

HERTFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST  
LOCAL LIST: **DACORUM**

Present Name of Site  
**CASTLE VILLAGE**

Historic Name  
**Britwell**  
**Shenstone Court**  
**Berkhamsted Hill**

Parish/Town

**Potten End, Berkhamsted**

National Grid Reference of Principal Building: TL 003 087

Present Area (approximate)      c. 27 Acres

### **Brief Description**

Arts and Crafts style gardens laid out around an Edwardian country house with views over the Bulbourne valley. Although much of the land now has retirement houses, the south lawn, sunken garden and Japanese Garden survive in good condition.

### **Brief History**

The mansion was built as a retirement home for Sir John Evans of Nash Mills as Britwell in 1905-6 to a design by George Hubbard, Evans's nephew, and built by local firm RA Matthews. Bought by Sir Arthur Cory Wright in 1908, it was renamed Berkhamsted Hill. The house was later extended by the Deen family who purchased it in 1919. They built 2 further storeys to the servants' wing and added a billiard room. The inside of the house was refurbished with Tudor panelling, firebricks and ornate ceilings.

The house was purchased by Sir Richard Ashmole Cooper in 1937 (see Felden Lodge entry) and renamed Shenstone Court after the family estate in Staffordshire. On his death the estate was sold in 1947 to the family firm, Cooper, McDougall and Robertson and the house became an administration block known as Berkhamsted Hill, for the research facility for the company. In 1959 Wellcome Foundation acquired Coopers and continued to use the estate as a research facility, installing computers in the attics in 1980. In 1991, the new owners, Pitman Moore, moved the research facility elsewhere and the site fell vacant. After various schemes were proposed, the development of the retirement village was agreed in 1999 and clearance and construction began.

### **Principal Building**

Queen Anne style of 2 storeys and an attic, of 7 bays. The central 4 bays are surmounted by a pediment. The doorway has Tuscan columns and consoles with open segmental pediment over shell. It is of English bond in purple brick with red brick dressings, surmounted by a hipped tile roof with large cornice. [See EH listing]

### **Approach**

The drive reaches the north front of the mansion from the east. The entrance court has a small grass plot with a sundial in the centre and shrubbery to the north. The stable block, with several glasshouses was formerly to the west of the entrance court but has now been demolished

### **Pleasure Grounds**

These extended south and west of the mansion. To the south are:

A terrace with steps down to

Lawns

Which have a path across them reaching the woodland perimeter where the path meanders through the woodland.

Further south is the **Japanese Garden**

This was laid out by Lady (Alice) Cooper and is almost identical in design to the one she had previously laid out at Felden Lodge (q.v.) A concrete-lined sinuous pool runs roughly north to south, with stepping stone at the northern end (now covered with a modern Japanese-style bridge). The path meanders around the lake and across the bridge (stepping stones). A small cascade admits the water which flows past the stepping stone to the fountain at the southern end. On the east bank is a brick built polygonal summer house. This garden has been restored with much bonsai and other 'Japanese' planting, and is well-maintained.

To the west of the house is the

Sunken garden. A low wall of limestone rocks planted with ferns in the interstices and bedding on top surrounds a long rectangular lawn. The centre of the lawn has a stone tank and paving and the surrounding lawn walk at the higher level can be reached by four stone steps from this feature. The windows of the house at the east side (formerly the library) looks out over the garden.

This led to a walled garden through a gateway slightly set back from the walls. It had 2 cross paths and a niche at the western end. This now has been built over.

**Important people associated with site:**

Sir John Evans, owner, former manager at Nash Mills (q.v.) for John Dickinson of Abbots Hill (q.v.), related by marriage to Charles Longman of Shendish (q.v.) and archaeologist (most famously at Knossos)

Deen family, owners of the nation-wide Blue Star Garage chain and owners.

Sir Richard Ashmole Cooper of Cooper, McDougall and Robertson of Berkhamsted and Lady (Alice) Cooper, owner and garden designer.(see also Felden Lodge)

Wellcome Foundation, owners of research facility at Berkhamsted Hill.

