

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## HORWOOD MANOR

Site Dossier September 2019



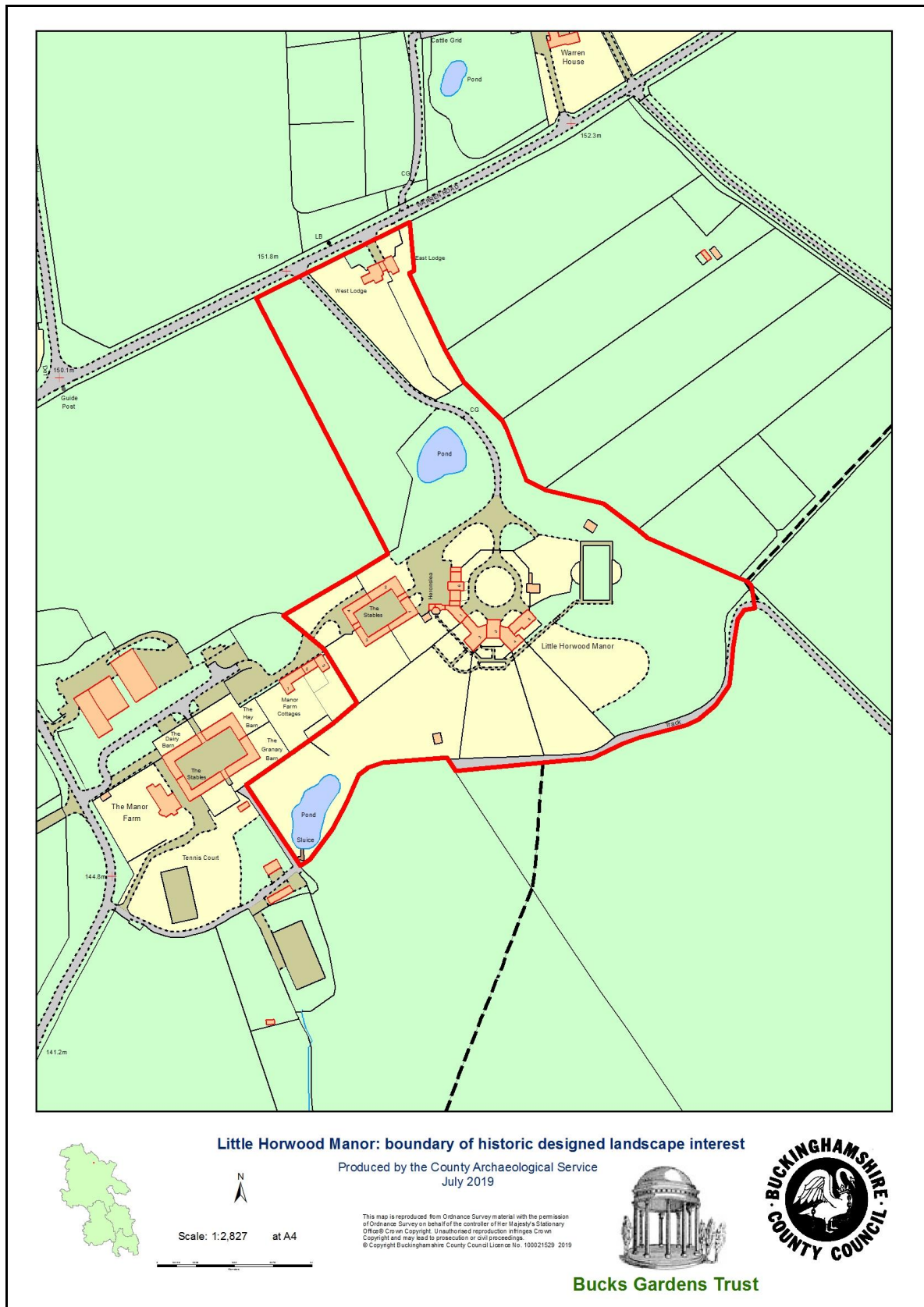
The Stanley Smith (UK)  
Horticultural Trust



