

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## Woodlands Park, Great Missenden

June 2016



Bucks Gardens  
Trust

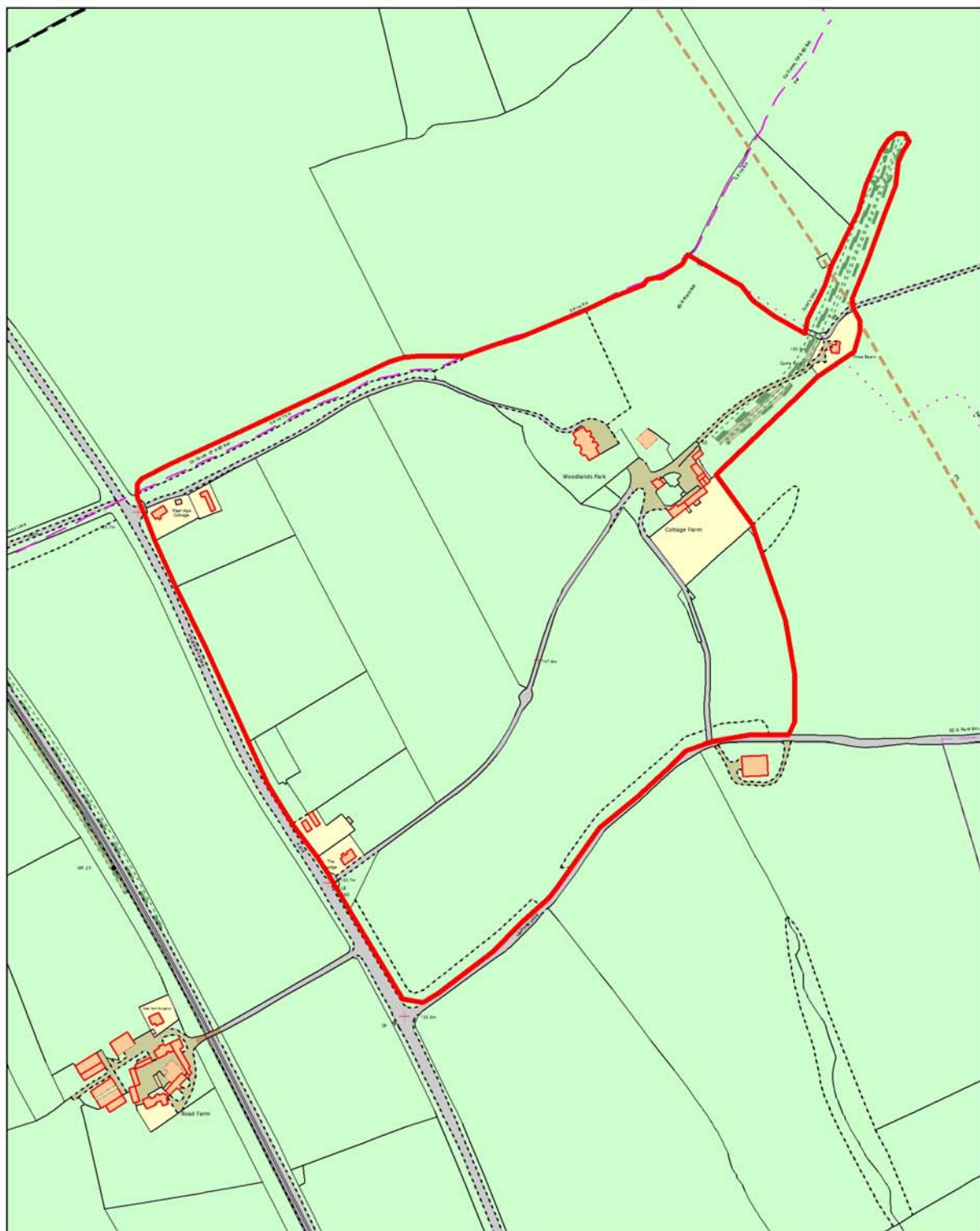


The Finnis Scott  
Foundation



The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust

## HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



### Woodlands Park: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
April 2016



Scale: 1:4,444 at A4



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**Bucks Gardens Trust**







Scale: 1:4,444 at A4



**Woodlands Park: 2008 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 (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not definitive 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/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 (now 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 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](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)

<b>COUNTY</b>	<b>BUCKINGHAMSHIRE</b>	<b>WOODLANDS PARK</b>  HER 1254301000
<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>CHILTERN</b>	
<b>PARISH</b>	<b>GREAT MISSENDEN</b>	
<b>OS REF</b>	<b>SP 888 033</b>	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

An early–mid-C19 Chiltern villa, gardens, kitchen garden and park, incorporating the linear archaeological feature known as Grims Ditch in the design, both in the park (where it is now filled in) and pleasure ground. The layout survives largely intact, together with long views across the Misbourne valley.

