

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



CHESHAM BOIS HOUSE

December 2016



Buckinghamshire
Gardens Trust



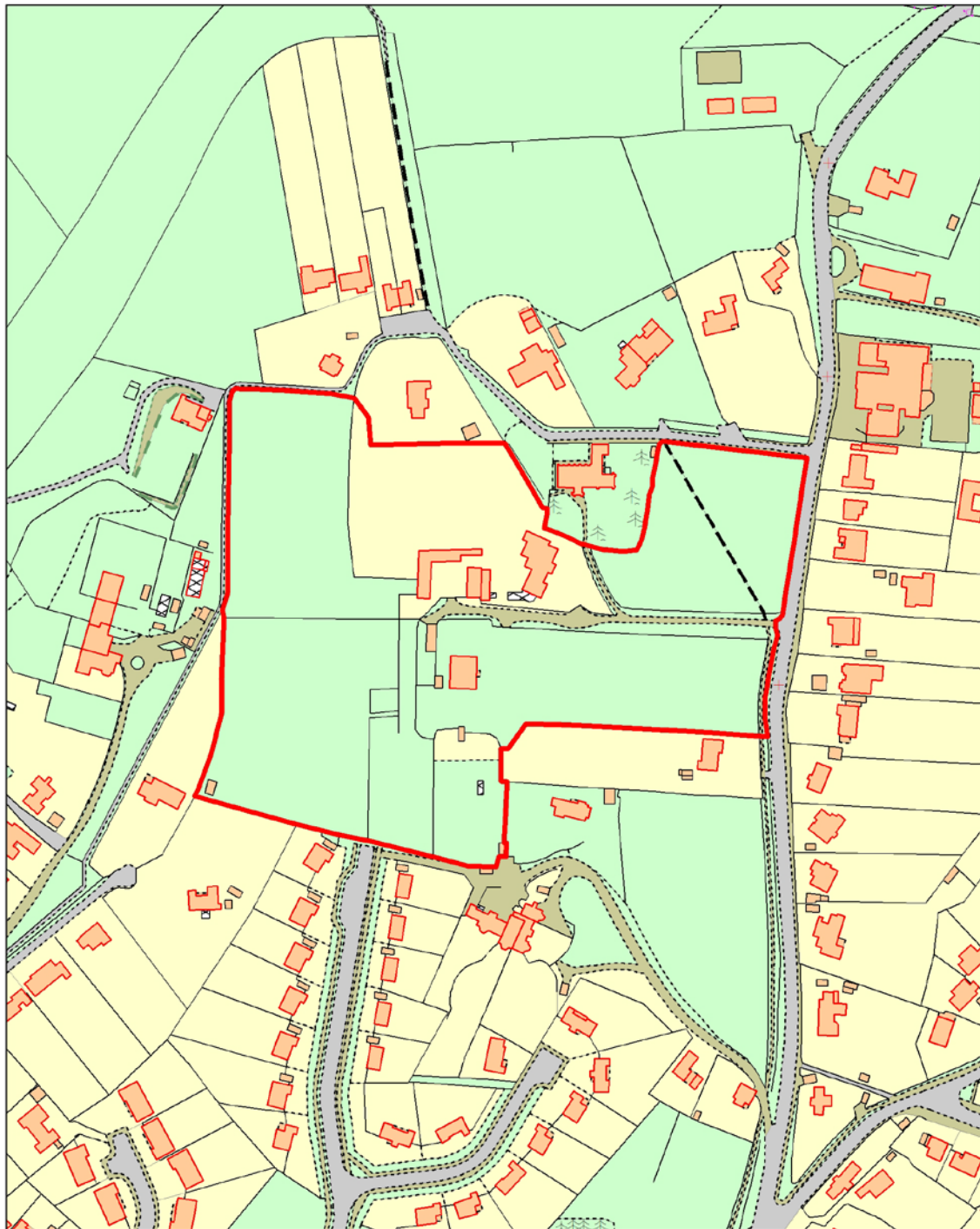
The Finnis Scott
Foundation



The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust



HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Chesham Bois House: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service
June 2016