Bucks Gardens Trust



# HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY







Scale: 1:2,827 at A4



# Little Horwood Manor: 2017 aerial photograph

© Getmapping plc. [www.getmapping.com](http://www.getmapping.com)

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
July 2019



**Bucks Gardens Trust**





## 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, based on the format of the English Heritage/ Historic England *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.
- A map showing principal views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

### Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was supported by The Gardens Trust (formerly the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society) and funded by BGT with significant grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the Finnis Scott Foundation. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: [www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)



COUNTY:	<b>BUCKINGHAMSHIRE</b>	<b>HORWOOD MANOR</b>  <b>BCC HER 1417303000</b>
DISTRICT:	<b>Aylesbury Vale</b>	
PARISH:	<b>Little Horwood</b>	
OS REF:	<b>SP792 316</b>	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

One of the last large-scale country houses, by architect A.S.G Butler on a new site in 1938-39, set in contemporary formal and informal gardens. The landscape survives largely intact but has been divided with the division of the buildings into many residences. The landscape design is integral with the house and Butler's associated structures including garden terrace, stable block, forecourt walls and gardener's cottage. The ensemble includes a formal approach from an imposing gatehouse through fields to the large forecourt, and informal gardens reached from the house via the formal terrace enclosed by the angled wings of the house, and formerly a kitchen garden.

### Archaeological interest

The archaeological interest and potential in part arises from evidence relating to lost buildings and features relating to the 1938-39 landscape, particularly lost elements of the garden and stretches of the main approach, such as paths, the drive, structures and borders, and for kitchen garden and orchard structures and features.

### Architectural interest

A typical ensemble of buildings by a renowned Interwar architect, A.S.G. Butler, a follower of Sir Edwin Lutyens, for a mid-C20 country house and small estate including the house, garden terrace and forecourt walls, lodge gateway, stable block, other service structures and garden structures. The ensemble survives intact, although the house is divided into several dwellings, the stable block converted ditto, and later C20 buildings erected on the site of the former kitchen garden. This is one of the last mansions built in England on such a scale, comparable in quality and contemporary with Lutyens' last great country house at Middleton Stoney, Oxon. It is Butler's largest commission in Bucks and the only one of this type that he carried out in the county.

### Artistic interest

A mid-C20 garden forming the setting for a late country house, which survives largely intact. The layout responds to the butterfly-plan house, its site and the rural setting, with long views over the integral garden terrace enclosed by the wings and the informal garden beyond over the rural Vale of Aylesbury to distant hills. The gatehouse frames an imposing approach through the park, now partly disused, to the walled forecourt and house. A series of formal and informal compartments includes to the north the formal and imposing forecourt, and south of the house the terrace, informal lawns with scattered trees and a lake. While a considerable amount of structural planting survives the more ephemeral planting has altered and the kitchen garden has been lost to development.

### Historic interest

The site is closely associated with a renowned architect, Butler. It is of interest for the close association of the formal elements of the garden with the house. A design drawing survives in the RIBA drawings collection at the V & A. It is also closely associated with the first owner George Gee, an industrialist and partner in Gee Walker Slater (GWS), a major engineering and building firm.



## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Horwood Manor was commissioned on a new site in 1938 by George Gee, an industrialist and partner in Gee Walker Slater (GWS), a major engineering and building firm. The architect was A.S.G Butler (1888–1965). The site chosen was on relatively high ground about 1km north of Little Horwood village, alongside the existing Manor Farm complex to the west. Gee appears to have bought the whole farm.

Manor Farm is not marked on Jeffreys (1770) or Bryant (1825), which shows another Manor Farm closer to the centre of Little Horwood. It is thus unlikely to be the site of the Little Horwood Manor known to have been owned and remodelled by the first Duke of Buckingham in the early 1600s and subsequently demolished (Wikipedia). The site was however close to the site of a medieval village called Shucklow, remnants of which survived in 1812 (OSD), the only trace of which now is the road name Shucklow Hill connecting Little Horwood Road and Warren Road. The site of Shucklow could explain the pond that remains on the site and the footpaths that traversed the area, including one on the alignment of the later drive to the house. Previous allotments fronting the road immediately west of the drive (OS 1885, 1926) may also be connected with a former settlement (possibly shown but not named on Jeffreys and Bryant), since they are remote from the village of Little Horwood.

