

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



GRENDON HALL

March 2021 (revised June 2021)

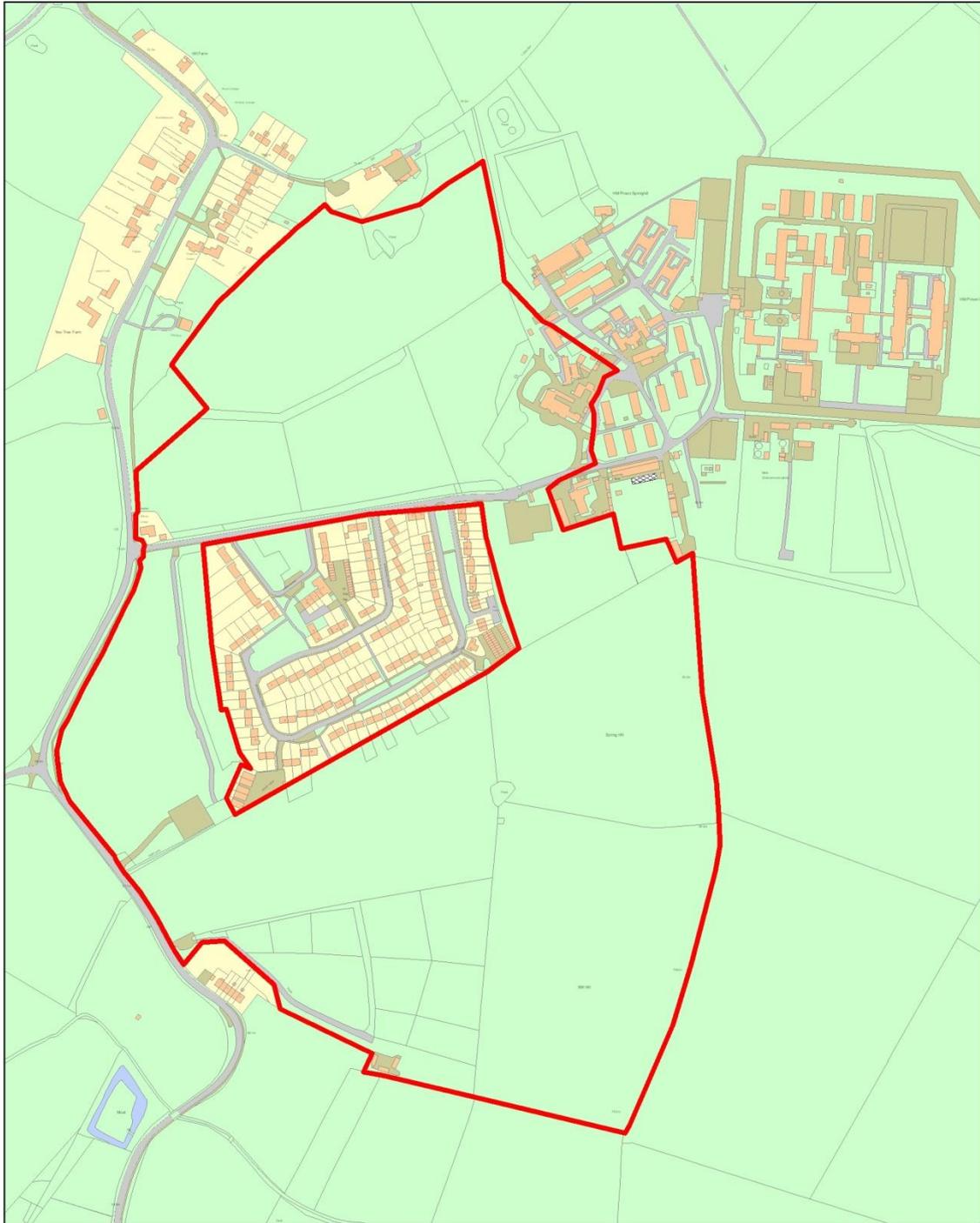


The Finnis Scott
Foundation

Roland
Callingham
Foundation



HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Grendon Hall: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
March 2021



Scale: 1:5,092 at A4



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Scale: 1:5,092 at A4



Grendon Hall: 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 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 definitive 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 by BGT in appraising designed landscapes.

