

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



DENHAM COURT, DENHAM

November 2021

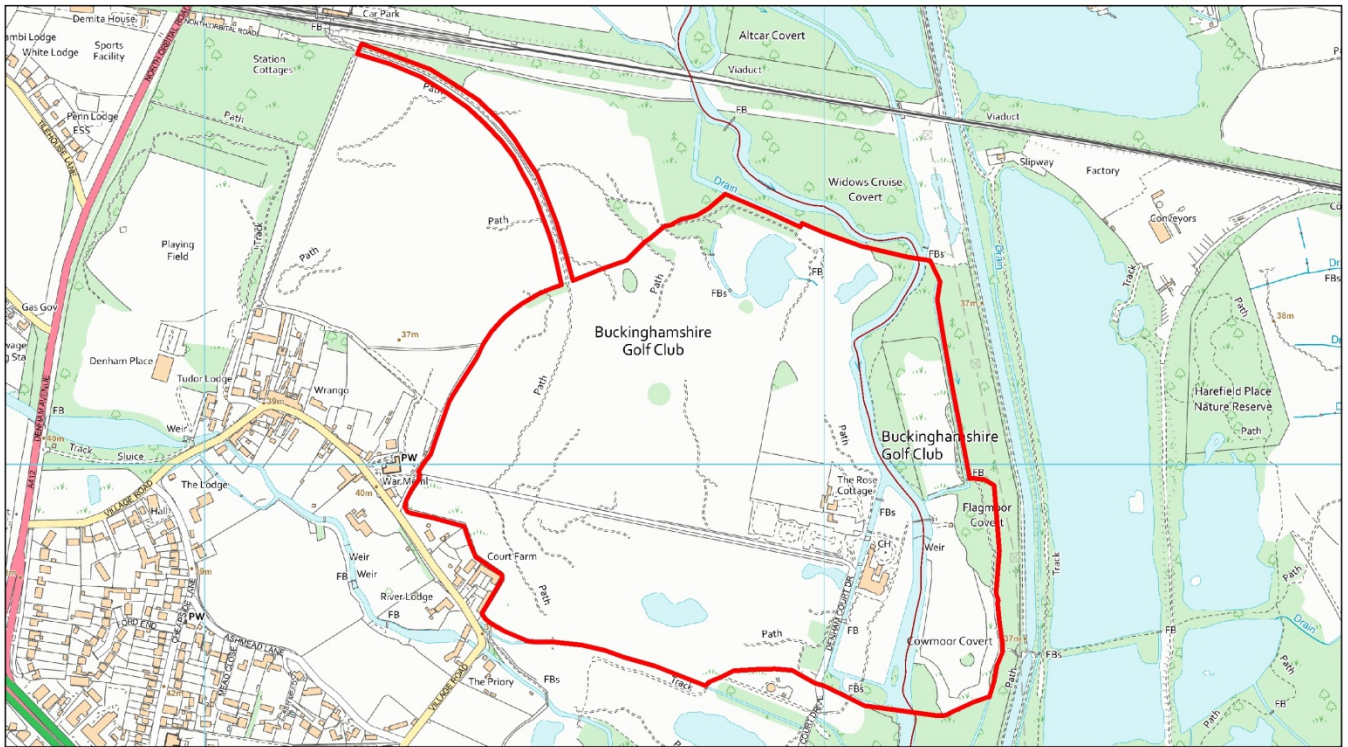


The Finnis Scott
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Roland Callingham
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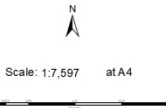
HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Denham Court: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
October 2021

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Denham Court: 2019 aerial photograph

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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	Denham Court Denham HER 0214900000
FORMER DISTRICT:	SOUTH BUCKS	
PARISH:	DENHAM	
OS REF:	TQ 051 868	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The park and pleasure grounds for a mid-C17 and later country house on the west bank of the River Colne in South Bucks which survive largely intact. While the pleasure grounds north of the C17 house have been grassed over and replaced by a large turning circle for the Mansion’s current golf clubhouse role, those on the south side retain the ornamental planting established in the late C19 and its wealth of mature trees. The island setting of the Mansion survives created by an ornamental watercourse which is crossed by a C18 classical bridge and two C19 bridges. An iron suspension bridge of c.1890 gives access across the River Colne to a further extension to the late C19 park. The main park is crossed by two C18 drives with entrances marked by ornamental gateways, and it contains mature typical mid-C19 planting, including a lime avenue framing the principal drive amongst much planting and ground remodelling for golf course use. Late C20 changes include considerable extensions to the Mansion, the addition of a number of pools in the park, and the removal of traffic from the original principal approach.

