

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



View from The Alcove in the park over the Ouse Valley

## WESTON PARK

May 2019



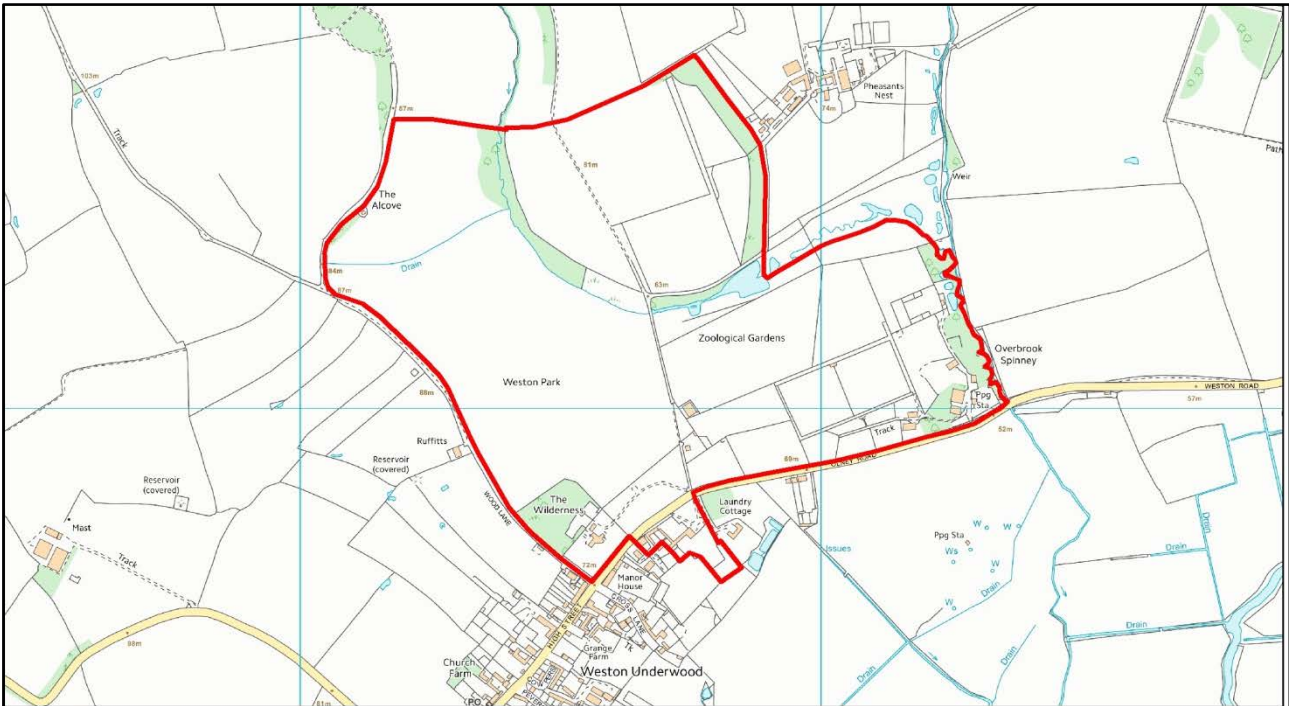
Bucks Gardens Trust



The Stanley Smith  
(UK) Horticultural  
Trust



# HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Scale: 1:8,659 at A4

## Weston Underwood Park: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
March 2018

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the controller of the Copyright in the National Grid. Ordnance Survey is a registered trademark of Ordnance Survey. Copyright and may not be reproduced or distributed without the permission of Ordnance Survey. © Copyright Buckinghamshire County Council Licence No. 100021529 2016



Bucks Gardens Trust



Scale: 1:8,858 at A4

## Weston Underwood Park: 2006 aerial photograph

© Getmapping plc. www.getmapping.com

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
March 2018



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 (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* 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 a significant grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. 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>WESTON PARK</b>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	MILTON KEYNES	
<b>PARISH:</b>	WESTON UNDERWOOD	
<b>OS REF:</b>	SP 870 511	

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Overview**

A garden and park associated with a lost Bucks manor house. The site has strong associations with the nationally significant late C18 English poet William Cowper who inspired the Romantic poets including with his poem *The Task* (1785) in which the features at Weston Park are seminal. It survives much as he knew it, with no major alterations after the house was largely demolished in the 1820s. The gardens immediately around the former house survive in outline along with various sets of imposing gate piers on the approaches. The most important garden areas are detached north the public road. These comprise three adjacent compartments, The Grove, the walled kitchen garden and The Wilderness. The park was in the C18 dominated by a formal layout of trees which was softened in its lines in the C19; some of these trees survive. It formed the setting for a number of important buildings that largely survive, including the Alcove and the Moss House (gone), some illustrated by Storer in 1803, as well as a circuit walk. The adjacent village makes a strong contribution to the approaches and setting, as does the wider rural Ouse valley including views from the park east to Olney church spire.

**Archaeological interest**

The potential exists for features related to the lost wings of the house and its service buildings, also lost features of the associated garden and park. Evidence of lost garden features may include paths, the lost gate piers on the main road, walls and other buildings and the ornamental layout of parts of the gardens evident on historic maps. In the park the sites of the avenues are of particular potential, together with the former Moss House depicted by Storer. There may also be evidence for former agricultural activity in the park such as ridge and furrow cultivation.

**Architectural interest**

The majority of an extensive, varied and high quality ensemble of C18 and early C19 structures and sculpture for the grounds of a former South Midland manor house. Even though most of the house was demolished in the 1820s, the remarkable ensemble survives largely complete as it was at the zenith of the landscape in the late C18 when the items were well known by the poet Cowper and inspired some of his greatest poems. They are still more significant as many are addressed individually in his seminal poem *The Task*. The main loss in the grounds is the rustic Moss House in the park. The extensive number of listed buildings and structures reflects their significance individually and as a group ornamenting a high quality landscape design (see Appendix 1).

**Artistic interest**

The C18 and possibly earlier gardens, park, wilderness and kitchen garden of a manor house, reflecting an early-mid-C18 formal layout seen on the 1781 estate map, that survives largely intact. The most important elements are associated with Cowper in the 1780s and 1790s, particularly the Wilderness, its layout, structures and sculpture, and the park buildings and their environs and linking walk, together with associated planting. The Wilderness, although not visually related to the former house, was the most significant element, and this survives intact. The framework of the gardens around the remains of the former house is of considerable interest for their survival for 200 years since its demolition largely without major alteration. The ornamentation of the public approach via imposing gate

piers is notable. The extensive visual links with the Ouse Valley and Olney church spire form a strong part of the design.

