

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



This image is from a collection held by the Swanbourne History Group.

## SWANBOURNE HOUSE

October 2021

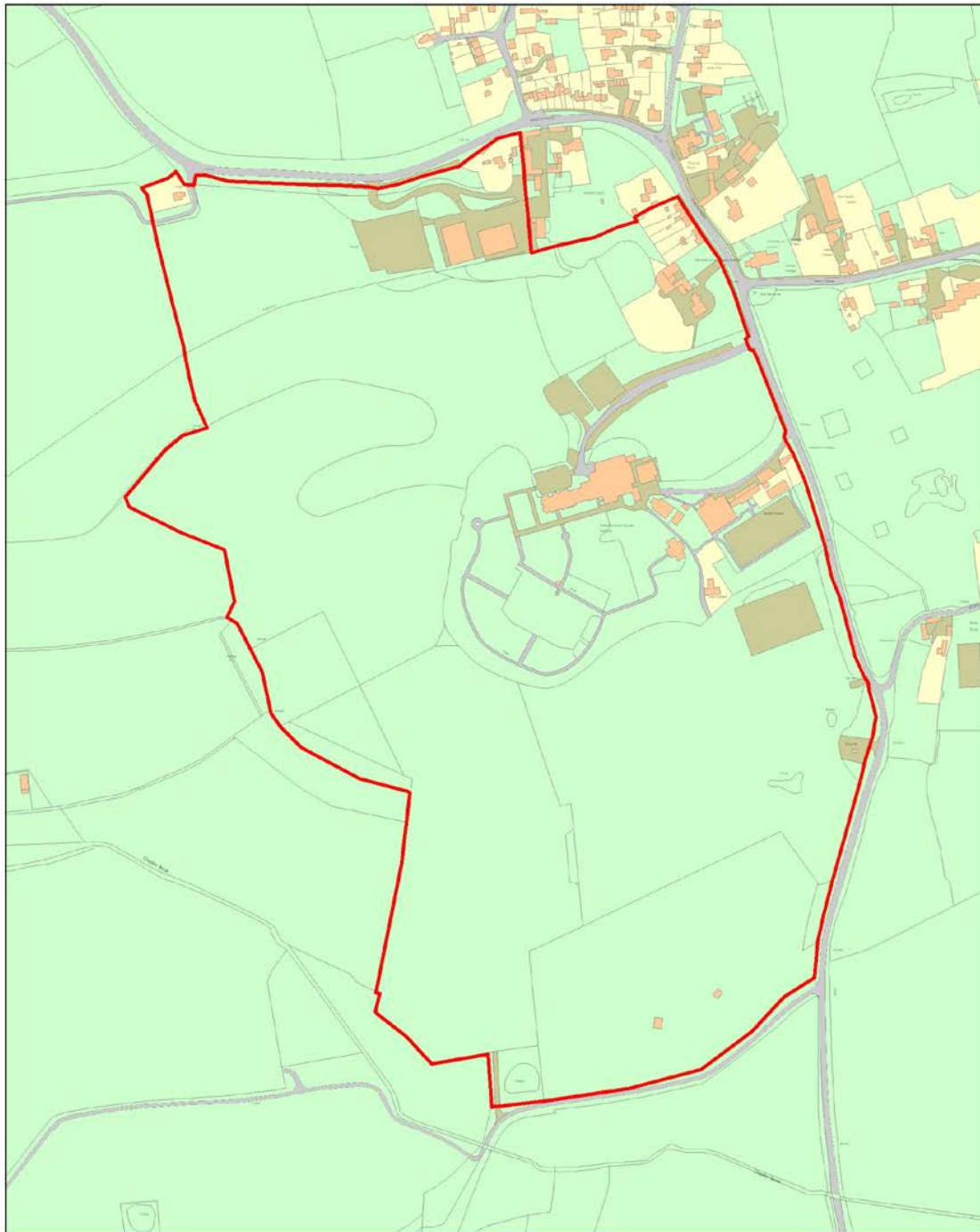


The Finnis Scott  
Foundation

Roland Callingham  
Foundation



## HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



### Swanbourne House: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service  
November 2020



Scale: 1:4,597 at A4



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**Buckinghamshire  
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Scale: 1:4,597 at A4

**Swanbourne House: 2019 aerial photograph**

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November 2020



**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 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, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage/ Historic England *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 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 a significant grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