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 Planning Policy Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of 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 funded by BGT, with significant grants from the Finnis Scott Foundation, the Roland Callingham Foundation, BCC (since April 2020 part of Buckinghamshire Council) and various private donors. Buckinghamshire Council also provided significant funding, and help in kind including current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record. The project is supported by The Gardens Trust.

The Trust thanks 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

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| SITE NAME: Grendon Hall | HER no: 1169100000 |
| COUNTY: Bucks | GRID REF: SP682 219 |
| PARISH: Grendon Underwood | POSTCODE: HP18 0TL |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The pleasure ground and park for an 1880s country house on an elevated site, including terrace, informal lawns with mature trees and shrubberies, and parkland, since the mid-C20 in institutional use as a prison. The layout survives considerably intact, except for a 7ha. housing estate in the south park and prison buildings in the pleasure grounds around the Hall to the east and south. The elevated areas of the site enjoy extensive views south and west. A large prison compound lies adjacent in the setting to the east.

Archaeological interest

Potential for evidence of Roman occupation is high, given the proximity to Akeman Street and archaeological evidence nearby along the route of HS2. The medieval Forest of Bernwood provides this area with a unique heritage, many of the features and place names being a direct legacy of the ancient royal forest. Potential for evidence associated with the Forest particularly relates to banks, routes, boundaries and buildings. The park is rich in ridge and furrow. Potential exists for former features related to the designed landscape since the 1880s, such as buildings, paths, beds, terraces, boundaries, and the lost north drive.

Architectural interest

This is a typical group of structures for a new country house of the 1880s. It is by an obscure but competent amateur architect, Rev. Randolphe Henry Piggot, who, as well as the Hall, seemingly designed the stable block, stable yard crenelated walls, lodge (gone), and associated structures. The structures were united in the design using fashionable Jacobean style in red brick with stone dressings. It is unclear whether Piggot designed buildings elsewhere. Unusually no kitchen garden was provided.

Artistic interest

The layout comprises a largely typical ensemble of pleasure ground and park for a country house developed in the 1880s with buildings in Jacobean style. The 1880s design incorporated hedgerow trees as specimens in the new park and a straight main drive was framed by an avenue. Some of the early specimens survive enclosing the informal lawns within the modest pleasure ground. Elements lost to development include the 7ha. housing estate in the south park and prison buildings east and south of the Hall. The rural setting enjoys views over the Vale of Aylesbury to the south, south-east and west. The setting has been damaged by the large prison development east of the Hall.

Historic interest

The early history of the site has strong associations with the Forest of Bernwood.

NOTE: There is believed to be an archive of material in the prison (pers comm Becky Hayward, Prison Governor), and the dossier may be amplified in the light of access to this material.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Evidence for Roman occupation includes the remains of a late Roman settlement at Lawn Farm north of the historic park boundary (BC monument record). The site lies north of the nearby Roman Akeman Street, now the A41 road from Aylesbury to Bicester.

Grendon Underwood (Grendon under Bernwode) was recorded in Domesday and was part of Bernwood Forest from before that time, being used as a hunting forest from the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) whose royal palace was at Brill to the south. Grendon means a 'green hill' and Underwood refers to Bernwood. The area was only partially wooded, as medieval forests included agricultural land and open land, and villages. During the reign of King John (1199-1216) the Forest shrank in size and was disafforested. Remnants of Bernwood survive at Doddershall and Grendon Woods (both SSSIs Bucks History Portal).

In 1068 Henry de Ferrers held the manor which eventually passed to the Braybroke family in 1402. In 1520 it was acquired by Thomas Piggot of Whaddon, who died that year, while his widow died in 1549. The manor and that of Doddershall 3km to the west passed to their son Thomas and descended through the family until the mid-C19 (*VCH*). C16 records mention a fishpond; however, this is not shown on later maps (Bucks History Portal). The hunting status of the Forest was removed in 1635. By 1812 (OS draft) the land was enclosed agricultural fields and a building, possibly a farm, stood at the core of the present site. Further details about the Piggot family can be found in the report on Doddershall (BGT 2017).

