Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



OVING HOUSE

November 2019



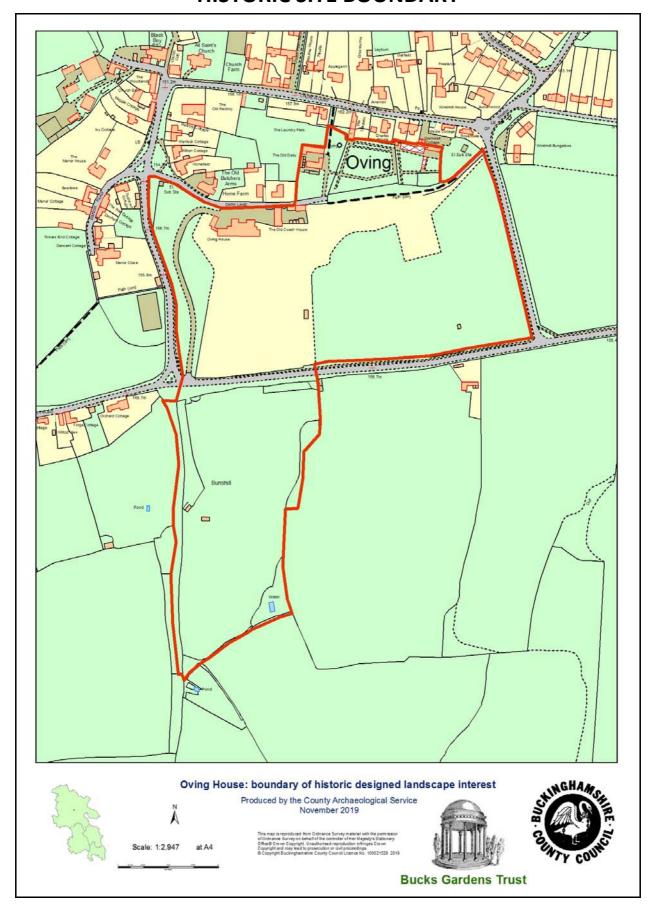








HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY





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 In terests 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 a significant grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. 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	OVING HOUSE
DISTRICT:	AYLESBURY VALE	HER 0189702000
PARISH:	OVING	
OS REF:	SP 7829 2120	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The largely C20 pleasure grounds and gardens of a C17 and later manor house and associated buildings, standing in an elevated position, facing south over a terraced garden created at the beginning of C20. An arboretum to the east was planted in the 1950s and an ornamented paddock containing an early C20 swimming pool lies to the south. Changes in the 1950s included the building of a swimming pool pavilion and gateway a portico of columns formerly outside the library window. To the north the walled kitchen garden possibly dates from the early C19. Recently, partly in response to recent developments encroaching on the impressive views across the Vale of Aylesbury to the Chiltern Hills, considerable changes have been made to the garden.

Archaeological interest

The potential exists for the remains of a house to the north of Dark Lane, demolished in 1789, and lost garden features which may include paths, walls and other buildings and the ornamental layout of parts of the gardens evident on historic maps including terracing and broad stone steps possibly north of the cottage, Home Farm.

Architectural interest

An early C17 house remodelled 1741-3 possibly by architect William Smith of Warwick (1705-47), who worked for Sir Thomas Cave, Mrs Pilsworth's brother, at Stanford Hall in Leicestershire in the 1740s. Another possible candidate is Thomas Harris who designed the Aylesbury Sessions House and New Inn at Stowe. Nearby, east of the house, is a mid-C18 coach house, now used as garages and a flat, and stables with first floor grooms' rooms rebuilt c.1900. The swimming pool pavilio portico was painted inside by Robert Morris in 1957, thought to be based on C18 decorations in the pavilions of West Wycombe Park by Giuseppe Borgnis.

Artistic Interest

The gardens of a largely C20 layout on a considerably earlier site which has been associated with a manor or farm house, although not the Manor of Oving, since at least the C17. They slope gradually to the south away from the garden front of the house towards the road from Whitchurch to Pitchcott, via a series of shallow terraces and gardens, there is a small garden and extensive arboretum to the east, an ornamented paddock with early C20 swimming pools to the south of the road, and a small area of woodland to the west.