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

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

<b>COUNTY:</b>	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>Swanbourne House</b> <b>(Swanbourne House and The Manor House)</b> HER <a href="#">1103500000</a> and <a href="#">0493201000</a>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	AYLESBURY VALE	
<b>PARISH:</b>	SWANBOURNE	
<b>OS REF:</b>	SP 799 270	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

The grounds of an 1860s Italianate country house by William Burn including terraces, informal pleasure grounds, a walled kitchen garden, and parkland, with many mature trees. Edwardian additions when the pleasure ground was remodelled include an extension for a tennis lawn set in shrubbery and overlooked by a small circular gazebo, and the north lodge. The ensemble survives largely intact, except for the loss of the north drive and kitchen garden structures and layout, and since the site became a school in the mid-C20 the addition of school structures and sports pitches around the house, structures and pitches in the kitchen garden, and in the park a much enlarged Home Farm.

### Archaeological interest

The site has the potential for evidence associated with former agricultural and village uses, particularly relating to surviving ancient trees but also for banks, routes, boundaries and buildings. Ridge and furrow survives in the park. It has potential for former features related to the designed landscape since the 1860s such as buildings, paths, steps, beds, terraces, drives, boundaries, etc, particularly for the kitchen garden, and lost north drive.

### Architectural interest

A typical group of structures for a new country house of the 1860s in Italianate style by the notable architect William Burn who worked on other projects in the county including Cliveden in the 1820s (house replaced 1850s) and Taplow Court in the 1850s. This was a late and gloomy work of his (Pevsner); he also apparently designed the contemporary stable block and forecourt balustrade and gateways, and possibly other structures such as the kitchen garden walls and gardener's cottage/lodge. A brick and half-timbered lodge was added in 1909 to the north drive. Within the park the C16/early C17 Manor House is a good example of its type built in stone.

### Artistic interest

The layout comprises a typical ensemble of garden, pleasure ground and park for a country house developed in the 1860s, with Edwardian additions to the garden including a tennis lawn and a small gazebo, much of which survives largely intact including many mature trees, although one of the original main drives has gone (the north) along with the kitchen garden layout. The design embraces the elevated position with views to the west and south, and has strong physical links with the adjacent Swanbourne Estate property: the Old House (q.v.), and with the adjacent rural and village setting in the Vale of Aylesbury.

### Historic interest

The site has strong links with the Fremantle family and the understanding of its significance is enhanced with the survival of documentary evidence including estate maps in a private collection.

**Note:** Swanbourne House, including Swanbourne Manor House, forms part of the Swanbourne Estate, along with another designed landscape adjacent to the east, that of the Old House, which is covered in a separate BGT dossier. While the two parks and gardens developed separately, they have a strong physical and to a lesser extent design relationship. The Swanbourne Estate includes other areas around the village.

## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Manor House has an early origin but does not seem to have had a significant garden or park. It was incorporated into the grounds of Swanbourne House in the 1860s when the house was built and its grounds were laid out.

Sir John Fortescue, cousin and personal advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, was knighted in 1592. He served as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1589 to 1603 and was the member of Parliament for Buckinghamshire from 1588 to 1598. He had a large house built for himself at Salden, close to Mursley a village 1.5 miles from Swanbourne. The Manor House at Swanbourne close to the church was probably built for his family in the C16 with additions in the early C17 (Pevsner, *VCH*). It may be on the site of an earlier manor house and was one of the most important houses in the village. The 1599 map of Swanbourne covers the Fortescue estate including Swanbourne; the roads, agricultural land and some houses are shown (Swanbourne History website).<sup>1</sup>

In 1624 John and Thomas Adams purchased the Lordship title, becoming Joint Overlords of the Manor. The purchase included two mansions, the White House (now known as The Old House) was occupied by John and the Manor House by Thomas (*VCH*, Reading). The Manor House later became the home of John Deverill (also spelt Deveral) and remained in the Deverill family until 1830 when it was purchased by Thomas Francis Fremantle (Bart) whose parents had bought the nearby Old House in 1798. (Parry) He was a wealthy and influential man. When his uncle, William Fremantle stepped down as MP for Buckingham in 1826, Thomas took his place. By this time, in the early C19 (OSD, Bryant) the area he later laid out as the grounds of Swanbourne House remained agricultural land. The 'Manor House' or 'Stone House' and its small gardens lay at the north-east corner of this land, opposite the church.