Archaeological interest

The site has the potential for evidence of lost structures and features associated with the medieval and later mansion, service structures and designed landscape in various phases, particularly the mid-C17, C18 and C19. Evidence may survive particularly of the C19 and C20 former stable buildings and yard, and a C17 water garden with a formal canal possibly originating as a medieval fish pond, also of former garden enclosures north of the mansion, and the typical structures and layout associated with the disused C18 kitchen garden.

Architectural interest

The mansion is a distinguished, large mid-C17 house with later modifications, on an earlier site, retaining evidence of the hall of the medieval building erected for the monks of Westminster Abbey. The mansion has considerable C20 extensions for its current use as a golf club house. The buildings round the stable yard have largely been demolished. The principal ornamental structures include two garden bridges, including a C18 classical bridge and an 1890s suspension footbridge, and the 3m high C18 red brick kitchen garden walls (all listed).

Artistic interest

This typical country house estate comprises a park and pleasure grounds developed since the mid-C17, with remodelling in the C18 and an important and extensive phase in the later C19/early C20. The park layout remained largely intact until the late C20 remodelling of the landform as a golf course, which with additional fairway planting and new water bodies resulted in many changes to the detailed layout of the immediate setting of the Mansion, but the framework of the country house landscape survives including two entrances and drives framed by mature planting. The main change in the pleasure grounds was the infilling of the water garden north of the mansion.

Historic interest

The site is associated with the poet John Dryden (1631-1700) who visited Sir William Bowyer who built the mansion, 1633-70 and was a relative by marriage. Dryden wrote of Denham Court that ‘Nature had conspired with art to make the garden one of the most delicious spots in England’.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Denham Manor (afterwards Denham Court) was granted to Westminster Abbey by Ulstan, a thegn, during the reign of King Edward the Confessor. The manor was tenanted by the de Capella family, then by the de Bohuns. (VCH). A two bay hall was erected by the abbey - elements survive behind the south front of the current mansion (Pevsner and Williamson, and Historic Collective).

In 1540, at the Dissolution, Henry VIII granted the manor to (Sir) Edmund Peckham JP MP. On a C18 copy of a plan of 1590, Denham Court is represented as a small building with buildings ranged to west and south in a curve with further buildings evident to the north all on a small island on the banks of the River Colne as today (Historic Collective). The river marks the county boundary in this location.

The manor was granted in 1596 to (Sir) William Bowyer. Sir William II was a keen plantsman and a patron of Dryden, who said of the garden at Denham Court "Nature had conspired with art to make the garden one of the most delicious spots in England" (list description and HER). Sir Roger Hill bought half the Denham estate from the Bowyer family and proceeded to build the - architecturally more distinguished - Denham Place at the other end of the village from 1688 (Pevsner and Williamson and VCH).

The house at Denham Court on its island was extended substantially in the late C17 (Historic Collective) to create the core of the current mansion. From this time its principal elevation has faced south: its north side presided over a courtyard. Rocque (c.1760) unfortunately cuts the mansion off with the border of his map but shows a double avenue running eastwards from the church with a patchwork of fields on either side (HER). By 1770 (Jeffery's County map) the Court was the residence of 'Sir Wm Bowyer Bt' again with little detail visible of the mansion site and island except for the avenue running eastwards from the church.

By 1783 (estate plan) the mansion had a short rear wing to the north-west and a long outbuilding running east-west on its north side enclosing a courtyard on the north side with a rectangular 'canal' running north-south to the north with gardens to the east. A rectangular strip of trees ran from the mansion to the southern end of the island dividing the long island into two halves. Another approach without an avenue of trees ran parallel to the other avenue a little to the south and turned north on the island towards the south front of the mansion. In 1800 the Grand Junction Canal (now the Grand Union Canal) opened as a through route for the first time on a course c.225m east of Denham Court (canalmuseum.org).

