Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



DORNEY COURT

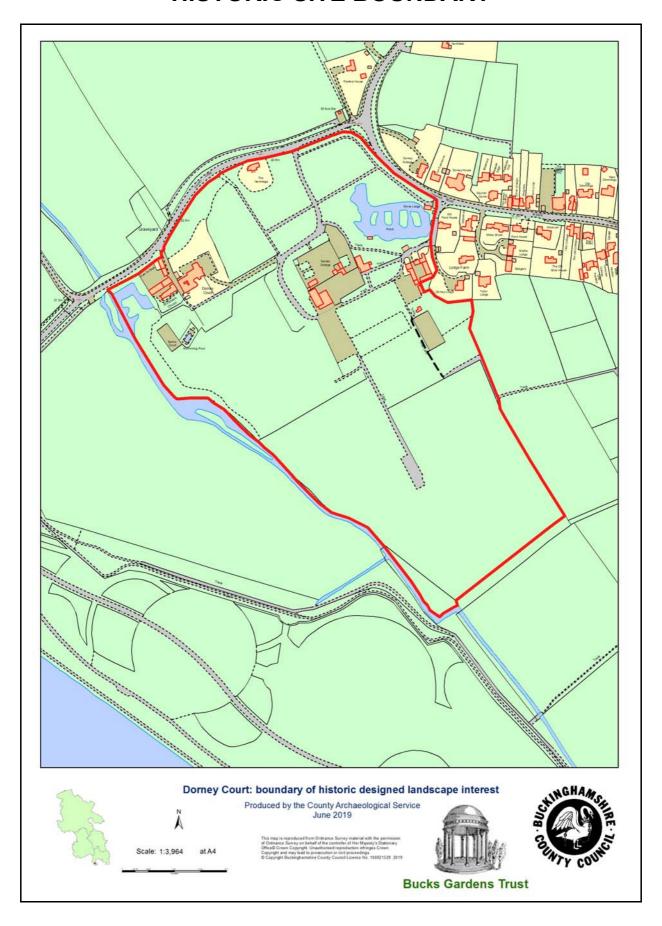
July 2019







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* 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 BCC. 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	DORNEY COURT
DISTRICT:	SOUTH BUCKS	BCC HER 0210407000
PARISH:	DORNEY	
OS REF:	SU 926 790	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A late C18 and C19 garden, pleasure ground and park with origins c.1500, which survives intact. The garden around the house was remodelled in the early C20 in Arts and Crafts style. It is associated with a c.1500 timber-framed manor house, remodelled in phases, most recently in the early C20. The informal wooded pleasure grounds retain many mature trees, with the classical Hermitage as a belvedere overlooking the grounds and wider landscape, evoking the Athenian Tower of the Winds. The village makes a strong contribution to the approach from the east, Windsor direction as does the wider rural Cress Brook and River Thames setting to the west, north and south.

Archaeological interest

The potential exists for features related to the early phases of the present house c.1500, including the courtyard layout and service buildings, and possibly of earlier buildings, also of the Cress Brook. Evidence of lost garden and park features may include paths, walls, greenhouses formerly in the kitchen garden, garden buildings and other ornamental features. Evidence may survive of former village features as well as agricultural practices. The moat west of the church is an enigmatic water feature of uncertain origin incorporated within a wooded area of the pleasure ground. The origin of the fishponds at the east end of the pleasure grounds is similarly unclear but is possibly Saxon.