### Archaeological interest

There is considerable archaeological potential as the site includes part of the Scheduled Monument of Grim's Ditch. Evidence may survive for lost C19 and C20 garden features, including in the kitchen garden, such as paths, walls, terracing, glasshouses, and for pleasure ground and park features including the remains of a pavilion in the north pleasure ground (now occupied by Three Bears Cottage).

### Architectural interest

A typical early/mid-C19 country house ensemble including outbuildings and kitchen garden. The house incorporates Italianate features. Surviving ornamental elements of the C19 landscape design include gateways, the walled kitchen garden and stables and two lodges to drives by the main A413 road.

### Artistic interest

A country villa, park and garden developed in the C19 and sited to make the most of elevated views over characteristic rolling landscape in a deep valley in the Chilterns. Woodlands is one of several such houses in a similar elevated site on the valley side along the former turnpike road from Aylesbury to London. Notable surviving features include a terrace, kitchen garden, pleasure ground to the north and park, incorporating the ancient Grims Ditch as a feature. Some mature trees date from the late C19 including a large cedar in the wilderness and a mixed area of perimeter planting on the approach from the main road in the valley. Notable specimens include a line of Scots pine, oak, beech and horse chestnut.

### Historic interest

The property was associated with an important C19 railway engineer, James Edward McConnell, who was responsible for much of the landscape development that can be traced today.

## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site of Woodlands Park lay to the east of the turnpike road to London and is shown before the villa was built on early maps (Jefferys 1770, 1812 OSD). These show it included an area of woodland which later formed the basis of the pleasure grounds laid out in the mid-C19. The OS 25" (1878) names the woodland as Grymes Dyke but the OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6" (1883) shows part of this woodland as Grim's Ditch (SM).

The house first appears as Ride Wood Lodge by 1822 (OS) with a long curved carriage drive with two entrances leading off the Turnpike road about 2km north of Great Missenden. A small building, Woodland Lodge, occupied the site of the present house (Bryant, 1822).

The first written reference to Woodlands Park appears in 1832 in an advertisement in the *Bucks Gazette*. This describes the early layout of the estate including the first written description of the gardens: *'To be sold by private contract, Woodlands, in a park of upwards of 40 acres with 2 entrance lodges....The mansion, which is newly built, stands on an eminence and. contains elegant drawing and dining rooms, 6 principal bedrooms etc.. Detached are double coach house, six stall stable and other buildings; a capital kitchen garden, walled round, with choice fruit trees in full bearing, greenhouses, orchard, etc. At a convenient distance excellent farmhouse and upwards of 185 acres of meadow, arable and woodland...'*

By 1839 (Tithe map) John Comley Olive was the owner of "Woodlands" Park and Lodges and its surrounding gardens and fields, in total over 100 acres including a designed landscape. Two specimen trees framed the western front of the house and an avenue of deciduous trees led eastwards through lawns and shrubbery. South of the house was an orchard and 'gardens and buildings'. The Grim's Ditch area was called Hill Wood.

The main phase of development in the designed landscape took place in the 1860s-70s after it was purchased by James Edward McConnell, a railway engineer who knew George Stephenson. McConnell was living there in 1865 and 1869 (Kelly's Directory) when the house was known as Woodlands Lodge. He bought an estate at Great Missenden in 1862, became a magistrate in 1870, and in 1873 was appointed High Sheriff (obituary). 'He was greatly esteemed in private as well as public life' (Grace's Guide). Developments by 1878 included the kitchen garden, tree planting and a croquet lawn and by this time it is known as Woodlands Park (OS). McConnell died in 1883 and his widow in 1886.

By the late 1880s Cecil Molyneux Howard was in residence (Kelly's Directory 1890). By 1901 his widow, a farmer, occupied the property with her servants (1901 census). In the first half of the C20 Woodlands had many occupants, possibly tenants (Electoral Rolls). Until the aftermath of WWII there was little change to the designed landscape apart from the removal of a number of trees.

