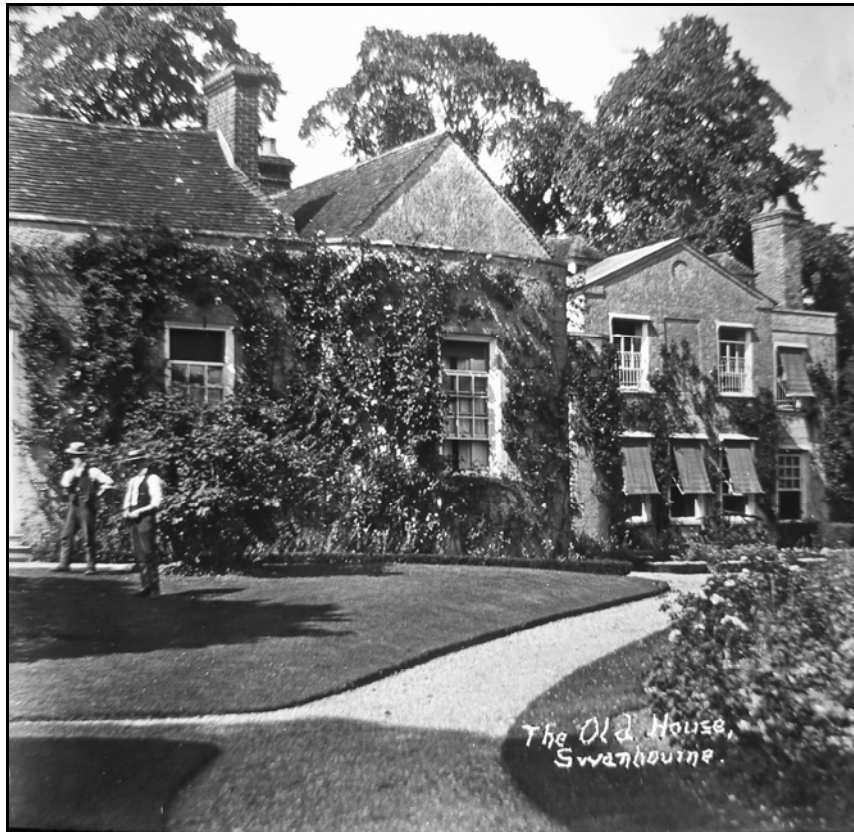


# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



This image is from a collection held by the Swanbourne History Group (L547 Old House Martin 35).

