

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## Orchard House Olney

January 2018

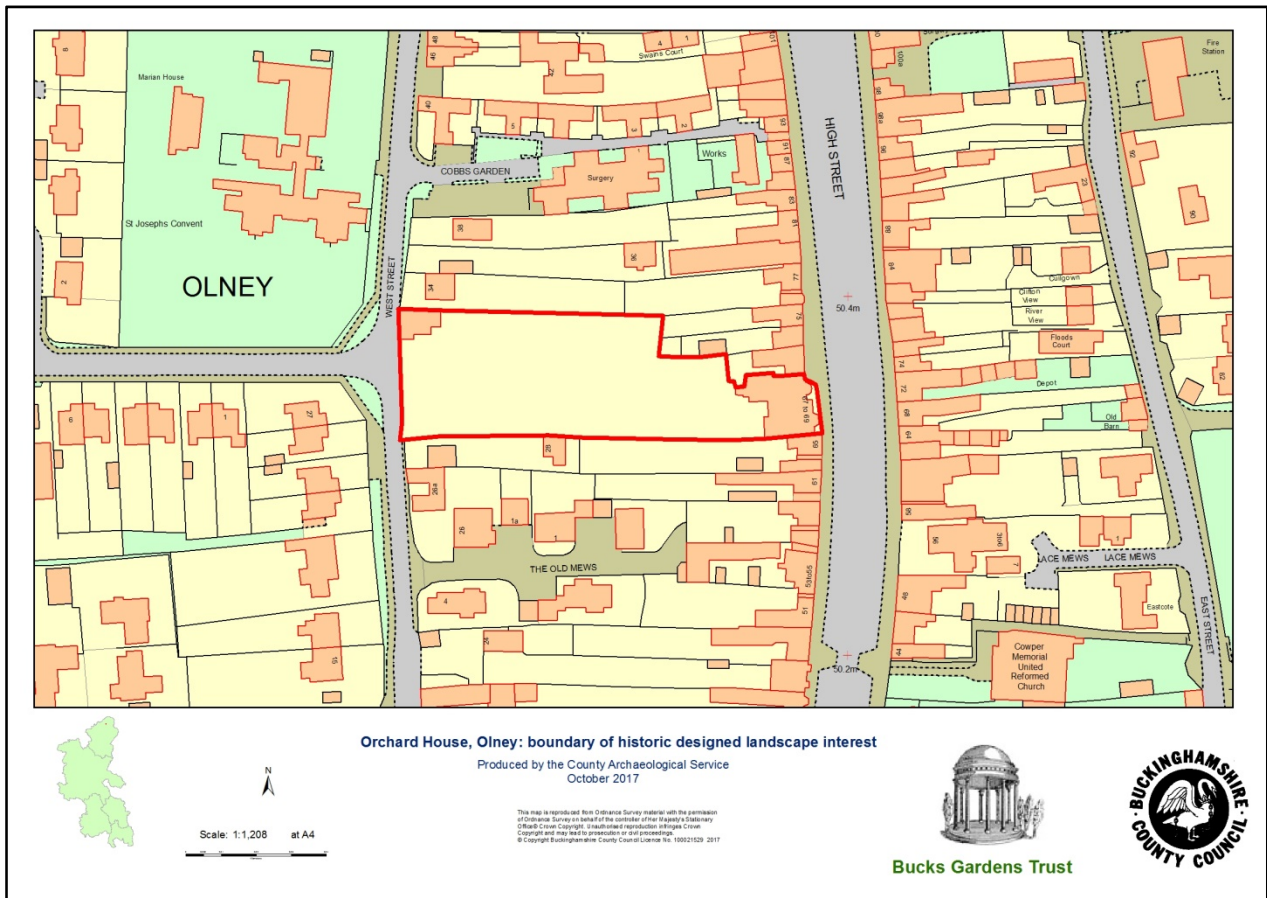


The Stanley Smith (UK)  
Horticultural Trust



Bucks Gardens Trust

## HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



## 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 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)

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>ORCHARD HOUSE OLNEY</b>
DISTRICT:	MILTON KEYNES	
PARISH:	OLNEY	
OS REF:	SP 889 516	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