By 1812 (OSD) both these approaches ran through a patchwork of fields. A rectangular walled enclosure is recorded on the island south of the mansion (no trace of this survives nor is any structure recorded here any other time). Denham Court was sold in 1813 to Thomas Hamlet (VCH). At this time, parkland was restricted to strips flanking both avenues (Bryant 1825).

In 1843 (Tithe map) a large rectangular walled garden was first mapped in its correct location, north-west of the mansion, along with an irregular courtyard of estate buildings and small enclosures immediately to its east. The area north of the avenue was fields. The buildings and a short straight 'canal' north of the mansion (probably a late medieval fishpond) and the two approaches survived. Various extensions were made to the mansion, first to either side of the late C17 core (Pevsner and Williamson; Heritage Collective).

The estate was acquired in 1840 by Nathaniel Lambert MP after the bankruptcy of Thomas Hamlet (list description). By 1857 (sale plan) the walled garden was divided into eight regular compartments: the fields to the north retained a patchwork arrangement. 'The Park' was confined to a strip either side of the avenue approach and to the land to the south, flanking the southern approach. This 1857 plan included land across the River Colne opposite the mansion backed by a belt of trees against the Grand Junction Canal immediately further east reached by a 'rustic bridge' in the lot to be sold with the mansion but with no designed planting shown except for a boundary belt against the canal (Bucks Archive: SC/130).

By 1877 (OS) the patchwork of fields north of the avenue was replaced with parkland including specimen trees and roundels, and perimeter planting to the north and east on the river banks. Further new parkland south of the avenue contained specimen trees flanking the south approach. The island was divided lengthwise by a path running north-south which survived until at least the mid-1930s; the mansion stood in the centre of the west half with courtyard buildings, planting, a glasshouse, the short canal all to the north of it. South of the mansion the area was grassed, with conifers. The east half of the island on the banks of the River was also grassed, with plentiful conifers. The walled garden was lined with orchard trees.

In 1885 Denham Court was bought by H. W. Swithinbank (list description). A suspension bridge was built c.1890 (list description) over the river at the same location as the former rustic bridge. In 1900 (OS) a considerable strip of land east of the river was included in parkland with a roundel at either end, specimen conifers and screen planting against the canal further to the west.

Mr. Swithinbank died in 1928. His widow sold the mansion and estate (c.305 acres) to Middlesex County Council in 1936 at auction (list description and Bucks Archive SC/219). The auction particulars list amongst others: an ancient dovecote with clock and vane; lawns with Wellingtonia, cypress, blue Atlantic cedar, purple oak, cedar of Lebanon; a lake with cascades at either end (this is the river Colne itself), wooded islets, a suspension bridge and four boat houses; to the north of the mansion, a rose garden with a heated greenhouse to one side; a south lawn terminating in a rockery and beyond again a wilderness garden, another wild garden and an orchard.

Little had changed in the designed landscape since the turn of the century (OS; RAF Aerial Photograph 1947). Middlesex Education Committee established an approved school for senior girls in the mansion from 1939 until 1948 (<http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk>). The mansion then was used as a remand home for boys and later as a children's home by Middlesex County Council and then by Hillingdon Borough Council (VCH). A camping site was laid out c.1970 in the north-east corner of the park (OS 6"). The camp site disappeared later but the buildings remained longer. Bucks County Council acquired the mansion in 1986 in very poor condition (Heritage Collective). The historic planting generally remained (AP 1989).

In 1988 change of use to a golf course for the 'Colne Valley Golf Club' and for the mansion to a clubhouse was granted (88/01045/CM: Bucks County ref: CC37/88). In 1992 an 18-hole golf course (now Buckinghamshire Golf Club) was established on the site with the mansion as the clubhouse with major ground remodelling and introduction of many associated golf features. The course was designed by John

Jacobs, a former Ryder Cup captain and extends north-west and south outside the park. 9 of the 18 holes of the Golf Club are either wholly or partly outside the historic boundary.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING, VIEWS

Denham Court mansion is located on a small island west of the River Colne 5 km (3 miles) east-south-east of Gerrards Cross and 3km (1.9 miles) north of Uxbridge. The 57ha site is situated in the valley of the River Colne and at the southern end of a considerable sequence of lakes and reservoirs. The terrain is generally level. The soil is a mixture of loam and gravel, the subsoil being chalk (VCH).

