Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



© Mandy Moore 2014 Balloon Photograph

Rignalls

MARCH 2016, REVISED JAN 2019





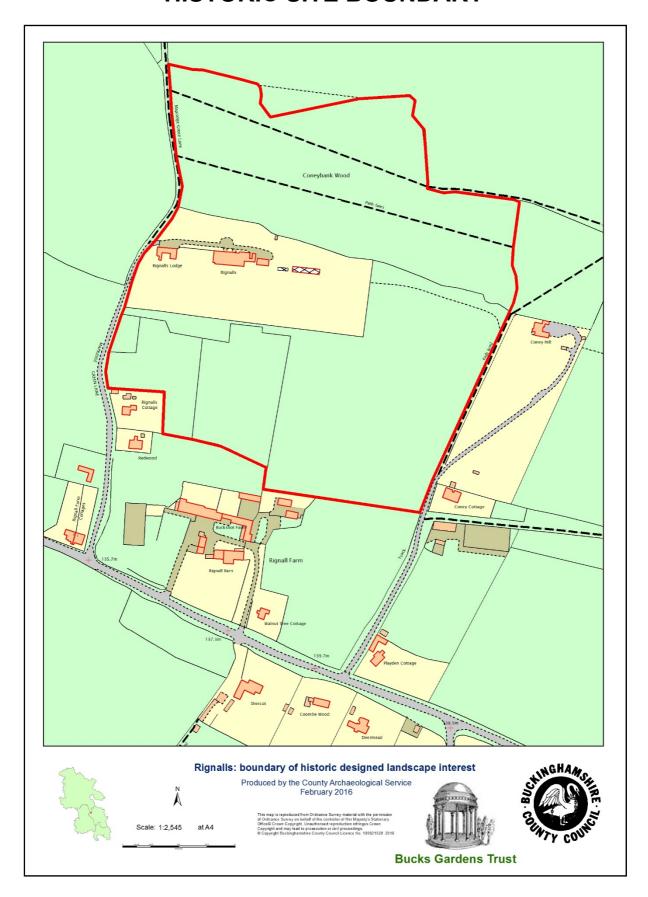






The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust

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 (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 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 Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest 2nd edn.
- A map showing principle 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	RIGNALLS,	
DISTRICT:	CHILTERN		
PARISH:	GREAT MISSENDEN	GREAT MISSENDEN	
OS REF:	SP 881 023	BCC HER 1256801000	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A compact, complex Arts and Crafts garden for a smaller country house built to designs by Adams and Holden. Planting advice by Gertrude Jekyll is recorded in an extensive series of plans, but it is unclear to what extent these were executed. The layout includes formal terraced lawns and garden compartments, designed to accommodate the steep Chiltern slope, with a complex flight of stone steps and landings, a brick and timber pergola leading to a summer house, also including a kitchen garden with structures by Woods of Taplow, informal orchard designed by Miss Jekyll, and mature Chiltern beechwood as a backdrop above. The layout and garden structures largely survive, although the garden has been divided into two unequal halves, with some early woody planting, but not apparently the Jekyll planting.

Archaeological interest

The identified archaeology is of local significance as far as it is understood. Archaeological potential relates to the former agricultural use of the site and the Chiltern woodland in the northern section, as well as lost features relating to the early C20 layout, particularly the former stable yard, stable, coach house and racquet court which stood to the west between the lodge and house, and lost paths, structures including glasshouses, beds, and other features in the kitchen garden.

Architectural interest

A largely complete ensemble of buildings for an early C20 smaller country house. It was designed in a single phase with the garden layout including walls, a pergola and summer house by notable architects Adams and Holden, with associated lodge, and a lost stable, coach house and racquet court. The glasshouse and potting shed range in the kitchen garden by Woods of Taplow survives partly intact, and, although the date of erection is unclear (probably 1917 or later), it is an unusual survival for a relatively modest range of kitchen garden buildings.

Artistic interest

A complex Arts and Crafts style garden in a relatively compact area forming the setting for a smaller country house. The Adams and Holden layout responds to the steep valley slope with a series of formal terraced garden compartments below the house, contrasting with informal embanked lawns and mature woodland above the house, and the largely unaltered rural Chiltern setting. A number of planting plans were produced by Gertrude Jekyll, one of the most prolific and influential early C20 garden designers, but it is unclear to what extent they were executed; elements of the early planting survive including perhaps some woody garden plants and the mature beech and hornbeam wood above.