After WWII a Polish re-settlement camp was established in the south-west of the Park near the main road from Aylesbury to Amersham. The RAF aerial photographs from March and July of 1948 clearly show worn tracks in the chalk and lines of huts which continued in the 1950s (APs). This was one of a number of such camps in the area, the unit here being 23 Karp. Baon Saperow ("Army Units in Polish Re-Settlement Camps in the UK"). During the 1960s -70s the camp was removed (OS 1978).

In 1978 the northernmost lodge was called Mapridge Cottage. By 1980 the park was in divided ownership with a new entrance from Leather Lane leading to the now separate property of Cottage Farm formerly the stables and kitchen garden (1872). Since 1960 until now (2016) Woodlands and its grounds have been in use as a residential care home (Heritage Archway Ltd) with the rest of the site in divided ownership.



## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

Woodlands Park is one of a series of villas along the Misbourne valley in the Chiltern Hills, including the nearby Mayertorne Manor House, and Havenfield Lodge also located on the west-facing side of the valley. The 24ha. site is situated c.2km north of the town of Great Missenden in the north-west of the parish. The site is bordered on its western side by the A413, Aylesbury to Amersham Road. This boundary is partly marked by an old flint and brick wall and it runs parallel to the Metropolitan railway line into London. The northern boundary is defined by a line of Scots Pine trees and follows the boundary between the Chiltern and Aylesbury Vale Districts for 400m. The land slopes to the south-west along the south-east boundary which follows Leather Lane for 500m.

The site occupies a west-facing slope on the east side of the River Misbourne valley, which cuts through this gently undulating chalky area of the Chiltern Hills. The site rises steadily and steeply eastwards to a height of about 200m. The designed landscape surrounds the villa and includes the land now belonging to Cottage Farm. It also includes part of Grim's Ditch (Scheduled Monument 1021198; HER 0014010000). The estate is set in a rural Chiltern valley landscape with large fields mainly used for pasture as they are too steep to plough. There are lines of trees along the park's boundaries.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The main entrance to the park is situated on the Amersham to Aylesbury road (A413) via a brick-built, curved gateway, with one pier remaining, 400m west of the house. The other pier has been replaced by barrier fencing concealing the adjoining north lodge, called Mapridge Cottage. This two-storey rendered cottage has arched upper windows set into the roof as dormers.

From here the tarmac north drive follows the hill, curving eastwards, and is lined by a variety of trees of mixed ages planted 20m from the site boundary, including horse chestnut, beech and oak. 250m east of the gateway stand the remains of another gateway with one tall brick-built pier with the remains of hinges. From here the drive curves south-east and continues for about 150m, passing the wilderness to the north-east, before arriving at the car park at the back of the house. On the southern side of the access road a hawthorn hedge runs parallel to the perimeter planting.

A further entrance lies 400m south-east of the main entrance, also on the A413. It has a large gate and gives access across the park, running north-east to Cottage Farm east of the villa via the curved south drive that formerly led to the villa, but now falls short by some 30m. The south lodge, called The Lodge, stands immediately north of the gateway. The south drive mirrors the main north drive, forming one half of the horseshoe-shaped drive across the park centred on the villa.

A third approach is via a track from the direction of The Lee via Hunts Green Farm on high ground to the north-east. Having crossed agricultural land it enters the pleasure grounds 250m north-east of the villa near the site of a former garden building adjacent to Grimm's Ditch (now occupied by Three Bears Cottage). It passes close by to the west of Three Bears, before crossing the Ditch and associated pleasure ground walk 200m from the villa. From here it continues south-west past Cottage Farm (the former service yard) to join the south drive south of the villa.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The villa (listed Grade II) stands half way up a steep south-westerly facing slope, set back some 400m from the road. The main entrance is on the north-east front, the garden front is to the south-west and the service buildings are to the south-east. The house was built in the 1820s in Italianate style (architect/builder unknown). It is rendered with a slate roof and has a three-storey square, belvedere tower and two semi-circular, double-height bay windows on the south-west front over a basement. The house has been extended and altered several times in the C20, by adding a south-east wing with conservatory and three canted bays on the north-east front.

A group of service buildings stands detached to the south-east of the house consisting of stables (listed grade II), brew house and kitchen garden (sales advertisement 1832), in separate ownership and part of Cottage Farm.

## GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The terraced gardens are adjacent to the south-west front of the house and the pleasure grounds are located to the north and north-east. A rectangular section of mixed woodland lies north of the main drive and west of the house; this existed before the house was built (OS 1812) and was developed, in the mid-C19, as a wilderness with circuit paths and a winding path into the centre (OS 1877). There are few remains of planned planting or paths (2016), but several mature trees survive including a mature Cedar. The linear pleasure ground is detached to north of the villa, based around the remains of Grim's Ditch.

The gardens on the south-west front are reached from the drive or a door from the house in a small sitting room extension built over a set of C19 steps in the C20; the steps enjoy extensive views across the valley. From this door three sets of steps run south-west down terraces to the lawn, the bottom set are at right angles to the upper sets. These steps are supported by red brick retaining walls, date unknown (in poor condition, 2016). A concrete path runs for 25 metres along the terrace below the south-west wall of the house and a steep bank drops to the lawn either side of the steps. By the late C19 a terrace ran along the south-west front reached via a flight of steps from the house, with another short flight from the terrace onto the lawn. Directly in line with these steps was a fountain which is now gone. The terrace led to a path which joined the south drive (OS 1877).

The garden is laid to lawn with late C20 beds, a small pond and a small gravel garden. 16m south-west of the house a concrete pad may be the remains of a small building such as the Croquet Ground building (OS 1877). No evidence of the croquet ground survives.

The linear pleasure ground begins 100m east of the villa, north of Cottage Farm. This is the start of a 350m long band of mature trees, within which is a section of Grim's Ditch and (?formerly) a linear walk. This pleasure ground runs north-east, after 150m turning north for a further 200m. In part it forms a section of the south-east garden boundary, hedged by conifers which obscure views of Cottage Farm. This is part of the early pleasure grounds which from 1839 included this thin band of deciduous trees and conifers flanking Grim's Ditch (Tithe Map 1839; OS 1877; OS 1898). A garden building present by the 1870s (OS) stood at the angle where the ditch and path turn northwards, on the east side, enjoying elevated views. A building called Three Bears Cottage now stands on or near this site. The new south-east boundary was established between 1960 and 1978 (OS).



## **PARK**

The park lies to the south and south-west of the house and gardens and is laid to pasture with scattered trees and surrounded to the north, west and south by the narrow belt of the boundary planting. Clumps of trees cover the steepest slopes and Grim's Ditch. A post and rail fence 30m south-west of the house divides the gardens from the park. Beyond the fence is a steep drop to the south-west as the park slopes away to the A413 with the remains of a retaining brick wall on the park side. Long views extend from the gardens and house over the park to the far west side of the Misbourne valley. The park was by the late C19 planted with a variety of deciduous and conifer trees (OS: 1877).

In 1839 Grim's Ditch also extended into the park in a south-westerly direction for about 250m. Deciduous trees were planted along its north-west bank and a small square building stood over a section (OS 1877 and 1898), possibly as a feature for visitors to the ancient site. By 1978 both the trees and earthworks had disappeared, the earthwork apparently filled in, but the building remained. They cannot be seen from the gardens (2016) but were perhaps formerly a feature in views from the house and gardens.

The park is in divided ownership and is largely pasture with about 10 scattered mature trees (2016).

## **KITCHEN GARDEN**

The 0.5 hectare kitchen garden lies 80m to the south-east of the house. It has lost its former grid-pattern layout of paths and beds, and is now occupied by a swimming pool and tennis court. Some of the C19 boundary walls may survive.

The 1832 sales advert. lists a walled kitchen garden, greenhouses and orchard (*Bucks Gazette*). The Tithe Award states 'gardens and buildings' in the kitchen garden (1839). By 1877 a number of buildings stood both inside and outside three of the kitchen garden walls and in 1898 those on the north-east wall and part of the north-west wall were glasshouses (OS). In 1877 four quarters were divided by paths and fruit trees. In 1839 the orchard occupied c. 0.25ha (Tithe). By 1877 orchards lay outside the south-west and north-east walls of the kitchen garden.

## **REFERENCES**

### **Books, Reports & Publications**

Kelly's directory (various years).

Levrant, Stephen, 'Woodlands Historic Appraisal', Heritage Architecture Ltd., 2008.

### **Maps**

1770, Jefferys, Map of Buckinghamshire.

1812, Ordnance Surveyor's Draft (BL).

1825, Bryant, Map of Buckinghamshire.

1839 Tithe map and award (CBS).

### **Ordnance Survey**

1877, 25" to 1 mile 1<sup>st</sup> Edition.

1883, 6" to 1 mile 1<sup>st</sup> Edition.

