

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Hitcham House, Burnham

December 2023



The Finnis Scott
Foundation



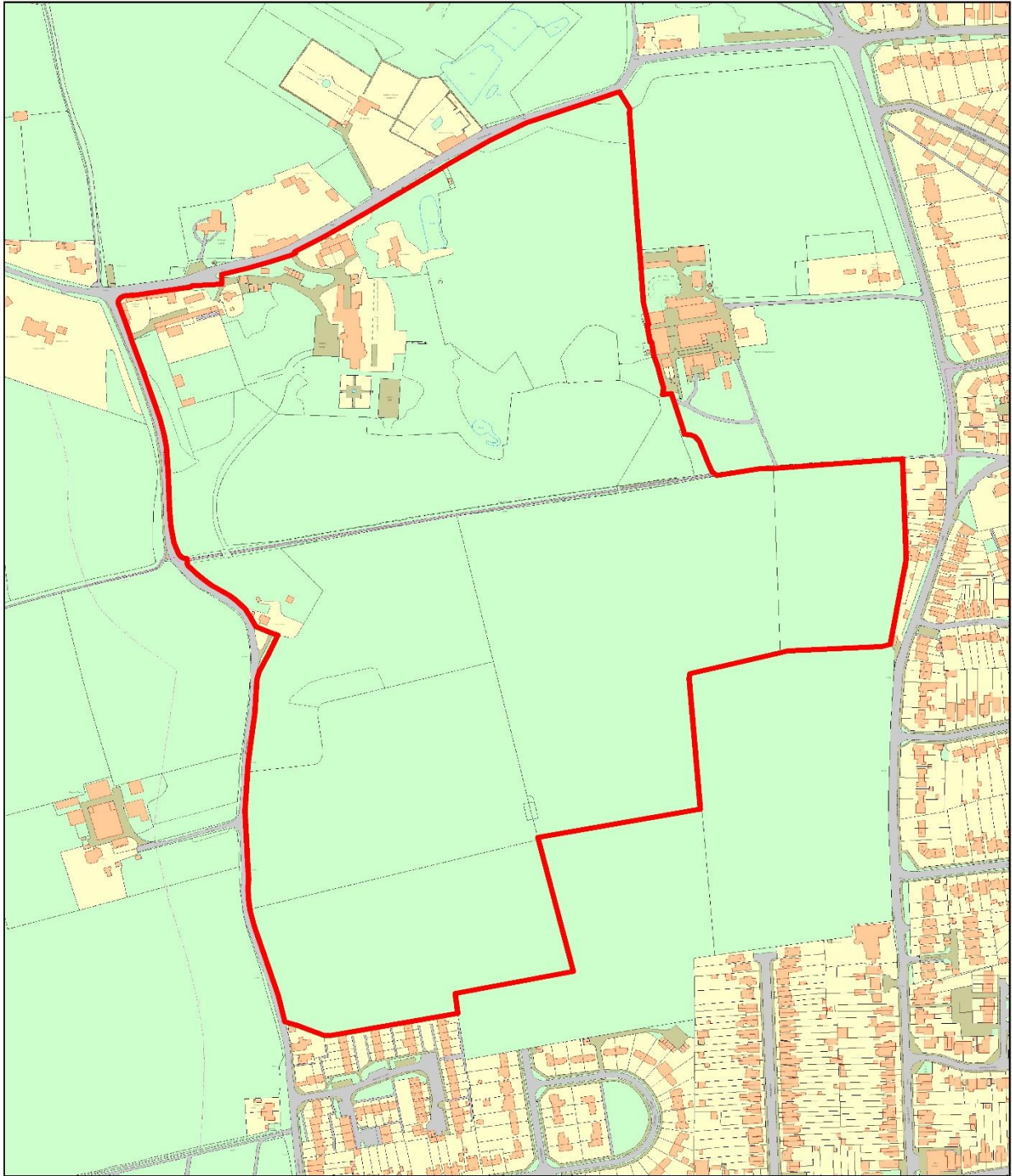
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Bucks Gardens Trust

