

Conholt Park

Assessment of the Historic Designed Landscape



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Executive Summary

This report concerns the setting for Conholt House, Wiltshire. It outlines the development of the designed landscape and assesses its significance in local, regional and national terms. It has been written to inform the restoration of some landscape features and the design of new ones, to enhance the setting of the house – and to accompany the planning application for those proposals.

The designed landscape lies within a wider estate dedicated to shooting and agriculture and is formed mainly by two separate areas of parkland, of different dates and characters, divided from each other by Hungerford Lane. The west park is the larger area, around 350 acres; originally laid out in the 1720s and now best described as remnant parkland. The Front Park covers about 90 acres. In its present form it was laid out in the 1820s. While it too has lost many trees, it retains the character of a Regency parkland. This and the pleasure grounds to the south and east of the house form the setting for the grade II* Conholt House. The pleasure grounds are not of any sophisticated design and consist mainly of lawn south of the house, with shrubbery flanking on both the west and east sides. The latter shrubbery forms a belt enclosing the Front Park on the east side. An early nineteenth century walled kitchen garden lies to the east of the house. Between it and the house are a number of modern gardens (c1990s) of no historic significance and laid out within formerly functional areas.

The designed landscape essentially evolved over the course of a century in three broad phases: the 1720s, 1760s and 1820s. The 1720s saw the initial laying out of a detached deer park – the west park – separated by Hungerford Lane from the house (still then merely a farm). It was a formal design of rides, bosquets and an avenue. Today the area is barely legible as parkland, though some impressive trees remain. In the 1760s the house evolved from a farmhouse to a more polite, though modest-sized mansion, with the addition of a new wing, facing south-south-west towards the finest vista. A limited parkland setting – the Front Park – was created to the south of the house. Of this phase of development little remains. In the 1820s the Front Park was extended and adapted. It was planted with mixed clumps and freestanding trees, particularly including copper beech. The Front Park is still legible as this Regency parkland, despite the loss of many trees since the later nineteenth century. There were few changes to the designed landscape after the 1820s. In the 1850s a short section of ha-ha, of inferior construction, was created south of the house and many conifers were planted; few survive. There has been very little tree planting in this area for well over one hundred years. This is one of the many issues that are now in need of addressing in the designed landscape.

This report analyses the evolution and design of the parkland and garden areas – and assesses the significance of the design and the elements within it. While the house is listed Grade II* and the stable block Grade II, the designed landscape is not included in Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens*. This assessment finds that justified. Through its history the design of the landscape has been just enough to set off the house – and it is in its role as setting for the house that any significance of the parkland and gardens lies.

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I. Introduction

I.1 The Site

Conholt Park, an estate of around 2100 acres, sits high on downland on the Wiltshire-Hampshire border; a landscape of beautifully sculpted grassy combes, with hangers of beech, yew and hazel on their slopes. The estate is located approximately six miles north of Andover and around eight miles south of Hungerford. The house lies just below the ridge, facing south-south-west, with unbroken views for around thirty miles across the unspoilt countryside of Hampshire, towards the downs of north Dorset. It is a sporting estate with much of the land dedicated to shooting and agriculture, for which it has a long history.

Conholt Park house is listed Grade II*, the stables and carriage house are Grade II. At the southern end of the parkland lies the Scheduled Monument of Bevisbury, an Iron Age univallate hillfort.¹ The landscape setting for the house, which includes parkland and pleasure grounds, covers around 450 acres. It is not included on Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest*. The wider surrounding landscape is rich in archaeological remains, including the substantial Iron Age multivallate hillfort of Fosbury Camp, just under a mile to the north of the house and the Roman road from Cirencester to Winchester. A section of this road (not scheduled) runs through the park at Conholt. The whole site sits within the Wessex Downs National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

I.2 Aims of this report

In 2022 the estate was bought by the current owner, Mr Stephen Schwarzman. It is his intention to restore and enhance the house and its setting, including the stable yard, garden and parkland and to rationalise the scatter of ancillary buildings to the north of the house and stables, which have evolved in an ad hoc manner, mainly during the post-war period. All this is to be carried out as part of a vision for the whole estate. The setting of Conholt House suffers from a number of issues at present: the swathes of tarmacadam, the unsatisfactory entrance drive, the poorly planned areas between the house and the kitchen garden, the lack of a single, well-planned location of working areas for the gardeners, the poor state of ornamental woodland, loss of parkland trees, lack of water security and the general low level of presentation of the areas around the house.

¹ For Conholt Park House listing see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1035931?section=official-list-entry>. For stable and carriage house see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1194589>. For Bevisbury see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001916>. N.B. The Scheduling description refers to the site as Berisbury, but maps plot it as Bevisbury.

This present report has been written to provide a firm understanding of the development of the designed landscape setting to the house, in order to inform the restoration of elements of the garden and parkland – and their enhancement with the design of some new features, ensuring they are sympathetic to the history of the place. These new features will provide a contemporary layer of design for the evolving history of the estate, building on what has come before. The plans for the improvement of the garden and parkland are concentrated on areas east of Hungerford Lane, in the sections of the designed landscape that most closely relate to the house. In investigating the site we have therefore concentrated more on the eastern areas, while also considering the west park as an essential element in the overall development.

1.3 Authorship and Methodology

This assessment has been written by Dr Kate Feluś. Fieldwork has been carried out in close cooperation with Oliver Jessop MIFA, who has produced the *Archaeological Desk-based Assessment and Survey*. The two documents should be read in conjunction with one another. The DBA largely considers the landscape before the imposition of design; this present document considers the landscape since the imposition of design. This report should also be read in conjunction with *Conholt Park: Conservation Plan* by Dr Simon Thurley, which has also been compiled in tandem with the present document. Dr Helen Lawrence-Beaton and Hugh Petter of ADAM Architecture have also contributed information and discussed interpretations. Landscape designer, Marie-Louise Agius and her team, have been closely involved throughout the fieldwork and research process.

Our research builds upon a document produced in 2021 by the Wiltshire Buildings Record, who carried out an extensive investigation of documents in the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives. They also seem to have had access to some papers in the possession of the van Vlissingen family, previous owners of the estate. We have not seen these for this study. It should be noted, however, that the direct archival evidence is limited generally. For example, there is no surviving collection of papers of the Meadows family, owners of the estate for almost the whole of the eighteenth century. Also conspicuous by their absence are resources such as estate plans of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Likewise there are no pictorial sources until the later nineteenth century and, even then, remarkably few of them. The picture of the development of the parkland and pleasure grounds, has had to be constructed from fragments of evidence, including features on the ground (trees and earthworks) and much contextual information on what was happening elsewhere at the same time, plus the lives, characters and connections of the owners and occupiers.

1.4 Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people for their help with the research and production of this assessment: Victoria Beauchamp, Kate Harwood, David Jacques, John Phibbs, Chris Soper, Karen Sturtivant and Caroline Tisdall, also Susan Campbell and Mike Kleyn of the Walled Kitchen Garden Network.

1.5 Nomenclature and Abbreviations Used in the Text

Some historic maps and sources refer to the former deer park to the west of Hungerford Lane as 'Chute Park', which is confusing as one might expect it was not therefore the park for Conholt House. This was because it was the park within Chute parish. It is also referred to as an entity in itself – as 'Conholt Park' – despite the fact that it was detached from Conholt House. Later the whole of the designed landscape, west and east of Hungerford Lane was referred to as 'Conholt Park', as it is today. Throughout the text, to avoid confusion, we refer to this section of the designed landscape simply as the west park, deliberately using lower case 'w' and 'p' – as it is not a formal name. Elsewhere we have used capitals for areas and features that have accepted historic names, as opposed to descriptive titles. The Front Park, in contrast, is an acknowledged name historically, so it is referred to using the upper case. The Lady's Walk, likewise is an acknowledged historic name.

It should also be noted that the spelling of the name of the family of owners for much of the eighteenth century changed. At some point towards the end of the century 'Meadows' started to be spelled 'Medows'. We have used the spelling most commonly used to day in sources such as the Dictionary of National Biography.

Common abbreviations used in the text are:

OS – Ordnance Survey

OSD – Ordnance Survey Drawing

WBR – Wiltshire Building Record (refers to their report on the history of Conholt, 2021).

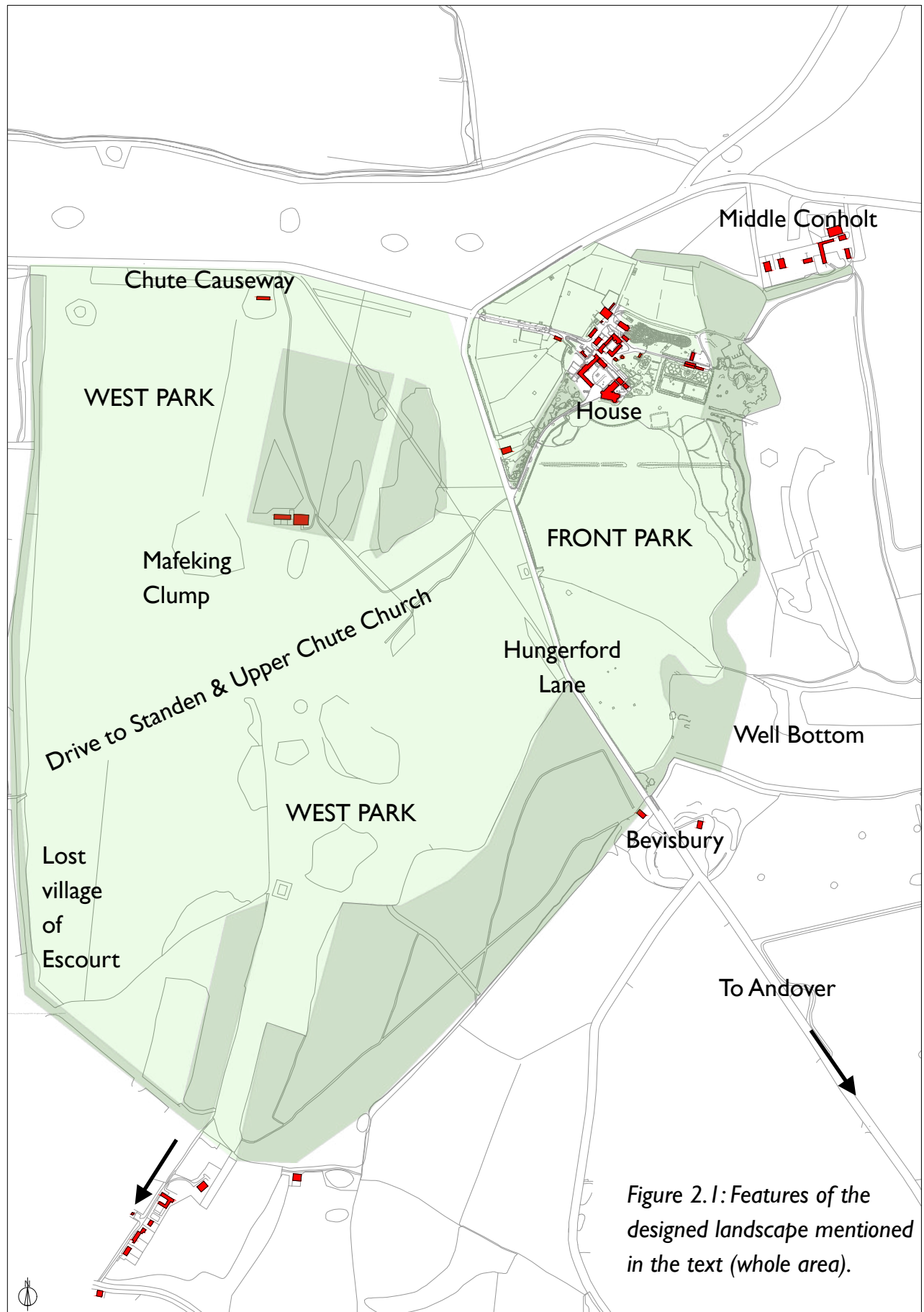
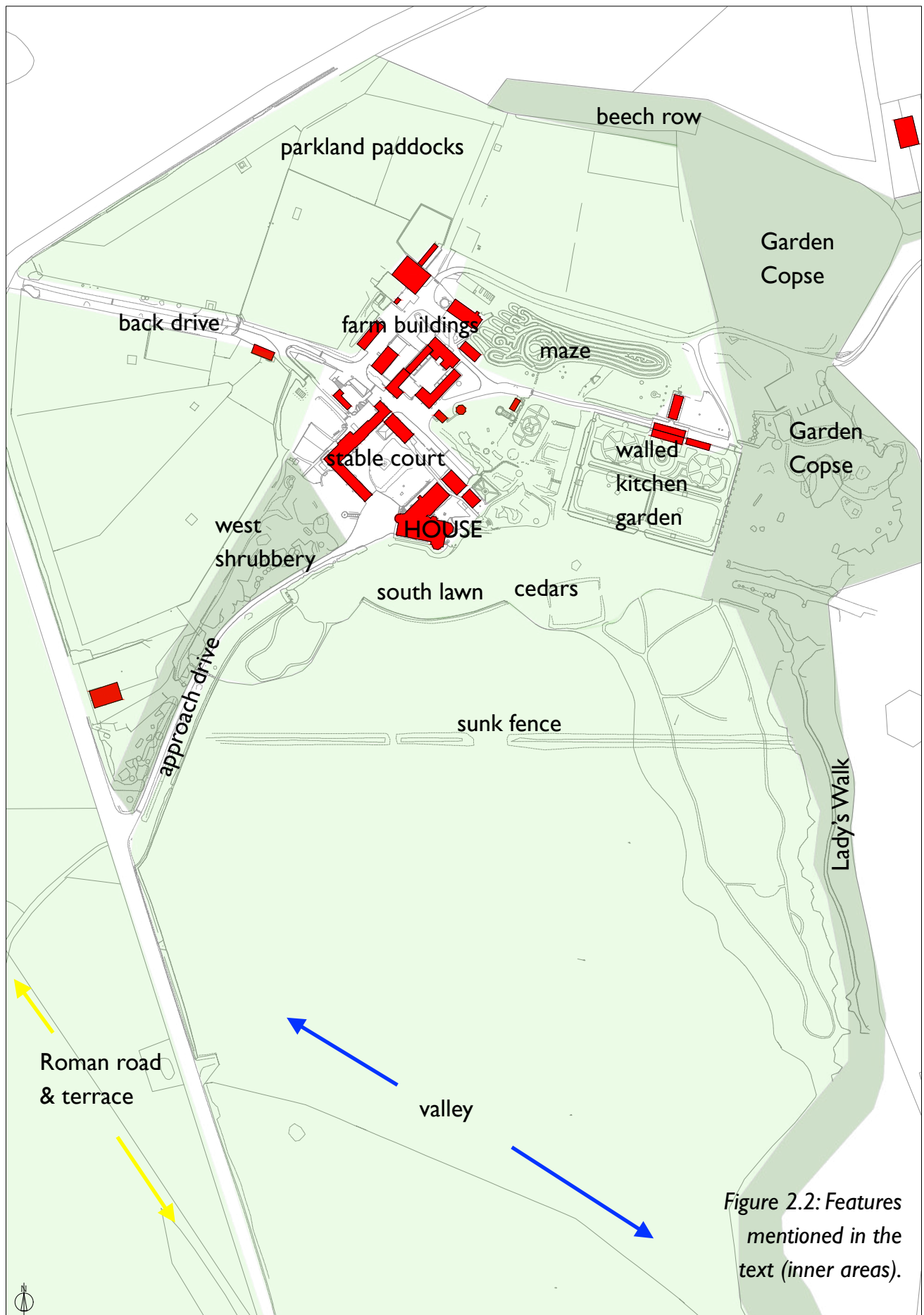


Figure 2.1: Features of the designed landscape mentioned in the text (whole area).



2. Description of the Site

The following is a brief description of the layout of the designed landscape and the features within it.

The designed landscape setting of Conholt House divides into two distinct parts: the historic deer park (west park) on one side of Hungerford Lane and the house and eastern areas, which were ornamented later, on the other.

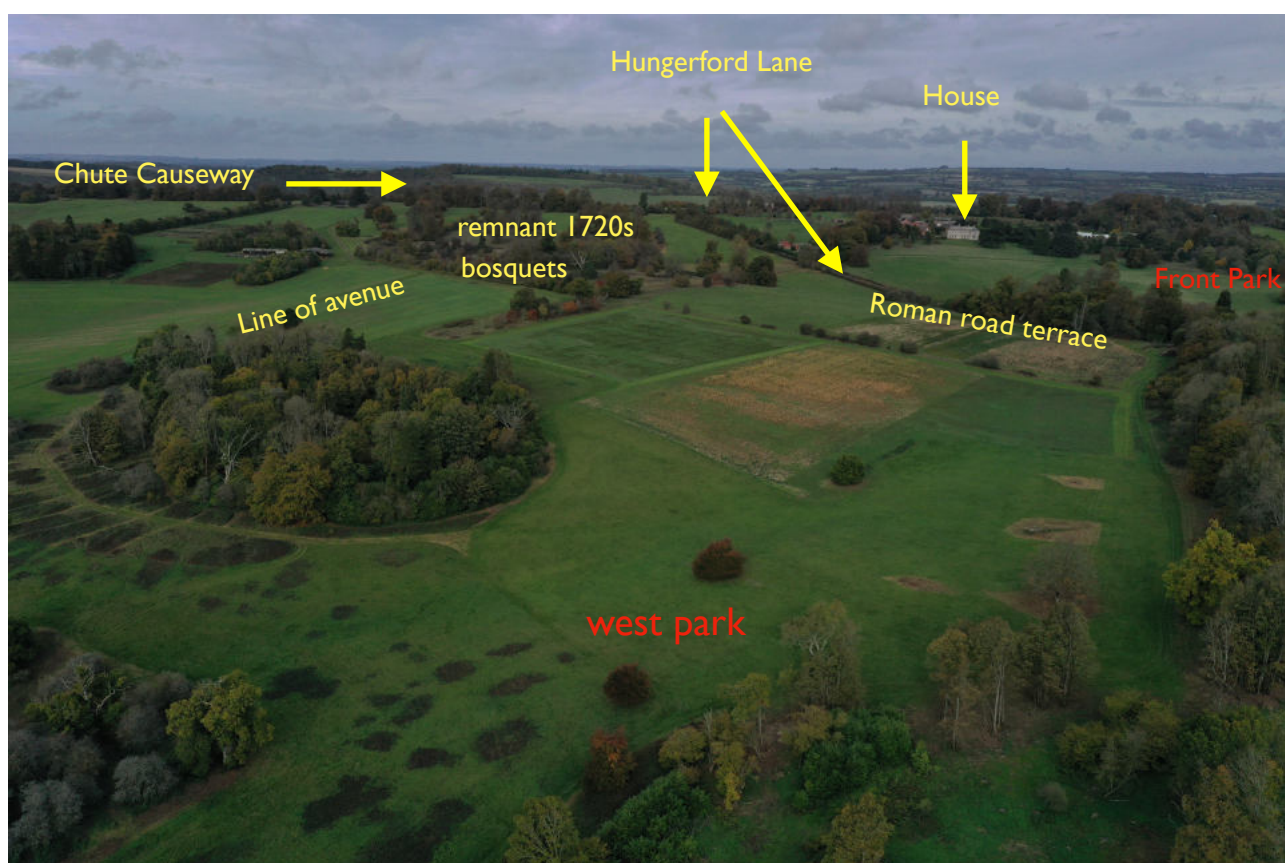


Figure 2.3: The designed landscape of Conholt Park divides into two distinct parts. To the west of Hungerford Lane is the west park, seen here in the foreground and left of the view. In the background to the right, the house and eastern areas, including the Front Park are visible. This view looks north.

To the west, on the far side of Hungerford Lane from the house, is the **west park** (figure 2.4) – an area of around 350 acres, characterised by its ancient trees and substantial earthworks, including a section of the Roman road running on a vast terrace through the north-east quarter of the park.² The alignment was utilised in the setting out of an

² The Roman road is F10 in the gazetteer of archaeological features, part of the *Archaeological Desk Based Assessment and Landscape Survey* by Oliver Jessop, June 2023 (hereafter Jessop, Archaeological DBA)

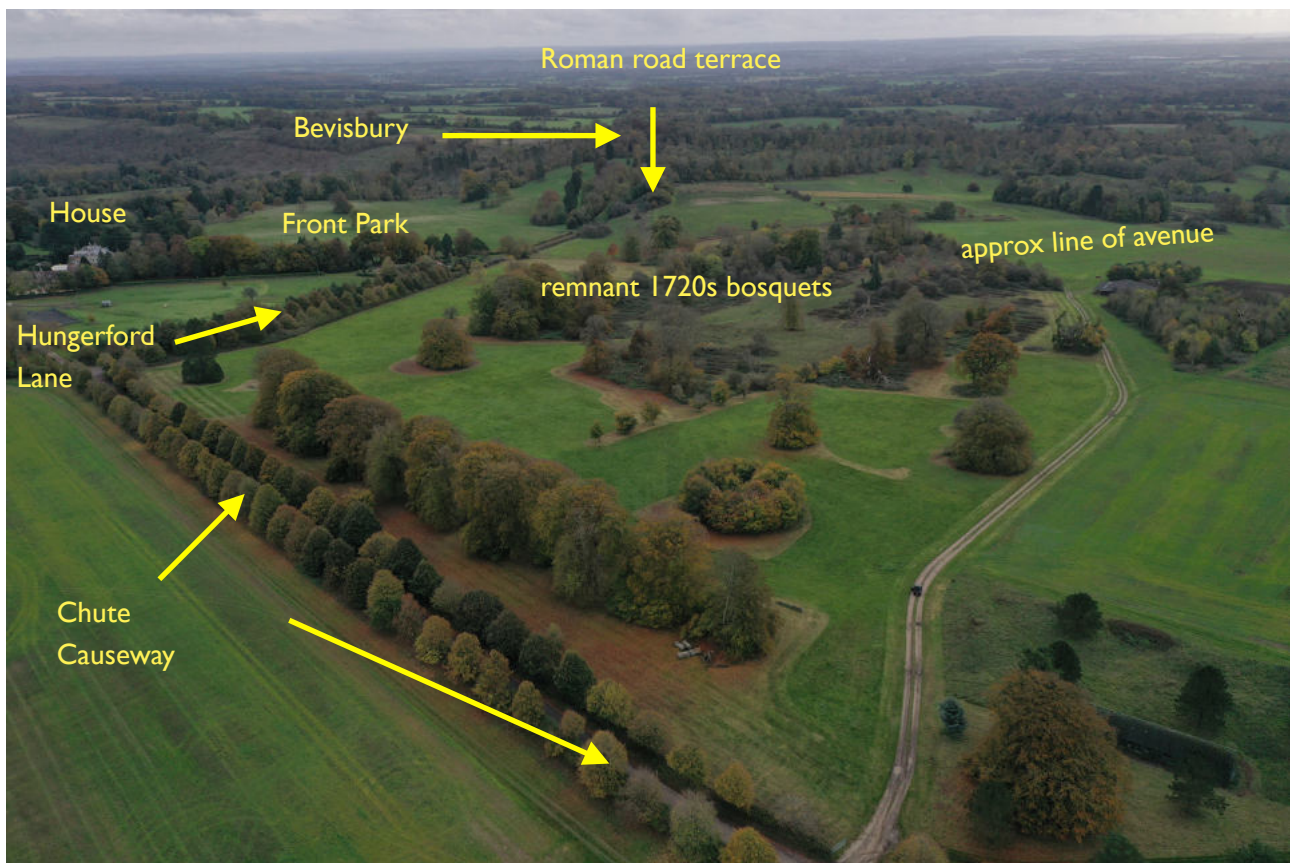


Figure 2.4: The eastern half of the west park seen from above Chute Causeway in the north, looking south. The west park contains the oldest trees at Conholt, including beech and horse chestnut originally part of the bosquets of the formal design of the 1720s.

extensive, formal design of intersecting avenues and rides executed in the early 1720s. Little of this layout remains legible today.