Historic Interest

The site is a typical mid-Bucks manor with associations, since the medieval period, with various notable local families. There are links with Randolph Churchill and Lord Hartwell, chairman and editor-in-chief of *The Daily Telegraph* group for 33 years and other members of the Berry family (novelist Eleanor Agnes Berry and her mother Pamela) and novelist Martin Cullen.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1735 Henry Lovibond Collins sold Oving House to Francis Tyringham of Nether Winchendon, whose sister and heir, Parnell, married Charles Pilsworth M.P.. (*VCH*) The property passed to Charles Pilsworth upon the death of Parnell in 1741, and he remodelled the house. (*Pevsner*) There is no evidence that he made changes to the grounds of the house, although mature beech trees in the grounds may date to this time. In 1755 it was inherited by Sir Thomas Cave, bart., (5th Baronet of Stanford); in 1756 he sold it to Richard Hopkins and Anne Maria Hopkins. (*VCH*)

Richard Hopkins added two wings to the house and planted two avenues of elms, one forming a 'formal approach' to the mansion from the Whitchurch to Pitchcott road and running through the line of the current swimming pool and another framing the line of the current drive (Lipscomb, CBS OVING HOUSE, OS and photos). Lipscomb claims one of these was cut down pre 1847 but vestiges of both seem to appear on 1883 OS 1st ed., 1900 and 1950 OS and photographs.

Jeffreys' map of 1770 showed a large building south of Dark Lane with no indication of anything to the north of Dark Lane. In 1789 Richard Hopkins bought a larger house 'contiguous to the north side of the premises' and demolished most of it (CBS OVING HOUSE). When Richard Hopkins died in 1799 the house was inherited by his nephew Richard Northey and eventually passed via marriage to his son William Hopkins Northey.

The OSD 1813 map depicted a house, stables and drive in roughly the current position but gave no indication of the existence of the walled gardens to the north.

Bryant's 1825 map appeared to show that the area of Oving House and its grounds included the land that is now the walled kitchen garden, although there is no definitive evidence of walls around the area. The house appeared central to the plot and further south than both the previous and current house. The tithe map of 1846 depicted house and service buildings much as they are now and what may be the 'bothy' and 2 other buildings in the area now occupied by the kitchen garden.

William Hopkins Northey's daughter married George Ives Irby, Lord Boston in 1830, and he remained the owner until the early 1860s. During most of Lord Boston's period as owner the house and gardens were leased to Sir Thomas Digby Aubrey (7th Bart.); High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1815/16. (VCH)

The 1861 sale particulars for the Oving House Estate, describe it as comprising Oving House, farm yard and walled garden, house with butcher's shop, three cottages, grass, pasture and arable land including Farm Close, Howes Close, Fullers Hill, Great Ground and Lower Meadow, all in Oving, and Holborn Hill Farm (201 acres) in Whitchurch. There is a description of Oving House as having 'pleasure grounds, gardens, stabling, brewhouse, laundry, double coach house, 2 stables, granary and sheds' and it says 'the lawn in front is belted on each side with ornamental timber and the grounds adjoining surrounded by shrubbery. At a convenient distance are Walled Kitchen gardens, a Gardener's house, farm buildings and several paddocks'. (CBS D-FR/20/8/6) Given that Lipscomb described the grounds as neglected during the tenancy of Sir Thomas Digby Aubrey, it is probable that most of this was created before 1830.

The house and gardens were sold to Col. Walter Caulfield Pratt. The remaining parts of the estate were sold to the Rothschild family and others. Col. Pratt later purchased the butcher's shop, which he subsequently demolished, and some other pockets of land.

Following the death of Col. Walter Caulfield Pratt, in 1900, the property was advertised for sale in *Country Life* and bought by Henry Yates Thompson, who had previously owned the *Pall Mall Gazette* and was the leading manuscript

collector of his day. Many of his books were donated to museums, with much of the collection going to the British Museum.

Henry Yates Thompson made major changes to the gardens. Apparently, his changes such as the terracing and stone paved and pebble paths he built to the south of the house and the areas of grass surrounded by trees, were inspired by his time at Trinity College, Cambridge (pers. comm. owner). He also built a swimming pool on the far side of the Whitchurch/Pitchcott Road, a laundry and laundry cottage and a dairy, completed the home farm buildings into a square, rebuilt the back stables, purchased further land to the south of the Whitchurch/Pitchcott Road, which extended the estate to a point just short of Pitchcott Manor, and demolished the three remaining cottages in Bunshill Lane. He died in 1928. (*Oving House*)

Following his widow's death in 1941 the house was inherited by Rosemary Elliott, her niece. It was then requisitioned by the Ministry of Health as a Nursery School from 1941 until 1947. (CBS D 201/111)

The house was home to Randolph Churchill (son of Winston Churchill) and his wife June in 1953 whilst researching his life of Lord Derby, assisted by Alan Brien. (Harris).