### **Historic interest**

The site has strong links to the C18 poet, William Cowper who was inspired by the park and gardens which he knew intimately in the late C18. Many aspects of the landscape appear in his work, notably in *The Task* (1785, see Appendix 2), one of the most frequently-printed poems of the C19, admired by George III and Jane Austen, and apparently an inspiration to William Wordsworth. Wilfred Pippet also took inspiration from the grounds for his illustrations of *Ballads of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire* (1825).

The site is a typical mid-Bucks manor with associations since the medieval period with various notable local families. The Throckmortons who owned the manor from 1446 until 1898 were Roman Catholics, infamous for the eponymous Plot against Elizabeth 1 in 1583 and as close relatives of most of the Gunpowder Plotters in 1605.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

In 1381, John de Olney purchased land at Weston Underwood. He died in 1405 and is buried in the churchyard in the village. The land passed to the Throckmorton family through the marriage of Sir Thomas to Margaret, daughter and heir of Sir Robert Olney in 1446 and it remained in the ownership of the family until the late C19.

About 1710 the house was partially rebuilt by Robert Throckmorton, who died there in 1720. (*VCH*) The estate passed to his son, Sir Robert Throckmorton (1702-1791) who, according to Storer, spared no expense in creating wonderful gardens and a park. Sir Robert married Lady Catherine Collingwood in 1738 and they had connections with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duchess of Portland, who was creating ambitious gardens and a park at Bulstrode, south Bucks.

A contract of 1742 (CR1998/J/Box61/Folder4/17 Warks R.O.) concerns wall construction enclosing the kitchen garden on the north side of the road to Olney. Another document refers to a "haw haw" (22 Nov 1745, TNA SP 36/74/2/27). While these developments were in the time of Sir Robert, a 1748/9 inventory (Warks R.O. CR 1998 1748/9.) of Weston House and the contents of the garden and park was drawn up and signed by Sir Robert's son, George and it is likely that George lived there until his death in 1767. Sir Robert had moved to Buckland House in Berkshire (now Oxfordshire), which he had built c.1755-58. Weston House became the home of his grandson, Sir John Courteney Throckmorton (1754-1819). Sir John and his wife were friends of William Cowper and persuaded him to live at Weston Underwood from 1786-95 after he moved from nearby Olney. Cowper mentions a number of features in the park and gardens in his works, including particularly *The Task* in which features include the Alcove, the Colonnade, or Chestnut Avenue, the Rustic Bridge, the Lime Avenue and the Wilderness (see Appendix 2).

By 1781 formal gardens surrounded the House, to the south and north with an extensive park with formal avenues to the north (Estate Map). It is unclear when these designs were implemented, as is which Throckmorton was responsible, but their formal style is of the early-mid-C18. It was certainly old-fashioned by the late C18.

Storer (1803) claimed that the Park was laid out by Capability Brown for Sir Robert, but there is no documentary evidence for this, and it has none of the hallmarks of a Brown landscape. There may be confusion with Weston Park in Staffordshire at which Brown did work. Sir Robert commissioned the contemporary and renowned designer Richard Woods to design the landscape at Buckland, and it is possible that he provided advice at Weston given the family connection, but the formal landscape present at Weston by 1781 is not in Woods' style.

In 1826 Sir Charles Throckmorton inherited and moved the library and other valuable fittings to his principal seat at Coughton. A large part of Weston House was then demolished. The park and gardens remained largely intact, and in 1894 it was reported that Weston Park was about 30 acres in extent, and contained some beautiful timber (*The Comprehensive Gazetteer of England & Wales*).

In 1898 the entire estate (c.1500 acres) was sold by Sir William Throckmorton (Messrs. Simmons sales particulars), including a 'beautifully timbered park' and lime avenue – the end of which it was suggested would form a splendid site for a new house, to the Chestnut Avenue and a Yew Grove. The walled kitchen garden was mentioned and the "old world garden and grounds" south of the former Weston House. The estate was bought by Lt. Col. Wentworth Grenville Bowyer (*VCH*), until 1920 (Winterton & Sons) when the estate was bought by Ernest William Smith Bartlett.

In 1927 the estate, this time 772 acres, was put up for sale (James, Styles and Whitlock sales particulars). The old park, about 75 acres in extent, still contained fine avenues of lime, beech, elm and chestnut trees and commanded varied and extensive views over the Ouse and surrounding country (*VCH*). The estate north of the Olney Road was sold to 'Jimmy' Long (Melville). The Lime Avenue was felled c.1928 (*Daily Express* 20 Feb 1928).

In 1929 the Manor House and parts of the park and the Walled Garden were sold to Air Vice Marshall McKintyre (Melville). Reports of ownership then differ but by 1939 William Worthington of the brewing family owned the Manor House. The manor and some land were bought by Lord Denham, son of a previous owner Lt. Col. W. G. Bowyer, c.1946. During the winter of 1946/7 the Alcove suffered severe damage and was near collapse. Lord Denham had it repaired and in 1948 it, and the land on which it stood, were given to Buckinghamshire County Council (CBS DC 3/10/89).

In 1950 the Manor, Wilderness and Walled Garden were sold to a brush making company and occupied by a senior executive named Geddes. At some time after this large entrances were constructed in the wall between the Kitchen Garden and the High Street (Melville).

In 1955 The Manor, the Walled Garden and other land was bought by the Marler family who used parts of the estate for the Flamingo Gardens Zoo from 1957 (Melville; advertising material in CBS local file). The Zoo closed to the public in 1999 but continued occupying the site into 2001 to allow the stock to be re-located or sold. In 2002 the Walled Garden, the Wilderness and Grove were put on the market (Melville; HER MMK5681).

Since 2003 a new house has been built in the Walled Garden, named 'The Walled Garden'. Other changes have been made to both the Walled Garden and The Grove for landscaping purposes and to facilitate access.

All that remains of Weston House are the Clock House, The Chapel, including a former wing of the old House, and Laundry Cottage, which are privately owned residences. The pleasure grounds and parkland are in split private ownership, except the area surrounding 'The Alcove' which is owned by Buckinghamshire County Council.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

Weston Park lies on the north-east edge of Weston Underwood, a village two miles south-west of Olney. The village occupies a high ridge overlooking the river Ouse to the south-east. The soil is generally loam with a subsoil of clay, but to the north-east is a seam of limestone, often with a characterful natural blue streak that has been quarried for centuries for building material. In 1847 the park area north of Weston Road was described as about half a mile in breadth by about three quarters of a mile in length (Miller).



The 72ha. site is bounded to the south and west by Wood Lane. On the south-east is the High Street, which is now a main public road bisecting the C18 park. The remains of the former Weston House and its gardens lie on the south-east side. Beyond these gardens fields run down to the Ouse.