On the east side of Hungerford Lane lies the **Front Park** (figure 2.5), an area of early nineteenth century parkland, running south from the house, across attractively undulating terrain towards the pre-historic circular enclosure of Bevisbury (now hidden by trees), which is bisected by the Roman road. Bevisbury sits on high ground just over the border into Hampshire.³ The county boundary follows an ancient bank just to its north, just outside the parkland. The southern half of the **Front Park**, particularly, is characterised by fine beech trees, clumps of hazels and slightly later plantings of wellingtonias. Flanking the Front Park on the east side and closing in the views in this direction, is a **shrubby belt** through which there is the remains of a path of the early nineteenth century, known as Lady's Walk. Both sections of designed landscape sit within a larger estate, which historically has been used both for shooting and farming.

³ Bevisbury, also referred to as Berisbury, is F3 in the gazetteer of archaeological features, part of the Desk Based Assessment by Oliver Jessop. The bank on the county boundary is just outside the study area.

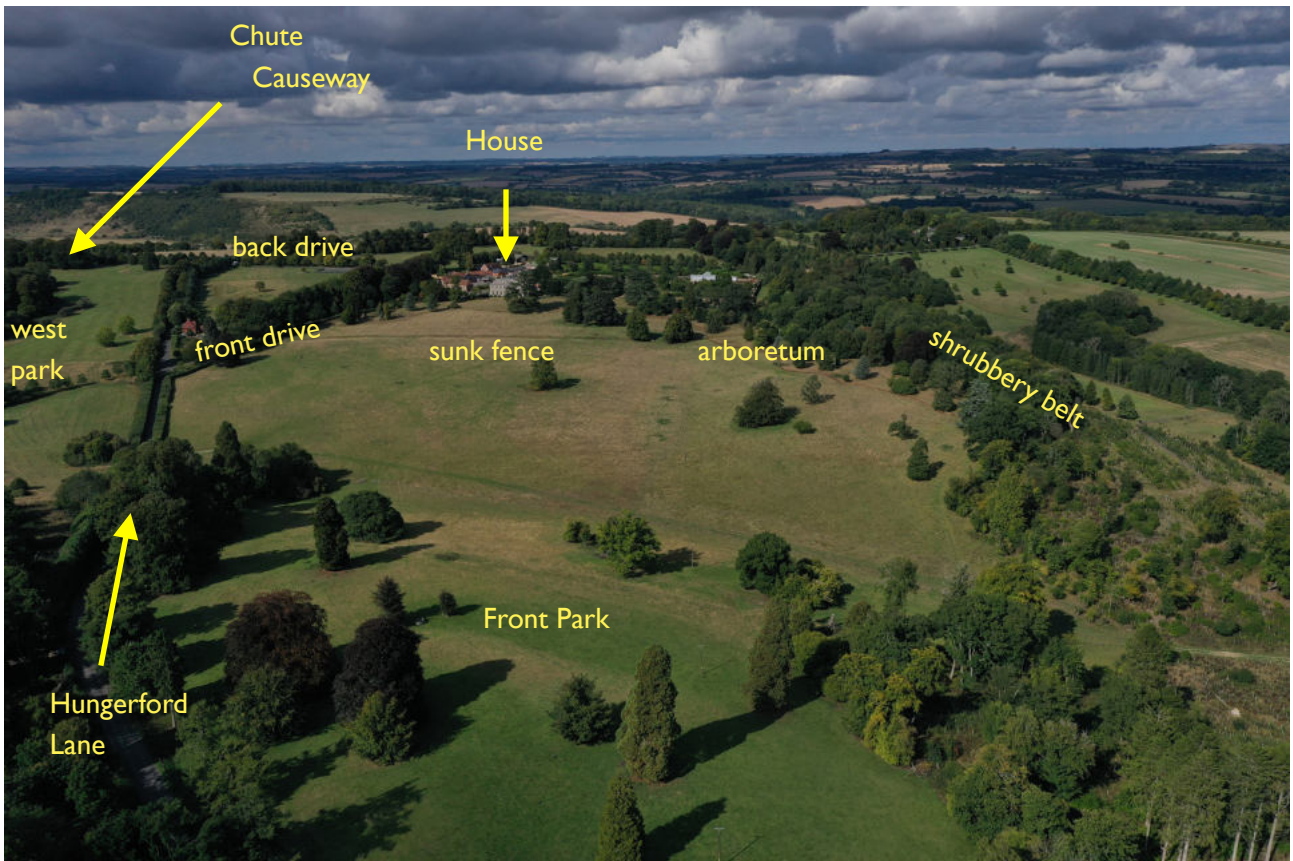


Figure 2.5: The landscape east of Hungerford Lane, viewed from above the south end of the Front Park, looking northwards towards the house and stables.

The house is approached by two drives, a functional back drive, which forms a spur off the road along the ridge known as Chute Causeway, and leads to the working areas at the north of the house. This drive is probably on a particularly old alignment. The **front drive**, the main approach to the house, is equally short. The **front drive** forks off Hungerford Lane to the south-west of the house and leads to the front door in a peremptory fashion, on a slight arc, but with very little design merit. This section was laid out in the 1820s on a line that was close to its predecessor. This drive once connected with a long drive across the **west park**, which headed west towards Standen and then on to Upper Chute where, historically, the family went to church. Late-nineteenth century maps show there were other, functional routes across the west park by this time, connecting with the drive from Upper Chute. These were presumably stopped up at some point and today just one public footpath runs through the west park, on an approximate north-south axis, in part following the route of the former avenue.

The **south lawn**, which forms the immediate setting of the house on that side (figure 2.6), is divided from the Front Park by a short section of Victorian ha-ha. The ha-ha is in poor condition, showing signs of having been modified and patched at various dates – and is located surprisingly close to the house. The rest of the boundary between the garden areas and the parkland is fenced, with modern post and rail.

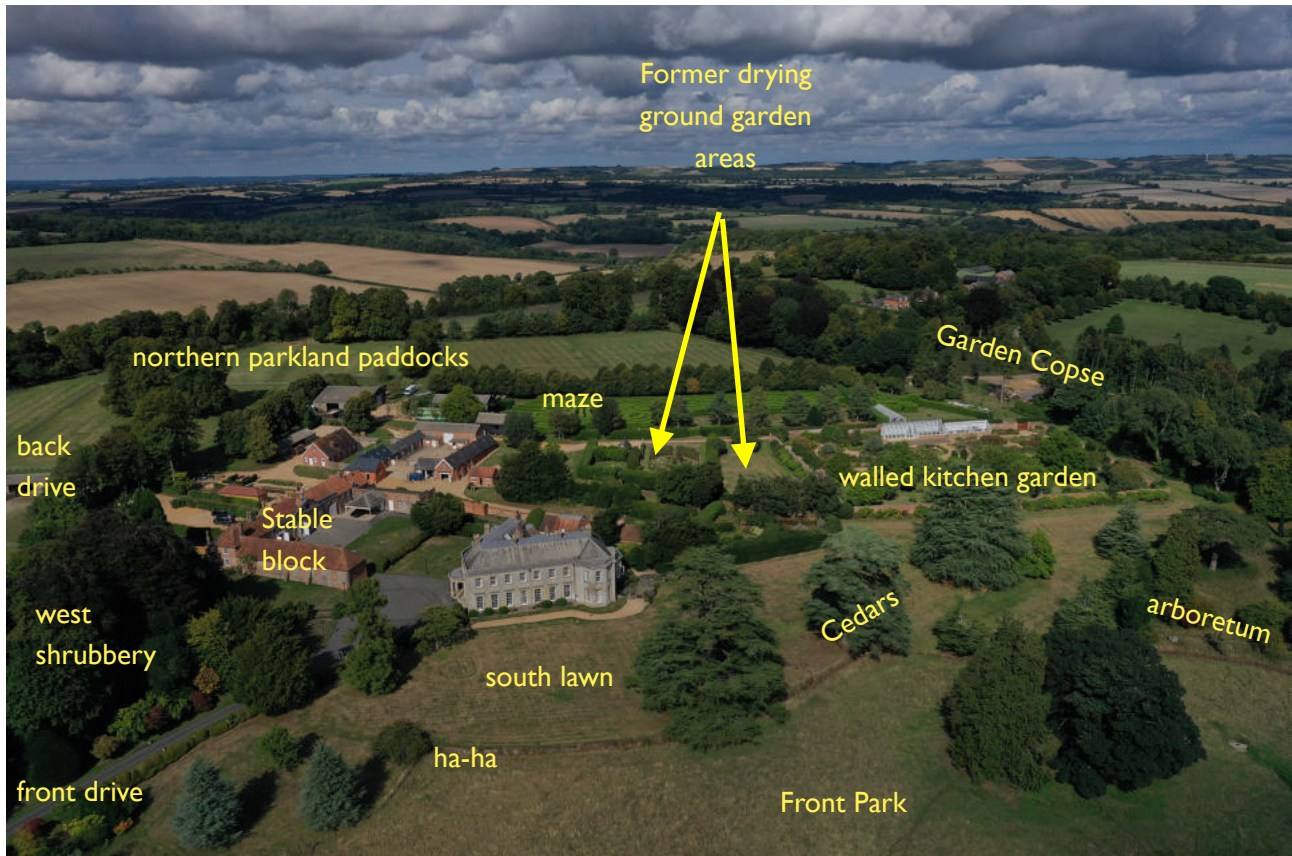


Figure 2.6: The house in its immediate setting with garden and working areas, viewed from above the north end of the Front Park, looking northwards.

For much of its existence the house has been a farm and a sporting estate (as opposed to a principal country seat) and this is reflected in the relatively small area of garden. Either side of the mansion, spaces are determined by the historic stable block and the walled kitchen garden and their relationship to the house. Immediately north-west of the house lies the stable block which, with its three ranges, forms a courtyard with that side of the house. This area is partly grassed and partly in tarmac. To the east and north-east, between the house and the walled garden, lie a number of small compartments. This area, historically, was used as the drying ground for laundry and a productive growing area additional to the kitchen garden. These compartments are largely filled with modern garden features, created ad hoc and with little or no rational relationship to each other, or their wider setting. The **walled**

kitchen garden itself is the main area for horticultural interest. To the south of the walled garden, divided from the park, the bulk of the pleasure ground (such as it is) is laid to lawn with some handsome, historic **cedars** and long ranging views. A modern **arboretum** has been created in the east of the north half of the Front Park. To the north of house are functional areas, with various outbuildings and barns of an assortment of dates. These have developed piecemeal without any overall rationale. North of the functional areas and walled garden a **maze**, in the shape of a giant's foot, was laid out in 1995. Northwards of this and wrapping round the west side of the stable block are a number of paddocks, which have historically been loosely planted as parkland.



Figure 2.7: To further aid understanding of the setting of the house, the designed landscape has been divided into Character Areas – here the outer areas. See map below for the smaller, inner areas, closer to the house.

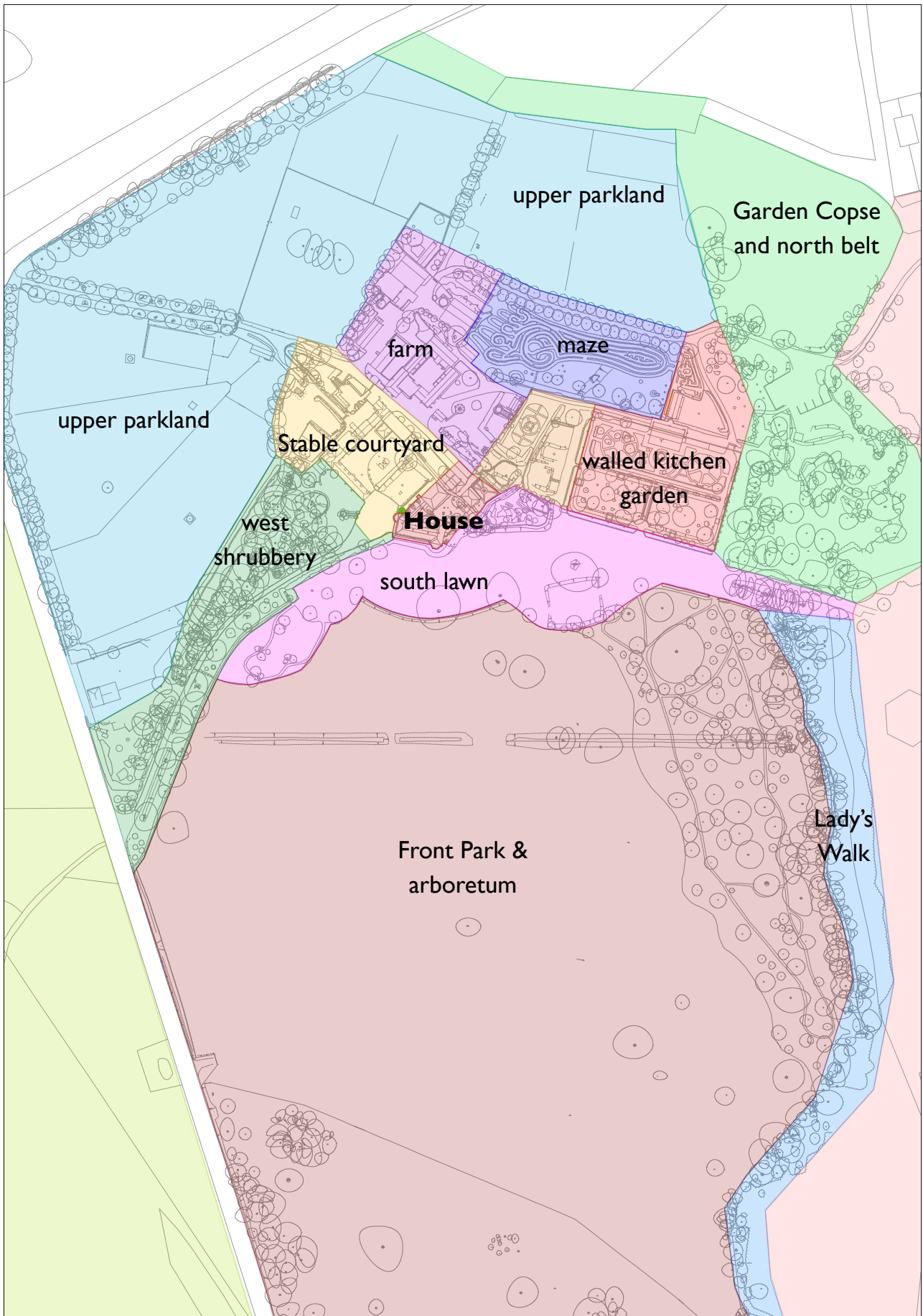


Figure 2.8: Character Areas of the designed landscape (inner areas)

3. Development of the Designed Landscape

The setting of the house, as we see it today, is the product of development starting in the later seventeenth century. It is therefore from this period onwards that the narrative of the development of the parkland and pleasure grounds at Conholt is set out here. However, the earlier landscape, its features and their relative distribution clearly had an impact on what came later, so here older landscape features are outlined and elements of the archaeology discussed in the context of the eighteenth to twentieth century design. This area of Wiltshire and Hampshire is particularly rich in archaeological landscape features and notable remains are preserved within the parkland. The landscape archaeology has also been discussed in greater depth in the assessment by Oliver Jessop, which was carried out in close conjunction with this report.

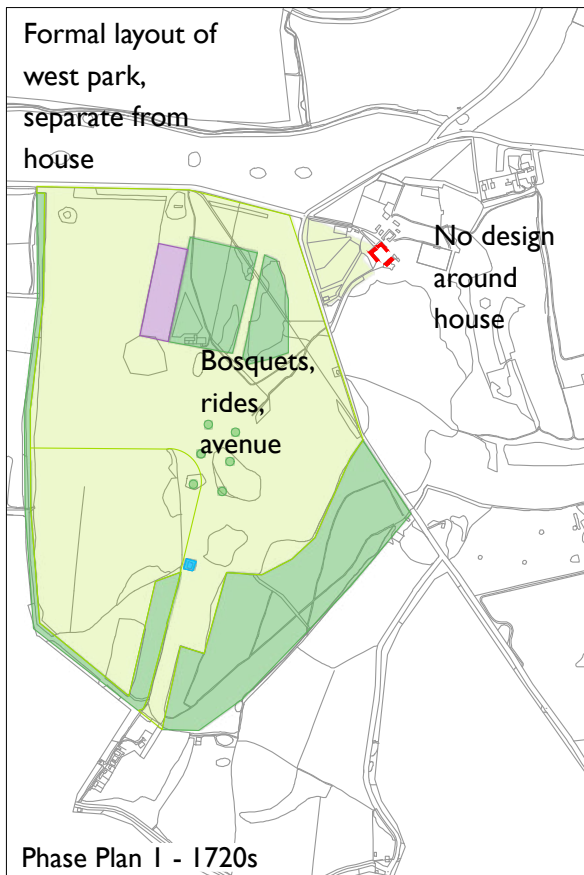
The development of the setting of the house as elucidated here should also be read in conjunction with the Conservation Plan for the house, stable block and ancillary and farm buildings written by Dr. Simon Thurley (June 2023). However, it should also be noted that the earlier phases of development of the house and its setting do not go as neatly hand in hand as might be expected, because – unusually – arguably the most significant phase of the design of the landscape occurred before the house started to be developed from a farmhouse into something rather grander and more polite. Therefore, the phases of development outlined in the Conservation Plan for the house are not exactly the same as outlined here.

The designed landscape at Conholt has been shaped by many particular factors: the complicated descent of the ownership of the house, the fact it originated as a farm (and farming continued to be important through its history), that it was often occupied by tenants and that it was used for much of its history as a hunting or shooting box / lodge.

SUMMARY OF PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT:

1630s to 1718 Francis Lucy Sir Philip Meadows I	Agricultural estate bought as investment. New farmhouse built c1680s. Occupied by tenant and bailiff. No designed landscape.
1718 to 1757 Sir Philip Meadows II	Sir Philip Meadows II showed more interest in the property than previous generations. He added to the stables and built a carriage house in the 1720s. By the 1730s he had built his bailiff a new house, suggesting he was now spending time in the farmhouse. In 1723 road following route of Roman Road was diverted. At the same time, the west park was enclosed as a deer park. Its design of bosquets and rides is likely to have been laid out with the assistance of Meadow's cousin, Kingsmill Eyre, a gentleman-amateur landscaper.
1757 – 1792 Sir Sidney Meadows	In the 1760s the house was extended with creation of south wing. New facade aligned on long vista to SSW, towards estates of Eyre cousins in Wiltshire. Despite more polite new incarnation of the house, its immediate setting appears to have been fairly modest – just about sufficient for its improved status – and probably largely functional. West park remained laid out as it had been by the previous generation in the 1720s. Emphasis on agricultural, hunting and equestrian interests. The place was essentially a hybrid of a gentleman's seat and a farm.
1792 – 1826 Evelyn Philip Meadows & General William Meadows	On Sir Sidney's death the passing of the estate to the next generation was complicated. His eldest nephew, Evelyn, was a rake and never lived at Conholt. The house instead occupied by Evelyn's younger brother, General William Meadows, when not serving with army overseas. Possibly some periods when house was let to tenants. Bay window built onto south facade, possibly for better views of landscape. General William built the walled kitchen garden. No evidence for further improvement of the landscape in this period beyond that.

1826 – 1851 Henry Manvers Pierrepont	The 1820s was the only period during which house and landscape were improved at same time. The eastern areas of the designed landscape, as seen today, are largely a product of this phase of development. Front Park extended southwards and planted with scatters of clumps and individual trees. New section of approach drive from Hungerford Lane created on a similar line to the final section of the old route, but curving rather than straight. Boundary between parkland and garden formed by metal fence. Eastern shrubbery belt created, with Lady's Walk through it.
1851 – 1897 Major-General Lord Charles & Lady Sophia Wellesley	Estate had stability due to long tenancy of Lady Sophia Wellesley, who had grown up there. Despite stability no concerted campaign of landscape improvements – though present ha-ha created in this period. Horticultural emphasis seems to have been mainly on growing fruit & vegetables – with exception of monkey puzzles and other conifers planted on south lawn and north end of Front Park. Many trees in the parkland lost to a storm in 1868. Conholt became a shooting estate in this period.
1897 – 1942 George Knowles and Edward Wigan	Re-working of farm area to NW of house. Re-building of bothies and expansion of glass – inside kitchen garden and outside. Thinning of Lady Wellesley's tree planting to re-open views from house & south lawn.
1942 – 1992 Henrietta Gaskell	Miss Gaskell took over running of the estate during the war, which set the tone for her period. Embodied in the designed landscape by shooting, farming and productive horticulture. Walled garden used for commercial growing. Substantial amount of timber sold on estate, likely to include trees in parkland. Significant losses to Dutch elm disease.
1992 – 2022 Paul van Vlissingen & Family Trust	Extensive new planting in parkland, but not to recreate historic design. Creation of arboretum in part of Front Park. Creation of giant's footprint maze. Re-building of walled garden walls and glasshouses. Other additions to the garden were small-scale and piecemeal.



Key:

- Principal buildings
- Parkland
- Gardened areas
- Water
- Woodland & shrubbery

Figure 3.0.1: This illustrates – at a glance – the changing shape and extent of the designed landscape over the three key phases of its development. Individual phase plans are illustrated in the relevant sections of history below.

