt walls are included in the house's Grade II listing). It is enclosed by tile-coped brick walls on two sides with the single-storey brick and thatch former stable range, now accommodation, on the north-west side, accessed via a central archway leading to the former stable yard, paved with some ornamental planting. Early C20 photos (1936 sale catalogue and BCC) suggest that ornamental tree planting enclosed the forecourt. In 1923 (*Country Life*) the gateway was overhung by an oak and a chestnut 'of ample growth'; a clump of deciduous trees on a low mound remains in the north corner but the west corner is now grass. In the south corner a round arch leads to the garden, in the west corner a

corresponding one at one time led to a small courtyard in front of the single-storey service wing, but this is now largely built over.

By 1813 (OSD), of the routes to the old house, one route took approximately the same line as the present drive but then ran along the rear, north-west side of the Old Rectory, while another came from a road parallel to the current drive starting 500m further south-east (towards Mursley). From that road, which continued south-west towards Winslow but was cut off when the railway was built in 1850, a turning led north-west to the front of the Old Rectory and then continued westwards to meet the other (northern) route at the west boundary of the Old Rectory's pleasure grounds, where there was a substantial building (on all OS and sales maps to 1966 but gone by 1985).

The position of this building suggests it could have functioned as a lodge, although it appears to have been a barn (1936 sale catalogue; 1950s AP). From there the route carried on westwards to meet the north-south Little Horwood–Winslow road 0.8km north of Hollow Hole Farm, now The Hollows (this western route is the only one shown on Bryant 1825). Angles in the routes reflect enclosed field boundaries. When the southern access disappeared in 1850 because of the coming of the railway, the northern one became the main drive (OS 25-inch 1880). Instead of continuing across the back of the property it turned south after three-quarters of its length, then west to arrive at the front of the Old Rectory and beyond straight to Hollow Hole Farm.

Since 1813 (OSD, Bryant) the main access was being from the Little Horwood–Winslow road on the west side of the park. This route continued across the south front of the house and across the park to meet a road (now a stub) running south-west from the Little Horwood–Mursley road north of the brook. The west path branched at the west park boundary across the north side of the house, continuing along the line of the current drive.

A footpath from the rear of the property running north to Little Horwood was established by 1900 (OS) and remains as a public footpath. A path from Swanbourne station met the east-west route on the west side of the gardens. Once the new house was built in 1911 the west access disappeared (a section of the path remains outside the park), but the path from the station was moved east so it ran along the front of the house to meet the north-south path to the village (OS 1925); again this path still exists as a public route, with a north-south path through the west side of the park in place by 1880 (OS). A track from the end of the drive encloses the east perimeter of the gardens then runs west to the edge of the park at the west end of Fishpond Spinney (access to sewage tank).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The symmetrical five-bay Horwood House (listed Grade II), c. 30 x 15m, stands towards the centre of the park, flanked by gardens and pleasure grounds to the south and east and former kitchen gardens and orchards to the north-west. Service yards are attached to the north with modern buildings enclosing them. The entrance front is to the north-east, with garden fronts to the south-east and south-west. The north corner is attached to the former service ranges enclosing courtyards.

The house (1911, Detmar Blow) is of narrow light red handmade bricks imported from the Netherlands, with Bath stone dressings, tiled roof, and tall brick chimneys. Gables, dormers, bay windows and stone-mullioned windows convey the impression of a 'Jacobethan' manor house. A few elements of the interior such as the stone chimneypiece in the hall may have been preserved from the Old Rectory. In the 1960s (sale cat) it was described as being constructed to a very high standard, with exceptionally well appointed interiors.

On the north-east front, the centrally placed projecting two-storey front porch with its stone pilasters gives on to the forecourt. A flagstone apron in front of the door with two cast-iron lamp-posts is a recent addition. The former service wing to the north, perhaps a third of the depth of the house, has been incorporated into later buildings. On the south-west, garden front semi-octagonal two-storey bay windows flank a central arched and pedimented stone door case approached by a quarter-circle of shallow stone steps. A similar bay on the north-west side is separated by

only a narrow strip from the late-C20 buildings, which together with car parking areas cover an area c.1.7ha north and west of the house.

