

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



SHRUB'S WOOD, CHALFONT ST GILES

MARCH 2021

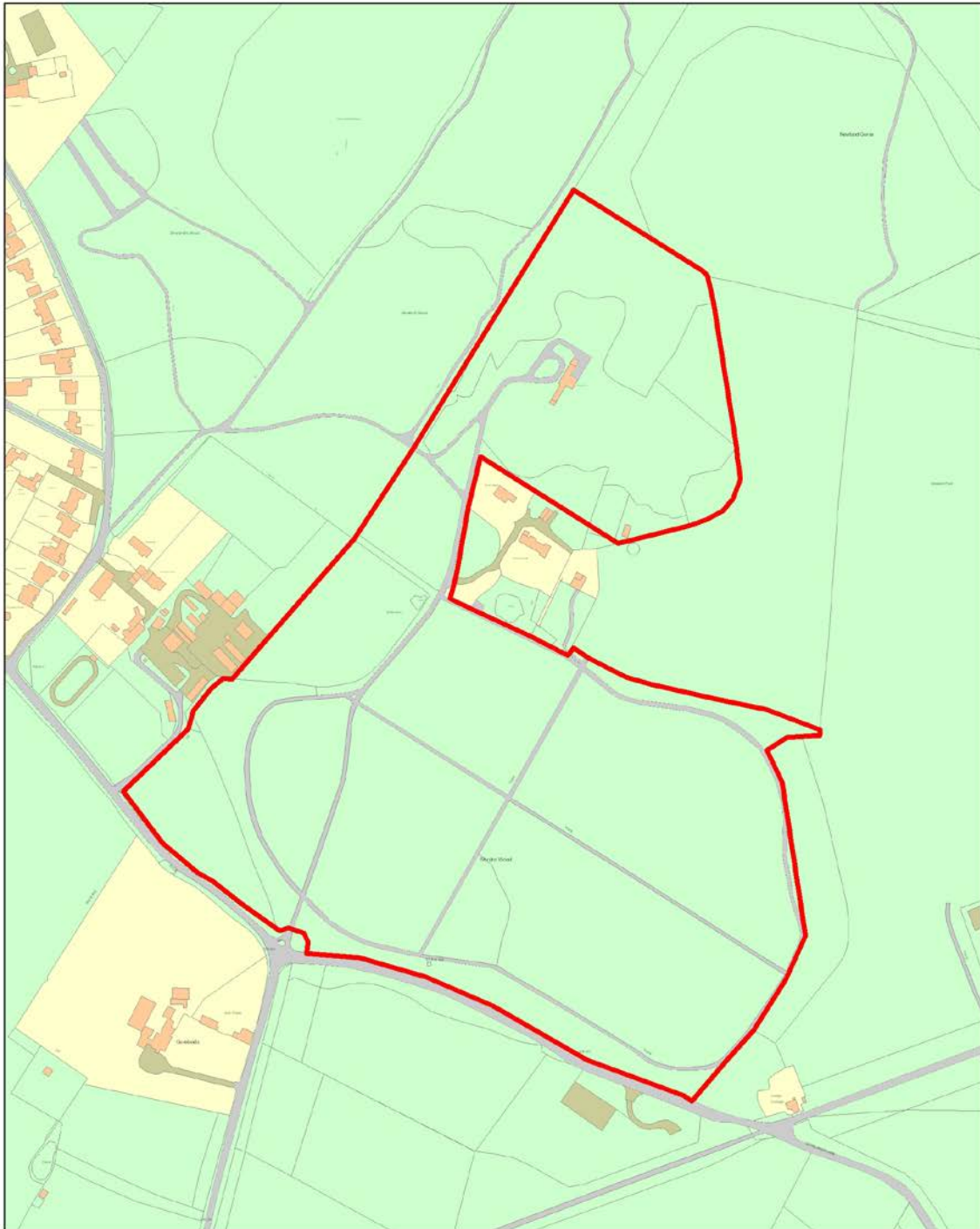


The Finnis Scott
Foundation

Roland
Callingham
Foundation



HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Shrub's Wood: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
January 2021