Historic interest

The site has been associated with various notable owners and occupiers including the physician Sir Felix Semon for whom it was developed, and a member of the free French Government in Exile in World War II, Alfred Boucher. The historic interest is considerably increased by the survival of at least 27 plans documenting the early development of the garden, 1909-10, with planting plans by Gertrude Jekyll as well as letters between the architects and Jekyll.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Rignalls was built on farm land formerly part of C18 Rignalls Farm (1812 OSD, 1877 OS & 1900 OS). The 1910 Valuation Map shows a plan of the land (the house not yet built) and records that the northern section of Coney Wood was owned by Arthur L. Liberty (CBS DVD 139). The land was valued at £1,820 for 20 acres 2 rods & 6 perch (8.2 ha.) and Plot 254 pasture or grazing land on the south side of Rignall Road of 15 acres valued at £1,075.

A new house and garden called Rignall Wood (later called Rignalls) was commissioned by Sir Felix Semon (1849-1921), a distinguished physician whose patients included the Kaiser, Queen Victoria and her son Edward VII. Semon commissioned architects Charles Holden & H. Percy Adams for the house and layout of the garden and the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll was asked to provide planting plans. Plans of 1909 show proposals for a house with a lodge, stables, coach house and racquet court, which were executed in slightly different form and largely survive; 27 plans survive, including Gertrude Jekyll's designs for the gardens and woodland (UC Berkeley, Environmental Design Archives, copies at Historic England Archive, Jekyll Microfilm). The architects had previously worked with Gertrude Jekyll on The King's Sanatorium, a private TB hospital in Midhurst, Sussex, opened in 1906 by King Edward VII.

The Semon family sold the estate in 1926. The house was owned by James Mackenzie (1928-35) then Sir Edgar Sanders Christian (1936?-1942) author of a textbook *The Criminal Justice Act in 1914* and a Director of the Brewers Society. Sale particulars illustrate the well-kept garden in 1936, including the terrace, rose garden with sundial, pergola, tennis court and lodge. 20 acres was for sale, including a chauffeur's cottage and garage, gardener's cottage and 'beautiful pleasure grounds' which were 'most tastefully laid out having been designed by Miss Gertrude Jekyll the eminent landscape garden designer.' They contained 'a choice collection of flowering shrubs and specimen trees.' A detailed description of the garden features was provided.

During World War II the house came into the ownership of a member of the free French Government in Exile, Alfred Boucher, formerly head of the French Chamber of Commerce (Electoral rolls R/E 1456 DD Great Missenden at CBS; Chiswick Auction 1966, Lot 337 Personal letters and memorabilia relating to Charles to Gaulle sold by A.A Boucher and family). It is said that General Charles de Gaulle was a regular visitor during WWII (2015 Sales particulars).

After World War II the house was converted into two units, East and West Rignalls (Howard, Son & Gooch Sales particulars). In 1947 (AP Run 477 21.08.019) the layout of the gardens with Coneybank Wood to the north appeared broadly similar. In 1966 the property was offered once more as a whole (sale particulars). West Rignalls grounds were said to "have an overall width of some 140 feet on the

north boundary and some 90 feet on the rear with an overall depth of some 300 feet. The Gardens have been terraced and are sheltered on the north by the Coneybank Wood which is protected woodland and the ground falls gently to the south in terraces" East Rignalls grounds, "to the house have an average of some 95 feet and an overall depth of about 280 feet. Also adjoining is a kitchen garden with extensive greenhouses which is rectangular in shape and has a width of some 245 feet and an overall depth of about 294 feet.'

The site remains in divided private ownership.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

The 10 ha site is set in an elevated position in the Hampden Valley on a south-facing slope of the Chiltern Hills amidst farm land, 1 mile west of Great Missenden, and 4 miles east of Chequers, on the Rignall Road.

