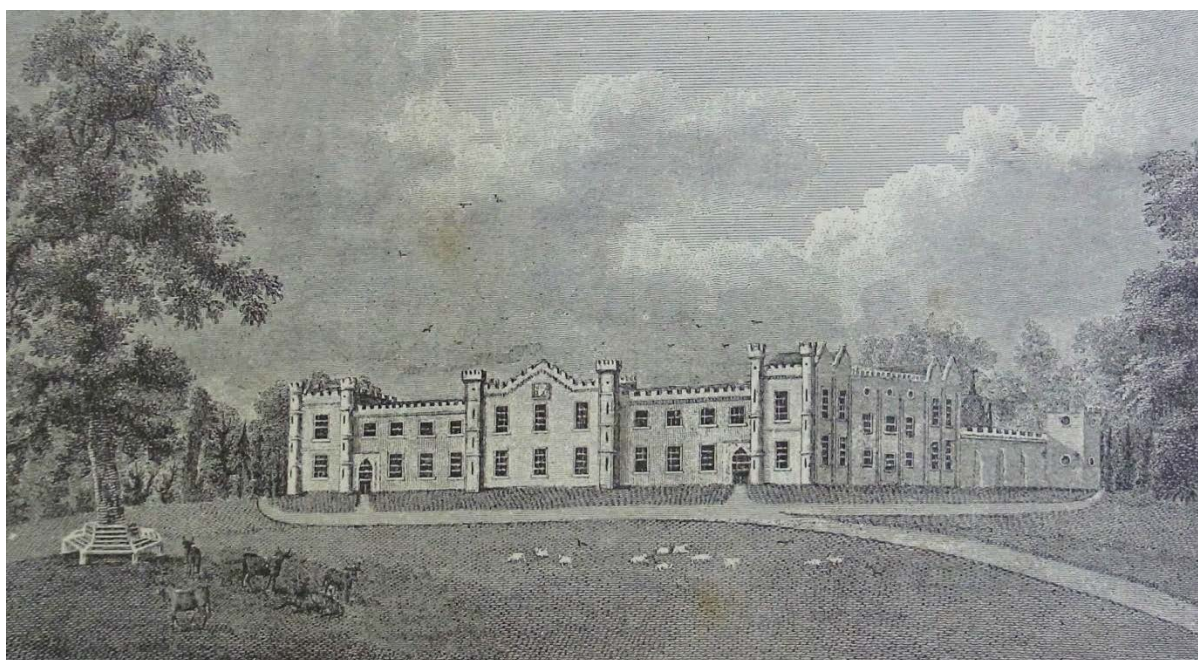


Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



LISCOMBE PARK

December 2021

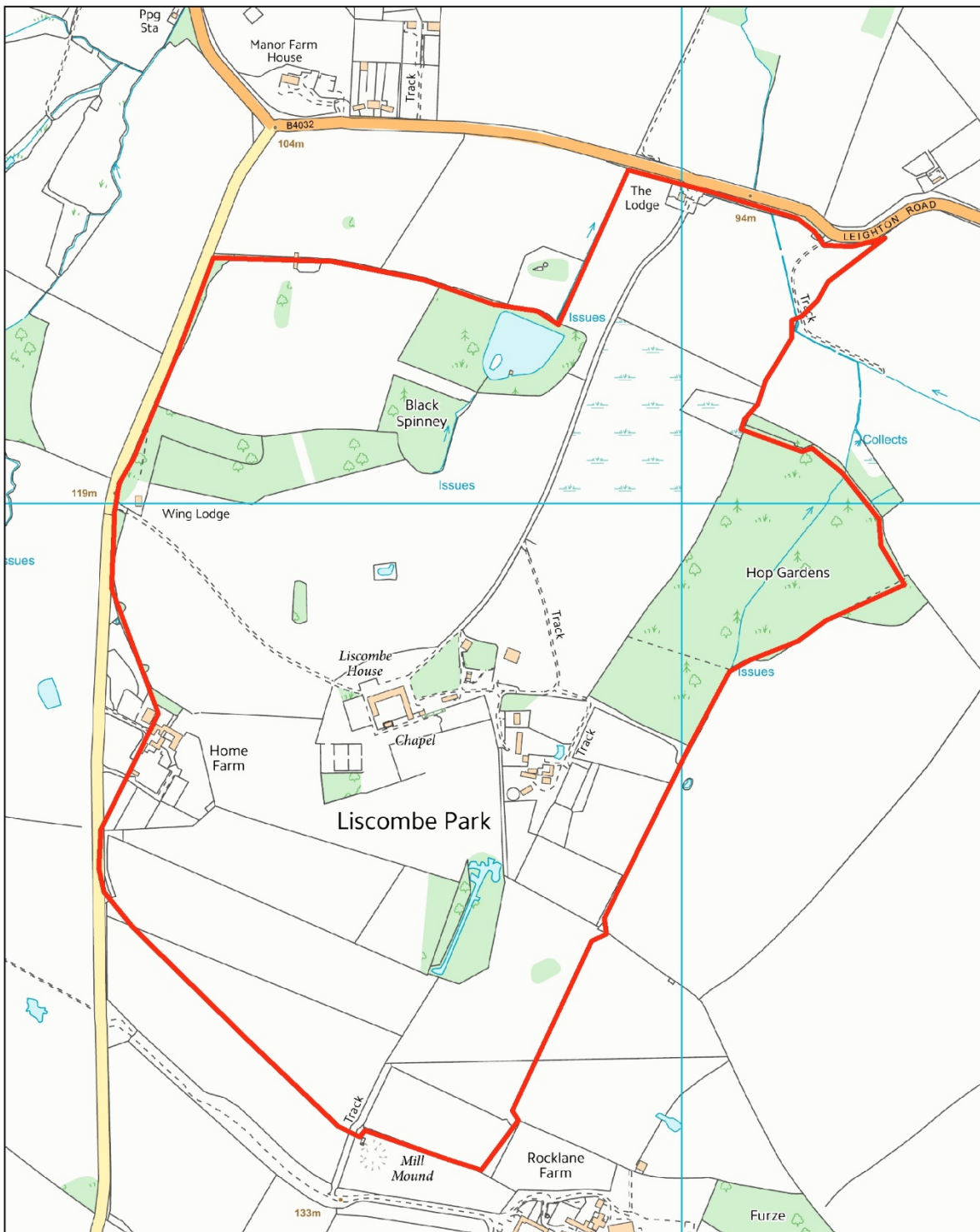


The Finnis Scott
Foundation

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HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Liscombe Park: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service
October 2019



Scale: 1:6,769 at A4

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Bucks Gardens Trust



Scale: 1:6,769 at A4



Liscombe Park: 2015 aerial photograph

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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, 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* 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 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

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	LISCOMBE PARK HER 0107606000
DISTRICT:	AYLESBURY VALE	
PARISH:	SOULBURY	
OS REF:	SP 886 257	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

Liscombe Park is the setting for a country house and its park, gardens and pleasure grounds which were laid out in the mid-C17 and altered in the late C18 and again in the C20 and C21. The C18 and C19 framework is largely intact, particularly the boundaries, entrances and drives and the current (2021) owners are carrying out restoration work to the gardens and parkland.

Archaeological interest

Liscombe Park contains evidence of earlier uses including ridge and furrow cultivation (1946 AP), a medieval deserted village, and earthworks south of the house. Near Butler's Cottage evidence of sherds of medieval pottery indicates the site of a medieval house along with other medieval ditches and pits. A larger post-medieval ditch contained waste from the construction of Liscombe House, possibly the remnants of an earlier garden feature infilled during the redesigning of the landscape garden (MOLA/ Northants Archaeology 2011, 2015, 2017). A linear "moat" mapped in 1789 survives. The potential exists for lost garden features such as paths and garden buildings.