A mid-C19 and early C20 market-town garden for two C18 terrace houses united and remodelled in Arts and Crafts style c.1904-10 for a local boot and shoe manufacturer. The garden is of considerable complexity for such a site and is ornamented by two substantial features: an early C20 conservatory, and a c.C17 cottage remodelled as a *cottage orné*. Based on long-established burgage plots united in the late C19 the garden was laid out shortly after c.1904 to a design by Perkins Nurseries of Northampton, focussed on the thatched cottage towards the centre dividing it into two compartments. The fine greenhouse designed and built by W.S. Revitt of Olney has been recently restored and stands to one side of the main axis. It is set on a terrace in the smaller compartment near the house, and has a central projecting canted bay. The layout established by c.1910 survives well, including enclosing garden walls, motor house, an early electricity generating house (c.1912), a working glasshouse, mature trees and shrubs, and paths, with an ornate iron Arts and Crafts front fence on the public road, to make this a fine example of a complex town-house garden.

### Archaeological interest

Between two and five burgage plots have been defined and associated with the house. Archaeological potential exists for uses and structures predating the existing garden layout relating to the use as burgage plots although it is likely that evidence was lost when the C19 and later layout and structures were developed. Potential also exists for evidence of lost elements relating to the present garden layout including the possible summerhouse in the south-west corner, path systems, beds, walls and other features.

### Architectural interest

There are a high number of significant structures for such a garden. The principal building is the house, comprising two C18 town houses probably with earlier origins, united and remodelled with an Arts and Crafts interior and external frontage and boundary wall/fence. It defines the east end of the site and its roadside frontage has been united and heralds the interior and garden with considerable style. The rear facade is not united in style, reflecting the C18 origins and successive alterations, and does not contribute greatly to the garden. Instead the c.C17 cottage is dominant as a thatched *cottage orné* towards the centre of the garden dividing it into two compartments. The recently restored ornamental conservatory is of considerable interest for its notable design and extent, and local origin, and contrasts with the contemporary working glasshouse nearby. The garden boundary walls make a major contribution to the garden design. The late C19 former stable/motor house is an integral element of the ensemble, servicing the house and placed at the far end of the garden close to the back service gateway and road, but has recently been converted to residential use. The generator house is the earliest surviving in Olney and has considerable significance and rarity as another functional service structure. One loss is the circular or octagonal timber summerhouse that apparently stood in the south-west corner in the late C19 (OS).

### Artistic interest

The design is a rare survival largely intact of a complex mid-late C19 market town garden modified in the early C20 by Perkins Nurseries of Northampton. It is rare for a designer name to be associated with a garden of this type and

period and this enhances the significance of the layout. The design includes the two major structures, the c. C17 *cottage orné* and early C20 conservatory. Elements of the early planting survive including several mature trees and shrubs, and the whole remains enclosed by the boundary walls and house.

### Historic interest

Historic interest of the garden is based on the local associations, particularly with J.W. Mann, the boot and shoe manufacturer, on W.S. Revitt the local manufacturer of the conservatory, and on the origins of the site as burgage plots long associated with the two houses at the heart of the thriving North Bucks market town.

## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The first mention of Olney is as 'Ollaneg' (Olla's Island) in 932 (*VCH* vol. 4, pp. 429-39).

By 1770 (Jeffreys) burgage plots extended west to the rear of the houses on the west side of the Newport Pagnell to Wellingborough Road (later High St) running north of Olney from the Market Square. Detached to the rear west of the present day Orchard House (2017) there was - and remains- a thatched cottage possibly of C17 origin.

By 1859 an arch was constructed dividing the cottage into two and it was extended north to create a classroom, St George's College (K.J. Quantrill, dossier 2015, pers. comm., Z. Sczczch). The cottage divided the garden into two parts, respectively to west and east, connected by the central archway.

The 1880 OS 25" (in two editions) gives the first detailed depiction of the garden layout. 2 long burgage plots ran westwards from the adjacent houses. The road frontage to the east against the High Street was of 5 houses numbering 67/69, 71, 73, 75, the southernmost plot, 67, being broader than the northern one, 69, and the houses each with one burgage plot. In the 1880s (OS, 1880) the gardens of 67/69 contained many trees, an orchard (present by 1886, hence house name), a pump, possibly a privy, and a circular feature in the south-west corner (probably a summer house) with a stable in the north-west corner (1892-1905 25" OS). Garden buildings included the cottage, a round feature in the south-west corner of the garden, possibly with a wooden/ thatched roof. The stable block was converted by J.W. Mann to a motor house in 1913 (pers. comm. G. Mann 2017).