The surroundings of the village are quite highly developed, with the M25/M40 interchange 3.3km (2 miles) south-west and the M40 Junction 1 (interchange with A40, A412 and A413) only 1km (0.6 miles) south. The Chiltern Railways line runs on a high embankment 0.6 km (0.4 miles) to the north. Denham Court stands in a detached location c.760m east of the village church in the centre of the old village of Denham. The Mansion sits in the south east quarter of the identified site.

The designed landscape (now largely the golf course) is bounded on the east and north by the River Colne and associated mature planting. There is no marked boundary to the north-west because the golf course extends through the historic boundary up to the railway line and Denham Station, 1.2km north-west from the mansion. At this location, the land falls away gradually from the line of the original park boundary towards the perimeter trees screening the river.

Further south the historic boundary line is marked by mature hedgerow which emerges north east-wards from a brick and flint wall which bounds a lane which in turn skirts the northwards extension of the cemetery of the parish church. Continuing anti-clockwise the historic boundary continues south to the village street to the entrance gates marking a former entrance and approach (see below) and runs behind private property and the substantial grounds of Denham Court Farm. Further round, the boundary is mainly marked by a tributary which leaves the River Misbourne to join the Colne c.200m south-east of the mansion. The river forms an important feature in the historic landscape setting as it passes the island on which the Mansion stands.

The site falls within the Colne Valley Regional Park. This extensive Park covers 43 square miles of parks, green spaces and reservoirs alongside the multi-channel River Colne and the Grand Union Canal running parallel with it, mainly in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. It extends around 22km (14 miles) north-south from Rickmansworth to Heathrow. The visitor centre stands c.460m south-west of the mansion.

There are no exterior views associated with this landscape given the level ground and the wealth of mature boundary planting.

The golf course extends beyond the south boundary with a large pond created between the historic boundary and the Country Park visitor centre.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The current, vehicular, approach serves the golf club from the south along a sinuous tarmac road from the interchange associated with junction 1 of the M40, 1 km (0.6 miles) south of the mansion. This approach was in existence at least by the late C18 (Jefferys) and now runs north past the Colne Valley visitor centre on the banks of the Misbourne between modern gate piers in red brick with cast stone dressings. The tall metal modern gates are in C17 style. This approach continues north along the west side of the channel past the mansion and a group of tall mature trees, turns and reaches the Club's car park. Vehicular access to the mansion is by means of a modern concrete bridge, finished in white with balusters also picking up its style from the listed bridge. This bridge leads to a large turning circle immediately north of the mansion with a cast stone fountain in the centre.

Other historic approaches were both from the west. The former principal and most imposing approach is entered between C19 tall gate piers of squared flint with stone dressings and ball finials supporting metal gates in C18 style (Listed Grade II) close to the east end of the parish church. From here a straight drive runs east towards the Mansion for 760m. This drive is lined by an avenue of limes and bounded with rustic timber post and rail fencing. This approach formerly arrived at the north front of the mansion on its island over a bridge with balusters to the west of the Mansion (listed Grade II, originally C18), the bridge and its balusters all finished in white. This bridge is now purely a pedestrian route into the Mansion and its immediate grounds.

Another approach to the south formerly ran parallel with the principal approach across the original park to access the south lawn and the garden front of the mansion. It entered the park 740m west of the Mansion off the village street through plain piers in a curving wall, all of red brick and flint and skirted Denham Court Farm (still part of the Estate in 1857) at a point some 60m south east of the gates of the other western approach. The bridge to take this approach over the channel matches the character and finish of the bridge for the former main drive. Apart from the bridge and roughly 100m surviving at its west, entrance, end this approach has disappeared below the golf course layout. A line of immature trees marks its course.