The west side of the property is bounded by mature trees alongside Mapridge Green Lane and beyond this agricultural land. The northern boundary is along the brow of the hill through mixed woodland, beyond which is pasture land. To the east, a footpath bounds the perimeter of the property against agricultural land. The southern edge is bounded by Rignall Farm paddocks and barns and beyond this Rignall Road. Long views extend south across the rural valley beyond Rignalls Farm, and Rignall Road in the valley bottom, and south-west and south-east along the valley.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance is c.300m north of Rignall Road off Mapridge Green Lane to the north of Rignalls Lodge. Views extend west and south-west across the valley from the gateway which is marked by an oak post c.1.5m high with chamfered corners and rounded top. The Lodge is contemporary with the house. A similar post marks the entrance into the Lodge garden.

From the gateway the gravelled drive leads 70m east below a walled embankment to the north, to reach the main entrance on the north side of the house. The entrance front of the house is enclosed by a semi-circular forecourt with a flight of 15 stone steps between 0.7m-high capped stone pillars leading north up the bank through shrubs to a grassy lawn (Hamptons sale particulars 2015), which was designed as an orchard by Gertrude Jekyll. From here the drive continues a short way east to the service are, garages and kitchen garden. The forecourt was shown in two different forms on the architect's drawing (March 1909, and Revised Garden plan, May 1909).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Rignalls (formally Rignall Wood, listed grade II) stands part way up the valley side between Coney Bank Wood to the north and fields to the south. The entrance front is to the north, with garden fronts to the south and west and services to the east.

The house is in Arts and Crafts style designed by Charles Holden of Adams and Holden in 1909 (UC Berkley, Environmental Design Archives). It has rendered and tile hung elevations, and three distinctive timber-clad gables facing south. It is of two stories with attics and prominent brick chimneys. The main entrance to the north, offset to the west, has a gabled porch with a plaster panel in the gable depicting in relief vine leaves and bunches of grapes encircling a central owl and the initials FAS, dated 1909 at the bottom. The central main hall, which is two storeys high, leads out

on the south front to the garden terrace. On the west front the conservatory garden room leads to the rill garden and thence to the rest of the garden. When offered for sale in 1966 the house was divided into an east and west wing, however since then it has been reunited (Sale Particulars CBS L396:12).

West of the house, adjacent to the south of the main gateway, is Rignalls Lodge, built at the same time and in the same style as Rignalls, as staff accommodation, originally with a stable yard, stable and coach house adjacent between the lodge and the rill garden (gone). The lodge is two storey, gabled and rendered to the north and east, and tile hung on the western side.

Holden (1875 – 1960) initially designed buildings in the Arts and Crafts style, but later in his career simplified his designs and adopted a 'Modernist' style, in which he designed many notable London tube stations and public buildings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The garden is divided into several formal compartments to the south and west of the house, with informal lawns and woodland to the north. The main reception rooms, hall and bedrooms face south and west, overlooking the formal gardens, enjoying views across the valley, agricultural land and to the far ridge of the Hampden valley to the south. Above the forecourt north of the house the garden is banked with shrubs and central stone steps lead to an informal lawn with orchard trees rising to the north, with a footpath winding east to a small timber and thatched apple store. Beyond to the north the lawn is framed by the mature Coney Wood, which is largely beech with some hornbeam and holly and carpeted with bluebells in spring. A public footpath bisects the wood from west to east. This area leading up to the Wood was initially intended by Miss Jekyll as an ornamental orchard (plan, May 1909).

From the hall two central doors lead south to the stone-paved upper terrace running west to east, edged with shrubs. At the east end the hedge-flanked terrace terminates with a curved stone seat backed by a mature weeping ash. Central steps lead down from the upper terrace to the upper lawn, which was planned by Miss Jekyll as a rose garden (Rignalls Wood Revised Plan, 1909). A swimming pool on the eastern side of this lawn was installed in the late C20. A flight of shallow stone steps, 10' wide, leads south from the western corner of the house linking the garden terraces to west and east of it with a series of turns and landings.

After the upper lawn the flight of steps passes and links to a pergola below the south side of the upper lawn. The pergola runs west to east to the summer house at the far end. It comprises 15 brick piers surmounted by replacement timber cross-beams linking them to the high, rendered and buttressed retaining wall to the north. The brick summer house with a pyramidal tiled roof has windows overlooking the kitchen garden to the west, the lower lawn to the south, and a rear door to the north giving access to the kitchen garden. The main west doorway is framed by two ornamental ship's timber pillars possibly acquired from Stewart Liberty who lived nearby at The Lee (Gunn, p. 125).