Thomas was MP for Buckingham for 20 years until 1846, when he argued with the 2nd Duke of Buckingham over the repeal of the Corn Laws. He then became vice-chair and eventually chair of the Board of Customs, until 1873. In 1874, he was raised to the peerage as Baron Cottesloe.

Between 1830 and 1860 Thomas bought much of the farmland, and other properties in Swanbourne, finishing in 1860, with all the houses, cottages and fields between New Walk and Petticote Lane (now Cemetery Hill). This area is known as Swanbourne House Hill (Reading). All but two of the properties were demolished leaving only the hedgerow trees marking the original layout (Memories of families connected with Swanbourne House School).

Fremantle decided to build a new mansion in the newly united agricultural land around the Elizabethan/ Jacobean Manor House. He employed William Burn 1864-65 to design Swanbourne House south of the Manor House, which he had unrealised plans to demolish (Sheahan), surrounding the new Italianate mansion and stable court with fashionable gardens and a park. The new layout, typical of its time for a substantial new house and grounds, included formal terraces and lawns, informal pleasure grounds, a walled kitchen garden, park and drives (OS 1878). The kitchen garden had a slip garden around the west and south sides. An 1866 plan (private collection) includes a 'Scent Garden' west of the house, with a covered way, flower beds and a conservatory on the south side of the house and a grass walk bounded by an iron fence parallel to the east drive. (Swanbourne Estate Plans) This east drive, off the village street, linked with that to the Old House on the opposite side of the road and the east entrance and that area

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<sup>1</sup> In 1963 the map was owned by a Mr Vardon (Elvey).



of the new park overlooked the park of the Old House. By 1883 Swanbourne House was 'a spacious mansion of white brick, surrounded by well planted grounds and a picturesque park of about 80 acres and commands most extensive views of the surrounding country.' (*Northampton Mercury* 25 Aug 1883)

Lord Cottesloe died in 1890, leaving the Swanbourne Estate to his son, Thomas, 2nd Baron, MP for Buckinghamshire 1876-85. He renovated Swanbourne House (*Bucks Herald*). Detailed plans of the Kitchen Garden in 1891 show it divided into four with a central water tank, pyramidal fruit trees and a range of buildings to the north west. (Swanbourne Estate Maps) The Manor House was restored in the early C20 (Parry) and in 1909 The Lodge, Winslow Road was built to serve the drive from the Winslow Road. Changes were made to the paths around the house (OS 1898, 1926). The 2nd Baron died in 1918 at which point the landscape had reached its most fully developed ornamentally. His son, the 3rd Baron, inherited the Estate, but preferred to remain at The Old House.

In 1920 the contents of Swanbourne House were sold and the building became a school, within the ownership of the Swanbourne Estate.

For many years the arrival of the school did not make a huge impact on the gardens and grounds: memories recorded by families associated with Swanbourne House School in the 1930s speak of the swimming bath, the Head Gardener lived in the lodge next to it, and there were greenhouses, an apple loft and a garden wall. At the end of an avenue, beyond the rose garden, was a huge stone, known as the Stone of Sacrifice, which was believed to be a meteorite dug up when ploughing the field. Plants included campsia, forsythia, Gloire de Dijon roses and batchelor's button and blue cedars which 'legend had it' Lord Cottesloe had brought from Canada in his hat to avoid Customs. A sunken bed west of the Knot garden with low box hedges, had a succession of plants including geraniums and delphiniums. These gardens had possibly been laid out by John Waterer and Crisp but the source for this is unclear. (Memories of families connected with Swanbourne House School)

In the 1940s the Knot garden survived west of the house and the kitchen garden to the south-east was divided in four as it was in 1880 and still fully cultivated (Photographs, OS). As in 1926 (OS) a terrace on the south front, had a path down to a sundial in the centre of a hedged square and a path leading south-west. The path to the south-west led to a gazebo, possibly the 'garden room' mentioned in 1883 (*Northampton Mercury* 25 Aug) and there was a flight of steps. Many mature trees corresponded to those planted in the late C19 (Aerial photos and OS). This layout survived into the later C20 although tennis courts, now a car park, were constructed north of the stable yard, in the kitchen garden and to the south of this.

The site remains in school use with some additional buildings including in the stable yard.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING**

The 40 ha. site forms part of the Swanbourne estate which lies south of the village of Swanbourne, 2.5 miles east of Winslow and 9 miles north of Aylesbury. The village is set on a ridge 40m AOD.