Scale: 1:4,030 at A4

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Scale: 1:4,030 at A4



Shrub's Wood: 2019 aerial photograph

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Buckinghamshire
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 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: SHRUB'S WOOD	HER NO: 1251601000
COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	GRID REF: TQ 005 942
PARISH: CHALFONT ST PETER	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The grounds of a mid-1930s country house which is of great significance as Modernist interpretation of the traditional English country house and is an important example of “mature” Modernism. The garden is typical for this sort of progressive house of the 1930s with an attached formal terrace encouraging the integration of indoor and outdoor life, surrounded by informal lawns with shrub beds and specimen trees set within the late C18 parkland of Newland Park (q.v.). The enclosed approach through Chiltern woodland, Shrubs Wood, is a key feature. The house was from 1949 owned by Bridget D'Oyley Carte, owner of the D'Oyley Carte Opera Company, for nearly 40 years who developed the garden. The layout survives intact and is comparable with others in this idiom such as the pioneering High and Over, Amersham (1929, q.v.), The Homewood, Surrey (Patrick Gwynne, 1938-39) and Royal Lodge, Windsor.

Archaeological interest

Potential exists for evidence associated with medieval agricultural and woodland uses, particularly trees, banks, routes, and boundaries, also for former features of the designed landscape from the late C18 to the early C20, e.g. buildings, boundaries, drives, rides, the pheasantry and orchard.

Architectural interest

Shrub's Wood is one of only two houses designed during the short partnership of Mendelsohn and Chermayeff (the other is the Cohen House, Chelsea). It is unique as a Modernist interpretation of the traditional English country house and is an important example of “mature” Modernism. It survives intact including the high quality interior. A key feature is the attached formal terraces encouraging the integration of indoor and outdoor life, typical for this sort of progressive house.

Artistic interest

The garden, designed c.1933-35, is typical for this sort of progressive house of the period. The attached formal terraces encouraged the integration of indoor and outdoor life, surrounded by informal lawns with shrub beds and specimen trees. The mature setting within the late C18 parkland and woodland of Newland Park (q.v.) ensures the sense of isolation, which is enhanced by the enclosed woodland approach which opens out into the informal garden lawns surrounding the prominent house. Views beyond the garden were restricted to the east-facing elevation, terrace and lawns, overlooking the park, but these are now largely obscured by mature planting. The combination of formal terrace attached to the house, with informal garden and woodland beyond, set in parkland, is similar to Royal Lodge, Windsor, with a woodland garden laid out in the 1930s with assistance from Sir Eric Savill and Russell Page, and a formal terrace by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, 1936, set in Windsor Great Park.

Historic interest

Bridget D'Oyley Carte while living at Shrub's Wood and developing the garden was the owner of the D'Oyley Carte Opera Company and was also active in managing the family's Savoy hotel. Good records of the earliest days exist including 1930s design drawings, donated by the Savoy archive to the RIBA in 2006, and photographs of 1935, shortly after completion.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By the late C18, the compact wood Shrubs Wood was set in agricultural land, north of the junction of Chesham and Gorelands Lanes, north of Chalfont St Peter and west of Chalfont St Giles (Jefferys, 1770). By 1812 (OSD) Newland Park had been laid out to include Shrubs Wood at the west corner, probably by Sir H.T. Gott who bought the estate in 1772. In Chiltern place names the use of 'Newland' refers to land reclaimed from woodland (Gelling & Cole). The area north of Shrub's Wood, on which the 1930s house was built, was open parkland, with Spring Grove wood enclosing the park to the north. In 1809 the estate was bought by Sir Thomas Allen who in 1826 bought the neighbouring property of The Vache and moved there. His son, Thomas Newland Allen, remained at Newland Park. Known as 'Squire Allen' his main interests were hunting, shooting and fishing. By 1840 (Tithe) a cottage had been built in the park north of Shrubs [sic] Wood which was later known as Wood's Cottage at the heart of a pheasantry. North of this the park had been divided to form an enclosure against the west boundary called The Cover, presumably for game, which by the late C19 (OS) was scrub with a plantation and an orchard.

After World War I Newland Park was sold. A 1922 sale agreement to Sir James Roberts includes Newland Gorse, Shortenhills Wood, Deadhearn Wood, Grovespring wood and Shrubs Wood.

In the early 1930s part of the park including the orchard and Shrubs Wood woodland was used for a new country house and garden. Pevsner suggests that it was bought by Mr Wimmel, who worked for the progressive American Aspro Company on the Slough Trading Estate; however, design drawings for the house indicate that the project was drawn up for R.L. Nimmo (RIBA).