## THE OLD HOUSE, SWANBOURNE

October 2021

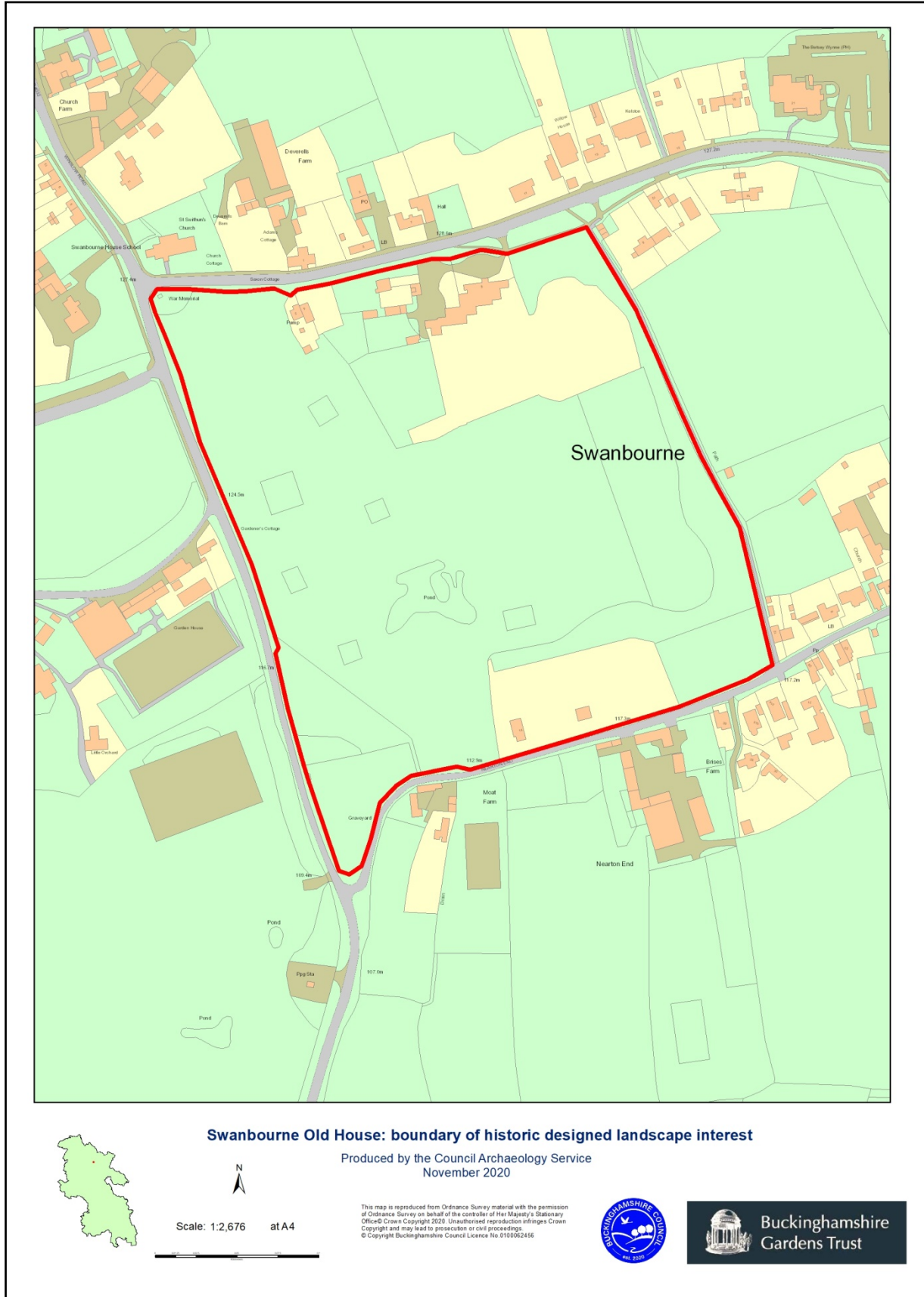


The Finnis Scott  
Foundation

Roland Callingham  
Foundation



# HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY





**Swanbourne Old House: 2019 aerial photograph**

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Produced by the Council Archaeology Service  
November 2020



Scale: 1:2,676 at A4



## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Project

This site dossier has been prepared as part of The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust (BGT) Research and Recording Project, begun in 2014. This site is one of several hundred designed landscapes county-wide identified by Bucks County Council (BCC) in 1998 (including Milton Keynes District) as potentially retaining evidence of historic interest, as part of the Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review project carried out for English Heritage (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not conclusive and further parks and gardens may be identified as research continues or further information comes to light.

### Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a dossier is prepared by volunteers trained on behalf of BGT by experts in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage (now Historic England) on its Register Upgrade Project.

Each dossier includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage/ Historic England *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.
- A map showing principal views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

### Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was supported by The Gardens Trust (formerly the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society) and funded by BGT with a significant grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: [www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)

<b>COUNTY:</b>	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>The Old House</b> <b>Swanbourne</b> <b>HER 1101600000</b>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	AYLESBURY VALE	
<b>PARISH:</b>	SWANBOURNE	
<b>OS REF:</b>	SP 80294 27257	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overview

The park, gardens and pleasure grounds for a C16 and later country house at the heart of a village in the Vale of Aylesbury. The present layout of the grounds, created in phases from the late C18/early C19 when the house was remodelled, survives largely intact with many mature trees and is typical of a country house estate in the Vale. Late C20 changes include the addition of a swimming pool, tennis court, productive garden and the loss of cultivation of the kitchen garden, but otherwise much of the garden layout appears to remain almost unchanged since 1810. The park remains much as it was when enlarged in the 1880s and major changes were made, including the drive linking with Swanbourne House (since abandoned), with C20 additions including a cemetery and the War Memorial.

### Archaeological interest

The site has the potential for evidence associated with medieval agricultural and village uses, particularly relating to the surviving trees, banks, routes, boundaries, and lost buildings such as cottages and farmsteads. It also has potential for evidence of lost structures and features associated with the country house estate, and for former features of the designed landscape from the C16 onwards, e.g. estate buildings, paths, beds, terraces, boundaries, kitchen garden features, and lost drives and rides.

### Architectural interest

The house, service structures and garden structures form a group of architectural note, built incrementally since the C16. The setting is enhanced by many village buildings, most notably the church, Swanbourne Old House and Swanbourne House but also including numerous cottages.

