

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## LOWNDES PARK, CHESHAM

OCTOBER 2021

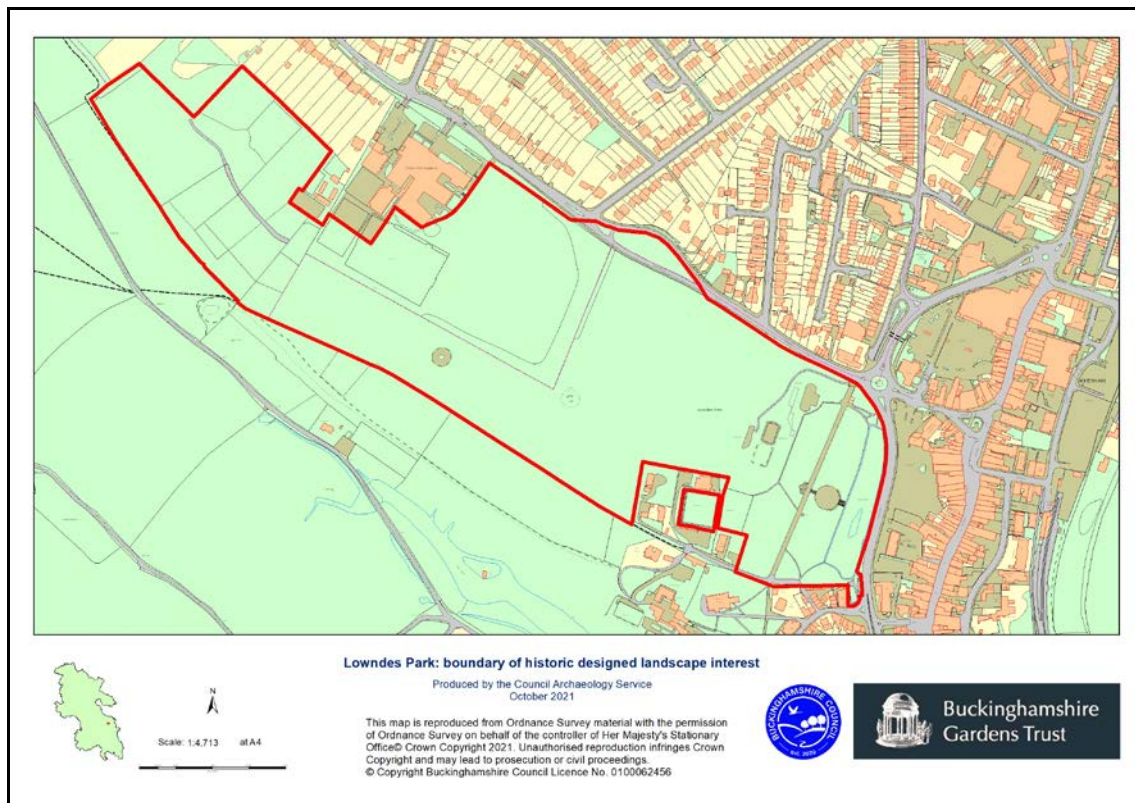


The Finnis Scott  
Foundation

Roland Callingham  
Foundation



## HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



## AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH





## 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>SITE NAME:</b> LOWNDES PARK | <b>HER NO:</b> 0651600000   |
| <b>COUNTY:</b> BUCKINGHAMSHIRE | <b>GRID REF:</b> SP 957 017 |
| <b>PARISH:</b> CHESHAM         |                             |

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

The grounds of a mid-C20 public park incorporating the pleasure ground and park of the former Bury Hill House which was closely associated with the adjacent town house, The Bury (q.v.). The layout, including Skottowe's Pond and the nearby avenue at the bottom of the park nearest to the town, survives largely intact although incursions have occurred at the north-west, upper end of the park with school and other development. The park is dominated by the great sweep of sward planted with specimen trees and clumps rising from the avenue north-westwards, with increasingly spectacular views over the Chiltern Chess and Pednor valleys in which the market town of Chesham lies, and of the parish church.