Given the lack of archival evidence, particularly the lack of historic estate plans, these are (to a certain degree) conjectural reconstructions of the extent of the designed landscape and the principal features within it, based on an analysis of historic maps, surviving earthworks and trees and LiDAR data.

3.1 Francis Lucy, 1630s – 1686 and Sir Philip Meadows I, 1686 – 1718

Summary of development, 1630s to 1718

- The agricultural estate was bought as investment.
- A new farmhouse was built c1680s. Occupied by tenant and bailiff.
- There was no designed landscape.

As Simon Thurley explains in his section ‘Beginnings’ in the Conservation Plan: ‘Although the land that now makes up the Conholt Park estate has a long prehistory its relationship with Conholt Park House only begins in the 17th century with its purchase, in 1632, by Francis Lucy, a successful London lawyer. With his first residence in the city, then Westminster and eventually a handsome villa in Hammersmith, Conholt Farm was a financial and social investment rather than a residence. On visits to his Wiltshire property, he would have probably stayed in an inn in Andover rather than any of the agricultural tenancies on his own land.’

Francis Lucy (born c.1597) was the youngest surviving son of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote Park in Warwickshire. As a younger son he had to make his way in the world and he became a lawyer. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had five children – two sons and three daughters. The daughters all married well. The new family connections – especially those of Constance and Martha – had an influence on the development of the estate at Conholt. Both Francis and Elizabeth’s sons and their daughter Elizabeth died before their father, so his estates were divided between the surviving daughters, Constance and Martha.⁴ Martha married Samuel Eyre in 1661, the same year as her sister Constance married Philip Meadows. The Eyre family owned land to the south of Salisbury and are significant to the story of the development of the designed landscape at Conholt, as will be discussed below. Samuel Eyre appears to have helped Lucy with the management of his estates.⁵ This suggests a close working relationship and there is evidence to suggest strong ties between the Eyres and Meadows families. On their father’s death in 1686, Martha inherited land at Brightwalton in Berkshire and Constance and her husband, Philip Meadows, inherited Conholt.⁶ At this stage there is no suggestion of a designed landscape at Conholt. It was an agricultural property, held primarily as an investment. Though it is possible that Meadows, at

⁴ Elizabeth Lucy married Sir Edward Atkyns.

⁵ *The History of the Conholt Park Estate* by Wiltshire Building Record (hereafter WBR), p. 13

⁶ Brightwalton is about 20 miles north of Conholt.

least, came to hunt across the wider landscape, including in Chute Forest.⁷

When Francis Lucy died in 1686 Conholt was inherited by Constance and Philip Meadows (figure 3.1.1). His family origins were in Suffolk. Their country seat was at Bentley Hall in Suffolk.⁸ Like his father-in-law, he was a younger son and had to forge a career for himself. He became a diplomat. As Simon Thurley explains: 'Meadows was a significant figure who cut a dash across the turbulent politics of the later seventeenth century. Working as a Latin secretary and then a diplomat for Oliver Cromwell he rose to be knight marshal at Oliver Cromwell's court. Like many administrators during the republic, he successfully made the transition to royal service in 1660. Surviving the Glorious Revolution in office, he held various government posts under King William III and Queen Anne. His success was due to his administrative capability, political neutrality and evident clubability'.⁹



Figure 3.1.1: Portrait of Sir Philip Meadows I (d.1718) by Godfrey Kneller

As discussed in the Conservation Plan, the origin of the present house is likely to date back to the 1680s, when it was built as a house for the farm bailiff, who was also a tenant. The first two bailiffs were called Thomas Piper and their name was preserved in the landscape as late as the 1840s, when the tithe schedule recorded the name of the eastern belt around the parkland and pleasure grounds as 'Piper's Field Row'.¹⁰

The farmhouse faced north-west, across a yard to stables and farm buildings, which became the core of the stable block that remains today. Inside the house, there were two parlours facing south-west. This location of the highest status rooms may have merely been functional as the best light came from the south, but they also face towards the best view.

⁷ See Chute Forest: <http://www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk/landscape-character-areas/hampshire/chute-forest-facombe.html>

⁸ There since at least the 1630s. VCH: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol11/pp19-77>

⁹ Thurley, CP, p. 7

¹⁰ Workers on the estate today still refer to the parkland south of the house as Piper's Field, rather than the Front Park.

(This became more relevant later). It is possible that one or both of the parlours were reserved for the owner when he came to visit.

At this stage, in the last three decades of the seventeenth century and the first two decades of the eighteenth century, there is no suggestion that the landscape surrounding the farmhouse was anything beyond functional and agricultural; there is no evidence of any design. At the end of the seventeenth century the landholding known as 'Home Field' covered 47 acres.¹¹ This field is likely to have corresponded roughly to the northern half of what later became the Front Park. Evidence suggests it may have extended slightly further east than the present Front Park does. This is discussed below.

During his period of ownership Philip Meadows I added to the land holdings at Conholt, including buying land to the south-west of the house, at Escourt and at Standen. In the late seventeenth century at least the south-west corner of what became the west park was in cultivation and grazing, as it is documented that the bailiff, Thomas Piper II, had cattle there and grew oats.¹²

¹¹ WBR, p. 16.

¹² WBR, p. 14.

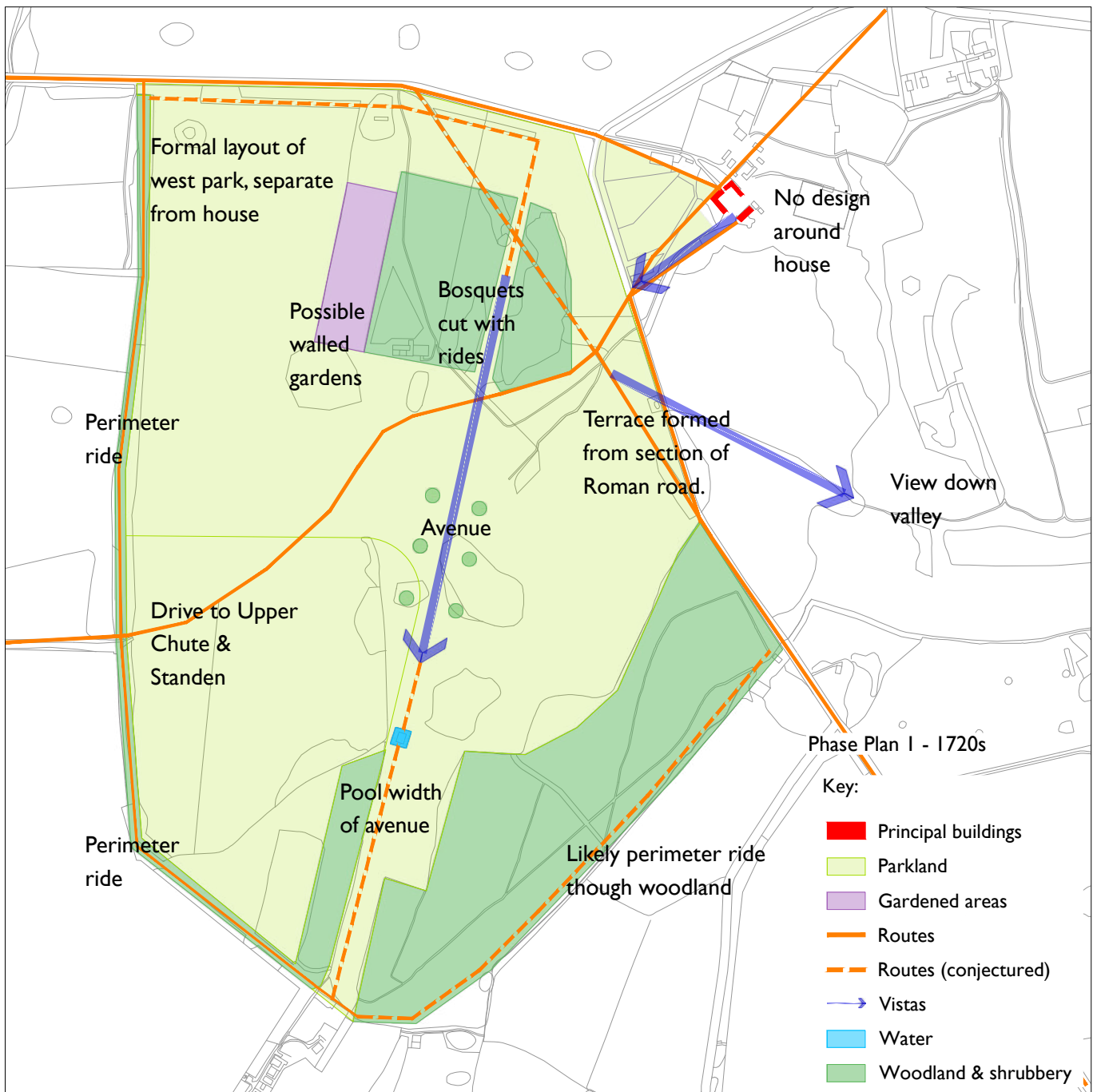


Figure 3.2.1: Phase Plan I. This shows the likely extent of the designed landscape in the 1720s – and plots the key features within the design. At this date the connection between the house, which was still yet to be gentrified and the designed landscape, was very limited.

3.2 Sir Philip Meadows II, 1718 – 1757

Summary of Development, 1718 to 1757

–Sir Philip Meadows II showed more interest in the property than previous generations. He added to the stables and built a carriage house in the 1720s.

–By the 1730s he had built his bailiff a new house, suggesting he was now spending time in the farmhouse.

–In 1723 the road following route of Roman road was diverted.

–At the same time, the west park was enclosed as a deer park. Its fashionable design of bosquets and rides is likely to have been laid out with the assistance of Meadow's cousin, Kingsmill Eyre, a gentleman-amateur landscaper.

Sir Philip Meadows I and his wife Constance had three daughters and one son, also called Philip (1672 – 1757).¹³ In 1696 Philip II married Dorothy Boscawen, sister of Hugh Boscawen of Tregothnan in Cornwall and niece of Sidney, Lord Godolphin (1645 – 1712), a very influential figure in politics during the period.¹⁴ This marriage cannot have failed to be strategically advantageous to the Meadows family. As a result of the Boscawen marriage, Meadows sat as MP for Tregony and later for Truro, both in Cornwall and controlled by the family of his wife. Like his father he was appointed Knight Marshal.¹⁵ Sir Philip Meadows II also pursued a diplomatic career, though perhaps not one quite as illustrious as that of his father. He too benefited from nepotistic sinecures.

Philip Meadows II paid more attention to Conholt than previous generations and stamped his mark on the property. He was the first owner to start to aggrandise the estate from a mere rustic farm to something more polite. He added to the stables and created a carriage house, suggesting he was there more regularly. By the early 1730s it appears that the farmhouse, with its two parlours 'facing the park' was exclusively reserved for his use and a new house for the bailiff had been built.¹⁶ While there is no evidence he changed the house

¹³ It should be noted that the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Philip Meadows I, gives the year of the birth of his heir as 1662, which is just one year after the marriage of his parents. Philip Meadows II was in fact born in 1672. This is the date used by History of Parliament online. Parish register of St. Martin in the Fields confirms this: '21 May 1672, Philippus Meadow Father Philippi, mother Constanciae', England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975

¹⁴ DNB. Venning, T. Meadows, Sir Philip (bap. 1626, d. 1718), diplomat. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Retrieved 22 Apr. 2023, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18479>.

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knight_Marshal

¹⁶ WBR, p. 88.

– he did improve the landscape and imposed the first elements of design upon it. These innovations beyond the house might be – in part at least – explained by his family connections.

Sir Philip's aunt Martha (younger sister of his mother Constance), married lawyer Samuel Eyre (1633 – 1698) in 1661. Their country house was Newhouse, six miles south-east of Salisbury.¹⁷ The relationship between the Meadows family and the Eyres is significant to the development of Conholt House and its setting in two ways – firstly in the laying out of the initial phase of designed landscape in the 1720s and secondly in the orientation of the extension to the house by the following generation in the 1760s.

Martha and Samuel Eyre had six children. The youngest son was Kingsmill Eyre (1677 – 1743).¹⁸ As a younger son he had to find a profession and he seems to have had a varied career, largely helped by family and political connections. One of his several interests was in landscape improvements.¹⁹ Though the evidence is circumstantial, having a cousin who had experience in design and arboriculture is likely to have influenced Sir Philip Meadows II laying out of an extensive formal design in the west park at Conholt. At the time that Philip inherited the estate in 1718 Kingsmill had been involved in the creation and improvement of parks and gardens for about a decade and was currently occupied in making gardens for the prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole – both at his London home in Chelsea and also at his country seat, Houghton in Norfolk.²⁰

Perhaps improving the landscape was an ambition from the moment Philip inherited in 1718, but it seems more likely that any design actually came to fruition five years later, in 1723, after he diverted the public highway from the course of the old Roman road.²¹ As he did not improve the farmhouse, so its immediate setting also seems to have remained unimproved and unornamented. But across Hungerford Lane, the west park took in around 350 acres. The formal design included a number of fashionable features. Where the Roman

¹⁷ Samuel Eyre bought the Newhouse estate from a cousin the year before his marriage. The Eyres had had connections to that part of Wiltshire for far longer though. The house at Newhouse is listed grade I: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1300128>. The granary: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1184496?section=official-list-entry>. There may be parallels in the way in which Conholt and Newhouse were used. Newhouse seems to have been essentially a hunting box.

¹⁸ Kingsmill Eyre was baptised at Whiteparish, Wiltshire just two days after his birth, on the 25th May 1677 (*Wiltshire Baptisms Index 1530-1917*). His unusual name came from his great grandmother Dame Constance Lucy, daughter of Richard Kingsmill of Highclere and Alice (Faulconer) Lucy. Constance was born c.1565 and died in 1637. She married Thomas Lucy of Charlecote in the County of Warwick in 1583.

¹⁹ Kingsmill Eyre therefore stands near the beginning of a line of gentleman-amateur garden designers through the eighteenth century, notable other being Horace Walpole and Sanderson Miller, a contemporary of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's, two name but two.

²⁰ Andrew Eburne, 'Charles Bridgeman and the Gardens of the Robinocracy', *Garden History*, 31:2, (2003), p. 200–201

²¹ The park must certainly have been laid out by 1731 as the lease of that date mentions the two parlours of the farmhouse 'fronting the park.'

road ran across the landscape on a dramatic scarp, this section of it was re-purposed as a terrace walk and still commented upon as an impressive feature over 150 years later.²² Towards its northern end, the Roman road was planted as an avenue. Another avenue sprang off it, heading south-west. At the north end this was lined with rows of trees; at its southern end with regularly planted groups, known as platoons (see figure 3.2.4, below). South of the platoons, a rectilinear pool was set across the avenue. Flanking the northern end was a pair of asymmetrical bosquets, cut through with axial rides and a perimeter ride ran along the western edge. To the west of the western bosquet there were (possibly) walled gardens.

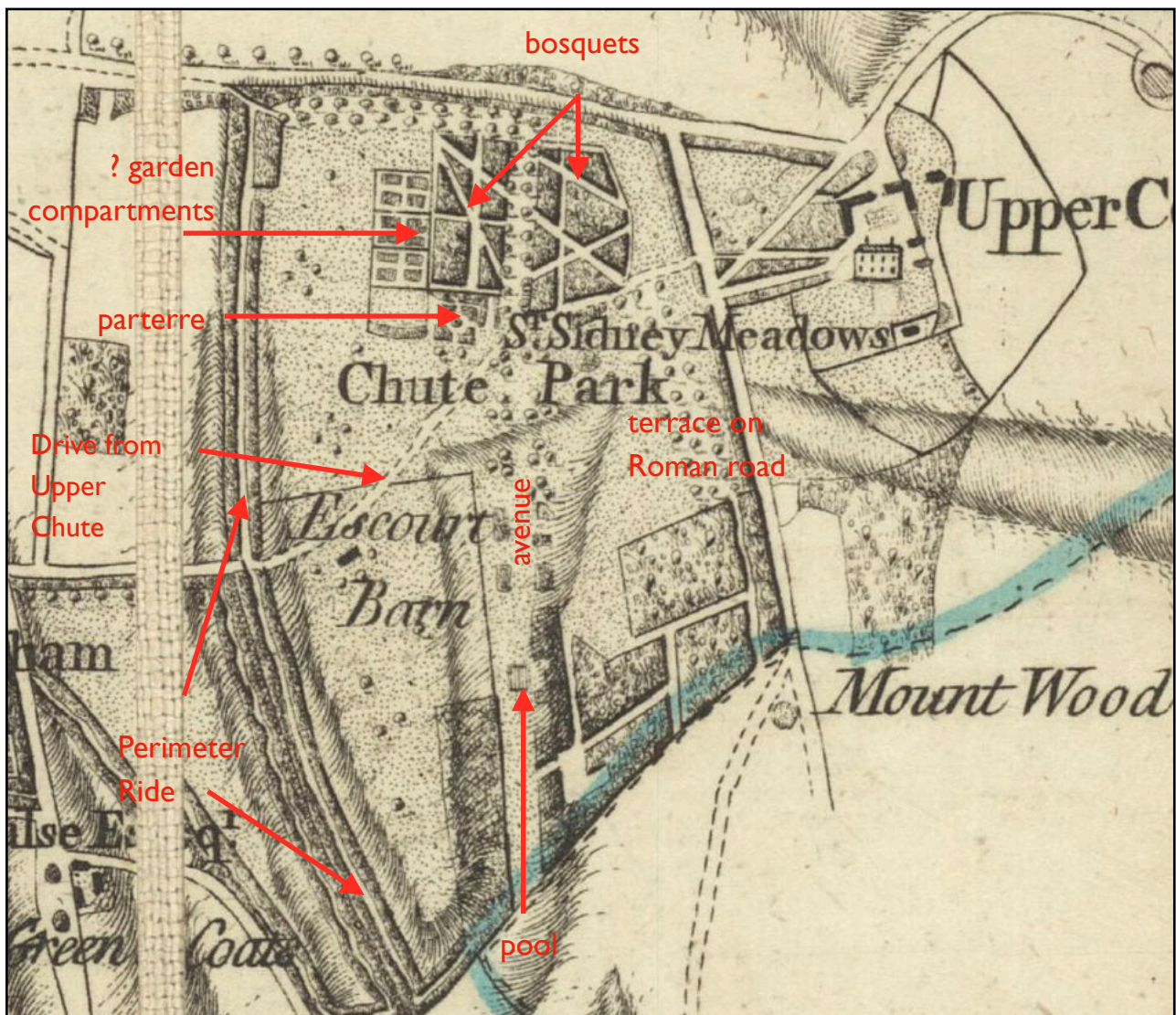


Figure 3.2.2: A detail of the Map of Wiltshire by Andrews and Dury, 1773, showing the west park. The house lies on the right, to the east of Hungerford Lane. The terrace was formed from a section of the Roman road, which was also lined for part of its length with an avenue of trees.

²² Reverend J. E. Jackson, 'Notes on the Border of Wilts and Hants', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, Vol XXI:LXIII, 1884, p330-355.

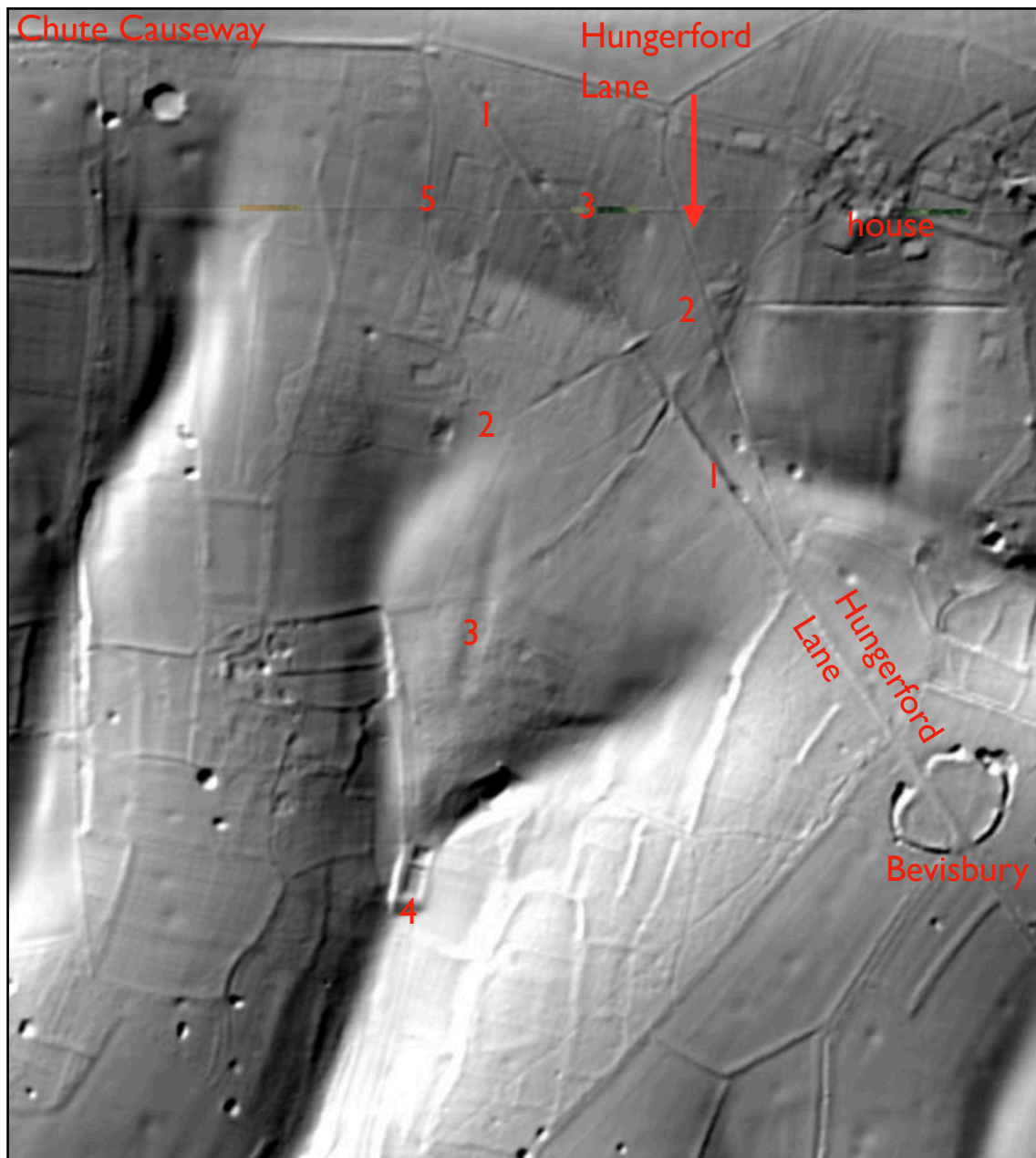


Figure 3.2.3: The LiDAR plot showing the designed landscape at Conholt with key features of the 1720s west park layout marked: 1 = the Roman road, 2 = the intersecting alignment, 3 = the alignment of the avenue, 4 = the pool (on 2 levels), 5 = the possible garden compartments. N.B. For further features visible on the LiDAR, see the Desk-based Assessment and Landscape Survey by Oliver Jessop.

