

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GARDENS TRUST RESEARCH AND RECORDING PROJECT PRIESTFIELD ARBORETUM

IDENTIFICATION STAGE

BASELINE INFORMATION			
Address (including post code)	Stony Lane, Little Kingshill HP16 0DS		
Prompt for assessment: Included in BCC Register Review?	'A' or 'B' list No	HER Number 1540400000	Suggested by Claire de Carle, Bucks Gardens Trust
Type of Site (Period, country house estate, cemetery, public park)	C20 arboretum		
Ownership (single or divided)	Private, Single		
Parish	Little Missenden		
Former District and current planning area (NSEW)	Chiltern; East		
Grid Reference	SU 900 991		
Type of Assessment Desktop/ Desktop and archival research/ Full Assessment incl. site visit	Desktop and site visit		

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This horticultural collection of choice and rare trees of varying ages has been developed for nearly a century. The 205 tree species in the 2.1 ha. site originate from 18 geographical regions of the world. The planting density varies. The collection has a representative of each of the 28 coniferous genera that will grow in Britain. Many of the species and varieties are unusual in Bucks and some are rare in the UK. It is unique as an arboretum in Bucks and survives intact, except for the loss of a small section at the edge. It is a valuable resource for the study of trees and includes the large proportion of conifers. It includes 12 'champion trees', these being defined as individual trees that are important examples of their species because of their size, age, rarity or historical significance. Champion status was awarded to these by the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland (TROBI) in 2009. It contains a locally significant historic variety, the Prestwood black cherry, *Prunus avium*, self-seeded from the one remaining tree of this variety from a garden in Prestwood, formerly part of a commercial cherry orchard, together with an old specimen apple of variety 'Hambleton Deux Ans' which originated in Hampshire in the mid-C18.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Location, Area, Setting, views

The 2.1 ha site lies to the north of Stony Lane in Little Kingshill (effectively a southern extension of Great Missenden) in the central Chilterns, approximately 8km west of Amersham, and about 7km north west of High Wycombe. It lies near the centre of the village on the north-east slope of the plateau between Windsor Lane and Hare Lane. The site is approximately square, apex at the north, with sides of c.145m. It is on an incline sloping down to the north-east towards the Misbourne valley, on pebbles, sand and clay (perhaps alluvium from glacial meltwater streams) over flinty chalk. Although overlying chalk, the topsoil is slightly acid, favouring a wide range of trees. Views across the Misbourne valley to north-east are now obscured by trees.

Historic Development of the designed landscape

The estate belonging to 'Harewood' on Hare Lane at the north-west corner of the present arboretum was broken up in the early 1900s and a portion including the house was bought by Miss M L Priest according to a conveyance dated 21st June 1912 [Guide Book; no further information at time of writing]. A sales document [Bucks Archives D-WIG/2/4/84] shows that the Hare Lane Estate was to be sold by auction on 16 April 1912, but 'Harewood' including the area now occupied by the arboretum was marked as 'sold' in that document. Miss Priest transferred the property to her brother Thomas Priest on 3rd July 1917 [Guide Book]; he was already living at this address in 1915 [Kelly's Directory]. A property or field name Priestfield appears in documents pertaining to Little Missenden in the C17 and C18 [Bucks Archives], but this may be coincidence.

Thomas Priest was a local solicitor and amateur tree enthusiast who, in the 1920s, planted up approximately six acres (2.4 ha) of his garden at Harewood with exotic trees. First he established shelter belts of Douglas fir, larch, pine and spruce around the site then, within the perimeter provided shelters of mainly laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* and yew *Taxus baccata*, and from what can be deduced from the site now, some individual Norway spruce *Picea abies* and Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*, to protect nearly 400 specimen trees and shrubs (shrubs now disappeared). The original shelter belts (shown on OS 1923) have now mainly been felled as they have become redundant, plus on the NW boundary have been lost to new ownership and thinned out [Davis] (this accounts for the 2.4 ha site being now reduced to 2.1 ha?). A parcel of land c.0.6ha adjacent to the SE boundary appears from its constituent trees to have once formed part of the Harewood planting [Tim Pye pers. comm.].