The Stanley Smith (UK)
Horticultural Trust

HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Hitcham House (Blythwood House): boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
November 2023

Scale: 1:4,288 at A4



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Buckinghamshire
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Hitcham House (Blythwood House): 2022 aerial photograph

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November 2023



Scale: 1:4,288 at A4



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* 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 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

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	HITCHAM HOUSE BCC HER: 0653800000
DISTRICT:	WYCOMBE	
PARISH:	BURNHAM	
OS REF:	SU 921 825	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A largely intact mid-Victorian garden, pleasure ground, lodges, stables, park and sweeping approaches as laid out originally by Robert Marnock, one of the most eminent garden designers of his time. Ponds originating earlier associated with the former Hitcham House (destroyed by fire 1804) were incorporated into the design. Marnock was influential in the siting of the substantial neo-Gothic house ('Blythewood') completed in 1869 which later became Hitcham House, now converted to flats. The gardens have been parcelled out and are tended by the various flat owners without having been physically subdivided.

Archaeological interest

The ponds to the east predate the mid-Victorian development of Blythewood and its garden and may be much earlier. The association of Hitcham House with the Former Hitcham House (site located opposite on the other side of Hitcham Lane) with its historic sequence of walled gardens is of considerable interest. (See BGT Dossier: 'Former Hitcham House')

Architectural interest

The house interestingly represents a high Gothic design completed evidently with considerable expense to designs by a lesser-known architect while the contemporary garden associated with it is by a famous and eminent practitioner.

Artistic interest

Both the House and its original garden survive in good condition. The major changes to the house (conversion to flats) have been completed with very little external alteration. The garden has not been physically subdivided. The only significant alterations to the garden has been the replacement of the half-projecting circular path in the centre of Marnock's east terrace with an orthogonal design in the 1920's. and alterations to the ponds to the south west of the house. The prominent siting of the house provides extensive views to the south

Historic interest

A little-altered Victorian house and grounds created for a wealthy businessman on an estate earlier associated with a considerable older house (now lost).

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 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 Friend 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). A survey of the Parish of Hitcham in 1779 shows the manor with a walled garden, and other buildings forming a yard (now Tithe Barn Farm) between it and the parish church (Bucks Archive IR 133). At this date the land on the south side of Hitcham Lane (the future site of the current Hitcham House) was occupied by fields with three long thin ponds indicated in line to the south of the Manor House.

In 1780 the Manor was acquired by William 1st Lord Grenville (VCH) who died in 1834. Lady Grenville died in 1864 and left her estates to her nephew, the Hon, George Matthew Fortescue. George Hanbury bought 75 acres of the Manor estate in 1866. The Hanbury family had made their money in brewing. Sampson Hanbury had purchased a share in the Truman Brewery in 1788 and was involved with Truman, Hanbury & Buxton for the next 40 years. It became the largest brewery in the world and was eventually floated on the stock exchange in 1888. <https://foxlinks.com/x-truman-hanbury-buxton-brewery/>

Blythewood House was built for George Hanbury to designs by Thomas Roger Smith (1830-1903: later Professor of architecture at University College, London and a prolific writer on historic styles) and completed in 1869 (date stone, list description, and Pevsner and Williamson). Both the House and its walled garden were constructed on the former Bowling Green Close as depicted on the 1779 Parish Map. The new House had sweeping drives arriving together at the west front of the House from the north-west and from the south with lodges at both entry points. The pleasure gardens were designed by Robert Marnock. He was influential in fixing the site of the House, (Marnock Blythewood accounts, October 1866). At Blythewood his executed design consisted of a terrace walk immediately on the east (garden) side of the House, looking over a wider terrace and down to the gully containing the three ponds mentioned above. The main feature of the terrace was a centrally-located circular walk which half-projected out (1877 25" OS). There was a fountain positioned between the two surviving ponds (but only identified as such on later OS sheets: the shape of the southern pond had been softened considerably under Marnock's designs). The slope facing the House on the far side of the ponds and fountain had also been planted as an orchard by the time of the 1877 OS sheet. A road on the far edge of the gully was removed in 1867 (Marnock Blythewood accounts)