The Nimmo House, as it was known, was designed by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff in International modern idiom and built 1933-34 in the park orchard. It was of monolithic reinforced concrete, with a formal terrace to the east to integrate outdoor and indoor life (Pevsner). Existing park trees were used within the wider, informal garden. The terrace and wall which dropped to the gentler more expansive slope of the lawn below the main garden front gave the house the appearance of an island surrounded by a sea of grass; but while the raised vantage point of the terrace gave the illusion of detachment, the two flights of steps from the south end of the terrace drew it into the surroundings. Contemporary photographs (1935, RIBA, AJ) show views from the east side over the garden and into Newland Park, including from the terrace, dining room, vestibule and living room.

Mendelsohn and Chermayeff were renowned architects in the International modern idiom who built other celebrated buildings including the de la Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, Sussex, but few houses, the only other being 64 Old Church Street, Chelsea (aka The Cohen House). Shrub's Wood is one of the most significant houses in this idiom, and followed the nearby, pioneering High and Over (q.v.), Amersham by Amyas Connell designed in 1929.

By 1947 the owner was Willa May Rolft, who in that year sold the property to Frederick Allwright, who in 1949 sold it to Bridget D'Oyley Carte (1908-85) (Deed, Land Registry). Bridget D'Oyley Carte

had sold the family home, Coleton Fishacre, Devon, after her father's death and was head of the D'Oyley Carte Opera Company from 1948 after the death of her father, until 1982. She was also active in managing the family's Savoy hotel. She added planting and renamed the house Shrub's Wood (Pevsner). The house was frequented by many celebrities, including Sir Malcolm Sargent. Dame Bridget pursued her love of gardening and gave summer parties. She died at Shrub's Wood in 1985 (Wikipedia).

The site remains in private ownership with the house and grounds little altered.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, LANDFORM SETTING

The 20ha site lies near the east Bucks boundary with Hertfordshire on the north-east edge of the village of Chalfont St Peter, 7km south-east of Amersham and 5km west of Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire and 15km east of High Wycombe. The site lies one mile east of the A413, originally the Wendover and Oak Lane turnpike road (Gulland) and before that the London to Buckingham road (Ogilby). The soil is chalk below glacial sand and gravel, with clay and flint in the west.

The isolated Chiltern site is set within the west half of the late C18 Newland Park (q.v.) park in an area which was formerly orchard and a pheasantry, surrounded by park woodland including Shrubs Wood to the south, Shortenhills Wood to the west and Newland Gorse to the north, with open parkland to the east leading towards Newland Park house and pleasure grounds. The wood, drive and garden partly enclose the garden for Wood's Cottage (outside the historic site boundary).

The site is set above the valley of the River Misbourne in a place for which there is evidence of occupation since Neolithic times. Due to the wooded nature of the area, the views are internal.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main approach is through Shrubs Wood along a sinuous drive north from Gorelands Lane at the junction with Chesham Lane, 500m south of the house. The entrance is set back off the road and marked by a gateway with timber piers and gates, flanked by clipped hedges. From here the drive curves through Shrubs Wood, then past Wood's Cottage to the east, opening into informal garden lawns planted with trees, to arrive at the turning circle set in lawn on the west side of the house. The turning circle remains much as it was designed in the 1930s (RIBA, AJ). This drive was carved out of the woodland on a new line when the house was built. A secondary approach off Deadhearn Lane gives access from the west through Shortenhills Wood and Newland Gorse.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Shrub's Wood house (listed Grade II*) stands towards the west edge of Newland Park, some 800m north-west of Newland Park house, and north of Wood Cottage and the old park pheasantry. The substantial two-storey house was built 1933-34, designed by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff. It is larger than usual for modern houses of the 1930s. It is of a long narrow rectangular plan, built in International modern idiom of monolithic reinforced concrete, plastered white which the most progressive architects of the 1930s preferred to the rendered brickwork they more often had to use. The design utilises the fall of the ground on the north side providing an underground utility and garage space. The entrance front faces west and the garden front to the east.

The entrance facade is of two main parts, that to left set forward and linked to the right hand part by a quadrant curve containing the staircase. The entrance to the left portion is recessed within a square headed opening with the original glazed small-paned door with metal glazing bars. To the left of entrance on each floor is a seven-light ribbon window with concrete mullions and metal casements. There is a four-light picture window to the upper floor of the quadrant curve. The side and rear elevations have similar treatment. The interior retains original fitted furniture, panelling and other fitments, all of notably high quality.