The mansion was supposedly intended to be used as a hunting box, Gee being a keen supporter of the Whaddon Chase Hunt, and this tradition seems borne out by the evidence of the building itself. Reportedly Gee was challenged in the hunting field by one of the Rothschilds to get his new butterfly-plan house up in under a year, which was achieved, including formal terraced gardens with views of the Chilterns between the two southerly wings, informal lawns beyond, and a kitchen garden. Gee and his household were in residence in September 1939 (Register of Electors) but on the outbreak of war the property was requisitioned by the government. Gee moved into nearby Steart Hill Farm, where he died in 1943 (*Derby Daily Telegraph*).

Information is scarce but it seems that various Special Communications Units (SCU) were located at Manor Farm during the war (Taylor 2005). SCUs were formed shortly before WW2 from the radio communications section of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). Manor Farm housed SCUs manufacturing radio signalling equipment and training radio operators based at Whaddon Hall, which was the administrative HQ of the SCUs and operated a transmitting and receiving station. Both places were a few miles from and in constant communication with the SIS and the Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park. Extensive workshops and Nissen huts were erected at Manor Farm (AP EAW005542). Italian prisoners of war were also housed, possibly in the stables. The mansion probably housed senior personnel.

The property was bought in 1945 by Michael Dewar, chairman since 1928 of the British Timken Ltd engineering company (obituary in *Grace's Guide*), and put up for sale in 1952 after his death (sales particulars). Dewar is commemorated in a stained glass window in Little Horwood Church (Stained Glass of Buckinghamshire Churches) which alludes to the fact that in 1940 he was appointed head of a special mission on tanks which went to the US, and which became responsible with US Ordnance for the design and production of the Sherman tank (obituary). The house was then apparently owned and used for storage by Barclays Bank (Little Horwood Newsletter) until 1982, when it was sold to a property company and subdivided into five main freehold properties, a sixth being converted from service buildings. The stables were converted to four residential units.

Around 1982, the lodges also went into separate ownership (Little Horwood Newsletter). The drive which had previously led under the arch framed by the lodges was realigned and a new gateway created on land west of the original entrance which previously had agricultural buildings on it (1947/8 APs).



## SITE DESCRIPTION

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

The 6 ha. site lies c.1km north of Little Horwood, 0.5km south of the A421 Bletchley–Buckingham road, 8km west of Bletchley, 11km east of Buckingham, 25km north of Aylesbury. It sits approximately on the 150m contour surrounded by gently undulating arable and pasture land on clay soil; the south-west corner abuts the Manor Farm complex. The house faces north; the rear (especially because of the butterfly plan) has panoramic views to the south-east, south and south-west over the Vale of Aylesbury towards the Chilterns. The site is bounded by hedges on the north side and otherwise by post-and-rail fencing.

### Entrances and Approaches

The current gateway enters from Warren Road 300m north-north-west of the house. This has since the 1980s superseded the original gateway, 50m to the east, separated from the house by lawns and trees. The original gateway is formed by a substantial pair of semi-detached lodges pierced by a central arched stone entrance surmounted by a pediment (listed Grade II). The symmetrical two-storey range runs parallel with the road, and is U-plan to the front. Each lodge has a broad end range projecting slightly forward, with a deep Dutch gable. At the rear, tower-like projections with hipped roofs flank the archway. To either side are well-detailed flanking walls which enclose small courtyard gardens; these walls are of special interest (Listing description). The West Lodge has a modern conservatory attached to its side and a brick garage of c.1990 beside this. The gateway is almost certainly by Butler as a key part of the ensemble, using the same style and materials as the main house. As a good, late, example of the integrated arch type of gate lodge in the Arts and Crafts style (comparable with that of nearby Horwood House by Detmar Blow), the gateway comprises a key element of the hunting box complex.