### Artistic interest

The site is a country house estate comprising park and garden developed since the C16 and currently reflecting phases in the C19 and later. The layout by the mid-C20 remains largely intact, focussed on the house, with many mature trees and woodland. The main loss is the kitchen garden south of the house. There is a strong link with Swanbourne House (q.v.) to the west which was formerly physically reflected in a drive which linked the two.

### Historic interest

The site is associated with various families and owners, particularly the Fremantle family, starting with Admiral Fremantle. In 1800 Charles Fremantle, the second son of Thomas and Betsey, was born in the Old House. Like his father, he also became an Admiral, but before this, in 1829, he had been given the task of claiming Western Australia for the Crown. Other members of the family became MPs and were both wealthy and influential. The diaries and letters of Betsey Fremantle are of interest for their descriptions of various Bucks sites including Stowe. The survival of archival material relating to the site helps considerably to understand its development and significance.

## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Old House forms part of the Swanbourne Estate, along with another designed landscape, that of Swanbourne House School (including the Manor House), which is covered in a separate dossier. While the two landscapes developed separately, they have a strong physical and to a lesser extent design relationship. The Swanbourne Estate includes other areas around the village.

Sir John Fortescue, cousin and personal advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, was knighted in 1592. He served as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1589 to 1603 and was the member of Parliament for Buckinghamshire from 1588 to 1598. He had a large house built for himself at Salden, close to Mursley a village 1.5 miles from Swanbourne. The Manor House at Swanbourne close to the church was probably built for his family in the C16 with additions in the early C17 (Pevsner, *VCH*). The White House (known now as The Old House), south-east of the church may also have been built by him (*VCH* and Swanbourne History website). The 1599 map of Swanbourne covers the Fortescue estate including Swanbourne showing roads, agricultural land and some houses (Swanbourne History website).<sup>1</sup>

In 1624 John and Thomas Adams purchased the Lordship title, becoming Joint Overlords of the Manor. The purchase included two main houses: the Manor House, occupied by Thomas, and the Old House by John (*VCH*, Reading).

In 1763 James Adams was Lord of the Manor and principal landholder when Swanbourne was enclosed and land exchanges took place (Enclosure Act and Map). When James Adams died in 1775 The Old House was inherited by one of his second wife's relatives and became the home of James Williamson of Soulbury. In 1798 Betsey Wynne bought The Old House with her husband Captain (later Admiral) Thomas Fremantle. The purchase included three surrounding small fields and a kitchen garden amounting to c.5 acres. They 'made improvements' (Taylor quoting the Fremantle Papers, Reading). In 1799 Betsey wrote that 'Mr James Lord who understands gardening very well called this morning to see the alterations we are making and give us his advice, we shall have all new trees entirely'. It is unclear whether Mr Lord was a friend or professional advisor. In 1800 an old barn was moved, in 1801 a gift of 50 Beech trees from Mr Harman was received, and roses and honeysuckles were grown in 1804 (Wynne Diaries).

The family had close connections with other local families including the Pouletts and frequently visited them at Addington Manor; they were regular guests at Stowe (Wynne Diaries) but were less welcomed by the owners of the Manor House, the Deverals. In a letter to Betsey (17 March 1801) her husband wrote, 'I am not surprised to hear your neighbour Mrs M Deveral is going to leave Swanbourne; however, I think you will have no great loss in her, or in any of that NAME.' Deveral's Farm was Captain Fremantle's first major purchase of agricultural land, in 1802. Betsey wrote 'We are to be great farmers' (Wynne Diaries).

Betsey's sketch of The Old House (1810) shows the south, garden front with a circular path around a lawn, a tree surrounded by railings, and glasshouses (Swanbourne History website). This is the earliest depiction of the gardens; the layout of the paths, lawn and the tree are similar to that in 1878 (OS), but without the greenhouse. Around this time (OSD, 1813, Bryant, 1825) the grounds of the Old House comprised a garden or paddock to the south, flanked by other paddocks. After Admiral Fremantle died in 1819, his widow, Betsey, lived for another 37 years, dividing her time between Swanbourne, London and the Continent. In 1820 his eldest son and heir, Thomas Francis Fremantle was made a Baronet and in 1824 married the daughter of Sir George Nugent of Westhorpe House, Little Marlow.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1963 the map was owned by a Mr Vardon (Elvey).