The Jervoise family of Herriard in Hampshire purchased a large part of the estate in 1796 and in the mid-C19 William Piggot sold them the remainder of the Manor of Grendon Underwood. However, by 1873 it was back in the ownership of the Piggot family (*VCH/Nat Arch*).

Sir Thomas Digby Piggot was born in Buckinghamshire in 1840, the family's main residence being Doddershall. His mother Emma was an Upcher, a Norfolk family, and the Piggots had connections with Norfolk and Cannock, Staffs. Piggot served as private secretary to Lord Northbrook, Lord Lansdowne, and Lord Cranbrook. In 1888 he was appointed Controller of HM Stationery Office by Disraeli. He was a keen amateur ornithologist and a writer, including of natural history stories for children. His work brought him into contact with some of the foremost scientific men of the day, including Walter Rothschild at nearby Tring. He was instrumental in the passing of the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1880 (Obituary).

Following the reacquisition of the land at Grendon, Sir Digby financed the building of a new country house on the estate and his brother, Rev. Randolphe Henry Piggot (rector and squire of Grendon Underwood) was given the task of designing Grendon Hall. The gabled, Jacobethan, red brick house is dated 1882 on a beam in the chapel. The grounds were laid out alongside the new house at this time and in any case by the late 1890s (*VCH*; 1898 OS). Sir Digby never lived in the house, and as the Old Grendon Rectory (1756) was not large enough to accommodate the Reverend's large family and servants they moved into the hall which was used as a rectory by Rev. Piggot until his death in 1900, when Mrs Adeline Piggot became the lady of the manor; she died in 1932 (Houghton/*VCH*).

In 1911 Sir Digby retired and settled in Sheringham, Norfolk he died in 1927. The house was sold and by 1913 Mr and Mrs A.E. Skinner were living there and they continued to maintain the garden.

During World War II the site was requisitioned, initially it was used by MI5 and from January 1942 as Station 53 of SOE (Special Operations Executive) here new radio communications were developed in conjunction with the new radio station at nearby Pounden House (BGT 2015). Towards the end of the war the estate was also used as a fire training centre and then as a school for the daughters of displaced Polish people until 1951. To accommodate more than 300 staff the pleasure grounds to the north of the house were used for accommodation huts, recreation facilities and stores with about ten more in the field beyond, this now forming part of the area occupied by the prison (Houghton).

The site was purchased in 1953 by the Prisons Commission and HMP Springhill (Category D) became the UK's first open prison. In 1962 HMP Grendon (Category B) opened on the adjacent site, the UK's first prison to use psychotherapeutic treatment. Many skills were taught to the prisoners, gardening being one (Wiki). A large kitchen garden was created to the south of the house which included extensive polytunnels and vegetable beds. It was at its most productive from the mid-1960s through to 2005, by which time its use was in decline (APs 1976, 1988, 2006).

In the 1960s Grendon housing estate was built in the area south of the approach road (outside the historic site boundary) to house prison staff. The properties, which include small businesses are in divided ownership having been sold in the late C20. The rest of the estate is in public ownership and used for prison purposes. Grendon Hall is used as offices.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION AREA BOUNDARIES LANDFORM AND SETTING

The village of Grendon Underwood sits in the Vale of Aylesbury between the neighbouring hamlets of Woodham and Edgcott, 1km north of the A41, formerly the Roman road Akeman Street which linked London to Cirencester. Aylesbury is 12km to the east and Bicester 10km to the west.

The 37ha. site is situated 1km north of the village centre and 0.25km south of Edgcott. Grendon Hall is situated on a hill (Spring Hill, 96m AOD) in a rural landscape with scattered settlements, which has changed little since it was built in the 1880s.

The area is predominantly agricultural land interspersed with small areas of woodland; remnants of Bernwood Forest are to be found at Grendon and Doddershall Woods (jointly an SSSI). The soil is clay. The land is gently undulating and rises to 96m AOD at the core of the site. A tributary of the River Ray (a tributary of the River Cherwell) rises in the park and flows south-west, hence Springhill.