The drive runs c.250m south-east from the current gateway and curves round the east side of a pond before returning to the alignment of the original drive, which ran under the archway of the lodge to the east but now does not extend beyond it. The first drive was by 1952 metalled and flanked with wide verges planted with young trees (sales particulars). The change of alignment was presumably made when the properties were sold in 1984 so it can be assumed that the double line of trees adjoining the drive was planted at that point. A laurel hedge in front of the pond west of the drive conceals the house on the approach; the pond and a perhaps also a nearby ash tree on a mound the other side of the drive predate the house.

A post and rail fence fronts a hedge on west side; west of that a chestnut avenue marks the old line of the drive. Just north of the large grassed turning circle in front of the house a spur leads south-west to a courtyard in front of the stable block and also provides vehicular access to No. 6; a symmetrical branch on the east side has been terminated after a short distance ending with a gate. North of the house the turning circle enclosing a grass panel is bounded by angled forecourt walls with a central gateway (no gates) with tall piers and ball finials which, with the house, define an octagonal space. (The garden gateways and walls are listed Grade II in the listing of the house.)

Two public footpaths from the north converge on the drive halfway along its length and follow it to where it branches to the west to the former stables. Shortly in front of where the eastern spur now terminates in a gate the footpath leads through the garden of the former gardener's cottage (listed Grade II with the Manor) on the east side of the turning circle to a tennis court. At the far end of the tennis court it continues round the back of the property through the grounds on the east and south sides of the house, turning south via a stile into fields opposite the central section of the house. At that point it meets another footpath coming through the south-east edge of the site from the west.



## Principal Building

(NB The historic OS mapping of the site is poor. The first OS map the house appears on is 6 inch 1952. The base map for the 1952 sale thus does not show the house, though it does show the boundary of the grounds. This may be because there was no map in existence, or be to do with wartime security. It doesn't appear on the 1946 or 1961 1".)

Horwood Manor (listed Grade II), a hunting box of 1938–39 by A.S.G. Butler, stands towards the centre of the site. It is built in angled 'butterfly' plan form to maximise exposure to sunlight of as many rooms as possible. It is built of dark buff brick with stone detailing and red tiled roofs, with mullion and transom windows in various sizes and arrangements. The lack of ornament conveys 'austere classicism' (HER/Listing). On the north, entrance front the central three-storey, tower-like block with a pyramidal roof is flanked by short, curving wings with an outer ground-floor corridor connecting to similar tower-like blocks at their ends. Flanking walls lead from the end towers to two-storey pavilions (each now a separate residence), one a former garage and the other designed as the gardener's cottage.

When built it had a double-height reception hall; library; three sitting or drawing rooms; dining room; and study. On the first floor were eleven bedrooms. Eight of these had en-suite bathrooms, and those on the garden side enjoyed long views across the Vale of Aylesbury to the Chilterns. A further six bedrooms were on the second floor as well as a large billiard room in the east-front tower. A games room occupied a third floor in the roof of the central tower (Listed Building description). Stables and a pair of substantial lodges enclosing an archway over the main drive (listed Grade II) completed the ensemble.

On the south, garden side of the house shorter wings containing the large dining and drawing rooms splay out from the central block (the great reception hall in quasi-medieval form) in which a door leads to the raised garden terrace. All these principal rooms overlook the garden terraces and lawns beyond.

A short service range, mainly single-storey garages (that behind the western pavilion converted to a house in the 1980s, now No. 6, was once a fire station) and a former lavatory block (also converted for domestic use) extends the west range beyond the former garage.

The 1984 division into separate properties was done with minimal disruption to the original external and internal features, which were constructed with a very high level of craftsmanship (HER/List); (Central tower = No. 3; south-east wing = No. 4; part of north-west wing and tower = No. 5; south-west and north-west from the central tower = No. 2 'Heronslea'; remainder of north-west wing = No. 1.). Likewise the associated service buildings are little altered. A modern conservatory is attached to the rear of No. 4.

