

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Buckinghamshire Archives

## Former Hitcham House, Burnham

November 2023



The Finnis Scott  
Foundation



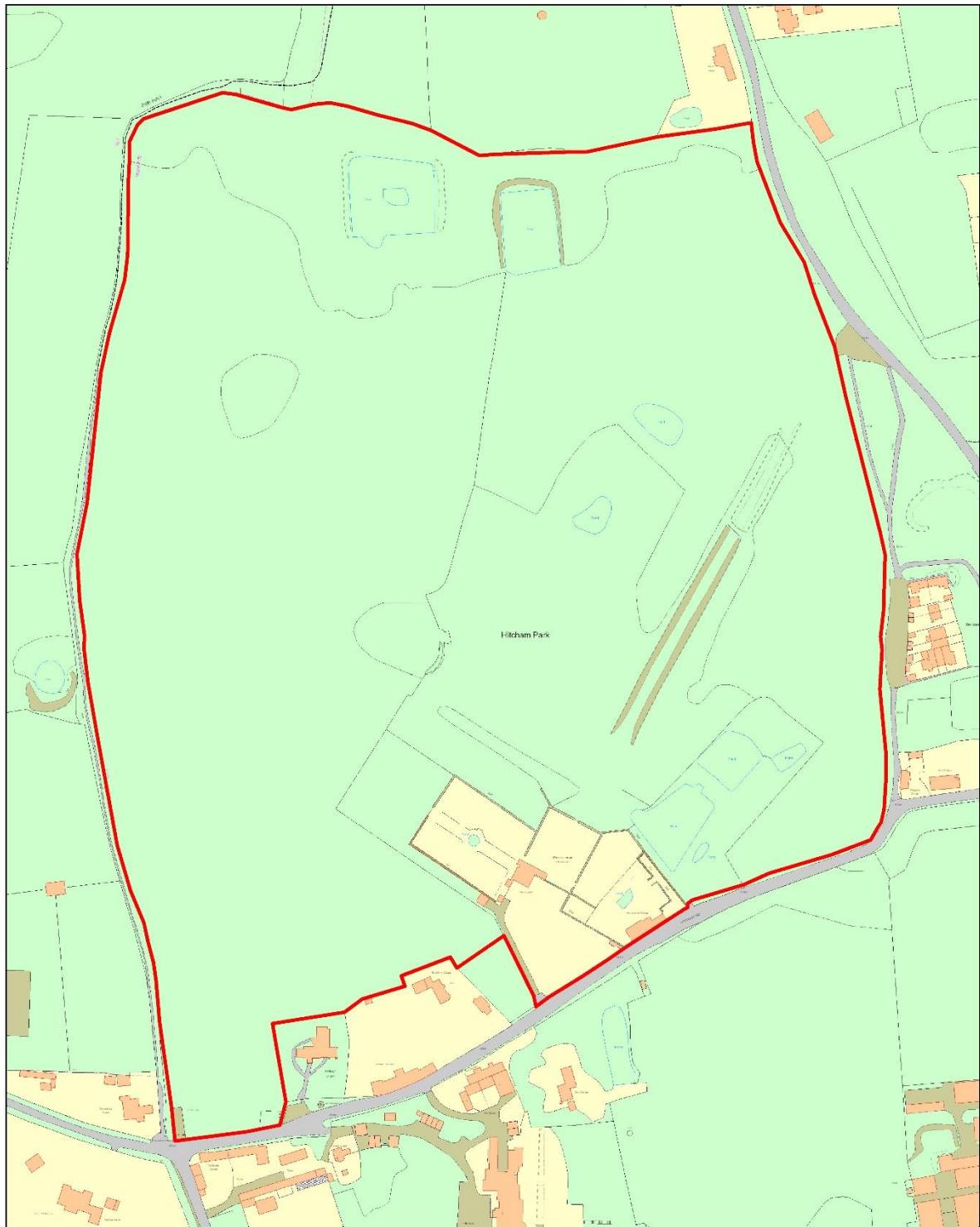
THE  
GARDENS  
TRUST



**Bucks Gardens Trust**

The Stanley Smith (UK)  
Horticultural Trust

## HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



### Hitcham Park: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service  
November 2023



Scale: 1:3,032 at A4



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Scale: 1:3,032 at A4



### Hitcham Park: 2022 aerial photograph

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November 2023



## 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 (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 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 *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 significant grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the Finnis Scott Foundation. 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>FORMER HITCHAM<br/>HOUSE</b><br><br>BCC HER: 0016304000 |
| <b>DISTRICT:</b> | WYCOMBE         |  |
| <b>PARISH:</b>   | BURNHAM         |  |
| <b>OS REF:</b>   | SU 922 827      |  |