**Assessment of significance:**

This site has connections to two of the most important local families and businesses; Coopers and Dickinsons. Both these families laid out other locally important gardens (Shendish, Abbots Hill, Nash Mills) or were involved, with major designers such as Edward Kemp (at Shendish), Thomas Mawson (White Hill, a former home of Cooper). The Japanese garden is uniquely one of pair laid out by the same owner, Lady Cooper, of remarkably similar design in the area (q.v. Felden Lodge), in the 1930s. Both these Japanese gardens are set on the top of hills with no views out, although the other components of both Arts-and-Crafts style gardens have extensive views over the Chilterns. Although some elements, such as the stable block and kitchen garden have been built over, much of the new housing is built around these gardens, which still form an appropriate and beautiful setting for the listed Edwardian mansion.

**Principal Uses:** Retirement Village

**Public Access/Rights of Way:** None

**Designations:** Green Belt

House listed Grade II

Gate piers and flanking walls listed Grade II

**Sources of information:**

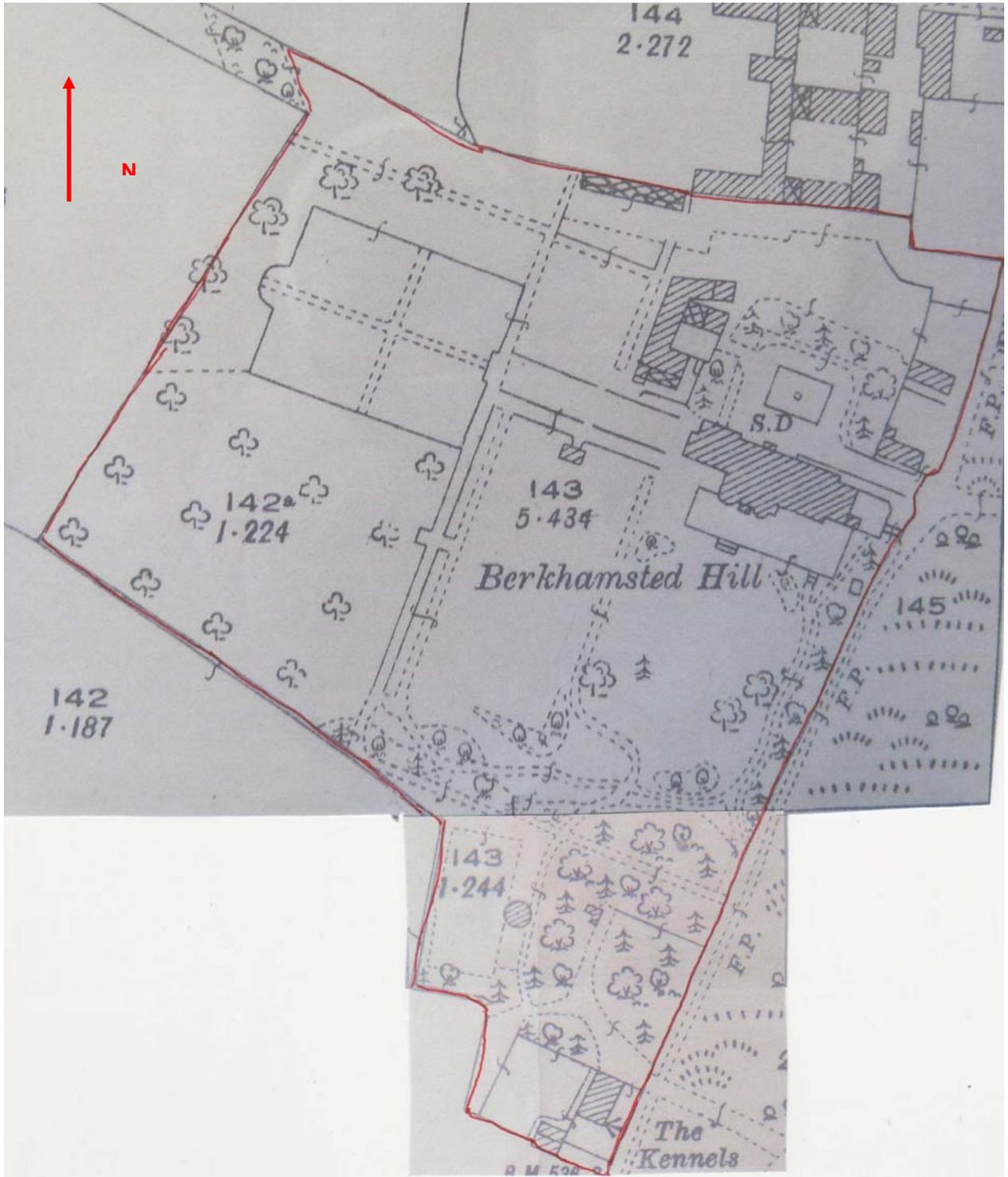
*The House on the Hill* Felicity Lidderdale,