The integration of outdoor and indoor life is of particular note. An extensive terrace and loggia extend across the southern and eastern ends of the building reached through a large glazed door in the hall. A particular feature is large expanses of windows running the length of the east and west elevations. Photographs from the interior of 1935, shortly after completion, show that the east front and terrace were intended to enjoy views over the garden lawns into Newland Park. The integration of outdoor and indoor life between the house and garden echoes a similar arrangement at the earlier High and Over, Amersham (Amyas Connell, 1929, q.v.) and the contemporary Hillfield, Dagnall (Berthold Lubetkin, 1933-36).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens enclose the house. The formal terrace runs along the east and south sides of the house below the principal living spaces, and beyond this informal gardens surround the house.

Attached walls and planting boxes surround a garage court to the north and the terrace to the south, overlooked by and reached from the main living spaces at the south end of the house. The living room opens to the curved south end of the walled terrace projecting east over the lawn. Two sets of steps, to the west and east of the curved terrace wall, lead down to the lawn and to the swimming pool beyond, with paved surround. Planting includes box hedges, shrubberies and borders, azaleas, roses, lavender, rhododendron. Wisteria and Virginia creeper are planted against the concrete walls. Within and beyond the formal areas are sycamore, lime, beech, cedar, oak, magnolia and lime trees; swathes of rhododendron line the drive and feature throughout. There is a vegetable garden and former lawn tennis court.

It is believed that Bridget D'Oyley Carte carried out modifications to the original layout but the details and the level of survival are unclear. The current woody planting somewhat obscures the intended views of and from the house including a woody clump on the east edge of the garden where it protrudes into the park.

OTHER LAND

South of the garden is Shrubs Wood, a deciduous wood which contains the main drive. It is designated Ancient Woodland and has a circuit path and cross paths which were present in the later C19 (OS) as part of Newland Park but were not mapped before this (OSD, 1812; Tithe 1840).

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Maps

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Jeffrerys, T., *Map of the County of Buckinghamshire surveyed in 1766-1768* (1770)
Bryant, A., *Map of the County of Buckinghamshire from an actual survey in the year 1824 ...* (1825)
Tithe Map, Chalfont St Peter (1840) (Buckinghamshire Archive)

Ordnance Survey

Ordnance Surveyor's Draft 2" scale (1812) (BL)

25": 1 mile 1st edition surveyed 1876
2nd edition surveyed 1897
3rd edition surveyed 1923

6": 1 mile 1st edition surveyed 1876
2nd edition surveyed 1896
3rd edition surveyed 1913
4th edition surveyed 1938

National Grid revision 1950, 1960, 1976, 1980

Images

Black and white aerial photographs 1947 (RAF), 1950 (RAF), 1965, 1974, 1985 (Bucks HER)
Colour aerial photographs 1989, 1995, 1999, 2003
RIBA photographs black and white c.1935 and modern images
<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=shrubs%20wood>

Photographs, 1935 and design drawings:

<https://www.ajbuildingslibrary.co.uk/projects/display/id/2863>

Archival Material

Buckinghamshire Archive

Sale Henry D Harben to Sir James Roberts Bart Newland Park Estate (24 March 1922) D-X 699/33

RIBA Archive

Design for a house at Newland Park for R.L. Nimmo:

Mendelsohn and Chermayeff designs, working drawings, & working details: Plans, sections and details 1933-34, 12 sheets PA1261/1 (1-12) (including details of forecourt layout and terraces attached to house)

Mendelsohn and Chermayeff alternative designs, working drawings, & working details, 1933-34 in PA350/1(1-77)