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

A sequence of C17 walled gardens with an extensive park arranged to the north and east around the remains of the former Hitcham House (demolished after a fire in 1804) converted to subsidiary offices to the Victorian 'Blythewood' (later renamed Hitcham House) to the south. The walled enclosures survive almost complete and contain gates with substantial piers on the main axes from the site of the former house. Parts of the house survive incorporated into the current Laundry Cottage. A C17 outbuilding is still in existence on the road frontage as Hitcham Park Cottage. There is another group of ponds or moats in woods at the north end of the Park, served in earlier times by a complex layout of paths according to the 1779 Parish Plan.

### Archaeological interest

There will be potential evidence for the former layout of the walled gardens. The sequence of medieval and post-medieval fishponds survive to the east of the site of the former Hitcham House. The two ponds at the northern boundary of the park (one with a small island) may even constitute the remains of a designed C17 water garden (viz. Hanley Castle, Oxfordshire).

### Architectural interest

The architectural interest of the site resides in the remaining walls, gate piers and finials. Hitcham Park Cottage (C17) on the site frontage to Hitcham Lane survives in good condition externally.

### Artistic interest

The continuing planting and maintenance to a high standard by a member of the former owning family (living close by) creates a fine impression. The site has a surprisingly rural and tranquil setting given its general location close to considerable urban development.

### Historic interest

A fascinating survival of a C17 and earlier sequence of gardens and fish ponds associated with a former house of considerable distinction, demolished in 1804 and superseded when the focus of the estate moved across Hitcham Lane in the second half of the C19.

## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Hitcham is recorded in the Domesday Book as a manor formerly held by Haming, a thegn of Edward the Confessor, and then subsequently held by Miles Crispin and was assessed as 6 hides of land (VCH). The Domesday Book also records a fishery of 500 eels (HER 00163032000 – MBC536 four medieval and post-medieval fishponds). The parish church has a nave dating from c.1190 (VCH, Pevsner and Williamson). The Manor descended through various families including Doe, Beauchamp, Ramsay and Clarke (VCH). Its most brilliant moment must have come when an ageing Queen Elizabeth I visited Sir William Clarke on 2 October 1602. After this the manor passed through the Weston, Travers and Freind Families. The Manor House was situated to the east of the church on the north side of Hitcham Lane with some farm buildings between (maps by Roque [1760], Jefferys [1779], the OS Surveyor's draft of c.1810, and Bryant 1824). Bryant shows a mainly featureless rectangular estate on the north side of Hitcham Lane. A detailed survey of the Parish of Hitcham in 1779 delineates the former Hitcham House as a substantial L-shaped building set back from Hitcham Lane, with a sequence of walled gardens to the north east and north west, and a detached building on the road frontage, and other buildings forming a yard (now Tithe Barn Farm) between it and the parish church (Bucks Archive IR 133). At this date there were three large fishponds in a line to the east-north-east and also an avenue to the north east. Also shown is a rectangular stand of trees in the park to the north east and then, to the north, at the northern perimeter of the park, a detached pleasure ground with paths and trees surrounding two quadrilateral ponds, the larger to the west having a small island. Continuing anti clockwise round the park is "Oaken Grove"; with an oval stand of trees in its centre and to its south west "The Meadows" extending into an orchard to the west of the walled gardens. The whole park is indicated on the 1779 map as covering 43 acres, 3 roods and 5 perches, roughly the equivalent of 17.5ha. In 1780 the Manor was acquired by William 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Grenville (VCH) who died in 1834.

After a period of use as a school, the House suffered a fire and was demolished in 1804 (pers. comm: Robert Hanbury of Tithe Barn). Lady Grenville died in 1864 and left her estates to her nephew, the Hon. George Matthew Fortescue. George Hanbury (a successful brewer) bought 75 acres of the Manor estate in 1866 on the south side of Hitcham Lane and built "Blythewood" there. The site of the former Hitcham House, the formal gardens and the rest of the estate was bought in turn by George Hanbury in around 1870- 80 (pers. comm: Robert Hanbury - his great grandson). He renamed 'Blythewood' as Hitcham House. The remains of the former Hitcham House were converted into a laundry with staff accommodation ("Laundry Cottage"). After the former Hitcham House was purchased by the Hanburys the area beyond the enclosed garden was used as a kitchen garden and later let as a plant nursery (pers comm: Robert Hanbury).