Scale: 1:2,162 at A4



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Bucks Gardens Trust



Scale: 1:2,162 at A4



Chesham Bois House: 2008 aerial photograph

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June 2016



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*

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	CHESHAM BOIS HOUSE
DISTRICT:	CHILTERN	
PARISH:	CHESHAM BOIS	
OS REF:	SU 963 997	
		HER 0420601001.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

An early C19 villa garden including the remains of gardens and park for an extensive later C17 house for Charles Cheyne on a site occupied since the C13, which has been further laid out with gardens since the 1960s. The C17 bowling green site remains, with the site of former parterres and other garden areas, but the site of the canal and the extensive rides and allees which formerly offered views over the Chess Valley to Latimer House and vistas through the woods have gone. Elements of the wider former park and woodland setting survive fragmented between C20 development.

Archaeological interest

The site of demolished ranges, including foundations of a C17 house incorporating fabric on a site occupied since the C13. Potential for evidence of formal gardens related to that house, including canal and parterres, and structures, also for features associated with the early C19 villa garden including the kitchen garden. Excavations in 2006 produced pottery finds. Evidence of earthworks possibly relating to an Iron Age fort found near the bowling green. There is also the potential for lost buildings and garden features of C19 origin associated with the present house and layout.

Architectural interest:

Early C19 villa incorporating masonry from C17 house with earlier origins, also used to build garden walls, with outbuildings. The Warren (listed Grade II) incorporates elements of medieval building. The adjacent medieval church (listed Grade II) forms a key feature in views.

Artistic interest:

The remains of an extensive later C17 park and garden associated with the Cheyne family, incorporated into the grounds of a C19 villa with C20 remodelling and garden compartments. Documentary evidence (1716 and 1735 maps), indicates the extent of Lord Cheyne's C17 garden, elements of which are incorporated into the site and include the site of the bowling green and parterres. The current layout and planting reflects the inspiration of the present owner since the 1960s and incorporates many mature trees, including apple trees in the former kitchen garden.

Historic interest

Charles, Lord Cheyne was a national figure in the later C17: a significant politician and government official, who built the lost mansion with its extensive designed landscape. Parallels exist between the Chenies and Chesham Bois estates, as the houses and gardens were allowed to decline while in the

ownership of the Russells as they concentrated on their Woburn estate, Bedfordshire. Estate maps were produced for both properties in 1735, accompanied by field-books.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

An Iron Age fort may have occupied part of the area of Bois House and gardens, along with other such forts on the other side of the deep Chess valley near The Grove. Evidence of this type of earthwork enclosure in the vicinity of the former bowling green appears on the 1735 map, immediately west of the old house.

Chesham Bois is not mentioned specifically in the Domesday Book (1086), but an entry identifies the manor of Chesham Bois as part of Chesham. By 1213 the manor had passed to William du Bois. The nearby church, St Leonards, was founded at about this time, near the former manor house. By 1285 the manor had passed to Sir Bartholomew Brianzon who was given the rights for a Warren. The house between the present house and the church, named The Warren, has some of the oldest structures and materials, possibly medieval, of the site and could have been the medieval manor house site, rather than Chesham Bois House (Wessex Archaeology 2007). By inheritance and purchase Chesham Bois passed through many hands but in 1433 it was acquired by the Cheyne family, owners for the next 300 years who developed the house, garden and estate (VCH).

In the C16 and C17, the Cheynes were an important family in local and national political life. In 1654 Charles Cheyne, first Viscount Newhaven (1625–1698), politician and government official, married Lady Jane Cavendish, the richly dowried daughter of William Cavendish, first Duke of Newcastle. With her dowry, 1657-60, he purchased the former royal palace and manor of Chelsea. John Evelyn commented that at Chelsea, Charles had *'embellished his house with ingenious waterworks'*. Cheyne's career is a shadowy one, and has left little personal record. He seems to have lived primarily in the old manor house at Chelsea, but retained seats on the family estates in Chesham Bois and Drayton Beauchamp in Bucks. His Cavendish connections remained strong (DNB).