The west side of the House, in contrast was furnished with trees, screening the walled garden and providing the settings for the short north-east approach and the much longer sinuous southern approach. Stables had been built to the north of the House on the frontage to Hitcham Lane. This boundary was also provided with a deep belt of mixed planting. A footpath to the south of the House (running east-west from

Burnham to Taplow across the park) is marked on the 1875 25" OS as the 'New Cut': its course appears to have been dug out and the resulting spoil placed on the north side (towards the House) as a measure to preserve the privacy of the House (site visit). The walled garden is shown with a number of glasshouses against its north wall and in the yard immediately to the north accessed from the north end of Hitcham Road. A circular feature is indicated in the centre.

ROBERT MARNOCK (1800- 1889)

Marnock is regarded as one of the outstanding garden designers of the 19th century. He was particularly associated with the early Victorian 'Gardenesque' style popularised by J C Loudon (where gardens had to be contrived to be readily distinguished from natural planting by means of exotic plants, intensive maintenance and planting in geometrical beds: a great many public parks have been laid out on this principle). Marnock is most famous for his designs for the Botanical Gardens (1833) and for Weston Park (1873), both in Sheffield, and for the gardens of the Royal Botanic Gardens (1839) in Regent's Park. He was successively appointed the curator of the Sheffield Botanical Garden and (on the advice of J C Loudon) later for the Royal Botanic Garden. He was also the editor of *The Floricultural Magazine* for four years.

The Hanbury family destroyed the two islands in the larger of the lakes (south-east of the House) in 1903 (family diary entry, Bucks Archive).

By 1923 (25" OS) Blythewood has been renamed Hitcham House. The original arrangement of paths east of the House has been revised. The semi -projecting circular walk has been replaced on the main terrace with a rectilinear layout of two square beds within a grid of paths: the semi-circular projection was configured as a boldly projecting rectangle with a new axial path which continued down a flight of steps to a walk running north-south alongside the ponds. The upper terraces had thereby been better integrated with the lower features (ponds and fountain). A featureless square enclosed garden (now a small formal water garden in Arts and Crafts style) appeared first on this OS sheet south of the House, also connected with the grid of paths on the main terrace and below a terrace walk on this side of the House. By this time the walled garden has been subdivided just north of its previous central feature with the east wall of the southern half removed to improve direct access to the tennis court installed there (pers comm. Robert Hanbury).

Later the path and planting associated with the larger pond has been reduced (1934 25"OS). A new tennis court makes its first appearance to the south of the main terrace, disrupting the connecting paths with the enclosed garden south of the House (1947 RAF aerial photo). In 1948 the House was sold by Col Lionel Hanbury to the Canadian Red Cross as a home for night nurses and was then handed over to the NHS as a training school for nurses (pers. comm Robert Hanbury).

Hitcham as a separate parish has been subsumed within Burnham. Furthermore, listed buildings in the hamlet are listed under Burnham.

The further history of the landscape involves the steady loss of trees from the park, on either side of the 'New Cut', where the lines of trees indicating the alignment of previous field boundaries had been supplemented by small roundels (1st and 2nd Edn 6" OS).

The House was divided into nine separate dwellings in 1983, unusually with conversion details left to individual purchasers (pers. comm. Perry Ashwood), with the immediate pleasure garden being divided between the properties (also unusually) without physical subdivision. The stables have been similarly converted to houses.

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 1.6 km (1 mile) to the west). Its immediate environment is of relative seclusion amidst the highly developed nature of this busy location 43 km (27 miles) west of the City of London.