The western side of the northern boundary is a mixed, mature hedge, which separates the Park from a quarry to the north. A weedy brook (Cowper) divides this from a new Chestnut Avenue (partially replacing the one marked on the 1781 map) on the north-east side, which ends in an open field.

The east boundary is composed of the remains of two spinneys running north-south to Weston Road - Home Spinney and Overbrook Spinney (1927 Estate map). To the east beyond Home Spinney is the set of buildings now known as the Pheasants' Nest. In the early C19 this lay outside the park and was surrounded and obscured by elms (Storer).

The setting is rural, with trees and gentle hills giving views over the Ouse and Olney church spire. It is recognisable from the descriptions of Cowper, even though much changed in details

## ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

By the late C18 (*1781 estate map*) Weston House was approached from the east and west along Weston Road, which is now the public road to Olney. The former line of the public road was said to pass to the south of the village and Weston House but there is no trace of this on the 1781 map, or on maps thereafter (*VCH*).

Formerly iron gates marked the Olney and Weston entrances on Weston Road, which were closed at night. The stone posts of Weston Gate to the west, built c.1700, and a length of attached wall at the south-east angle of the Walled Garden still stand (*VCH*). These posts (listed Grade II) are known as "The Knobs" and are crowned by pine cones finials on plinths. No trace remains of the former similar piers at the Olney entrance and their location is not marked on any map.

The entrance to Weston House, now the surviving wing of the building demolished in the 1820s, is on the south side of Weston Road. It is approached via two sets of C18 wrought iron gates, with urn standards and arrow-head finials, between ashlar stone piers. These gates are linked by a ha-ha with coursed rubble stone wall and a moulded coping. The whole is listed Grade II.

In the C18 a network of footpaths crossed the area, linking it with Olney, which was used by Cowper. Access to these paths has varied over the years; in 1889 it was reported that 'Access had been barred to 'Cowper's walks' for a long time but had now been reinstated by Mr F Attenborough (tenant of the Manor House)' (*Northampton Mercury*, March 30, pg. 3). Access is again limited but a bridleway traverses the Park north/south leading to Hungry (previously Hungry) Hall Farm.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The former Weston House formed the focus of the C18 landscape but was largely demolished c.1827. It was of the 1570s with wings of 1710. The Weston branch of the Throckmorton family had inherited the principal family seat at Coughton and moved there with valuables. 'When it was pulled down in 1827 it was in a dilapidated condition, and the south part had been uninhabited for over 200 years' (*VCH*). The north, entrance front overlooked the surviving forecourt, framed by the gate piers, towards The Grove and park beyond, with the vista north of the road framed by the avenue. The south, garden front enjoyed long views over the garden, much of which survives, of the Ouse Valley. What remains is the early C18 west wing, with additions of 1828 and later, and one bay of the Roman Catholic Chapel of 1838 (otherwise demolished early C20), with one window of intersected tracery (Pevsner). The building is coursed rubble stone with plain tile roofs (listed Grade II).

Other service buildings are incorporated in nearby buildings, notably The Clockhouse, formerly the Stables (C18, listed Grade II), also of coursed rubble stone, and Laundry Cottage.

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

North of Weston Road opposite the site of the former house, are three linked areas of garden, present by 1781 (Estate Map). These comprise The Grove, to the west of this the Walled Garden (kitchen garden), and to the north of this The Wilderness.

NB listed structures are described in further detail in Appendix 1.

### **The Grove**

The Grove lies north of the road opposite the forecourt entrance and site of the former house, with the park beyond to the north. This paddock, measuring c.150m x 100m is laid to grass and contains a few mature trees including limes, possibly some of them are the remains of those present in the C18. It is bounded to the south along Weston Road by a metal fence and a recent beech hedge. It is in the ownership of the new house in the former kitchen garden and is gated on the south east corner, with an access drive leading west. It is largely screened from the road by a beech hedge. The north and east sides are bounded by the park.

The Grove was an important C18 feature as it framed the view north from the house to the park. It was mentioned by Storer in 1803, and illustrated as part of a view south to Weston House framed by trees. This also shows the ha-ha in front of the house, and the then private road. The road at that time was bounded alongside The Grove by low link fencing affording a clear view between the House via the trees in the Grove to the Park. By the late C18 (estate map, 1781) the tree pattern was formal, with a building at the end of an avenue of trees running north from The Grove, opposite the entrance to the house. By 1882 (OS) the pattern of trees was informal and grouped, with remains of the original avenue running north but no building. The trees have largely disappeared and the views between the site of the House will be obscured once the beech hedge matures.

### **The Walled Garden or Kitchen Garden**

Adjacent to the west of the Grove is the Walled or Kitchen Garden, surrounded by an C18 stone wall (listed Grade II). This almost rectangular garden, measuring c. 75m x 100m contains an early C21 house and grounds and was in the late C20 the site of the zoo. Except for minor alterations, such as the insertion of openings in the mid-C20, the garden walls survive as they were constructed in c.1742 and provide the same handsome border to the High Street as Cowper knew. It lies close to the site of the former house in a position typical of early-mid-C18 landscapes and divides the Grove from the Wilderness.

### **The Wilderness**

North of the Walled Gardens is The Wilderness and from his writings it is clear that this area was a particular inspiration to Cowper. The layout, buildings and sculpture mark it out as an exceptional element of this landscape and much is known of it in Cowper's time from the illustrations and description of 1803 (Storer).

The roughly square Wilderness, measuring c.120m x 120m is bounded to the south by the wall of the kitchen garden and a short continuation (listed Grade II). C18 ha-ha walls extend north and east (listed Grade II) with a low coursed rubble stone wall (listed Grade II) against Wood Lane on the west. The area contains mature ornamental trees and shrubs, consistent with C18 wilderness design. The spinal diagonal avenue running south-west to north-east and wavy circuit of paths that enclosed it, present at least 1881-1951 (OS), may survive to some degree.



A wilderness was a common feature in C18 and C19, being a designed grove or wood with paths cut through it. It was an ornamental, attractive area in which to wander or pause. It was usually laid out at some distance from the house beyond the formal gardens. The shape was usually regular but the design within it could be varied. Wildernesses commonly contained trees, evergreen and flowering shrubs, grass, seats, garden buildings and statuary. Even in the early C18 they often contained paths that wriggled and wound around and across straight allees. In more naturalistic landscapes of the later C18 a wilderness would be an informal woodland area of mixed species. The one at Weston Underwood seems stylistically to have an early-mid-C18 origin, with its central straight allee and the former wriggly paths seen on the early OS encircling this.

