

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project

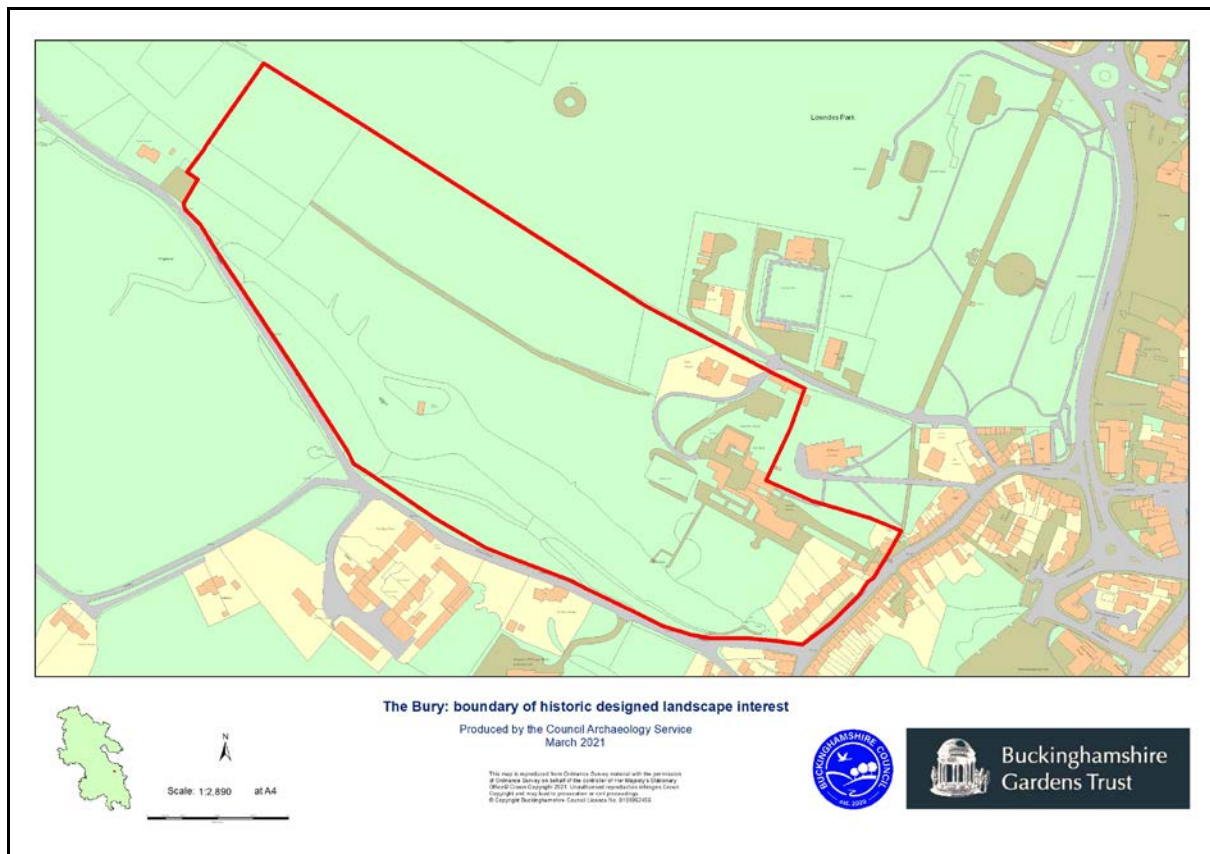


THE BURY, CHESHAM

September 2021



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 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 written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of 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 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: THE BURY	HER NO: 0651600000
COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	GRID REF: SP 956 014
PARISH: CHESHAM	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A country villa built 1712-16 for the Lowndes family of landowners and politicians at the edge of the market town of Chesham. The grounds comprise elements of the original formal layout, with other areas in informal style. Elements of the early-C18 framework include the entrance, gateway, fine flanking lodges, drive and forecourt and the strong relationship with the church and churchyard. Other notable later features include the terraced lawns leading down to Bury Pond, which is a large, C18 serpentine lake possibly created from a formal canal, and the remains of The Grove (now overgrown), formerly a lawned pleasure ground with specimen trees and an C18 avenue bisecting it which overlooked the Pond. The main loss is the kitchen garden, developed in the C20 with houses, although elements survive including some walls. The elements of the early C18 layout are a rare survival; later modifications reflect contemporary trends in various phases. The setting contrasts the buildings along one of the main roads into Chesham, to which the entrance ensemble makes a strong contribution, with the rural Chiltern Pednor valley and the public Lowndes Park.