The House itself is positioned in a commanding position in the centre of the pleasure grounds that constitute the northern part of the 30-acre identified area of historic interest, with views over its principal terraces and the ponds in the considerable defile immediately to the east, and south over the park: Windsor Castle 7.25 km (4.5 miles) can be seen from the upper floors of the southern apartment (pers. comm: Perry Ashwood, resident). The House is prominent through mature planting on the approach (Hitcham Lane) from Burnham to the east.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The short north-west approach commences through brick piers with stone dressings and a pair of iron gates (111m north-west of the House) and a short section of iron fencing opposite the Parish Church. Just to the south stands Church Cottage, the former lodge, its separate ownership boundary truncating the approach which continues within the curtilage of the House through a court of plain, neat, late C20 brick garages erected for the residents. The approach curves round to the south towards the House and is joined by the current main direct vehicular entrance (plain red brick piers and flanking walls, and decorative gates) from Hitcham Lane from the north.

The long sinuous southern approach runs from Hitcham Road (280m south west of the House) past Lower Lodge to the east (timber fencing and a wooden five bar gate in evidence today). The approach runs over the 'New Cut' by means of a low brick tunnel (205m from the House). There is now no evidence of any

original drive surface over this bridge and the course of the drive is overgrown in this location. The drive was still surfaces and in use in 1959. (Pers comm. via Perry Ashwood) Close to the House the drive is of tarmac and runs over a strip of stone flags as it enters the large, modern, rectangular tarmac parking apron fringed by clipped box hedging in front of the House that replaced the original sweeping drive.

BOUNDARIES

Much use has been made of metal 'estate' fencing around the land owned by the Hanbury family, except at the junction of Hitcham Lane and Hitcham Road where the yard associated with the walled garden is bounded by high walls of yellow London stock bricks.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

HITCHAM HOUSE

Hitcham House (listed Grade II) is a substantial building of red brick under red tiles predominantly in an eclectic Gothic Revival style. It occupies a compact rectangle running north-south and stands in the centre of the pleasure grounds and in the centre of the northern half of the area designated for the purposes of this report. The principal rooms are at the taller (2½ storeys) southern end which has unusual stepped brick gables. There is a single storey block extending the House to the south with lead rainwater goods dated 1914 but this block is clearly in evidence earlier (1875 1st Edn 25" OS). The west entrance front is treated asymmetrically. The principal entrance is topped by a semi- octagonal projection with its own conical roof. The House's tall roof with bands of shaped tiles is studded with decorative Tudor-style brick chimneys. The lower two-storey service wing occupies the northern end of the rectangle with its own array of tall decorative chimneys and gables. Two single-storey wings project northwards and stood originally on either side of a glazed court, (OS 25" sheets 1877 – 1934) open to the north. The glazed roof has since been removed. The east garden elevation is more intricately modelled. The distinction between the higher southern half of the House and the rest is marked by a prominent semi-circular turret.

LODGES (in private and separate ownership)

Both lodges are compact dwellings in 'Old English' style. They display decorative half timbering upper storeys and bargeboards over red brick ground floors, originally all under tiled roofs. It is assumed that LOWER LODGE (south-west of the House) on Hitcham Road (259m south west of the entrance to the House) retains its original red tiled roof with bands of decorative tiles while CHURCH LODGE, 93m north-west of the House and opposite the parish church on Hitcham Lane, has been reroofed with plain blue clay tiles.

Dairy Cottage (now in separate ownership) to the northeast of the House, was built in the C20. Its use as a dairy was probably short lived. Its gardens occupy the NE corner of the site and include the north pond.

STABLES (in private and separate ownership, converted to houses)

This building is a large two-storey building in red brick with some quirky gothic details and with a steep roof of plain red tiles topped by decorative chimneys. It is located close to Hitcham Lane, 78m north of the House entrance. It has its own small yard on the south bounded by a red brick wall with decorative coping detailing. There have been considerable extensions, those on the north side towards the road being completed in matching style. The stables have been converted into four dwellings.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens were designed by Robert Marnock and laid out in the 'gardenesque style', the groundwork commencing in 1866, Turner (the gardener) commenced the planting in 1867 (Marnock Blythewood accounts). The roughly square pleasure grounds surround the House. Against the east elevation of the House they are more formal and to the south east consist of lawns and specimen trees on the slope down to the main pool.