Of great significance is a group of monuments (all listed Grade II), including the Gothic Temple, a Lion and Urn both commemorating the battle of Waterloo (1815), Memorial Urns to the dogs, Fop and Neptune, and a Bust of Homer, donated by Cowper. In 2003 these monuments survived in the positions in which they were located in the C18 and C19. With the exception of the Gothic Temple standing in the north-west corner, it is unclear whether this remains the case. Even so, The Wilderness retains much of the C18 character that would have been so familiar to Cowper.

### **The south side of Weston House**

The garden south of the former Weston House was present by 1781 (Estate Map). An illustration, c.1819-26, with text by CM, shows gardens on the south side facing the field going down to the River Ouse, with a terrace along the house and formal steps leading down to a lawn, or possibly bowling green. A roller lay on its side on the grass and in the inventory of 1748/49 is reference to a Bowling House. At the eastern end of the terrace was a small summer house with pillars. The garden to east and west was bounded by walls and small trees stood on the terrace and were grouped against the western wall. The framework of the layout on the south side survives as garden compartments for various subdivided properties.

### **PARK**

The park lies north of the Olney Road. It is laid largely to arable with a few mature trees surviving from the C18 formal layout and contains a number of ornamental structures including The Alcove and bridges. A circuit route is described in a clockwise manner below.

From the Wilderness the path leads for 550m north towards the Alcove, which is visible across the fields on an eminence. Until 1928 this was reached through the Lime Avenue of which a few specimens remain. Beyond the former Avenue the ground dips towards a small, seasonal brook, described in Miller (1847), before rising again to the Alcove. The Alcove can also be reached via Wood Lane, which is the western boundary of the Park.

According to Storer (1803) the Alcove was built by John Higgins for Robert Throckmorton, about "50 years" ago. Cowper refers to it in his poem *The Task* of 1785. There is no record of this building on the 1781 map, which shows other buildings in the landscape. Sir John toured Italy and France in 1775 (Wa. Record Office CR 1998 Drawer 3, item 9). It is likely that he had the Alcove built between 1781-85 inspired by what he had seen abroad.

The Alcove (listed grade II) is sited at the highest point of the Park, where the view was considered very fine, with glimpses of Olney Church spire and the Ouse (Miller) and in the mid-C18 the Park had deer (Warks. R.O. inventory 1748/9). Cowper speaks of the view from this spot and sound of Emberton Church bells. In 1847 the building was apparently a somewhat clumsy erection of wood and plaster, with two squat wooden columns in front. It has since been rebuilt and repaired several times and is now made of coursed rubble stone with a rendered interior. The front is open with two Doric columns, entablature and hipped slate roof and seats round the back walls. The Alcove and immediate surrounds are publicly accessible. The view to Olney Church spire remains, but neither Emberton Church nor the Ouse are visible and there is a bank of wind turbines in the middle distance.

From The Alcove in 1781 the view included a second avenue of trees, running north-south and parallel to the lime avenue, with a small building framed by trees at the south. No trace of this remains.

The north boundary of the Park follows Wood Lane north-east beyond the Alcove and then turns east down an incline at the north boundary of a field, alongside a mature hedge. This hedge was previously (*Estate map 1927*) an avenue of horse chestnuts. At the bottom of the incline is the Rustic Bridge (listed grade II), which was built by John Higgins for Robert Throckmorton in c.1740 (*Storer*). It is made of coursed rubble stone with a round headed arch and carries a path as part of the pedestrian circuit around the path over the stream. To the east the entrance to the bridge is marked by stone gate posts possibly contemporary with the bridge set into the remains of low walls. In 1847 Miller described the bridge as both rustic and ruinous and also refers to massy chestnuts. It has been repaired in the 1990s though is now (2018) overgrown and after a dry summer there was no water in the stream. A single large chestnut remains on the east side of the bridge.

Proceeding east beyond the stone gate posts the ground rises towards a bridleway, which runs north/south from Hungary Hall Farm to Weston Road. The way up to the bridleway is lined with a recent avenue of horse chestnut trees. In 1781 the horse chestnut avenue led east, up the hill, across the bridleway and continued east to meet Home Spinney on the north/east park boundary. This line of trees survived in 1927 (*Estate Map*). It may be that in the corner where the chestnut avenue and the spinney met was the yew grove, featured in the estate particulars of 1898, but not subsequently. Currently, between the lane and the Spinney is an open field. In 1927 a path followed the line of the Spinney, but this is no longer visible. Beyond the Spinney is the area known as the Pheasant's Nest. It is now an extensive farmstead but was illustrated by Storer as a modest farmhouse obscured by elms and formed a feature on Cowper's walks to Weston Park.

The route turns south down the bridleway which slopes gently down to cross the Devil's Bridge just south of the road that leads north-east to the Pheasant's Nest. The coursed rubble stone bridge was built c.1750 in the form of a rustic grotto (listed Grade II). It is below the confluence of the seasonal stream mentioned above and the bigger stream that runs under the Rustic Bridge. Just north of Devil's Bridge a road leaves the bridleway to run north-east as the east edge of Home Spinney before turning east to Pheasant's Nest.

East of Devil's Bridge Overbrook Spinney runs north-south as the far east boundary of the Park. In 1927 (*Estate Map*) this was linked by a path with Pheasant's Nest to the north and the path continued south through the Spinney to meet Weston Road. It is unclear whether this path survives but the Spinney is still wooded. The small stream that runs west-east through the Park, beneath the Alcove and under the Devil's Bridge joins the Overbrook here. At the south end of Overbrook Spinney is the site of the former Moss House, mentioned by Cowper and illustrated by Storer. It is now the site of Olney Pumping Station, built in 1936 (HER No: MMK5229).

South of Devil's Bridge the bridleway joins Weston Road at the new gates to the Grove. The park here is arable and mainly undeveloped with the exception of a red brick house east of the lane, built in the 1930s/40s and later extended. East of this house traces of former trees reflect the route of the formal avenue leading east that was present by 1781 (*Estate map*).

A single ring feature lies on top of a ridge, under pasture, evident on an aerial photograph, but no features are visible on the ground. (*Milton Keynes Journal* (1973) 2 p12 HER: MMK531). This may be the result of C18 landscaping, as it appears more distant than nearby ridge and furrow and may even overlie it.

## REFERENCES

### BOOKS AND ARTICLES

*Comprehensive Gazetteer England and Wales* (1894-5).

Cowper, William, *The Task: A Poem, in Six Books* (1785).

*Daily Express* (20 Feb 1928).

Lipscombe, G., *History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham* Vol IV (1847).

Miller, Hugh, *First Impressions of the English* (1847).

*Northampton Mercury* (1889 March 30) 3.