Cheyne sold some of his Chelsea land and possibly used the proceeds to extend the old house into an impressive new mansion at Chesham Bois and develop the gardens, pleasure grounds and park (Edwards), as a base for political entertaining in the county. A canal was probably also constructed around this time. Charles's son, William (1657-1728), was also a politician. In later years his country seat was at Chesham Bois. He left his estate to his wife, who died in 1732 (DNB). The family are buried at Drayton Beauchamp. Periods of expenditure coincide with the family's prosperous periods in 1520-1540 and 100 years later in 1620-1644 (Wessex Archaeology 2007).

Three successive Cheynes, Francis (d. 1644), Charles (d. 1698) and William (d. 1728), had the money and opportunity to develop and improve the existing house and garden. It seems probable that each made a contribution. Certainly the 1716 and 1735 maps make garden development in the second half of the C17 likely. It is hard to be sure who did what (pers. comm. Anne Paton via J Plaistowe).

In 1735 the Manor was bought by John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford, but as investment rather than to live there. The Russells had for over two centuries also held the adjacent estate of Chenies. With the change of ownership a detailed field book and plan of the Estate were produced (Beds RO: plan R1/93: Field Book R2/129). The mansion, church and other buildings with the ornamental gardens occupied the centre of the park. The land flanking the main vista to the south was cultivated fields, named as The Old Parke, suggesting that the park had recently been brought into cultivation from a deer park.

The Russells' main interest was in the land, and the houses fell into disrepair, as the family was rebuilding Woburn Abbey. The surveyor of the 1735 Chesham Bois map commented: 'The Manor House is not like to be let and will be no more service than to be pulled down to repair the rest of the Estate', however it was let. By 1780-1800 the Cheyne house and gardens had gone except for a very small part of the house. The Russell interest ceased by about 1800 when the estate was sold (Russell papers).

After the Russells sold the property, c.1800, the present small house was built as a villa c.1820, incorporating materials from the former house with a $\frac{3}{4}$ acre fenced garden consisting of the present walled garden and a lawn to the south, the remaining area was left un-cultivated (J. Plaistowe). By the late C19 the site comprised Bois House and garden, Dairy House Farm (later The Warren) and its related buildings (OS 1870s).

By the 1870s (OS) the house was tightly enclosed by a small garden to the south, with a turning circle on the east front, set within informal parkland and an approach avenue from the road to the east. In different ownership was the rectangular kitchen garden (on the site of the former south parterre) and to the west two park paddocks contained the site of the former C17 main garden axis including parterres, canal, wilderness and bowling green. In 1903 the Lordship of the Manor was sold to Mr J W Garrett-Pegge. Between c.1900 and 1920 (OS) the outer parkland was developed with scattered houses, some in large gardens, to the west and south, including Woodland Court and Bois Place, respectively. Elements of the park remained undeveloped but divorced from Chesham Bois House in other ownership.

During the early C20 the garden was sub-divided to form a separate plot, Bois Place, 500m south of the house. In 1926 Chesham Bois House was bought by Mrs Harper, she made repairs to the house, bought the former kitchen garden (now an orchard) to the south and land to the west and south-west as well as the land down to Bois Lane making a total of nearly 5 acres. Mrs Harper was a keen gardener and she planted several large beds of roses (these were later removed by Mrs Plaistowe owing to rose sickness).

The house was purchased by the Plaistowes in 1964, also keen gardeners, and from then to the present (2016) considerable maintenance and improvements have been carried out. The kitchen garden was removed and a grass tennis court was laid but it is now (2016) a meadow. A small summerhouse was built north-west of the house on a bank over C16/17 remains. Large amounts of unworkable orange clay and rubble in the garden may indicate the site of former water features.

The site remains in divided, private ownership.

