

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



AKELEY WOOD

DECEMBER 2020

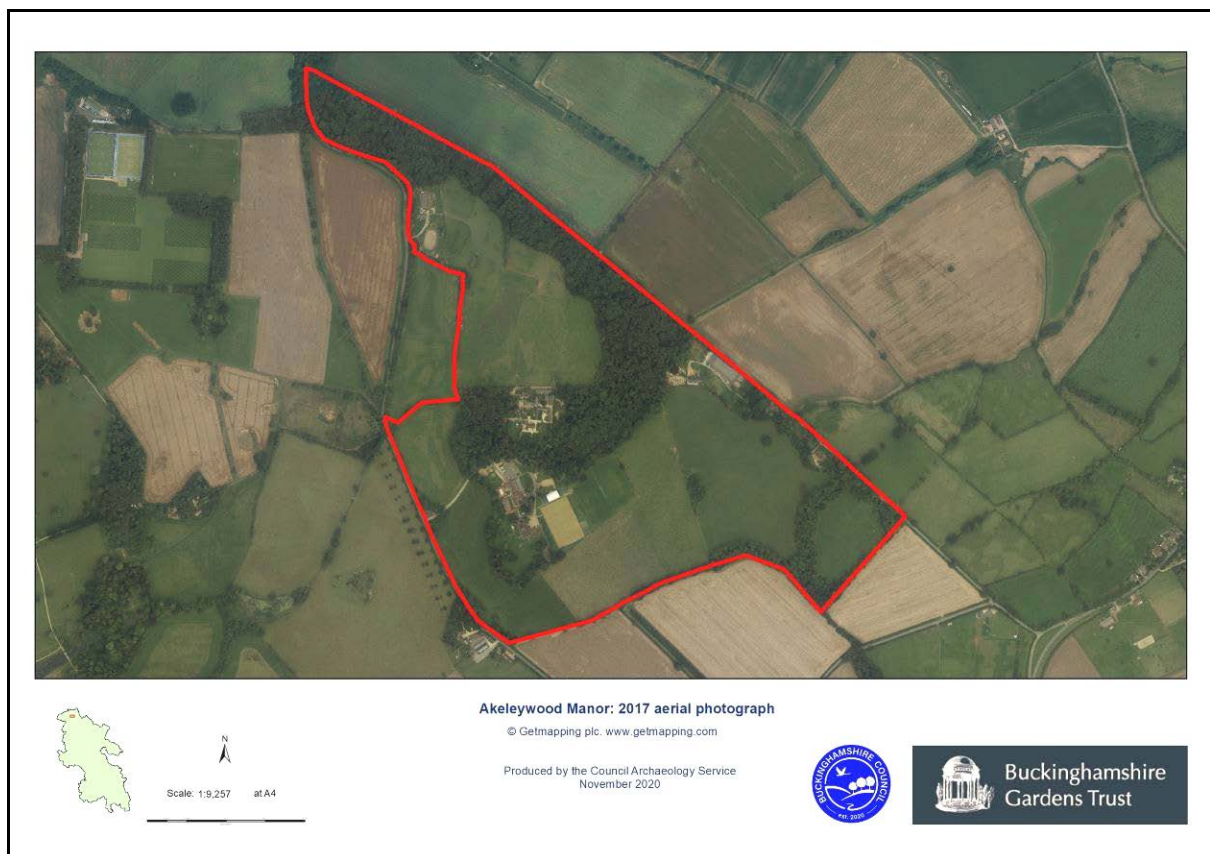
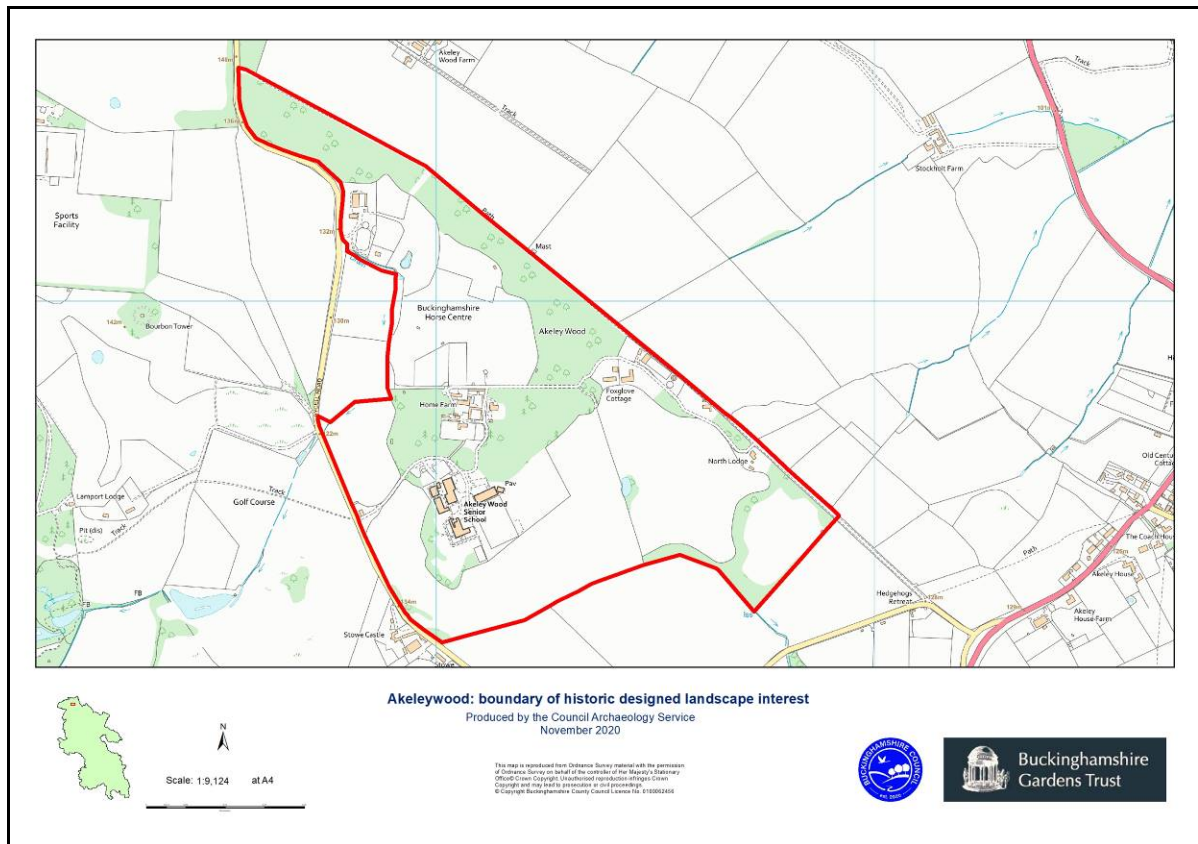


