

HERTFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

LOCAL LIST: **DACORUM**

Present Name of Site
FELDEN LODGE

Historic Name

Parish/Town
Felden

National Grid Reference of Principal Building:

Present Area (approximate)

Brief History

Felden Lodge was built in the late 19th century but nothing is yet known of its early landscape history. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows the house set in lawned and wooded gardens with a walled kitchen garden to the south and a range of buildings to the east which could well have been the usual domestic offices, with a glasshouse at the southerly end. The site of the present Japanese garden is marked as a small area containing a few trees.

Sir Richard Ashmole Cooper of Shenstone Court, Staffs, (2nd Bart) purchased the house at Felden Lodge c.1926. He had married Alice Elizabeth Cooper of Spondon, Derbyshire in 1900. At the beginning of the 20th century, several Arts and Crafts houses and gardens were being laid out in this area, such as Felden Orchard, by Forsyth and Maule, and Feldenhurst by AE Bullock.

Lady Alice is credited with laying out the 'Japanese' garden at Felden but we do not have an exact date, nor the name of the designer. However, Sir Richard's brother was Dr William Francis Cooper who lived at Hertcombe, Kingston Hill and married Eileen Hill 'of Coombe Warren, Kingston', the site of the great Veitch Nurseries and Japanese garden which still survives in part.

Cooper appears to have moved from Ashlyns Hall, Berkhamsted which was near the family firm of Cooper & Nephews of Berkhamsted (and following a merger, Cooper, McDougall & Robertson). who manufactured a famous dip for sheep scab.

In 1933 the house was sold to Charles Albert Searle and the sales advertisement Constable and Maude of Grosvenor Square London described it as *The most up-to-date and attractive small country seat* in 60 acres of grounds. This included *unusually beautiful **Rock and Water Gardens*** as well as the usual complement of lawns and herbaceous borders (the remnants of a rosery garden can be seen opposite the main entrance to the house).

Cooper moved to White Lodge (formerly The Kraal) in Berkhamsted in 1933. This house by architect Dan Gibson, had a garden which had been commissioned from Thomas Mawson, the famous landscape architect, in 1904. It had been laid out for Lt Col S Timson (VD) who was the General Manager at Coopers. Mawson wrote about this particular garden in some detail in his book *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*. The coopers later moved to Britwell on Berkhamsted Common, which they renamed Shenstone Court and another Japanese garden was laid out. It is now named Castle Village (q.v.)

By 1940 Felden Lodge was in the possession of the Birnbaum family who offered accommodation to about 20 Dutch refugees.

After World War II Felden Lodge was purchased by The Boys Brigade as their national centre and the house and its 32 acres continues in that use.

Principal Building

Two storey mid-Victorian pale brick building with double-height bay windows flanking the main entrance. A service wing lies to the east. The building has been much extended to accommodate the conference centre. It first appears on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map, there being no buildings shown on the Bryant map of 1821/22 nor on the Ordnance Survey Drawing of 1806.

Approach

The drive is across Sheethanger Common, approaching the house from the north-east past a lodge [now in separate ownership] and through woodlands to arrive at the east side of the house then sweep round to the main entrance on the south.

Stable Block

No separate stable block is shown on the 1st edition map, although the buildings to the east of the house, may have been used. In the 20th century these were converted to the garages with 2 conservatories attached and flat above for the chauffeur.

Pleasure grounds

The land to the west and north falls away down to the Bovingdon road giving good views across the Chilterns. Formerly this was farmland with the house being surrounded by belts of woodland with the main gardens lying to the south of the house. By the 1930s the tree cover had been removed to reveal the views, the carriage weep extended to a turning circle at the south front. A range of glasshouses (conservatory) has been built to the east of the house next to the site of the Japanese Garden. A small wooden summer house is positioned at the south end of the gardens and evidence on the ground suggests this was a rosery or similar. To the west of the lawns, separated by shrubbery is a levelled lawn with low ornamental walls and steps suitable for croquet or tennis. Some topiary remains on the south lawn, and a flagpole has been added, possibly by the Boys Brigade

Japanese Garden

This lies to the east of the house, behind a wall separating it from the current car park. It is approached past the buildings to which were once attached a conservatory. Evidence of ornamental walling and an ornamental Maple are in this entrance area. The garden runs north-south and contains a sinuous lake, lined with concrete and remains of a blue coating. At the northern end are stepping stones and a feature where the water would have cascaded in. The water flowed to the south end of the lake, past more stepping stones. Remnants of the piping from the recycling system for the water were found during building works on the adjacent buildings some years ago.

Planting includes ornamental maples, bamboo and some outgrown shrubs. Inappropriate species such as laurel have subsequently been planted, and these, together with brambles and outgrown pines, are causing problems.