Architectural interest

The C17/18 house (listed Grade II*), coach house, three-sided court yard and parts of the walls form a group of considerable architectural note and form the focus of the landscape design. Other features, including the lodge adjacent to the main entrance in the east of the estate and gateway are of special importance as part of the landscape design. The C14 Chantry chapel is disused (listed Grade II). The small brick garden pavilions in Arts and Crafts style ornament gardens. The glasshouse by Foster and Pearson of Beeston is an increasingly rare survival.

Artistic Interest

The site is a typical country house park, garden and pleasure grounds laid out from the mid-C17 and modified as a landscape park in the C18. Much of the layout remains, still focussed on the house; mature trees survive including the avenue along the west drive and a striking yew in the courtyard.

Historic Interest

The site was associated with the notable Lovett family for several centuries, most famously Colonel John Lovett (1660-1710), the patron of the Eddystone Lighthouse, where he commissioned John Rudyard to build a conical lighthouse around a core of brick and concrete. He was an MP and is buried in All Saints' Church. The Lovetts established a charity school in the centre of Soulbury. The building was inscribed with "Lovett's Charity School and School-House 1724". The building is called Lovett House. Many memorials to the Lovett family are in the Church of All Saints.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Liscombe was the main manor of Soulbury in 1066. It was known by several names such as Lychescumbe and Lyscumb. It was rented to various families and by 1304 Robert Lovett was noted as Lord of Liscombe (*VCH*). The estate remained in the hands of the Lovett family until 1907, having owned it for 600 years (*VCH*).

There was a house on the land from at least 1250, but the present house is possibly from the second half of the C16 (*VCH*) although the earliest date on the rainwater heads is 1639 (Pevsner) and the Bucks Monument Report dates it as mid C17. It was much altered and extended over the centuries since (Pevsner). A medieval hamlet may have stood south of the house which was deserted when the land was emparked in 1505 (BMFR, p.11).

240m south-east of the house a rectangular water feature was noted on a 1769 estate map as 'the moat'. The deep ditch was said to have 2 other arms but now only one survives. It is unclear whether this was medieval or an C18 garden feature (BMFRp.9).

In 1770 the estate was noted as 'Liscumb, Loyal Esq' with a small pictorial representation of a house but no other detail (Jefferys). By 1812 the house was a C shape, enclosed on the south side by the chapel. There was a rectangular enclosure on the south-east corner which is the site of the kitchen garden. Home Farm stood 250m west of the house close to the Wing road. A large, vaguely circular pond lay 460m north of the house and 90m west of the drive as it approached Leighton Road. This seemed to be connected to a smaller pond 45m east of the house by a stream. Small copses and scattered trees populated the park (OSD 1812).

A black and white print of the entrance front on the north side of the house (CBS, dated by Pevsner to c1840). shows sheep and cows grazing with no apparent ha-ha or fencing to prevent them coming up to the house walls, however other versions of this image (including a painting held in Liscombe House) do show fencing. A specimen tree had a circular white seat around the trunk.

By 1880 (OS) the two ponds no longer appear connected. By 1900 the larger one has a jetty (OS 6" 1900) and boat house is marked in 1926 (OS 6" 1926). This boat house has gone (2021). The smaller pond has dried out but does fill slightly in heavy rain.

In 1907 the estate was sold by the Lovett family to Ernest Robinson, who made considerable changes to the pleasure grounds and park, including a substantial drainage system running north from the house across the park towards the large pond. Robinson then sold it, c.1921, to Lord Rosebery who owned nearby Mentmore Towers. Rosebery only owned the estate for a couple of years and never lived at Liscombe. From c.1923 the house and land were owned by Sir Reginald and Lady Nancy Bonsor, passing to Bryan and Elizabeth Bonsor in 1958, then Nicholas and Nadine Bonsor in 1975 and Alexander and Jane Bonsor in 2015 (Lady Nadine Bonsor, pers. comm.).