In the C20 areas around the Hall were built over, with the development of the prisons, much of which sits outside the historic boundary, and an area of the south park was lost to the Grendon housing estate for staff (outside the historic site boundary). Grendon Prison to the east was noted in 1994 as having bleak buildings of 1962 by the Ministry of Works (Pevsner). Extensive views remain from the house north-east towards Edgcott and from the pleasure grounds and park south-west towards Mill Hill, Doddershall Wood, and south to the village of Grendon Underwood and Waddesdon Hill in the distance.

Starting from Hall Cottages (which were built to house servants in late C19) 750m south-west of the house, the west boundary follows Edgcott Road and Grendon Road then turns north-west 50m after the main entrance. The north boundary then follows the field line parallel to Edgcott, skirting Lawn

House (formerly The Rookery, Grade II) to the north. It then turns south as the east boundary, through the centre of the prisons. It continues for 500m south along the line of a public bridleway downhill and then turns back west along a footpath as the south boundary, re-joining the Edgcott road after 250m. The boundaries are predominantly marked by hedges which in places offer far-reaching views into the parkland and out to the wider landscape.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance lies 450m west of the Hall and was created when the house was built in 1882. The gateway (listed Grade II) stands on the east side of Edgcott Road. It is marked by two masonry piers flanked by iron pedestrian gates and curved railings; the carriage gates are missing. The piers are of red brick with stone bases, moulded cornices and obelisk finials. Pedestrian gates and railings are wrought iron, the gates having standard panels with wavy Ionic pilasters and scrolled overthrows, the railings with scrolled standards. The former carriage gates were probably of this pattern too. North of the entrance Willow Lodge, c.1990s (AP 1999), replaces a lodge present by the 1890s which was presumably part of the creation of the drive when the house was built c.1882. By the 1980s the Victorian lodge was in a state of disrepair and was replaced with the current considerably larger building (Houghton; OS).

The straight, drive runs 450m east from the gate, through the park, ascending more steeply as it reaches the pleasure grounds. In the opposite direction, when travelling west back down the drive to Edgcott Road, fine views to Graven Hill near Bicester in Oxfordshire, are framed by the gateway. Five turnings off the drive lead south into the housing estate: two for Park Road, two for Springhill Road and one to Mill Corner (all outside the historic site boundary). Upon entering the pleasure grounds, the Hall suddenly comes into view across the south lawns, where the drive turns north. It then continues for 75m to the forecourt on the south-west, entrance front of the Hall; the drive continues beyond this, east into the prison complex.

In 1882 the drive followed a circuit and entered the pleasure grounds where it turned north, arriving at the south-west, entrance front of the Hall. The former stable yard adjoining the house to the east was reached via a spur from the drive through an arch in its east side, the spur is now gone although part of the yard and stable building survive (1898 OS; Historic image).

A service drive formerly gave access through the north of the park, entering via Lawn House Lane in Edgcott, west of Lawn House, where further stabling for the house was located. It ran south-east through the park to arrive at the north-east, service front of the Hall (OS). This too had access to the stable yard, into the west side. A spur linked the forecourt and service drive alongside the north-west side of the Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Grendon Hall (listed Grade II) is situated near the east boundary of the roughly oval site. The house is situated at the centre of the original area of the pleasure grounds on high ground with extensive views extending several miles particularly to the south-west from the garden front; the elevated position makes good use of the topography. It is used as offices for the prison. The E-shaped Hall is built in Jacobethan style. The north-west and south-west, entrance, fronts overlook the pleasure grounds, with service fronts on the other two sides.

It is described as follows (Listing description):

'Red brick with painted stone quoins, bonded window surrounds and copings, and moulded brick eaves. Tiled roofs, brick chimneys. Jacobethan E-plan building with shallow projecting outer bays and porch. Outer bays have shaped gables and 2-storey canted bay windows with painted stone mullions and transoms, embattled ornament to parapets, and diaper panels between storeys. 3-light attic windows with hoodmoulds and shields above. Intermediate bays each have 2 cross windows to each storey and 2-light attic dormers with stone crosses in ogee gables, Central porch has 3-light transomed window with hoodmould to first floor, 2-light attic window, and door in 4-centred stone arch with hoodmould. Stone shields above door and in shaped gable of porch'. Chapel to rear of left wing has battlemented porch with 2-centred arch. Altered chapel has open truss roof, inserted floor, and coffin hatch with re-used C16 wooden surround'.