The building is 'One of the last mansions in England on such a Lutyens-esque scale', its style characterised as 'a kind of watered-down Lutyens' (Pevsner and Williamson 1994). The architect was not only a follower but a major biographer of Lutyens, and was also responsible for the Catholic churches of St Teresa of the Child Jesus, St John Fisher and St Thomas More in Beaconsfield (1927), and of the Sacred Heart in Henley (1936) (<http://taking-stock.org.uk/>). Although it used contemporary construction methods such as reinforced steel joists to support the ground floor, the scale and quality of the house seem more fitting to the Victorian or Edwardian age than to the eve of World War II. Likewise its 'butterfly' plan, which provided a sun-trap and variety of aspect, is perhaps the last substantial example of a form that was popular only for a short period between c.1890 and c.1912, used by Lutyens and other leading Arts and Crafts-influenced architects such as Voysey, Shaw, Blow (responsible for nearby Horwood House, 1911) and Baillie Scott (Franklin, 1975). Another late example was built by Edward Maufe at Yaffle Hill, Dorset in 1930 with a Y-shaped dining hall. Butler worked elsewhere in Bucks in the 1920s on several projects including a



major refitting of the interior of Soane's Wotton Underwood, the Catholic church in Beaconsfield and the conversion of the medieval Boarstall Tower into a residence.

The former stable yard (listed Grade II) standing 15m west of the house formed the heart of the hunting establishment, the scale reflecting the purpose to serve Gee's numerous guests. The building is in a similar style and materials to the house and gateway. It has a quadrangular plan, the front and rear ranges (to east and west respectively) being of two storeys and those to the sides (north and south) of one. Central front and rear archway entrances include a clock tower to the front rising from the ridgeline. Tower-like projections with pyramidal roofs at each corner echo the tower features of the house. The complex provided four staff flats and 14 loose boxes and is now four residences.

## **Gardens and Pleasure Grounds**

The gardens lie adjacent to the south and east of the house. Those to the south are divided unevenly between the separate properties so that Nos 2, 3 4 and 5 each has a 'wedge' (No. 6 has no rear garden; No. 1 apparently has a very small one). The area to the east is now communal. The boundaries between the subdivisions are a mixture of hedges and post-and-rail fences.

The central Hall on the south, garden front of the house opens to the paved terrace, retained by a brick wall 2.5m high; stairs down this to the garden have at their head a single tall brick pier with a stone finial. Butler's plan for the house drawn after completion (RIBA) show the original layout, which is also evident on 1947/48 APs. He also showed the garden terraces and steps in front of the elevation of the south front. This comprised the south terrace enclosed by the west and east wings, containing respectively the large dining and drawing rooms and reached via a large central door from the Hall. All three major rooms enjoyed extensive views of the terraces and garden beyond. From the terrace steps led down to the geometrical paved Rose Garden, enclosed by the outer ends of the wings and in turn a complex arrangement of steps leading down to lawns beyond. The recent garden compartments south of the house have various newer additions close to the house but have been largely retained as undulating lawn and trees (e.g. horse chestnut, lime, oak, sycamore, birch) with denser shrub/herbaceous planting close to the building. A mature oak tree on the south boundary probably predates the garden; in 1947/48 (APs) mature trees were included.

Harry Thrower, head gardener for the Denny family at nearby Horwood House for several decades before WW2, and father of the well-known gardening broadcaster and writer Percy Thrower, may have contributed to the design and execution of the gardens.

The 1952 sales catalogue lists extensive lawns below the south terrace with ornamental shrubs and trees leading to a lake; small rose garden; herbaceous borders; shrubberies planted with young conifers; kitchen garden; hard tennis court; but with no map it is not clear where these were apart from the still-existing tennis court east of the house and the lake in the south-west corner. A 1986 sale of No. 2 includes a 'productive orchard', current aerial photographs indicate that part of this survives, in the south-west sector of the site adjacent to the Stable yard gardens.