1898, 6" to 1 mile.

1900, 6" to 1 mile 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

1950s, 6" to 1 mile National Grid provisional.

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### **Archival**

*Bucks Gazette* (13 February.1832), Sale advert, (CBS).

### **Websites**

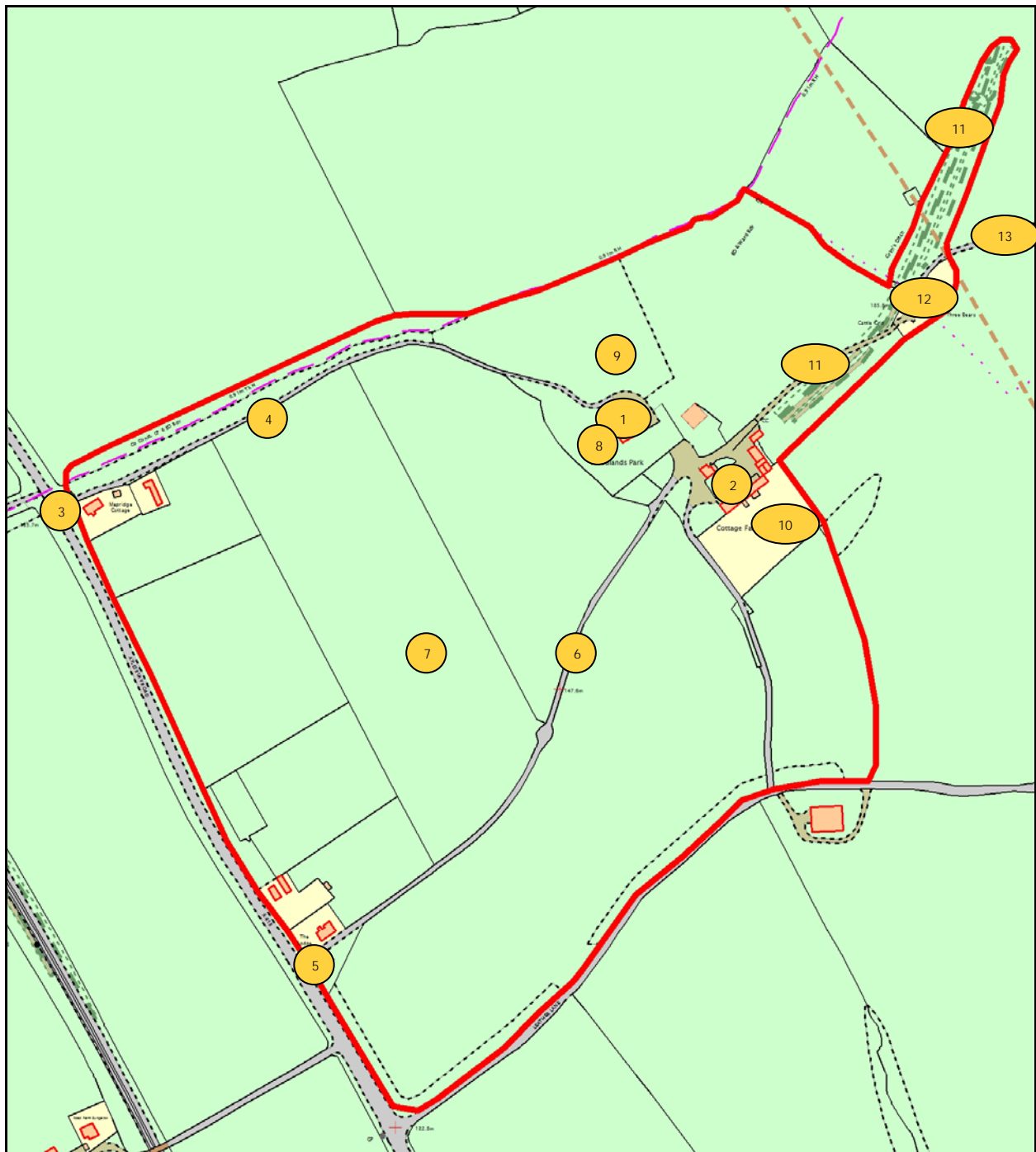
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M Buckle and S Meekums, edited by C de Carle, & SR 03 May 2016