NB: The early house of the Cheynes and Russells was known as the mansion house. The early C19 villa was named Bois House; this name changed to Chesham Bois House in the mid-1920s.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The 3.5ha. site lies in the parish of Chesham Bois, 500m south of Chesham and immediately north of Amersham, on the north-east-facing slope of the Chess valley in the Chiltern Hills (AONB). Here the chalk is overlain with clay-with-flints. At the bottom of the valley to the north-east the River Chess floodplain forms the northern parish boundary. The land is on a long spur running north-west to south-east in the dip slope of the Chilterns that divides the Rivers Chess and Misbourne. The site lies on the edge of a plateau at 150m AOD sloping gently to the south-east, which is partly terraced.

The village of Chesham Bois lies east of the early C19 main road (A416) connecting Berkhamsted, Chesham, Amersham and Beaconsfield known as 'New Road' (Bryant 1826). With the coming of the Metropolitan railway, over the last 100 years Amersham on the Hill and Chesham Bois have developed extensive residential areas which now surround much of the site.

Bois Lane forms the east boundary, to the north is High Bois Lane and the churchyard, and to the west and south the site is enclosed by C20 housing.

The C13 church of St Leonard (listed Grade II) stands 80m north of the house in the rectangular churchyard (outside the area of historic interest). It is reached by a footpath from the drive and its tower forms a feature in northerly views. By the early C18 (1735 plan) the church stood in the middle of a park paddock but this area has since largely been developed. It was enlarged from a chapel in 1884 with further work in 1911. It contains C16 brasses and two monuments to the Cheyne family. The public approach to it is from the north from High Bois Lane.

The surrounding area is heavily wooded with fine stands of beech, some of which made up part of the former mansion house landscape (early C18 plans). This includes a strip 200m west of the house adjoining Great Bois Wood, and an area called Willow Coppice south-east of the house. The Bois name has nothing to do with woods, although the area is, and has been, heavily wooded. The name descends from the Boyes, or *du Bois* family who held the manor from the early C13; hence the accepted modern pronunciation of the place-name.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance lies 135m east of the house. The drive runs west from Bois Lane flanked by a lime avenue and is enclosed by a paling fence. After 25m a footpath leads north-west to the church. The drive continues east to west and to the north is the entrance to The Warren and about 15m further on is the entrance to Chesham Bois House to the south. A few metres further on is the entrance to two converted barns (Dairy House and Bois Barns) standing west of The Warren, and 10m to the south the drive ends at the garages of Chesham Bois House.

This drive and avenue originated as an approach to the C17 Cheyne house. It was present by the early C18 when entrance gates stood slightly back from the road (1735 plan). The 100m-long avenue led from the gates to the north front of the former mansion house, beyond the current site of the walled garden. The 1735 map shows a square garden compartment with a circular feature, possibly a fountain indicating that the entrance was located on the north front at this time possibly in the area of the walled garden adjacent to the north wall of the current house (1735 map).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Chesham Bois House (listed Grade II) stands towards the centre of the site. The house, built as a villa c.1800, is a compact square, with the entrance front to the east, the service front to the west and garden fronts to north and south. It was refronted in the later C19. It has white rendered elevations below broad eaves with low-pitched slate roofs; some of the windows and doors are in Gothic style, with blue painted shutters on the entrance front. The house apparently occupies part of the site of Lord Cheyne's house which was considerably more extensive.

The main east entrance overlooks the gravelled forecourt and beyond this lawns and informal gardens including 2 large herbaceous beds and specimen trees and shrubs slope away to the east to the road. From the garden front French windows lead to the south garden. 10m south of the house a medieval hearth was discovered in 2005, measuring 3m east to west and 1m wide, made up of tiles on their sides with a hole full of ash and clinker, so thought be a smithy. At the west end the remains of a large oven had 5 compartments which presumably was used for baking the 69 loaves mentioned by Mrs Cheyne in her diary just before she died. Nothing was found in the hearth except a coin of 1420 (pers. comm. J. Plaistowe).

The service front to the west has a kitchen door leading out to a small paved courtyard which has a former wash house, then an area leading to a very small courtyard. North-west of the house are C20 garages, a gazebo and summerhouse. Most of the west walls of the outbuildings are of flint. It is believed that these were formerly the internal walls of the mansion house. Rubble from the former mansion is also used in the construction of the current house.