A lost 'List of Trees' indicated that Priest planted some 70 varieties of conifer alone [Guide Book]. The locations of the older trees show that there is a loose structure of botanical classification where trees of one genus are planted together in one area. It is unclear from where Mr Priest obtained the trees nor whether he was in contact with notable collectors of the day of their patrons.

It is thought that the land had previously been an apple orchard and a sizeable kitchen garden for Harewood [Guide Book]. This cannot be ascertained from contemporary maps, but a 1946 AP indicates the walled kitchen garden was in the north-west corner of the site adjacent to the ornamental gardens of Harewood. A single apple tree discovered near the northern corner of the site has proved to be the old variety 'Hambledon Deux Ans' [Tim Pye pers. comm.] which from its appearance could well be a relic of this orchard. The same AP shows there was an road from the west side of Harewood as far as the boundary of the arboretum, which is marked as

'carriage drive' on the 1912 sales document; its line can still be discerned. The arboretum incorporated a small area of older woodland in the north-east corner [OS maps].

During World War II the tree canopies hid docklands factory equipment and machines intended to replace those damaged during the London bombings [Guide Book]. Concrete footings assumed to date from this time can still be seen in the approximate centre of the site.

Thomas Priest died in 1943 and the land was sold to Marcel Porn of Little Kingshill Grange, who became equally attached to the arboretum [Guide Book]. Possible recent planting of saplings can be discerned on a 1946 AP. He died in 1949 and it was then inherited by his daughter Lica Carton and her husband (who bestowed the name 'Priestfield' and were still the owners in 1987), but as only minimal maintenance was possible the arboretum gradually fell into neglect. In 1968 they received advice from the great tree expert Alan Mitchell of the Forestry Commission. In 1982/83 Merelene Davis of the Chiltern Society who became the first curator accompanied him on a reinspection which led to the Chiltern Society Small Woodlands Project undertaking clearance which uncovered 98 of the original 400 trees, and the formation of a 'Friends' group who maintain the arboretum.

Bedgebury Pinetum, Kent, and Savill Gardens, Surrey, provided replacement specimens after the storms of 1987 and 1990. The storms were however beneficial in thinning out some of the existing trees and finishing off moribund ones [Guide Book].

Ownership passed through the family to the current owners c. 2000. A succession of curators, regular maintenance volunteers and local support and goodwill have ensured the site's survival, health and ongoing development as new specimens are acquired. The site is private, but open to the public twice a year, and by appointment. The owner also permits access to members of the Friends group at any time.

Principal Building

There are no buildings. Thomas Priest's house (Harewood) was on Hare Lane c.50m outside the north-west boundary of the arboretum; it is shown but not named on OS 25" in 1925 and 6" 1926 maps; it was extant in 1960 (OS). That site is now occupied by a new Harewood, a prestigious contemporary house in woodland gardens of c.1ha [*The Modern House*]. The gardens are part of the previous Harewood garden – a 20m 'buffer zone' has been left and remnants of iron park fencing can be seen among the remains of the shelter belt, but the property now has no connection with the arboretum.

The Arboretum

Access is along a track running NW from Stony Lane (shown as a footpath on OS 1900), a partly unmade road between private houses, then turning NE through plantation of mixed deciduous woodland created in the late 1990s [APs]; it is in the same ownership as the Arboretum but not part of it. The entrance from the path from Stony Lane is on the southern edge through a boundary of old planting of oak, pine, holly and laurel. A subsidiary entrance leads from the plantation woodland on the western end of this boundary. From the main entrance a network of grass paths lead around and across the site, designed to ensure the visitor is taken particularly to easily recognised trees, the 'champion trees' and areas of special planting (described below). The main path from the entrance on the southern boundary leads north to a 'log lounge' which acts as a quiet seating area for *shinrin yoku* ('forest bathing') near the southern edge of the central woodland area. The north and south boundaries are woodland, the east and west sides are unmanaged areas edged with dead-hedging. Within those a mown