Pevsner, N. and Williamson, E., *The Buildings of England, Buckinghamshire* (1994).

Pippet, Wilfred, *Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire Ballads* (1925).

Storer, J. and Greig J., *Cowper, Illustrated by a series of views in or near the park of Weston Underwood* (1803).

Page (ed.), *A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 4.* (1927).

### MAPS

Weston Underwood: a survey of the manor and lordship of Weston Underwood, co. Bucks., taken from John Courtenay Throgmorton esq., by James Wyburd, 1781. (Warwickshire Archives CR1998/M6)

Sales particulars, 1927, James Styles and Whitlock (Cowper & Newton Museum)

### Ordnance Survey

6" 1881 Published 1885

6" 1899

6" 1924 Published: 1928

6" Revised: 1950 Published: 1952

### ARCHIVAL ITEMS

Rodney Melville and Partners, The Walled Garden, Grove and Wilderness, Weston Underwood, Conservation Statement, 2003 (private collection).

### Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

DC3/10/59

DC 3/10/89

### Cowper and Newton Museum

Sales particulars 1898, Messrs Simmons and Sons

Sales particulars, 1920, Winterton and Sons

Sales particulars, 1927, James Styles and Whitlock

### **National Archives**

SP 36/74/2/27

### **Warwickshire Records Office**

CR1998/J/Box 61/Folder 4/17 Articles of agreement between Lewis Harris of Olney, mason, and Sir Robert Throckmorton's agent for building garden walls at Weston Underwood. 1742

CR 1998 Drawer 3 item 9 Sir John Throckmorton Diary of Grand Tour

CR 1998 Folder 49 correspondence between Lady Throckmorton, Mrs Pendarves and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duchess of Portland

CR 1998 1748/9 inventory of furniture etc at Weston Underwood

### **IMAGES**

Cowper and Newton Museum, image of south side of Weston House (CM)

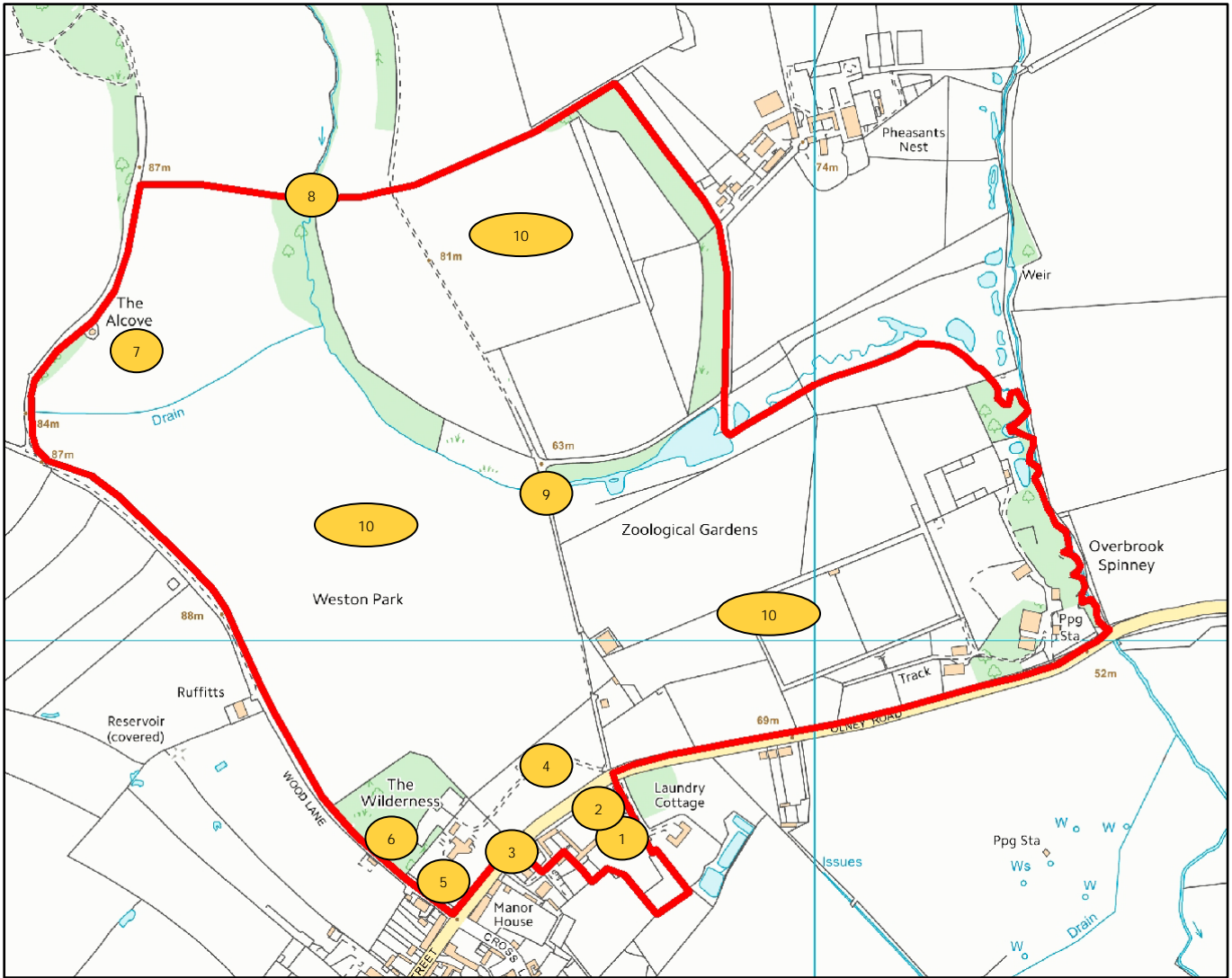
PHX/A/3/6 (CBS)

Engravings in Storer (1803), including of the Wilderness, Grove and house, Alcove and Moss Hut.