The site is bounded to the north by the Winslow Road (B4032 Winslow to Leighton Buzzard Road). After passing Home Farm, this road then turns south through the Estate, forming the east boundary. From east to west, a bridleway, a small section of the Swans Way and Midshires Way, form the southern boundary. The west boundary, against fields, is marked by mixed hedges. Similar hedges form most of the estate boundaries, although there is a stretch of high wire fence between the two drives leading to Swanbourne House.

Swanbourne House lies in the middle of the park, on Grange/Swanbourne House Hill. The site enjoys various views to the north, south and west over the rolling Vale of Aylesbury. There is a boundary trench to the south and west of the hill (Reading). The soil is a gravelly sand based on clay.

The Manor House and its grounds stand 190m north-east of Swanbourne house, west of Winslow Road at its junction with Mursley Road, opposite St Swithin's Church. The house is set back from the road, behind a brick wall and lawns, on the east edge of the grounds.

The grounds of the Old House form a contiguous parkland setting east of the Winslow Road. It may have been possible when Swanbourne House was built to enjoy views between it and the Old House, although the historic OS show many trees in the respective parks which may have precluded this.

## **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The two approaches to Swanbourne House School from Winslow Road follow the course of those present in 1880 (OS). In 1885 (OS) there was a third approach from the junction with the Mursley Road south of The Manor House linking to these, which had gone by 1923 (OS). The main approach to the Manor House is a short (c25m) drive via a gateway off the Winslow Road opposite the church; this entrance was present in 1880.

The main entrance is 200m north-east of the house, some 50m south of the church, and is marked by a five bar wooden double gate. The north-east drive, framed by a lime avenue curves south-west for c150m; the trees on the south side are more mature and continue a line of trees east of Winslow Road in the grounds of The Old House. Car parking bays line part of the north edge of the drive. After 40m a path leads north to The Manor House. 60m further on a pedestrian crossing goes to hard tennis courts on the north side and a car park. This drive curves gently south west to enter the gravelled forecourt below the north front of the house; the forecourt is framed to the west, north and east by a stone balustrade (Listed Grade II) built c 1865. The corners are curved and the west and east sides have entrances flanked by square stone piers. The piers on the east side have ball finials.

A further entrance 185m east of the house curves west from Winslow Road for c120m to the service buildings east of the house, originating as stables etc but now supplemented with school buildings. North of this drive is a line of trees, to the south is a series of buildings several of which were present in 1880 (OS) and may have been accommodation for the gardening staff, as the former kitchen garden lies just beyond to the south.

In 1866 a north drive from Winslow Road curved south across the park (Estate map and OS). A red brick and timber lodge was built at the entrance in 1909, c.425m north-west of the house. The drive remained in 1985 (OS) but has now gone. Instead the entrance gives access to a new drive leading east to a greatly enlarged Home Farm (previously Grange Hill Farm) with a C16-17 farmhouse (listed Grade II). Scattered trees mark the former course of the drive curving gently south-east across the park to the house. A footpath leads west from Home Farm across the park to North Hill Farm and then to Granborough. A former footpath crossing the southern tip of the park shown in 1885 had gone by 1923 (OS).

The approach to the Manor House is via a short drive off the Winslow Road opposite the church to the east front through garden lawns containing car parking and a play area for Swanbourne House Nursery School. Historic walls enclose this area. An historic gateway separates this area from the grounds beyond.

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

Swanbourne House (listed Grade II), now the main school building, is a white brick building with stone dressings and slate roofs which stands towards the centre of the site enclosed by pleasure grounds and beyond this the park. Constructed c.1865 by William Burn, Pevsner describes it as a "A tall, dour Italianate mansion that looks as if it might



have strayed from Belgravia. Late in Burn's career and not his best work!" It was built on the site of the parish gravel pits. The former service buildings to the east were extended post 1988 to provide a school hall.

The detached Chapel (listed Grade II) stands immediately east of the house and was built as the garden room c.1865 which was mentioned in 1883 (*Northampton Mercury* 25 Aug). The three-bay, south-facing single-storey building, like the mansion, is of white brick with stone dressings and has pedimented gables. The former stable yard and associated quadrangle of buildings stand adjacent to the east of the house but school buildings now fill the yard and surround it. It has always been screened from the wider landscape by trees (OS).