In 1954 the estate was sold to William Michael Berry who became Lord Hartwell and was chairman and editor-in-chief of *The Daily Telegraph* group for 33 years. (CBS D-WIG/2/3/121; D-WIG/2/8/416 [Former reference: A 1948/4] D-WIG/2/9/1161; Pevsner). During the 1950s Lord Hartwell purchased Holborn Hill Farm to the south east of the house, on the far side of the Whitchurch to Pitchcott Road, and made significant changes to the gardens. He planted an arboretum on the eastern edge of the gardens. The field on the eastern boundary was blended with the existing wooded area, although existing mature trees on the original field boundary and differences in height levels were retained. Changes were made to the house, which was 'Georganised', (*Country Life*) and a new swimming pool with pavilion and a tennis court were built.

In about 2002 the terraces were redesigned with input from Lady Mary Keen, who has also worked for the Rothschild family at Eythrope and designed the gardens at Glyndebourne.

Houses were built in the area to the north of the Kitchen Garden in 2015. Further changes are planned to the stable buildings west of the Kitchen Garden.

The house and gardens remain in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Oving House is set on the southern edge of the village of Oving, c. 500 feet above sea level. The 10ha site runs along an ice-age escarpment with far reaching views to the Chilterns to the south across the Vale of Aylesbury, encompassing Aylesbury, 6 miles to the south-east, and encroaching modern developments. It is roughly 1 mile west of the A413 leading from Aylesbury to Buckingham. It is about 3.5 miles north east of Waddesdon and four miles south of Winslow. The topsoil is Kimmeridge clay and this and the local limestone have been used for bricks and building stone for many centuries.

The southern boundary of the garden and arboretum is the road leading to Pitchcott to the west and Whitchurch to the east but the paddock south of the road is part of the Oving site and contain an Edwardian swimming pool. The western boundary is New Road. The garden and arboretum are bounded to the north by Dark Lane, with a wall of local clunch stone running from the Coachhouse to the east down to the village green to the west, and a grass

footpath continuing on to Baulk Road/Bowling Alley which form the boundary on the eastern side. On the north side of the footpath is the partially walled Kitchen Garden.

The southern edge of the garden is marked at the western end by hedging, with lengths of clunch stone wall, fencing and trees along the eastern section. The 1950s arboretum to the east has a line of C18 beech at the southern edge, typical of remains of old Chiltern forests, but which may have been planted by Pilsworth or Hopkins. The west and east boundaries are protected by belts of trees, including old oaks, beech, hawthorn, chestnuts, yew, holm oak and also on the east by a line of hollies planted in the 1950s. The north boundary of the garden and arboretum is made up of sections of clunch stone wall, park railings and fencing. The Kitchen Garden is surrounded by brick walls to the west, north and east with fencing to the south.

The wider landscape comprises a paddock south of the Whitchurch to Pitchcott Road called Weaver Close. The west boundary is a public footpath formerly known as Bunshill Lane, to the north it is enclosed by the road, and to the east and south by fields. The area is largely enclosed by late C19/early C20 iron railings and hedgerows.

The site is set in the rural Vale of Aylesbury with extensive views south. 500m east of the paddock a C19 lime avenue leads south from the Whitchurch to Pitchcott Road to Holbourn Hill Farm.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main approach to the house is a driveway from the Whitchurch to Pitchcott Road through a wooden 5 bar gate. This follows the route of the carriage drive from the south west angle of the lawn through a shrubbery described by Lipscomb. This drive is lined by yew, intermixed with box. To the east is an avenue of young to mature beech trees and a line of park railing. The drive leads north (150m) and then east to the north face of the house, where the main entrance is located. There is a gravelled area (60m x 20m) to the north of the house, with a stone wall as the boundary with Dark Lane lined by shrubs.