The Finnis Scott
Foundation

Roland
Callingham
Foundation



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 definitive and further parks and gardens may be identified as research continues or further information comes to light.

Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a dossier is prepared by volunteers trained by BGT in appraising designed landscapes.

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 Planning Policy Framework and including an overview.
- A description, derived from documentary research and site visits, based on the format of Historic England's *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 funded by BGT, with significant grants from the Finnis Scott Foundation, the Roland Callingham Foundation, BCC (since April 2020 part of Buckinghamshire Council) and various private donors. Buckinghamshire Council also provided significant funding, and help in kind including current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record. The project is supported by The Gardens Trust.

The Trust thanks 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

SITE NAME: AKELEY WOOD	HER NO: 1071003000
COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	GRID REF: SP 690 374
PARISH: AKELEY	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The gardens, pleasure ground and park for an 1860s country house which was George Devey's first large country house, including terraces, informal pleasure ground lawns with mature trees and shrubberies, a walled kitchen garden, parkland and pre-existing woodland which was incorporated as part of the design. Garden terrace additions in Arts and Crafts style by Ernest George 1911/12 include a Tudor-style brick and ironstone gazebo. The woodland and many trees originated in the medieval royal forest of Whittlewood. The ensemble survives largely intact, except for the loss of kitchen garden structures and layout and the addition of school structures and sports pitches around the house, stables and Home Farm since the site became a school in the mid-C20, also a house in the kitchen garden, and equestrian centres and houses in the park.