belt with some patches of flower meadow and small areas devoted to herbaceous plants encircles a central core of woodland which occupies roughly half of the overall area. Interestingly, recent deturfing to create a wildflower area has exposed a clear boundary between humus-rich soil and gravelly soil, perhaps marking a lost garden feature. Specimen trees occur both within the woodland area and as specimens in the mown areas..

In 2021 there were 205 tree species in the 2.1 ha site, originating from 18 geographical regions of the world. The planting density varies in different areas. The collection has a representative of each of the 28 coniferous genera that will grow in Britain [Priestfield Arboretum website]. The grouping by genus discerned in the original plantings has been continued with the more recent plantings, particularly of the conifers, subject to providing optimum conditions for growth within the structure imposed by the existing trees [Guide Book]. Thus most examples of silver fir (*Abies*) are in one zone, spruce (*Picea*) in another and pines (*Pinus*) in another. The Guide Book lists 6 specimens as planted in the late 1920s: western yellow pine *Pinus ponderosa*, Bosnian pine *P. leucodermis*, Jeffrey's pine *P. jeffreyi*, Korean fir *Abies koreana*, himalayan spruce *Picea spinulosa* and Norway spruce *P. abies*, all near the centre. Otherwise planting records have only been kept since 1984. The plan for broadleaves was not for forest trees, but for smaller, unusual trees that would not impact on the conifers. The vision was also to plant trees that might provide inspiration for gardens and public places [Newsletter]. The neutral/acid soil allows the growth of many species which do not thrive in the chalky soil more common in the Chilterns.

All specimen trees are listed in the Guide Book and labelled with a unique reference number; supplementary schematic plans provided with the guidebook locate individual specimens within colour-coded planting zones. A few species have more than one specimen. About 60% are conifers, many of them rare outside their natural range. Uncatalogued native species may have been 'accidental' arrivals but left to provide cover for the more delicate specimens.

Twelve 'champion trees' are present – individual trees that are important examples of their species because of their size, age, rarity or historical significance. The champion status was awarded by the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland in 2009. Kansu crab apple *Malus kansuensis* is a UK and Ireland champion; bastard service tree *Sorbus x thuringiaca* is a former England champion, while the rest have county champion status: northern Japanese hemlock *Tsuga diversifolia*, Lawson cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Wisselli', himalayan spruce *Picea spinulosa*, western yellow pine *Pinus ponderosa*, Jeffrey's pine *Pinus jeffreyi*, Manchurian fir *Abies holophylla*, Japanese red pine *Pinus densiflora*, butternut *Juglans cinerea*, American sweet gum *Liquidambar styraciflua*, Formosan fir *Cunninghamia konishii*, Katsura *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. There are two Wollemi pines *Wollemia nobilis*, one of the world's oldest and rarest plants. It has a locally significant historic variety, the Prestwood black cherry *Prunus avium* self-seeded from the one remaining tree of this variety from a garden in Prestwood, formerly part of a commercial cherry orchard [Bernwode Plants].

Management is based on essential maintenance, scrub clearance, mowing and replanting, but effort is also made to encourage biodiversity. Specimens continue to be added to the collection, in response to donations of trees, suggestions and occasionally memorials.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFERENCES

Key Sources

Bernwode Plants <http://www.bernwodeplants.co.uk/descriptions/cherry3.htm>

Davis, Merelene 'The renovation of an arboretum', International Dendrology Society Yearbook, 1987, 86–95