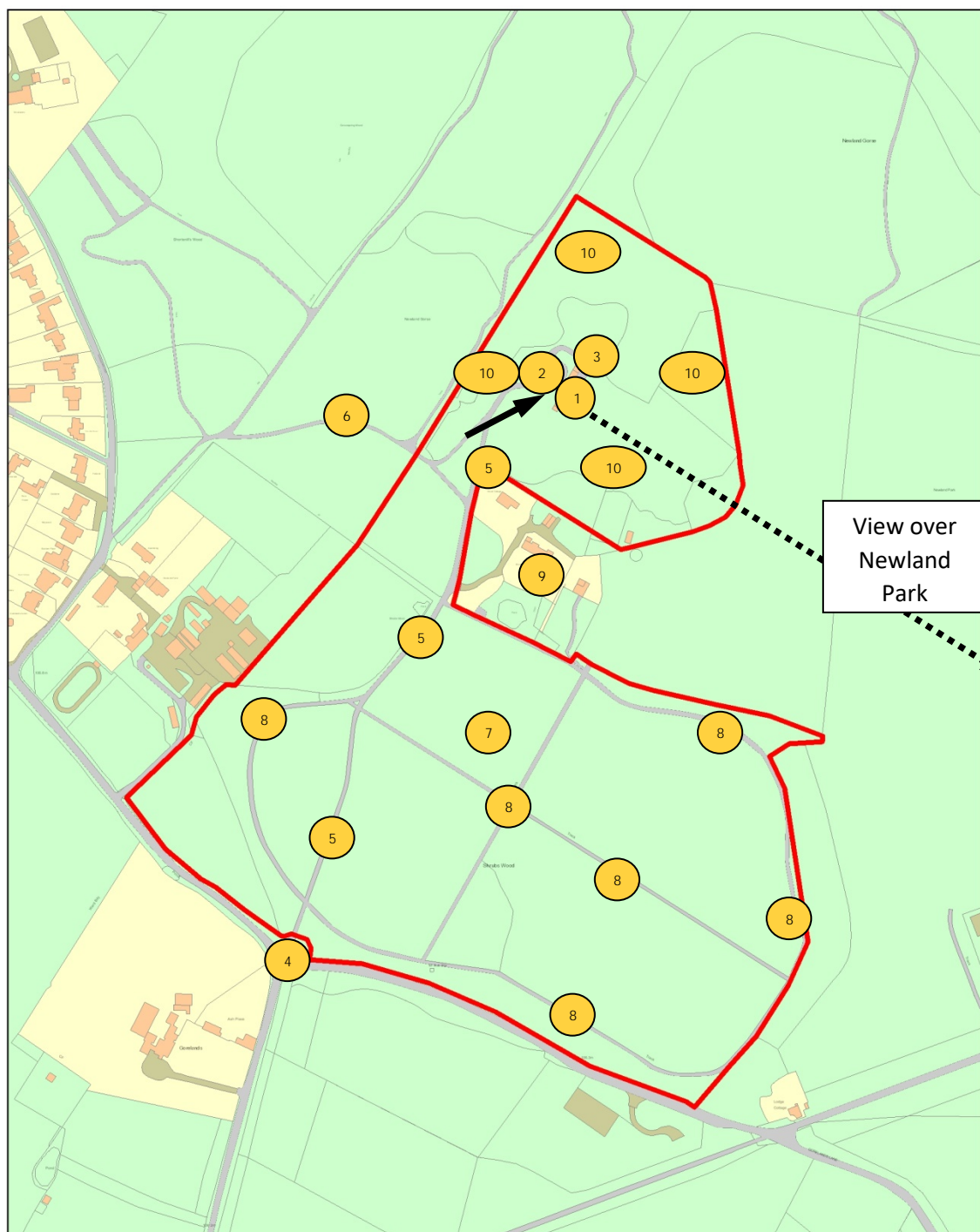
SR January 2021

APPENDIX Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953)

Erich Mendelsohn was one of the most important architects of established German Modernism, having an extensive and lucrative architectural practice in Berlin that employed up to 40 people during the 1920s. His was the largest architect's office in Germany by the end of the decade, and he was building large numbers of Modernist structures from offices to housing, as well as cinemas and factories across Germany and in Russia. With Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, he was a founder of the progressive architectural group known as Der Ring. His reputation dwarfed those of his contemporaries Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, yet today Mendelsohn stands in the shadows of the others. With the rise of anti-Semitism, he fled from Berlin to England via Holland, immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933. Between then and 1936, Mendelsohn designed and built four buildings in Britain – the Nimmo House or Shrub's Wood in Chalfont St Giles, (1933-34), the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill, Sussex (1933-35), the Cohen House, Chelsea (1934-6) and premises for Gilbey's Gin in Camden (1935-36) in collaboration with Serge Chermayeff from their office at No.173 Oxford Street. Their partnership lasted three years and ended with disagreements. At the time, to come to Britain, émigrés had to enter partnerships with British or British naturalised architects – hence Gropius and Fry, York and Bruer, and Chermayeff and Mendelsohn. Norman Foster studied under Mendelsohn at Yale and worked with him after he finished his studies. (KM Heritage)

KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS

Dotted lines indicate currently obscured views



Shrub's Wood: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
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Scale: 1:4,030 at A4