Archaeological interest

The site has the potential for evidence associated with the medieval forest and woodland uses, particularly relating to the surviving ancient trees but also for banks, routes, boundaries and buildings. It has potential for former features related to the designed landscape since the 1860s such as buildings, paths, beds, terraces, boundaries, etc, particularly for the kitchen garden, and lost drives and rides.

Architectural interest

A typical group of structures for a new country house of the 1860s by notable architect George Devey who worked on many other projects in the county. This was his first large new country house; he also designed the stable block, two lodges, and perhaps Home Farm and the gardeners' cottages (gone). The structures were united in the design by his hallmark Old English style using Tudorbethan half-timbering with stone and brick details which is found elsewhere in Bucks including Mentmore, Waddesdon, Eythrope, Cliveden and Halton. The house was greatly enlarged c.1911 by Ernest George when the surrounding terraces were formalised in Arts and Crafts style with low walls, a corner bastion and a Tudor-style brick and ironstone gazebo.

Artistic interest

The layout comprises a typical ensemble of garden, pleasure ground and park for a country house developed in the 1860s with buildings in Old English style, and early C20 additions to the garden by the notable architect Ernest George, principally Arts and Crafts-style terraces, including a gazebo in Tudor style, a corner bastion, and terrace walls replacing the previously turfed slopes, enclosing an ornamental pattern of stone paths. The 1860s design retained much of the existing ancient Forest woodland both as woodland and as specimen trees in the new park. Stowe park and pleasure grounds forms a key feature of the setting beyond the west boundary with Bycell Road including the

relict village of Lamport (now a golf course) set in fields. Several prominent major structures in an arc on the east side of Stowe landscape garden were the focus of 'borrowed' views, including to Stowe Castle, Cobham's Column, the Bourbon Tower, and perhaps others.

Historic interest

The site has strong associations with the royal Forest of Whittlewood.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In medieval times Akeley Wood was part of the royal hunting forest of Whittlewood within which it was a famous hunting covert (Houghton-Brown). Latterly it was variously known as Stockwell Wood (Jeffreys), Stockholt Wood (OSD, 1813), Akely Common Wood (Bryant), and finally Akeley Wood (n.b. spelling change) (OS 1881).

By 1825 (Bryant) the Wood, was owned in part by New College, Oxford, but part was also called Akely Common Wood suggesting it was part of the parish common land. Around the wood three areas were under cultivation: the largest was to the south near Stowe Castle, one lay the north of the woodland and another on the west side was bounded by the Bycell Road.

In 1850 Buckingham's first railway station opened. This made it possible for people whose source of wealth was elsewhere to move into the area and prompted the construction of several country houses with parks. These included three new estates around the boundaries of Stowe: Boycott Manor (1865), Tile House (1882) and Akeley Wood (1864-67). The three owners built in the fashionable Old English Style, a Victorian version of the Elizabethan style (Houghton-Brown).

Around 1860 the Bursar of New College Oxford sold 90 acres of Akeley Wood to Captain Charles Pilgrim for a small country estate. Pilgrim's new buildings included a house and stables designed by George Devey c.1866-67, also lodges probably by him (Bucks Monument full report Akeley Wood School; Pevsner; Allibone.). Devey was a master of the Old English style: the upper levels were timbered and the lower levels of rusty ironstone. The house was enclosed on two sides by terraces: along the west and south elevations, with steps down to the informal lawned pleasure grounds with scattered shrubberies. The west, garden elevation and terrace enjoyed borrowed views to several Stowe buildings including the Corinthian Arch, Gothic Temple, Cobham Monument and Bourbon Tower, all at no cost to Capt. Pilgrim. A well-defined park and woodland boundary enclosed the house (OS).