North of the house and drive a group of buildings includes a dwelling called The Warren (listed Grade II), formerly called Dairy House Farm. This L-shaped building has formed a distinctive feature on maps since the C18 when it formed part of the Cheyne group of buildings. Its shape suggests that it could have been part of the medieval house (Wessex Archaeology 2007) but later in late C19/early C20 was remodelled. To the west of The Warren are 2 barns one of which is called Dairy House Barn which are now separate dwellings, one of which is the same age or older than The Warren adjacent and the other (Bois Barn) is of C19/C20 arranged round a courtyard. The Russell surveyor in 1735 commented that: 'The old dairyhouse would make a good Farmhouse and when the house is down and the Willow Coppice stocked and cleared with a barn and stable will be let for about £25 or £30' (Russell Papers). The 1876 OS map shows the result as Dairyhouse Farm.

It is likely that the Medieval Manor, belonging to the Cheynes was the site of The Warren (listed Grade II) as this building is on the same axis and contains late C14 and mid C16 elements. The boundary path in front of the house was found during excavations (Wessex Archaeology 2007). In the C17 the Mansion House was built by Lord Cheyne around a courtyard, and in its elevated

position it dominated the landscape. The service wing was probably in the south range around a smaller courtyard and the long gallery (the west range) overlooked the large elaborate garden which included water features to the south-west. The front range was to the east of the present house (Wessex Archaeology 2007).

GARDENS & PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens encircle the villa. West of the house the land is slightly higher, embanked and levelled, being the site of former parterres. The land falls away gently to the east of the house. The garden was largely laid out in its present form from 1964 onwards by the present owner, including an arbour, several ponds and a rill, incorporating the framework of the villa garden of c.1820, which itself incorporated the underlying site of Cheyne's C17 former mansion house garden and any earlier features related to the medieval occupation.

Immediately north of the house a walled garden is laid to a square lawn with central flower beds and borders, with a clipped holly. This area is enclosed by the house to the south and by free standing flint and brick walls on the west and north sides and edged on the east side by shrubs on a bank which was probably made of dug up flints. The north wall, adjoining the main drive, is wide with curved west and east corners and could have incorporate an external wall to the former mansion house (Wessex Archaeology 2007). West of the house, north of the former wash house the service yard is partly bounded by a decorative brick and flint wall with a brick-stepped coping decoration.

From the central porch and front door on the east entrance front a view east down the centre of the lawn is flanked by large mature trees including copper beeches and sycamore. The vista ends at a hedge and trees raised 1m above Bois Lane. Until the 1960s the lawns immediately below the forecourt included a series of rose-beds (pers. comm. Julia Plaistowe).

The south front is enclosed by a narrow stone-paved terrace with narrow flower beds. Beyond this, the lawn extends for 16m with a mature mulberry tree in the lawn. Beyond this (the former kitchen garden) are flower beds with a path running through and then rough grass with mature apple trees and a wild life pond. This outer area was it seems the site of the kitchen garden to the villa in the C19 (OS, 1876) and is partly walled to the south and east (in part rebuilt).

20m west of the house, beyond the formal gardens, a bank leads up to the west lawn, an area of rough grass which was the site of the main north-south garden axis (1735 map). At the centre, immediately west of the house, is the site of the former bowling green, measuring c.50m x 50m enclosed by a low bank to the south and west. To the north and south of the former bowling green are the sites of two parterres (1735 plan). A small triangular wilderness lies at the south-west corner of the grassy area. This area is planted with scattered mature trees including a large sycamore. The lawns immediately south of the house include part of the site of a further parterre which was also partly incorporated into the later villa kitchen garden (now rough grass with a recent pond and mature apple and ornamental trees). Another parterre lay below the north wing of the former house, west of The Warren. The parterres were quartered with central features. A canal extended the main garden axis west of the house southwards, beyond the south-west parterre, as the most remote feature from the house. The canal was flanked by an avenue of trees in an open and relatively flat landscape, terminating the axis of the formal gardens west of the house. The canal was

linked to the south and south-west parterres by a cross terrace with a building at the north corner, set in a small wilderness. The sites of the cross terrace and adjacent canal are not now discernible.