Thomas Francis Fremantle (Bart) was wealthy and influential. When his uncle, William Fremantle stepped down as MP for Buckingham in 1826, Thomas took his place. He was MP for Buckingham for twenty years until 1846, when he argued with the 2nd Duke of Buckingham over the repeal of the Corn Laws. He then became vice-chair and eventually chair of the Board of Customs, until 1873.

Between 1830 and 1860 Thomas purchased much of the land in Swanbourne, including The Manor House in c.1830 (Parry). In the mid-1860s (Pevsner) he built Swanbourne House, an Italianate mansion by William Burn in agricultural land west of the village street, laying out extensive grounds around it in fashionable style.

Thomas became the 1st Baron Cottesloe in 1874 and c.1880 changes to the layout of the grounds included a new drive linking The Old House and the new Swanbourne House (Reading). The paddocks enclosed by the village streets had become parkland surrounding the Old House, retaining hedgerow trees marking the former boundaries, and adding specimens (OS, 1878). The 1st Baron died in 1890, aged 92 (Parry, Reading). The Estate was inherited by his son Thomas Francis (1830-1918), 2nd Baron, MP for Buckinghamshire 1876-85, who lived at The Old House in 1891 (census) but moved to Swanbourne House.

In 1918 Swanbourne House was left vacant after the death of the 2nd Baron. The 3rd Baron who inherited the estate remained at The Old House, which was more suitable for his family life. He provided land opposite the church for the erection of the Swanbourne war memorial, an obelisk made of Portland stone. It was unveiled on 26 September 1920 by Admiral the Hon ER Fremantle the great-uncle of Lt Fremantle who is remembered on the memorial.

The memorial gardens (adjacent to the main war memorial site) were developed in 2018 as part of the events marking the Centenary of WW1 as a place for rest, remembrance and reflection. A history plaque was installed which provides details of Swanbourne's WW1 veterans and new ironwork fencing at the boundary with the Park, and an entrance gate were installed.

Few changes occurred in the landscape around the Old House between 1880 and 1956 (OS). In the 1960s (aerial photographs) changes occurred to the path leading from the house to the kitchen garden. The divisions within the kitchen garden went and new formal gardens were created on the south front of the house. In the 1980s (aerial photographs) a hard tennis court lay south-east of the house and a swimming pool to the west. Between 1988 and 1999 a building was constructed in the former Kitchen Garden. Formal gardens were laid out east of the Old House. The site remains in private ownership.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

The village of Swanbourne lies approx. 2.5 miles east of Winslow and 9 miles north of Aylesbury. The village is set on a ridge 125 feet above sea level. The 9 ha. site stands at the centre of the the village close to the south-east of the church. It is bordered by Mursley Road to the north, a bridleway leading from Mursley Road to Nearton End to the east, Nearton End to the south and Winslow Road (also known as Church Hill) on the west. The Old House is on the northern edge of the site, on an elevated site overlooking Mursley Road and the church, and with views from the rear, garden front over the land sloping away to the south. The soil is a gravelly sand based on clay.

## **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The Old House is approached from Mursley Road to the north via a gateway into a forecourt. A further entrance formerly led from Winslow Road (also known as Church Hill) on the west park boundary, c.50m south of the junction with Mursley Road (OS 1880). This split with the northern branch leading north-east to Ivy Cottage/The Lodge and the south-east branch leading to the south front of The Old House. This was a continuation of the drive to Swanbourne House (now the school) to the west on the opposite side of the road. In 1887 Thomas Fremantle painted a view of Ivy Cottage and this 'new road to Swanbourne House' indicating that it was contemporary with or post-dated the 1860s construction of Swanbourne House and linked the two (Swanbourne History website). This entrance was gone by 1923 (OS) although some trees which lined the drives survive (OS). Ivy Cottage/The Lodge, now 2 and 4 Mursley Road (listed Grade II) are a pair of C17 village cottages which were partly rebuilt in C19 as a lodge, and stand isolated in their gardens on the north boundary of the park. They are timber-framed with plaster, whitewashed brick and C19 brick infill. They are the remains of all the cottages that were knocked down between the Old House and Swanbourne House in the 1860s when the latter was built and its grounds laid out.