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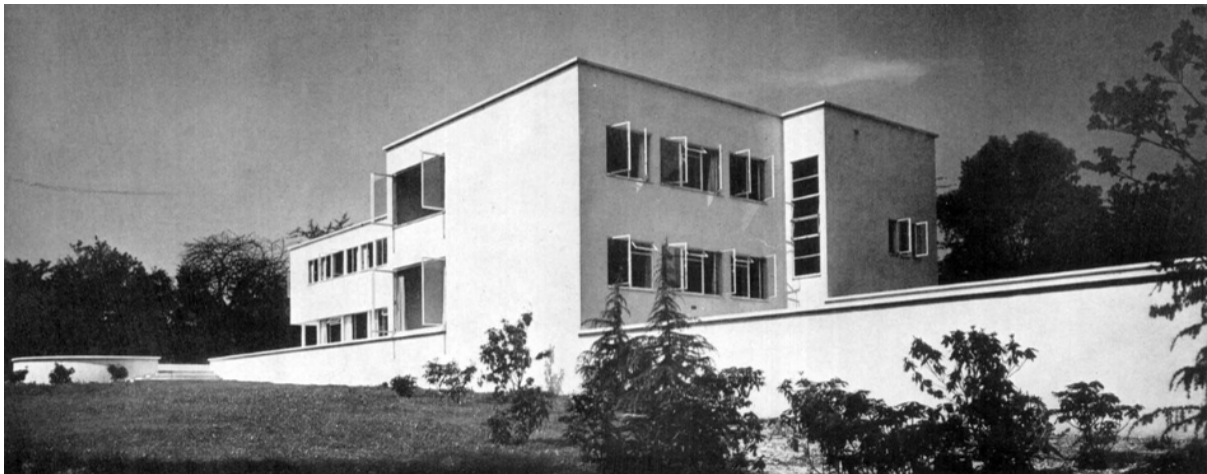
Key to numbered features (see maps above and below)

1. House and terrace	2. Forecourt
3. Service yard	4. Main entrance
5. Main drive	6. Back drive
7. Shrubs Wood woodland	8. Woodland paths, part of Newland Park layout by the early C20
9. Wood's Cottage and garden, former estate cottage for Newland Park and pheasantry	

1935 IMAGES



East, garden front, south end with terrace



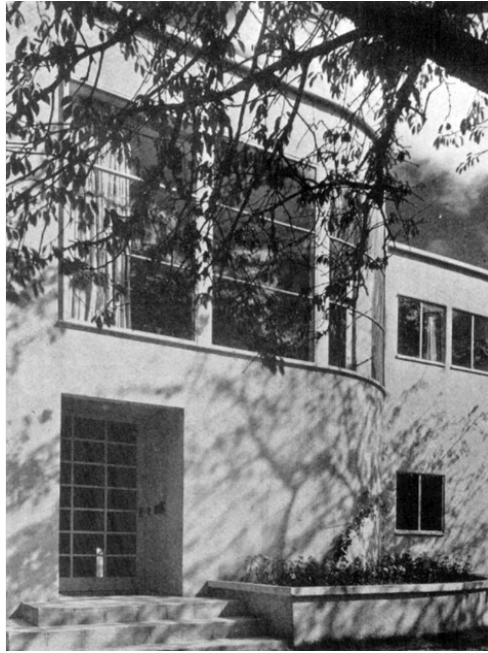
East, garden front, north end with yard wall