A curving public footpath to the station leads out from the north west boundary of the C19 parkland. It is flanked by an avenue of mature limes. The station was opened in 1906 following the dualling of the line. The avenue survives as a curving cinder path running for c.500m with rustic timber post and rail fencing on either side. The lime avenue continues until it meets a tarmac public footpath which connects the east end of old Denham village to the south with Denham Green to the north through a tunnel under the railway station. Access to Denham Station high above is contrived by flights of steps within the tunnel structure.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The mansion (listed Grade II) stands on its island in the south-east quarter of the historic landscape. The earliest part lies in the centre of the south, garden front. Two bays of a medieval half-timbered aisled hall from Westminster Abbey's medieval possession survive in the principal reception room (list description). Apart from the earlier rear wing on the west side, the rest of the house is mainly C18, of three storeys, built in brown brick with dressings in red brick under a slate roof. A large C19 Doric portico hides a

pedimented C18 door in the centre of the south front. Lower later wings have bowed fronts towards the south and to the river to the east. The two-storey north front is of early C18 yellow brick with prominent red brick dressings and a central door with a portico. Modern rear wings embrace a small courtyard with a steel and glass veranda on axis to shelter visitors. A long single-storey wing with similar facings screens the turning circle from the car park.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The immediate grounds of the mansion comprise the island on which it stands. They lie around the mansion to the north, east and south. The north area was in earlier times occupied by enclosed gardens and a short rectangular 'canal' extending some 55m and parallel to the ornamental watercourse that divides the island from the parkland to the west. The site of these gardens and short canal is now grassed over and forms part of the vehicular turning circle to the rear of the clubhouse. This canal was first securely mapped in 1843 (Tithe). This north area also forms part of the setting of the C19 suspension footbridge (listed Grade II) that linked the Mansion with the parkland created across the River Colne.

Works for the Golf Course and Clubhouse removed the historic layout north of the mansion on the island. In place of the former courtyard is a large turning circle and an area of grass: the outbuildings and 'canal' have gone (the canal was still in existence in 1989 (OS 1:10,000)).

On the east side of the mansion a well-maintained open lawn leads to the river, which here adds significantly to the character of the lawn. Low weirs also clearly shown on the 1843 Tithe Map just south of the suspension bridge and again further south on the river give the river such a placid surface that it was described as a lake in the 1935 sale particulars (Bucks Archive SC/219).

Further south lies the south lawn with a wealth of mature trees. Those listed in the 1935 sale particulars (see above) survive. A practice putting green lies in front of the mansion. The south lawn has been brought into the Club's layout as the 9th hole. Because of this, the grass is threaded by paths for access by buggies. West of the mansion flows the ornamental channel that creates the island, crossed by the balustraded C18 bridge carrying the former main drive and its two modern clones on either side. The channel is revetted by low vertical walls of brown brick. A smaller island beyond the south end of the south lawn contains an elevated tee, landscaped with a 'Japanese' garden of stones with raked sand, which continues across the channel onto the west side close to the entrance drive.

Across the suspension bridge to the east (and outside the County) lies a thin pan-shaped grassed area, c.540m long and c.100m at its widest point, between the river and the canal extending north and south from the bridge, fringed with boundary planting with a roundel at either end (1900 OS). Formerly lawned, the north half is now disused, and, separated from the bridge and the rest by a tributary from the river, is reverting to woodland. The south half is open lawn and is used by the Club as a driving range.

PARK

The mid-C19 park spreads from the parish church eastwards to the banks of the river. Although the area survives, the layout, land form and planting have been considerably altered by the introduction of the golf

course. Formerly level enough to be advertised as suitable for polo (1935 sale particulars: SC/219) the ground is now contoured throughout. Four large ponds have been introduced. Mown grass is interspersed with significant areas of long grass as 'rough'. Any surviving specimen trees and clumps have been supplemented by a large number of new trees. The course is surrounded by thick and mature perimeter planting, particularly to the north on the banks of the River Colne. The golf course planting blurs the historic planting scheme which comprised occasional specimen trees and roundels (1900 OS). This planting survived at least until the mid-1980s (aerial photographs).