This layout is known from the 1773 map of Wiltshire by Andrews and Dury (figure 3.2.2). Even though this was surveyed about fifty years after the landscape was laid out, correlations between the features shown on the 1773 map and other evidence including nineteenth century maps, LiDAR data (figure 3.2.3) and observations on the ground, show

that the map gives a reasonable representation of the features and their relative distribution.

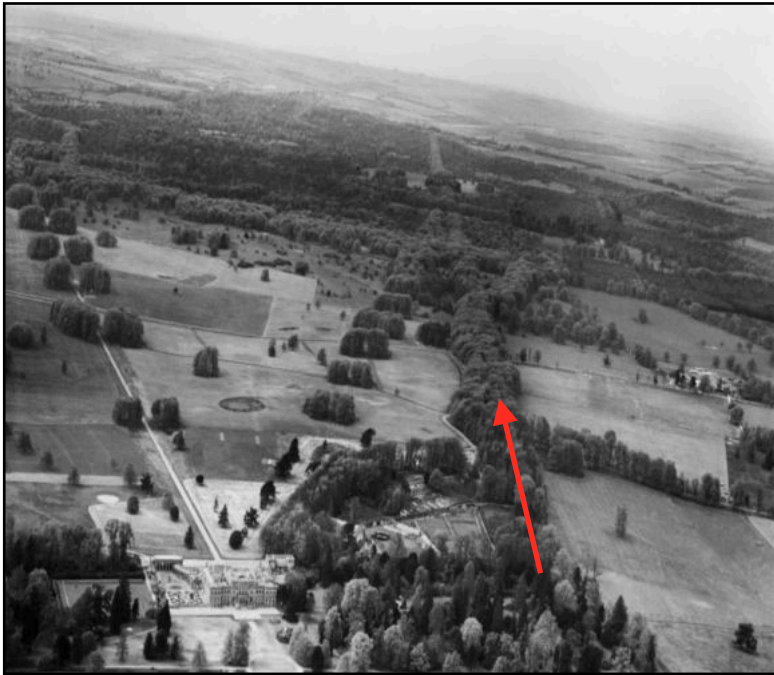


Figure 3.2.4: An aerial photograph of Tottenham Park, Wiltshire, 1948. This illustrates the effect of an avenue of platoons rather than the more common arrangement of rows of trees. Tottenham Park is just eight miles from Conholt and the same Roman road runs through the landscape here (red arrow).

Although the features shown by Andrews and Dury are typical of a layout of this scale of the 1720s, the fact that this design was detached from the house – which remained modest – was relatively unusual. There are examples of detached pleasure grounds located away from the great house laid out throughout the eighteenth century, but these are generally on a smaller-scale than the 350 acres of parkland here and usually at sites where there was also a designed landscape surrounding the parent house (which there was not at Conholt at that date). A partial parallel to the scenario at Conholt is the detached deer park of Lodge Park in Gloucestershire, which is separate from – but relates to – Sherborne Park.²³ It was named after an architecturally sophisticated lodge (essentially a grandstand) which survives. Here the landscape was laid out by the Royal Gardener, Charles Bridgeman, with whom it seems likely Kingsmill Eyre overlapped at Houghton – and perhaps elsewhere. In Wiltshire a handful of other sites shown on the 1773 county map had detached elements of designed landscape. At Foxley, a modest estate near Malmesbury, a sixteenth century house refaced in the 1720s had a limited garden around the house and a detached park across the road. Within it was a bosquet-like woodland cut through with straight rides, called Foxley Grove, about half a mile away from the house. At Lacock a wood cut through with intersecting rides, called Innwood, lay about three quarters of a mile from the house, also divided from it by a road. These groves probably played a similar role to the

²³ Lodge Park, *Register of Parks and Gardens* entry: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000770> Listing: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1340791>. The lodge / grandstand was built to view the deer course, with which the park was closely associated.

geometrically laid-out woodland known as the Ridings at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, but on a far smaller scale and one of their main functions was as part of the hunt.

It is unlikely that deer were actually hunted in the west park at Conholt though. With a total area of around 350 acres, it would not have provided as much excitement as hunting in the wider surrounding landscape and was essentially a venison farm. In the second half of the seventeenth century there was a national initiative to restock the deer population – both wild and domesticated.²⁴ Many deer parks had been destroyed both during and following the Civil War (in the 1640s and 1650s) and, partly because of the upheaval and partly the expansion of agriculture, the wild population had plummeted too. Charles II restocked many parks, shipping deer in from France and Germany. By creating a new deer park in the 1720s Meadows was following this trend, albeit belatedly. Deer leaps were created in park walls to allow wild deer in, but not out again. Such devices may have been present at Conholt as, in 1893, a horse following the fox hunt cleared the ‘deer hurdles’ in Conholt Park, which were nearly six feet high.²⁵ These hurdles sound very much like early eighteenth century deer leaps. Within the park, at the time of Meadows, they may have hunted smaller prey such as hares. The park may have been created to complement hunting in the wider landscape of Chute Forest – and the farmhouse, at this point in time, acted as hunting box. When hunting away from home in this period gentlemen might stay at the local inn, or find accommodation in a local farmhouse. The farmhouse at Conholt had two parlours and two (presumably acceptable) bed chambers above, so would have provided suitable accommodation.²⁶

²⁴ John Fletcher, *Gardens of Earthly Delight: The History of Deer Parks*, (2011), pp. 178–9

²⁵ J. Eardley-Wilmot, *A Famous Fox-hunter: Reminiscences of the Late Thomas Assheton Smith, Esq., The pursuits of an English Country Gentleman*, (1893), p.40

²⁶ A parallel in possible use (though far different in architectural quality), is Fox Hall at Charlton in West Sussex, built for the 2nd Duke of Richmond of nearby Goodwood. Though small – just one bedroom – it provided superior accommodation to the local inn.

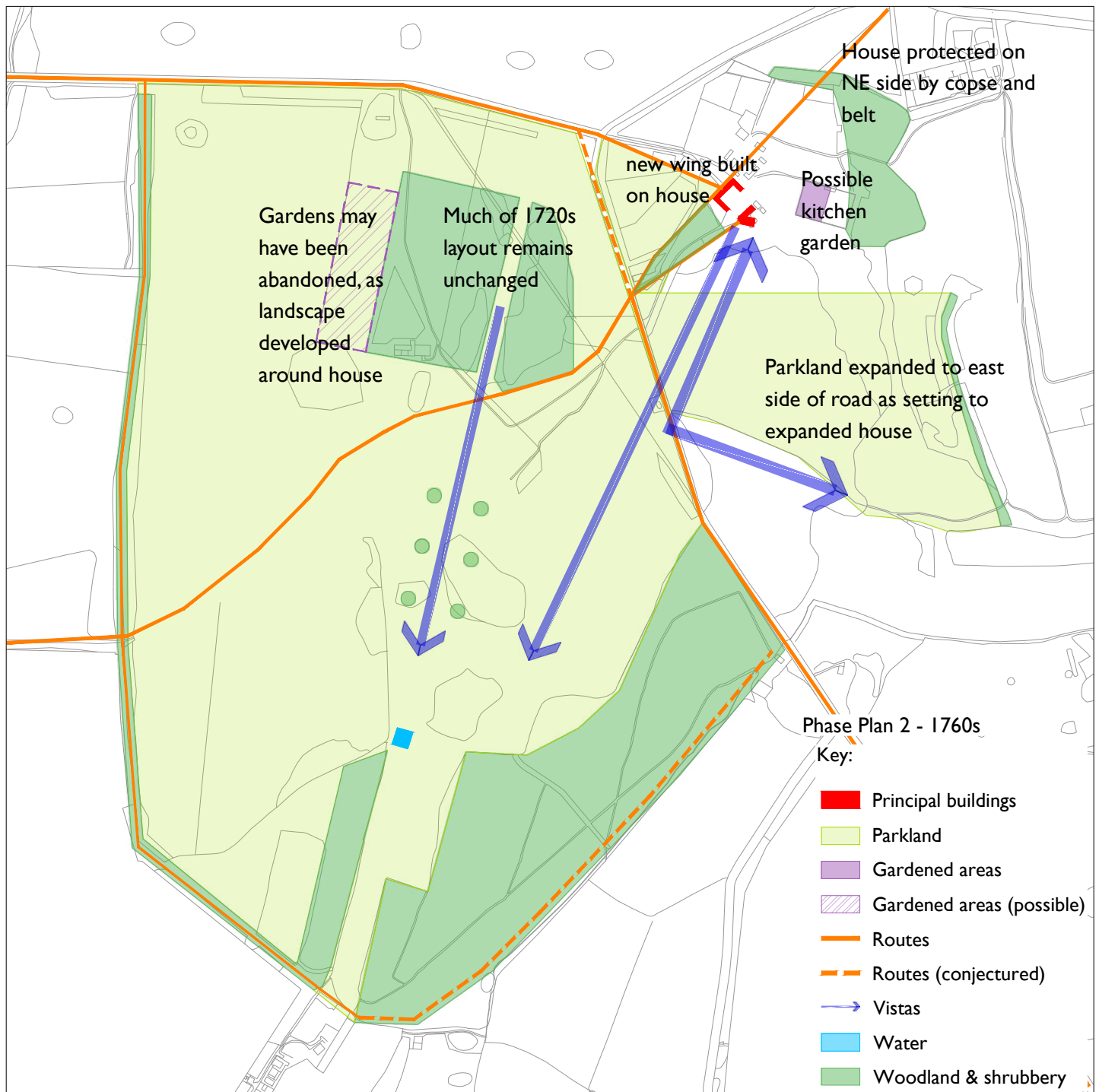


Figure 3.3.1: Phase Plan 2 – showing the extent of the designed landscape and its principal features in the 1760s.

3.3 Sir Sidney Meadows, 1757 – 1792

Summary of development, 1757 – 1792

- In the 1760s the house was extended with the creation of the south wing.
- The new facade aligned on the long view to SSW, towards Eyre estates in Wiltshire.
- Despite the more polite new incarnation of the house, its immediate setting appears to have been fairly modest – just about sufficient for its now improved status – and probably largely functional.
- West park remained laid out as it had been by the previous generation in the 1720s.
- Emphasis on agricultural, hunting and equestrian interests. The estate was a hybrid of a gentleman's seat and a farm.

Sir Philip Meadows II and his wife, Dorothy Boscawen, had six children. Their oldest son and heir was Sidney, born in 1699. It may be significant that he was not named Philip after his father and grandfather – that name was given to the third son (who we will meet later). It is tempting to conclude that Philip and Dorothy's eldest son was named in honour of Sidney, Earl Godolphin. It was Sidney Meadows who, in the few years after inheriting the estate, added a wing to the original farmhouse and created a modestly-sized, but polite house for himself.²⁷ He was, by this time, in his early sixties and childless. It is possible – likely even – that he had been involved in the running of the Conholt estate for some time by this date, as his father was eighty-four by the time he died. By now the family seem to have become fairly



Figure 3.3.2: A portrait of Sir Sidney Meadows by George Stubbs, 1778 (Royal Collection). His obituary stated that he was 'extravagantly fond of horsemanship'. He was a leading figure in the Georgian revival of the Haute Ecole.

²⁷ Sidney married fairly late in life (1742) but, as with his father and grandfather, he married well – into a family with many political connection. He and his wife, Jemima Montagu, did not have any children. She died in 1759.

rooted at Conholt, with Sir Sidney's sister, Constance, having married James Pulse of the neighbouring Standen estate.²⁸ It is also likely that some of the horses, which were clearly Sir Sidney's passion and main purpose in life, were stabled and possibly bred at Conholt. Sidney Meadows's equestrian prowess is discussed in the Conservation Plan by Simon Thurley.

Like his father and grandfather before him Sir Sidney had a number of government and court positions, one of which was as Knight Marshal and another was as deputy ranger of Richmond Park, a position in the gift of the monarch. With a hands-on involvement in farming shared with George III – who was famously interested in agriculture – it seems likely that Meadows cooperated with the King in the management of Richmond Park.²⁹ This interest in agriculture was reflected on his own estate at Conholt. History has left several glimpses of Sir Sidney in surviving journals written by Reverend Henry White – brother of the famous naturalist, Gilbert White – in the early 1780s. The Reverend was rector of Fyfield, just west of Andover and only five miles from Conholt. In late July 1782 White rode to Conholt Park, where he found 'Sir Sidney making hay and building barns'.³⁰ This suggests Meadows was actively involved in these agricultural activities, not just ordering it to be done from a distance. A couple of other journal entries mention White riding or walking to Conholt only to find Meadows was not at home. This might imply that he expected there was a chance Sir Sidney would be there, which suggests he spent a reasonable amount of time at Conholt.

Sir Sidney's new wing of the house, which was attached to the old house at a thirty-five degree angle, faces south-south-west. The reason for this is connected to the landscape. After deciding to keep the old house and extend it to provide polite accommodation, it would have been more practical and logical to either extend on the same alignment, or build the new wing at ninety degrees to the old farmhouse.³¹ However, this latter scenario would have rotated the house to face too far towards the west to make the best of the longest view – south-south-west – which, from its elevated downland position, gives an uninterrupted view of at least twenty miles on a clear day. Sir Sidney's new house at

²⁸ Sir Sidney's sister, Constance, married James Pulse of neighbouring Standen House, which suggests, perhaps, that the family were relatively closely connected to the Conholt and its surrounding area – and therefore that the estate was more than just another land investment by the mid 18th century.

²⁹ For an account of Sir Sidney Meadows and George III at Richmond Park, see *The British Friend*, 2nd month, 1849, pp. 31 – 33.

³⁰ R.H. Clutterbuck, *Notes on the parishes of Fyfield, Kimpton, Penton Mewsey, Weyhill and Wherwell in the county of Hampshire*, (1898), p.45. White's full entry (as quoted by Clutterbuck) runs: '1782, July 24th. — Rode to Conholt Park, Sir Sidney making hay and building barns. Wheat looks strong and well, some laid very much by ye rains, other corn prosperous but rather late, hay cutting at Ramridge, much spoil at Clanville and much standing in and about ye park.'

³¹ It may be notable also that Newhouse, the Eyre house to the south of Salisbury, has a very unusual floor plan, in a sort of 'Y' shape.

Conholt may have been relatively modest, but this fine vista is longer and more impressive than many views claimed by far more prestigious seats.

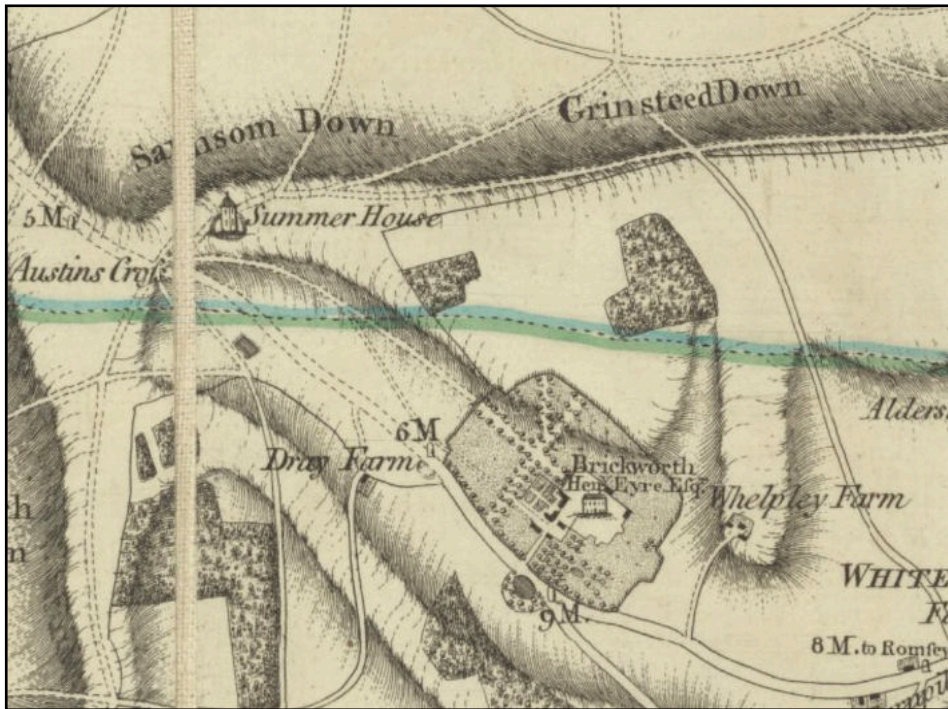


Figure 3.3.3: A detail from Andrews and Dury's Map of Wiltshire, 1773, showing the Eyre estate of Brickworth, with the eye-catcher known as the Pepperbox marked as 'summerhouse', on Samson Down, near the top left corner. Its importance as a landmark would have been one of the reasons the cartographers chose to depict it on this map.

There is a further, connected, reason for this alignment of the house and consequently its unusual floor plan. Twenty miles away, on the ridge of high ground south-east of Salisbury to which the vista aims, is an eye-catcher known as the Pepperbox (figures 3.3.3 and 3.3.4).³² It was built by one Sir Sidney's Eyre cousins.³³ While this is not visible with the naked eye it would have been visible with a telescope. In the eighteenth century there was a great interest in topography and surveying. This was derived in part from a general Enlightenment interest in understanding the world scientifically and also from an improvement in cartographic techniques – which was itself in part derived from a need to improve mapping for military and strategic reasons.³⁴ Against this background viewing landscapes with a telescope was a common leisure activity to take place in the landscape of the country

³² Differing dates for the construction of the Pepperbox have been put forward. Some authors suggest the early seventeenth century, although Historic England's listed building description states that it is early eighteenth century: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1355631>. See Barbara Jones, *Follies and Grottoes*, (London, 1989), p. 409 and Gwyn Headley and Wim Meulenkaamp, *Follies*, (London, 1990).

³³ Intervisibility of family estates was known elsewhere. At the Edgcumbe family's estates of Cotehele and Mount Edgcumbe in Cornwall a pair of matching viewing towers were erected on high ground, allowing each to be seen from the other, over 12 miles away.

³⁴ This was a period of increasing land surveys both for the benefit of mapping and managing country estates and farms, but also at this time there was the start of a new interest in more sophisticated surveying techniques to inform much more accurate cartography, especially for military purposes. From this the Ordnance Survey was born towards the end of the eighteenth century.

house (figure 3.3.5).³⁵ So, to align one's house with a particular far-flung point in the



Figure 3.3.4: The Pepperbox, or Eyre's Folly, a viewing tower on the ridge of hills south-east of Salisbury. The south wing of the house is orientated to face in this direction.

landscape, was not out of keeping with the habits and interests of the period. The extension of the house might, elsewhere, have prompted a comprehensive rethink of the landscape, but any reworking of the surroundings of the house by Sir Sidney appears to have been modest. This seems to be consistent with what we know of Sir Sidney's character. He was interested in horses and he was interested in agricultural improvement.



Figure 3.3.5: A detail of the Montagu Family at Sandleford Priory, Berkshire, by Edward Haytley, 1744. The family are depicted watching the haymaking, with the additional amusement of viewing the landscape through the telescope on the table. The seated gentleman is actually Sir Sidney Meadow's brother-in-law, Edward Montagu. On top of the hill on the right is Heaven's Gate, an eye-catcher on the Highclere estate. Conholt is therefore only about 10 miles beyond those hills in the same direction. The view also illustrates the importance of 'borrowed' landscape during this period and the interest in distant focal points often belonging to other estates.

³⁵ For more on the interest in topography and using telescopes to view the landscape, see Kate Feluś, *The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden*, (2016), pp. 108 – 113.

The design that characterises the areas east of Hungerford Lane today is largely dateable to the 1820s. Given that the scheme of the 1820s was a fairly light touch, it is unlikely that this swept away a comprehensive scheme of the earlier generations – more likely the setting for Sir Sidney’s house was minimalist and utilitarian. Parkland-like paddocks to the south of the house were divided from its immediate setting by a sunk fence. For this southern parkland Meadows perhaps utilised trees from pre-existing hedgerows, which would have been removed in the adaptation of the landscape.³⁶ But, as so few trees of this period remain, it is not possible to reconstruct this layout. The sunk fence survives (figure 3.3.8, below) and is one of three landscape features dating to the 1760s phase of the development of the setting of the house. The others are the belt of fine, historic beech around the north side of the paddocks north of the house (figure 3.3.6) and the cedars on the south lawn (figure 3.3.9).



Figure 3.3.6: The beech row and the western edge of Garden Copse, as seen from the service drive north of the maze, looking north-east. The group of six beech are on the left (arrows). Note the copper beech along the edge of Garden Copse. These are significant trees of a later generation (1820s). The oldest of the trees of the northern beech belt are typical of a mid-eighteenth century date (c.1760s). One possible interpretation of the features shown in the section of the landscape east of Hungerford Lane on the 1773 map of Wiltshire, is that there was a belt of trees around the north of the house. This would make sense in terms of sheltering an exposed site from winds coming from the north-east.

³⁶ LiDAR shows the remnants of an earlier pattern of fields to the south of the present garden boundary, see Jessop, Archaeological DBA, F30.

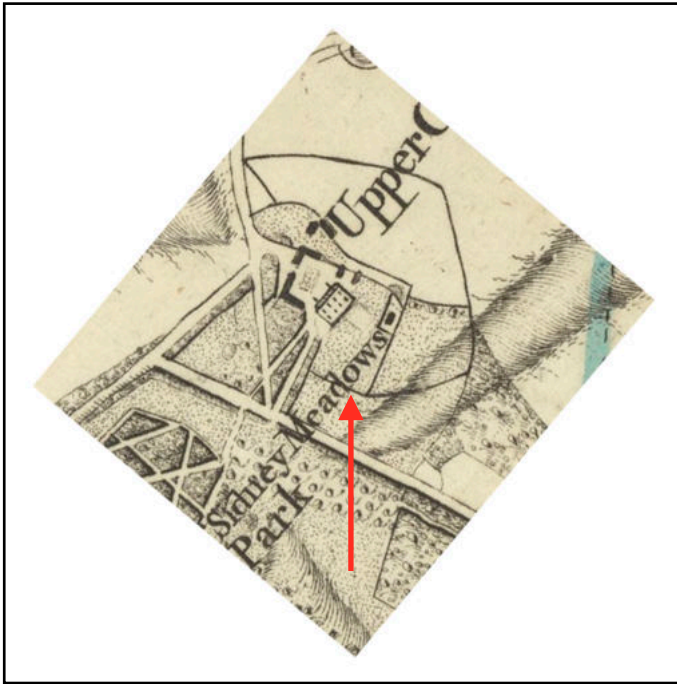


Figure 3.3.7: A detail of the 1773 map of Wiltshire rotated to show the house and stable block in the correct orientation in relation to each other. The boundary line of the red arrow is interpreted as the line formed by the sunk fence.