Architectural interest

Dorney Court comprises the remains of a timber-framed gentry house of c.1500, originally built in two courtyards, which was remodelled most recently in the early C20 in Old English style. It forms part of a typical cluster of rural estate structures of a variety of periods, including the medieval parish church (C12 origin), the stable and Brewhouse yard (C18/C19), the late C19 burial ground wall and gateway and the red brick garden wall along the roadside. In the east half of the pleasure grounds are the C18/C19 walled garden and C19 gardener's house, the riding horse stable yard, and the early C19 lodge with a cast iron veranda, gateway and railings. The flint hermitage is the most important ornamental feature in the grounds, the octagonal prospect tower evoking the Athenian Tower of the Winds (flanked by later single-storey wings), and embellished with Classical plaques. It enjoys a panoramic view from the upper floor over the grounds, and north over the fields towards the Chilterns. It may also have enjoyed a view of Windsor Castle some 3 miles distant to the south-east.

Artistic interest

The grounds are typical of a Bucks manor house, reflecting the fashionable tastes of late C18/C19 gentry owners and survive intact. The gardens and park are largely laid out in the informal late C18 and early C19 style but the gardens around the house are probably on the site of earlier gardens phases, possibly dating to the construction of the house, into which early C20 formal and informal gardens in Arts and Crafts style are fitted around the house. Mature trees survive throughout, with later C20 planting.

Historic interest

The site is a typical mid-Bucks manor with associations since the medieval period with various notable local families including the Palmer family since 1624.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Anglo -Saxon name 'Dorney' means island of bumblebees. The Manor of Dorney appears in Domesday (1086) as containing three hides, held by Aldred and being among the lands of Milo Crispin, Lord of Wallingford (HER). The Domesday entry refers to the fisheries containing 500 eels. For nearly 200 years the Manor was part of land owned by the Danvers family, which included Danvers Manor at Little Marlow.

The manor house was built c.1500 (Pevsner) possibly by Thomas Lytton (*VCH*), probably on the site of an earlier building. There is no evidence of a garden or park, but it is likely that a small garden at least was present.

Between 1086 and 1537 the house and surrounding estate passed through at least six families before it was sold to William Garrard who became Lord Mayor of London. His impressive tomb, which is flanked by images of his fifteen children, survives in the church adjacent to the house. In 1609 his widow, Elizabeth gave up her rights in return for a fixed payment and use of the manor. The family sold due to family problems, including indiscretions (*VCH*).

In 1624, Dorney Court was sold to Thomas and Richard Palmer of Wingham, Kent (it has remained in the Palmer family until the present day) acting as trustees to their younger brother James, who was married to Martha, Garrard's youngest daughter. During this period the gentry classes were expanding at a great rate and gardens were becoming status symbols. However, it would appear at Dorney the Palmers never had much money to make improvements and very little was done to the garden. This was despite Sir James Palmer being a gentleman of the bed chamber to Charles I and Chancellor of the Order of the Garter (*VCH*). The family all suffered during the Civil War and some of their goods were seized in 1646. James was also a miniaturist painter of considerable note.

During the tenure of James Palmer the house had four gables and a range on the north side and an additional building to the south and the gardens to the front of the house were cultivated with parallel beds and conifers (cartouche from illustration on page 104 of the *Palmer Family Pedigree*, by John Stanney of Windsor, 1750). The cupola shown in the centre of the cartouche never existed and the image may be inaccurate as by the time it was drawn the house had a Georgian frontage.

Sir Roger Palmer (1634-1705), James's half-brother, later 1st Earl of Castlemaine, was married, against his family's wishes, to the renowned courtesan Barbara nee Villiers (1640-1709). Villiers may have given birth to as many as five illegitimate children of Charles II, including a daughter, Anne in 1661, and the King insisted that she bore the additional appellation 'Fitzroy' (fille du roi/ child of the King). Roger Palmer was imprisoned for his staunch support of Catholicism on more than one occasion despite his loyalty to the King.

During 1668 it is claimed that the first pineapple to be grown in Britain was grown at Dorney by the gardener, Charles Rose and presented to King Charles II (as depicted in the Danckaert portrait of 1675, the building shown is possibly Wimpole). Given that there is little evidence of extensive gardens at Dorney, it is more likely, as suggested by the diarist John Evelyn, that it was grown by Rose later when he was in the employment of the King (Dorney Court booklet). The confusion may well arise from the fact that the top of a pineapple that had been brought from Barbados had been cut off and given to Earl of Castlemaine by the King at a banquet at the Mansion House (pineapples can be propagated from their tops).