In 1911, when the 'Rectory' (then known as Horwood House) was demolished the structure was described as a timber, brick and tile building probably of the late C16, extended towards the north during the second half of the C17 and much enlarged in the C19 (RCHM). Since the documentary evidence points to the 'Rectory' being erected in the late C18, some part of the building was perhaps transported from elsewhere and re-erected on the site (c.f. local timber-framed but post-enclosure farms such as Shipton Farm, Winslow and Buckslow Farm, Swanbourne). The site is now under the garden, the 1911 mansion and outbuildings having been built over the service yard of the older house (OSD 1813; OS 1885, 1927). The C19 enlargement perhaps coincided with the extension of the park after 1844. In 1813 (OSD) the gardens formed an oval in front of the house around 125m wide (south-west/north-east).

The Lodge gateway (listed Grade II) stands 520m north-east of the house set back from the north-east park boundary, off the Mursley road. It is of similar materials and style to the house, and likely to be of the same date and by Blow. A round-headed pedimented arch which breaks the eaves leads the drive through the centre and is flanked by single bays of one-storey and attic with leaded casement windows.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS (including south kitchen garden)

The gardens enclose the house to the south and east. A sequence of enclosures leads south-west from the C18/C19 areas adjacent to the house to the 1911 walled garden and then via informal areas to the belt called Osierbed Spinney. A further sequence formerly led north-west from the house but these areas have been lost to modern development.

The following gardens comprise the former Rectory gardens enclosing the house to the south-west and east. The archway from the forecourt leads both across the south-east front of the house and into the *étang*. This was designed to be seen from the drawing room on the south-east front (1936 sales cat), but the view is now screened by clipped yews c.2–3m high; axial paths allow views through the yew hedges along and across the pool, which is aligned north-west to south-east. The stone-lined pool is rectangular with rounded bays at each end, c. 25 x 10m with a small central fountain (which does not appear on old photos), surrounded by lawns and herbaceous planting. In 1923 (*Country Life* photo) 'alpine' planting softened the stonework at the edge of the pool, and tubbed trees were set out at the four corners; apart from the loss of these and the height of the yew surround it is unchanged. Broad flagstone paths encircle the yew hedges, with one then running north-west across the garden front of the house and another running south-west for 50m from the south corner of the *étang* to the walled garden.

A low drystone retaining wall with coniferous and herbaceous planting in front runs along the north-east side of the *étang* garden; at the north corner (at the turn of the flagged paths) a semi-circular niche holds a stone seat. In 1923 (*Country Life* photo) a pedestal urn marked the far end of the path at the south corner of the mansion. Behind and above the wall, in the most northerly corner of the garden adjoining the forecourt wall, mixed tree planting includes a massive purple beech probably remaining from before the 1911 garden construction. Continuing south, the curvature in the east boundary against the park reflects the late C18 boundary, although the brick ha-ha which defines the edge of the garden c.50m south-east of the *étang* is a 1911 feature. This area is mainly lawn with dense mixed planting in the north-east corner. A small semi-circular bastion projects at the south end; it may be aligned on Mursley church but trees screen any view. At the south corner of this area a small brick-walled courtyard with brick gate piers giving access from the track outside contains two tumbledown brick and tile sheds, presumably earlier potting sheds, and a small gateway into the walled garden to the south-west backing on to the position of the Denny-era greenhouses within the walled garden.

A dell lies north-west of this lawned area across the flagstone path and amongst mature trees. It contains conifers, low shrubs and herbaceous planting marking the site of the C18 barn and possibly also that of the Edwardian rock

garden. A modern 'wishing well' reflects the position of a previous pond visible on maps up to the 1960s. Among more recent trees, the various mature trees, some of them quite enormous, could well be those that *Country Life* (1923) mentioned as remaining from the Old Rectory garden. A row of columnar yews interspersed with shrubs marks the south-west boundary. Moving north-west, rough grass is enclosed by post-and-rail fencing and mature trees on the south-west edge and a 1911 ha-ha to the north-east. Above the ha-ha lawns stretch c20m to the house front but shrubby planting on the line of the ha-ha now obscures the view across it. The ha-ha is little wider than the house, having been truncated by the C20 development to the north on a previous garden and tennis courts, along with the former rose garden and orchard on the north side.