By 1926 a new piece of woodland has been planted around the larger pond (OS). The Hop Gardens had doubled in size, with mixed woodland over the whole area (the western extension was previously field) and various tracks marked through the wood. Lodges stood at both ends of the drive. A ha-ha has linked the north-west drive to the north-east drive, situated 45m from the north front of the house (OS 1926). By 1946 a tennis court lay south-west of the house (OS 1953, RAF AP, 1946).

By 1982 a new drive had been created forking south-east from the north-east approach. This leads to Field Place (built 1974/5), a cottage and the former dairy which had been sold in the 1990s but is now back in the ownership of the Bonsor family (Jane Bonsor, pers. comm.). These lie to the east of the kitchen garden wall.

Home Farm has been enlarged and developed and is no longer owned by the Bonsor family. The park has been returned to pasture and is grazed by sheep. South of the house is Rock Lane Farm which was the site of a large

quadrangular stable complex. This was used by the Whaddon Chase hunt during the tenure of Sir Bryan Bonsor (Lady Nadine Bonsor, pers. comm.). Rock Lane Farm was developed in the mid-1990s. The stable buildings are apartments and the surrounding land hosts a large equestrian centre, a fitness resort, a media centre and various prestige business premises as Liscombe Park Ltd.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Liscombe Park is a country house estate located in a predominantly rural area in the northern part of the Vale of Aylesbury, 2km south of the village of Soulbury and 2.75km west of Linslade. Situated near the county boundary in the extreme east of Buckinghamshire, the nearest urban area is Linslade.

The 90 ha. site occupies the south-east-facing aspect of a ridge of gently undulating land which rises from 90m to a 130m in the centre of the estate around the site of the house. The soils are mixed - mainly clays - consisting of glacial drift deposited by ice sheets which also left a large erratic in Soulbury. These glacial deposits cover the underlying bedrocks which form part of the Greensand Ridge.

The north boundary of the park is formed by the road from Soulbury to Leighton Buzzard (B4032). The road from Wing to Soulbury forms the west boundary. By 1880 perimeter trees were planted along both sides of the Wing to Soulbury road from where the drive joins it. These continue to the junction with Leighton Road and along both sides of the road in an easterly direction (OS, 1880). Currently (2021) wide perimeter hedges mark the boundary with the Leighton to Soulbury road. These contain mixed deciduous trees and shrubs and form a significant feature providing privacy and security for the estate. The south and east boundaries abut farmland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance leads from the Leighton Road through black metal gates flanked by high curved cream painted rendered walls with a lodge on the west side, built in 1907. The two-storey lodge is integrated into the entrance walls and rendered and painted in the same manner. The east and south gables are 'Queen Anne' style with a tiled roof and two tall red brick chimneys. A date plaque on the east gable shows 1907 ER.

This approach curves steadily uphill in a south-south-westerly direction towards the house for 770m, passing scattered park trees in the park. It passes in front of the house and terminates on the west front. By 1812 (OSD) the drive continued from the north front c.400m north-west to join the Wing to Soulbury road. In the mid-C19 (1840 print) the drive curved towards the house from the north-west with one spur along the west side of the house and another alongside the east side, and two short stretches to two front doors on the north front each next to the corner towers. The north-east drive which is now (2019) the only approach was not shown (Sheahan).

By 1900 the trees both sides of the public roads bounding the property were no longer shown, there are a few remaining on the east side of the Wing to Soulbury road but an avenue of trees had been planted along the north-western approach drive. By 1926 the lodge had been built at the entrance called 'Wing Lodge' on subsequent maps (OS). This building is a single storey, brick construction with a steep hip-backed roof. The drive linking it to the main house no longer exists, having been taken out of use approximately seven years ago (as of 2021). There is only a wooden farm gate into a grass field at this entrance (2021).

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Liscombe House (listed Grade II*) was built over several decades between 1639 and 1744 for the Lovett family. The house encloses three sides of a courtyard garden. The main entrance is now (2021) on the west front. This was

moved in 2015 from the north front overlooking the park. The entrance arch and stables formed the east section of the courtyard and a disused chapel and pedestrian entrance to the gardens are on the south side of the courtyard.