### Archaeological interest

The site has the potential for former features related to the gardens, yards and buildings of the former Upper Parsonage/ Bury Hill House, the principal building of the previous domestic landscape, in and around the position of the present guide hut. Potential exists for evidence associated with former agricultural and town uses, particularly relating to surviving ancient trees but also for banks, routes, boundaries, quarry pits and structures. The Mound or Rolling Pin (SM 1013931) at the top of the hill 100m north-west of the council depot, has been identified as a late Bronze Age bowl barrow, but a small scale excavation by Chess Valley Archaeological Society questions this interpretation. The feature shows signs of other use as the summit is flattened into a platform c.10m across; fragments of brick may indicate the former presence of a summer house or other viewing pavilion associated with the house from which to enjoy views over the Chess and Pednor valleys.

### Architectural interest

The former Upper Parsonage/ Bury Hill House, the principal building of the domestic landscape, has gone, the site being covered by the present guide hut. A shelter erected by the Council in 1935 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of George V stands isolated on the lake side of the avenue. It has a tiled roof resting on four brick piers. It was formerly flanked by brick- built raised beds, and a small clump of trees with a sunray metal screen filling the voids on the sides of the building.

### Artistic interest

The layout comprises a typical mid-C20 public park, utilising features from the former domestic landscape and the deer park, with features inserted in the C20 such as the bowling green, scented garden and shelter commemorating the Silver Jubilee of King George V. The principal features, Skottowe's Pond, the avenue and the sweeping hillside parkland, all enjoy views of the Chiltern topography and the setting of the market town of Chesham.

### Historic interest

The site has strong links with the Lowndes family and the understanding of its significance is enhanced with the survival of documentary evidence.

## **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

**For earlier history please refer to dossier on The Bury**

### **C19 & C20 until 1950**

In 1802 William Lowndes (1734-1808), purchased the Upper Parsonage known as Bury or Berry Hill House which included the land now known as Chesham Park, from Thomas Skottowe for £8,810. Lowndes demolished the house and possibly the viewing tower in the park (Friends of Lowndes Park). This reunited both manors which had been under single ownership but were separated in 1687 by William 'Ways and Means' Lowndes (1652-1723). The remainder of Chesham Park was used as grazing which ceased in 1959 (Chesham Town Council).

By 1900, the OS map shows the park contained an elm avenue, the former drive for Bury Hill House, Skottowes pond, and an area of pasture. During World War I troops used Skottowe's Pond for bridge building practice (Birch), and in 1919 two victory oaks were planted in Chesham Park.

In 1920 The Bury, together with 5.6 ha of land, was offered to Chesham Urban District Council for £27,500. The offer was turned down, but the Council leased it instead (Hunt). In the 1920s the Lowndes family retained the right to drive cattle along the avenue. In the 1920s the island was created and the Pond which was consolidated with concrete sides and a circular terrace with seats and flower beds created, now the performance area (2021) (Friends of Lowndes Park).

At the outbreak of war in 1939 The Bury was requisitioned by the army (Foxell) and the Lowndes family left Chesham. The Upper Park was purchased by the Town Council in 1949 and in 1953 William Lowndes gave the Lower Park (formerly leased) to the Council.

### **1950 onwards**

In 1957 the Council bought the final 0.34 ha. of Lowndes Park. The Bury was subdivided into flats and was subsequently occupied as offices in 1961 (Foxell and Chesham Society). By 1970 the whole park was owned by the Chesham Urban District Council, and on 2nd June 1972 the park was dedicated as a Public Open Space and named Lowndes Park, making what had been private deer park and then grazing, a resource for the town (Friends of Lowndes Park).

By the 1980s St Mary's Way truncated the park adjacent to Skottowe Pond as a dual carriageway to by-pass the historic High Street. Lowndes School was built in the north-west corner of the park in the 1960s.

The site is now (2021) divided between a public park owned by the Town Council, a senior Academy school, St Mary's Way, residential properties and The Bury and its grounds and outbuildings.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

Lowndes Park, formerly the deer park of Bury Hill House, lies at the north-west edge of the Chiltern market town of Chesham. The 24ha. site is in the centre of the town adjacent to St Mary's Way.

The single-track Chesham branch of the Metropolitan Line built in 1889 line terminates here. Church Street was the commercial hub until the C19; some of the buildings date from the C14 and the focal point is the medieval St Marys church (Grade I) standing in its walled churchyard adjacent to the south of the park. Between the wars the town had a thriving brick industry with 23 brickworks. It is best known for its other 4 B's- Brushes, Boots, Beer and Baptists (Visit Bucks).