The Manor House (listed Grade II) stands in the north-east of the park, c. 190m north-east of Swanbourne House and opposite the church. It is of two storeys, built of ashlar, probably in the second half of the C16. The early plan was rectangular, facing east, with a central porch-wing in front; part of the building has been pulled down, and a modern wing has been added, making the plan L-shaped. The house is an interesting example of C16 domestic architecture. (An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Buckinghamshire). It is said to have been built by the Fortescues of Salden, who, tradition asserts, used it principally as a nursery or hospital for the children when ill (VCH).

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

The gardens and pleasure grounds enclose the house to the north, west and south and are largely surrounded by mature trees including large oak, Wellingtonia and yew. The principal garden fronts are to the south and west. Grass terraces enclose these fronts. Beyond the 35m long west terrace is a lawn bounded by gravel paths which was formerly the knot garden. Long views extend west over the park and rolling countryside below, framed by mature trees.

The garden door at the centre of the south front leads out to the 85m long south terrace. A broad gravel path running parallel to the house leads east to the former stables and then to a further path leading to kitchen garden door. To the west it gives access to the west terrace. This terrace is divided by two paths leading south towards the lawns. One path leads down to the sundial lawn. The network of paths around the lawns, including a boundary circuit path, remains much as in 1926, having been extended since 1900 beyond the terrace path across the south front (OS). The south-west extension was added, presumably as part of this phase, in the early C20 (OS). It is reached directly from the house via the sundial lawn path from the central garden door. It is centred on a tennis lawn, with a terrace path above on the entrance side to the north-east, and other entrance paths as spurs off the circuit path leading into it through shrubbery. A small octagonal gazebo overlooks the lawn near a flight of steps from the terrace down to the lawn. The pleasure grounds contain many mature trees enclosing the lawns and as specimens, underplanted with shrubberies.

The early C20 garden development extended the garden to 12 acres. By 1926 (OS) a network of formal paths on terraces enclosed the west and south sides of the house, with a small square garden with a central sundial off the south terrace path. These paths led out to a network of paths including the circuit path around the garden boundary and lawns which were sprinkled with trees and shrubberies.

Long views over the park and distant rolling countryside extend west from the west front, west terrace below and lawns beyond, and south from the edge of the pleasure grounds.

## **PARK**

The park and woodland is enclosed to the north and east by the Winslow Road, to the south by a lane and to the west by agricultural land. They enclose the house and pleasure grounds. The pasture retains many mature trees from the late C19 and early C20 as belts, plantations and specimens. It is now part of the school grounds and partly occupied by playing fields. A football pitch lies east of the house, between the two drives, with hard tennis courts

south of the former kitchen garden. Other school features include a squirrel-carved fallen tree, an amphitheatre, an Outdoor Learning Classroom and team building stations, and a small golf course south of the pleasure grounds. Ridge and furrow survives in pasture west of Home Farm, north of the Cross Bucks Way.

A square plantation on the west boundary was created between 1900 and 1926 (OS) and a similar plantation lies immediately north-west of the Manor House. The far south section of the park is a village playing field with a cricket pitch and small pavilions.

A belt of trees north-west of the Manor House separates the park from the mainly C20 buildings of Home Farm in former parkland, which are reached via a modern drive from the north gateway off Winslow Road. This also contains Home Farmhouse (listed Grade 11) also known as Grange Hill Farmhouse which is of C16-C17 origin, extended, and altered in the C19. It is timber framed with brick infill, and refronted in brick in the C19.

## KITCHEN GARDEN

The brick walled kitchen garden lies 80m south-east of the former stables. It is occupied by four tennis courts and modern buildings in the north and west corners within the walls, many of the associated buildings and what may be a fountain remain.

## REFERENCES

### BOOKS AND ARTICLES

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## MAPS

- 1599 Map of the Fortescue Estate (Buckinghamshire Archive Ma69)  
1762 Pre-Enclosure Map (Buckinghamshire Archive IR/119A)  
1763 Post-Enclosure Map and Award (Buckinghamshire Archive IR/119B)  
1770 Jeffreys, T., Map of the County of Buckinghamshire surveyed in 1766-68

1825 Bryant, A Map of the County of Buckinghamshire from an actual survey in 1824  
Various manuscript maps in a private collection.