Archaeological

Potential for evidence of lost structures and garden features since c.1712, e.g. terraces, walls, paths, etc. There is considerable potential for features from the early C18 formal layout and for those relating to the lake (Bury Pond), which may have an origin as a formal canal; also former boat houses and other structures, and the adjacent Grove pleasure ground and avenue and routes across it.

Architectural

A fine country villa ensemble c.1712-16 including a house, lodges, gateway, garden walls and former stables that survives largely intact with little alteration. Later features include service structures in the service yard behind a later-C19 garden loggia and summer house.

Artistic

The grounds for an early C18 country house with later phases, sited to make the most of the location on the edge of Chesham nestled into the rural Chiltern landscape, and proximity to the parish church. Comparable notable gardens in historic Bucks include Lowndes' Winslow Hall (1700-04), the Marquess of Wharton's Upper Winchendon, and Baylis Park, Slough. Browne Willis's house at Water Hall, Bletchley 1707-11 had pavilions, a formal garden and avenues (gone, site within Bletchley Park).

Historical

Associations with nationally important political figures and diplomats who were strongly connected with the history of Bucks. William Lowndes, Chancellor of the Exchequer to Queen Anne, was also responsible for building Winslow Hall (qv).

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Domesday Book (1086) records Chesham Bury as one of the three manors of Cestreham. A second manor was Chesham Higham. At various periods they were under the joint ownership of the Crown, the Earls of Oxford, the Whichcote family and the Lowndes family, but they remained separate entities.

Chesham Bury did not have a manor house. The two manors encircled the church which is the dominant feature of the landscape, half way down the south-east slope of the Chesham Higham park. Pedestrian access still divides the two manors leading through the churchyard and with a shared boundary on Bury Lane, to the south of Chesham Higham.

The manors passed to the Earls of Oxford and by 1656 to the Whichcote family along with the Upper Parsonage, Berry Hill House. Both manors remained in the possession of the Whichcotes until William Lowndes (1652-1723) bought the Bury manor in 1687, followed by serial acquisitions of agricultural and retail property. The ecclesiastical manors were separate entities and in 1769 the Duke of Bedford unified the parish, demolished the Lower Parsonage and replaced it with the building now known as the Rectory.

For most of the C17 there are no records of the area that later became The Bury.

Between 1712-16 The Bury was built by William 'Ways and Means' Lowndes, Secretary to the Treasury, 12 years after he built Winslow Hall, also in Buckinghamshire (q.v.). A 1747 Map (Bucks Archive) shows The Bury and grounds including an outline of the house, stables and timber yard; contemporary features that survive in whole or in part include a pond, iron gates into the churchyard, green walks either side of the fish pond, the kitchen garden, an elm walk leading to a rivulet feeding the Fish Pond, and the New Ground to the South between the house and lake. Lost features include the osier ground, a new walk, 2 green courts behind the house, The Dell, an orchard, the nursery or wilderness, Frog Moor, the New Pond, and Berry Meadow. The pond could have been a former Mill Pond.

By 1770 the names Skottowe, Lowndes and Dennis are shown, with the boundaries of the park and Bury Pond (Jeffreys).

In 1802 William Lowndes (1734-1808), grandson of 'Ways and Means' Lowndes, bought the neighbouring Upper Parsonage (Berry Hill House) with the park adjoining, from Thomas Skottowe for £8,810, and he demolished the house and possibly the viewing tower in the park. The remainder of Chesham Park was used as grazing which ceased in 1959 (Chesham Town Council).