Chesham is in the Chiltern Hills. The land rises steeply from the River Chess valley at 90m AOD to c.250m AOD. The river Chess is a chalk stream which rises from three streams: to the northwest 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. Water from Skottowes Pond in the park feeds into the Chess through a culvert and is conducted below street level emerging at Waterside where it flows southeast towards Latimer (Friends of Lowndes Park).

The park is surrounded to the south and east by the early centre of Chesham, C19 and C20 housing to the north, and a group of buildings which includes; the church, a cluster of town cottages and The Bury are adjacent to the south. The church with its needle point tower dominates views of the old town and can be accessed from the park. Several Edwardian villas on the north side of Park Road have views over the park. Lowndes Park is on a steep hill, which offers extensive views to the west towards the Pednor Loop, to the south-west towards the Chess Valley, and views beyond the town to the east of the densely wooded far side of the Chess Valley.

The boundary to the north-west corner of the site consists of houses and the Chiltern Hills Academy School in Chartridge Lane. 150ms southeast of the school there is a loop in the road beyond this it becomes Park Lane. Fencing and hedges form the north-east boundary of the park with Park Road for 600m from the school to the roundabout at the junction with St Mary's Way. The boundary continues for 300m south along St Mary's Way (constructed in 1980s) to Church Street, where it skirts the Church Street cottages and then follows Bury Lane, a brick wall continues alongside the rectory, to the north wall of Bury Barn, and the access to Lake House a total distance of 250 mts. The south-west boundary is then defined by a private wooded belt following the line of the public footpath for 1km towards the Old Chalk Pit and Pednor. Initially this south-west boundary is shared with The Bury.

## **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The Park is approached from the south via Church Street and Bury Lane (tarmacked, access only road). The approach turns east when it reaches the entrance to the park at the start of the avenue which extends for 250m north to Park Lane (Rue de Houilles). Beyond the avenue entrance the tarmac road continues northwest for 500m to the Guide Hut (on the site of the former Upper Parsonage/Bury Hill House), Bowls Club and Council Depot.

The main pedestrian entrance is via the Zebra crossing adjacent to the St Mary's Way roundabout and can be accessed from the public carpark east of the dual carriageway via a pedestrian crossing. The main service vehicle access is via the Avenue from Park Road and Bury Lane.

A further pedestrian access via Church Street and from the Church enters from the churchyard through a metal railing gate. A plaque on the brick gate pier commemorates the donation of the park to the town of Chesham by the Lowndes family in 1953. Further pedestrian access enters at the corner of Church Street and St Mary's Way, from Park Road and by the boundary with the school in Chartridge Lane. In the upper park the Chiltern Link recreational route from Herberts Hole and a public footpath from Chartridge Lane (which joins it in the south-east corner of the Upper Park) also provide public access.

The historic approach was from the south side of Park Lane, immediately east of the roundabout via the Avenue (formerly the drive of Bury House) which dates from 1715. Now known as the Rue de Houilles this promenade running roughly parallel with and to the west of Skottowe's Pond was framed with elm trees, replaced in the 1950s with mixed species.

## **BUILDINGS**

The site of the former Upper Parsonage/Bury Hill House is now occupied by the guide hut and nearby buildings including a bowling green club house towards the south end of the site.

A shelter commemorating the Silver Jubilee of George V erected by the Council in 1935, stands isolated on the east, lake side of the avenue. The tiled roof rests on four brick piers. It was formerly flanked by brick-built raised beds, and a small clump of trees with a sunray metal screen filling the voids on the sides of the building (historic image).

## THE PARK

Lowndes Park is an elongated rectangle running from St Mary's Way northwest up the steep Chiltern hillside, it can be divided into the upper and lower park. The Park is adjacent to the park belonging to the Bury for much of its western boundary, at the limits of the Upper Park to the north-west it borders agricultural land. The Lower Park related to Bury Hill House and is where most of the public amenities are found. Recent facilities include play areas, wildlife area, skate park, multi-use sports area, informal football pitch, zip-wire and scooter park. There is also a performance area where bands play on Sundays during the summer.