The road from Newport Pagnell to Wellingborough formerly had a stream running through it; this was culverted in 1861 creating the present day High Street (pers. comm. M. Neale & E Knight; OS 1880). This wide tree lined boulevard, first planted with limes in 1911 to commemorate the Coronation of King George V, enhances the frontage of the houses either side, especially Orchard House. By 1899 (OS) two of the associated burgages plot at the rear and to the west were united with parts of those of nos. 71, 73 and 75 to create one garden.

It is suggested (pers. comm. Z. Sczczch) that nos. 67/69 were converted to one dwelling before J.W. Mann bought the property in 1904, possibly by the tenant of 69: C. Raban who was a plumber and painter. Mann refurbished what was, by then, Orchard House, in the Arts and Crafts style, which has remained little altered to now (2017). Parts of the extension to the rear west of the house were designed by Alexander Ellis Anderson (1866-1935) who also remodelled the main house. Anderson surveyed 78 Derngate, Northampton for W.J. Bassett Lowke between 1916/17 before Charles Rennie Mackintosh designed the interior (Mackintosh Architecture, University of Glasgow M333 Additions and Alterations).

The garden was designed and constructed by Perkins Nurseries of Northampton (Listed Building Description). This left several yards or garden compartments attached to 71, 73 and 75 in a rectangle. An ornamental conservatory and a working greenhouse were designed and built by W.S. Revitt of Olney (Ratcliff 1900) and a stone building north of the cottage was converted as an electric generator house, the first in Olney (Listed Building Description).

The garden included a tennis court in the west half but there is little information about the layout of the 1904 garden for Mann (MERL/RHS) or of any subsequent development for him (MERL/ RHS). Mann employed a gardener (pers. comm. G. Mann, grandson).

J.W. Mann died in 1951 and the house and garden were purchased by R.F. Soul, a successful garage owner and collector of vintage cars. It seems that 'Bob' Soul did little to change the property before his death in 2006 (Olney and District Society).

From 2006 the house and garden were unoccupied until purchased by the present owners in 2013. By then the garden was much neglected and planning permission was sought for the development of a hotel in the garden and use of rooms in the house; this was rejected but the coach house in the north-west corner was converted to a residence with a small garden divided from the main garden.

The present owners of Orchard House are restoring both house and garden, and the site remains in divided private ownership.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting**

Olney High Street runs north of the town from Market Place. Orchard House stands on the west side of the High Street 300m north of Market Place. Olney is a town of some 6,500 souls situated in the north-east corner of Bucks.

The 120m x 35m (at its widest) site is largely level. The 0.35 ha. garden is rectangular, c.90m x 35m, aligned east to west on the axis of the house. The west boundary (23m long) against West Street is marked by a 2m high local stone wall. South (105m long) and north boundaries are defined with further high stone walls. These three boundaries are lined with trees and shrubs. East of the house the boundary against the High Street is partly marked by a low stone wall, 15m long, divided by an iron gate and topped with fine Art Nouveau iron railings (listed grade II), dividing the paved forecourt from the road and framing the ornate stone front door case.

Orchard House is one of a terrace of listed houses on the High Street; the grand entrance and iron railed wall distinguishes it from the others. They with their rear gardens originating as burgage plots probably have considerably earlier origins than their present appearance suggests. The wide boulevard adds to the stature of Orchard House and its fine frontage. Exterior views from the garden are limited by the stone boundary walls and fairly dense trees and shrubs.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The approach to the main entrance of Orchard House is on the west side of the High Street. The entrance to the narrow paved forecourt is set back from the road and surrounded by a low stone wall topped by a low ornamental iron railings, depicting a tree design in Arts and Crafts style (listed Grade II), introducing the orchard theme. This originated as the entrance to no. 67 High Street. The ornate doorway is in Arts and Crafts style and was part of Mann's work c.1904. Two ironstone Ionic columns flank a double wooden door; above and resting on the columns is an arched pediment flanked by stone scrolls of the same stone with the inscription 'Orchard House' and floral work.

A secondary entrance to the house lies 7m to the north, originating as the entrance to no. 69. It is of stone, with a broken pediment above two stone columns, a swag in the centre of the pediment, with a half glazed wooden door in Arts and Crafts design.

To the rear of the house, two entrances in the west boundary wall give direct access to the garden from West Street. These comprise a small arched pedestrian gateway to the north, and to the south a double entrance giving vehicle access to the former coach house.