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDING**

Swanbourne Old House (listed Grade II) stands towards the centre of the north boundary, with the entrance front to the north facing Mursley Road, and the garden front to the south. It originated as a late C16 T-Plan House which has been much altered. It was enlarged in the late C18-early C19, including an attached C18 former stable wing. The earliest part of the house has a timber frame with herringbone brick infill concealed by render. The extensions are of rendered brick. The roofs are tiled.

West of The Old House (Listed Grade II) stands a small early-C19 single-storey brick outbuilding, partly chequered and colourwashed, with a central wooden octagonal cupola bearing a wooden ball finial on its ogee lead roof (HER). Its original purpose is unclear.

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

The gardens and pleasure grounds lie mainly to the south and east of the house, with a swimming pool west of the forecourt.

There are three knot gardens south of the east wing of the house. To the south of these is the path present since 1810 although its curve around the lawn has become more rectangular. The trees remain much as in 1880, although the trees edging the east of the lawn and curving around to form a belt along the eastern border now frame a modern tennis court south-east of the house. There is a formal garden to the north-east of the house.

## **PARK**

The park encloses the house to the east, west and south, with Winslow Road (also known as Church Hill) to the west, a small cemetery, (which was formerly part of the grounds but was gifted to the village in 1892) at the south-west corner, and a short stretch of Nearton End and a belt of trees separating it from the former Kitchen Garden and orchard to the south. This belt of trees continues along the east border between the Park and a public footpath. There is an extensive plantation (c50m x 170m) of young trees in the south eastern corner next to this belt of trees.

Swanbourne War Memorial (listed Grade II), a Portland Stone obelisk stands in the Memorial Gardens in the north-west corner of the park opposite the church.

A lake lies c200m south of the modern productive garden, in the same position, but of a different shape, to that in 1880 (OS). The remainder of the Park consists mainly of pasture with scattered trees, including a recently planted



avenue which leads from the south west tip of the modern Kitchen Garden, curves around the western side of the lake and terminates at the north-west corner of the former Kitchen Garden. Small areas of the park have been fenced.

## **KITCHEN GARDENS**

A modern, irregularly shaped productive garden measuring some 40m x 100m, lies south-west of the house containing a range of sheds and polytunnels.

The former kitchen garden lies on the south boundary of the park, c.170 m south of the house, adjoining Nearton End with an orchard to the east. Little of the original design appears to have survived, and it is mainly grass with a few trees. There is a parking area in the orchard and a modern garage in the kitchen garden. It is screened from The Old House by a belt of trees.

What may have been the gardener's cottage at the south west corner is now 14 Nearton End (listed Grade 2). It is C17 house which was altered and partially rebuilt in the C19-C20 in red brick. The roof is thatched.

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### **MAPS**

- 1599 Map of the Fortescue Estate (Bucks Archives Ma69)  
 1762 Pre-Enclosure Map (Bucks Archives)  
 Jeffreys, T., Map of the County of Buckinghamshire surveyed in 1766-1768 (1770)  
 Bryant, A Map of the County of Buckinghamshire from an actual survey in the year 1824 by A Bryant (1825)

### **Ordnance Survey**

- Ordnance Surveyor's Draft 2" 1813 (BL)  
 6" Surveyed: 1878 to 1880 Published: 1885

6" Revised: 1898 Published: c. 1900

6" Revised: 1923 Published: 1926

6" Revised: 1923 Published: 1937

6" Revised: 1950 Published: 1952

1:25 000 Explorer Map 2011

## **Census**

1871-1911

## **IMAGES**

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/rchme/bucks/vol2/plate-70>

[https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/gallery/665?place=Swanbourne%2c+BUCKINGHAMSHIRE+\(Parish\)&terms=swanbourne&searchtype=englandsplaces&i=1&wm=1&bc=16|17](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/gallery/665?place=Swanbourne%2c+BUCKINGHAMSHIRE+(Parish)&terms=swanbourne&searchtype=englandsplaces&i=1&wm=1&bc=16|17)