Two cartouches at the bottom of Stanney's illustration show the north and south prospects of the house and are similar to two chalk drawings of the house still held by the family (*Country Life*). They show that Sir Roger Palmer may have enclosed the garden with a wall and a substantial gateway. The north view shows an area that was possibly used as a medicinal herb garden. The south view shows signs of cultivation, as a more open pleasure ground which appears to be surrounded by wooded parkland (*Palmer Family Pedigree*).

During the C18 and C19 considerable alterations were made to the house that make it almost impossible to convey a clear description of the architecture; a lack of finance led to materials being re-used which also contributes to the confusion of building phases. By 1810, there is evidence of an avenue north of the house and planting to the east of this, possibly a wilderness (OS Draft). The 1812 Plan of the Lower side of the parish of Dorney (CBS) shows the ownership of Sir Charles Palmer, including a small plot enclosing the church and house surrounded by trees on three sides and bounded by the brook to the west. Bryant's map (1825) shows the small hamlet of Dorney and to the east of the house an area of park with a possible avenue.

By 1820 (illustration) and as part of the alterations any formal gardens had been swept away. The classical entrance front, with a pediment, had been added to the building along with a sweeping carriage drive. This work was probably by Sir Charles Harcourt Palmer (1760-1838) in the later C18. The gardens were informal in style in keeping with the fashion of C18 and early C19. (https://dorneycourt.co.uk/work-category/archives/ accessed 19/03/19). By 1831 (etching J.P. Neale) the rear north east elevation, in contrast to the classical front, is stuccoed and decorated with barge boards in Picturesque *cottage orne* style (*Historic Views of Bucks*).

By the late C19 (OS 1877) the pleasure grounds east of the house had paths through the ornamental woodland forming a wilderness, and the walled kitchen garden and orchards were in situ.

Around 1900, Charles's son, also Charles (1872-1939), restored and revised the buildings returning them to a Tudor style of architecture. The garden was given a more formal appearance with yew topiary and hedges, neatly manicured lawns and borders in keeping with Arts & Crafts style of the period (*Country Life* 1924). By 1951 a rose garden, monkey puzzle tree (gone 2019) and stone urns had been added (Historic England images).

Lt. Col. Philip Palmer saved and preserved the buildings through two world wars. By this time the grounds east of the house were given over to market gardening. Peregrine Palmer during his tenure 1979-98 continued the restoration work and the present generation of the family continue the work including the restoration of the garden (Dorney Court booklet).

Today the house is frequently used for filming and the gardens reflect some of the changing requirements. The hedges remain, a lavender parterre has been created and areas of prairie style planting and shrubberies which included exotic plants such as yuccas. There are large number of trees however most of them have probably been planted in the last fifty years, the wooded area to the north east of the house may be the site of an older wilderness. The walled kitchen garden is now run as a garden centre (2019).

The site remains in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, LANDFORM SETTING

Dorney Court is in Buckinghamshire's most southerly village, Dorney, which is tucked away between the M4 motorway to the north (nearest junction 7) and the River Thames 1km to the west which at this point forms the boundary between Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. Eton is 3.7 km to the east and Slough is 6 km to the north-east. The river meanders at this point and there are a couple of islands (Monkey and Queen's Eyot) and several marinas. The neighbouring villages are Dorney Reach, directly south of the house and Eton Wick to the east. Dorney village lies east of the site, lining Village Road, the village street running east.