At the north-east corner of the gravelled area is another gated vehicular entrance. Slightly east of this is the entrance to the former stable-yard, with similar double wooden gates. The former stable is to the west of this entrance and the former coach house to the east. There is a further pedestrian brick gateway east of the coach house.

Roughly 100m further east, along the northern boundary of the gardens, south of the footpath linking Dark Lane and Baulk Lane, is a metal gate set into park railings giving access to the arboretum.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Oving House (listed Grade II*) stands on the northern boundary of the pleasure grounds, with a small area of woodland to the west and a more extensive area, encompassing service buildings, gardens and an arboretum to the east. Three ornamental terraces to the south descend the hill to the Whitchurch to Pitchcott road.

The north (entrance) front, set back from Dark Lane, is of dressed local stone with gables to the east and west of the central block. The roofs are mostly tiled but there is some slate on the centre to the north. The south (principal garden) front is of red brick formerly rendered (in the C19), with a moulded stone plinth and stone first floor band courses and copings to the parapet.

The north side of the house was built in the early C17 and was remodelled for Charles Pilsworth MP 1741-3; possibly by William Smith of Warwick (1705-47) architect, who worked for Sir Thomas Cave, Mrs Pilsworth's brother, at Stanford Hall in Leicestershire in the 1740s (Pevsner and listing). The east and west wings were added later in the C18.

On the northern boundary, east of the house, is a coach house (listed Grade II*) dating from mid-C18, latterly used as staff accommodation and now as garages and a flat. It is constructed mainly of red brick with some coursed rubblestone at the northern end and feature a wooden cupola with a small lead dome which houses a clock. Beyond this building to the east is a 2-story stable building, also red brick, rebuilt in c. 1900.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The principal garden front of the house is the south front. A series of three terraces and gardens slope down to the road from Whitchurch to Pitchcott with smaller ornamental areas and an extensive arboretum to the east and an area of woodland pleasure ground to the west.

The top terrace (70mx60m) consists of two areas. The northern portion is dominated by a large box parterre, with a substantial herbaceous border to the north/west. The effect is to hold the eye within the garden. South of the parterre is a stone-paved and pebbled path running east/west, the remaining one of Yates Thompson's scheme inspired by his college at Cambridge, Trinity, and beyond, at the centre of a grass area (70mx20m), surrounded by hedging, is Henry Yates Thompson's octagonal lily pond (early c20), with its central fountain, consisting of a basin (replaced early C21) on a pedestal.

The second terrace, (70mx30m), below the lily pond, is another grassed area, formerly a grass tennis court, the third (70m x45m) is a wild flower meadow recently created by the current owners with apple trees and a central avenue lined with apple trees (pers. comm. owner).

South of the meadow rises a wide grass bank (created with the earth dug out for the modern swimming pool) before the hawthorn hedge, which borders the road.

The current owners have planted four poplar trees on the terrace to the south of the lily pond and have planted a further group of poplars on the road border more recently. The intention is to add height to the spaces within the garden and partially to mask the view of current housing developments around Aylesbury. They have also planted two plane trees within the wild flower meadow area.

These terraces have been redesigned by the current owners to refocus the view from the previous main attraction – the view over Aylesbury Vale (*Country Life*). Formally the eye had been led from the house by a path to the lily pond, over the terraces to the distant view of The Chilterns. The quality of this landscape is at risk from development.

Photographs, from the time of Col. Pratt (owner 1861-88) show that at this period the path leading south from the house was lined by conifers, with lawns to either side surrounded by flower borders. At the southern edge this was bounded by a metal fence, east/west. These conifers and the fence were removed by Yates Thompson when he created the terraces. The conifers were replaced with flower borders and the path extended to and around the newly constructed lily pond. A rock garden was created on the terrace beneath the lily pond. The paths leading south and around the lily pond have been removed by the current owners and the rock garden no longer exists.

East of the house is a stone patio with seating, created by the present owners and surrounded by climbers and shrubs. Beyond, at a higher level bounded by stone steps and a broad upward sloping low box hedge, is a rectangular lawn to the east, formerly a croquet lawn, overlooking the lower garden due south of the house, from which it is also separated by a low box hedge. It is bounded by a second, substantial, herbaceous border planted in 'hot tones' and a yew hedge surrounding it to the east and south, which is being trained to form arched openings beyond. At its far southern end is a mature chestnut, at the side of which more stone steps lead down to the stone-paved and pebbled east-west path and the main parterre garden. Close by to the north-east outside the Library window a line of mature yew may date to the C17, possibly when the house was built, or C18.