Capt. Pilgrim died in 1884 his wife died in 1910 (Houghton-Brown). By 1911 the estate had been increased to 190 acres and the estate was sold (Waring and Gillow Sale Catalogue). The particulars described it at the end of the Pilgrims' ownership as "...about 100 acres of grandly timbered park and paddocks, sheltered and enclosed by about 70 acres of woodland containing a great variety of very valuable oak and other timber in fine condition, pierced and intersected by delightful grass walks and drives arranged in vistas commanding extensive views of the surrounding country". The 1.5 acre kitchen garden lay c.230m north of the house. It contained three glasshouses, ensuring initially that the house was provided with exotic fruit such as melons and grapes, but by 1911 (sale catalogue) they had been given over to the production of flowers. Beside the kitchen garden was Home Farm. The head gardener lived in a superior dwelling nearby built in the 1860s, an another gardener's house nearby, with similar features to the mansion; this group was probably designed by George Devey with the other buildings.

The estate was purchased by Capt. and Mrs Robin Price (nee Brassey, a member of a family of railway millionaires) who in 1911/12 engaged another renowned architect, Sir Ernest George, (Pevsner), who greatly enlarged Devey's house, increasing the number of bedrooms from thirteen to twenty-six, encroaching onto the garden. The Winter Garden was replaced by a dining room, and the turfed terrace slopes contemporary with the 1867 house were replaced by a terrace wall with steps to the lower lawns. (Houghton Brown).

By 1923 (OS) some removal of woodland had occurred at the north end of the site.

Captain Price enjoyed considerable success at the Chelsea Flower Show with his exhibition of Violas. Rhododendrons were one of the glories of Akeley Wood, unusual in this area because of the alkaline soil, and some survive (Houghton-Brown).

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939 the Shirley House Preparatory School evacuated from London to Akeley Wood and the Price family moved out.

By 1945 (sale catalogue) the garden and pleasure ground included the walled Dutch garden with rose beds and paved walks, two grass tennis courts and a croquet lawn, a brick summerhouse and a sundial. In this year, the Price family sold the estate to Hillcrest School and the house was adapted to school use by Lionel Brett (Lord Esher) in 1946 (Pevsner).

A large house was erected within the 1.5 acre kitchen garden, and the gardens saw a varying change in upkeep. Many of the finest trees were sold to Mr Harold Bartlett of High Wycombe for furniture manufacture, and removed. In 2008 the gardens enjoyed a period of restoration. The grounds had altered in places with the erection of school facilities, including a large all weather playing surface near the house and indoor courts. The site remains largely in the ownership of Akeley Wood School with other owners around the periphery including in two equestrian establishments and two modern houses.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Akeley Wood is located half a mile west of Akeley village, 3.3 miles north-west of Buckingham.

The boundary is defined by Bycell Road on the west, a footpath on the east, and agricultural land to the south. Bycell Road runs north from Stowe Castle to join the footpath at the north end of the estate, this footpath returns south-east for 1 mile to join the edge of a field; the field boundary then runs west for 800m from the footpath to re-join the Stowe Castle road at Stowe Castle, the boundary outline giving a rough triangular outline to the estate (1900 OS).

The gently undulating site is focused on the house, garden and pleasure garden on a central level area.

The 73ha site is set in the rolling north Bucks rural landscape, mainly surrounded by farmland with trees along the footpath. The west side beyond the Stowe Castle road is adjacent to Stowe Castle Riding and the new Stowe Golf Club set among the remains of the former medieval Lamport village in pasture and then further west Stowe Landscape Garden. Several prominent major structures in an arc on the east side of Stowe landscape garden form a strong element of the setting. These were originally the focus of 'borrowed' views of Stowe, including to Cobham's Column, the Bourbon

Tower and perhaps others. The rear of Stowe Castle was screened. Southerly views over the park towards the hills of Brill and Quainton were framed.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The principle entrance lies 225m north-west of the house, off the Bycell Road 250m north of Stowe Castle. On the north side of the entrance is Wood Lodge (listed Grade II, 1860s, Devey). The single-storey lodge is in Tudor style on an ironstone plinth, half-timbered above with whitewashed roughcast infill in similar style to the house. The tiled roof has ornamental bargeboards and finials around an ironstone chimney which has been reduced in height.