The house has been altered several times: there was some restoration in 1874 and a refitting of the interior in 1924 (Pevsner). The interior has been further refurbished recently. The two-storey brick house encloses three sides of a courtyard. The eleven bay north front, in Gothick style, has a castellated parapet and was added in 1769. A photo from between 1880 and 1923 shows two gothic upper glazed doors, one at each end of the north front (J. Bonsor pers comm). The projecting pedimented centre has square turrets at both ends. The end bays project in similar fashion but with rounded turrets on each corner. The turrets have plinths, band courses and blind arrow slits. The sash windows on this elevation have moulded stone surrounds picked out in white. By 1921 the principal entrance was at the west end of the north façade surrounded with a heavy, gothic style tower (sale particulars 1921 and J.Bonsor pers comm). The cement rendering of the north front has been removed to reveal pink brickwork. A large block built by the Bonsor family soon after acquisition extends into the courtyard at the back of the eastern end of the north wing (Jane Bonsor, pers. comm.).

The west wing is probably the oldest part of the house with shaped gables and a substantial chimney breast at its southern end with decorative stacks. On the advice of William Smalley RIBA, the principal entrance was moved to the centre of this elevation in 2015 and a full-height hall created (Jane Bonsor, pers. comm.), all served by a tear-drop-shaped carriage drive on the site of a former rose garden. A garden wall runs south to a small square battlemented garden tower.

The longer east wing contains service accommodation and includes an arched entry into the courtyard and terminates at its southern end with a coach house (listed separately, Grade II). The open south side of the courtyard is partly closed at its south-east end by a detached C14 private chapel (listed Grade II). It was formerly used as a billiard room (list description), and more recently, for private functions (Jane Bonsor, pers. comm.).

An C18 garden wall with gates joins the coach-house to the chapel and completes the enclosure of the courtyard.

A substantial detached former laundry with tall chimneys and a big central gable, built in 1907, all in Arts and Crafts style, stands c.40m east of the south end of the east wing.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The house is placed centrally in its estate. The only formal gardens are in the central 'courtyard' area, enclosed by the main building. It is mainly laid to lawn with some clipped box and herbaceous borders round the edges. A large, mature Yew tree stands in the east half of the enclosed courtyard.

By 1988 a rectangular formal garden lay below the west façade of the house (AP, 1988). This has reverted to an enclosed grass area with a large gravelled turning circle/parking area in a teardrop shape which covers half of the area.

South-west of the house is a hard tennis court with a small, red brick, open-fronted building, in Arts and Crafts style. East of this court is a recent swimming pool, on the site of a second tennis court which was grass- surfaced. By 1769 (map, private collection) this whole area was an orchard this had gone by 1880 (OS).

Nancy Bonsor (whose husband Reginald bought Liscombe in 1923) created a Japanese style garden (exact date unknown) with a small, decorative bridge over the dried -up stream which ran from the north-east corner of the House through the old small pond (Jane Bonsor, pers. comm.). The bridge is all that remains of this garden.

PARK

The park is laid to pasture, through which the main approach to the house runs, and contains scattered trees of varying ages. To the north-west a small wooded area has been planted (2006 AP). The pond north of the house is surrounded by trees some of which are a commercial plantation of Poplar which is being thinned by the current (2021) owners. The boat house no longer exists having fallen into disrepair about 10 years ago but the lake has been dredged recently (since 2015), because it had become silted up. The 1920s ha-ha runs 45m north of the house separating the park from lawns around the house. The park has been used for both arable and pasture with a small area of mixed woodland but it is now used for grazing sheep.

The Hop Gardens mixed woodland lies 575m north-east of the house. In the late C19 it was named 'Hop Gardens' (OS). Hops were grown throughout England reaching a peak in the 1870s.