The stable complex adjoining the rear of the house, was formerly accessed via a spur from the main drive which entered an archway in the ornamental screen wall adjoining the west elevation of the house. The arch was framed with stone work and was crenellated, adjoining this was a decorative tower, possibly of stone. These were both demolished in the mid-C20 (HE Sketch of Tower. C.1910). A further access to the stable yard entered from the north drive from Lawn House Lane into the north-east side of the yard through another crenellated arch, where further stables were sited outside the historic boundary (HE image 1904). Part of the stable complex, which included brick built carriage houses and horse stabling survives and is used as a service area by HM Prison.

THE GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The 1.5 ha pleasure grounds formerly enclosed the Hall but have partly been covered by C20 buildings to the east and north. They were laid out with informal trees, lawns and shrubbery and included a small lake to the east of the house which was filled in when the prison was built. The largest, south section remains and retains lawns through which the drive and paths thread and views extend south-west over the distant countryside. The west section includes a car park enclosed by mature trees. Many C19 trees survive, particularly around the perimeter, framing views over the park of the distant countryside to the west.

The pleasure grounds were created when the house was built in the 1880s when mixed trees, both deciduous and conifers, and shrubs were planted, and walks were laid out overlooking lawns to the south. A photograph of 1910 shows the pleasure grounds beyond the lake to the east of the house, this is the only image of the tower and shows a tunnel arbour in front of the crenellated walls of the stable yard (Houghton). An early C20 photograph show a rockery. A photograph of an 'Olde country Faire' on the lawns in front of the house in 1913 shows that the front of the house was covered with climbers including roses (Bucks historic photos). A photograph from 1935 of the west façade includes a parterre with beds enclosed by box hedging and standard rose bushes (Houghton). A group of stone pine west of the house survived in the late C20, with other mature planting around it. An undated photograph (probably early C20) of the sweeping drive to the front of the house shows island beds in the lawn planted with roses and further shrubs planted on the east side of the drive. The crenellated wall that extended from the east wing of the Hall screened the stable yard from visitors, with the arched gateway giving pedestrian access to the rear of the house and gardens, and a large archway in the wall as the stable yard entrance with its adjoining rustic tower were demolished during WWII (Sketch of tower/Historic England image).

By c.2005, the south lawns below the entrance front of the house were planted by the prisoners with flower borders accessed via stone steps, and a gazebo was erected over the steps from the terrace to the east of the house (see cover image). Their training included traditional bedding-out of borders, one of the few places where this skill, popular in Victorian gardens and a feature in public parks in the C20, was still taught. This is no longer the case. Now the area is laid to terraced lawns with specimen trees and shrubbery, and a circuit path around the perimeter evoking the late C19 layout.

THE PARK

The park extends north-west, west and south of the house and is laid largely to pasture with a few mature specimen trees. Initially an avenue flanked the drive (OS 1898) and other rows of trees broke up the landscape, probably remnants of field boundaries. These have largely been replaced by hedging, dividing fields grazed by sheep, possibly during the time the site was requisitioned (APs 1947, 1976). Specimen elms formerly in the park, the remnant of former field boundaries, have all gone. One fine C19 specimen is a horse chestnut on high ground in the south park, south of the car park. Further south in the south park a late C20 belt of trees on the west boundary of the 7ha. housing estate (outside the historic boundary) screens it from the road to the west. Pronounced and extensive areas of ridge and furrow indicating former agricultural practices survive in the outer areas of the south park.

A triangulation point on Spring Hill 300 metres south of the house marks the highest point of the park at 96 metres. Nearby is a fragment of C19 iron park railing and a pedestrian gate set into a field boundary at a point where spectacular panoramic views extend to the Chilterns to the south, Waddesdon Hill to the south-east, and to the west the wooded Graven Hill near Bicester.