The lower lawn (formerly a tennis/croquet lawn) is retained by the remains of a rocky wall or feature on a bank to the south above the length of the pergola and summer house. It is laid to lawn and

enclosed by mature shrubs which screen views. The terraces and pergola formerly enjoyed southerly views over the former orchard, now a paddock, towards the far hillside, but these views are now screened by mature shrubs.

To the west of the house steps lead down from the upper terrace and the conservatory garden room to the rill garden, which was described thus "the site with its stone steps appears exactly as it does on Jekyll's plan but a rill garden has been constructed here instead of the rectangular borders proposed by Jekyll. Today the elegance of the site has been marred by having this garden divided in two. One half of the watercourse runs under a fence into the garden of the lodge next door." (Gunn, 1991) Below this to the south are further lawns including a swimming pool on the lowest level.

Throughout the garden there is little evidence of Miss Jekyll's planting other than possibly the orchard trees to the north and occasional mature shrubs. Most of the woody planting dates from the later C20 and has matured, screening key views.

The gardens were designed at the same time as the house. Architects Adams and Holden designed the layout and that Gertrude Jekyll provided planting plans in 1909-10. As with many of her commissions, she never visited, but was informed by the architects of the soil, chalk overlain by a shallow layer of topsoil, and the steepness of the site and advised upon terracing. Gunn visited the gardens, and compares the original plans and planting to the time of her visit, including the sunken garden, pergola, terrace and the swimming pool now on the site of Jekyll's rose garden. Gunn commented on it being "maintained and planted so that its period character has been preserved". Bisgrove (1992) also describes details of the plans and planting.

The site plan dated March 1909 includes the house, lodge, stables & coach house, racquet court paddock/orchard and a kitchen garden on the north bank, gardens and upper and lower terraces with a seat at each end. Plans of May 1909 give an overview with an outline of the house and buildings and detailed plans of the gardens with alphabetical letters and numbers from 1 to 12 for each section of the garden on the south and west which cross reference with the detailed individual plans. 1 A-N is the sunken garden and north borders against the house, 2A-B the two borders against the west house conservatory, 3 & 4A-C the borders against the house on the south side and the terrace alcove seat, 5 & 6 the long terrace borders, 7 A-C borders & wall with seat and view across the valley, 8 A-G the steps, terracing and rose garden, 9 the steps, pergola, bank and summer house, 10, 11 and 12 the designs for the borders of the "playing lawns (east and west)" (Correspondence 02.02.1910 Holden to Gertrude Jekyll, copies at Historic England Archive). Three letters from the architect Charles Holden to Gertrude Jekyll in February and March 1910 refer to the problems with the gradient of the of the site and the suggestion to remove 500 loads from "North side of the house....very steep bank" to fill in "garden beyond the summer house marked with x seems to be in a hole" at a cost of £45.

The lawn on the bank north of the house was planned to be bisected by path/avenue and turning half circle opposite the main entrance to the house to the woodland with a retaining wall, border of roses and fruit trees to the woodland boundary (plan May 1909, sheet 37).

The 1936 sale particulars amplify this. They noted the terraced orchard to the north with steps to the drive, and to the west of the house a paved garden with pool and flower beds. The broad stone flagged terrace below the south front was flanked by a brick retaining wall with stone steps leading to the brick and rose covered pergola with summerhouse. Below this, reached by further stone steps was the tennis or croquet lawn and the hard tennis court flanked by a dry stone retaining wall. A 'Garden House' adjoined and there was a rock garden. The two winter photos of the garden show much of the structure as the garden stepped down the hillside. This survives largely intact.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The rectangular kitchen garden, measuring some 90m west to east by 50m north to south, lies east of the house and terraced gardens below Coneybank Wood to the north. It is bounded by later C20 trees, screening it from the valley views, and laid largely to lawn with occasional specimen and orchard trees. Stretches of a distinctive and elegant iron bow-top fencing survive, particularly along the north boundary against the wood, and associated gateways.

Two glasshouses and a potting shed/boiler house stand along the north boundary. The longer, western glasshouse has been rebuilt using earlier iron spandrels, which are marked Woods of Taplow, and ornate cresting. Adjacent to the east a smaller glasshouse retains its window mechanisms (in poor condition) and the ironwork is also marked 'Woods of Taplow'. A gap beyond this glasshouse leads to a shed built on the site of another former kitchen garden building, and beyond this, at the east end, is the potting shed above a boiler house in which the boiler survives. A metal label over the doorway indicates it too is by Woods.