It is located in a strategic position on a gentle rise in the flood plain, which slopes to the river. The site is separated from the river by meadows overlain by a network of former or existing watercourses. There are views from the

house, south across the meadows towards the Thames and possibly to the north towards Burnham Beeches, from the Hermitage. In 1924, views from Dorney Common (0.5m south-east of the house) of Windsor were framed by elm trees, however the large number of trees surrounding Dorney Court at this time, probably obscured the view from there towards Windsor (*Country Life*). It is possible that the house when first built enjoyed views over the surrounding agricultural land of the Castle 3 miles distant.

The 20 ha. site is bounded by Village Road (B3026) to the north-east and Court Lane to the north-west, with the Cress Brook, a tributary of the Thames, to the west and south west, and field boundaries to the south and east. The boundaries along the roads to the north and east, enclosing the garden and pleasure ground, consist of red brick walls. That to the north was probably rebuilt in the 1970s when the gates were restored. The wall alongside the church lane is C18 or C19 origin and encloses the garden north of the house.

The meadows have peaty soil underlain with gravel. Dorney was not enclosed by Act of Parliament, as it seems that it was enclosed piecemeal (Foreman/Hiller & Petts). The fertile soil makes it an ideal area for market gardening, including orchards, there are also arable fields in the vicinity, giving it a rural feel despite its proximity to urban Slough and the M4. North of the Thames is Dorney Lake (an amenity rowing facility) set within 450 acres of parkland which includes an Arboretum and nature conservation area. There is evidence of prehistoric finds in the area, however no finds are recorded for Dorney Court.

North of Court Lane, opposite the entrance to the church lane lies the rectangular parish graveyard extension. It is entered opposite the church lane through a late C19 Tudor-style brick gate-arch with crow-stepped gable and wooden gates, set into a low stone roadside wall. The graveyard contains a number of mature trees including cedar.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Access to Dorney Court today is from Court Lane 80m west of the T-junction with the B3026, 350m north-east of the house. This drive runs south following the route of an earlier carriage drive (OS 1877). Now tarmacked as it gives public access to the garden centre in the south side of the walled garden. 50m south of the entrance the drive bends south-west; here a spur leads east to the stable yard, fishponds and lodge. The road continues west for a further 50m and then bends to the south where the approach to the house across garden lawns is accessed through contemporary cast iron gates with brick piers. After a further 50m the drive reaches a gravel forecourt below the east front of the house. A second spur off the drive continues south from the modern gateway for 50m around the west side of the walled garden and culminates at the garden centre car park in a former orchard south of the walled garden.

A short spur off Court Lane 50m north of the house and church runs south to the church, passing the coach house yard and brew house, to the east of the road is the high brick garden wall and the west wing of the house. The entrance to the church lane is marked opposite to the north by a late C19 Tudor-style brick gateway to the cemetery extension. This gateway echoes the style of the buildings around the service yard opposite.

During the C19 the entrance was from the B3026, 150m SE of the junction with Court Lane, 330m east of the house. The former east drive enters through gates on the corner on the west side of the road immediately adjoining The Entrance Lodge from the same period. The entrance is marked to the south by the C19 Grove Lodge (listed Grade II), 250m east of the house. The lodge is brick with cement rendering which probably dates from the 1970s, the ground floor has a cast-iron trellis work veranda with tented roof (HER monument report).

The ornate early C19 cast iron gates and railings (Grade II) were restored in the 1970s. They consist of two side gates flanking a wider central gate for vehicular access. The cast iron piers are topped with ornate urns, and the rails

include stylised palm leaves and trellis work. The C19 gate piers and side walls are cement rendered and curved, ending at large square piers with flat pyramid copings (HER monument report).