KITCHEN GARDEN

It seems that no kitchen garden was laid out initially in the late C19 when the grounds were designed. This is very unusual for an estate of this type and period.

With the arrival of the prisons after World War II, gardening became an important part of prisoners' rehabilitation and two areas of productive kitchen garden were created within the prison site. These included glasshouses in which flowers for cutting, bedding plants and pot plants would have been grown. Enough fruit and vegetables were produced for the prison needs and the excess was sold to the public. A historic image inside the glasshouse shows a prisoner being trained in the cultivation of chrysanthemums. Since the beginning of the C21 this activity has been in decline and a relatively small area is now cultivated (APs 1979, 1988, 2006).

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Ordnance Survey

1812 OS surveyor's draft, 2" to 1 mile

1880 1st edition, 25" to 1 mile

1885 1st edition 6" to 1 mile

1898 6" to 1 mile

1898 25" to 1 mile

1900 2nd edition 6" to 1 mile

1950 6" to 1 mile

1984 National grid 1:10,000

Images

Aerial photographs 1947 (RAF), 1976 (British Gas), 1985, 1988, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2019

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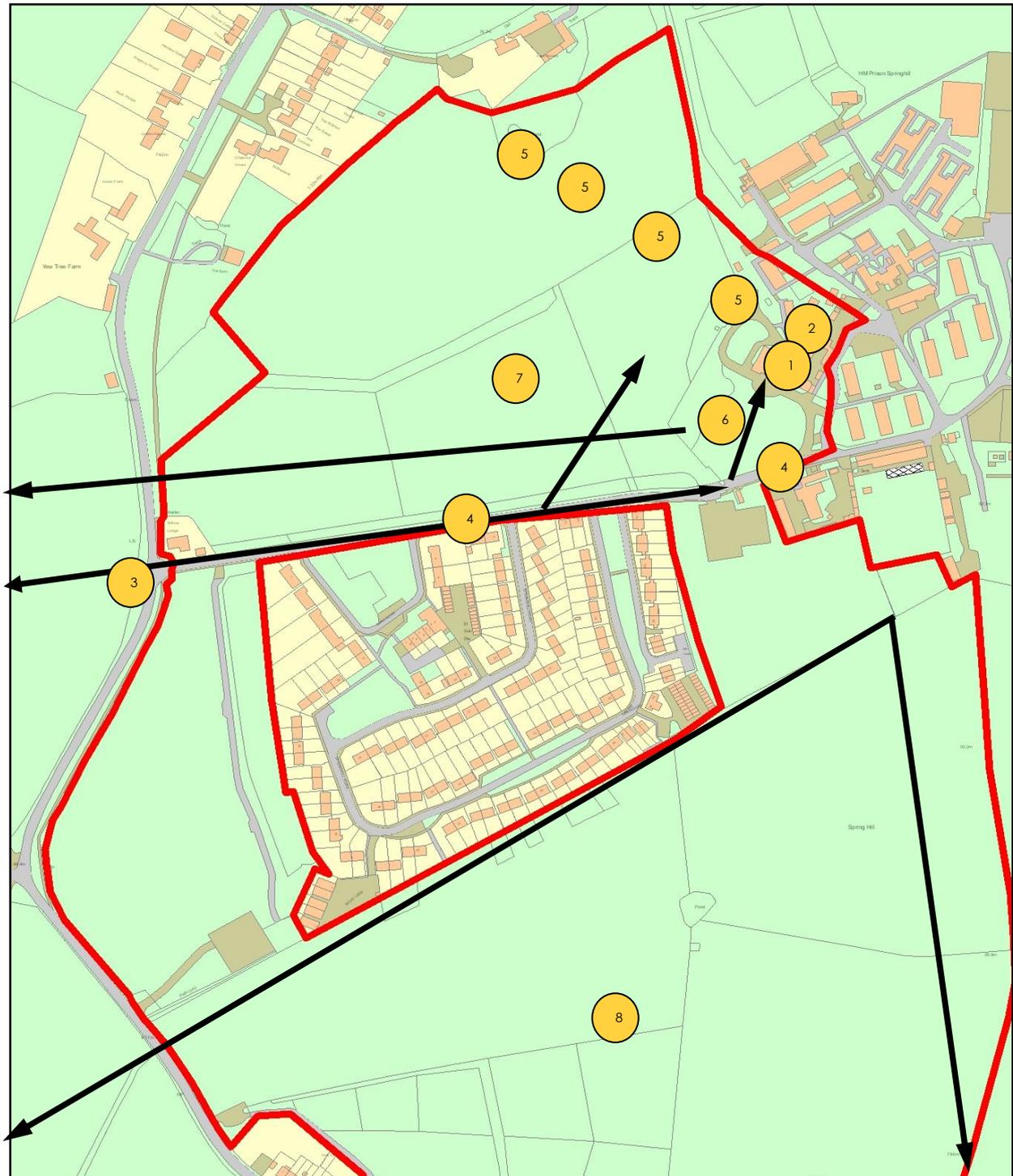
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C de C March 2021, edited SR March 2021 Revised C de C June 2021