The sunk fence, a substantial linear depression, runs east-west across the Front Park. It correlates with the boundary to the south of the house shown on the 1773 map (figure 3.3.7).³⁷ A sunk fence is a similar device to a ha-ha – a method of hiding a stock-proof boundary in the landscape, so it does not interrupt a view. Literally made up of a deep ditch in which a fence is hidden, it is a less sophisticated construction than a ha-ha, but not necessarily less effective.³⁸ The example at Conholt was – and still is – masterfully sited. When viewed from the house it is positioned just over a slight brow and the profile of the land carefully sculpted, so it is invisible from the south lawn – in all lights and angles of the sun.



Figure 3.3.8: The ditch of the sunk fence in the arboretum, looking west into the Front Park with the west park in the background (trees on the horizon).

The third feature ascribed to this phase are the oldest of the cedars of Lebanon. Two of the three surviving cedars are particularly large and – being comparable with examples elsewhere – convincing of planting date of around the 1760s.³⁹ A fourth historic cedar was still standing when the guide to the gardens was written by

³⁷ F.29 in Jessop, Archaeological DBA.

³⁸ There are many examples of sunk fences in landscapes of the 1760s, including at Stowe (Buckinghamshire) and Wimpole (Cambridgeshire).

³⁹ Trees number 87 and 89 in the tree survey carried out by David Cashman of Barrell Tree Consultancy, for Arboricultural Constraints Assessment, February 2023.

Caroline Tisdall in 1998.⁴⁰ In December 1780 Reverend Henry White recorded in his journal: 'Spent the day with Sir Sidney Meadows, Mr. Scroggs and Fam[ily] at Conholt Park. Walked round [ditto], the most lovely scenery of evergreens possible to be imagined.'⁴¹ The evergreens referred to by Henry White could have been shrubs, but at this date the shrubbery walk had not yet been laid out. However, it is possible that the 'evergreens' he was referring to were cedars. In the 1760s they became so fashionable that the Duke of Richmond planted 1500 of them on his estate at Goodwood in Sussex in 1761 – a handful still survive.⁴² The 1st edition OS map of Conholt (1880) plots a large number of evergreen trees both sides of the garden boundary south of the house. Many of these are likely to



Figure 3.3.9: An aerial view is an effective way to illustrate the sunk fence (red arrows), as it is almost indiscernible in the landscape from close to the house at ground level (see figure 3.5.4, below). Two of the three cedars are visible to the left of the house (blue arrows). The tree on the right is likely to have been planted by Sir Sidney Meadows. The other c1760s cedar is just out of shot on the left. (Photo: Marie-Louise Agius).

⁴⁰ WBR, p. 84. The stump and some of the trunk still remains on the ground.

⁴¹ Mr Scroggs is likely to have been either Edward Scroggs (1724 – 1784) or, less likely, his son, Sydney Edward Scroggs (1764 – 1845). Edward's wife was Mary Pulse, daughter of James Pulse of Standen, whose wife, Constance, was Sir Sidney's sister. Reverend White rode there with Sir Philip Haughton Clarke, one of his pupils. See R.H. Clutterbuck, *Notes on the parishes of Fyfield, Kimpton, Penton Mewsey, Weyhill and Wherwell in the county of Hampshire*, (1898), p. 45.

⁴² 'Capability' Brown, often planted cedars close to houses within his designs (1750s to early 1780s), like those at nearby Highclere Castle. The Meadows family were related to the family at Highclere. The estates are just 12 miles from one another.

have been Victorian, but some of those mapped probably represent an earlier collection of evergreen trees, including cedars planted by Sir Sidney. It seems in character that he should have a collection of these horticultural curiosities – but that his collection was focused, concentrated and relatively modest, in comparison to someone like the Duke of Richmond, as befitted the status of the place.



Figure 3.3.10: The cedars near the house at Conholt today. The middle one is slightly later and probably dates to the 1820s.

The landscape to the north of the sunk fence was, aside from the cedars (and other possible evergreens), probably fairly utilitarian. To the north-west was the stables and the carriage house and north of that working areas, likely to have included barns and other agricultural buildings. There would have been a productive kitchen garden, probably to the east of the house, but whether there was anything one could describe as ‘pleasure grounds’ immediately around the house is uncertain – the cedars are the only suggestion of horticultural interest in this period. The almost total lack of evidence suggests there was not further horticultural interest – had there been more to the pleasure grounds it is likely there would be more evidence remaining, however fragmentary. South of the central valley of the Front Park, the land rising on the other side would have been a mixture of woodland and grazing, stretching to the ancient county boundary bank and the circular earthworks of Bevisbury, which may have been planted with beech in this period.⁴³

⁴³ There are a couple of notable surviving beech trees on the earthwork of Bevisbury and it was common to plant clumps of beech on hilltops.

If the eastern areas of the designed landscape were minimalist, the west park by now was established and coherent. By this time the trees of the 1720s would have been maturing, their spreading canopies sculpted by the browse lines of the animals who lived there. In the 1780s Reverend Henry White considered Sir Sidney's deer particularly 'fine and large'.⁴⁴ It seems likely that the deer grazed here along with the horses about which Sir Sidney was so passionate – the two were not mutually exclusive, as seen in the view of Wakefield Lawn (figure 3.3.11).⁴⁵ Both beasts added to the aesthetics of the place. Unlike sheep they do not pull up grass when they graze, they do not leave tracks and they create a more elegant browse line to the trees.⁴⁶



Figure 3.3.11: Wakefield Lawn, Northamptonshire, by Paul Sandby, 1767. Here the park (laid out by in the late 1740s) is grazed by both deer and horses – their presence helping to give the attractive browse line to the clumps of trees in the distance. This is likely to have been the case in the west park at Conholt. Like Wakefield Lawn, it too would have been used for carriage driving.

As already stated, it is unlikely deer would have been hunted in the park. In most cases deer parks were effectively prestigious venison farms. Venison was a high status meat and laws against poaching meant that it could not be sold, only given as gifts. There is evidence that

⁴⁴ R.H. Clutterbuck, *Notes on the parishes of Fyfield, Kimpton, Penton Mewsey, Weyhill and Wherwell in the county of Hampshire*, (1898), p. 41.

⁴⁵ Wakefield Lawn in the ancient hunting forest of Whittlewood, was laid out by 'Capability' Brown in the late 1740s.

⁴⁶ John Fletcher, *Gardens of Earthly Delight: The History of Deer Parks*, (2011), pp. 178–9

Sir Sidney was generous with his venison.⁴⁷ Reverend Henry White records receiving venison from Meadows. In this he gives us glimpse of another aspect of Sir Sidney's character – his generosity and hospitality.⁴⁸ He made gifts of venison to his local acquaintances and he seems to have been open to visits from neighbours, friends and family.

⁴⁷ See Feluś, *ibid*, pp. 165 – 167

⁴⁸ On September 27th 1784, Henry White recorded in his journal: 'venison, a side presented by Sir Sidney Meadows, very fine and fat'. Two days later he recorded simply, 'venison feast'. R.H. Clutterbuck, *Notes on the parishes of Fyfield, Kimpton, Penton Mewsey, Weyhill and Wherwell in the county of Hampshire*, (1898), p. 31.

3.4 Evelyn Philip Meadows & General William Meadows, 1792 – 1826

Summary of development, 1792 to 1826

- On Sir Sidney's death the passing of the estate to the next generation was complicated. His eldest nephew, Evelyn, was a rake. He never lived at Conholt.
- The house was occupied by General William Meadows when he was not serving with army overseas. Possibly some periods when house was let to tenants.
- The bay window was built onto south facade, possibly for better views.
- General William built the walled kitchen garden. No evidence for further improvement of the landscape in this period beyond that.
- There were 300 deer in the deer park.

It was with the death of the childless Sir Sidney Meadows in 1792 that – after three generations of being handed down, essentially, from father to son – the ownership and occupation of the Conholt estate became more complicated. Sir Sidney had six younger siblings, including a younger brother who was christened with the family name, Philip (1707 – 1781). In 1754 he had married Frances Pierrepont, only daughter of William Pierrepont, Viscount Newark – nephew of Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull, who owned vast estates, particularly in Nottinghamshire, including Thoresby Park. Philip has been described as 'manipulative and mercenary' and Frances's family did not approve of him. The couple eloped.⁴⁹

Frances's brother died before his father and it was to Frances and Philip's sons that the Duke looked for his heir. However (for a variety of reasons, including his dissolute lifestyle), the Duke took against the eldest son, Evelyn. He deliberately cut Evelyn out, leaving his estates to the younger brother, Charles.⁵⁰ However, it was not just the Duke who objected to Evelyn, so too did Sir Sidney Meadows – for whom Evelyn was also the logical heir. Sir

⁴⁹ For a sketch of Philip Meadows III and his relationship with Frances Pierrepont and her family see: Catherine Ostler, *The Duchess Countess: The Woman Who Scandalised a Nation*, (London, 2021) – a biography of Elizabeth Chudleigh. In time the Pierrepont's distrust of Meadows turned out to be well founded. Frances suffered from mental health issues and, in the later nineteenth century, it was said that he 'imprisoned' her for 12 years.

⁵⁰ The inheritance of the Duke of Kingston was further complicated by his bigamous marriage to Elizabeth Chudleigh. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Pierrepont,_2nd_Duke_of_Kingston-upon-Hull and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Pierrepont,_Duchess_of_Kingston-upon-Hull. Although, after a scandalous legal case, the marriage was judged to have been bigamous, she still inherited his wealth and estates for life. After which time they passed to Charles Meadows, Philip and Frances's second son. The dukedom however died out, but Charles, who took on the name Pierrepont, eventually became the 1st Earl Manvers. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Pierrepont,_1st_Earl_Manvers. DNB: <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-39303#odnb-9780198614128-e-39303>

Sidney added a codicil to his will referring to Evelyn's debts.⁵¹ History paints a picture of him as a typical of a Regency rake, 'a debauched inheritance hunter', spending against the Pierrepont inheritance that he assumed would come his way.⁵² In the codicil of his will Sir Sidney Meadows allowed another of Evelyn's younger brothers, William, an army officer, to live at Conholt whenever he was in England.

It is General William (1738 – 1813, figure 3.4.1) who, in this period, is most relevant to the story of the designed landscape at Conholt. He is recorded as having spent £4000 on a new garden. This was a huge sum, the equivalent of around £170,000 today and, as the west park was never improved and updated, and the eastern areas show no evidence of either scale or intricate design, this substantial sum must relate to the building of the surviving walled kitchen garden.⁵³ That it was a built structure, as opposed to planting, would explain the scale of the expense too. It was in situ by 1805 when it was described as an 'Excellent cross Wall'd Garden of about two acres well stock'd with vegetation and fruit'. The 'cross' refers to the layout of four quarters divided by intersecting paths making the shape of a cross.

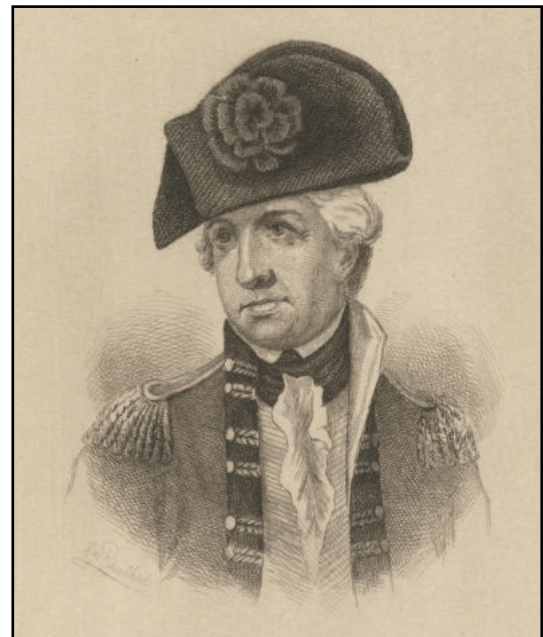


Figure 3.4.1: General William Meadows (New York Public Library).

General William Meadows (as it is more usually spelled) entered the army in 1756, aged eighteen.⁵⁴ He served overseas for long periods of time particularly in America and India, returning from the latter in 1792 – the year Sir Sidney died. He could therefore have used Conholt for several years until it was advertised to be let in 1805. It is unclear whether a tenant was found at that juncture. It is perhaps telling that it was advertised fully furnished,

⁵¹ The codicil states: 'This is a Codicil to the above written will of me Sir Sidney Meadows as it may unfortunately happen that my nephew Evelyn Philip Meadows may not for some time be so freed from his debts and enjoyments as to enable the trustees in my will to determine the trusts of the term of five hundred years, hereby created. I do hereby will and declare that in the meantime if my nephew General Meadows shall be in England he shall be at liberty to occupy my house, offices and park at Conholt and the lands which I now have in hand without his paying of any rent for the same and that when and so long is my said nephew General Meadows shall not be in England my nephew Edward Meadows shall be at liberty to occupy the said house and premises in the same manner...' WBR, p. 36, footnote, 168

⁵² Ostler, *op cit*, p. 377

⁵³ The approximate equivalent sum is derived from the National Archives currency converter: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>. £176,000 would also buy 380 horses or 800 cows.

⁵⁴ It is with this generation that the surname is more commonly spelled 'Medows' than the earlier 'Meadows'.

which suggests that it may only have been anticipated to be let for a relatively short time. The advert also mentions that the tenant was expected to employ the gamekeeper and the gardener. The reference to just one gardener might suggest that the staff was minimal at that date – partly due to the limited gardens and partly to the circumstances of it being let.

Given General William's investment in Conholt, it seems likely he used the place as his country residence when he was in England and retired there subsequently. He died in 1813. Although he was married he did not have any children and therefore one would not expect he kept a large household. The house too was relatively modest in size and therefore could not have accommodated a large household. These facts raise the question of what would have motivated Sir William to build a new kitchen garden, when there is – seemingly – no indication of the need for greater provisioning of fruit and vegetables. It is possible that this had never been particularly attended to at Conholt. At this period kitchen garden technology was starting to advance quickly. Perhaps General William was interested from a technological and scientific point of view, or as the result of his army background, in which logistics of provisioning must have been important. The present garden is well situated and laid out on a gently south-facing slope. It is possible that a previous garden had not been located in quite such an optimal position. Also, by this date there was an increasingly better understanding of how to get plants to grow successfully, especially exotics. It may be relevant that General William had spent many years in India and had briefly been in the Caribbean, raising the possibility of his desire to grow tender plants from these areas. The tithe map of 1842 shows the internal arrangement of the garden as described in 1805 (figure 3.5.2, below), with a glasshouse, centrally located against the south-facing north wall. There is a glasshouse in this location today, but it was extensively renovated in the 1990s and little of the original structure survives (see figure 3.9.1, below), so it is impossible to say whether it was Victorian or older. It is likely that the walled kitchen garden always had associated working areas behind it, including potting sheds and bothies and an enclosure is seen to the north of the east end on the tithe map of 1842.

Simon Thurley has dated the bow window at the east end of the south facade to the 1792 – 1826 period. This is likely to have been planned to give framed views of the landscape. Although the views from the house looking south are naturally good due to the topography, it is hard to know if the vista from each of the three windows had a specific focal point (as happened frequently in other designed landscapes throughout the Georgian period), due to later planting blocking views. The Ordnance Survey Drawing of 1808 suggests the house still sat in a limited parkland setting, to the immediate south and stretching to the east – but that it did not yet reach all the way up the facing slope towards Bevisbury. This is curious as this area of the landscape is so fundamental to views southwards from the south lawn and the area in front of the walled garden, even though the main vista from the house faced south-south-west, into and across the west park. Few

trees that might be dated to the pre-1820s period survive in the parkland either. (Although it should be noted that the northern half of the present extent of the Front Park has lost almost all of the trees that were plotted there on the OS map of 1880).



Figure 3.4.2: Detail of Ordnance Survey Drawing sheet 78, 1808. (British Library). Note the perimeter ride around the west park (marked Conholt Park) and the large pool in its southern half. Two possible barns in the west park are marked with red arrows and the building on the same site as a building marked 'gatehouse' on the tithe map is marked with a blue arrow. East of Hungerford Lane, the Front Park does not yet stretch as far as the county boundary bank, where 'Hampshire Gate' is marked.

In its plotting of the west park the Ordnance Survey Drawing of 1808 (figure 3.4.2) suggests a simplification of the former layout. This may be because, almost a century after it was laid out (and likely with no subsequent redesign), the formal features were becoming

less legible.⁵⁵ So the cartographer plotted the essentials that remained: the northern section of the central avenue, the route across the park from Standen, the sub-division of the Escourt quarter in the south-west, the pool in the south and, perhaps most noticeably, the circuit ride, which suggests it was clear because it was still used. There were also three buildings, at least two of which are likely to have been deer barns. The third was in the same location as a building named as 'gatehouse' on the tithe map and may have been a lodge of some sort. Of this structure nothing further has yet been discovered. In this period the deer herd numbered almost 300.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The Ordnance Survey Drawing sheet for Conholt is not as skilled in its execution as many of the other sheets in the series and perhaps lacks some detail one would expect had it been carried out by a different draughtsman. It is notable that the British Library catalogue does not give a recorded cartographer, unlike many of the other sheets. When compared with later mapping the lack of detail of the OSD is shown to be misleading. For example both the tithe map of 1842 and the large scale OS of 1880 indicate that some of the platoons at the southern end of the avenue remained until at least the end of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁶ There were 294 deer in 1805. WBR, p. 38.

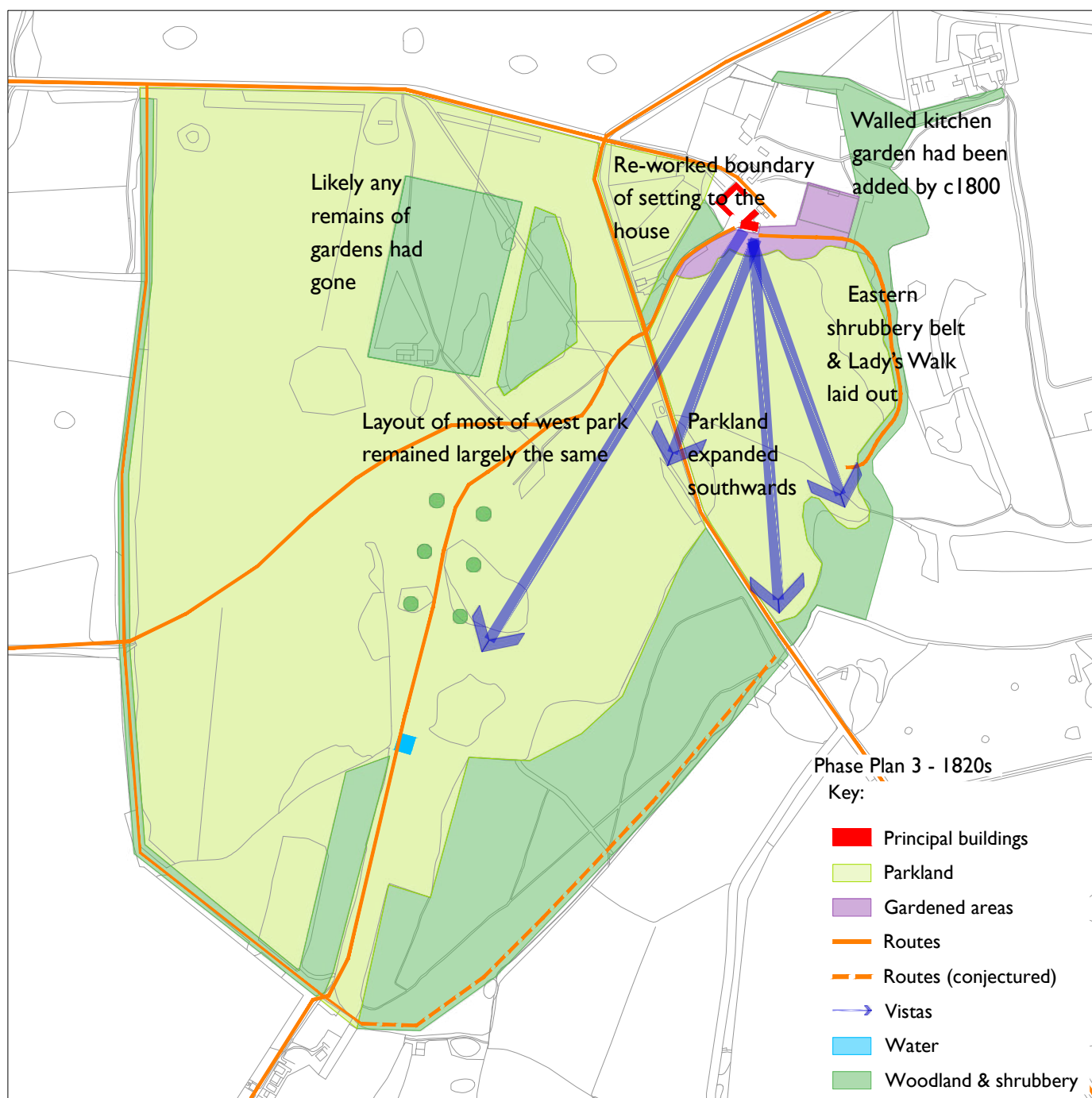


Figure 3.5.1: Phase Plan 3, showing the extent of the designed landscape and its key features by the 1820s.

3.5 Henry Manvers Pierrepont 1826 – 1851

Summary of development, 1826 to 1851

- This was the only period during which house and landscape were improved at same time.
- The eastern areas of the designed landscape, as we see them today, are largely a product of this phase of development.
- The Front Park extended southwards and planted with clumps and scatters of individual trees.
- A new section of drive (from Hungerford Lane) was created on a similar line to the old route, but curving rather than straight.
- The boundary between the parkland and the garden formed by a metal fence.
- The eastern shrubbery belt was created, with Lady's Walk through it.