Between 1803 and 1849, after the demolition of Berry Hill House, improvements were made to the joined estate; invoices include work carried out on a bird cage, for many native trees and soft fruit trees, and for the stopping of the gate into the churchyard. Invoices from J Dawney, a nurseryman of Aylesbury, for £26.12.6 in 1804-06 show Morello cherries, peaches, apricots, nectarines and English elms (Bucks Archive). The 1842 Tithe Map shows the enlarged Bury. On the south front of

The Bury was a parterre with an oval fountain basin in front of a conservatory, which had a central section flanked by two smaller wings. A C19 photograph shows the south-facing conservatory against the house (Hunt), in existence in 1878 (OS) and later replaced by a brick loggia.

By 1878 (OS) the house was grouped with the church, vicarage, timber yard, the Grove, and Bury Pond. The walk from the garden front of The Bury round to the west of the house and into the stable yard was blocked by trees, and the parterre had gone. A pump stood in the kitchen garden.

By 1900 (OS) the conservatory had been replaced by the brick loggia on the garden front of the house. A 1905 photograph shows the Old Berkeley (West) Hunt moving off down the drive at The Bury having met on the south lawn (Foxell).

In 1920 The Bury, together with 14 acres of land, was offered to Chesham Urban District Council for £27,500, but the offer was turned down; instead it was leased to the UDC (Hunt). At the outbreak of war in 1939 The Bury was requisitioned by the army (Foxell) and the Lowndes family left Chesham.

In the 1950s The Bury was bought by Colonel Melville as the headquarters of his turkey farm. By the 1980s (AP) 5 houses had been built in the kitchen garden, and Lake House, Bury Lane, was built on the former timber yard, and sold with a barn to a private buyer.

The Bury was subdivided into flats and maisonettes, and occupied by IBB solicitors in 1961 (Foxell and Chesham Society). It remains offices.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The 10 ha. site lies in a valley in the Chiltern market town of Chesham, 13 miles from the county town of Aylesbury and 2.7 miles from Amersham. Chesham rises steeply up the Chess valley sides from c. 90m AOD, to 250m. The river Chess is a chalk stream which rises from three streams; to the north-west along the Pednor Vale at Frogmoor, Higham Mead to the North of the Town and West near Amersham road. They converge in the town near East Street.

The river was called the *Isen* from at least the C12 when it contributed the name to the nearby hamlet of Isenhampstead, later to divide and become the manors of Isenhampstead Chenies and Isenhampstead Latimer and persisting until the C19. Possibly 'Isen', which derives from the Anglo-Saxon word for iron, refers to the chalybeate or iron-charged spring waters which feed the river.

The site abuts the walled churchyard of St. Mary's parish church above to the north-east. The south-east boundary runs along Church Street from which the site is entered. The former kitchen garden boundary was probably a red brick wall but has been removed since the construction in the garden of numbers 91-99 Church Street, a row of mid-C20 houses.

The longer south-west boundary is marked by Pednor Lane; the roughly parallel north-east boundary against Lowndes Park is marked in part by a lane past the church and partly by a public footpath. It is bounded on the south side by railings along Pednor Road, as far as The Warren; at this point, just beyond the head of the lake, the railings extend north-west to Lowndes Park. However the current boundary goes north from Pednor Road to Lake House, and further west there is another boundary going north to a point just beyond Lake House. From the north lodge the wall turns west and forms

the boundary with the churchyard. The boundary incorporates the edge of the wing over the stable archway, the stables themselves and new buildings and then turns north to Bury Lane, along the western boundary of the churchyard.

The site is set in the Chess valley and is overlooked by hillsides. The grounds of the former ?Grove lie adjacent to the north boundary, now Lowndes Park.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance lies 50 metres south-east of The Bury. The entrance drive from Church Street is flanked by two lodges (listed Grade II), each attached by a low brick wall with iron railings to gate piers supporting wrought iron gates. Each early C18 lodge is attached to a short stretch of C18 red brick wall to its outer side. That to the north is attached at the far end to the churchyard wall. That to the south probably formerly was attached to the kitchen garden wall along the roadside (gone). The one-storey C18 red brick lodges have rusticated brick quoins and panelled parapets with end quoins and plinth. The later Doric porches were added to the original small boxes (Pevsner). They have one window each facing the road and two facing the opposite lodge with sashes in cambered architraves, panelled parapets, end quoins and plinth. The central doorcases have round-headed arches with 'Gothick' glazing to fanlights and porches with Tuscan columns but Roman Doric entablature.