By 1744 the garden contained 'a large stone role, Four Chequer benches, Five pair of large Iron Gates and two small pair iron gates one leaden statue one large sundial six Corner benches and a grindstone and handle' (lease dated 1744, Edwards/Paton). The 1735 map shows to the south-west of the house an isolated square building on the edge of the small wilderness; this might have been a summer house or more likely, a wellhead/pump house to supply the water to the garden, especially the canal. The Land Book that accompanied the 1735 map referred to a pump-engine.

PARK

Remnants of the former park survive outside the historic boundary as pockets of woodland surrounding the site and to the north the larger Great Bois Wood (Woodland Trust). The park was at its greatest extent in the C17 and early C18. The park was an elongated rectangle with a north/south axis through the house and adjacent gardens. The wooded areas formed an arrow shape and bore the names *Great Boys Wood*, *Little Boys Wood*, *Bottom Parke*, *Blackwell Stubbs* and *The Lager Spring*. Narrow and wider rides and avenues cut through these woods focussing on the house and gardens (1735 map). A system of broad rides or allees (now all lost) radiated from the former house affording vistas through the park (1716 map). The site of the broadest of these extended east from the former house across Bois Lane through Little Boys Wood and Blackwell Stubbs at the far side of the wood. Here the land drops steeply, formerly giving a view from the house over the deep Chess valley and towards Latimer House. To the north a narrower ride ran to the plateau edge overlooking the river. The longest of these rides was to the west, through Bottom Park and onto hedged fields (Roque map 1760).

In the C18, the park and estate were converted to agriculture (Bryant 1825). In the C20 various areas nearer to the house were developed for housing.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The site of the C19 villa kitchen garden lay south of the house, detached from it by an area of ornamental garden (OS 1876). It has since been incorporated as part of the main garden, and (as mentioned above) is laid to rough grass and partly walled with a recent pond. It contains mature apple trees that may be of C19 origin.