From the lodge the approach to the house formerly ran along the boundary of the estate as it enclosed the north corner of the pleasure grounds. After 200m, it turned south through the wooded area of the garden for 50m before turning to the south east and joining the current approach (OS 25" 1st ed). Traces of this drive remain in the pleasure grounds (2019). It may previously have continued to the north side of the house as this was at one time used as the entrance. A spur from the lodge off the former east drive continues south through a wooden gate, after 30m arriving at the former estate farm and carriage horse stables and coachman's cottage and grain store surrounding a rectangular yard (all C19, red/blue brick, listed Grade II).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Dorney Court (listed Grade I) stands close to the north boundary of the site in the north-east corner close to the Cress Brook. It forms part of a cluster of estate buildings around a lane running south from Court Lane with the adjacent St James' Church (listed Grade I, C12-C17), brewhouse/stable yard, garden wall and burial ground gateway.

Although it probably occupies a much earlier site, the present manor house dates from c.1500 and has been much altered since, the most recent remodelling being in the early C20. It retains recognizably its original form and is a 'rewarding and instructive example of successive changes in taste and in the changing domestic requirements of the owners' (Pevsner, 282).

The house is of timber frame construction with red brick infill and a tiled roof. The entrance front is roughly symmetrical, with two storeys and five bays, with gables and barge boarding the centre one has an open porch with a 4-centred arch and oriel window above. The chimneys are bold star shaped. The interior has a C15 Hall with a dais, screens, fine roof and arched braces. A large fireplace with tracery and linenfold panelling is from Faversham Abbey, Kent (HER monument report).

Around 1712 the house comprised of two quadrangles, one to the east which has now been incorporated into the building and a small area in the centre of the west wing which remains. The south-west portion of the house was formerly connected to the south end of the outbuildings by a low wall with a carriageway in the middle, which formed a garden court ornamented with a fountain (*Country Life*). An C18, three storeyed pedimented east frontage was removed at the beginning of the C20 to reveal the Tudor timber framed structure. At the same time all the casement walls and windows on the south east and north-west frontages were re-modelled and the bay window to the hall was also added (*Country Life*).

North of the church is a yard entered off the west side of the lane by a gate in a wall at the south-east corner, opposite the north-west corner of the house. The south range is formed by the Old Brewhouse (Grade II) standing adjacent and parallel to the north of the church, built in 1780 of brick and timber; it has a fish scale roof. The interior has the original copper for brewing, which supplied the three public houses on the estate. The other three sides of the yard are enclosed by the Carthorse Stables (dated 1865 on a keystone overlooking the lane) to the east, and to the north alongside the road by the Granary and Coachman's House, now 2 cottages (all listed Grade II). All date from the C19 and are of ornamented polychrome brickwork with ornamental roof tiles (HER Monument report). The stables at least were built by the Revd H Palmer as noted on the key stone and possibly the cottages too. The stables are currently used as a function facility (2019).

300m east of the house are further stables which were used for Carriage Horse Stables (Grade II, HER Monument report), reached from the lodge via the former service drive.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens and pleasure grounds extend for 250m east of the house to the east lodge, and to the south.

The lawned gardens surround the house to the north, south and east. From the entrance front, on the east side, the area is gravelled and surrounded by two rows of ancient clipped yew hedges, with domed ends which were formerly topiary standards (*Country Life*) and formerly enclosed the formal gardens. A gap in the centre allows access to the lawns to the east. A sundial stands within the space, and beyond this further to the east is a small area of contemporary planting. The gravel area continues round to the north side of the house (the former entrance front, *Country Life*) to a flint archway which appears in late C19 photographs (CBS). From the arch a wide shrubbery extends north along the wall which forms the garden boundary it contains young ornamental trees, flowering shrubs, palms and yuccas. There are recently planted ornamental trees throughout the garden and a large area laid to lawn to the east of the house beyond the formal features. South of the house a contemporary style parterre has been constructed on what was formerly the rose garden (HE image). The centre piece is a contemporary fountain in the form of an Indian elephant (Dorney Court website).

The informal pleasure grounds east of the lawns are largely ornamental shrubbery woodland, through which the former east drive winds. The area contains a group of fishponds which are overgrown, water being pumped from the Thames at night to maintain the level. The fishponds, which may be Saxon in origin, contain a row of four rectangular islands which were perhaps used for rabbits to keep them safe from predators.