Col. Lionel Hanbury, son of George, eventually retired to live in the detached building on the road frontage, now Hitcham Park Cottage (pers. comm: Robert Hanbury). The gardens came to the Colonel's elder son. The gardens had suffered many years of neglect but have been restored, planted and maintained by Robert Hanbury on behalf of his widowed sister-in-law. Hitcham Park Cottage on the frontage is currently in separate ownership (Robert Hanbury's late brother) and with its own rear garden is in use as a holiday cottage.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

The hamlet of Hitcham is located on relatively high ground above the river Thames, 1 km (0.6 miles) west-north-west of the centre of Burnham, and 6.5 km (4 miles) north-west of the centre of Slough. It sits in gentle rolling and well-treed country (Dropmore, Cliveden and Burnham Beeches being located between 3 and 5 km (1.8 – 3.1 miles) to the north. The Thames itself flows 1.6km (1 mile) to the west). Its immediate setting is of relative seclusion amidst the highly-developed nature of this busy location 43 km (27 miles) west of the City of London.

The former Hitcham House was located in a rather secluded hollow with a restricted view southwards across Hitcham Lane along a defile containing three long, thin, lakes (1779 Parish plan, IE 399). It stood in its pleasure grounds near the southern boundary of its park, the identified area of historic interest of which extends to 23ha.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The present approach is a curving gravel drive approximately 75 m long from Hitcham Lane on the south boundary of the designated area entered to the south west of what is now Laundry Cottage immediately west of a substantial brick wall running west along the road frontage from what is now Hitcham Park Cottage. It leads to Laundry Cottage and its dedicated private garden (not accessed) and also (round the north side of a tall brick wall) to the garden enclosures.

### **PRINCIPAL STRUCTURES**

#### **REMAINS OF FORMER HITCHAM HOUSE (LAUNDRY COTTAGE)**

The principal building is therefore 'Laundry Cottage and the Laundry' (listed Grade II) which from the evidence of historic mapping (IR 133) and an illustration on the front cover (both Bucks Archive) incorporates the scant remains of the former Hitcham House. Furthermore, it sits in the centre of the surviving sequence of historic garden enclosures and on the axis of an avenue (still in existence running north east from one of the garden enclosures: AP's). The original House was set back to the north of Hitcham Lane and consisted of two wings at right angles to each other (drawing in Bucks Record Office: coloured version in the possession of Robert Hanbury). The shorter wing to the north faced the road with the other longer east range running southwards towards the road forming the eastern side of an open forecourt, laid to grass with three conifers in the historic view. Laundry Cottage follows the dog-legged layout in general terms but the shorter, current east wing is entirely modern, of one storey, and sits to the east outside the footprint of the former east wing which formerly incorporated the House's kitchens (pers. comm: Robert Hanbury). The historic view shows a substantial brick House with hipped tiled roofs and small-paned sash windows. A cupola shows above and behind the east wing.



The north range exhibits today a modest two-storey element with its own hipped roof of old red tiles. The upper floor is of buff brick while the ground floor of its north elevation is of red brick infilling between four timber Tuscan Columns of what appears to be originally an open loggia (which surprisingly is not on the central axis of the principal garden enclosure immediately to the north). The remainder of the modern bungalow accommodation of Laundry Cottage forms a square block which fills in the re-entrance angle between the two wings. Tall garden walls of buff brick still remain from the long east wing of the former House dividing the private garden from the historic C17 walled enclosures (incorporated the kitchens: pers. comm: Robert Hanbury). Blind arcades are evident on the eastern façade. The existence of the former house is marked by a plaque on a surviving wall (2023).