The Upper Park is maintained as meadows and is the site of the Sovereign Coppice planted in 1992 to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. The trees were planted to form the shape of a crown (Friends of Lowndes Park). The dell south of the coppice is a small hollow with trees.

The Lower Park is managed as mown grass with scattered specimen trees, the main features are the large pond at the lowest point, adjacent to St Mary's Way, and the Avenue which runs parallel to the pond. The park was grazed up until the mid C20 and a pleasure ground surrounded Bury Hill House until it was demolished in the early nineteenth century. Its key features included a possible viewing platform now known locally as the 'rolling pin' and Skottowes Pond, a narrow, regular tapering quadrilateral body of water, c.190m long and 35m at its widest point, the island lies 45m from the SE corner.

The Mound or Rolling Pin (SM 1013931) is situated at the top of the hill 100m northwest of the council depot. It is has been identified as a bowl barrow from the late Bronze Age (HE), but recent excavations have questioned this. The barrow shows some signs of other use as the summit has been flattened to form a level platform, c.10m across, and fragments of brick in two places perhaps indicate the former presence of a summer house or gazebo or other viewing pavilion. From here the Skottowe family would have enjoyed views along the Chess and Pednor valleys, indeed visitors still enjoy these views today.

A small flower garden named after another of Chesham's twin towns, Archena, in the Murcia region of Spain is located next to the little theatre at the southerly tip of the pond. This was created following the twinning in 1995 (Friends of Lowndes Park). A scented garden was created midway along Houilles Avenue for the enjoyment of the blind in June 1956, which was restored in 1994 by The Chesham Society (Current Image).

The pond and island were renovated in the 1970s, and a fountain and water staircase installed on the slope down to the bank on the west side from the Avenue, now reduced to steps only (2021).

The park contains many mature specimen trees and a community orchard north of the Council depot, with apple, pear, cherry, and plum trees. Ornamental species include field maple, hornbeam, mountain ash, beech, copper beech, horse chestnuts, weeping willow and red oak.

## REFERENCES

### Books & Publications

Birch, C. *The Book of Chesham* (1976), 122.

Chiltern District Council - Chesham Conservation area document (amended 1987).

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

*Records of Bucks*. Vol 20, 439-441. Vol 3, 52-62.

Skottowe, P. *The Leaf and the Tree* (1963) Chapter 3.

### **Bucks Archives**

Unpublished document: Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society 2009. Geophysical survey of the Mound in Lowndes Park Chesham.

HER 0184500000-MCB 5455 Carolyn Adams archive notes

### **Aerial Photos**

1947 RAF; 1985-2016 (HER)

### **Maps**

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

Jeffreys, Map of Buckinghamshire 1770

Bryant, Map of Buckinghamshire 1885

1842 Tithe Assessment

### **Ordnance Survey**

1812 OS surveyors draft 2" drawing

1878 1st edition 25"

1883 1st edition 6"

1900 2nd edition 6"

1925 revised edition 6"

1938 emergency edition 6"

1945 provisional edition 6"

1947 revised provisional 6"

Late 1950's National Grid provisional 6"

1976 National Grid 1:10,000

### **Websites**

[https://www.chesham.gov.uk/Open\\_Spaces/Lowndes\\_Park\\_History.aspx](https://www.chesham.gov.uk/Open_Spaces/Lowndes_Park_History.aspx)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesham>

Friends of Lowndes Park <https://lowndespark.org.uk/>

<https://lowndespark.org.uk/about-us/>

<https://www.visitbuckinghamshire.org/article/chesham>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013931>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013931>

<https://picclick.co.uk/Nice-Old-Real-Photo-Card-Lowndes-Park-Chesham-203313702653.html>