After General William died in 1813 the estate went into another period of limbo. Eventually, in 1826, with the death of the rake Evelyn Pierrepont, the life tenancy of the Conholt estate passed to his nephew Henry Manvers Pierrepont, the third son of his brother Charles (who was by now Earl Manvers). In 1818 Henry had married Sophia, daughter of Marquess of Exeter (of Burghley), another influential connection for the family. After five years of marriage, Sophia died in 1823, leaving Henry and one daughter – also Sophia, for whom Conholt was home for most of her life. She became Lady Wellesley and is discussed in the next section. Henry was widowed three years before he inherited Conholt from his uncle. So, even though this was a period of relative stability and investment, Conholt was not a home to a large and bustling family.

Once he inherited the life tenancy of the estate Henry Manvers Pierrepont turned his full attention to Conholt. This is the only time in the history of the place when house and landscape improvements have gone hand-in-hand.⁵⁷ The general appearance of the landscape today speaks of this period. A comparison between the OSD of 1808 and the tithe map of 1842 illustrates the degree of change on the east side Hungerford Lane, where the parkland was extended (see phase plan, figure 3.5.1). The west park was still largely left alone, but remained as a deer park.

The further gentrification of the house demanded a new approach drive, this led to re-arrangement of routes passing close to the house. A historic route that passed along the

⁵⁷ The only other period during which there have been substantial works to the house and landscape was under the ownership of Paul van Vlissingen.

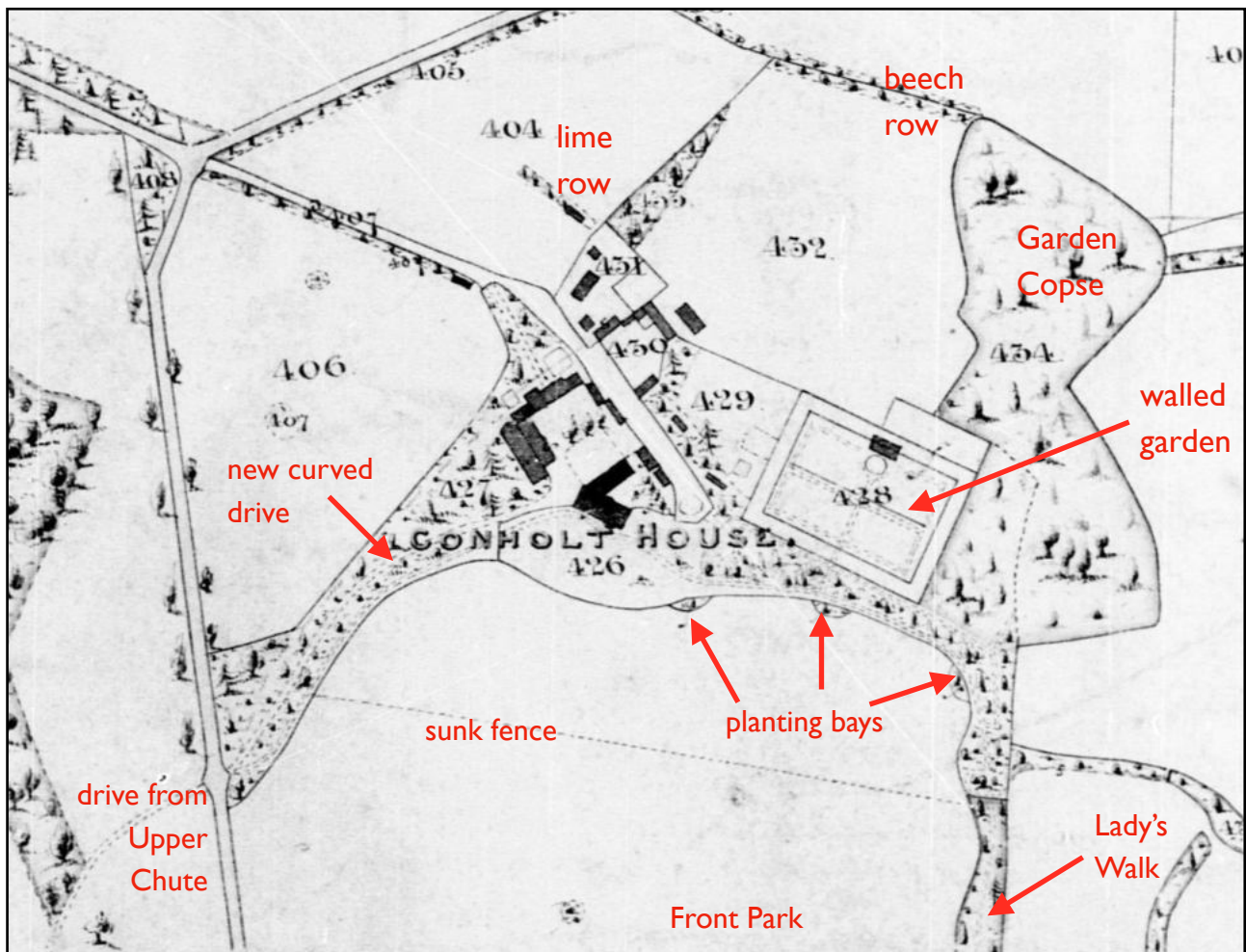


Figure 3.5.2: A detail from the tithe map of 1842, showing the areas around house and the northern section of the Front Park – with key features discussed in the text marked. This shows the landscape sixteen years into Henry Manvers Pierrepont's tenure.

line of the field boundary behind the stable block was stopped up (see figure 3.2.1, above). The direct, straight line of the drive (the continuation of the west-east route across the west park from Upper Chute), was adapted. A new drive from Hungerford Lane to the house was created, following a similar course but on a gentle arc. As it sprang from the public road it was remarkably short and direct for a principal approach to a house of this status, at this date. This is the present front drive. The house was also served by a back drive heading to the service areas, as would have been expected. This continued on an established alignment from Chute Causeway. The service drive today still follows this line.

The creation of the new drive would have prompted a re-think in the boundary between the parkland and the more gardened areas around the house, which would have been known at the time as the pleasure ground. The new boundary created in the 1820s, which reflected the arc of the drive, is that plotted on the tithe map of 1842 (figure 3.5.2). By the later nineteenth century this boundary was, in part, a ha-ha. However, a number of factors suggest that in the 1820s the south lawn was instead divided from the parkland by a fence,

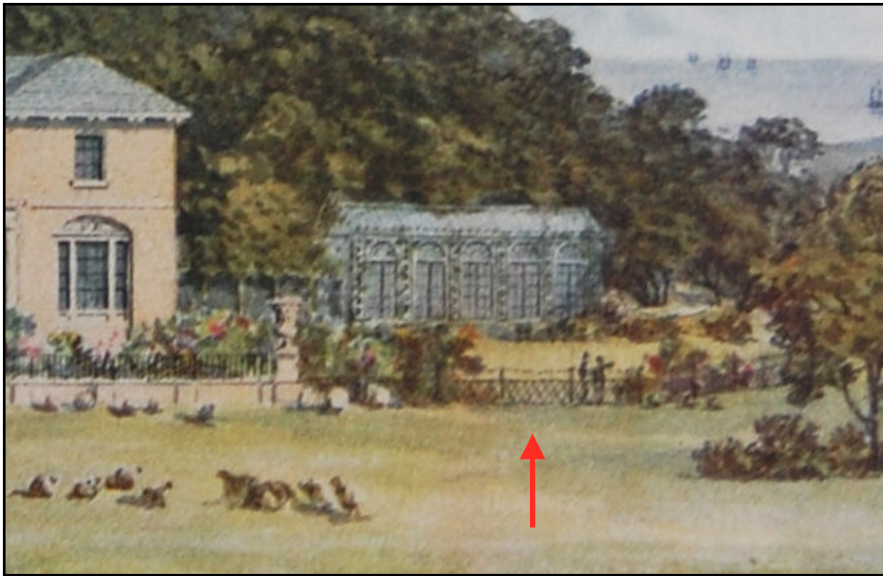


Figure 3.5.3: Sheringham Park, seen from the south, from the Red Book by Humphry Repton, 1812. Note the unobtrusive, light fence, used to divide the pleasure grounds from the parkland instead of a ha-ha (red arrow). In places the fence is visible, in places hidden by bays of planting; the boundary at Conholt is likely to have been similar.

likely to have been of a light, metal variety, which would not be visually intrusive (figure 3.5.3).⁵⁸ There are several reasons to conclude that the section of ha-ha is later and not part of the 1820s boundary of the pleasure ground – and that the whole of the boundary, from Hungerford Lane to the start of the Lady's Walk was made up of a fence. Firstly, the 1842 tithe map shows that the line of the boundary included planting bays.

These would not have

been compatible with the structure of a ha-ha. Secondly, the section of ha-ha is far shorter than one would expect with a Georgian example. Thirdly, it is crudely constructed and the re-profiling of the land on either side is too unsubtle to be eighteenth or early nineteenth century – whereas it is characteristic of a Victorian ha-ha.⁵⁹ The middle cedar correlates with the westernmost of the three planting bays and it would have been unthinkable to plant a cedar on the very edge of a ha-ha in the Regency period, although it makes sense for the cedar to have been part of that distinct planting feature – the bay. (It is younger than the others, which date to around the 1760s). This close proximity of the tree to the ha-ha compromises its root system and makes it vulnerable to wind throw, as is also the case with its older neighbour to the west.

This new 1820s garden boundary headed east towards the shrubbery belt, through which a walk ran (see figure 3.5.2, above). This is traditionally known at Conholt as the Lady's Walk, a name found in other similar features elsewhere.⁶⁰ Based on other contemporary examples, one might expect a walk such as this to have been part of a circuit route running

⁵⁸ Humphry Repton, the leading landscaper of the time, proposed fences like this at various sites including Endsleigh (Devon, 1814), Oulton (Yorkshire, 1809), Leigh Court (Gloucestershire, 1814) and at Sheringham in Norfolk (in 1812).

⁵⁹ For example Youngsbury in Hertfordshire, where the entrance front was moved in the 1880s and a new ha-ha constructed as a consequence of the re-orientation of the house. Victorian ha-has also tend to be shorter than Georgian examples.

⁶⁰ For example at North Aston Hall in Oxfordshire, where an ornamented walk ran around the outside of the parkland. It was probably created in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

out from the house and returning back again. Here, at Conholt, map evidence merely shows the walk heading out into open parkland. History has left no clues (documentary or on the ground) as to how a walker returned to the house. Furthermore, in contrast to examples elsewhere, once a walker passed beyond the northern fifth of the walk, there is no evidence of changes in species of trees and shrubs, no hints at openings for vistas or clearings for benches on which to rest.⁶¹ All of which is symptomatic of a general lack of sophistication and coherence in the design.



Figure 3.5.4: A general view of the 1820s parkland setting of the house, looking south from the south lawn. The facing slope on the right of this view is the extension to the parkland made at this time. Trees here include copper beech probably planted in the 1820s and wellingtonias dating from Lady Wellesley's period, later in the nineteenth century. The shrubbery belt encloses the landscape along the edge of the grassland, seen here to the right of the cedar (yellow arrow). In this view the later nineteenth century ha-ha is obvious at the edge of the lawn on the left, but the 1760s sunk fence beyond is invisible in the landscape.

The belt of the Lady's Walk, planted with shrubs and trees, created a visual barrier, closing in the Front Park further to the west of its earlier boundary. The narrowed area channelled views to the south from the house. The southern end of the Front Park was finally planted as parkland as part of these improvements in the 1820s – so the slope facing back towards the house was laid out with small clumps of mixed species and individual trees (figure

⁶¹ As the walk heads south today the shrubs are all laurels, with relatively young, self-seeded ash and sycamore above. The upper end of Lady's Walk was plotted as a separate compartment by both the tithe map and the later 1st edition OS map of 1880. This different character survives. The northern section is slightly built-up with a curved bank on the pleasure ground side and with a wider variety planting. It is possible that many of the trees above the shrubs were originally elm, which would explain the total loss of historic trees within the belt.

3.5.4). Some of these survive, but they do not speak of any degree of sophistication – or even particularly intention – in their placing and distribution. There was not a definite focal point to the view southwards from the house. The vista was general, encompassing the whole of the facing slope. The Front Park was listed as ‘meadow’ in a survey of the parish of Chute in 1828, so it would have been mown for hay.⁶²

Although we have little direct evidence it is likely that at this period there was somewhat more horticultural interest in the pleasure ground than previously. The tithe map (3.5.2, above) shows fairly dense planting south of the walled garden, likely to have been a mixture of specimen shrubs and beds, and a number of evergreen trees. The tithe map suggests there were planting bays attached to, but outside, the garden boundary – which in turn suggests these must have been significant shrubs and / or trees. Immediately in front of the house the treatment was simpler, with lawn sloping down to the boundary of the parkland, though at least one small planting bed is implied. While the mapping suggests more horticultural interest, it was still very limited in comparison to other similar status estates.⁶³

On the west side of the house, north of the entrance drive, there was also a dense shrubbery. Today this consists of a shrub layer including some significant yews, plus holly and laurel, above which are a number of mature and historic trees, including fine beech and copper beech. A couple of further, substantial beech stumps and stacks also remain. The oldest of the trees may date from Sir Sidney’s period (c1760s – 1780s), while the copper beech are typical of an early nineteenth century planting date. There is no evidence of this west shrubbery having had paths through it and it is perhaps too narrow to have done so. However, by at least 1880, there was a path along the northern edge.⁶⁴ This was probably a remnant of the earlier, more major route that ran along the back of the stable block.

In the north-east extremity of the west shrubbery the 1900 OS map plotted an ice house (see figure 3.6.6, below). There are no longer any discernible, above-ground remains to indicate its exact location, though it is possible that the subterranean chamber survives below the surface. It is likely that the ice house was built here for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it was close to the house and kitchens. Secondly, because there was probably already a planting of beech here. Beech cast a dense shade, so were often utilised to help keep the environment around an ice house cool. Thirdly, because ice houses need to be located close to water bodies to be provided with ice. At Conholt there was no single substantial body of water. The biggest pond was at the southern end of the west park

⁶² WSHC - CC/Chap/94 - Church Commissioner, Chapter estates - Survey and particular of the parsonage and tithes (covers the whole parish), 1828. Hay was essential for the horses that ensured the running of the country house.

⁶³ Census evidence suggests there were few gardeners. This in turn suggests the level of horticultural intensity was low.

⁶⁴ 1st edition OS map, 25 inches to 1 mile.

and that could not really be described as substantial. The lack of a large water body – something that is generally conspicuous by its absence in the designed landscape at Conholt – would have been due to the geology. It was very difficult to get water to stay on porous chalk. However, historic maps indicate that there were a number of small ponds around the mansion and stable block, probably originally created for the watering of stock (see figures 3.5.2 and 3.6.5). These would have been used for supplying ice for the ice house in winter.⁶⁵ We do not know at what date the ice house was created, but the two strongest possibilities are either during this period (1820s), when the house and landscape both received attention or, perhaps less likely, during the time of Sir Sidney Meadows – another period of investment in the house and possibly its setting. The need for ice suggests entertaining, which in turn suggests guests, but there were only a limited number of bedrooms before 1820, so on balance it is more convincing that the ice house was created in the 1820s.

Across Hungerford Lane, the west park was still home to a herd of deer in the 1820s. There were just over fifty acres of coppice within the deer park, a further forty-six acres was assessed as ‘waste, barren land, walks and trees’ and the remains was pasture, which implies permanent grazing – which makes sense considering the deer still remained. The same survey states there was a further seventy three acres of meadow, which corresponds with the Front Park and tells us it was managed for hay at this date.⁶⁶

Henry Manvers Pierrepont died at his older brother’s house at Thoresby in 1851 and the estate passed to his younger brother Philip (d.1864). However, he had an estate in Northamptonshire and it made sense for Philip to let the house to Henry’s daughter Sophia, by now Lady Wellesley, thereby providing some degree of continuity and stability.⁶⁷ She had a very strong connection to the place, as discussed below. When Philip Pierrepont died in 1864, the estate was inherited by William Heather Norie, a relative of their uncle Evelyn Meadows’s second wife, Harriot Maria Norie.⁶⁸ Sophia Wellesley continued as tenant.

⁶⁵ The ponds are clearly seen on the OS map of 1880. They survived until at least 1924, probably being lost after the Second World War.

⁶⁶ WSHC - CC/Chap/94 - Church Commissioner, Chapter estates - Survey and particular of the parsonage and tithes (covers the whole parish) 1828.

⁶⁷ Philip’s estate was Evenley Hall near Brackley, in south Northamptonshire.

⁶⁸ The will of Evelyn Meadows rather than the will of Sir Sidney Meadows dictated who was to inherit at this stage. WBR, p. 49.

3.6 Major General Lord Charles and Lady Sophia Wellesley, 1851 – 1897

Summary of development, 1851 to 1897

- The estate had stability due to long tenancy of Lady Sophia Wellesley, who had grown up there.
- Despite stability there was no concerted campaign of landscape improvements, though the present ha-ha was created in this period.
- The horticultural emphasis seems to have been mainly on growing fruit & vegetables.
- Monkey puzzles and possibly other conifers were planted on the south lawn and in the north end of Front Park.
- Many trees in the parkland were lost to a storm in 1868.
- Conholt became a shooting estate in this period.

Lady Sophia Wellesley lived most of her life at Conholt; from being a girl of six when her father inherited the estate, to the time she died aged seventy-three. In 1844 she married Charles, the second son of 1st Duke of Wellington. Sophia and Charles had six children, one son dying in infancy. When Charles was only forty-seven he lost his sight. He died three years later. Sophia was in her late thirties, mother of five children, aged from thirteen down to five. Like Queen Victoria she endured a long widowhood. Despite the loss of Charles Wellesley this was a period of stability for Conholt – and the only time it has been the home to a relatively large family. The Wellesley's children all grew up here and their eldest son was the local MP, sitting for Andover. In 1884 he became Duke of Wellington and inherited Stratfield Saye, thirty miles away. Despite this stability, there is no suggestion of major improvements to the designed landscape during this period and, in its structure, the setting to the house was largely the same as it had been during Lady Wellesley's childhood, with one possible exception – the introduction of a ha-ha, discussed below. In the wider landscape the development of the shoot would have wrought changes and this is probably true of the west park, but it seems to have little impact on the eastern areas of pleasure ground and Front Park.



Figure 3.6.1: Lady Wellesley by Camille Silvy, 1861. (National Portrait Gallery).

At this period there was a definite need for provisioning for a large household and both Lady Wellesley's head gardeners – Mr Muirhead and then Mr Bisset – are recorded as being active in the growing of fruit and vegetables.⁶⁹ Through the 1850s and into the 1890s, Conholt, its head gardeners and their produce regularly appeared in horticultural magazines and occasionally in the journal of the Horticultural Society of London (later the Royal Horticultural Society).⁷⁰ It is notable that while Conholt does appear in horticultural journals for this period in relation to its produce, no references have been found to anything more exotic or floriferous being grown and exhibited – as one might expect from an estate of this status at this time. The horticultural impetus here was generally towards the practical and the edible; no ferns or orchids for example, both of which were highly popular in the Victorian period.⁷¹ Despite the clear importance of the kitchen garden the



Figure 3.6.2: A late nineteenth / early twentieth century photograph of the south front of the house. By the end of the century the house was flanked by a pair of monkey puzzle trees, possibly grown from seed by Lady Wellesley herself. Note the low fence on top of the ha-ha, which suggests it never worked in the same way as a superior Georgian ha-ha. Note also the tall trees behind the house. These were probably elms. A possible cypress of some variety flanks the right hand edge of this photograph; one of Lady Wellesley's plantings in the Front Park.

⁶⁹ In 1851, the year that Henry Manvers Pierrepont died, the census recorded William Muirhead (later spelled Muirhead) as gardener. He remained as head gardener to Sophia when she became Lady Wellesley. He died in 1882 after thirty-five years of service at Conholt.

⁷⁰ For example, *The Journal of the Horticultural Society of London*, Vol.9, 1855, p.lxxii

⁷¹ While the freestanding glasshouse north of the kitchen garden has been referred to as 'orchid house' we have seen no evidence for the growing of orchids. And, indeed this house actually dates to the Edwardian period, when it was a forcing house for melons and cucumbers.

1st edition OS map of 1880 shows that there had not yet been any further glasshouses added in the walled kitchen garden – beyond the vine house that was plotted there on the 1842 tithe map. While the area to the east of the walled garden was probably used for additional cultivation, there was only one very small structure of glass here, likely to have been a small bank of cold frames. The working area north of the walled garden had expanded into Garden Copse – beyond the footprint on the 1842 map – in this period. Although none of the popular ferns or orchids were grown at Conholt, Lady Wellesley does seem to have been very keen on monkey puzzle trees.⁷² She sent specimens of their seed to be exhibited in London.⁷³ Photographs show numerous monkey puzzles planted on the south lawn (figures 3.6.2, 3.6.3 and 3.6.8). They may have been planted just outside the garden in the northern section of the Front Park too.



Figure 3.6.3: Another undated late nineteenth or early twentieth century photograph of the south front of the house, taken from just south of the ha-ha. This shows a further young monkey puzzle tree planted by Lady Wellesley. On the far left of the view a large beech can be seen, this was part of the group in the west shrubbery around the ice house, probably dating to the 1760s

⁷² *Araucaria imbricata* is a synonym for *Araucaria araucana*, the monkey-puzzle, a conifer species native to south-central Chile and west central Argentina

⁷³ *The Garden Illustrated Weekly Journal* (August 27th 1892), p. 180

As time wore on and Lady Wellesley grew old, she may to have become something of a recluse, seldom leaving Conholt. There is a suggestion that this might have manifested itself in the garden and parkland with the planting of trees, especially evergreens, which would have closed in the house and shut it off from its setting and views to the south. The 1880 OS map shows a remarkable number of trees south of the ha-ha. While the earlier tithe map does not plot individual trees, this planting must have been so dense that it seems unlikely it would have been ignored had it been there in 1842. Therefore the majority of these trees must have been Lady Wellesley's. A generation later, by 1924, they had been thinned, re-opening the vistas enjoyed by successive members of the Meadows family. One tree of this era, a *thuja plicata*, survives in the parkland today, blocking the vista between the older cedars from the south lawn and the bay window of the house.⁷⁴



Figure 3.6.4: The vista between the two cedars is blocked by the evergreen thuja, which is likely to have been planted by Lady Wellesley. It means no long view in this direction is possible from the central window of the bay on the south side of the house. This photograph also illustrates the degree to which the Victorian ha-ha, which runs between the two cedars, is visible in the landscape.