Garden terrace below east front

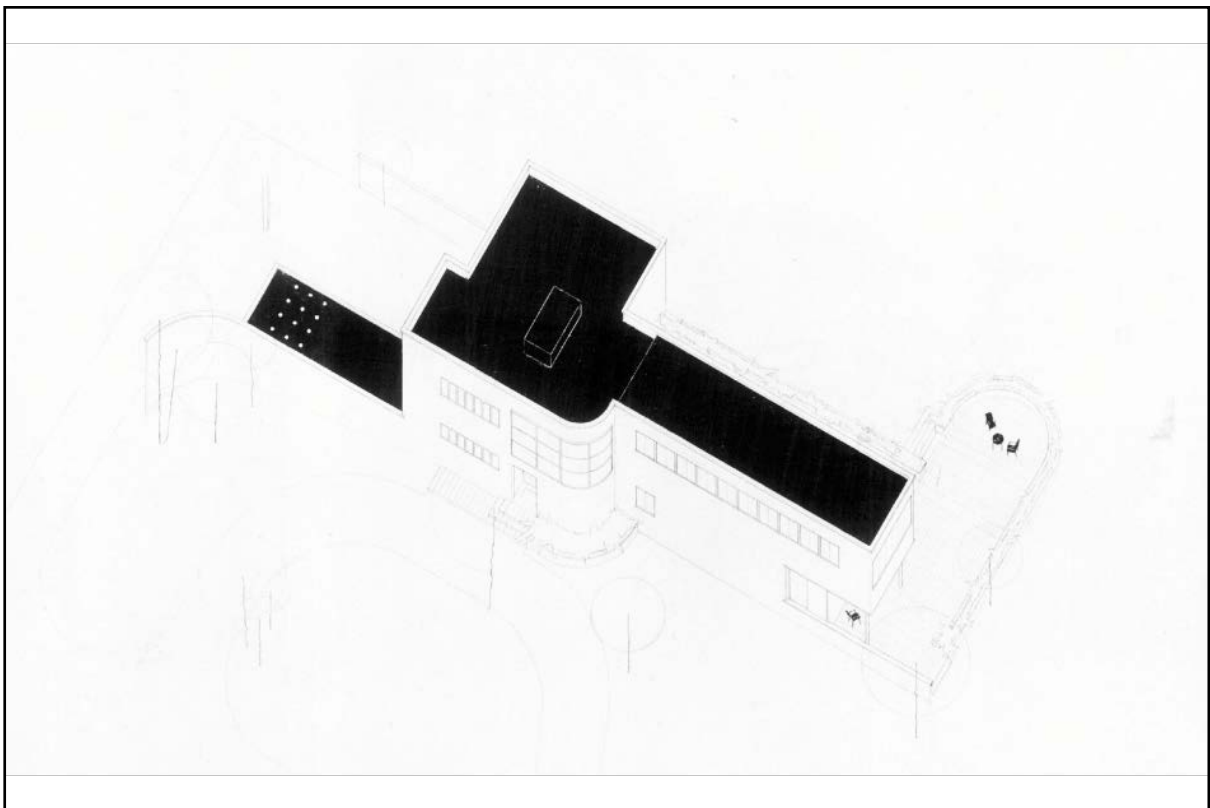


Dining room with view over garden lawns to Newland Park

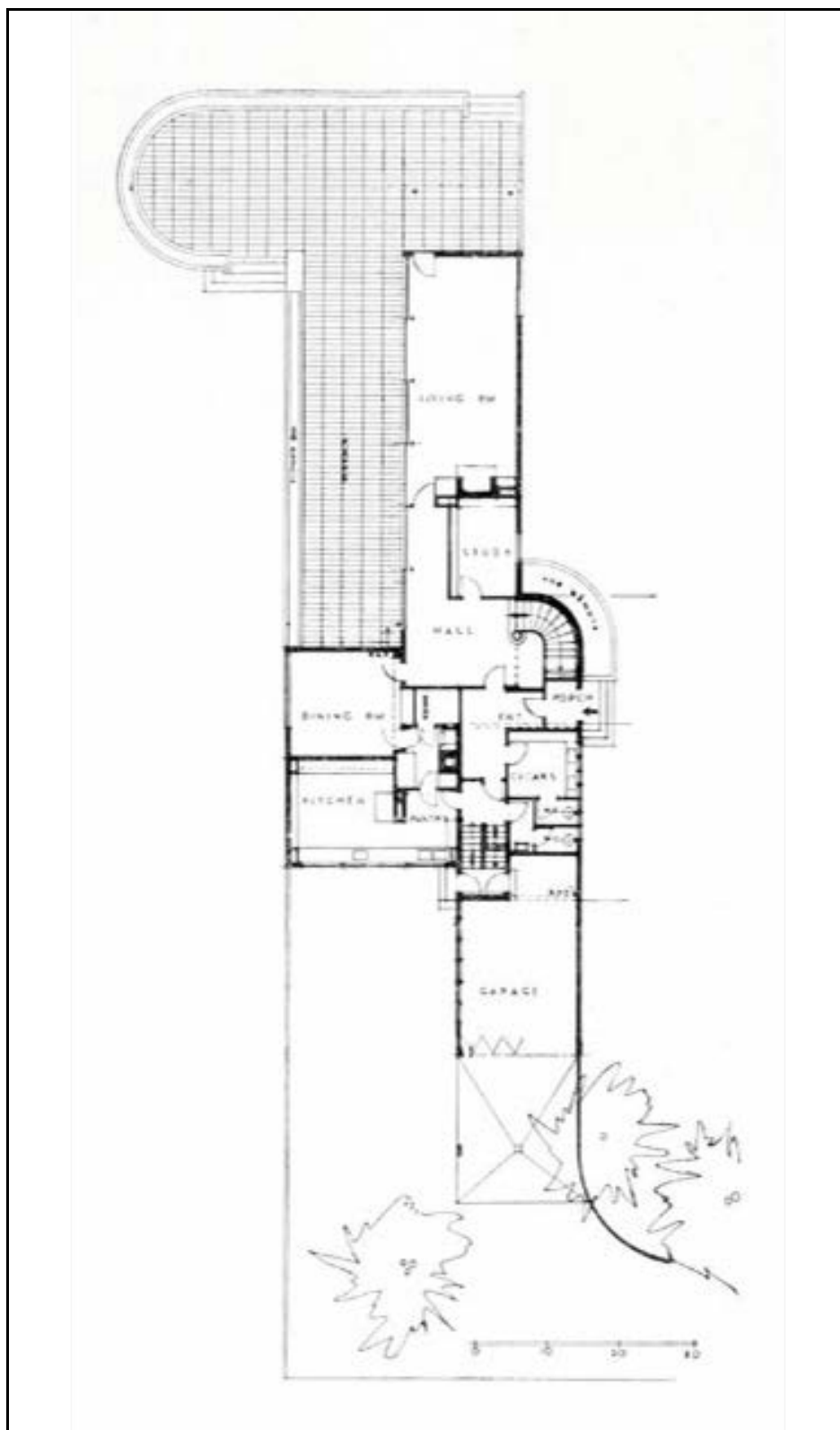