The immediate setting of the House involves the contrast between the deep slopes to the east and the south sides and the level ground surrounding the entrance front, walled garden and the approaches from the west and south west. The principal element of the pleasure grounds is the formal terrace on the east side of the House. The orthogonal gravel paths of the revised layout divide the terrace into grass compartments, those at the northern end having ornamental clipped hedging. A large stone basin stands at the centre of the furthest walk. Informal steps from here descend towards the lakes in the defile into an area of trees, grass and bulbs. To the north is a plain sunken lawn fringed by shrubs part of the way down the slope to the former Dairy (in private and separate ownership). On the south side of the terrace, a clipped yew hedge separates it from the tennis court and a large plain grassed slope running south east towards the southern pond. Turning westwards round the south end of the House there is a small derelict water garden set into the slope with a central pond fringed by stone paving and symmetrically planted yews. Continuing clockwise, and further west across the southern approach, is a plain grassed area with trees and shrubs screening the walled garden. The most notable specimen is an old copper beech directly opposite the entrance to the House.

KITCHEN GARDEN *(in the separate ownership of Mr Robert Hanbury of Tithe Barn opposite - a great-grandson of the man who commissioned Blythewood – who kindly gave access to the Trust's researchers).*

The walled Kitchen Garden measures 75m x 60m approx. and is located 92m west of the House entrance. It was also designed by Marnock largely in 1867 (Marnock Blythewood accounts), with hothouses, formidable walls and corner piers with finials. This garden was originally cultivated in its entirety but once the owner of Blythewood had purchased the land associated with the former Hitcham House (demolished in 1804 after a fire) much of the horticultural activity moved across Hitcham Lane to it and the working part of this walled garden was reduced to the northern half. A yew hedge was planted across the enclosure just north of the central circular pond. The southern half of the eastern wall was demolished to improve direct access from the House and a tennis court was installed (Robert Hanbury, pers. comm). After this, access to the

operational garden was gained via the centre of the north wall through an open bay in the substantial lean-to offices and bothy range attached to the outside of the north wall, and the grand gateway with piers in the centre of the south wall would have apparently been bypassed by the alterations. The northern half currently contains vegetable beds and a contemporary greenhouse set against the formidable north wall which still displays original whitewashing along its length and there are remnants of fixings and tiles. The C19 glasshouses were supplied by Foster & Pearson: [Our Heritage - Foster & Pearson Glasshouses](http://OurHeritage-Foster&PearsonGlasshouses.com) (fosterandpearson.co.uk)

Most of the northern half is laid to lawn and flower beds with perimeter planting. Beyond the yew hedge the southern half has two simple sheds and again is mostly lawn with perimeter planting.

PARK

The 20.5ha park extends eastwards some 230m to the buildings of the former Home Farm (now Hitcham House Farm) which was established at the same as Blythewood (pers.comm. Robert Hanbury) The northern part of the park runs southwards 150m downhill to the line of the old public footpath as dug into the ground on the advice of Robert Marnock as part of his design for the gardens. The land originally associated with the house (OS 6" 1900) extended a further 450 m south over grassland. The sporadic tree cover (mostly lines of hedgerow trees from the original field boundaries of the 1779 Parish plan) were slowly lost over time except for a clump prominent from Hitcham Lane to the west.