The early park south of the principal approach and flanking the private approach, which was incorporated in the C19 park, has been cleared of historic trees for the golf course except for one large oak.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The large C18 rectangular kitchen garden (Listed Grade II: 118m x 75m, 0.9ha, 2 acres enclosed) stands 115m north-west of the mansion and north of the parking area. The 3m high red brick walls show little consistency of design and are in poor condition. A section on the west side has been rebuilt with brown brick. The west end is raised to accommodate a slight change in ground level. External sections of whitewash suggest the site of former lean-to glass houses with vents in the wall (north end of east side) and brackets for former rafters (east end of south side). A former shed survives as a lean-to against the east side. It is of brick painted white with a central door with windows either side. A single chimney pierces the slate roof, with a store with wooden doors at the north end. Breaks in the wall include a short gap in the north side for vehicular access, with a larger gap in the east side filled by a pair of mid-C20 cottages (see below.) The interior is unkempt grass: the former locations of a central circular feature and of the raised paths that divided the garden into four regular portions can be traced. A large timber shed stands in the south-east corner.

Associated with the kitchen garden are the remains of an estate yard immediately to the east. The most substantial building surviving is a late C19 red brick house with a half-hipped roof of clay tiles and a substantial central panelled brick chimney. This is probably the head gardener's house as referred to in the 1935 sale particulars (SC/219). It stands detached outside the south-east of the walled garden with the ruins of a brick enclosure that formerly contained sheds and glass houses (1933 OS). Closer to the walled garden is a small brick building with a hipped roof of clay pantiles with a rustic timber porch. Next to it to the east is a timber shed with a tall half-hipped roof of clay tiles. A modern flat-roofed shed stands next to this shed on its north side. Both these sheds open onto the trace of the former stable yard, marked out on the ground by an apron of blue brick pavers laid in herringbone pattern. None of the other buildings that surrounded this yard survives.

A pair of red brick cottages standing close to the east wall of the yard first appear on the 1933 25" OS. They are in similar style to the putative head gardener's house with a half-hipped roof and hipped dormers. The long gap in the garden's east wall was perhaps contrived merely to give these cottages a better prospect from their rear windows.

REFERENCES

Historic Collective (2017) Pre-application Heritage Assessment for Buckinghamshire Golf Co. Ltd. (included in application PL/20/3762/HB)

Pevsner N. and Williamson E., *The Buildings of England - Buckinghamshire* (1994) pp.273-4
Victoria County History *Buckinghamshire Vol 3* (1925) pp.255-261

Maps

1770 Jefferys map of Buckinghamshire

1825 Bryant map of Buckinghamshire

1843 Tithe map and apportionment (Bucks Archive Tithe/128)

1857 Sale particulars (Bucks Archive SC/130)

1935 Sale Particulars (Bucks Archive SC/219)

Ordnance Survey

1812 OS surveyor's draft 2-inch drawing

Second Edition 6" revised 1897 published 1900

25" Edition of 1933

6" Edition of 1939 (revised 1934)