Aerial photographs 1964, 1966, 1985, 1988

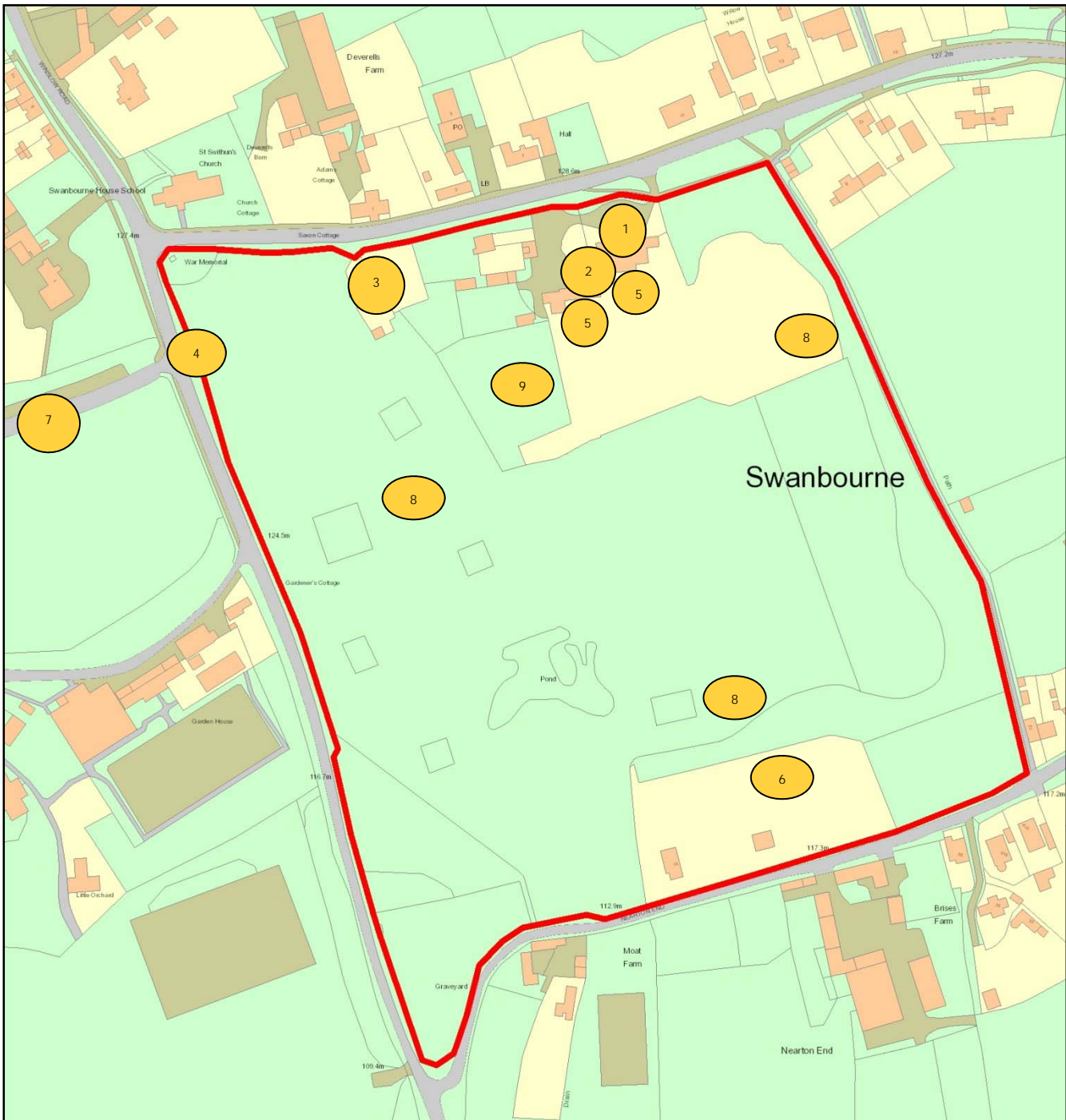
## **WEBSITES**

<http://www.swanbourneestate.co.uk/history.html> accessed March 2020

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Bucks Gardens Trust is grateful to Ken Harris of the Swanbourne History Group for help in preparing this dossier.

Gill Grocott and Jill Stansfield 2021; edited SR September 2021



## KEY HISTORIC FEATURES

### Key to numbered features

1. House and forecourt	2. Stables
3. 2/4 Mursley Road, former lodge	4. Site of entrance to former drive between Swanbourne House and Old House
5. Gardens	6. Former kitchen garden
7. Drive to Swanbourne House School	8. Park
9. Modern productive garden	

## HISTORIC IMAGES

The following late C19/early C20 images are from a collection held by the Swanbourne History Group.



Swanbourne History Group (L547 Old House Martin 35).



Swanbourne History Group (L541 Old House Back 1).



Swanbourne History Group (L544 Old House rear).



Swanbourne History Group (L544 Old House rear Martin 66).