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDING**

Orchard House (listed grade II\*) stands on the west side of the High Street within a long row of market-town houses. It is a combination of two C18 terraced houses: nos. 67 and 69 that were remodelled in the early C20 (c.1904) in the Arts and Crafts style for J.W. Mann, a local boot and shoe manufacturer

Constructed mainly of Northamptonshire Ironstone, the C18 house runs north-south alongside the High Street. The ornate entrance front, ornamented in Arts and Crafts style, faces east overlooking the High Street, and the house extends west to the garden. It is of two storeys under a slate mansard roof with four dormer windows, and brick chimneys. The main entrance on the east front is framed by a pediment on top of two pillars surrounding an ornamental wood and glass door. The second entrance has an Arts and Crafts design door of three leaded glass panels, the lead work of the centre panel is connected to a plain circular glass motif. The door is contemporary with the design of the 1904 conversion of the house to the Arts and Crafts Style. A rectangular bay window south of the front door is two storeys high of under a flat roof, the bay window north of the front door is a semi-circular design to the ground floor only. The main rooms on the ground and first floors overlook the High Street.

The west side of Orchard House has two extensions, to north and south. The north extension houses the kitchen and utility space and extends into the garden more than the south extension. The main rooms on the ground and first floors overlook the garden. The elevation reflects an informal ensemble of piecemeal changes and does not make an ornamental contribution to the garden design. Orchard House was the first house in Olney to have electricity, powered by a generator housed in the small brick building in the garden, and still uses a 50 volt current for most of the house lighting.

In the north-west corner of the garden 95m north-west of the house stands the former coach house. It is two storeys high with brick walls and a slate roof. The central vehicle entrance faces south, originally with double doors for vehicular access. The building originated as a stable block, then a coach house, recently converted to a dwelling (not owned by Orchard House). Access to the building is in the south corner of the west garden wall off West Street.

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

The garden extends west of the house for 100m constructed on an east-west alignment. It is divided into two unequal halves to the west and east separated by the cottage standing 30m west of the house. The two level areas comprise the lower terrace area of weathered stone with a small pond, leading to steps to the higher garden path across the garden to the west boundary wall, and steps to the conservatory standing against the north boundary wall. The following describes a route clockwise around the garden, starting at the house.

Looking west from the garden door of the house, a tarmac terrace, 4m x 10m, is surrounded by a stone wall 1m in height; this is surmounted, to its southern end, by a curved ornamental flower bed. Four stone steps lead to the garden's higher level. At the top of the steps stand two brick piers topped by ornamental terracotta vases by the fashionable Arts and Crafts Compton Pottery, Guildford. They were probably purchased by JW Mann in 1904.

A path runs west along the south side of the garden. It is bounded by a stone wall against which is planted shrubs with two formal lawns to the north of the path, against the north boundary wall is the conservatory forming the main focal point of the east garden.

In the centre of the lawn panels flanking the conservatory stands an ornamental planter on a stone plinth. The path continues westward through an arch bisecting a thatched cottage (listed Grade II) once run as a school called St George's College (late C19). The cottage, in vernacular style, probably dates to the C16 or C17. It is constructed of stone with brick dressings under a decorative thatched roof and forms a Picturesque feature dominating the garden. An equal space flanked the arch when first constructed, but the north side was extended to accommodate the classroom of St George's College. Under the arch is a former doorway on the north side to the north room, now blocked. A door on the south side leads to the second room now a store with some exposure of lath and plaster on the south side. The entrance to the north side room is via the north end exterior wall. A window in this wall which has a small glass panel showing a cross of St George is seen above the doorway.

North-west of the cottage a path leads to a lawn, part of which was formerly a tennis court. 18m west across the lawn is a gravel path the entrance which is marked, on either side by ornamental stone planters on stone plinths. This path leads back to the southern boundary path.

The lawn is terminated, at its western extremity, with a driveway to the former Coach House. The western end of the lawn is now fenced as the garden to the converted former Coach House.

The southern boundary path terminates at the garden's western boundary wall with the two entrances: a vehicle access to the former Coach House towards the south end of the wall, and a single door to the north of this, set into the wall.

By the late C19 (OS, 1880 and 1899) in the south-west corner of the garden, against the south and west walls, stood a circular feature. This was possibly a former octagonal thatched summer house present by 1858 (*Olney News*, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1858: Olney Museum Archive).

A path alongside the north boundary wall leads east from the Old Coach House, along a flagstone path, to a lean-to glasshouse (W.T. Revitt, builder after 1904). The path continues past an assemblage of out-buildings, presently (2017) under restoration, to the Conservatory.