South of the house an avenue of Acer trees was planted in 2000 by Sir Nicholas Bonsor which terminates in a semi-circle of trees. This is known as the 'Millennium Walk'. The single arm of the 'moat', lies beyond the Millennium Walk and is partially hidden by woodland. Although present in 1880 (OS) it was not marked on the 1812 OSD. The Historic Environment Record notes that it comprises a 'Waterfilled, deep ditch called 'the moat', said formerly to have had two other legs. On 1769 Lovell estate map. Could be a garden feature, though far from house. E. arm survives but S. arm mostly infilled. Perhaps a C18 fishpond?' (2018 HER 0107603000-MBC3249).

KITCHEN GARDENS

The rectangular partially walled kitchen garden lies 40m south-east of the house. A gate in the south wall between the coach house and chapel leads to a gravel path which runs parallel to the courtyard wall. This path runs south-west to the tennis court and swimming pool and north-east to the kitchen garden.

The only reference to gardens in the 1921 Sales Particulars (Jane Bonsor) are 'Kitchen Gardens; walled in on two sides lie to the south-east of the residence. They are well-stocked with fruit trees and a range of heated glasshouses, forcing pits, potting sheds etc. A splendid tennis court, there is also a charming rock garden'. The position of the rock garden is unclear.

The north and east boundaries of the kitchen garden are brick walls, and the west boundary is a mature beech hedge. The south boundary is black painted metal 'estate' railings. Glasshouses by Foster and Pearson of Beeston run along the west end of the north wall and have been renovated since 2015. Opposite the glasshouses is a small, brick garden building, very similar in style and materials to the tennis court pavilion and probably originated as a garden gazebo.

The kitchen garden is laid to grass with mown paths. It was in the C19 laid out with a grid of paths dividing it into various sized rectangles (1812 OSD, OS 1880) but this layout has gone. It contains old apple trees and new (since 2015) plantings of apples, pears and plums. The area is about half that in the C19 and is believed to have been reduced after World War II (Jane Bonsor, pers. comm.). It was enclosed by woodland to the west and a strip of wood along the south side (OS 25" 1880, OS 6", 1926). This wood had disappeared by 1946 (1946 RAF AP) and all that remains of the woodland today (2021) are a few specimen trees in the park.

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Pevsner N and Williamson E, *The Buildings of England - Buckinghamshire* (2003), 434-35.

Victoria County History, Buckinghamshire, Vol III (1925), 414-20.

HER Documents

Bucks Monument Report HER no. 0107602000-MBC3248 (Ha ha)

Bucks Mon report HER 0107603000-MBC3249 (moat)

Bucks Monument reports HER 0107604000-MBC3250 (hamlet) and HER 0107606000-MBC2174 (park)

Maps

1825 Bryant, Map of Buckinghamshire

1770 Jefferys, Map of Buckinghamshire

Ordnance Survey:

1812 Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing (BL)

1880; 25" 1st Edn,

1900; 6" 2nd Edn

1926; 6"