From here the drive leads north-west to the forecourt on the north front. This has been unchanged for 300 years. North of the drive a grassy slope leads up to the brick wall that forms the boundary with the churchyard. Pedestrian access to the churchyard is via an C18 arch in the brick wall north of the house, probably when the house was built.

The arch from the churchyard leads west via steps to a path along the wall to another flight of steps opposite the north entrance of The Bury. West of the drive another brick wall, the boundary with the kitchen garden, is screened by a tall yew hedge that continues to the entrance to the gardens near the south-east corner of the house.

Beyond the forecourt the drive leads west into the stable yard under a large arch with metal pillars with hinges from former double gates. The main arch is flanked by smaller arches with wooden pedestrian gates, one functioning and the other a dummy for symmetry. From here the service drive to the timber yard leads to a modern house, Bury Barn, and via Lake House to Bury Lane, north of the house; this winds down from the former timber yard through the stable yard to Church Street.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The Bury (1712-16, listed Grade II) stands towards the south-east corner of the site. The entrance front is to the north, with the garden front to the south and service structures to the west. The house has 2 stories, cornice, panelled parapet and sash windows. The date 1712 (16?) appears on rainwater heads. The early C18 5-bay front was extended in the late C18 to 7 bays and the west wing was added in 1853. The north front has been much altered. The west wing includes a later C19-brick loggia with a door leading to the stable yard which connects the house with the summer house. St Mary's church, on higher ground to the north (outside the historic site, listed Grade I), dominates the north front. The garden front to the south overlooks Bury Pond beyond the terrace and lawn.

Attached to the north corner is a Neo-Tudor wing including carriage arch over the service drive to the stables.

The detached C18 stables (listed Grade II) stand north-west of the house on the west side of the adjacent yard and have been converted to residential/office accommodation. They are built of red and grey brick with a tiled roof, 2 stories, and 3 gables facing the archway from the forecourt. There are closed windows and casements, with pointed arched glazing bars under flat arches. A red brick service building with red clay tiled hipped roof, of c. late C19/early C20 origin, stands opposite on the east side of the yard with Lowndes House, a modern two-storey building, to the north of this. All are now offices. The modern Lake House stands in its own garden above to the north of this, reached by a steep drive from the stable yard up the hillside which terminates at a car park at the top by the lane on the north boundary.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

A door and steps from the centre of the south, garden front leads down to the terrace overlooking the lawn and lake beyond. The gardens can be approached from three other places: from the forecourt along a path beside the east end of the house onto the terrace below the garden front; through a door from the stable yard to the loggia at the north-west end of the terrace; and by skirting the west side of the house, beyond the stables, onto the terrace. From the terrace a broad flight of steps leads down to a lawn and then the vestiges of a retaining wall and smaller steps.

Beyond the wall and steps at the southernmost limit of the lawn is the 1.2ha. Bury Pond which contains one of the springs that feeds the river Chess. It now has concrete sides and the water level fluctuates seasonally depending on the flow from the springs. An island lies towards the west end formerly reached from the north bank via a footbridge, with a landing stage on the north shore, two boathouses (1878 OS). The water exits via a sluice to a culvert under Pednor Road, through properties in Pednormead End and thence in another culvert to the brook at the junction of Church Street and Wey Lane. It joins two other springs to form the Chess. The lake is c.460 metres long and runs roughly parallel to the south-west boundary. The island is close to the north shore 245m from the south-east end, and is out of sight of the house. The widest point is c.30m and it has an irregular linear shape. A path leads over sluice gates at the south-east end and round the south perimeter adjoining Pednor Road, with much fallen timber on this boundary. Wooden stumps remain from a boat house on the north side of the island and on the south side are the brick foundations of another boat house.