From here the drive leads north-east through pasture and enters a belt of trees at 100m then turns south to pass the east side of the former stable block. Before curving around to the forecourt east of the house. This follows the original pattern of the drive (OS 1880).

The forecourt shows the rear aspect of a stone garden building entrance with a wooden door, a formal layout of grass and paving stone paths, in the centre of this area is a 6 sided plinth 1.5m high with a metal plate on the top possibly the remains of a sundial, steps north of this garden rise to the upper garden area.

The approach to the east entrance at North Lodge, 700m east of the house, is via a footpath 900m from the Chackmore/ Akeley road then a turn to the west which becomes a track into the estate. North Lodge stands on the south corner of the junction, beyond which the widened road continues north as a footpath to join Bycell Road. North Lodge seems to have originated in the 1860s in similar style to Wood Lodge and was probably also by Devey. The single storey house has steeply pitched roofs and ornamental brick chimneys, but the original footprint has been extended. The ornamental gables and half timbering have gone.

The north entrance off the Bycell Road formerly lay 1km north of the house at the north tip of the site. From here a former drive wound its way southeast through woodland, dividing into two by the north park paddock.

A bridle path curves across the south park between the Stowe Castle road and the east drive.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The house (listed Grade II, George Devey, 1866-68) stands towards the south-west corner of the site, set in gardens and pleasure grounds to the south and west. The entrance front and porch is to the east, the service wing to the north, and garden fronts to the west and south enclosed by terraces. It is not in Devey's more usual Wealden style; it looks like a Lancashire or Cheshire house with elaborately patterned half-timbering and close-studding (Pevsner). The lower part and chimneys are of local iron-stone. At the south-east corner is a block added in matching style 1911-12 by Ernest George, which required that the garden terrace was remodelled. The two-storey house, with plenty of gabling and half-timbering, is highly asymmetrical, picturesque and very appealing (Pevsner). This was the first new country house Devey designed on his own: he was then 48. His cashbook shows he was paid £461 in 1867 (Allibone).

Devey's former stable block (1860s, listed Grade II) stands 30m north of the house and is in similar style to the house and lodges. It is now schoolrooms. The half-timbered, single-storey block surrounds a yard and stands on an ironstone plinth. The main entrance has an ironstone arched

surround and a clock tower above and many gables around the whole building. It was converted in 1946 by Brett. West and north of the stable block are large modern school buildings, with car parking to the north of this.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The Pleasure Gardens enclose the house to the west and south and in the late C19 amounted to nearly six acres (OS).

The house is enclosed by two terraces on the garden fronts to the west and south, supported by brick walls (Ernest George, c.1911). The upper terrace below the west front is laid out with circular formal flower beds set in lawn, stone-paved paths and low hedging. A path leads to steps down to the lower lawns beyond, which wrap around the terrace. At the south-west corner of the upper terrace is a stone-flagged, brick and tile bastion linking the walls. The lower terrace, to the east, below the east end of the south front, is known as the Dutch Garden; the centrepiece is a sundial in the form of the base of an octagonal stone column probably from another site. At the east corner of the Dutch Garden is a small summerhouse/gazebo in red brick with ironstone dressings, with a pitched tiled roof and a Tudor-arched doorway giving access down stone steps to the lawns below.

The terrace structures were built during work to the house by Ernest George in 1911-12, when the ornamental stone paths were apparently laid out. A preliminary sketch, apparently signed by George, survives dated September 1914 (Houghton-Brown). The terrace walls replaced turf slopes, and remain as depicted on the 1920-21 OS. George's design included four sets of steps, the bastion as a vantage point to view the lawn tennis and to take tea, a rose garden and the gazebo. The 1945 auction catalogue describes a "Walled Dutch Garden with rose beds and paved walks" A Sun Dial. Walled terraces with herbaceous borders and a Brick Summerhouse'.

Beyond the lawns are enclosed by mature trees and shrubbery against the park. Views to the west and south are fringed with trees with cut away spaces for a borrowed sight of buildings of Stowe. Circular flower beds on the lower lawns were mapped on the 1911 sale plan when the trees were less dense, before the works by George. The beds were later planted with Violas, which Captain Price successfully exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show and a hard tennis court.