The communal grounds to the east occupy the site of informal garden lawns. From the yew-hedged tennis court with a semi-circular paved terrace on the east and west sides a paved path leads to a copse containing a small pond.

Each Stable Yard property has ornamental gardens though of unequal size, presumably constructed since the division of the property in the 1980s.



## Kitchen Garden

The 1947/8 APs show a kitchen garden south of the stables, now gone under private gardens of the Stables properties. Sales particulars for No. 5 from 1990 describe a vegetable plot and soft fruit area beyond the tennis court but it is not clear if these existed before the property was divided.

## REFERENCES

*Derby Daily Telegraph* (25 February 1943) (info supplied by Julian Hunt).

Pevsner, N., & Williamson, E., *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1994), 438.

HER: BCC record ID 1417300000 Little Horwood Manor; 1417301000 (Stables); 14173000 (Lodge)

Franklin, J. 'Edwardian butterfly houses', *Architectural Review*, vol. CLVII, no. 938 (1975), 220–225.

Grace's Guide to British Industrial History '1951 Obituary: Michael Bruce Urquhart Dewar',  
[https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Michael\\_Bruce\\_Urquhart\\_Dewar](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Michael_Bruce_Urquhart_Dewar) (accessed 20/02/2021).

<http://taking-stock.org.uk/Home/Dioceses/Diocese-of-Northampton/Beaconsfield-St-Teresa-of-the-Child-Jesus-St-John-Fisher-and-St-Thomas-More>

Little Horwood Newsletter, Autumn 1982 (extract supplied by Peter Arnold)

Stained Glass of Buckinghamshire Churches <https://www.buckschurches.uk/glass/window.php?windowid=762#top>  
(accessed 20/02/2021).

Taylor, J. A., *Bletchley Park's Secret Sisters* (2005).

Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little\\_Horwood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Horwood)

## Centre for Bucks Studies

SC/79/9 Sale of Little Horwood Manor estate Feb 1952

SC/159 agricultural part with map (proof)

SC/79/10 agricultural part

L232.12(1) Sales Particulars 1986 'Heronslea'

L232.12(2) Sales Particulars The Stable Yard (undated but c.1985)

L232.12(3) Sales Particulars No. 5 1990?

L232.12 (4) *Bucks Herald* 4-6-97 3 The Stable Yard

Register of Electors for Little Horwood, 1939 – info supplied by Julian Hunt

## Royal Institute of British Architects

Architect's plan and elevation: 'Design for Little Horwood Manor, near Winslow, Buckinghamshire: elevation and plan showing the house and terraced gardens after their completion' RIBA Catalogue No. PA210/25, RIBAPIX No. RIBA36477

<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix/image-information/poster/design-for-little-horwood-manor-near-winslow-buckinghamshire-elevation-and-plan-showing-the-house-an/posterid/RIBA36477.html>



**Photographs:**

English Heritage 'Britain from the Air' aerial photos, 1947/48: EAW016599; 011450; 011449; 011448; 005542.