<https://ehive.com/collections/4535/objects/523846/the-alcove-weston-underwood> accessed Nov 2018

J Stansfield & G Grocott March 2019, edited SR April 2019

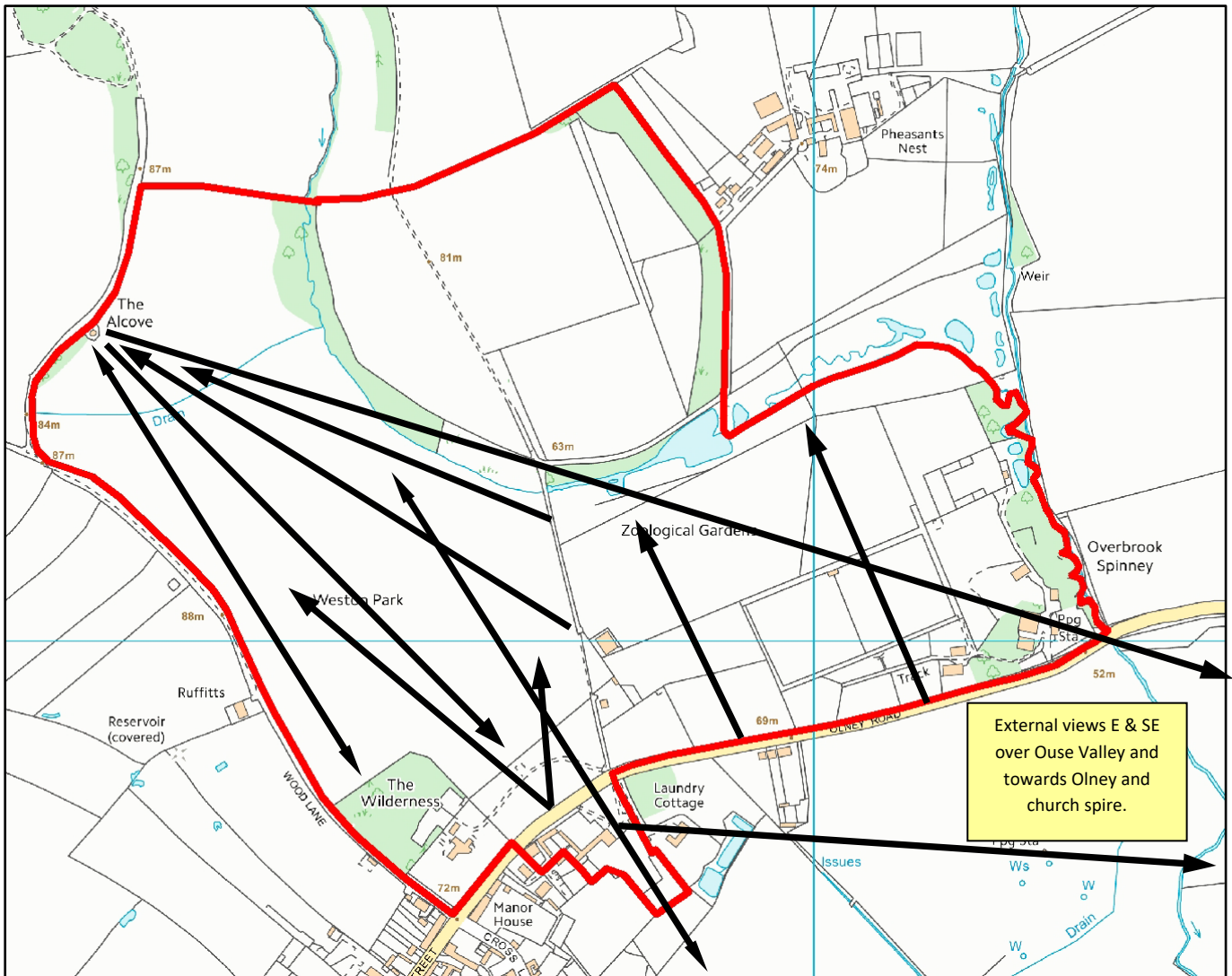
## KEY HISTORIC FEATURES



### Key to numbered features

1. Remains of Weston House including Clock House	2. Forecourt with gateway to High Street
3. The Knobs: gate piers flanking High Street	4. The Grove
5. Walled Garden with modern house	6. The Wilderness
7. The Alcove	8. Rustic Bridge
9. The Devil's Bridge	10. Park

## KEY HISTORIC VIEWS



## Appendix One

**Historic England: Listed buildings and features in Weston Park and Gardens, referred to in the text.**

### **Weston House, including Remains of Former Catholic Chapel**

House a surviving wing of a mansion and including the surviving bay of a former Roman Catholic Chapel. Early C18 with additions of 1828 and later. Coursed rubble stone and plain tiled roofs. Grade II.

### **Clock House**

Clock House, formerly listed as former Stable Block to Weston House, including coach house and coach man's cottage and walls forming courtyard. C18, altered 1901. Coursed rubble stone with old tile roofs. Grade II.

### **Ha Ha and Piers**

Two sets of piers with railings and gates linked by ha-ha, on the south side of Weston Road fronting the remains of Weston House. C18. Ha-ha has coursed rubble stone wall and moulded coping. Ashlar stone piers with moulded bases, cornices and carved and draped stone base finials. Between each pair are C18 wrought iron railings with urn standards and arrow head finials. Grade II.

### **Gate piers across High Street**

Gate piers across High Street at south-east angle of Kitchen Garden with attached walls (see below). Moulded cornices and large carved pine cones on plinths. Grade II.

### **Kitchen Garden Walls**

Walls to Kitchen Garden, north-west of Weston House. Grade II. C18, coursed stone wall fronting the High Street, divided into 9 bays by slightly battered pilasters swept up to higher sections at each end. In the third bay from the left is a modern (1950s) entrance with wrought iron gate. Two other board gates. The wall continues on all four sides of the kitchen garden, ramping down to a lower height along Wood Lane.

### **Features in The Wilderness**

#### **The Wilderness Walls**

Wall to south-west side of, and ha-ha wall to north-west side of the Wilderness, C18. Coursed rubble stone. Grade II

#### **Gothic Temple**

Gothic Temple garden building in The Wilderness, C18. Grade II. Hexagonal in plan, the three back walls brick, the three sides facing The Wilderness wood with Gothic arches. Old tile roof with pine cone finial. Round the three solid sides are wooden seats with tracery supports. Frequented by William Cowper.

#### **Memorial Urn to dog, Fop.**

Memorial urn on plinth in The Wilderness, C18. Grade II. Plinth with moulded base and cornice. Reeded urn. Inscribed with verse by William Cowper as an epitaph to Fop, a dog belonging to Lady Throckmorton.

#### **Memorial Urn to dog, Neptune.**



Memorial urn on plinth in The Wilderness, C18. Grade II. Stone. Square plinth with moulded base and cornice. Reeded urn on moulded base. Plinth inscribed with verse by William Cowper as an epitaph to Sir John Throckmorton's dog, Neptune.

#### **Bust of Homer**

Bust of Homer on plinth in The Wilderness, C18. Grade II. Stone. Tapering plinth with bust of bearded Homer, given to William Cowper by his nephew John Johnson and originally in the garden of Cowper's house in Weston Underwood, before its removal to The Wilderness. The plinth is inscribed with a quotation from Homer in Greek and, below, a verse by Cowper.