Further on, north of the Cottage, stands an electricity generator house (listed grade II) built of brick with stone dressings and a steeply pitched corrugated iron roof. This was the first such building in Olney erected after 1904. The machinery has gone and it is used for storage but some remains of wiring survive inside. The chapel-like form and attention to detail indicate the significance of its purpose, and it is a rare early surviving example of housing for a private electricity generator. The building had appeared by 1880 (OS) and was apparently converted for use as a generator house.

The path leads east back to the conservatory against the north boundary wall, constructed by W.T. Revitt (after 1904). It stands 17m north-west of the garden door of the house. The timber superstructure was re-built by Martin Smith (2005). It has three elements: a centre section flanked by two sections to the east and west 5m in length. The timber superstructure stands on a brick plinth of 10 courses. The centre section projects south by some 2m from the body of the conservatory, with a half glazed, arched, door. Above this entrance is a canted metal and glass roof, leading back as a pitched roof to the rear wall. The two wings of the conservatory to east and west comprise a lean-to metal and glass roof against the north wall. The east and west ends are entered via half glazed wooden doors.

The path returns via a brick privy and storage shed against the north wall to the terrace below the house. This has a curved stone water feature echoing the curved ornamental flower bed at the southern end of the terrace.

The garden of Mann's remodelled house took in all the land to the rear up to the boundary with West Street, and was landscaped by Perkins Nurseries in Northampton. The fine conservatory was built by a local firm, W.S. Revitt, but the stone thatched cottage, used as an eye-catching feature, was already there in its present plan form in 1882.

## REFERENCES

Kelly, *Directory of Buckinghamshire* (1883)

Historic England, Listed Building Description Electricity Generator house <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1393086>

Historic England, Listed Building Description Orchard House <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1222060>

Historic England, Listed Building Description Thatched Cottage <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1393087>

1891 census

1901 census

Olney and District Historical Society reference 67/69 High St , n.d. <http://www.mkheritage.org.uk/odhs/full-list-of-elizabeth-knights-articles/elizabeth-knights-researches/walter-pennington-storers-st-georges-college-2/>

Pevsner, N. & Williamson, E., *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1994).

Stephan Oakley, Sale Catalogue (2013)

*Ye Olney News* No 35 reference Summer house (July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1858) (copy at Olney Museum)

## Personal Comments

Gerald Mann grandson of JW Mann (owner Orchard House 1904)

Zen Szczech (present (2017) owner)

## Maps:

OS 25" to 1 mile 1<sup>st</sup> edition, surveyed 1880

OS 25" to 1 mile 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, surveyed 1899

OS 6" to 1 mile 1<sup>st</sup> edition, published 1885

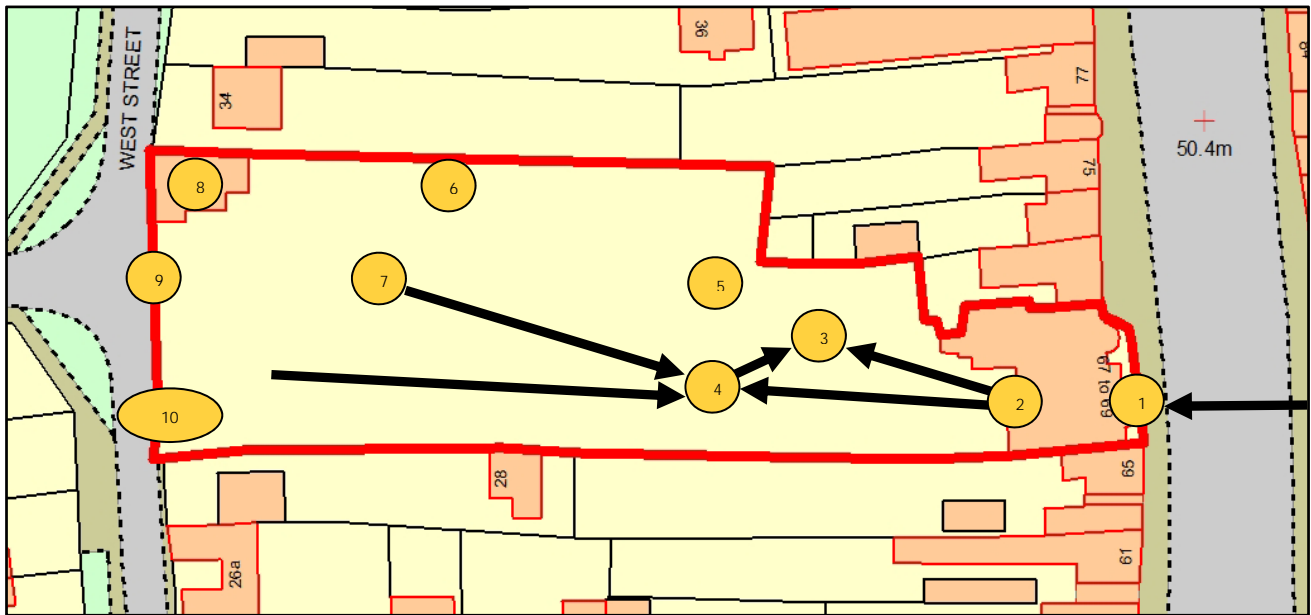
OS 6" to 1 mile 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, published 1900