REFERENCES

Pevsner N. and Williamson E., *The Buildings of England - Buckinghamshire* (1994) pp.400-401
Marnock, R.: Blythewood accounts, kindly copied by Robert Hanbury
Victoria County History *Buckinghamshire Vol 3* (1925) pp.231-235

Maps

1770 Jefferys map of Buckinghamshire
1825 Bryant map of Buckinghamshire
1779 Parish Map (Bucks Archive IR 133)

Ordnance Survey

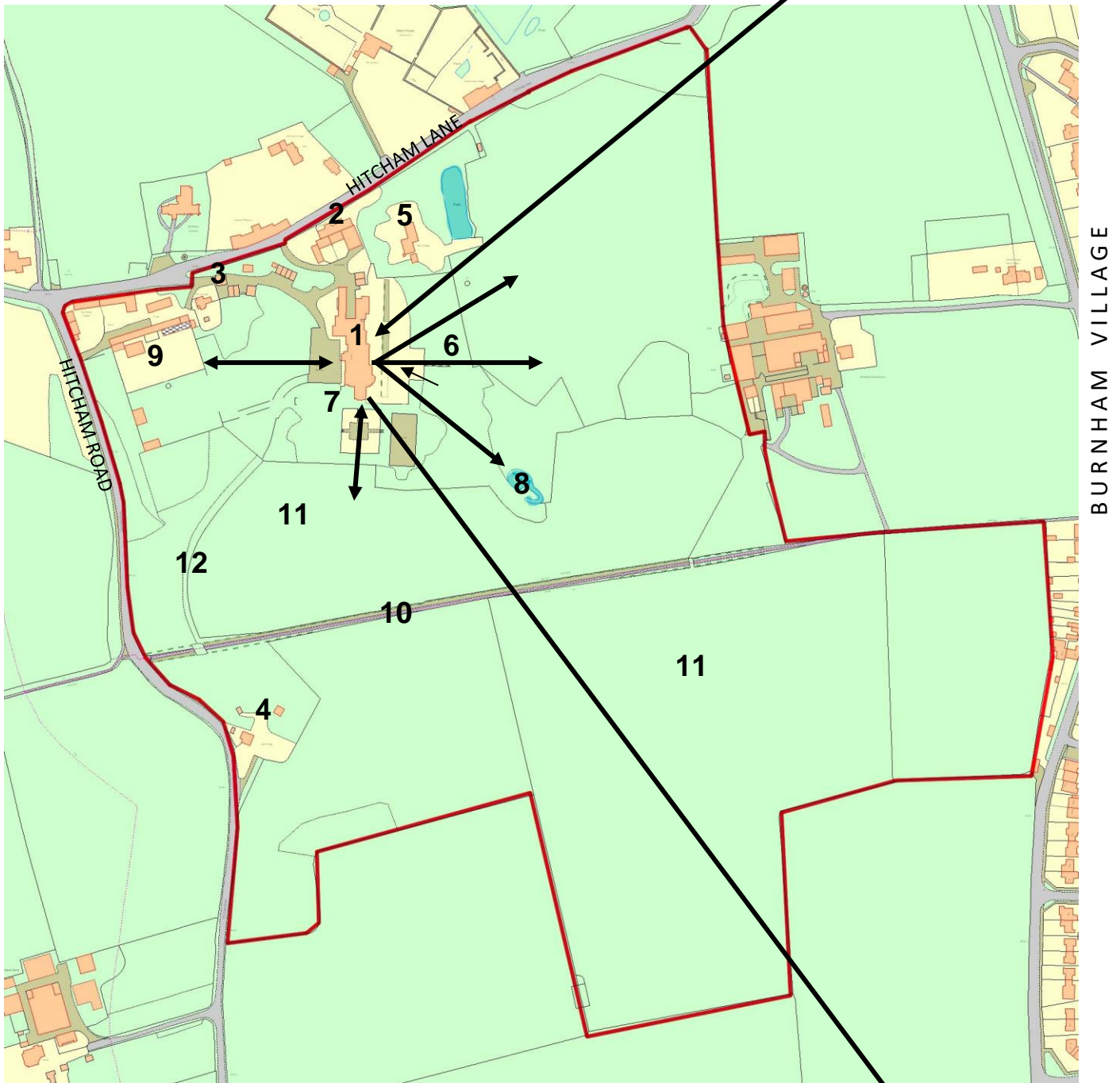
1812 OS surveyor's draft 2-inch drawing
1875 25"
1900 6"

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

With thanks to Perry Ashwood (Hitcham House) and Robert Hanbury (Hitcham House walled garden) for kindly giving up so much of their time to show us these gardens.