### **Ordnance Survey**

Ordnance Surveyor's Draft 2" c.1813 (British Library)  
6" Surveyed: 1878-80 Published: 1885  
6" Revised: 1898 Published: c. 1900  
6" Revised: 1923 Published: 1926  
6" Revised: 1923 Published: 1937  
6" Revised: 1950 Published: 1952  
National Grid 10,000: 1985

### **ARCHIVAL ITEMS**

#### **Buckinghamshire Archives**

D/FR/19 Bundles of correspondence, notes, calculations, accounts, etc., relating to the "building of the Mansion at Swanbourne", and making of the gardens, approaches, hothouses, etc., 1866-72, consisting mainly of items concerning the gardens, gardener's lodge, hothouses and provision of shrubs, trees, etc., with some bundles concerning the supplying of carpets and blinds to the main house, and of various accounts paid.

D/FR/D/229-231 diaries

Box 11 DFR/D/95 -111

D-WIG/2/9/1131 Papers relating to valuation of Swanbourne House School, 1947

D-FR/A/18 and 16

Corresp. Sir Thomas Francis Fremantle, 3rd Lord Cottesloe, concerning Swanbourne [House... ]1929-1932

D-FR/23/2 Counterpart lease of The Old House, Swanbourne to Mrs. F.J. Collie

1910 Domesday Survey

Local Studies file 2239.37 Memories of families connected with Swanbourne House School.

Census 1871, 1881, 1891, 1911

### **IMAGES**

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/rchme/bucks/vol2/plate-70>

[https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/gallery/665?place=Swanbourne%2c+BUCKINGHAMSHIRE+\(Parish\)&terms=swanbourne&searchtype=englandsplaces&i=1&wm=1&bc=16|17](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/gallery/665?place=Swanbourne%2c+BUCKINGHAMSHIRE+(Parish)&terms=swanbourne&searchtype=englandsplaces&i=1&wm=1&bc=16|17)

Aerial photographs 1964, 1966, 1985, 1988, 1999, 2003; 2010 Mike Farley oblique (HER)