OS 6" to 1 mile 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, published 1923

Ken Edwards August 2017, edited S Rutherford January 2018

Bucks Gardens Trust is indebted to Mr Charles Szczech for the delightful features map of the site below.

## KEY HISTORIC VIEWS AND FEATURES



**Key to Features**  
(see also following plan)

1. House front door and forecourt off High Street	2. House garden door to terrace.
3. Conservatory	4. The Cottage
5. Generator House	6. Working glasshouse and potting shed
7. Former tennis lawn	8. Coach house/stable/motor house, now residential
9. Rear pedestrian doorway	10. Rear vehicle entrance off West Street in boundary wall



## CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS



Entrance elevation overlooking the High Street, with front door and Arts and Crafts railings and gateway.



Views from the rear of the house to the Cottage and Conservatory.



The Cottage, east elevation (left); north elevation (right).



The east half of the garden and the Cottage (left); the rear of the house (right).



The south elevation of the restored conservatory.



Maker's name panel in the working glasshouse: W.T. Revitt (left); garden wall (right).



The working glasshouse (left); the rear of the house (right).



The west wall, tennis lawn and former coach/motor house (left); tennis lawn, view east (right).



Generator house.



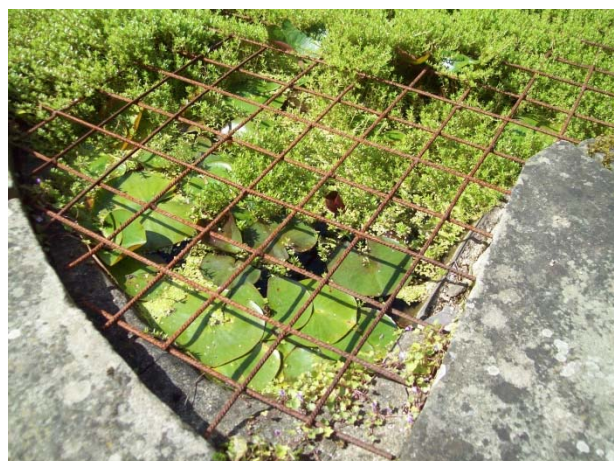
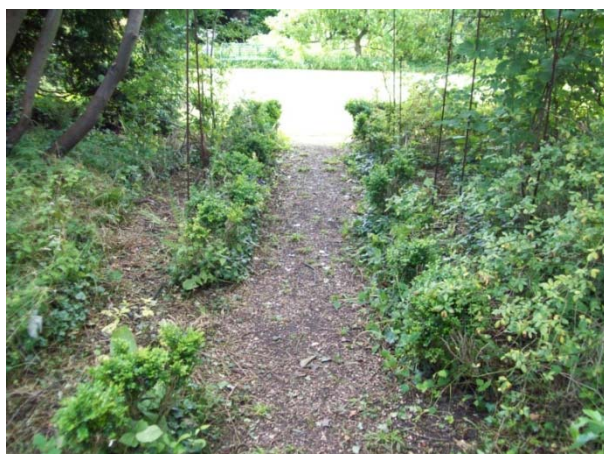
The west wall, vehicle gate off West Street and tennis lawn (left); arched pedestrian door in the west wall (right).



The west wall and vehicle gate off West Street at the south-west corner of the garden (left); the west wall and mature trees (right).



West Street, west wall, with coach/motor house (far left), mature trees in garden and gateways.



Garden path (left); terrace dipping pool (right).