A stone path winds round the lake, and across the stepping stones, with a platform at the southern end which could have had a Japanese Tea House or similar on it. This garden is remarkably similar in layout, size and atmosphere to the restored Japanese garden laid out by the same owner at what is now Castle Village (q.v.). No stone Japanese garden artefacts, such as lanterns, have been found. The lake was used as a dipping pond for the Boys Brigade but does not now hold water

Walled Garden

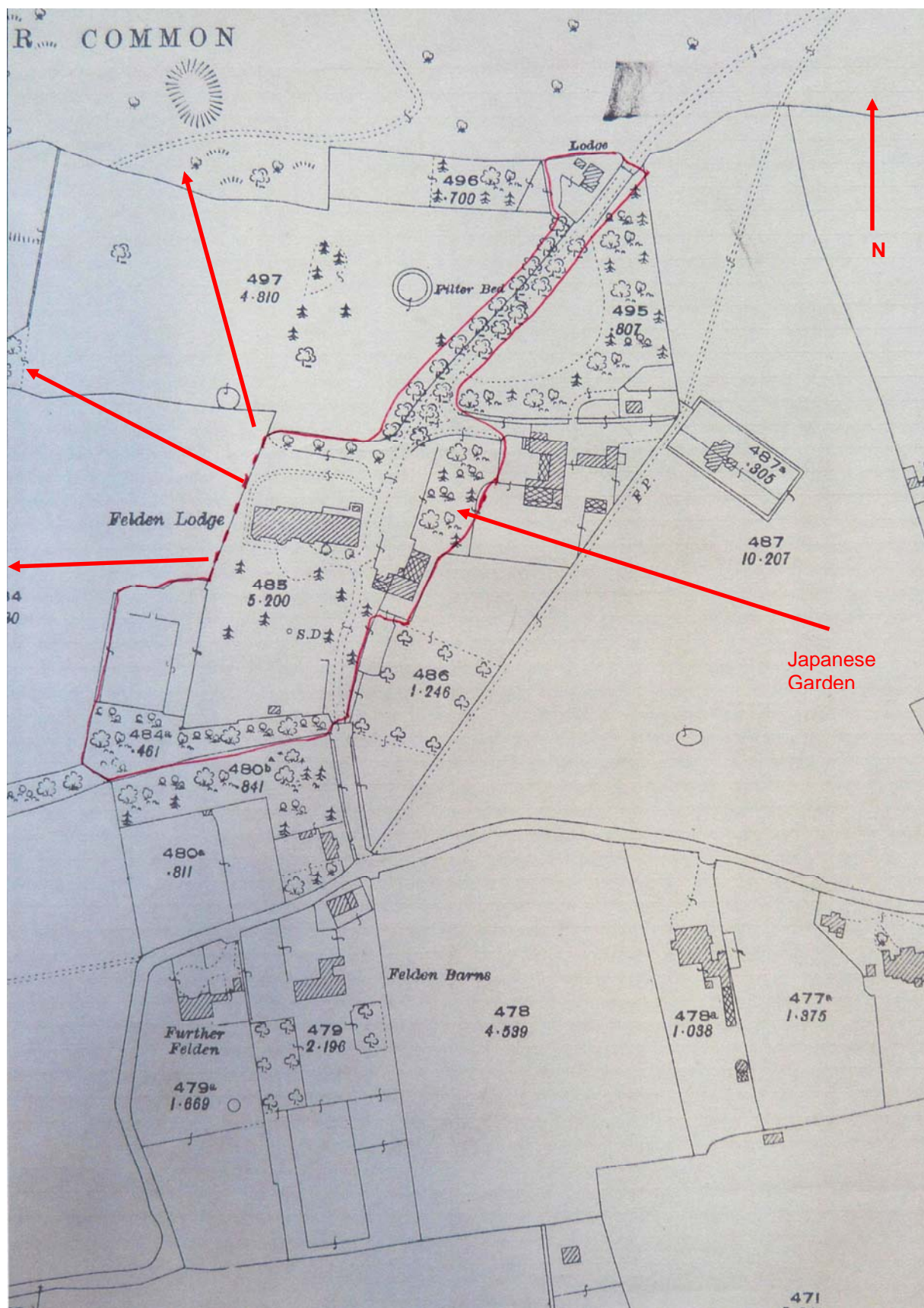
The 1st edition OS shows a large walled garden to the south of the south lawns, divided into to by a north-south path and with a perimeter path inside the walls and a square pond of tank just inside the northern wall. No glasshouses or backsheds are shown. By the 1930s, this area has been taken into the pleasure grounds, the northern wall demolished and a summerhouse placed against the back wall. The east wall is still in position.

By the 1930s a separate building around three sides of a courtyard was built to the north east of the house, off the drive. This has several glasshouses attached to it and a walled garden on its south and east sides. It has now been converted to a private residence.

Important people associated with site: Sir Richard and Lady (Alice) Cooper, owners	
Assessment of significance: One of 2 Japanese gardens in the Berkhamsted area laid out by Lady Cooper in the late Arts and Crafts period. It is set in grounds which still retain some of the other Arts and Crafts details	
Principal Uses: Main area: Boys Brigade HQ. Japanese Garden: Derelict	
Public Access/Rights of Way: None	
Designations: Conservation Area	
Sources of information: HALS	
Site visited by: Hertfordshire Gardens Trust	Date: 2008, 2012.2013



Ordnance Survey 1st Edition Sheet XXXIII.15 25":1 mile



Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 1937-39. Sheet XXX.III.15. Scale 25":1 mile



Stepping Stones and Cascade Entrance



Lake looking north



Entrance to Japanese Garden



Northern Stepping stones



Japanese Garden 2012



Steps to Croquet Lawn



Croquet Lawn



Post WWII photograph (n.d.) showing south lawn and path system with carriage sweep. Top right shows one of the conservatories