West of the house is a disused tennis court, first mapped in 1976 (OS). From the west edge of the terrace a gravel path leads down to a flagged area where a landing stage used to be. Lake House and Bury Barn have been built on the boundary with Lowndes Park to the north-west on Bury Lane. A further parcel of land extends from the west end of the Lake House boundary on the path in Lowndes Park to Pednor Road including the island and reaching west to the boundary by the warren, which is in private ownership. The service entrance from Bury Lane links Lake House and Bury Barn with Church Street. The fountain has gone from the parterre but there are still two rectangular grass beds flanked by paths in front of the loggia and summerhouse west of the main terrace.

North-west of the lawn the former Grove pleasure ground extends north-west. Although this 13 acre area is now thickly treed it was formerly an informal lawn planted with scattered specimen trees

including conifers which overlooked Bury Pond lining the south-west edge of the lawn. The pattern of a sunken path called The Grove survives, which by the early C20 (OS) was flanked by an avenue and led north-west to a small enclosure called The Warren. A parallel path to the south led to a gateway out to the lane leading north-west to Pednor Bottom.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The remains of the kitchen garden (formerly c.0.2ha. in extent) lie immediately south of the drive beyond the south lodge, and run along the east boundary of the main lawn. A short stretch of the former brick wall runs south along Church Street from the South Lodge. A photograph (Hunt) shows that it was formerly a uniform height and extended south along the east boundary to Pednor Road. The remaining boundaries are part tall brick and yew hedge to the north against the main approach to the house, and a tall yew hedge on the west side leading down to the lake.

The area contains a row of mid-C20 houses on the east side, numbers 91-99 Church Street, and their gardens to the west. By 1842 (tithe map) a structure abutted the south-facing side of the north wall, and a free-standing structure stood in the middle of the garden; a pump is shown by 1878 (OS). By 1947 structures stood in the middle (OS and AP). The entrance may have been on the north side near South Lodge. There are invoices for fruit trees but the 1747 map key also refers to an orchard.

REFERENCES

Books

Hunt, J., *Chesham, a pictorial history* (1997), 29, 76, 77.

Foxell, C., *The Lowndes' Chesham Estate: The Early Photographs* (2011).

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

Bucks Archives

D/LO/6/14/2-30

The Bury building report dated Nov 1980 - Aug 1981, NMR BF 105425

HER 0184500000-MCB 5455

Carolyn Adams archive notes

Aerial Photos

1947 (RAF)

1985, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1999 (HER)

Photographs

Kitchen Garden wall (Hunt 29)

Maps

1747 Estate Map (Bucks Archives Ma/44/2T)

Jeffreys, Map of Buckinghamshire 1770

Bryant, Map of Buckinghamshire 1825

1842 Tithe Assessment

Ordnance Survey

1812 OS surveyors draft 2" drawing (BL)

25" scale: 1878 1st edition;

6" scale: 1883; 1900; 1925 revised edition; 1938 emergency edition; 1945 provisional edition; 1947
Late 1950s National Grid provisional 6"
1976 National Grid 1:10,000