#### **Urn commemorating the battle of Waterloo**

Urn on plinth, erected in The Wilderness in 1815 to commemorate the battle of Waterloo. Grade II. Square plinth; urn has scroll handles and spiral flutings. Plinth inscribed "Adieu to destructive war and Mad Bellona in her iron car. Welcome to our smiling fields again sweet peace", plus the date of 1815.

#### **Monument commemorating the battle of Waterloo**

Monument on plinth in The Wilderness, Grade II. Stone lion couchant regardant on rectangular pedestal with moulded cornice and base. Verse mostly illegible, but date "1815" clear.

### **Features in Weston Park**

#### **The Devil's Bridge.**

Bridge in the form of a grotto. C18. Coursed rubble stone. To the west are two low segmented arches and to the east a single chamber in the form of a grotto. Within the single arch is a niche. Cow and calf stone coping to the east. Grade II.

#### **Rustic Bridge**

Ornamental bridge, mid-C18 by John Higgins. Coursed rubble stone with round headed arch with long embankments on either side, forming a path over a brook. A favourite haunt of William Cowper. Grade II.

#### **The Alcove**

Garden building. Mid-C18. Hexagonal in plan, coursed rubble stone, rendered to interior. Open front with two Doric columns, entablature and hipped roof. Seats round the back walls. Built as a view point from the Rustic Bridge to The Wilderness via the former Lime Avenue. Grade II.

## Appendix Two

### Quotations from Cowper relating to Weston Underwood

*'The Task'* Book 1 (1785) talking of a walk proceeding along the following route:

#### **The Chestnut Avenue**

'Not distant far, a length of colonnade  
Invites us: Monument of ancient taste,  
Now scorned, but worthy of a better fate.  
Our fathers knew the value of a screen  
From sultry suns, and in their shaded walks  
And long-protracted bowers, enjoyed at noon  
The gloom and coolness of declining day.  
We bear our shades about us; self-deprived  
Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread,  
And range an Indian waste without a tree.  
Thanks to Benevolus; he spares me yet  
These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines,  
And though himself so polished, still reprieves  
The obsolete prolixity of shade.'

#### **The Rustic Bridge**

'Descending now (but cautious, lest too fast,)  
A sudden steep, upon a rustic bridge  
We pass a gulf in which the willows dip  
Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.  
Hence ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme  
We mount again'

#### **The Alcove**

'The summit gained. Behold the proud alcove  
That crowns it! Yet not all pride secures

The grand retreat from injuries impress'd  
By rural carvers, who with knives deface  
The panels, leaving an obscure rude name,  
In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss,  
So strong the zeal t'immortalize himself  
Beats in the breast of man, that ev'n a few  
Few transient years, won from the abyss abhorr'd  
And even to a clown. Now roves the eye;  
And posted on this speculative height,  
Exults in its command.'

### **The Lime Walk**

'Hence the declivity is sharp and short,  
And such the re-ascent; between them weeps  
A little naiad her impoverished urn  
All summer long, which winter fills again.  
The folded gates would bar my progress now,  
But that the lord of this enclosed demesne,  
Communicative of the good he owns,  
Admits me to a share: the guiltless eye  
Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.  
Refreshing change! where now the blazing sun?  
By short transition we have lost his glare,  
And stepped at once into a cooler clime.  
Ye fallen avenues! once more I mourn  
Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice  
That yet a remnant of your race survives.  
How airy and how light the graceful arch,  
Yet awful as the consecrated roof

Re-echoing pious anthems! while beneath  
The chequered earth seems restless as a flood  
Brushed by the wind. So sportive is the light  
Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,  
Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,  
And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves  
Play wanton, every moment, every spot.'

### **The Wilderness**

'And now with nerves new-braced and spirits cheered  
We tread the wilderness, whose well-rolled walks  
With curvature of slow and easy sweep, -  
Deception innocent, - give ample space  
To narrow bounds.'

### **The Grove**

'The grove receives us next;  
Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms  
We may discern the thresher at his task.'

### **Other quotations**

Inscription for a Moss House

'Here, free from riot's hated noise,  
Be mine, ye calmer, purer joys,  
A book or friend bestows;  
Far from the storms that shake the great,  
Contentment's gale shall fan my seat,  
And sweeten my repose.'

1784 Letter from Cowper to Rev. Unwin, talking about the Throckmorton family. Says they have enjoyed the 'range of the pleasure grounds' at Weston Underwood having been given a key that 'admits us into all'  
<https://ia800209.us.archive.org/19/items/lettersofwilliam00cowp/lettersofwilliam00cowp.pdf> P93 Letters of William Cowper Rev. W Benham 1907

1786 Letter from Cowper to Lady Hesketh 'We took our customary walk yesterday in The Wilderness at Weston and saw with regret the laburnums, syringas and guelder roses, some of them blown ..... Still however, there will be roses and jasmine and honeysuckle and shady walks and cool alcoves'

<https://ia800209.us.archive.org/19/items/lettersofwilliam00cowp/lettersofwilliam00cowp.pdf>

P150 Letters of William Cowper Rev. W Benham 1907

1788 Letter from Cowper to Lady Hesketh 'We also, as you know have scenes at Weston worthy of description.... one of them has been much improved..... I mean the Lime Walk. .... Mr Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness that no cathedral in the world can show one' (arch) 'of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom to both the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure-grounds have displaced without mercy; because, forsooth, they are rectilinear.'

<https://ia800209.us.archive.org/19/items/lettersofwilliam00cowp/lettersofwilliam00cowp.pdf>

P193-195 Letters of William Cowper Rev. W Benham 1907

1789 Letter from Cowper to Lady Throckmorton 'Your aviary is all in good health. I pass it every day and often enquire at the lattice; the inhabitants of it send their duty, and wish for your return.

<https://ia800209.us.archive.org/19/items/lettersofwilliam00cowp/lettersofwilliam00cowp.pdf>

P206 Letters of William Cowper Rev. W Benham 1907

## Appendix Three

### 1803 Images and Text (Storer) Compared with 1997 Photographs (S Rutherford)

‘Among the literary characters that, in the present age, have attained celebrity by the extent of their genius and excellence of their productions, must be ranked the poet Cowper. ... uniting piety to talent, and devotion to principle, [who] employed the graces of poesy to strengthen the bands of morality, and give energy to the precepts which direct the heart to religion.’ (Storer, 1803)

Cowper’s time at The Lodge in Weston Underwood from 1776 to 1795 saw his greatest creativity, including the translation of Homer’s works, published in 1791, which won him national renown. At this time he became a friend of Sir John and Maria Throckmorton, the owners of the grandest house in the village, Weston House. Storer believed that Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown had laid out the park in the C18 for Sir Robert Throckmorton, but there is no evidence for this. In any case by 1781 the park contained many formal features including avenues which were unlikely to have survived the hand of the Brown who worked with the serpentine line of beauty. Cowper knew the park, and particularly the Wilderness, intimately, and they were an inspiration to his literary art. In 1847 Lipscombe, the county historian, wrote,

‘The scenery of the Park and gardens, with the course of the river, and the venerable Groves which shelter the mansion, have been the theme of Cowper’s muse: An alcove in the Park, with the walks and the scenery around, were his favourite topics.’