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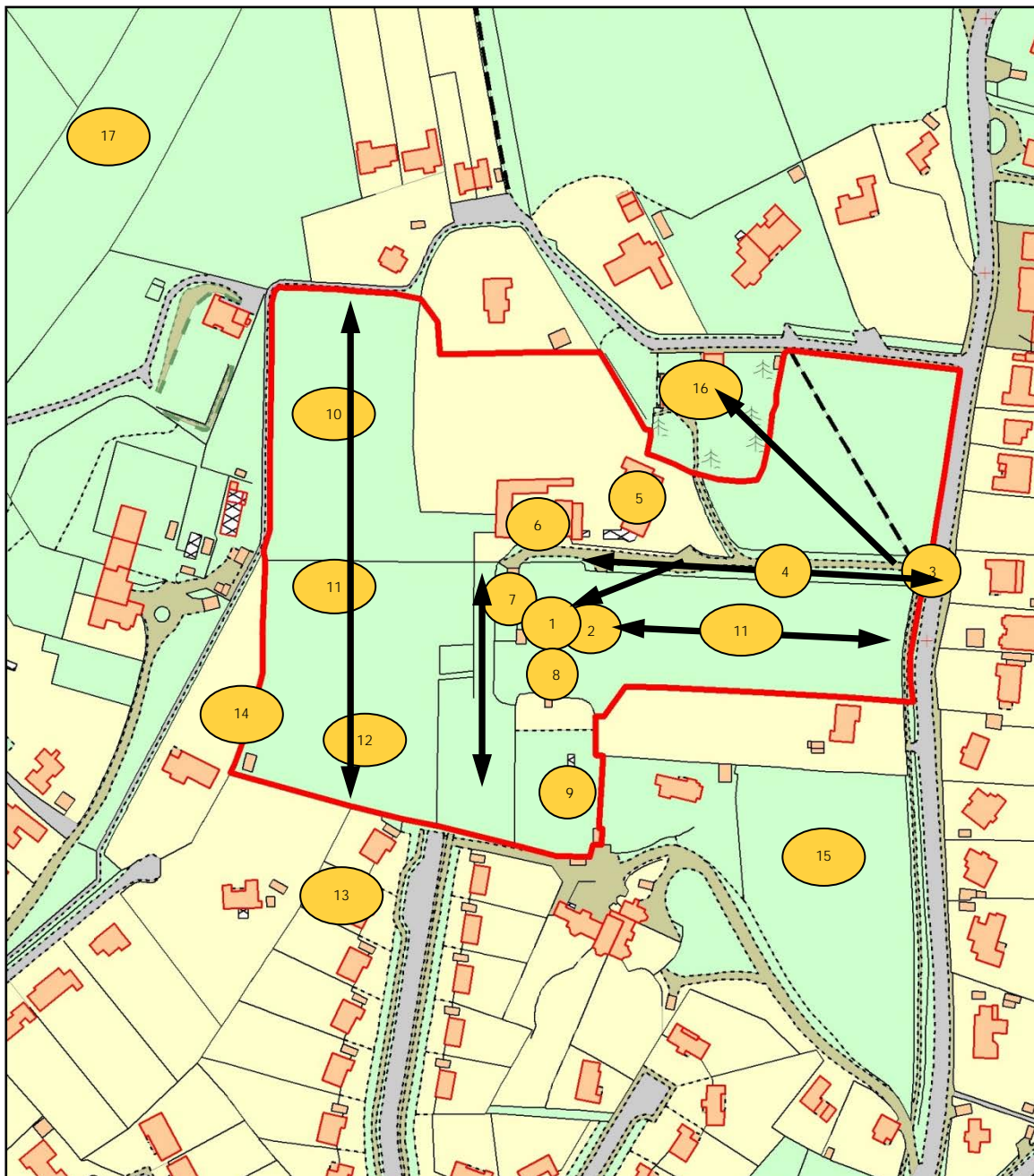
Plan of the Lands in Chesham Boys...belonging to John, Duke and Earl of Bedford 1735 (Bedford Record Office R1/91)

Map or Description of Chesham Bois...belonging to William Lord Viscount Cheyne 1716 (CBS)

Tithe Map 1838 (CBS)

B. Willet, J. Plaistowe, edited C de Carle 9 May 2016; SR 30 December 2016

KEY HISTORIC VIEWS AND FEATURES



Key to numbered features

1. Chesham Bois House	2. Forecourt
3. Main entrance	4. Drive
5. The Warren (formerly Dairyhouse Farm)	6. Dairyhouse Barn and Bois Barn
7. Walled courtyard	8. South garden, overlying part of site of S parterre (1735 plan)
9. C19 Kitchen garden (site of), overlying part of site of south parterre (1735 plan)	10. Grassy area, site of NW parterre (1735 plan)
11. Grassy area, site of bowling green (1735 plan)	12. Grassy area, site of SW parterre (1735 plan)
13. Approx site of former canal	14. Approx site of small triangular wilderness (1735 plan)
15. Part of C19 paddocks, previously Willow Coppice	16. St Leonard's church
17. Bois Wood	

HISTORIC IMAGES



The Warren around 1915



Drive to Chesham Bois House



St Leonard's Church 1850 (PHO2232)

Church before rebuilding

CURRENT IMAGES



Walled Garden north of house (C de Carle).



Walled Garden north of house (J Plaistowe).



West courtyard, garden wall and former wash house (C de Carle, left; J Plaistowe, right).



West elevation of house with garden wall built of old materials (left, C de Carle);
South, garden front of the house (right, J Plaistowe).



Contemporary rill and Summer House, views north & south (C de Carle, left; J Plaistowe, right).



Former C19 kitchen garden with orchard trees and recent pond (J Plaistowe).



Main entrance from the road (left);

The Warren (formerly Dairy House Farm) and St Leonard's church (right) (S Rutherford).