Kelly's Directory of Berks Bucks & Oxon 1915 <https://berkshirestories.org.uk/archive/berkshire-directories/kellys-directory-of-berks-bucks-oxon/kellys-directory-of-berks-bucks-oxon-1915/134207-kellys-berks-bucksoxon-1915-0716jpg?q=#prettyPhoto>

Priestfield Arboretum Friends newsletter, Winter 2021

Priestfield Arboretum Guide Book and Tree List 2021 edition

Priestfield Arboretum website <https://priestfieldarboretum.org.uk/history/>

The Modern House 2020 'Harewood' (sales brochure) <https://www.themodernhouse.com/>

Buckinghamshire Archives, D-BASM/2/55, D-7/2/49, D-7/2/62; D-WIG/2/4/84

OS maps:

Buckinghamshire Sheet XLII Surveyed: 1874 to 1877, Published: 1883 6 inch

Buckinghamshire Sheet XLII.NE Revised: 1897, Published: 1900 6 inch

Buckinghamshire Sheet XLII.NE Revised: 1923, Published: 1926 6 inch

Buckinghamshire XLII.3 Revised: 1923, Published: 1925 25 inch

Buckinghamshire Sheet SU99NW Surveyed/Revised 1930–1959 Published 1960 6 inch

Aerial photos in HER:

1946 (RAF), 1947 (RAF), 1980, 1985, 1989, 1999, 2003, 2020

Reason for Interest (e.g. type of site, age, named designer)

Unique collection of choice and rare trees of varying ages, many of which are unusual for Bucks and some are rare in the UK. Valuable resource for those interested in trees, and for educational purposes.

Current Management and Status

The Friends of Priestfield Arboretum have recently acquired Charitable Incorporated Organisation status (CIO 1191183) to ensure better financial security and accountability.

The site is at some risk of trespass and vandalism.

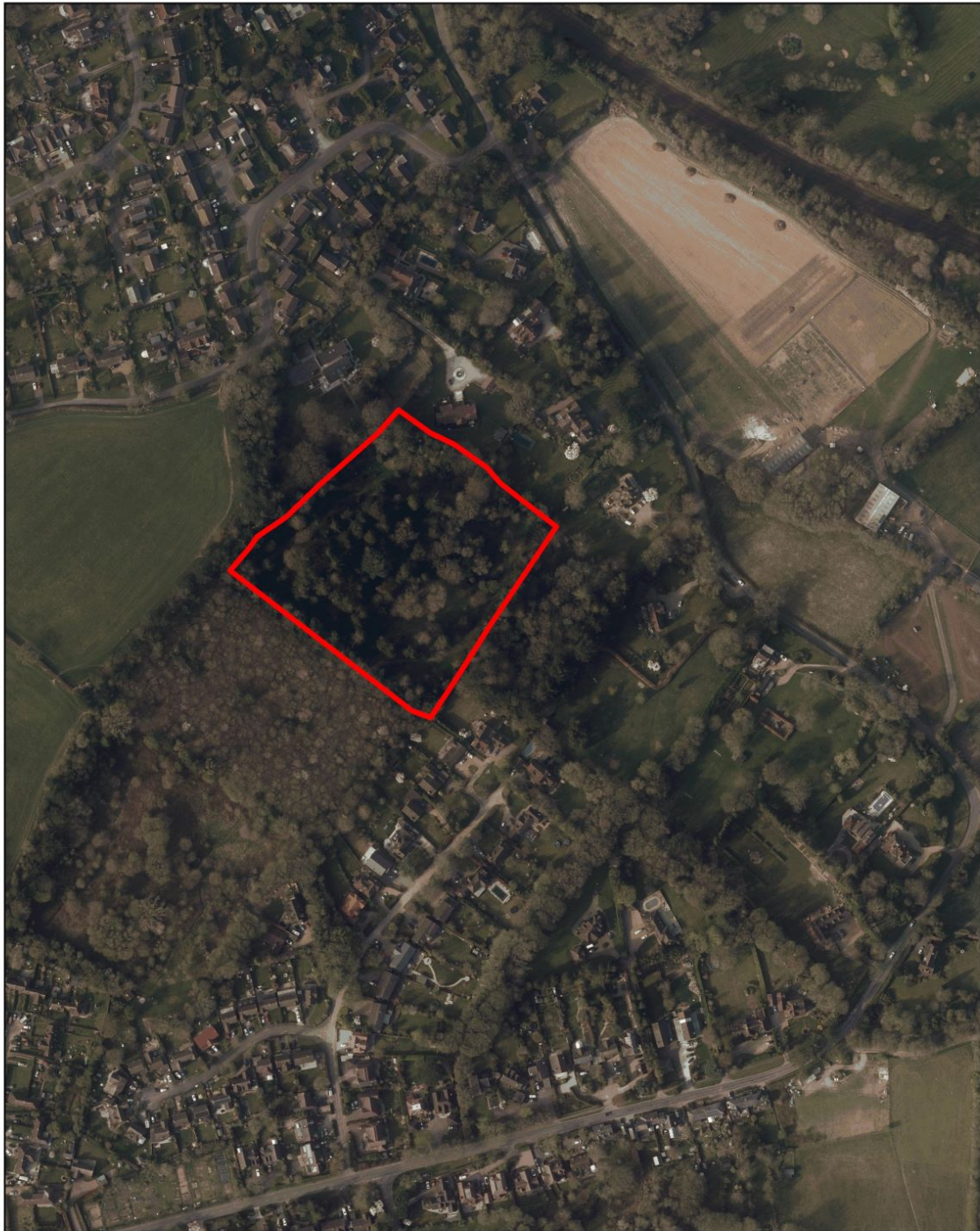
At the time of writing (February 2022):