In the walled Wilderness Cowper contributed verses as epitaphs for two stone urns erected in memory of Lady Throckmorton’s spaniel puppy, Fop, and Sir John Throckmorton’s pointer, Neptune. These and other urns survive, together with the hexagonal and formerly crenellated Gothic Temple, restored so that it appears rather differently to its 1803 illustration. Further out on the fringes of the park several features remain which were laid out between the 1720s and 1750s, before Cowper came to Weston Underwood, but which he knew well: the Alcove, and Devil’s Bridge (which is in fact a very unassuming little structure), which was built ‘for the purposes of keeping up a piece of water in the Park’, along with another small bridge which survives. These restored in the 1990s and the Alcove, again, lost some of the original whimsical Gothic detail. Views out of the park to the surrounding countryside were very important, especially from the Alcove towards Olney and its great church spire. The piece of water has gone, as has the Moss House in the Shrubbery, and abundant and stately elms which were illustrated in 1803, but from the now open park and Alcove (freely accessible to the public) the views are still evident.

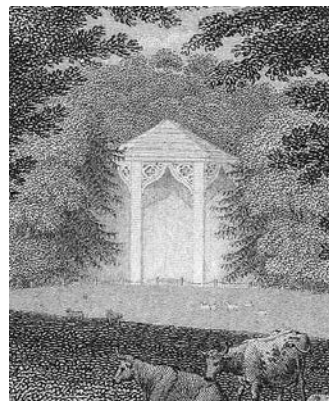
The following are extracts from Storer’s 1803 descriptions which accompany his engravings and photos taken in 1997:

#### **The Rustic Bridge [engraving; photo below]**

This bridge was built about 60 years since by Mr John Higgins for Sir Robert Throckmorton ... for the purpose of keeping up a piece of water in the Park: it spans a deep brook, forming a scene remarkable for its wild and romantic beauty, and, after winding its latent course along the bottom of a woody vale, meanders through the Park ...



**The Alcove**, being open in three divisions, presents as many distinct, though not equally extensive, prospects: through the middle compartment, on the left, the park appears finely adorned with clumps of noble trees, and, among the various foliage, part of Weston House is visible; the Avenue presents itself directly in front: to the right is seen the western boundary of the Park, the walls of which are judiciously excluded by plantations.



**The view** [see engraving and photo below] is in a direction south-east from the Alcove: in the centre is seen the termination of the grove, commencing at the Rustic Bridge: ... over the grove may be discerned the tops of firs and pines, which form the plantation between the Colonnade and Peasant's Nest; and rising from the foliage like a lofty obelisk, is Olney spire, beyond which are the hills in the vicinity of Clifton: the row of distant trees, on the eminence, is the high walk, from which is seen the Peasant's Nest.





**The Wilderness [engraving of urn and photos of 2 urns below]**

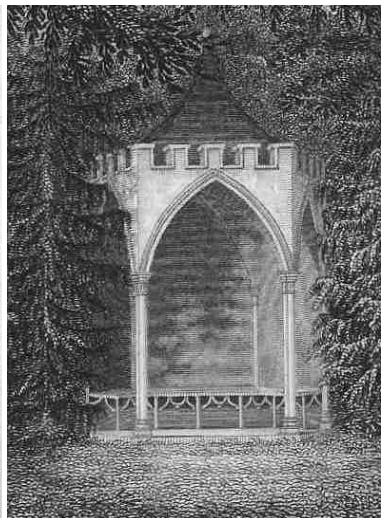
From the Avenue we enter the Wilderness by an elegant gate, constructed after the Chinese manner. On the left is a statue of a lion, finely carved in a recumbent posture ... at the end of grassy walk which is shaded by yews and elms, mingled with the drooping foliage of the laburnum, and adorned with wreaths of flaunting woodbine [honeysuckle]; the walk forms a border to the Wilderness on the northern side, and is ornamented with two handsome urns ...



Opposite to the entrance is a winding path, leading to

**The Gothic Temple [engraving and photo below]**

In the front of the Temple is a hexagon plat, surrounded with a beautiful variety of evergreens, flowering shrubs, and elms, whose stems are covered with a mantle of venerable ivy. In the centre of the plat stands a majestic acacia. On the left, a serpentine walk, under a sable canopy of spreading yews, winds to an elegant vista, bordered on either side with laurels, syringas, lilacs, and woodbines, overhung with the golden clusters of the laburnum, interspersed with branching elms and beeches entwined with ivy.



### Weston Lodge [engraving below]

This house is built of stone ... ornamented by vines and jasmines in verdant wreaths. It commands from the front a prospect into an orchard planted with well-grown trees, and the village. ... It has a good kitchen garden, and an orchard, which was formerly Cowper's Shrubbery.



### Shrubbery [engraving above]

Here stands the Moss House. This delightful retreat Cowper has celebrated in some verses of exquisite pathos, written, as he observes, 'in a time of affliction', and surely, every reader must feel for the unhappy bard, who, when speaking of the beauties of the spot, says, they are such as

'Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,

And please, if any thing could please.



# HISTORIC IMAGES



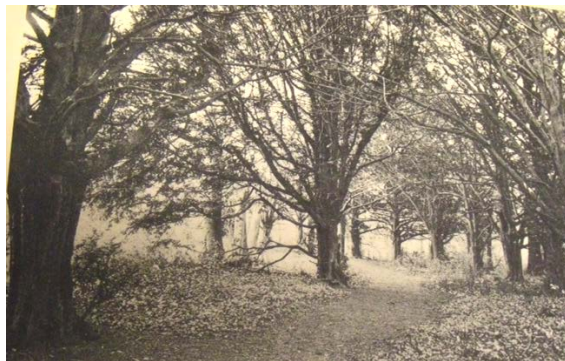
The Alcove (left); The Lime Avenue (centre); The Wilderness (right) (Centre for Bucks Studies)



The Wilderness (CBS)



The High Street (left); The Lime Avenue (centre); Chestnut Avenue (right) (Cowper and Newton Museum)



The Yew Grove; The Wilderness (Cowper and Newton Museum)







## CURRENT IMAGES



The Grove, view north (left); remains of the Lime Avenue (Centre); Devil's Bridge (right).



View from The Alcove in the park over the Ouse Valley