Ordnance Survey maps no XXXIII.1 for various dates

EH Listing documents

Personal Communications from residents at Castle Village

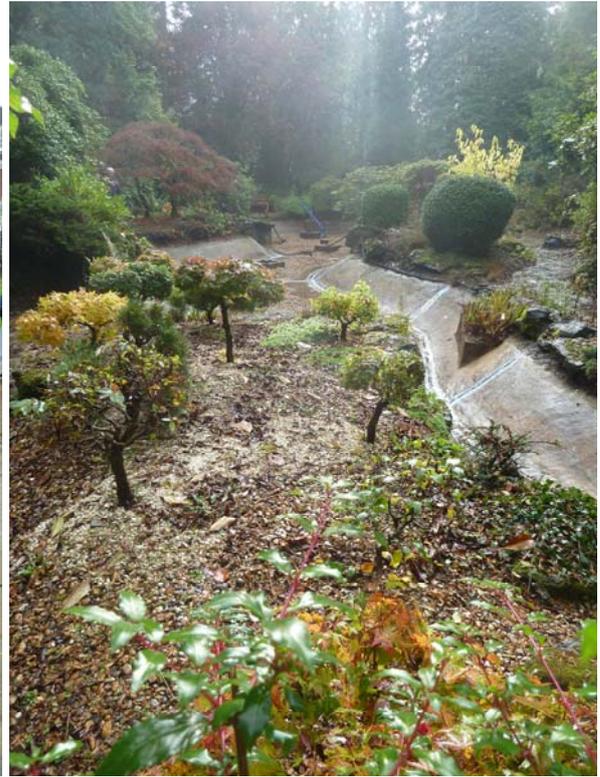
**Site visited by:** Hertfordshire Gardens Trust      **Date:** 2013



Ordnance Survey Sheets XXXIII.5 and XXXIII.5. 1925.  
Scale 25":1 mile [not to scale]



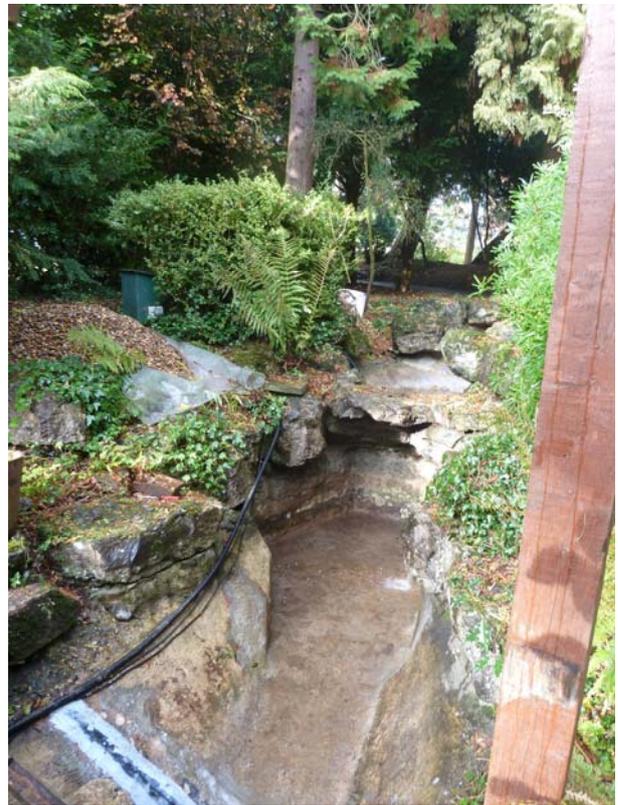
**Sunken Garden**



**Japanese Garden [pool drained]**



**Stepping Stones**



**Cascade**



**South Lawns**