Google Earth

**Maps:**

Jeffreys 1770

OSD 1812

Bryant 1825

OS 1 inch 1946, 1961

OS 6 inch 1885, 1926, 1952

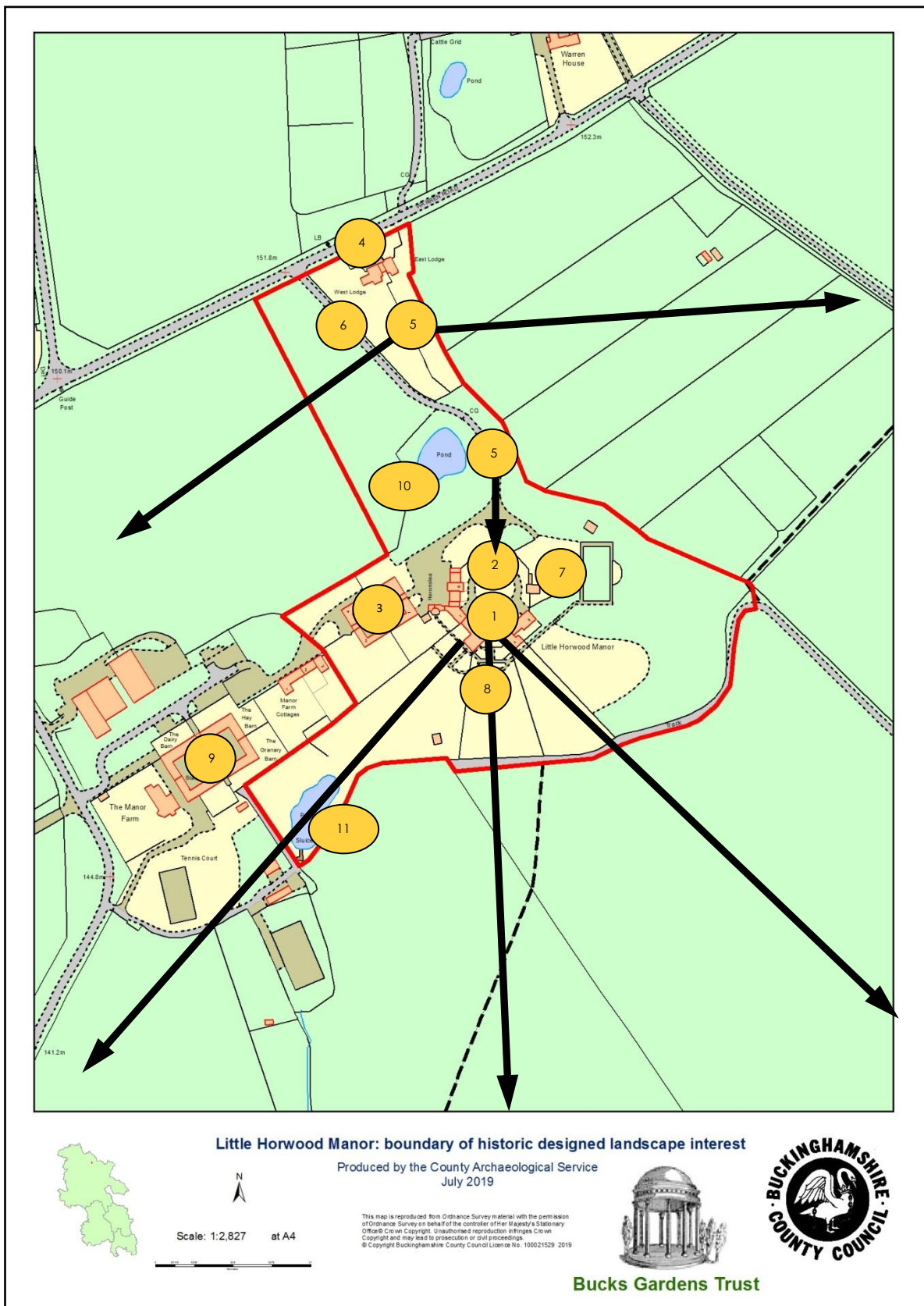
Clare Butler

SR edited June/July 2019

Amended CB February 2021 with new information received from Peter Arnold of Little Horwood



# KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS



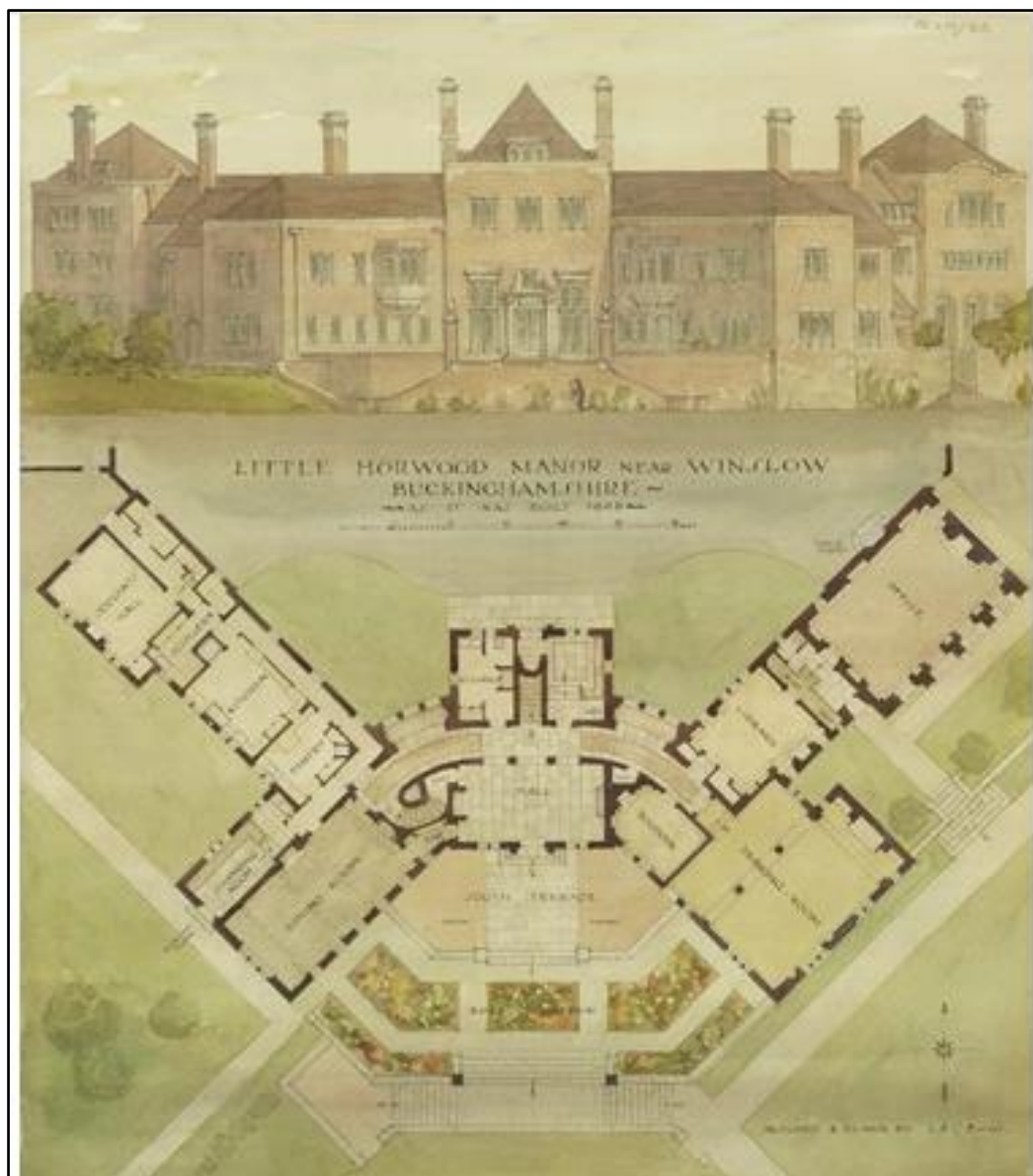


## Key to Features

1. House, terrace to south side	2. Forecourt; former service wing to west and former gardener's cottage to east
3. Former stable yard	4. Former main entrance, lodges/ gatehouse
5. Historic line of drive	6. Late C20 new line of drive
7. East Garden with tennis court	8. South Garden
9. Manor Farm	10. Historic pond
11. Lake in garden	

Modern house divisions: Central tower = No. 3; south-east wing = No. 4; part of north-west wing and tower = No. 5; south-west and north-west from the central tower = No. 2 'Heronslea'; remainder of north-west wing = No. 1.

## HISTORIC IMAGE



Design Drawing for Horwood Manor, A.S.G. Butler (1888-1965), 1938, RIBA PA210/25



## CURRENT IMAGES



Gate lodges from the road



House and forecourt



Forecourt looking north





Stable yard