South of the areas described above, which constitute the C19 Rectory gardens, is the sequence of 1911 additions. The first area is the c.75 x 75m walled garden, 80m south of the house and axially aligned north-east to south-west. Stone-capped brick steps descend from ornamental iron gates in the centre of the north-east wall; similar gates are set between brick piers in the centre of the south-east wall and a smaller gate leads out from the south-west. As with the bastion, there is no significant view from the south-east gateway; at one time Mursley church may have acted as an eye-catcher, but given the spinney planted to hide the railway line in the 1850s and the low-lying ground, it seems unlikely that the church was visible.

The 3m brick walls of the walled garden are stepped to accommodate the slight southward slope. They have stone capping and brick piers on the inner faces, apart from the south-west wall where the piers are on the outside. Gravel has replaced the earlier flagstones on the axial paths; the north quadrant is a hard-surface tennis court and the north-west path has gone, as has the elaborate central circular lily pond-cum-tank constructed by Harry Thrower (*Country Life* 1923) and remaining in 1955 (OS). In 1923 the garden was filled with dense herbaceous planting as well as kitchen produce; the only planting now is a few shrubs and fruit trees along the walls in the east quadrant. Otherwise the area is laid to grass with a shrubby mound in the south quadrant. Marks and fixings on the walls in the east corner show the position of earlier greenhouses, which remained until at least 1955 (OS).

Beyond the south-west wall of the walled garden is an informal area. The wall is lined by a row of yews. From here a path leads to the area beyond, marked by a post-and-rail fence, is now scrubby woodland traversed by tracks and a nature trail. In 1923 it was 'a roughish little field newly planted with silver birch on one hand and bold clumps of rhododendrons'. This leads to the earlier bog and water garden; in 1923 the bog garden was open in character and the branching streams were planted with irises and 'all kinds of big-leaved water plants', but it is now barely distinguishable from natural woodland. Carpets of bluebells and some very large trees bear out *Country Life's* assertion that this area was thinned spinney incorporated into the garden which was allowed to assume a more informal character close to the stream which forms the south boundary of the estate. The 0.4ha ornamental lake (about 50m from the walled garden) described in 1936 (sales cat) is now silted-up and overgrown.

When the garden was extended south-west in 1911 it had a formal layout near the house but a woodland character as it reached the park boundary. Although there is no direct evidence that Blow had a hand in the garden design, its elements and its harmony with both the house and the surrounding countryside suggest a strong Arts and Crafts influence. *Country Life* (1923) says that 'The particularly pleasing gardens ... owe only their general direction to the architects, having been gradually laid out by Mr and Mrs Denny with Mr Thrower, the gardener.' 'Arts and Crafts' design features include a sundial at the west corner of the mansion and a ha-ha giving unbroken views from the house across the parkland to the south-west (OS 1925). *Country Life* and Percy Thrower's memories of the gardens at the same period (recalled in Thrower 1977) describe other features typical of the period, virtually all of which can still be distinguished. South-east of the mansion, on the site of the old Rectory, a spring-fed formal pool known as the *étang* was surrounded by clipped yews, rose borders and flagstone paths. The spring was perhaps the source of the well marked on OS 6-in 1885. South-east of that, the pre-1911 large south-east-facing lawn with its old trees (chestnut, cedar, oak, elm, ash) was retained. Adjoining to the south-west broad brick steps led down to a 2-acre

(0.8ha) walled garden with a central circular lily pool which served as a tank and contained a fountain and a lead sculpture. Although planted with broad herbaceous borders it served as a kitchen garden and housed four greenhouses by Skinner Board of Bristol in the north-west corner. Between the walled garden and the boundary stream the marshy ground was woodland and water/bog gardens, the stream being diverted to form a small branching lake (O'Sullivan, 1989). Silver birches were planted along with groups of azaleas and rhododendrons at Mrs Denny's insistence, but the latter were (unsurprisingly) unsuccessful (however one remaining rhododendron was noted in 2018). There was an extensive (0.6 ha) rock garden. North-west of the house an orchard with 200 apple varieties, a rose garden and a tennis court (all now gone) filled in the area between the previous service yard and the old kitchen garden.