NOTE: There is believed to be an archive of material in the prison (pers comm Becky Hayward, Prison Governor), and the dossier may be amplified in the light of access to this material.

KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS



Key to numbered features

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. House | 2. Stable block and yard, entrances to west and east |
| 3. West entrance & Willow Lodge | 4. West drive |
| 5. Former north drive (site) | 6. Pleasure Grounds |
| 7. North park | 8. South park |

CURRENT IMAGES



Gate piers at main entrance



View across west park from Edgcott Road



View west from west park



Willow Lodge with west park beyond



Tree belt screening housing in south park



View from N boundary towards Edgcott



Left: View south-east from south park towards Waddesdon Hill



Right: South park view from Spring Hill with ridge and furrow and view south towards the Chilterns



Surviving horse chestnut in park



Garden front (Late C20)



Pleasure Grounds seen from west park

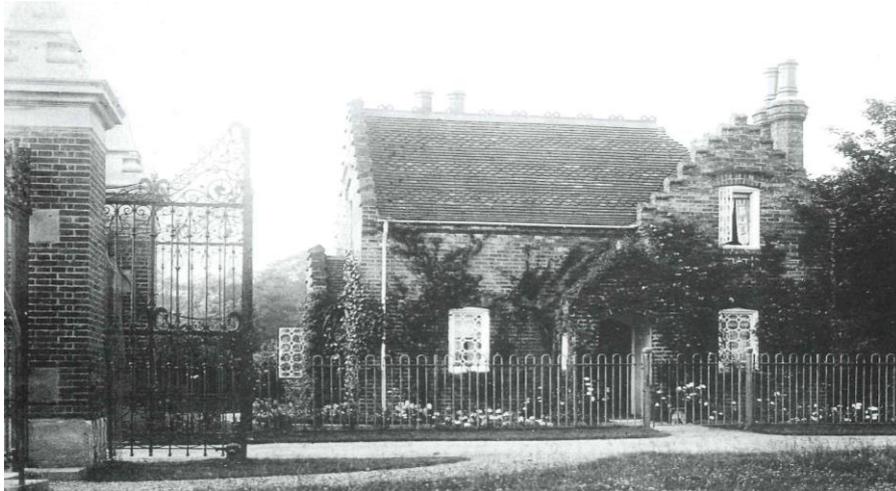


Remains of C19 iron park railing and gate on
Spring Hill

HISTORIC IMAGES



Garden front (circa 1913) chapel to the rear to left and gateway to stable yard to right.



Entrance gates and former lodge (demolished 1980s) photograph 1910



Lodge and gates 1915



Sketch of tower and entrance c.1910



View of east side of house, across the lake, showing tower at entrance to the service yard (demolished during WWII) and tunnel arbour to the right c.1910



View of west façade of house showing pleasure grounds and chapel to the rear 1935



The stable yard 1904 (Historic England)



Rows of trees (probably elms) in park (now gone)



Rockery in pleasure ground (now gone)

There may be more details on the planting in the 1912 sales particulars (Bucks County Archive)



Carriage drive, with island beds and stable entrance to right of Hall



HMP inside the glasshouses



Prisoners gardening 1953