It is believed than an icehouse lay in this area, but the location is unclear.

Within the north-west corner of the pleasure grounds 100m north-east of the house is a wooded area or dell, concealing The Hermitage. This late C18 or C19 Gothick folly cottage (listed Grade II) stands 120m north-east of the house. It originated as a two-storey octagonal tower with windows in alternate sides, in similar form to the Temple of the Winds in Athens depicted by James 'Athenian' Stuart in the 1780s, which was later extended to form a cottage. The tower is built in a rustic classical style of stone, unknapped flint and rubble with brick and bottle-bottoms decoration, and fine terra cotta plaques depicting classical motifs including mythical beasts. It may have been built as a tea house belvedere for the family to enjoy views from the upper floor to the north and the Chilterns, before it was converted and extended as a cottage. Similar examples of octagonal belvederes are rare but include the Temples of the Winds at West Wycombe, Shugborough and Mount Stewart, Northern Ireland.

The pleasure ground wood is thickly planted with mixed mature trees, including yews and may have been designed as a wilderness with a network of paths (OS 1877). The pleasure ground is first seen in this form by 1877 but may be C18 or earlier in origin.

West of the church is a water feature which seems to originate as a small moated site (OS, 1877), fed by the Cress Brook which runs parallel immediately to the west. It is enclosed by mature trees.

The Pedigree book made for Barbara Villiers daughter in 1672 provides evidence of a garden of at least C17 origin. The cartouches of the north and south fronts show a large enclosed garden, with trees in the park beyond. West of the south front a walled garden was possibly a medicinal or herb garden within the L-shaped larger walled area. The rear or north garden may have been walled and was possibly more ornamental as it contained a number of small trees (*Country Life*).

By 1780 these gardens had been replaced by more informal landscaped gardens to complement the new Georgian façade on the west front. A sweeping drive trees and statuary were present by c.1820 (*Country Life*). By 1831 (Neale) a picket fence on the cottage *orne* side of the house protected the shrubbery from livestock and there were

climbing plants on the walls of the house. By contrast the Georgian front was plain and austere (*Historic Views of Bucks*). There are no images of the garden from the mid to late C19. By 1877 (OS) the wooded pleasure ground was laid out much as it survives, containing a network of paths, drives, the Hermitage and Fishponds.

In 1924 Dorney Court was featured in two consecutive editions of *Country Life* by Christopher Hussey, with five photographs of the garden which was by then in the Arts & Crafts style, including lawns, hedges and topiary. The walls were covered with climbing roses, and creeper. The garden retains some of these features.

PARK

The park extends south and south-east of the house, bounded to the south-west by the Cress Brook which is marked by a belt of mature trees. The paddock immediately south of the house is pasture with mature trees, and in the north-west corner a tennis court and swimming pool. Beyond this to the south-east the remainder of the park contains a commercial orchard, nurseries and the car park for the kitchen garden with occasional mature parkland trees. Remnants of a shelter belt mark the east and south-east boundaries. The nursery was used for market gardening during and after World War II.

Jeffreys map of 1770 does not indicate any park at Dorney; by 1810 (OS Draft) the pleasure grounds are in evidence, tree planting being confined to this area. By 1881 (OS) parkland has been created 500m south of the house. It reached its present extent in the C20.

KITCHEN GARDENS & ORCHARD

The walled kitchen garden and associated buildings lie 200m east of the house marking the south side of the pleasure ground. The garden is enclosed by high brick walls of C18 or C19 origin. Adjacent to the east stands a substantial gardener's cottage.

By the 1870s (OS) the kitchen garden was square with cruciform paths and glass houses, slips surrounding it to the east and south and beyond this to the south an orchard bounded to the south by a double row of conifers. However, by 1881 the paths have disappeared and there are trees planted within the walls (OS 1st ed 6"). A more formal garden has been created in the kitchen garden today which now forms part of the garden centre (2019).