## HITCHAM PARK COTTAGE

This cottage (listed Grade II) stands on the frontage of Hitcham Lane some 70m south east of Laundry Cottage. The list description includes the comment: 'part of the remains of Hitcham Manor'. It can be identified on the 1779 Parish plan (Bucks archive IR 133) and the ridge of its roof can be seen to the right on a drawing of the principal House (front cover: Buckinghamshire Archives). It is clearly an outbuilding to the former Hitcham House. It is of two storeys and of red brick under roofs of old red tiles. Its frontage contains a sequence of timber-framed casement windows with modern leading, and a pedimented timber doorcase. There is some decorative work in blue brick (two lozenges have survived alteration at the western end). At the eastern end of the cottage, a high brick wall steps up the hillside along the road frontage for some 25m. On the other side a lower brick wall with historic coping details runs along the road frontage westwards for 45m with a modern gap next to the cottage for car parking (this wall is absent from the historic view of the House: its place is taken by a low fence in Chinoiserie style). The rear elevation has a substantial chimney and two large, plain brick projecting gables.

## THE GARDEN WALLS

These C17 structures (listed Grade II) are the dominant elements in the gardens and pleasure grounds and are an important survival. They are of two main types: taller walls with stone-like brick slab copings (typical of the larger northern enclosure) and lower walls with brick copings. The latter generally exhibit (on one side) a dentil course set diagonally below a sloped brick coping topped by bricks laid flat (typical of the walls to the east of Laundry Cottage). The gate piers on the outer sides of these enclosures are described below. The sequence of walled gardens covers some 2ha (4 acres, 3 roods and 29 perches: 1779 Parish plan)

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** (maintained and planted up by Robert Hanbury for his widowed sister-in-law)

Laundry Cottage sits well-related to the sequence of walled enclosures which extend from it to the north and east. All the enclosures have perimeter and other planting carried out and tended by Robert Hanbury. Starting from the north and proceeding anti-clockwise, the first rectangular enclosure ('A') extends north west for 63m from the north elevation of Laundry Cottage and is 46m wide. It is bounded by 3m brick walls



topped with large stone slabs. The centre line of its axis appears to have run from the original north east corner of the former House (1779 Parish plan) and still contains a central grassed allée running past a circular pond between bowed trimmed hedges leading to a gate flanked by large brick piers topped with ornate stone urns. The metal gates themselves are low and ornate. Earlier the pond had a quatrefoil shape and sat at the centre of four paths with tree planting in the quadrants (1779 Parish plan). The whole enclosure sat at this time within a larger enclosure extending to the west, north and east with a grid of paths and orchard planting. Nothing survives today of the boundaries or the historic planting of this larger enclosure though its extent can be made out on modern mapping. Today the northern area immediately beyond the gate piers is a small area of grass with a planted exedra of trimmed conifers framing an informal and restricted view of the park through a gap in surrounding mature planting.

To the south-east of this first enclosure is another ('B': 36m long and 33m wide). This enclosure extends north east from Laundry Cottage on the axis of the main avenue in the park. Inside the tall listed walls, a new lime avenue has been planted leading to similarly substantial but plainer brick gate piers with large ball finials (one is sitting nearby on the grass). Amongst other trees in this enclosure, there is a fine catalpa in the centre of the northern half (information from Robert Hanbury). Walls extend diagonally out into the park from the exterior eastern corners of this enclosure connecting with the enclosures on either side (the boundary of the larger example to the north having disappeared).

The next enclosure ('C') is wedge-shaped, not rectangular like those to the north. Its southern boundary wall with the current back garden of Hitcham Park Cottage is not shown on the 1779 Parish Plan. It measures 49m by 24m at its widest and furthest point across its bowed eastern end. This enclosure has no particular defining elements. A personnel gate with a filigree metal gate between small plain brick piers with diminutive ball finials leads southwards to the final enclosure ('D') at the rear of Hitcham Park Cottage (not accessed) which measures 46m by 42m at its widest to the east where there is a raised terrace.

## **PARK (not accessed)**

Located north-eastwards uphill from the raised terrace at the rear of Hitcham Park Cottage are a sequence of fishponds (two larger and two smaller, all evident of the 1799 Parish plan) currently used by a local Fishing Club (pers. comm: Robert Hanbury). The mature and historic lime avenue extending north eastwards from Laundry Cottage and the gates of the second enclosure runs out between two large stands of trees, with another avenue running from outside the gates north westwards along the elevated eastern side of the former larger enclosure surrounding the first, northern enclosure. The remainder of the park (farmed from Park Farm south-east of the House and part of the original estate of the later Hitcham House) is mainly pasture as viewed from Hitcham Tithe Barn to the south.