Websites

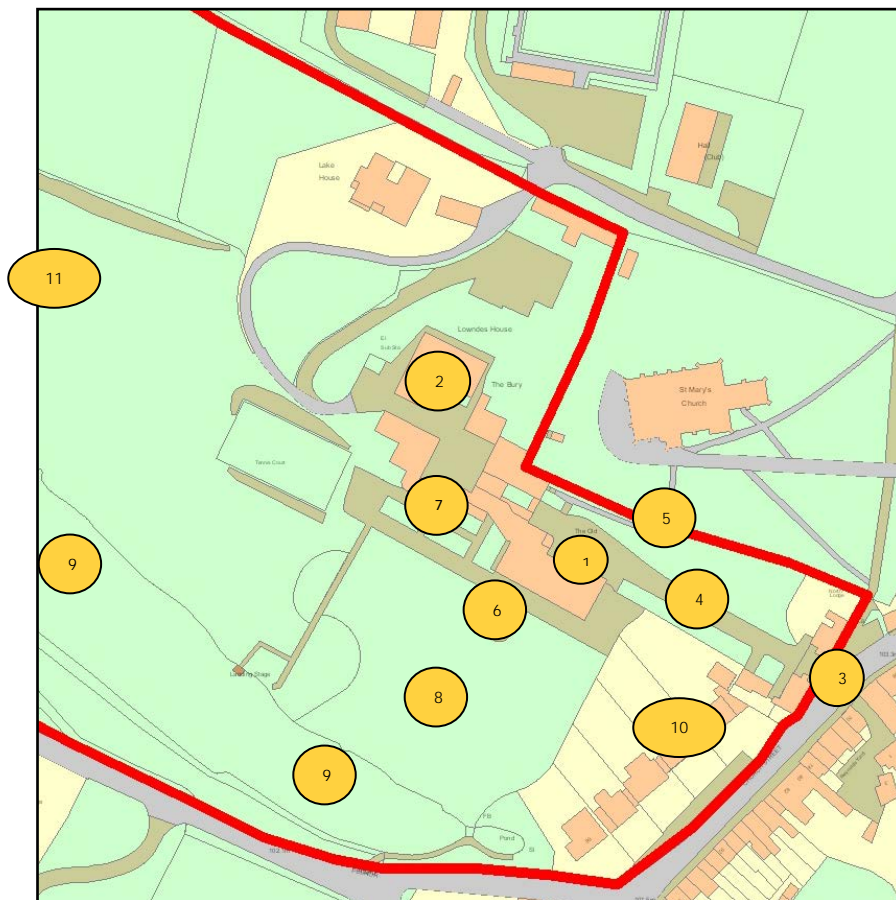
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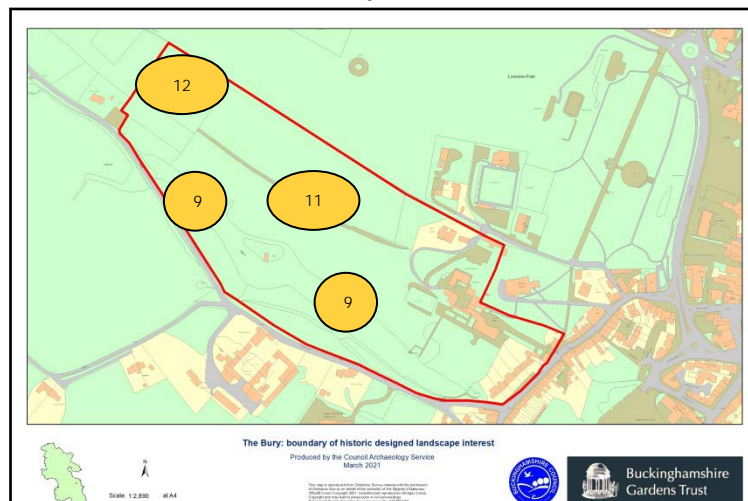
L. Wormell and J Kidd, February 2021

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KEY HISTORIC FEATURES



Core of the site



The wider landscape

Key to numbered features

1. House and Forecourt	2. Stable block
3. Gateway & lodges	4. Main Drive
5. Churchyard gateway	6. Terrace
7. Loggia and Summerhouse to west	8. Lawn
9. Lake – Bury Pond	10. Former kitchen garden, now 91-99 Church Street
11. The Grove pleasure ground & former avenue	12. The Warren

CURRENT IMAGES



View from lodges to the forecourt



Garden front facing south



North facade, arch and neo-Tudor wing



View from east end of terrace towards the lake



South Lodge and kitchen garden wall



Bury Pond



Terrace looking east, former parterre



Parterre



Loggia with gate to the stable yard



Steps down to the lake



South entrance



Church from south terrace



Stable yard west side



Stable yard north



Cedar and gates



Upper lake - dry



The Grove



The Grove



View down the service road to the yard



Looking west up the lake - dry



Boundary -park railings



Stable yard pump



Stable yard boot scraper