Entrance on west front

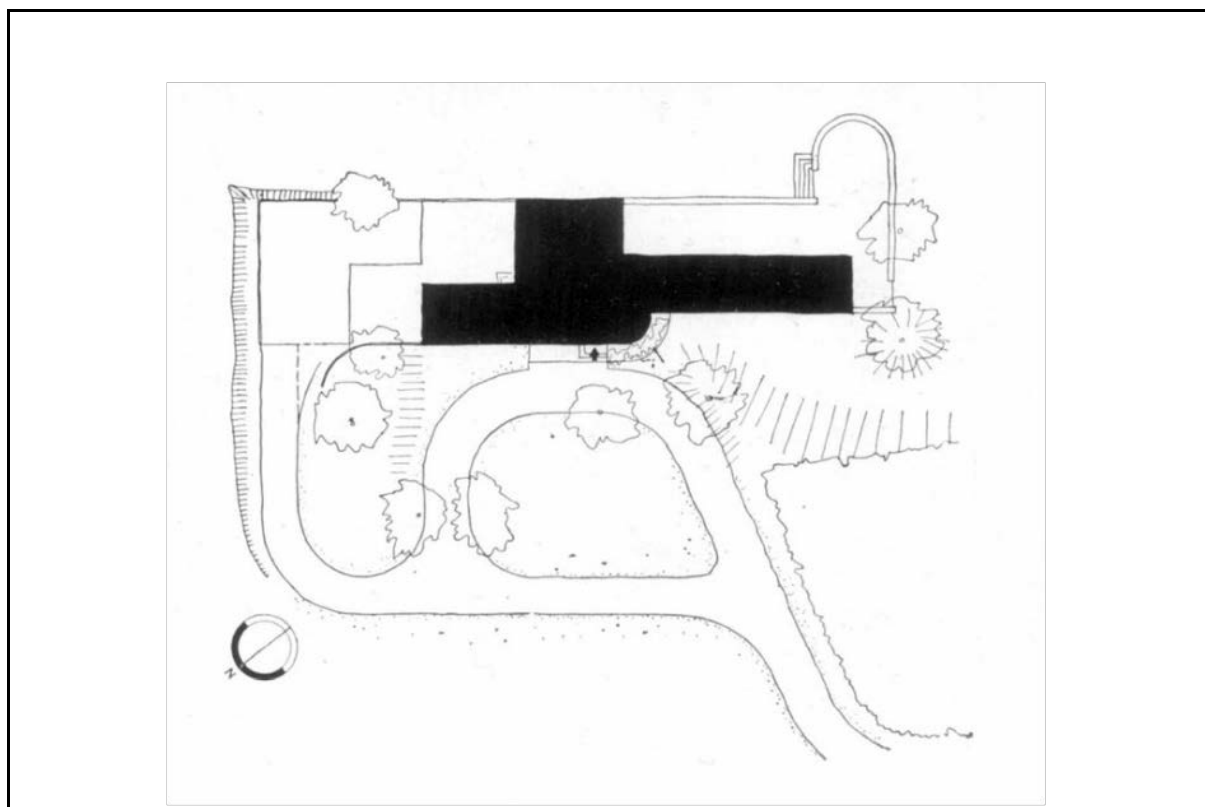
1933-34 PLANS AND VIEWS



Isometric view



Ground floor plan



House, terrace, service yard, drive and forecourt