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25" to 1 mile (1912)

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Images

Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies D-X 1100

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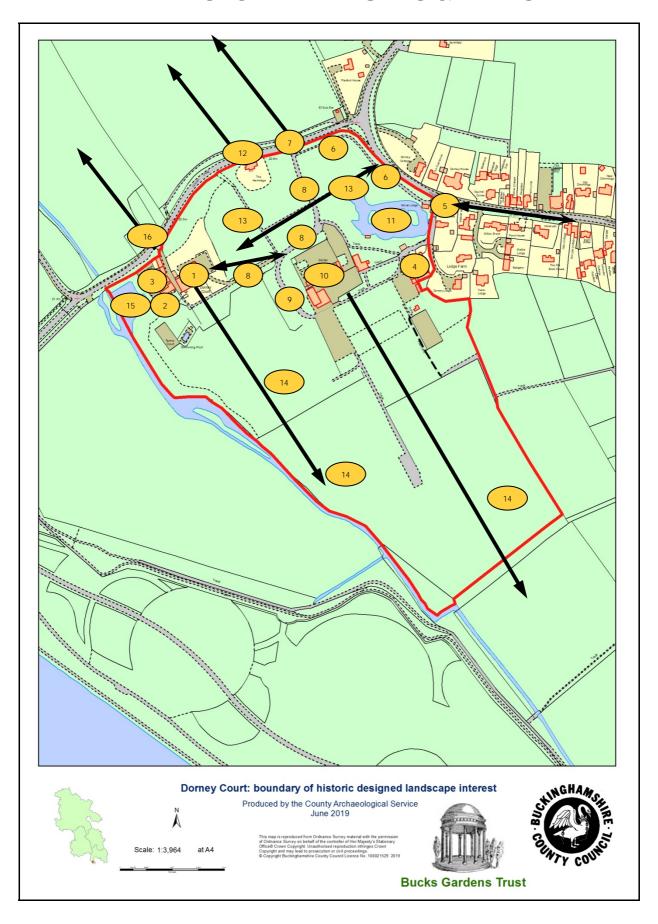
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Reference Numbers PHX/10/3JJ/4 PHX/10/3JJ/5

Claire de Carle

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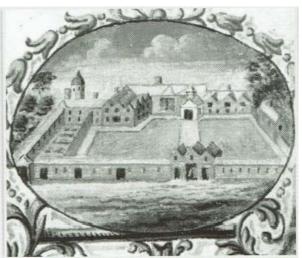
KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS



Key to numbered features

1. House and gardens	2. St James parish church
3. Old Brew House Cart Horse Stables yard	4. Carriage horse stables
The main Entrance Lodge and gateway (disused)	6. Former drive through pleasure grounds (disused)
7. Current entrance and drive	8. Current drive continuing line of drive from the main gateway
9. Spur drive to kitchen garden	10. Kitchen garden (now garden centre)
11. Fishponds (possibly Saxon)	12. The Hermitage
13. Pleasure grounds	14. Park
15. Moated site	16. Parish cemetery





C17 images from Pedigree Book







Historic Views of Bucks 1831 (Neale)

CURRENT IMAGES



Saxon fish ponds



C19 Carriage Horse Stables



Former Stables and yard (event venue)



C19 Former entrance Lodge and



Old Brewery and Cart Horse Stables



The Hermitage



North elevation Pleasure grounds & flint arch



South elevation and gardens



Court Lane looking North church & brewery on LHS



St James Church



Current approach to house from East



Main drive from North (Village Road)



Former Walled Kitchen (now Garden Centre)



Garden Remains of C19 drive



Garden Front (north of house) with topiary and hedges



Pleasure Grounds East

HISTORIC IMAGES



Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies:



North-east wing



Historic England Archive 0305/129





HE 0305/114 South Front



Former Rose garden