PARK

The park encloses the house and pleasure grounds on three sides. It contains a network of approach and service drives. The south half is pasture while the larger north half retains much of the early woodland which was incorporated as a major part of the design, around a central paddock. Home Farm and the adjacent kitchen garden were grouped within this woodland but an area north of Home Farm contiguous with the park paddock has been cleared in the mid-late C20 for pasture. The open historic parkland is enclosed by hedges and mature trees but most of the specimen trees which were thickly sprinkled in pasture by the mid-C20 (OS and APs) have gone.

The park contains several areas of development. Sports pitches east of the house include a large all-weather area next to the forecourt and covered courts north of this. An equestrian centre has been built in the former north paddock, also, confusingly called Home Farm. Development in the woodland near the east boundary includes two large houses replacing a former pair of semi-detached staff cottages, and Coppice Farm, a further equestrian establishment, by the boundary.

In 1864 Charles Pilgrim purchased from New College 90 acres of land, part of the early Royal Forest of Whittlewood. A spectacular bluebell display every spring is a good indicator of the antiquity of this area of woodland, and over the next few years further purchases were made bringing the estate to about 190 acres. Trees were thinned within the woodland to leave shade-giving mature trees in the open parkland, predominantly oaks hence the name Ake(oak)ley.

Waring and Gillow described the park as follows: 'about a 100 acres of grandly timbered park and paddocks, sheltered and enclosed by about 70 acres of woodlands containing a great variety of very valuable oak and other timber in fine condition, pierced and intersected by delightful grass walks and drives arranged in vistas commanding extensive views of the surrounding country.'

KITCHEN GARDEN

The 1.5 acre walled former kitchen garden lies 110m north-east of the house and adjacent to the south of the Home Farm. The under-gardener's house was built nearest to the Kitchen Garden, so he was on hand to supervise any work, the head gardener's house was a little way off and superior to the under gardener; both were probably designed by George Devey in the 1860s, but neither seems to survive. A large house has been built within the garden walls.

Three glasshouses were built for the cultivation of delicate fruits such as melons and grapes. By 1911 they were given over to the cultivation of flowers such as orchids, lilies, geraniums, fuchsias and many ferns, which were probably used to decorate the house and planting in the pleasure gardens.

REFERENCES

Books, Reports and Articles

Allibone, J., *George Devey Architect 1820-1886* (1991), 50, 64, 157.

Houghton Brown, A, *Report on the History of Akeley Wood* (2008) (private collection).

Page, W., ed. 'Parishes: Akeley', in *A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 4*, (London, 1927), 144-47. *British History Online* <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/bucks/vol4/pp144-147>

Pevsner, N., Williamson, E., *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (2nd edn, 1994), 129.

Waring and Gillow *Sale Catalogue* (1911).

Sale Catalogue (1945).

Maps

Jeffreys, *Map of Bucks* (1768)

Bryant, *Map of Bucks* (1825)

Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, 1813 (BL)

Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile, surveyed 1880

Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile, surveyed 1880; revised 1899; revised 1920-21