Provisional Edition revised 1938: published c.1944

1975-1989 National Grid 1:10,000

1989 National Grid 1:10,000

Photographs

1947 RAF AP;

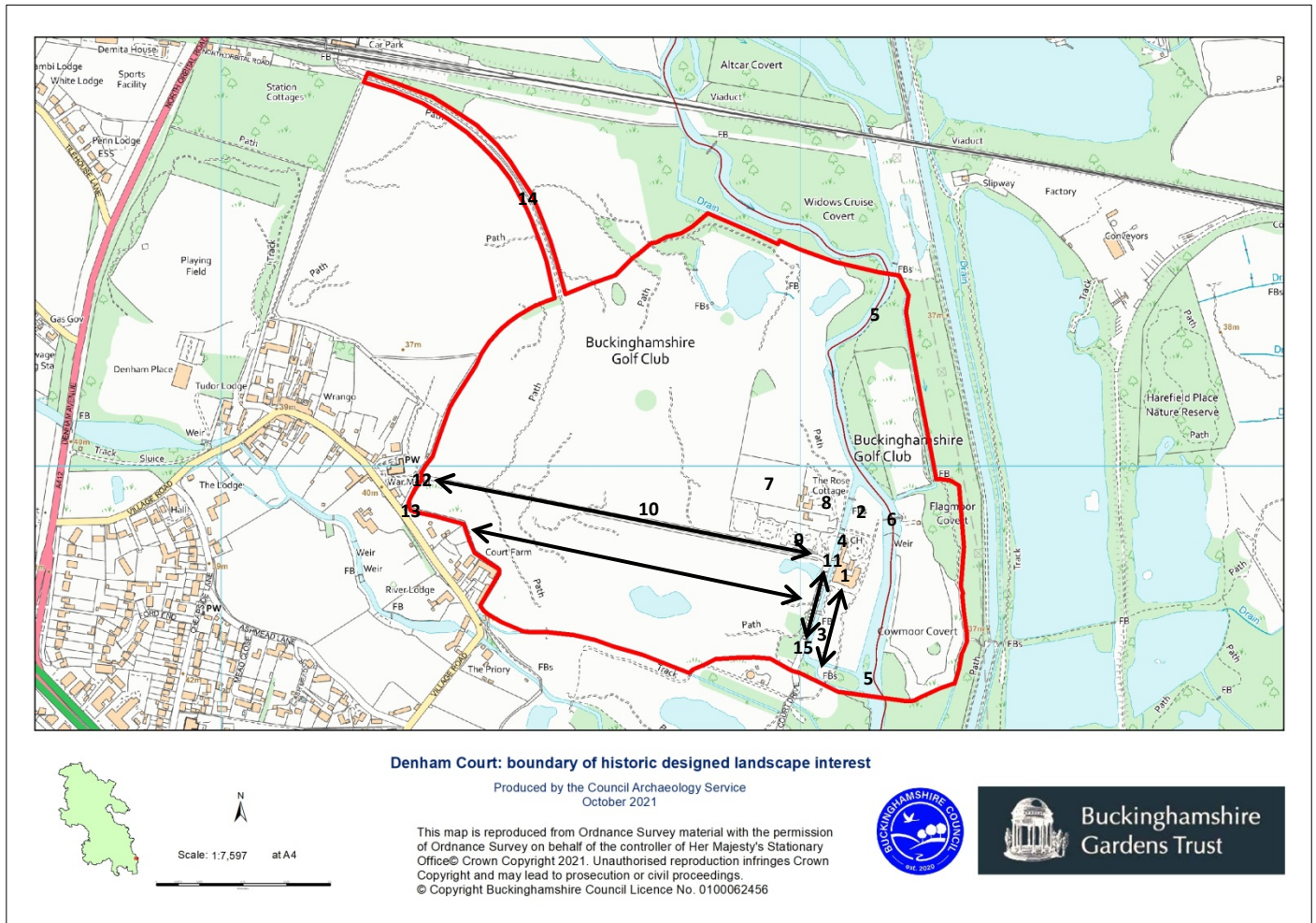
1985 AP;

1989 AP

GH June/October 2021

ed. SR October 2021

KEY HISTORIC FEATURES AND VIEWS



Key to numbered features

1 Mansion	9 Golf Course Club members' parking
2 Site of canal and former enclosures	10 Former principal approach
3 South Lawn	11 Principal bridge to Mansion
4 Canal	12 Gates to former principal approach
5 River Colne	13 entrance to former secondary approach
6 C19 Suspension Bridge	14 Lime walk to station
7 Walled Garden	15 Modern approach
8 Remains of Stable Yard	

CURRENT IMAGES



The C19 gates at the east end of the historic approach (left) and the park looking NE from inside the gates (right)



The historic approach, looking east (left) and the southern part of the park looking south east (right)



The modern gate piers on the current main approach looking north (left) and modern golf course landscaping around the southern end of the canal that separates the house and its pleasure grounds from the park (right)



Looking south along the modern route to the golf clubhouse where it intersects with the historic principal approach also showing the C18 bridge carrying the historic approach across to the Mansion (left) FROM The east side of the mansion looking towards the south lawn (right)



The surviving elements of the former stable yard to the east of the walled garden, looking west (left) The bothy against the east wall of the walled garden from the west (right)



The interior of the walled garden looking north west (left) The exterior of the north end of the eastern wall of the walled garden showing evidence of a former glasshouse (right)



The Mansion from the north showing the Club House extensions and the modern turning circle (left) The C19 suspension bridge over the River Colne (right)



The C19 park across the River now employed as a driving range (above)

The lime walk north west to the station (below)