- The landowner plans to build over the access from Stony Lane and divert the footpath.
- The landowner has engaged a firm of solicitors to challenge the green belt status of his land, which includes the arboretum.

The Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan 2016–2036 (now withdrawn) identified Little Kingshill as not contributing to the green belt, stating that 'Given that a permanent boundary can be found this village should be removed from the Green Belt'. See also the Green Belt Exceptional Circumstances Report May 2019 <https://www.southbucks.gov.uk/article/10015/Green-Belt>.

CONSERVATION STATUS None	
Survival 88% (2.1 of original 2.4 ha)	Condition Good
RECOMMENDATION Nominated for Buckinghamshire Council Local List	
PRIORITY [High/standard, based on threats/issues] High	
Report by: C Butler Date: 22 March 2022 Edited by: SR Date: 22 March 2022 Thanks are due to Tim Pye, Coordinator of the Friends, for help with compiling this report and permission to reproduce the plan of the Arboretum.	

CONTEMPORARY IMAGES & BOUNDARY MAP



Scale: 1:3,149 at A4



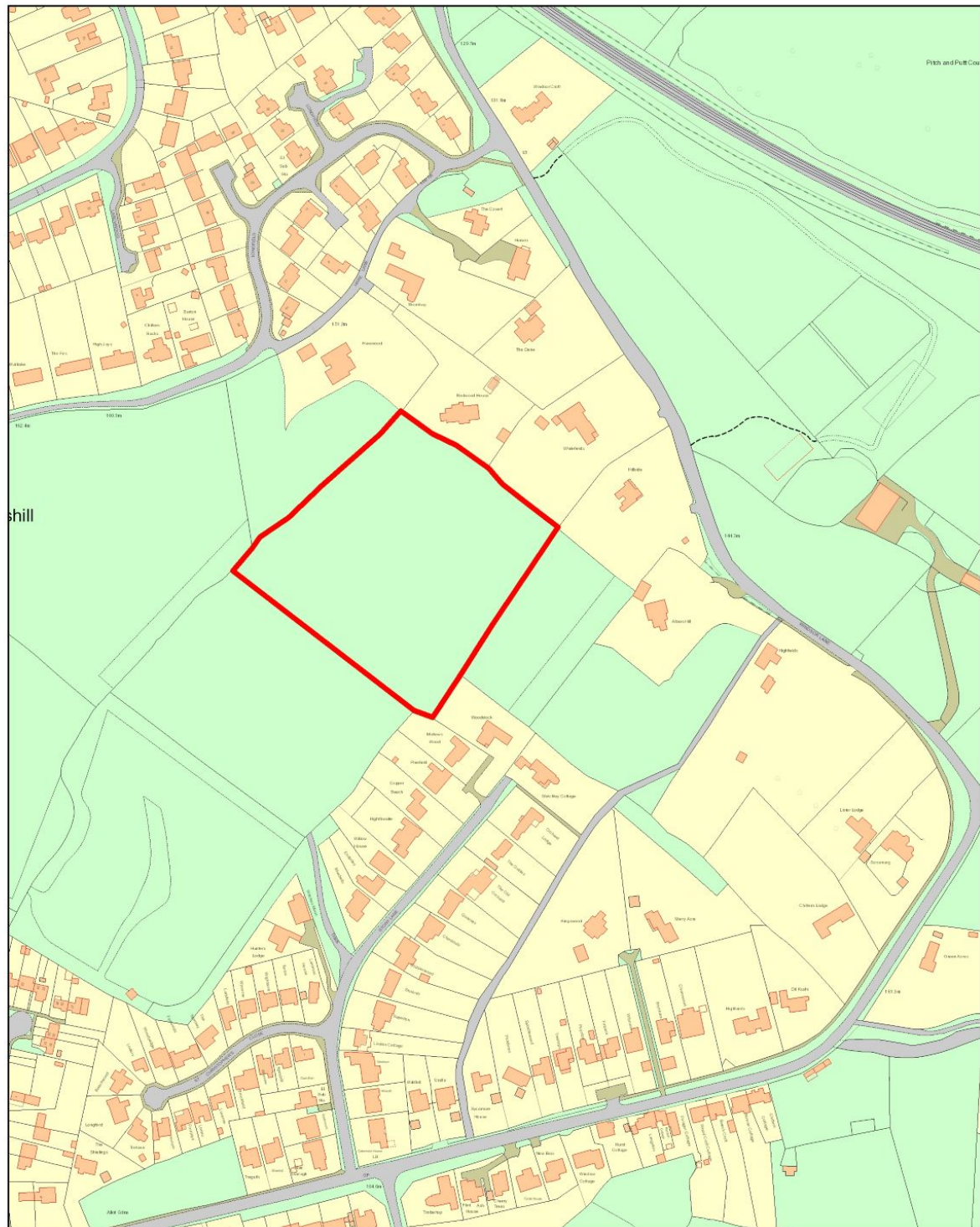
Priestfield Arboretum: 2020 aerial photograph

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Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
February 2022



Buckinghamshire
Gardens Trust



Priestfield Arboretum: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
February 2022