While the parkland gained many trees just south of the house, there were losses too. In February 1868 the *Reading Mercury* reported on the widespread damage caused by a gale, including at Conholt Park, which was 'literally strewn with huge trees that have been torn up by the force of the wind'. During this phase of the evolution of the designed landscape, further trees had already been lost to man-made causes rather than the weather. In 1853

⁷⁴ This species were introduced to the UK in the late 1820s. Tree number 90 in tree survey carried out by David Cashman of Barrell Tree Consultancy, for Arboricultural Constraints Assessment, February 2023.

there was a sale of timber from the estate, with almost a thousand trees sold.⁷⁵ Given that this happened at about the same time as the west park was disparked and the deer herd removed, it is possible that many of the trees sold at this time were from this part of the estate. This rethinking of the landscape is likely to have been connected to the development of the shoot in this period. This timber sale would help to explain the degraded state of the old, 1720s formal layout by the time of the 1880 map.⁷⁶ The majority of the wood sold was oak. This would have had the greatest value, but the quantity of beech and elm is also notable. Some of the largest and oldest trees surviving in the landscape are beech. There were, until the later twentieth century, a substantial number of elm trees on the estate, all of which would have been lost to Dutch elm disease in the late 1960s and early 1970s – and indeed elms are particularly mentioned in the 1897 sale catalogue (see below). It is likely that the tall trees seen rising behind the north side of the house in figure 3.6.2 (above) were elms. The loss of the entire stock of a single species would – in part at least – account for the lack of trees in the parkland today, in comparison to the OS maps of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Notable too in the list of timber sold in 1852 was abele. Also known as white poplar, it is possible these could have been trees of 1720s, at which period they were sometimes used for avenues. It may be that abele poplars lined the northern end of avenue in west park.

As previously mentioned, the short section of ha-ha forming the boundary between the pleasure grounds and the parkland in front of the house is characteristic of a Victorian ha-ha. By 1880 a short, curved section of ha-ha had been created, immediately south of the house and was plotted on the first edition OS map (figure 3.6.5).⁷⁷ By the time of the second edition map of 1900 (figure 3.6.6), the ha-ha had been extended by an additional section further to the east, which ran to a point approximately on line with main axis through the walled garden. This is likely to have been carried out by Lady Wellesley. The reason for the extension is unclear. By 1923 this second section of ha-ha had been abandoned.

⁷⁵ WBR, p. 51.

⁷⁶ WBR says it was Philip Pierrepont who decided to dispark the west park.

⁷⁷ It has proved extremely hard to date the ha-ha from the bricks because it has been patched numerous times and is in a poor state. The patching also suggests it was not executed very well when originally built.

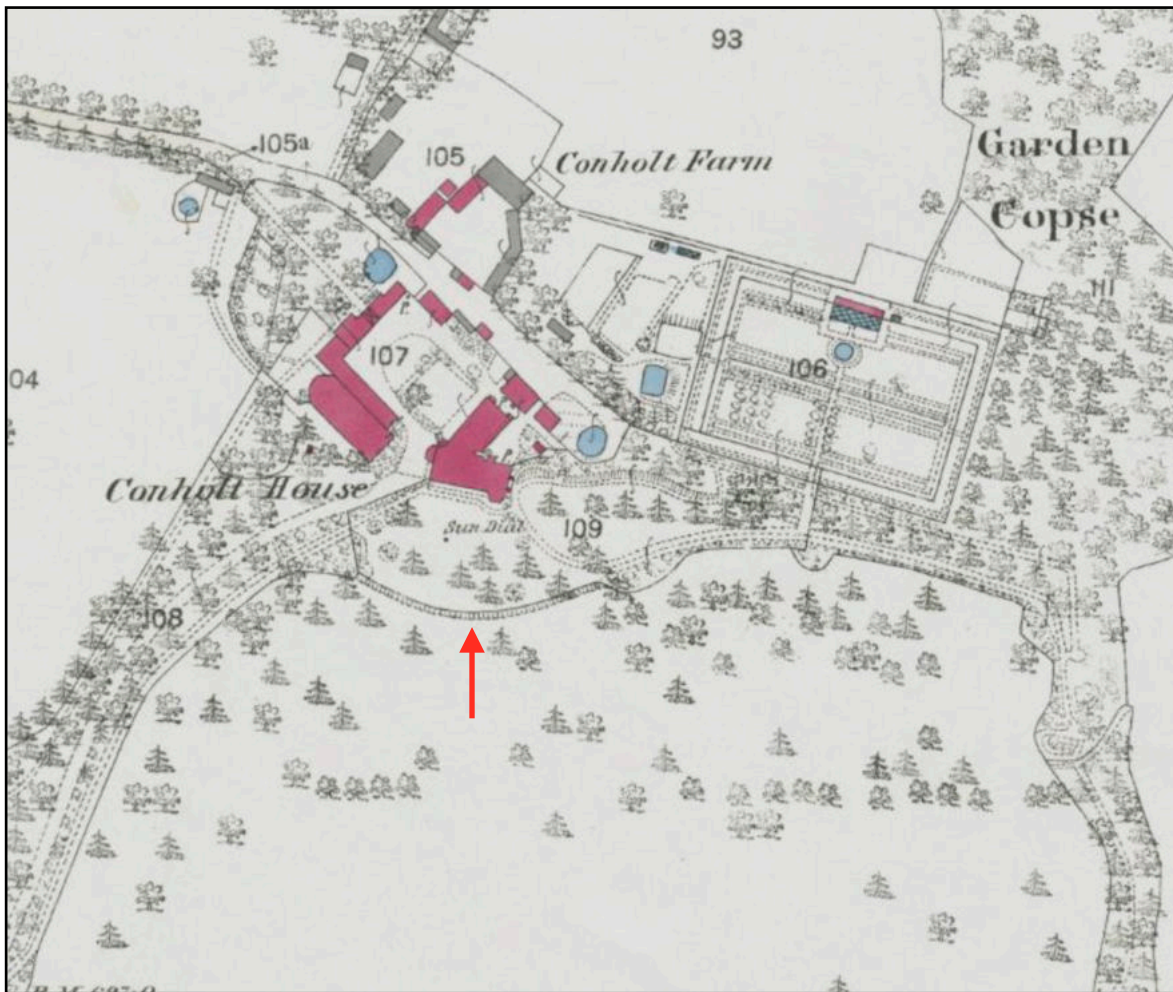


Figure 3.6.5: A detail of the 1st edition OS map, 1880 (1:2500) showing the house and its environs. Note the short section of ha-ha in front of the house (red arrow).

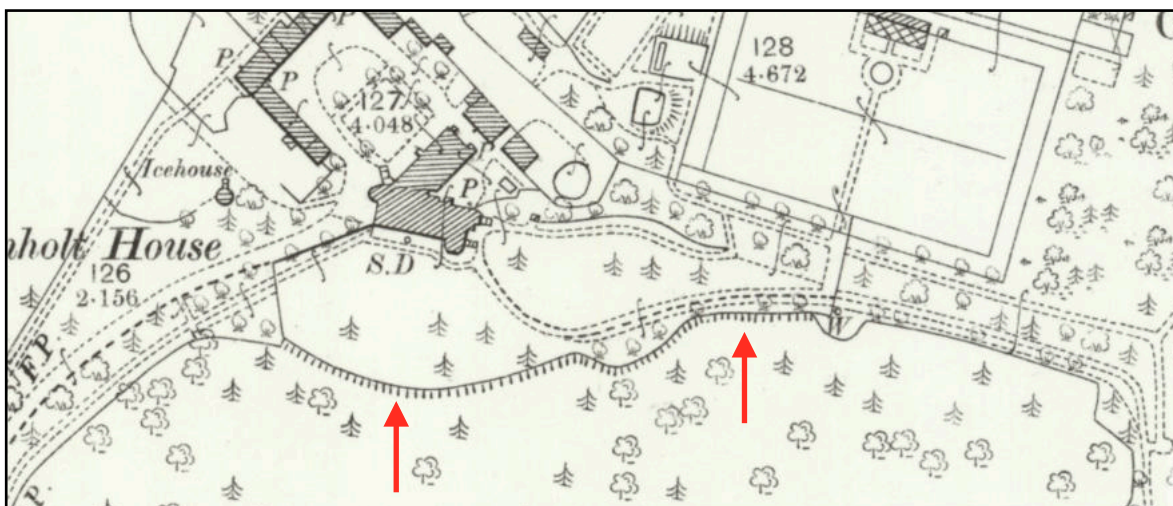


Figure 3.6.6: A detail of the 2nd edition OS map of 1900. By this date the ha-ha had been extended further to the east. On this map the ice house west of the house is plotted and labelled.

After Lady Wellesley died in 1893, the estate was advertised for sale. While the description of the garden from the sale catalogue prepared at that time was penned with a degree of estate agent hyperbole, it gives us a snapshot of the gardens soon after Lady Wellesley's death:

The pleasure grounds are situated on the south and east fronts of the mansion. A ha-ha separates the lawn from the home park. The grounds are tastefully laid out and planted with cedrus, araucaria, clumps of rhododendrons, and a variety of other ornamental trees and flowering shrubs of mature growth, with long gravelled walks, sheltered by thriving elm and other timber, and flanked by shrubberies of laurel, &c. A considerable extent of woodland walks is also afforded through the plantations which bound the home park. Adjacent are the fine old kitchen gardens extending to upwards of 2 acres, entirely walled in, with a brick dividing wall in addition. The same are most productive and stocked with a profusion of fruit trees, borders have also been formed outside, and the whole walled area, inside and out, is covered with trained fruit trees...⁷⁸



Figure 3.6.7: A photograph from the 1897 sale catalogue, showing the gardens about four years after Lady Wellesley's death. On the left is the south wall of the kitchen garden. This sinuous path does not seem to correlate with the straight paths mapped by the OS here in 1880 and 1900. Even more evergreens are seen and the trees along the outside of the wall have been allowed to get so large they would have shaded the crops. Along with her plantings of evergreens this gives the impression that Lady Wellesley allowed trees to encroach on the setting of the house in a way that would have made it feel very closed in.

⁷⁸ The mention of rhododendrons is a puzzle, as the soil is not right for them to grow here and, indeed, there are none in the garden or shrubberies today. This may have been a mistake on the part of the auctioneer.

When Lady Wellesley died in 1893, it was the end of an era for Conholt and – essentially – the end of the family connection with the estate. That she was firmly rooted a Conholt is clear from the obituary in *The World* magazine:

Lady Charles Wellesley was greatly beloved by her family and friends, and her sudden death is sincerely and widely lamented, particularly in the neighbourhood of Conholt Park, her place in Hampshire, where she was an immense favourite among all classes of her neighbours. Lady Charles did not care for general society, and lived nearly always at Conholt, coming very little to London. She inherited a very large fortune from her father, Mr Pierrepont, and she was exceedingly generous. Lady Charles was buried last week beside her husband (who died in 1858) in the family vault underneath the church at Stratfieldsaye.

After Lady Wellesley's death, attempts were made to let the estate, but they failed and it was put up for sale in 1897.



Figure 3.6.8: Another photograph from the 1897 sale catalogue, showing the gardens about four years after Lady Wellesley's death. Here the south lawn (east of the house) is seen from the Front Park. More monkey puzzle trees and another young conifer are visible. Note that the wall of the ha-ha is visible from this angle too.

3.7 George Knowles and Edward Wigan, 1897 – 1942

Summary of development, 1897 to 1942

- The farm area to the north of the house were re-worked.
- The bothies of the kitchen garden were rebuilt and glass expanded, both inside kitchen garden and outside.

In 1897 George Knowles bought Conholt after his own estate, Syrencot on edge of Salisbury Plain, was requisitioned by the army. It has been suggested that he bought Conholt in haste as it appeared to be comparable as a sporting estate, with the exception of the lack of fishing.⁷⁹ However, he only retained the estate for eight years, before moving to France and subsequently selling in 1905. During this time Knowles sold off live stock and dead stock from the home farm and let the land to a tenant, which suggests he was rather hands-off. His main contribution to Conholt was the building of a pair of cottages on Hungerford Lane close to the end of the approach drive and another pair at Middle Conholt. Neither were mapped in 1880, but were in situ by the OS map of 1900. One might have expected the cottages on Hungerford Lane to take the form of a gate lodge, but they seem to relate more to the road than the drive. There is no evidence for any changes in the parkland or pleasure grounds during this period.

In 1905 Edward Wigan bought the Conholt estate from George Knowles. He was the son of a wealthy hop merchant. He grew up in Winchmore Hill, Middlesex and was educated at Eton and Cambridge. He was considered an excellent shot.⁸⁰ He and his wives (the first died in 1913) lived in some style at Conholt, maintaining a high number of staff right up to the start of World War Two.

Unlike his predecessor Edward Wigan embraced farming and developed a prize winning herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle. He altered and built new farm buildings to the north of the stable block, including the attractive octagonal dairy, which harks back to similar buildings from the Georgian period – and could be seen as an outdoor embodiment of his taste for this era, which was expressed in the interiors and furnishing of the house.⁸¹ Probably connected to these improvements and expansion of the functional buildings, he also rebuilt

⁷⁹ WBR, p. 61

⁸⁰ WBR, p. 65

⁸¹ Examples of octagonal Georgian dairies include at Battle Abbey (East Sussex), Eastwick Park (Surrey, re-erected at the Weald and Downland Museum in West Sussex), Kenwood (London), East Dene (Isle of Wight) and Tynish House, (Argyll and Bute).

the potting sheds and bothies at the rear of the walled kitchen garden and added to the glass, both in the walled kitchen garden and its outer areas (figure 3.7.1).⁸² Alongside the pre-existing central vinery he erected a lean-to glasshouse to its east. This was manufactured by F. Strawson and Son, of Horley in Surrey. Outside the garden, in the working areas to the north, he added a forcing house, designed for cucumbers and melons,

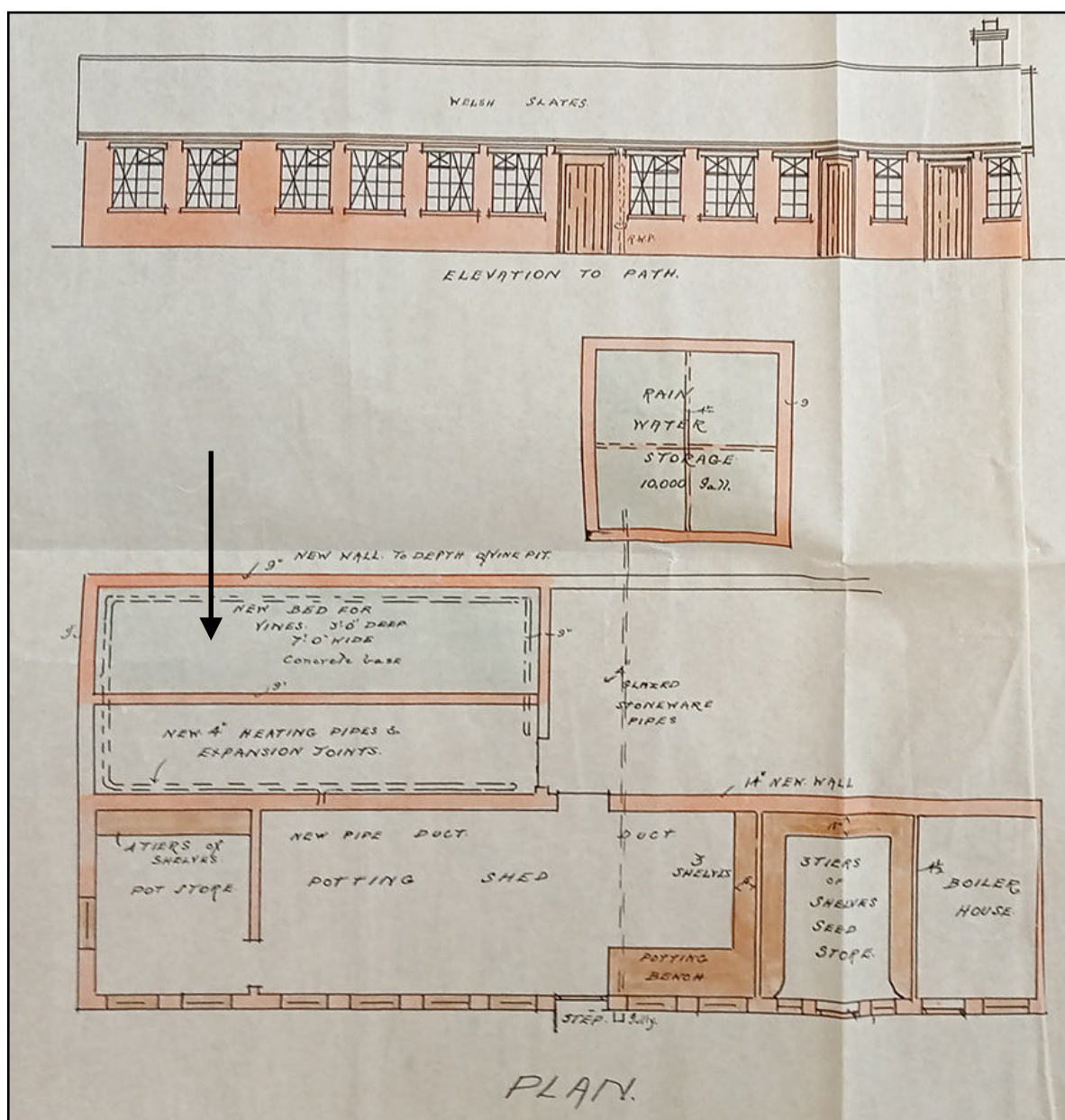


Figure 3.7.1: A detail from the plans for the new potting sheds, commissioned by Wigan. Note that inside the glasshouse there was to be a new bed for vines (arrow).

⁸² It is not clear whether Wigan rebuilt the vinery and other glasshouse, which is located at the centre of the north wall of the garden. This was built by W. Wood and Son of Taplow, Buckinghamshire. Wood and Son are not a well known maker and were unfamiliar to Susan Campbell, author of *A History of Kitchen Gardening* and founder of the Walled Kitchen Garden Network, who visited Conholt in February 2023.

in 1907 (figure 3.7.2 and 3.7.3).⁸³ More glass, likely to be cold frames, was added west of the walled garden. Although Wigan expanded the extent of glass in the garden at Conholt fairly early on in his ownership of the place – which might indicate more intensive horticulture – census returns suggest that, at that time, there were not significantly more staff in the garden than in Lady Wellesley's period. However, by 1939 evidence suggests there were more gardeners. How they were all employed, given that the gardens do not seem to have actually expanded, is not known.⁸⁴

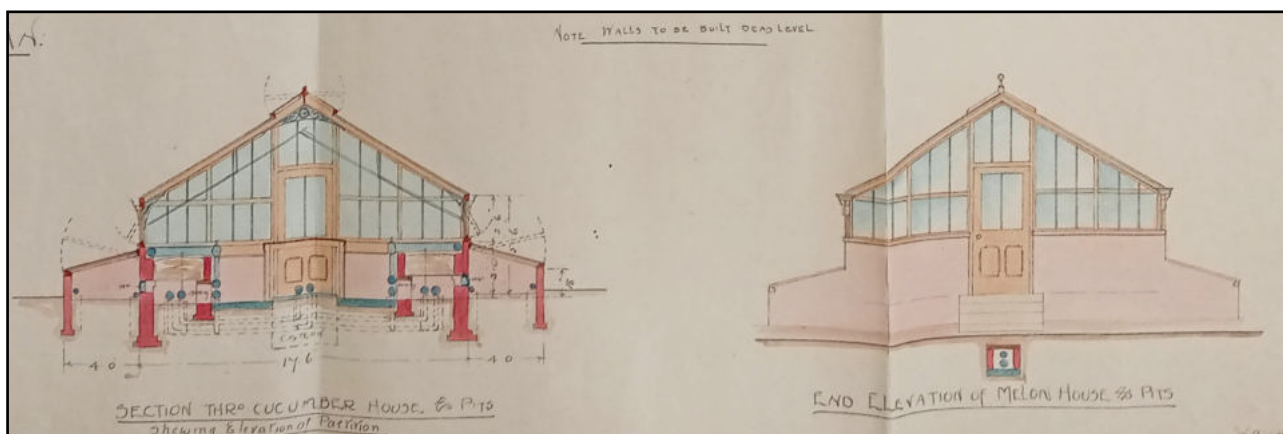


Figure 3.7.2: A detail from the plans for the new forcing house, commissioned by Wigan in 1907. One house was for cucumbers and the other for melons.

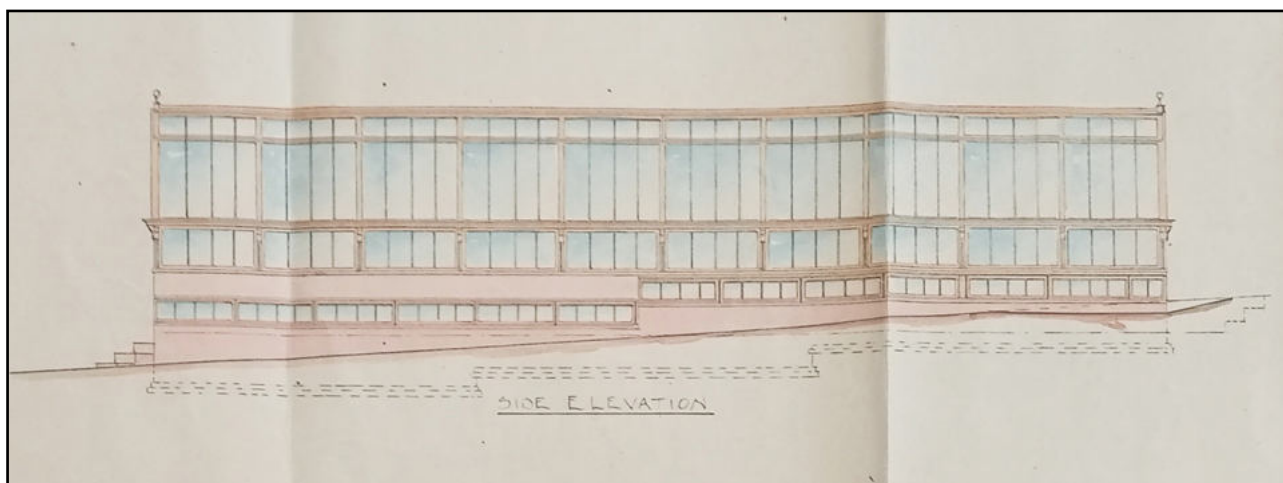


Figure 3.7.3: An elevation of the new forcing house, commissioned by Wigan in 1907.