A complex of two decorative ponds close to the northern boundary (some 365m north of the former House) and shown as set in deeper perimeter planting with paths, on the 1779 Parish plan) is still extant ('Google Earth' March 2022). Furthermore, the larger western pond still appears to contain its small central island at this date.

## KITCHEN GARDEN

There is no kitchen garden now associated or evident at this location. The 1779 Parish plan shows an orchard to the west of the formal gardens: in addition, fields to the south of Hitcham Lane bear the names 'Walnut Tree Orchard' and 'Hop Grounds'. It is possible that one of more of the original enclosures may have been used as a kitchen garden but there is no sign of this on the 1779 Parish Plan.

## REFERENCES

Pevsner N. and Williamson E., *The Buildings of England - Buckinghamshire* (1994) pp.400-401

Victoria County History *Buckinghamshire Vol 3* (1925) pp.231-235

Wass, S, *Seventeenth-century Water Gardens: the case of Hanwell Castle* (2022) Windgather Press/Oxbow Books

### Maps

1770 Jefferys map of Buckinghamshire

1825 Bryant map of Buckinghamshire

1779 Parish Map (Bucks Archive IR 133)

### Ordnance Survey

1812 OS surveyor's draft 2-inch drawing

1875 25"

1900 6"

With Thanks to Robert Hanbury for showing the Trust's volunteers the gardens of the former Hitcham House.

G Huntingford (with Claire de Carle and Louise Kiel of the Bucks Gardens Trust for the visits)