KEY FEATURES AND VIEWS

View from Hitcham Lane



1	The House	7	Sunken Garden
2	The Stables	8	Southern pond as originally adapted by Marnock and since reduced
3	Church Lodge	9	Walled kitchen garden (Marnock)
4	Lower Lodge	10	The 'New Cut'
5	Dairy Lodge	11	Park
6	Main terrace garden	12	Remains of southern approach

Windsor Castle
7.25 km (4.5
miles)

CURRENT IMAGES



The main terrace on the east side as reconfigured c1920 (left) and the terrace walk next to the east side of the House (right)



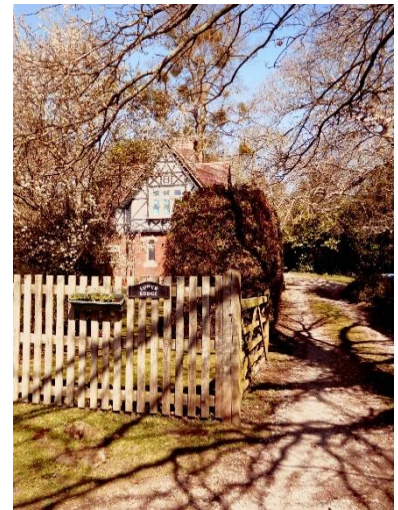
The House from the NE (left) and from the SE (right) (See below for historic view)



The southern pond: originally shaped by Marnock (left) but now much reduced and provided with a liner (pers. comm, Perry Ashwood) and the pleasure grounds south of the House (right)



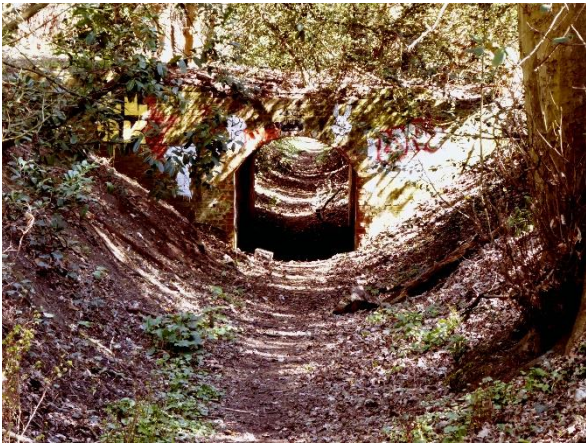
The Stables from the south (left) and C20 hedging and Marnock trees to the west of the House right)



Church Lodge and the north-west entrance (left) and Lower Lodge and the southern entrance (right)



View over the park south from the pleasure ground towards 'the New Cut' (left) and the park looking north east from Hitcham Road (right)



View in the 'New Cut' looking east towards the brick bridge taking the southern approach (left) and the entrance to the walled garden yard near the north end of Hitcham Road (right)



Looking north-east towards Chapel Lodge from within the northern half of the kitchen garden (left) and looking north-east inside the southern half of the kitchen garden (right)



The office range and bothy against the north wall of the kitchen garden (left) and looking south inside the southern half of the kitchen garden towards an entrance with piers and finials(right)

HISTORIC IMAGES



'Blythewood' from the south-west as designed by T Roger Smith. The *porte-cochère* and the south porch seem to have been omitted from the house as built.



The garden front of 'Blythewood' from the south-east - with the southern pond in the foreground - all as originally laid out by Robert Marnock. The short arm of water at the extreme left still survives.

Both images by kind permission of James Darwin (Georgian Group)