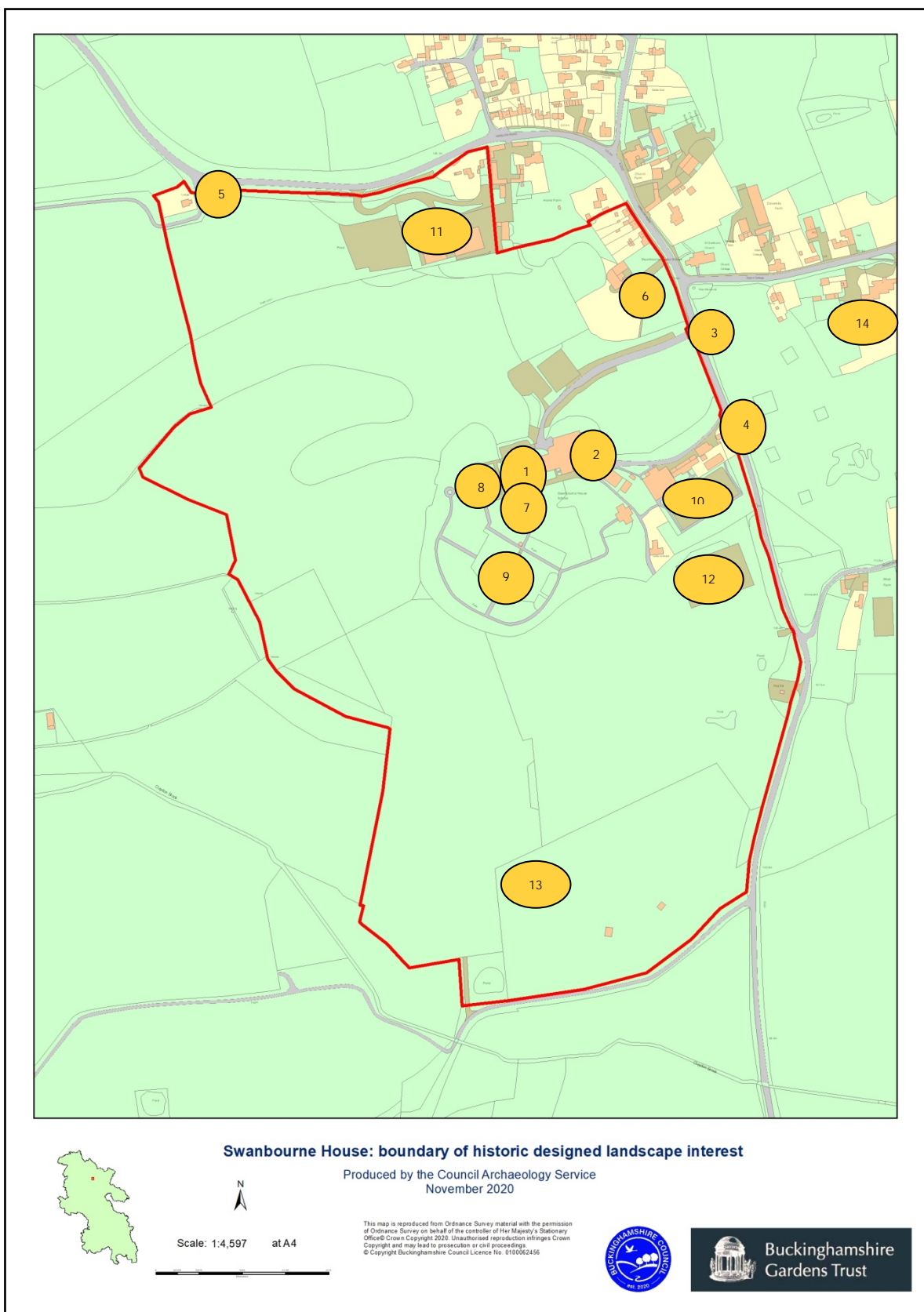
### **WEBSITE**

<http://www.swanbourneestate.co.uk/history.html> accessed March 2020

<http://www.swanbournehistory.co.uk/> accessed March 2020

Bucks Gardens Trust is grateful to Ken Harris of the Swanbourne History Group for help in preparing this dossier.

## KEY HISTORIC FEATURES





### Key to numbered features

1. Swanbourne House	2. Stables
3. East entrance, drive & lime avenue	4. Service drive and lodge/cottage
5. North entrance and lodge	6. Swanbourne Manor House
7. South Terrace and sundial garden	8. West Terrace
9. Garden extension with former tennis lawn and octagonal gazebo	10. Former Kitchen Garden
11. Home Farm	12. All weather pitches
13. Sports ground	14. Swanbourne Old House and park

## HISTORIC IMAGES

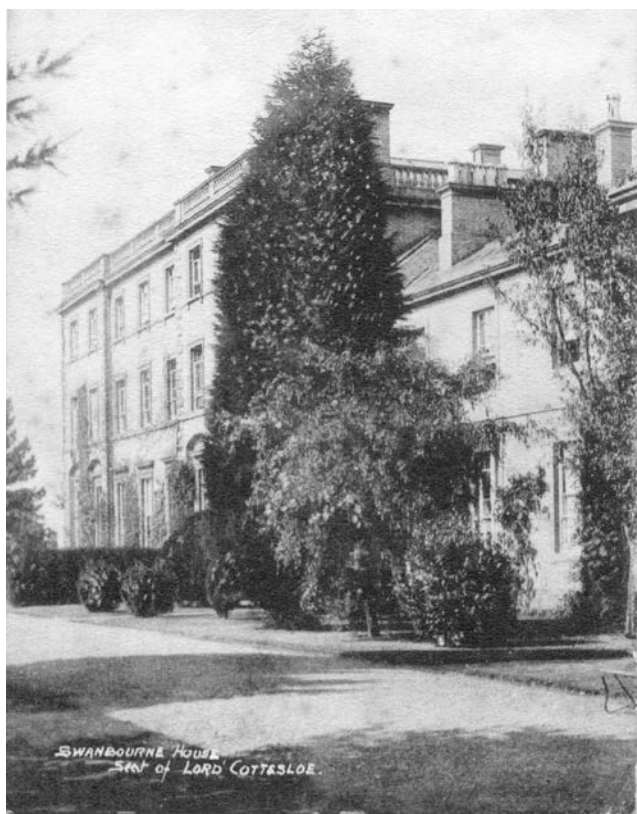
The following images are from a collection held by the Swanbourne History Group.



Swanbourne House, north, entrance front (left); south, garden front (right).



Sundial garden.



South terrace (left); ?Head Gardener and his parterre (right).



The gardeners and kitchen garden glasshouses.