South and east of the gardens is an L-shaped area of paddocks with occasional specimen trees, formerly including an area of orchard (OS 1950s, and 1960s). This enjoys extensive views of the valley to the south and east.

Initially the kitchen garden was planned to be sited north of the house, on the present sloping lawn (plans March 1909), but instead it was constructed on its present site south of Coneybank Wood, east of the house. In the mid-late C20 the kitchen garden contained several greenhouses along its northern side (OS 1950, 1960 and 1978), but the detail of the layout is unclear. The 1936 sale particulars noted that the enclosed kitchen and fruit garden was well stocked, and contained a three-division peach and plant house, and two-division plant house, with potting shed and other sheds, etc. Later sale particulars (1966) detail the kitchen garden being 245' wide and 294' deep with extensive greenhouses'. The greenhouses appear on aerial views of the site (1947, 1985, 2008), and the aerial view of 1947 shows the layout of various beds. Woods of Taplow were noted landscape contractors and designers with a country-wide reputation working in the early-mid-C20, which issued annual catalogues of their commissions. The glasshouse range would have been a relatively modest project for the company, and the date of construction is unclear but as the firm did not move to Taplow until c.1917 it seems (pers. comm. V Joynt, 20 April 2017), between then and 1936.

ADAMS AND HOLDEN AND MISS JEKYLL

Although so often associated with the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, the Surrey-based Gertrude Jekyll worked with nearly 50 other architects including prominent names such as Adams and Holden. She collaborated with them on another, considerably more extensive commission, for the King Edward

VII Sanatorium near Midhurst, West Sussex in 1908, for which a number of plans also survive. Miss Jekyll provided designs for a number of other sites in Buckinghamshire including Woodside Place, Chenies (her first commission with Lutyens, 1893), Cheswick, Hedgerley (1902), Pollard's Park, Chalfont St Giles (1906), Barton Hartshorn (1908 architect Robert Lorimer, qv), Nashdom (Lutyens, 1909), Chalfont Park (architect Lutyens, 1912, qv), Fulmer Court (1913), Bramleys, Great Missenden (architect E Willmott, 1913), Pednore House, Chesham (architect Forbes & Tate, 1919), Little Haling, Denham (1927, architect W Sarel), Ponds, Seer Green (1928). As at Rignalls, it was common for her to provide planting plans without having visited the site, based on information and plans supplied by the architects.

GM, JT, RH

Edited SR 29 March 2016; revised April 2017 & January 2019

REFERENCES

Bisgrove, R., The Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll (1992).

Gunn, F., Lost Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll (1991), 36-52, 122-33.

Hamptons International Great Missenden Office. Rignalls Sale Particulars (September 2015)

Howard, Son & Gooch, Surveyors. East & West Rignalls Sale Particulars (September 1966) (CBS L396.12)

Kelly's directory, 1911, 1920,1924, 1928, 1935, 1939.

Wilson & Co, Sale Catalogue (April 1936) (CBS).

Maps

1812 2" Ordnance Surveyor's Draft (British Library)

1910 Valuation map, sheet 38.10 (CBS)

1910 Valuation details (CBS DVD/139)

OS 6"to 1 mile 1st edition (sheet 38) 1877

2nd edition published 1900

National grid provisional edition late 1950s

National Grid provisional edition revised 1960

1:10 000 OS map SP80 SE 1978

Illustrations (Bucks County Council HER)

1947 aerial photo

1985 aerial photo (run 513) RC8-HD

1988 aerial photo (run 477) 21 88 019

Archival Items

Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

Bucks Biographies: (CBS) Sir Felix Semon, Sir Edgar Sanders (Christian)

Electorall rolls (CBS R/E 146DD, Great Missenden)

U C Berkley Environmental Design Archives

Gertrude Jekyll collection, some 27 plans and drawings, accessed online 1/07/2015

http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb5t1nb6zz/?order=2&brand=calisphere