East of the second herbaceous border are groups of laburnum and lilacs.

The east edge of the lower terraces is bounded by a yew hedge planted by Lord Hartwell, in the 1950s to enclose the modern swimming pool. An oak tree has more recently been planted in front to break the effect of the horizontal lines. Arched openings cut in the north and the south side of this hedge lead into the swimming pool area and a pavilion to the east incorporating a portico with columns formerly from the library window. Inside the portico are faded murals painted by Robert Morris in 1957, thought to be based on C18 decorations of the pavilions of West Wycombe Park by Giuseppe Borgnis. One of the rooms (south) was decorated by Felix Harbord and Stanislaus Terek with paintings representing the four continents carried out when Harbord was 18 and installed there as part of his subsequent work in the 1950s.

East of the swimming pool is the arboretum. The design, by Lord Hartwell, in consultation with Hilliers Nursery, who supplied the trees, was deliberately complex to give a sense of space and mystery and to make the visitor feel it was larger than in reality (pers. comm. owner). It features grassed open spaces, hedges and avenues, with deliberate effects of light and shade. The underlying structure is two wide diagonal rides which cross each other, one running south-east from behind the former croquet lawn and herbaceous border, lined with alternating green and copper beech hedge, towards the boundary of mature beeches which border the gardens to the south, and the other running north-east from behind the swimming pool, bordered with eucalyptus and other specimen trees, to a striking roundel (near the shrubberies before Dark Lane), bounded by high yew hedges. A line of Irish yew leading to a thuja grove, which forms a central point. The Irish yews have recently been trained to form an arch. There is also an important ride in the eastern part of the wood planted in the field towards Baulk Road, running north-south parallel with the eastern boundary, of fastigiate oaks bordered by laurels. There are a number of original specimen trees apart from eucalyptus, eg ailanthus, metasequoia, weeping ashes, sugar maple, tulip trees, magnolia grandiflora, Antarctic beeches (nothofagus) Hungarian oak, and a row of beeches of considerable age marking the previous boundary with a field, which lay on the eastern edge of the estate, bounding Baulk Lane, as well as a newer avenue of young beeches.

To the north is a tennis court, surrounded by a clipped holly hedge and a grass pathway proceeds to the northern boundary with Dark Lane. West of this is a large open grassed area lined by hedges which leads back to the house. Close to the south-west corner of the coach house are two very large beech trees, c.300 years old, a mature lime tree and sycamore. A small new garden has been created from a shrubbery of old yew trees to the east of the coach house. South of the coach house, west of a small shrubbery, is a small dog cemetery dating from c.1960s.

PARK

The wider landscape lies 200m south of the house, beyond the Whitchurch to Pitchcott Road. Weaver Close is a 3 ha. grazed paddock, which contains mature trees and is overlooked by the south front of the house and gardens. The paddock includes two large sycamores at different levels of the sharply descending hill, and a group of C19 holm oak, added to by the current owners to shield the view from developments in the Aylesbury Vale. The boundaries are defined by shrubs and mature trees, and iron park railings including a pedestrian gateway (probably early C20). The west boundary is a public footpath formerly known as Bunshill Lane. Areas of large stones indicate the extent of the boundary. This path formerly led to a number of 'hovels' the last of which were demolished by Henry Yates Thompson c1910 (*Oving House*).

In the paddock, 500m south of the house and at the bottom of the steep slope, is the rectangular swimming pool built by Henry Yates Thompson in the early 1900s (*Oving House*). It is of stone, though the edge is not as ornamental as the lily pond. It was used for early morning bathing by Thompson, but fell into disuse and was replaced by the new pool in the 1950s. It is now overgrown by trees and shrubs, though it still holds water. To the north-west are two red brick buildings which were formerly the dairy. (pers. comm. owner)

The origins of the ornamental features in this field are unclear. Some mature trees seem to predate Thompson though he added features including the pool, possibly some more trees and probably the iron railings. The area forms the setting for key views from the house and garden terraces, framing the wider countryside and views over the Vale.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The walled kitchen garden lies 60m north-east of the house, beyond the footpath linking Dark Lane and Baulk Road. It is partially walled and trapezoidal (100m x 60m). It is divided centrally north/south by a brick wall pierced by two arches. The current access is through the western wall into an area containing a variety of fruit trees that have replaced former fruit bushes (pers. comm. owner). Along the north wall are a series of cold frames, whilst ornamental borders containing a variety of roses and other perennials are grown along the west and east walls. There are two gravel paths west/east across this section. The southern path, leading from the entrance to one of the arches, features what appears to be original Victorian/Edwardian rope edging.