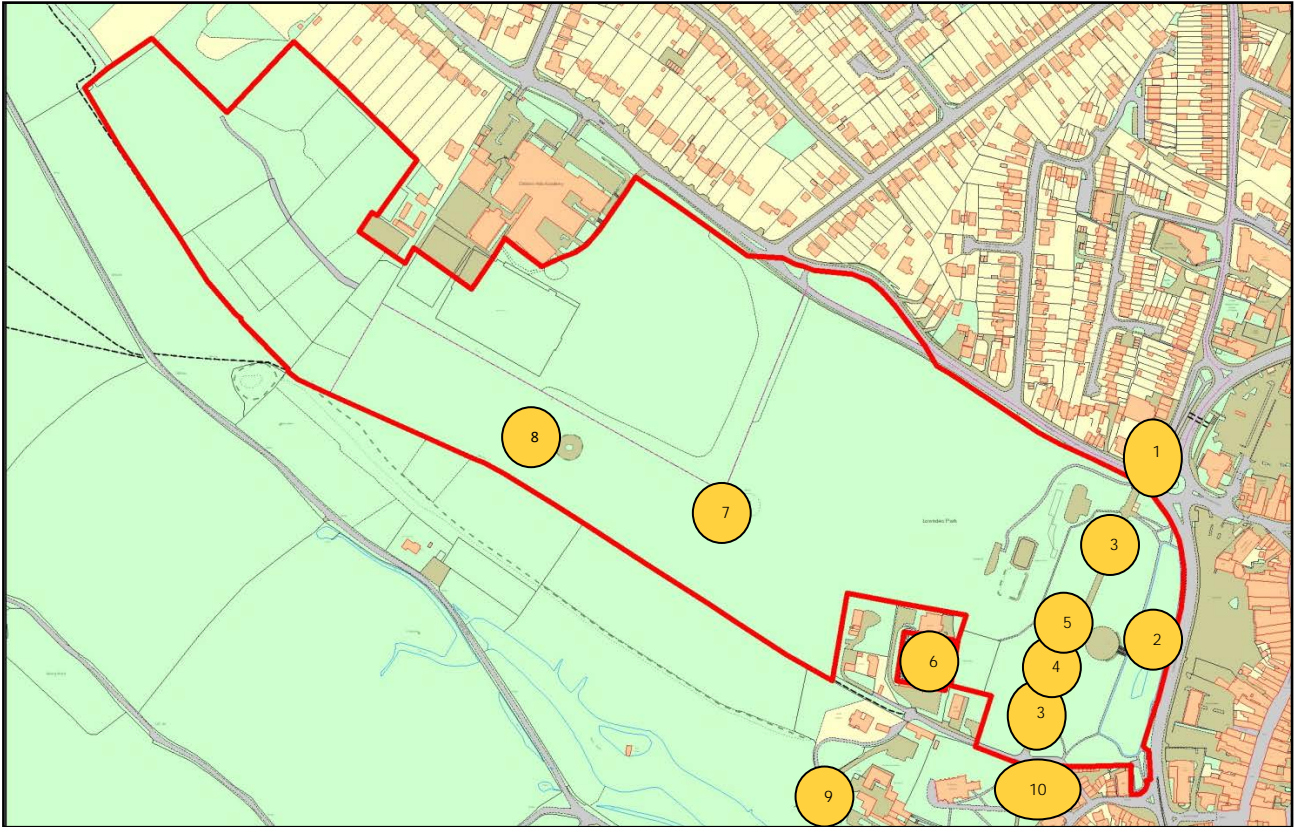
<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/culture-and-leisure/buckinghamshire-archives/online-resources/historic-photographs/>