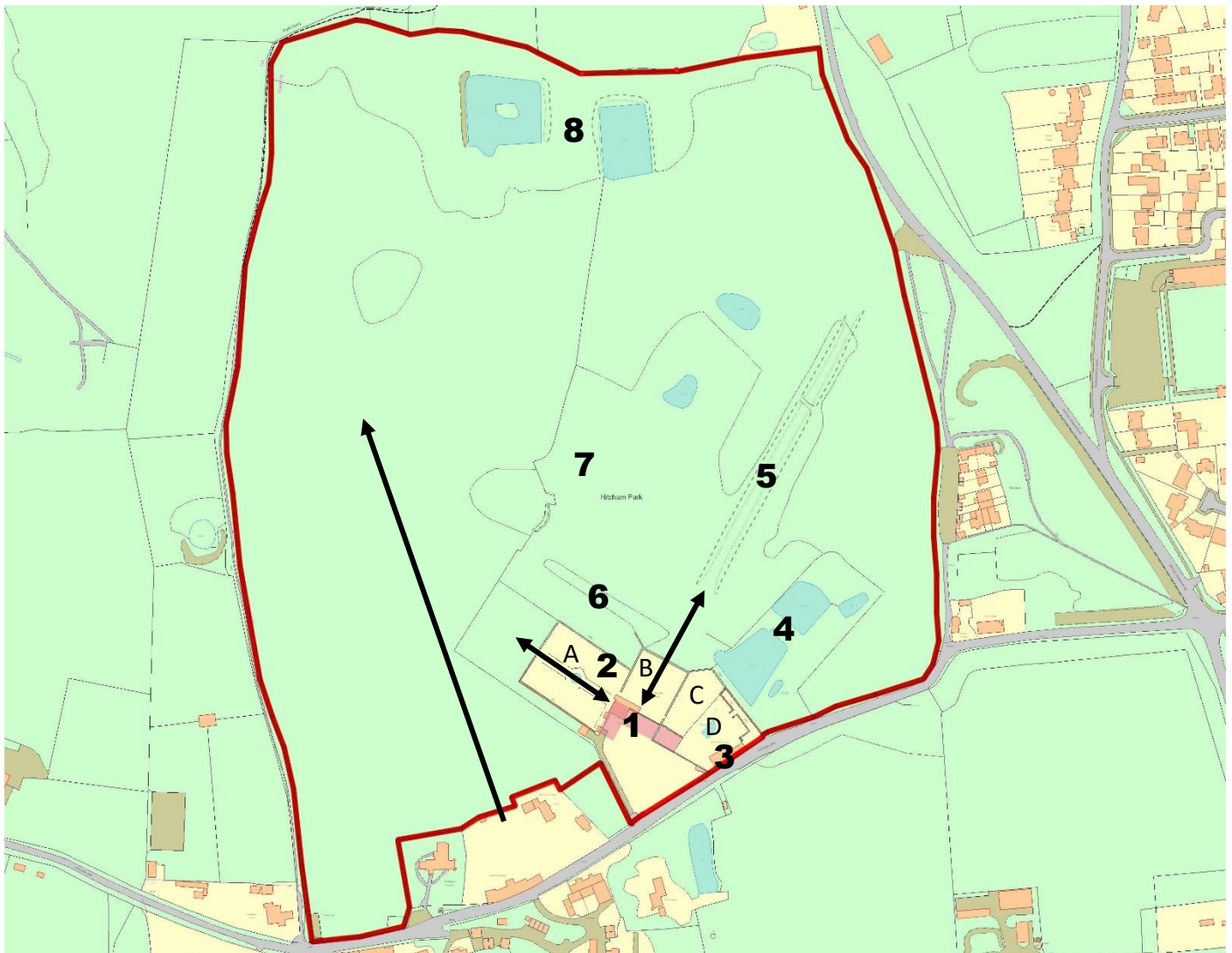
## EXTRACT FROM 1779 PARISH PLAN



Buckinghamshire Archives



## KEY HISTORIC FEATURES AND VIEWS



HITCHAM HOUSE (FORMER BLYTHEWOOD)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Laundry Cottage and footprint of former Hitcham House (pink tint) |
| 2 | Formal C17 sequence of walled gardens (A-B-C-D as in text above)  |
| 3 | Hitcham Park Cottage  |
| 4 | Sequence of medieval and post-medieval fish ponds                 |
| 5 | Principal NE avenue   |
| 6 | Lesser avenue to north east of enclosures                         |
| 7 | Park  |
| 8 | Ponds/moats in northern woodland                                  |



## CURRENT IMAGES



The pond at the centre of the northern walled enclosure from the west (left) and the view from the pond south to Laundry Cottage (right)



Laundry Cottage from the NW (left) and the gates at the north end of the northern enclosure looking north (right)



Detail of the C17 wall between the northern enclosure and the one to next to the south (left) and view west along the lime avenue towards Laundry Cottage (right)

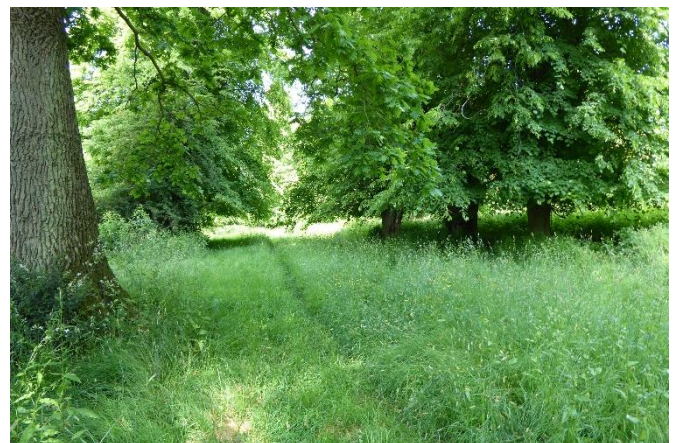
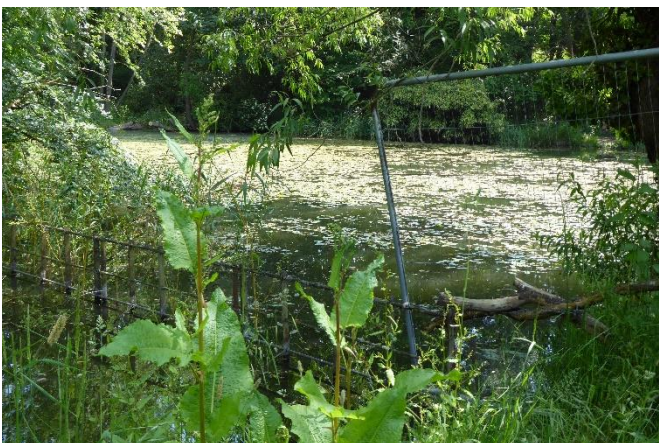




View east towards the gates to the east of Laundry Cottage (left) and a surviving wall of the former Hitcham House immediately south of Laundry Cottage(right)



View east in the enclosure south-east of Laundry Cottage (left) and view south towards the rear of Hitcham Park Cottage (right)



The pond to the east of the enclosures from the north-west (left) and view north along the lesser avenue to the north-east of the enclosures (right)





View north over the park from the grounds of The Tithe Barn