The designer of the garden in and after 1911 is unclear. The head gardener was Harry Thrower who worked closely with Mrs Denny on the design of the remodelled and extended garden, and executed it (*Country Life*). Even so, the architect Blow would have influenced the layout of the grounds, particularly in the environs of the new buildings such as the forecourt, but the extent of his contribution is unclear. Elsewhere he is known, like many contemporary architects, to have advised on the garden setting for his houses. At Happisburgh Manor, Norfolk (butterfly-plan house, 1900), the formal/architectural elements of the garden design were by Blow (Historic England Register entry). At Hilles, Gloucestershire (1914-39), his garden design, including substantial terraces, is integral to his design for the house (LB description). These, along with the grounds of Horwood House, survive well as the contemporary setting for the Blow buildings.

Head Gardener Harry Thrower had previously worked for Mrs Denny's family at Bawdsey Manor, Suffolk, and was at Horwood from the outset, remaking and then maintaining the gardens for Denny (Thrower, 1977) and remaining there until his death in 1939. He is described on his tombstone at Little Horwood church as a 'highly valued friend' of Mr and Mrs Denny, which suggests he was a collaborator on the gardens as much as an employee. The estate was bare fields and woodland when Harry Thrower took over but the gardens were established 'by the time I [i.e. Percy] was old enough to appreciate horticultural matters' (Thrower, 1977, born 1913), i.e. in the 1920s.

PARK

The park boundary encloses the drive for c.150m from the lodge then to the east follows the line of Laurel Bank; it then turns south following the Swanbourne Brook which forms the south-east and south edges of the park. The brook runs through woodland to the west edge of Fishpond Spinney then turns north following the edge of the agricultural land beyond, being hedgerow with occasional standards which widens into a tree belt as the boundary turns north-east. It then turns north-east to meet the north side of the drive opposite Laurel Bank.

The park is grassland with ridge and furrow and some very large oak trees in the north and south-west sections. Other rows of trees in the park denote previous hedge lines left when the park was extended in the mid-C19. A fence line running north-west on a line with the south edge of the walled garden then turning north-east on a line with the edge of the modern complex to 'square up' the area is apparently recent.

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BCC ph LittleHorwood5, ph Little Horwood8

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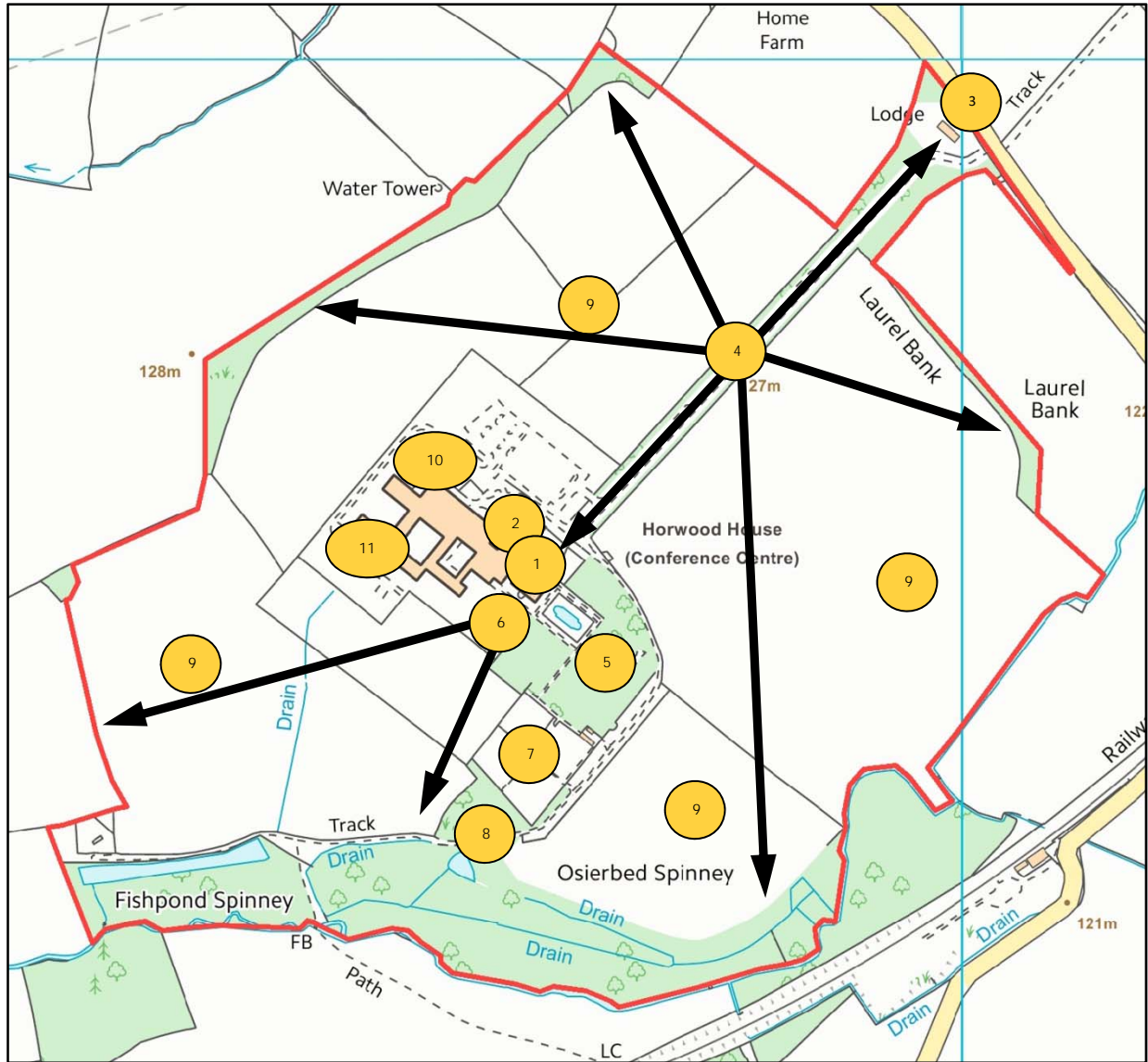
Clare Butler