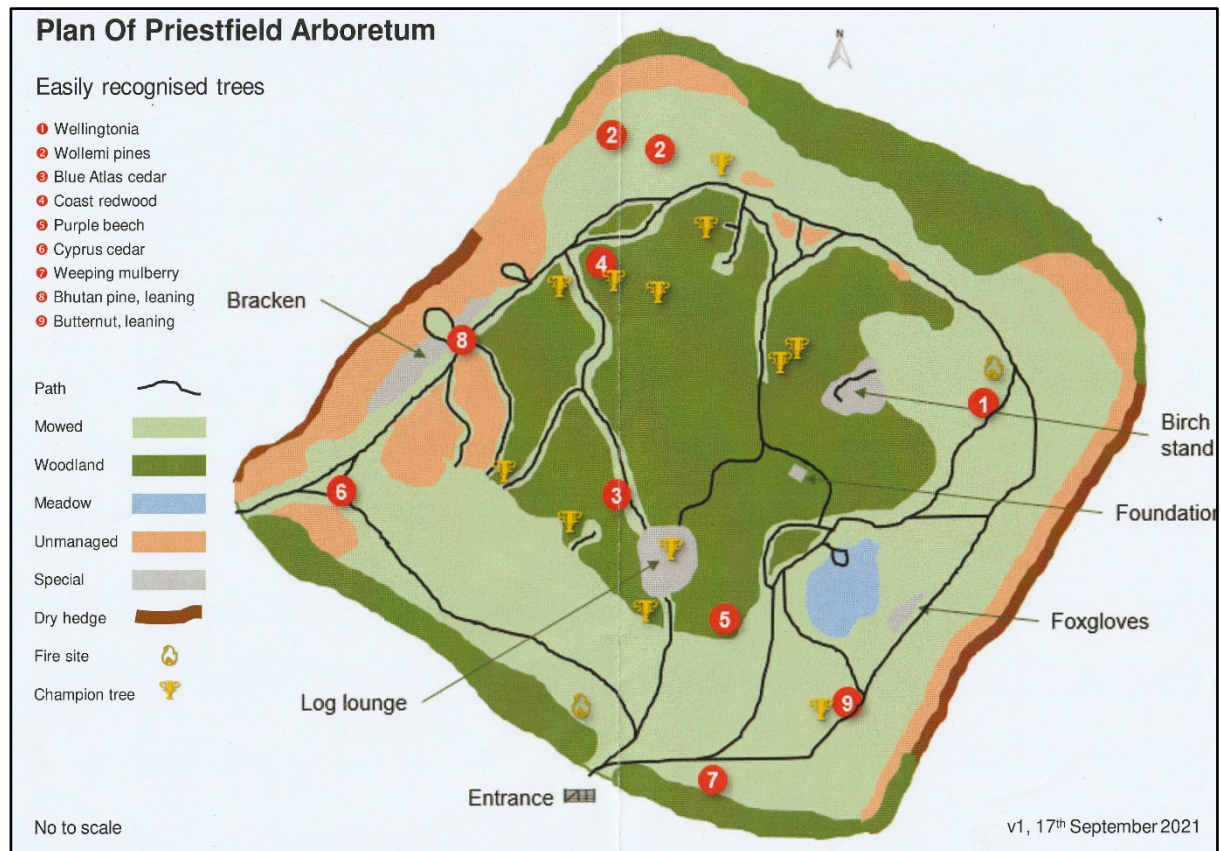


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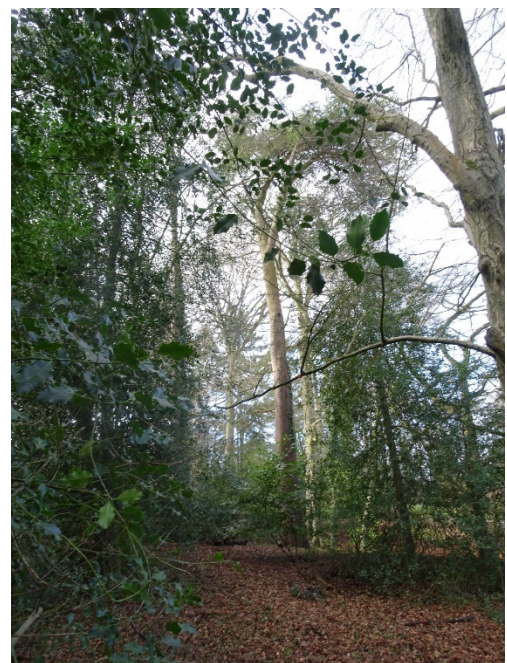
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Guide Book Plan © The Friends of Priestfield Arboretum



Entrance path to arboretum



Boundary planting



General view of conifers



Wollemi pine



Katsura, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*

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Volunteers creating wildflower area © The Friends of Priestfield Arboretum