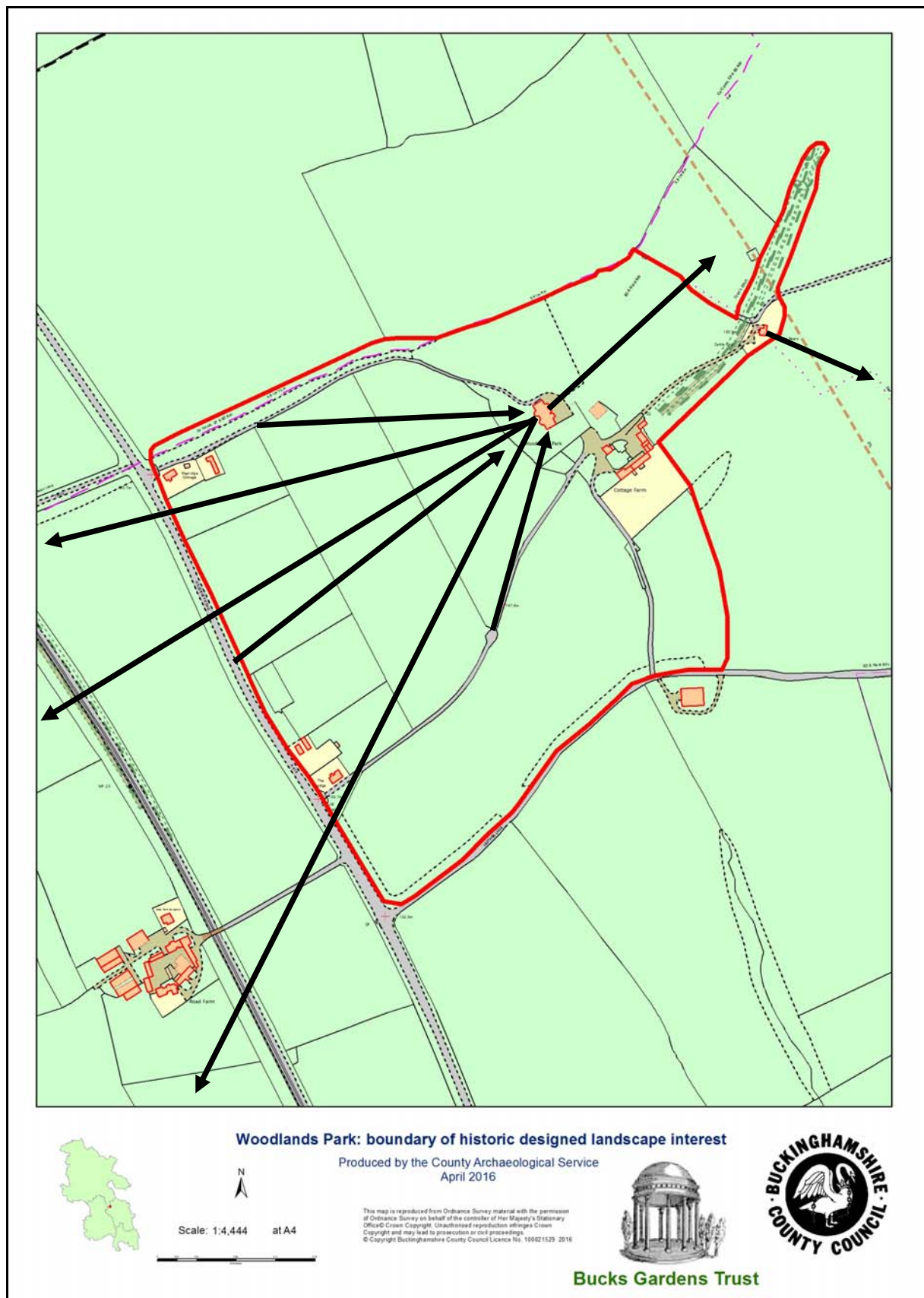
## KEY HISTORIC FEATURES



**Key to numbered features**

1. House	2. Service yard/Cottage Farm
3. Mapridge Lodge & north entrance	4. Main, north drive
5. The Lodge & south entrance	6. South drive
7. Park	8. Garden
9. Wilderness pleasure ground	10. Kitchen garden/ Cottage Farm
11. Grim's Ditch pleasure ground	12. Site of summerhouse now Three Bears Cottage
13. North-east drive from The Lee	

## KEY HISTORIC VIEWS



## KEY IMAGES





Garden front



North-east main entrance



Entrance drive and lodge



View south-west from house over Misbourne Valley



The Wilderness



Looking north-east from house



Mapridge Cottage (north lodge)