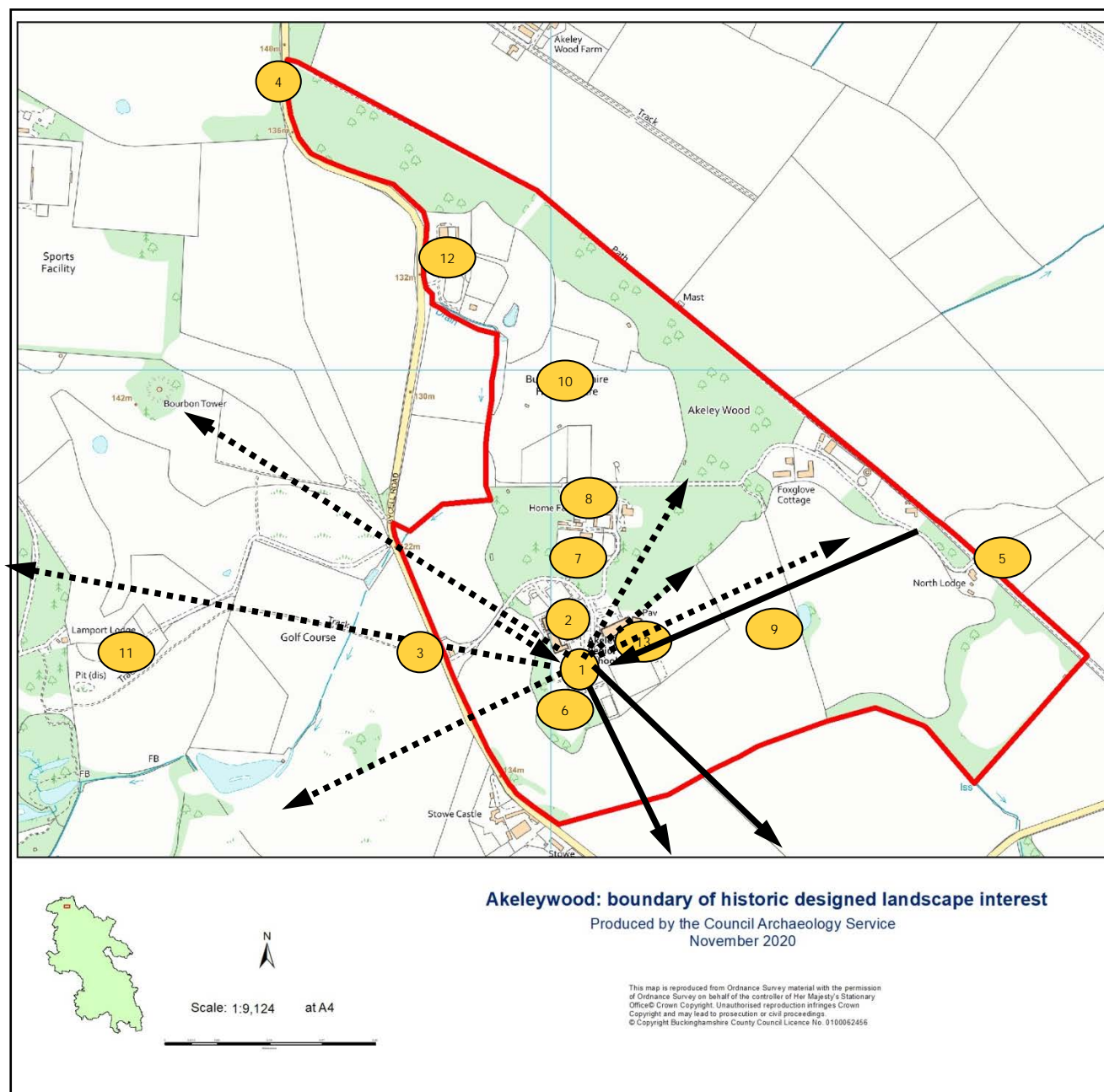
Illustrations

3 C19 photographs (RIBA):

<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=akeley%20wood>

1946-47 RAF Aerial Photographs (at HER)

KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS



Dotted lines indicate currently obscured views.

Key to numbered features

1. House and terraces to W & E	2. Former stable block & school buildings to W
3. Wood Lodge and west drive	4. Former north entrance to former north drive
5. North Lodge and east drive	6. Pleasure ground
7. Kitchen garden	8. Historic Home Farm
9. South park	10. North park
11. Lampport Village (site of)	12. C20 Home Farm Equestrian Centre
13. Sports pitches	

CURRENT IMAGES



Wood Lodge



North Lodge (left and centre); Akeley Wood main entrance and porch (right).



West front (left); west and south fronts (centre); detail of chimney and rainwater head (right).



South terrace.



South and west terraces, with bastion terrace (left)



South terrace and Tudor-style gazebo.



Lawn with rhododendrons (left); school buildings west of stable block (centre & right).



Views across the park.



Stable block, converted for school use.



Stable block (right) with mature planting screening forecourt and house.