The eastern section of the kitchen garden contains the large Victorian/Edwardian greenhouse and garden bothy and another large wooden greenhouse as well as a variety of vegetable beds.

The southern side of the Kitchen Garden is fenced.

The kitchen garden was mentioned in the 1861 sales particulars and three small buildings in the area occupied by the kitchen garden appeared on the 1846 tithe map (CBS D-FR/20/8/6; Tithe 296). One building may be a garden bothy which now stands at the western end of a large Victorian/Edwardian greenhouse along the north wall at the east end of the kitchen garden.

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Ordnance Surveyors Draft, c1813

Bryant, A Map of the County of Buckinghamshire from an actual survey in the year 1824 by A Bryant (1825)

Oving Tithe Map 1846 (CBS 296)

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Bucks Gardens Trust, Site Dossier: Oving House, Aylesbury Vale DC November 2019

OS 6" Surveyed: 1878 to 1879 Published: 1883

1910 'Lloyd George Domesday Survey'

OS 6" Revised: 1898 Published: c. 1936

OS 6" Revised: 1950 Published: 1952

ARCHIVAL ITEMS

Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

Local Studies L197:88

Sales particulars of Old Butcher's Arms, Oving S.T. Rotherham & Co. undated

Archives

D-FR/20/8/6 Sale particulars for Oving House 1 May 1861

D 201/111 Schedule of furniture at Oving House, prior to requisitioning by Ministry of Health1941

W/1578 Will of Sir Thomas Digby Aubrey of Oving House, Buckinghamshire

IMAGES

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Black and white aerial photographs 1947 (RAF), 1950 (RAF), 1985 (Bucks County Survey), 1998

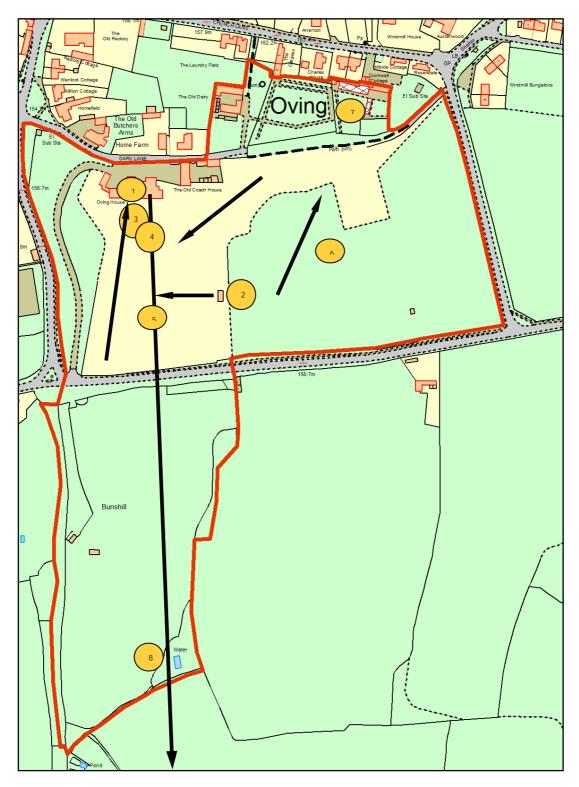
Colour aerial photographs 1988, 1995, 1999, 2006, 2015

WEBSITE

http://www.ovingpc.com/ovings-history.html

J Stansfield & G Grocott, November 2019, edited SR November 2019

KEY HISTORIC FEATURES AND VIEWS



Key to numbered features

1. The House	2. The Swimming Pool/Pavilion
3. Box Parterre	4. Lily Pond
5. Wild Flower Meadow	6. Thuja circle and yew arch
7. Kitchen Garden & Greenhouse	8. Old swimming pool

KEY IMAGES







Garden next to the stable block

Stable block



Gateway in paddock.