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KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS

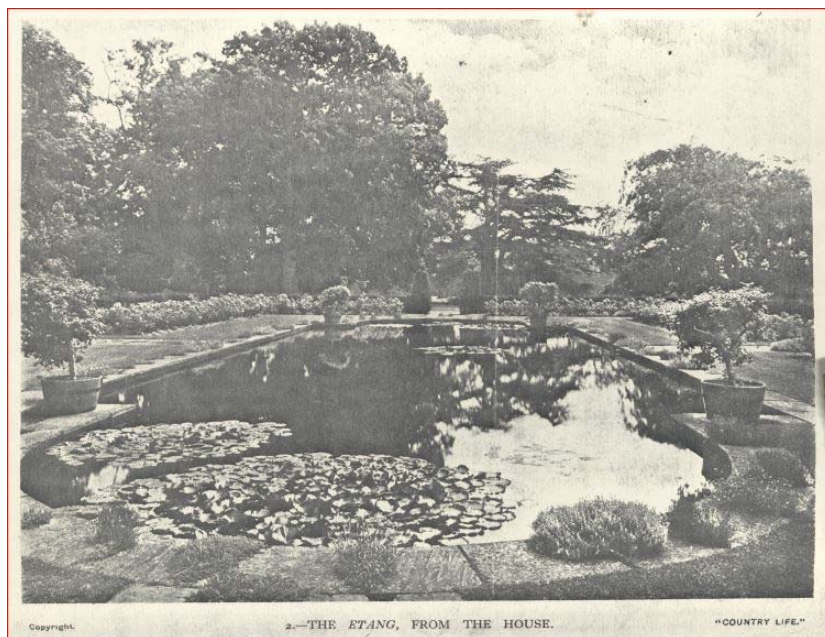


Key to Features

1. House, forecourt to north-east	2. Former stable yard
3. Former main entrance and lodge/gatehouse	4. Main drive/ avenue
5. Garden and ‘etang’	6. Garden terrace
7. Walled Garden	8. Woodland Garden
9. Park	10.

HISTORIC IMAGES

Country Life, 1923





CURRENT IMAGES

2018



Lodge, probably by Blow, 1911 (left); drive, view north-east (right).



Forecourt: main entrance (left); stable block (right).



Entrance front and forecourt (left); garden with sweet chestnut (right).



Garden front (south-west) (left); *etang* next to south-east front (right)



Ha-ha on south-east side (left); site of barn 'dell' south of house (right)



Walled garden: north-east, main gateway (left); south-east gateway (right).