⁸³ This has been referred to as the orchid house, by WBR quoting the *Victoria County History for Wiltshire*. The VCH give no reference for it being called that. Wigan was listed as a customer of Strawson and Son, in an advert of 1912: *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, Series 3, Vol. 51 (1st June, 1912), p. ix.

⁸⁴ It is possible that the greater number of garden staff by 1939, in comparison with 1921, is partly a reflection of more resources going into the gardens by the end of the '30s (we know the Wigans were thought of as extravagantly out of touch with the times by the start of the war). But it may also reflect the ability to house staff closer to the core of the estate, as new cottages had been built at Middle Conholt some time after 1924. With garden staff living closer to the house it is easier to identify them in census returns.

A comparison of the 1900 and 1924 OS maps suggests many trees had been felled during Wigan's period, both inside and outside the pleasure grounds. The planting in the northern section of the Front Park had been thinned allowing the long views from the house once again. By 1924 the extension of the ha-ha, east of the original section that was in situ by 1900, had reverted to fence. In the Front Park, south-east of the house, a tennis court had been created, with a small building – presumably a pavilion for spectating, resting and taking refreshments – adjoining it (figure 3.7.4). We do not know what this looked like. It appears an odd location to place the tennis court, a relatively long way from the house and quite exposed. Up near the house, at the west end of the south lawn, a small square building is plotted on the map of 1924, which was not there on any earlier maps. This is likely to have been a summerhouse of some form. Again, no photographs of this are known and it is likely to have been off-the-peg and not of any high architectural merit.

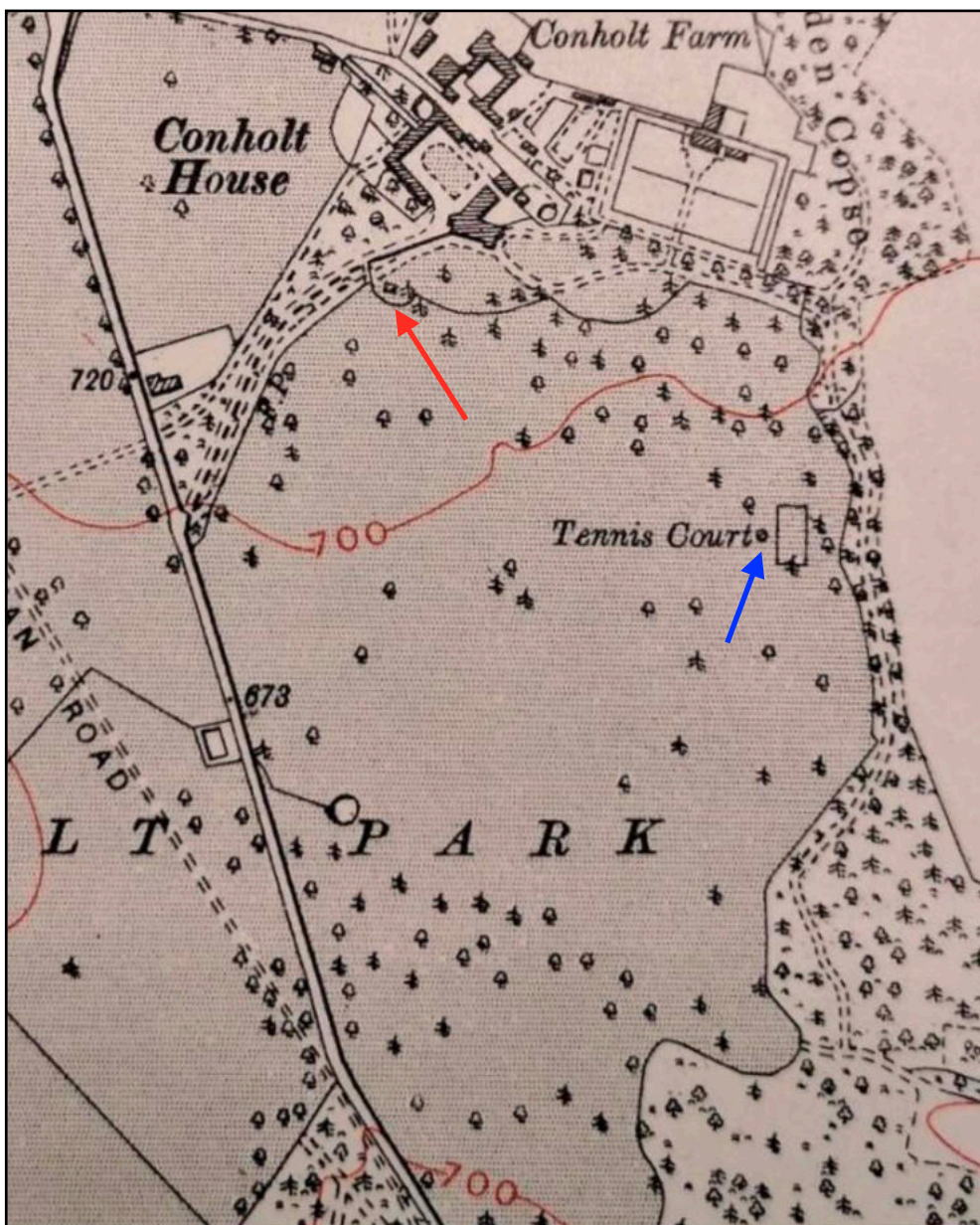


Figure 3.7.4: A detail from the 1924 OS map (6 inches to 1 mile), showing the tennis court and its associated building (blue arrow) and the other likely summerhouse to the south-west of the house (red arrow).

The *Victoria County History* states that during Wigan's tenure both parks were being used for farming, though it does not give details.⁸⁵ One final point to note about the designed landscape in this period is that one of the more modern plantations in the west park is named Mafeking Clump. This suggests it was planted (or at least named) to commemorate the lifting of the siege of Mafeking in 1900, during the Second Boer War. It is regrettable that it was imposed on the landscape in this position as it further renders the 1720s layout illegible.

When Edward Wigan died in 1942 the estate passed into the hands of a number of trustees, who found that his lifestyle had been rather extravagant for the straitened times and the farm was not very efficient. One of the trustees was Miss Sibyl Gaskell, who was the daughter of Wigan's sister, Ada Lewellin. She moved in to run the place more efficiently. The motivation for this was probably larger than just putting the estate on a more healthy footing, it was also a matter of doing her bit for the war effort. It may be no coincidence that her step-brother, John Llewellyn, was minister for food from 1943 to 1945.

⁸⁵ A P Baggs, J Freeman, C Smith, J H Stevenson and E Williamson, 'Chute', in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 16, Kinwardstone Hundred*, ed. D A Crowley (London, 1999), pp. 108-120. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol16/pp108-120> [accessed 1 May 2023].

3.8 Henrietta Gaskell, 1942 – 1992

Summary of development, 1942 to 1992

- Miss Gaskell took over the running of the estate during the war, which set the tone for her period. This was embodied in the parkland and gardens by shooting, farming and productive horticulture.
- The walled garden was used for commercial growing.
- A substantial amount of timber on the estate was sold, likely to include in the parkland.
- The loss of elms to Dutch elm disease.
- The loss of trees in Garden Copse, to disease and possibly air crash.
- Loss of ponds

In the fifty years that Miss Gaskell presided as the chatelain of Conholt, she seems to have been successful in turning the estate around from the poor management of the end of the Wigan period and the difficult circumstances at the end of the Second World War. She was forty-four when she went to live at Conholt; she dedicated the rest of her life to the place.

During the war, unlike many other such houses, no troops were billeted in the mansion, so the fabric suffered less than it might have done. But the war and its immediate aftermath took its toll on the designed landscape. In the west park

American troops blew up the brick and flint

gate piers, which marked the start of the route across the park on the drive from Upper Chute and Standen. In the park – and on the wider estate – timber was felled and sold to the government. Written evidence has not been seen, but it is reasonable to suppose that at least some of the parkland was ploughed for food production in this period.

The paring back of the post-war austerity era, which culminated in the demolition of the service wing and oldest section of the house in 1958, was probably continued across the



Figure 3.8.1: Miss Gaskell and her farm bailiff, Mr. Pinner, from the Women in Farming article, 1960.

designed landscape too. Ornament, such as it was, gave way to functionalism. Agriculture and shooting were the priorities.

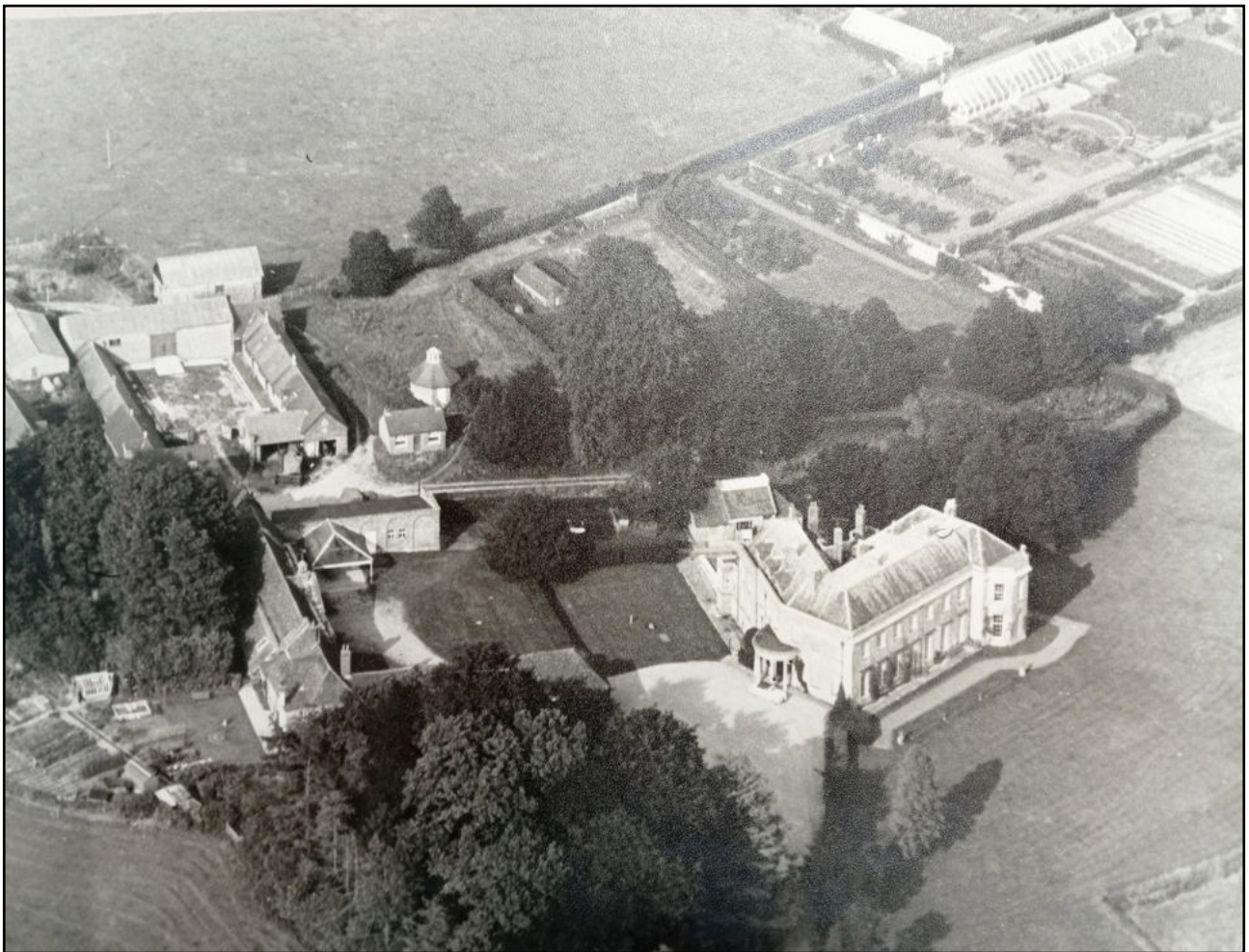


Figure 3.8.2: An undated aerial photograph, likely to have been taken after World War Two. It shows the walled garden in full production as Miss Gaskell's market garden. Other points to note in the landscape are the dense trees blocking the arch through the stable block and the productive staff garden, or gardens, also to the west of the stable block (left side of photograph). Some tall trees remain behind the house, but not as many as are seen in figure 3.6.2.

In 1960 *Farm and Country* magazine published an article about Miss Gaskell and her farming operations at Conholt. In it she explained how she used the walled kitchen garden and glasshouses as a market garden. She grew green and salad vegetables, soft fruit and, in the glasshouses, arum lilies, carnations and pot plants. Miss Gaskell personally took her produce to market in Andover. An undated, but mid-twentieth century aerial photograph clearly shows the walled garden in production (figure 3.8.2).

In 1985, towards the end of Miss Gaskell's reign at Conholt, 140 beech trees were sold. Again, it is not known exactly where these came from (and the wider estate did cover

around 2000 acres), but it is possible they were tall, straight specimens, probably from some of the sections of woodland. Garden Copse is a possibility for some of the 140. This small woodland was a long standing feature in the landscape and today has some remnant beech in the north-west corner, which are connected to a row of fine, likely eighteenth century beech of a tall straight habit – which make the most valuable timber. Garden Copse now has remarkably few old trees considering the length of time it has been a feature in the landscape. This may also, in part, be explained by the fact that the copse seems likely to have been where an Avro Lancaster plane crashed in November 1948, while returning from flying relief missions during the Berlin blockade.⁸⁶

One final loss, which may possibly have happened during this period, was the disappearance of four small ponds around the house, which were last plotted on the 1924 OS map.⁸⁷ These were probably old dew ponds, originally created for the watering of stock. There were two on the walled garden side of the house, one north of the north corner of the stable block and another in the paddock north-west of the stable block. In 1992 Miss Gaskell died and the trustees put the estate up for sale. It was bought by Paul van Vlissingen.

⁸⁶ WBR, p. 77. See also: <http://sussexhistoryforum.co.uk/index.php?topic=14224.0> The crew had flown 40 missions to airlift supplies into Berlin, which was being blockaded by the Soviets. They were returning home in thick fog and the pilot is thought to have become disorientated. One member of the crew was thrown clear of the plane, seven other men died. It is thought that some of them were another crew hitching a lift home. It is reported that a person in a nearby cottage was injured by flying debris. This is likely to have been one of the cottages at Middle Conholt.

⁸⁷ Later maps do not give enough detail to have plotted them.

3.9 Paul van Vlissingen & Family Trust, 1992 – 2022

Summary of development, 1992 to 2002

- Extensive new planting was carried out in parkland, though not all in historic locations
- Creation of the arboretum in part of the Front Park.
- Creation of the giant's footprint maze.
- Re-building of the walled garden walls and glasshouses.
- Other additions to garden were small-scale and piecemeal.

Paul van Vlissingen (1941 – 2006) was a Dutch businessman, philanthropist and conservationist.⁸⁸ As well as the Conholt estate he also owned substantial land in the north-west Highlands. In 2005 he was listed as the richest man in Scotland. In 1992, following the death of Miss Gaskell he added Conholt to his property portfolio. Unlike his immediate predecessor he invested in the designed landscape adding features and planting trees. Many of these are now becoming a presence in the landscape. However, while many



Figure 3.9.1: The old glasshouse and vinery in the walled kitchen garden, just before it was rebuilt in 1992. Note the small patches in the brickwork of the vinery on the right. These were blocked up holes through which the vines would originally have been grown. They were planted on the outside and trained through the holes. The different colours of brick work suggest this range of glass was built in two different phases.

⁸⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2006/sep/06/guardianobituaries.business>

are species for which there is a historic precedent – and which sit happily in the landscape – a few are odd choices that would probably not be made today.⁸⁹



Figure 3.9.2: Rebuilding the walls of the kitchen garden in 1992. This is the south wall. The internal central wall can be seen in the background.

One of the first projects carried out by van Vlissingen was the rebuilding of the walls of the kitchen garden, as the present gate at the southern entrance carries the date 1992. Although Miss Gaskell used the kitchen garden for commercial growing, it was in a state of disrepair by the time of her death. Photographs shared by a former member of staff at Conholt illustrate how comprehensive the rebuilding was (figures 3.9.2 and 3.9.3).



Figure 3.9.3: Rebuilding the walls of the kitchen garden in 1992. This is also the south wall close to the south-eastern corner.

After the walls and the glasshouses were rebuilt, the garden was redesigned, with a potager and flower beds in a cartwheel pattern. Van Vlissingen's partner, Caroline Tisdall, was the designer of the new layout.⁹⁰ Some historic plants, like the old Muscat of Alexandria grapevine were retained. Orchids were introduced into the 1907 forcing house. Caroline Tisdall was also responsible for the new gardens laid out in what

⁸⁹ For example a large number of holm oaks in the south-west quarter of the west park.

⁹⁰ The WBR report states: 'The 'Rose Garden' was re-created, by chance, in its original position up to 1953. A new garden called the 'Calor Garden' was created in 1996-7 and beehives introduced on the former site of the gas tanks. The 'Winter Garden' was planted in 1997 with the 'Rose Temple' at its centre. The 'Secret Garden' was planted in 1996-7 as a play area for the grandchildren and to be a pleasant spot to spend time on a summer evening.' This information all appears to have come from a pamphlet on the garden produced in 1998. The pamphlet also states that there were, at that time, four cedars of Lebanon on the south lawn. One was lost in 2008. A substantial stump to the south-west of the eastern-most surviving cedar, now in the arboretum area, is the remains of this tree.

had, in the nineteenth century, been functional areas – the laundry drying ground and an overspill from the kitchen garden, probably used for growing root vegetables and other coarser crops. The most dramatic feature designed by Caroline Tisdall was the maze. Created in the years leading up to the millennium, it was conceived as a giant's footprint – 'a step in time'. It was planted on the north side of the walled garden in what had been paddocks and laid out in laurel.⁹¹ An avenue of limes was planted flanking the track formed along its north side. During the van Vlassingen period the gardens were open to the public on occasion, including for the National Garden Scheme and featured in several books.⁹²



Figure 3.9.4: The gardens of Conholt House in autumn 2022. In the foreground the maze can be seen. Behind and to the left is the walled kitchen garden with the beds designed by Caroline Tisdall. (Photo: Marie-Louise Agius).

⁹¹ The maze was listed an article in *Country Life* on 8 July 2009, part of a regular series called *Dream Acres* by Arabella Lennox-Boyd. See: https://www.blottkerrwilson.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/countrylifejuly8_2009a.pdf

⁹² http://www.gardens-guide.com/gardenpages/_0324.htm. See also: Anita Pereire, *Gardens for the 21st Century*, (London, 1999) and Tania Compton and Andrew Lawson, *Dream Gardens: 100 Inspirational Gardens*, (London, 2007).

4. Significance

It is necessary to assess the significance of the designed landscape at Conholt within two different contexts: in terms of national and regional significance and in terms of its importance as the setting of the Grade II* house. These significances provide a benchmark against which decisions on future change and management can be taken. To help with this assessment the landscape has been divided into its constituent parts and, for clarity, is set out in a table (below). The character areas can be found on the plans, figures 2.7 and 2.8, above. A summary of significance for the whole designed landscape can be found at the end of this section.

4.1 Significance by Area

Area	Significance Value – External: Nationally, Regionally	Significance Value – Internal: as Part of the Setting of House	Reasons
South lawn	Low	High	No named designer. Underlying rationale of design limited. But of high importance as immediate setting of house and as area carrying main vistas.
Walled kitchen garden	Low	Moderate	In national terms, majority of significance lost in the 1990s re-building. Important as part of workings of the house (provisioning etc) and probably much cash invested in it (£4k in c1800), but not connected to house in design terms.
Lady's Walk / shrubbery belt	Low	Moderate	Upper (northern) section suggests greater level of design, but the longer, southern section is monotonous in terms of species and features. Belt has value in being the screen that channels views through and within the Front Park. In national terms, very little design merit.
Garden Copse	None	Moderate	Has some significance in the setting of the house, in that it helps close in the eastern side of the landscape. No evidence of design internally though. In national terms no significance.
Drying ground	None	Low	Functional, back-of-house area. No design until 1990s. No national significance.
Maze	Low	Moderate	Arguably the best of the 1990s interventions. No named designer. Perhaps has some significance nationally, as few mazes created post-WW2. Has featured in books and articles in national press.
Stable Yard	None	High	Important as part of setting of the house, especially when there was a drive on axis with the archway (alignment now lost). The landscaping of the courtyard has no national significance.

Front Park	Low	High	Intrinsic to setting of the house and carries two of the principal vistas. But many trees lost and no clear evidence of design rationale in the planting.
Upper parkland (W and N paddocks)	None	Low	Almost no evidence of design in either north or west paddocks, either historically or now. No significance nationally or regionally.
West Park	Moderate	Low to Moderate	The circumstantial evidence suggesting west park was laid out with advice from Kingsmill Eyre gives a degree of significance, as it adds to knowledge of this little known gentleman-amateur designer. But design does not appear to have been particularly sophisticated and it is much eroded. In terms of setting of the house, the course of the SW vista through the west park is of significance, as is the view of the terrace – and the veteran trees that add further interest to the mid-ground views.

4.2 Summary

The historic designed landscape of Conholt House is not – in itself – of significance in design terms nationally. Nor is it particularly important regionally. This is reflected in the fact that it is not included on Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens*. It does, however, have some local significance within its own wider landscape setting, as it covers a reasonably large area (over 400 acres) and sits on high ground. This is, however, tempered by the fact that the largest section of the designed landscape – the west park – is, for most of its extent, no longer legible as designed landscape.

The importance of the parkland and pleasure ground at Conholt lies in its role as setting for the listed house. The relationship between the house and the landscape is strong in two vistas – looking south and looking south-west. The relationship between house and setting on the north and west sides is very limited. On the east side it relates to the walled kitchen garden in a peremptory manner, with nothing particularly to draw one towards it. Likewise, slightly further on, the physical connection between the house and the Lady's Walk through the shrubbery is weak, with nothing to draw one there either. The historic path network of the pleasure grounds (such as they are) was not especially carefully designed and has been almost totally lost. The visual connection between the house and the shrubbery is likewise weak. On the west side of the house the west shrubbery helps to frame the house in views from the terrace, but there is no sign of ornamentation within it. On the north side of the house the connection with the designed landscape is negligible, as these were always service areas. South of the house the Front Park is of importance as the area with which it most clearly reads and relates. The west park is significant for its historic interest as a likely

design by a gentleman- amateur designer, Kingsmill Eyre – although the design laid out by him is no longer legible. The greater importance of the west park now is the role a section of it plays in carrying the principal vista from the house.