Liza Wormell and Joanne Kidd, Edited Claire de Carle & SR October 2021



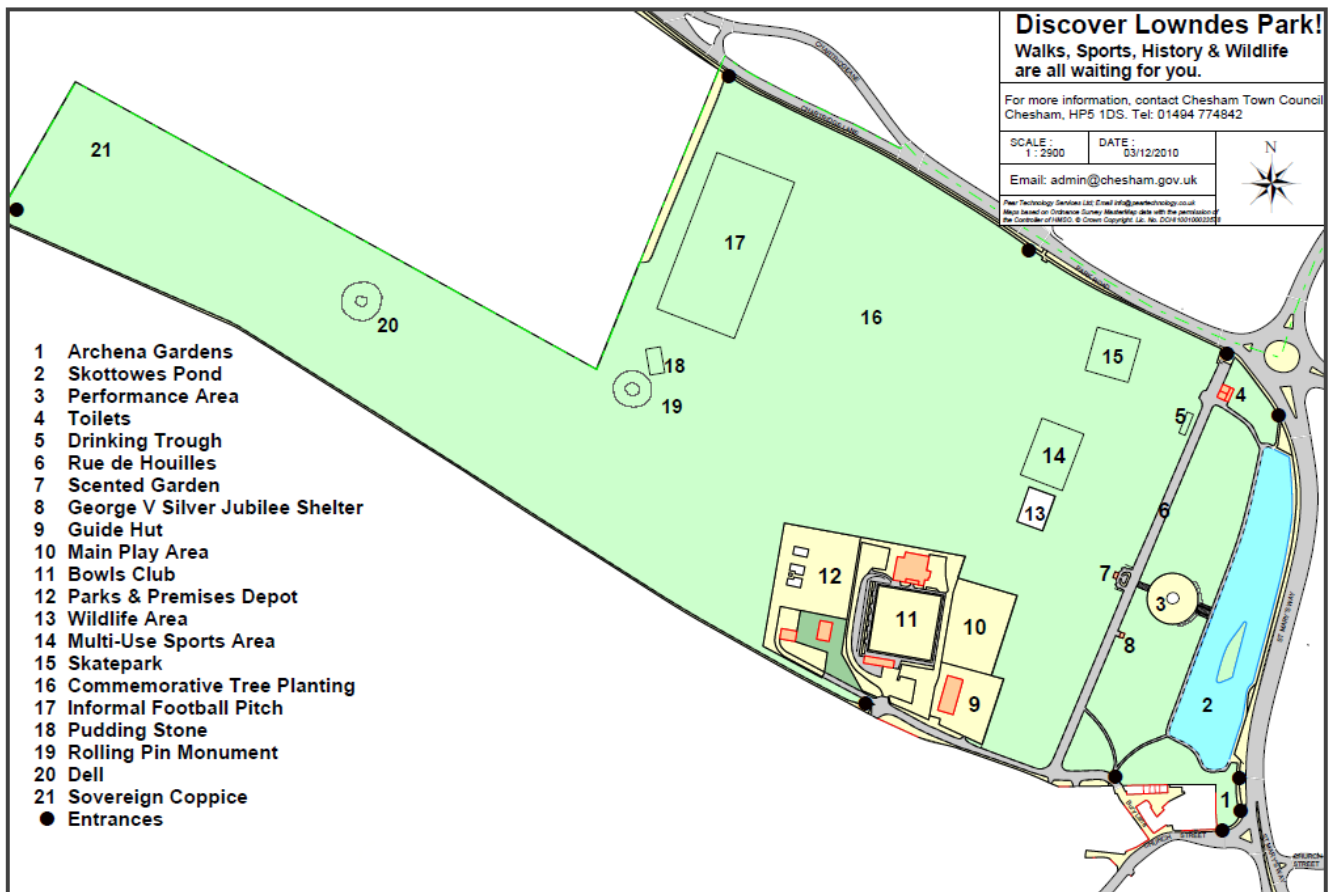
## HISTORIC FEATURES

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### Key to numbered features

|                                 |                             |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Main entrances               | 2. Skottowe's Pond & Island |
| 3. Main Avenue: Rue de Houilles | 4. Shelter                  |
| 5. Scented Garden               | 6. Bowling Green            |
| 7. The Mound or Rolling Pin     | 8. Sovereign Coppice        |
| 9. The Bury (q.v.)              | 10. Parish church           |



Site map kindly supplied by Chesham Town Council and online at

[https://www.chesham.gov.uk/Open\\_Spaces/Lowndes\\_Park.aspx](https://www.chesham.gov.uk/Open_Spaces/Lowndes_Park.aspx) (accessed 29 October 2021)



## CURRENT IMAGES (C DE CARLE)



Plaque on gate pier at churchyard



The scented garden



Plaque on the shelter commemorating the silver jubilee of King George



View south across Skottowe's pond





Avenue Rue de Houilles



Scented garden and site of former water staircase



National cycle network signpost



View east across the town to wooded hills beyond





View south towards the Chess valley



The mound known as 'the rolling pin'



Bury Lane access to park



Gate and piers St Mary's Church





Park trees



Planting in northeast corner of park

## HISTORIC IMAGES



Skottowes pond and Elm Avenue c. 1890 (Bucks Archives)



The Park and St Mary's church c. 1900 (Bucks Archives)