Microfilm copies at English Heritage Archive, Swindon

Internet

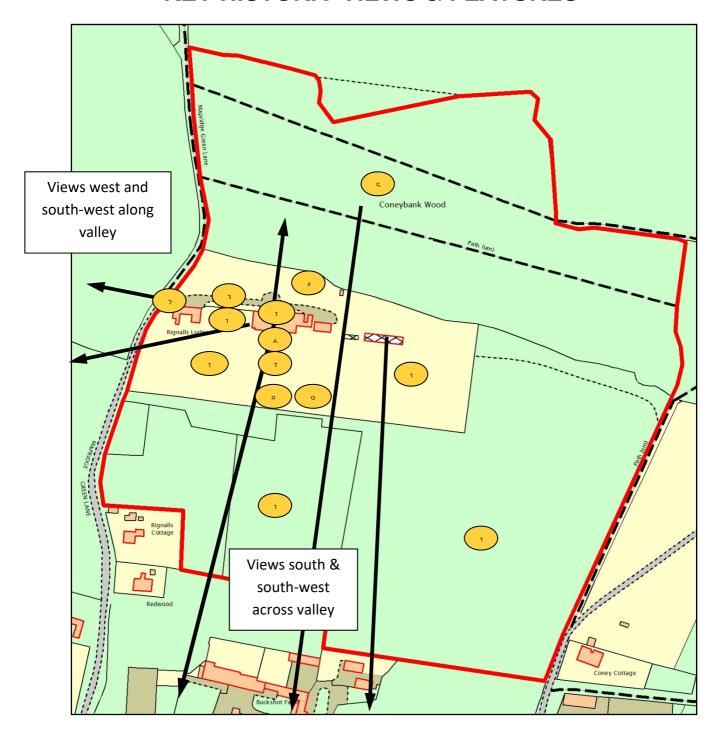
Sir Edgar Sanders. Brooklyn Daily Eagle -25/10/1933 accessed 27/8/2015 http://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/59978010

Sir Felix Semon. British Medical Journal 21/3/1921 accessed 27/8/2015 www.bmj.com/content/1/3141/404.5

Alfred Boucher. Lot 337 – a highly important collection relating to Charles de Gaulle. The following lots are the personal collections of letters and memorabilia concerning Charles de Gaulle by Alfred Boucher. Accessed 29/10/2015

http://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/chiswick-auction.com

KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES

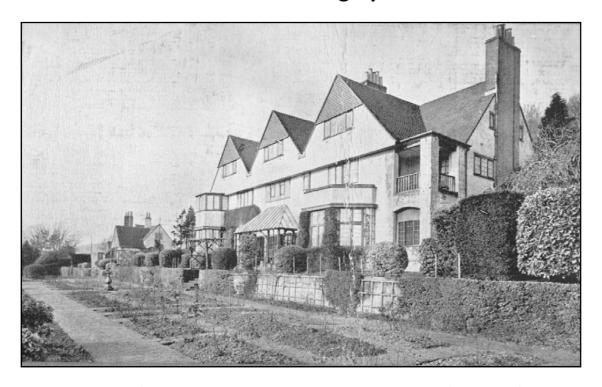


Key to numbered features

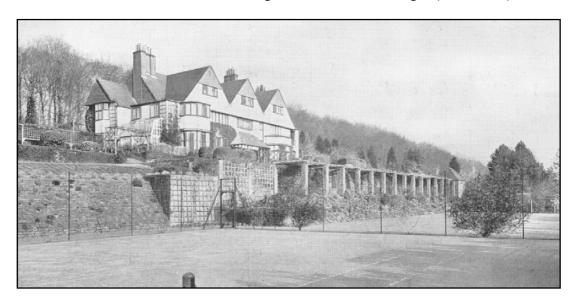
	1.	House & forecourt	2.	Main entrance, gateway & lodge
3.		Drive	4.	Steps & bank up to Coneybank Wood
5.		Coneybank Wood	6.	Upper terrace
7.		Upper lawn (formerly rose garden)	8.	Pergola

9.	Summerhouse	10.	Kitchen garden
11.	Conservatory terrace	12.	Sunken garden
13.	Paddocks		

Historic Photographs



The south front, terrace and rose garden, 1936 Sale catalogue (Julian Hunt).



The south front, pergola and tennis court, 1936 Sale catalogue (Julian Hunt).



The south front and terrace, 2013 (Julian Hunt).



The south front and terrace, 2013 (Julian Hunt).