1982; National Grid 1:10,000

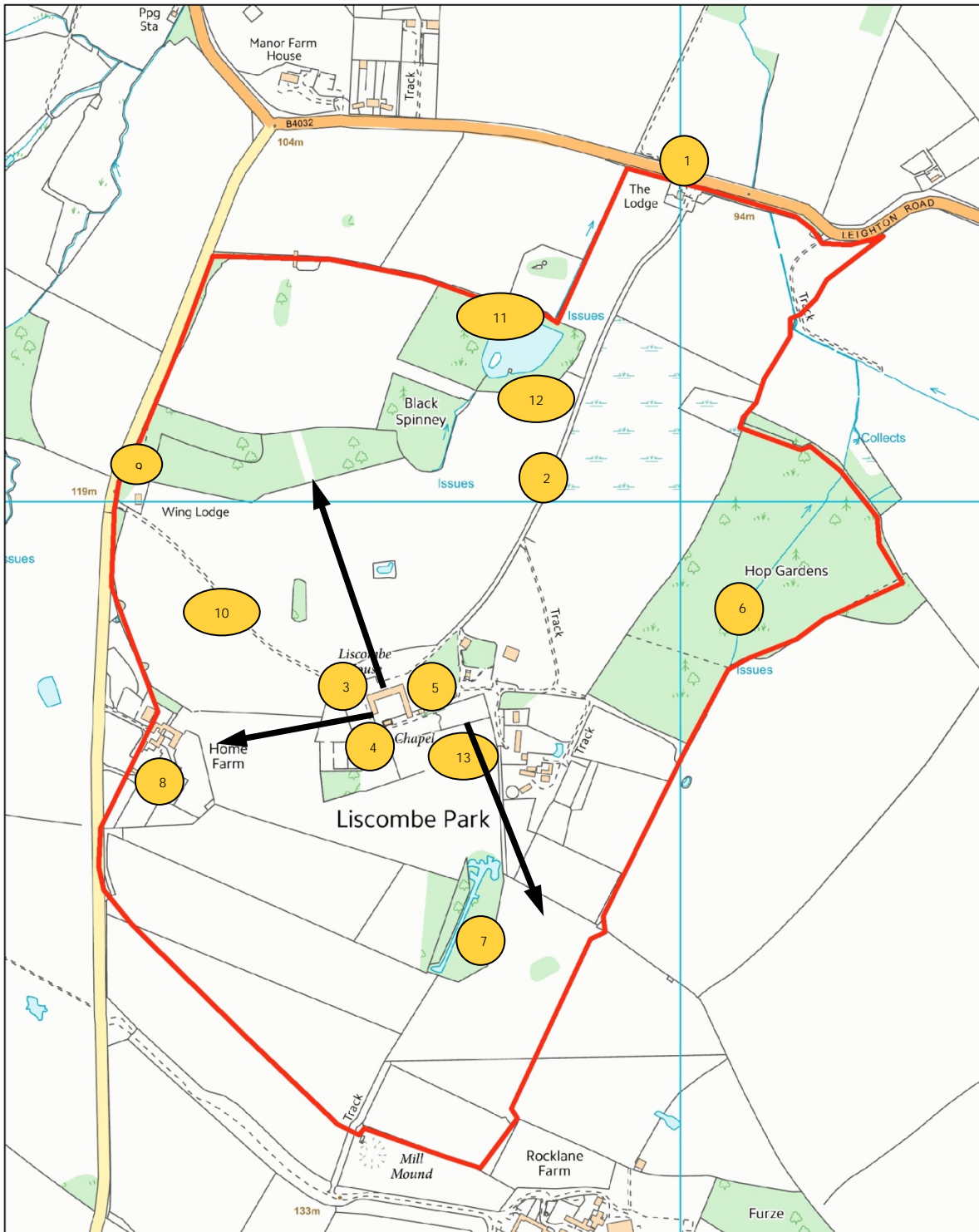
Others

1769 map and 1921 Sales Particulars (private collection)

M Buckle and S Meekums, November 2019; revised November 2021 by Mary Buckle and Geoff Huntingford;
edited SR December 2021.

Bucks Gardens Trust is grateful to Jane Bonsor and Lady Nadine Bonsor for additional information.

KEY HISTORIC FEATURES AND VIEWS



Scale: 1:6,769 at A4



Liscombe Park: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service
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Bucks Gardens Trust



Key to numbered features

1. North Lodge	7. Remains of 'Moat'
2. North, main drive	8. Home Farm
3. Liscombe House	9. Wing Lodge
4. Chapel	10. West Drive
5. Coach House	11. Pond 12. Boat House
6. Hop Gardens	13. Kitchen Garden



Main entrance and north lodge (Mary Buckle 2019)



Wing Lodge (Mary Buckle 2019)



Remains of former north-west entrance (Mary Buckle 2019)



The inner courtyard looking east (Mary Buckle, 2021)



The restored Foster and Pearson glasshouse and small pavilion (Mary Buckle, 2021)



The kitchen garden looking south (Mary Buckle, 2021)



The old laundry (Mary Buckle, 2021)



The north front (Mary Buckle, 2021)



The west front (Mary Buckle, 2021)



The ha-ha (Mary Buckle, 2021)