Current Photographs, Ros Haigh & June Timms, April 2017



View south west





Entrance Drive

.Steps from Forecourt to North Gardens





Thatched Apple Store North West Garden



Bluebells in Coneybank Wood





View South from House



West - Rill Garden



Rill Garden & Conservatory



Rill Garden towards Lodge



Rill Garden & Conservatory



South Garden Front & Swimming Pool



South Paved Terrace looking East



Stone Seat East End of Terrace



Pool Garden



Steps Leading to Central Doors of South Front



Lawn to West of Pool Garden



Steps Leading to Lower Lawns



Summer House. Door-Posts from Liberty's? Pergola Looking East



Pergola Looking West from Summer House



Tennis Lawn





Two Glass Houses, Stable & Potting Shed







First Glasshouse & Vines including manufacturer's name on ironwork







Second Glasshouse







Potting Shed





Foot Gate & Field Gate into Former Kitchen Garden





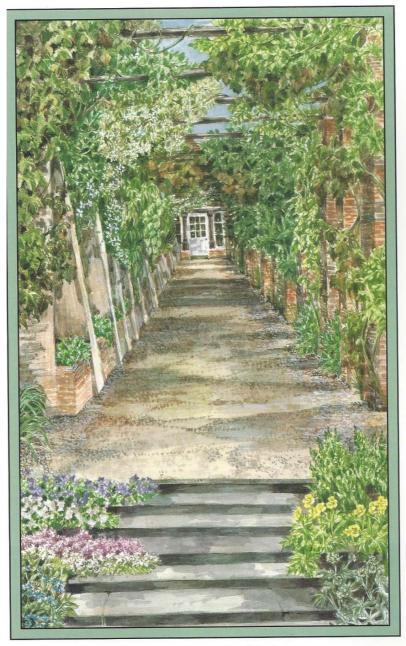
Gate from Garden into Wood

Rabbit Fencing



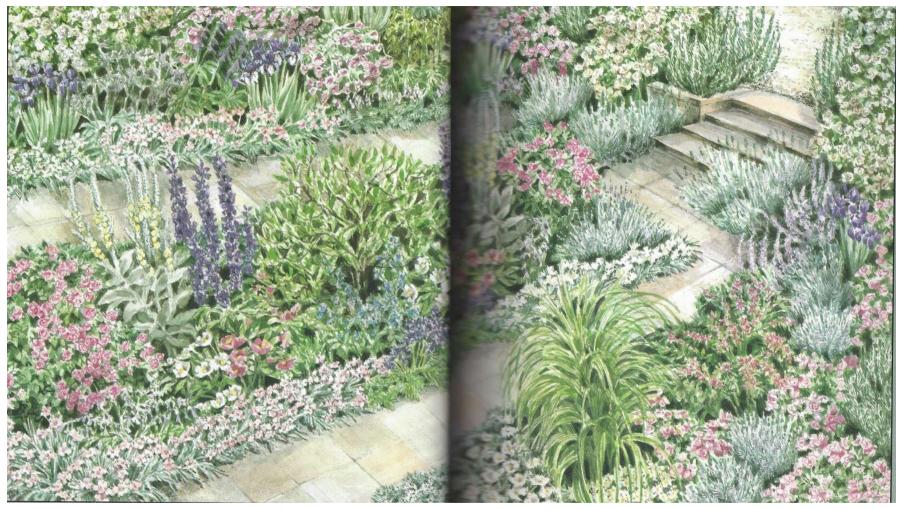
View South East from Kitchen Garden

The following images are planting reconstructions from Fenja Gunn's book: Lost Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll (1991). Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder to obtain permission for the use of copyright material including publishers and via the Authors Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS). The Bucks Gardens Trust apologizes for any errors or omissions and would be grateful if notified of corrections that should be incorporated in future editions of this report.



XXXII. Rignall Wood Pergola and Garden House

The terraces up to the house are to the left. South is to the right.



The colour scheme was a typical Jekyll blend of purple-blues, grey, pink, white and pale yellow. Stone steps lead down to the paved area surrounding a rectangular border which has its centre *Magnolia stellate* flanked by blue delphiniums and pale yellow verbascum (which both flower much later). The rose Zephirine Drouhin is planted at either end ofo the border. China roses were planted among lavender and rosemary.