

HERTFORDSHIRE GARDENS TRUST
LOCAL LIST: **DACORUM**

Present Name of Site **CHAMPNEYS**

Historic Name (if known)
FOSTERS, FORSTERS

Parish/Town: **Wigginton**

National Grid Reference of Principal Building: SP946 087

Present Area (approximate) 170 Acres Hectares

Brief Description

First mentioned as a manor of Tring in 1514 although records of the estate go back to 1307 with Ralph de Champney.

The present house was built by Emily Sutton, who inherited the property in 1871 and married Richard Valpy. She also enlarged the estate by 200 acres. In 1902 Canon Valpy, son of Richard and Emily, sold the estate to the Rothschilds of Tring Park .It was intended as a dower house for Lady Rothschild, who never occupied it but let it to Alexander Marc by 1908. In 1923, after the death of Nathaniel Rothschild, she sold it to Stanley Lief, who added the L-shaped wing. He set up the first health resort in Britain, the Nature and Health Cure Clinic, which he brought from Orchard Leigh at Chesham. His regime was spartan and holistic, but it became fashionable and while he lived the Clinic was very successful. It became less so after his death, and by 1972 the estate was run down' During WWII the house served as headquarters for the local Home Guard platoon, captained by Lief. The clinic revived after 1972 and was transformed into a major health resort and college, with a good deal of new building.

The original farm buildings and stables lie to the north of the house and parkland lies on the other three sides

Principal Building: The house, close to the site of a medieval moat was built in the mid 19C by Emily Anne Sutton, who married Richard Valpy, the earlier house being demolished at that time. The Rothschilds after 1902 added the grand turrets and red brick of the centre section, which forms the entrance to the present mansion in the distinctive family style. The entrance front faces northwest. The garden front faces southeast with views, now partially obscured, over parkland. The L-shaped wing was added in 1925 by Stanley Lief.

Approach: The main drive is from the **Lodge** on Chesham Road to the west of the house and curves gently southeast, along the line used in the 19th century, past a large complex of spa and hotel buildings to the car park to the north of the house. There is limited vehicle access to the front of the house.

A second approach from Shootersway leads west to the mansion from a **lodge** through Newsetts Wood and open parkland which has replaced the wooded belt of the 19th century.

Stable block/other utilitarian buildings: Buildings north of the Victorian mansion. one long range with two wings extending SW, are shown on OS 25 inch plan, 1st edition. 1878-89, as part of a planned farm layout. The smaller buildings which were part of this complex have disappeared

Pleasure grounds: The circular carriage sweep to the entrance on the northwest is still extant, although with the central bed much reduced in size. The shrubbery to the north of the approach now contains a car park. The cross paths and 'bastion' delineated on the 1898 OS map are still evident, with the 'bastion now being represented by a sweeping hedge. The

grounds to the north of this feature have had new wings for the clinic built on them and the vista to the path now houses a tennis court.

On the 1898 OS map there is a raised terrace along the south and west fronts with central steps leading to the lawn from the south front. The terrace to the west front and the wet end of the south front terrace still survive although much of the rest has been obliterated by modern spa buildings. Lief built chalets along the east side of the south lawn and today these have been replaced with modern accommodation blocks.

The ornamented boundary between the pleasure garden and the park still exists as do the two intersecting paths on the south lawn, as seen on the 1898 OS map.

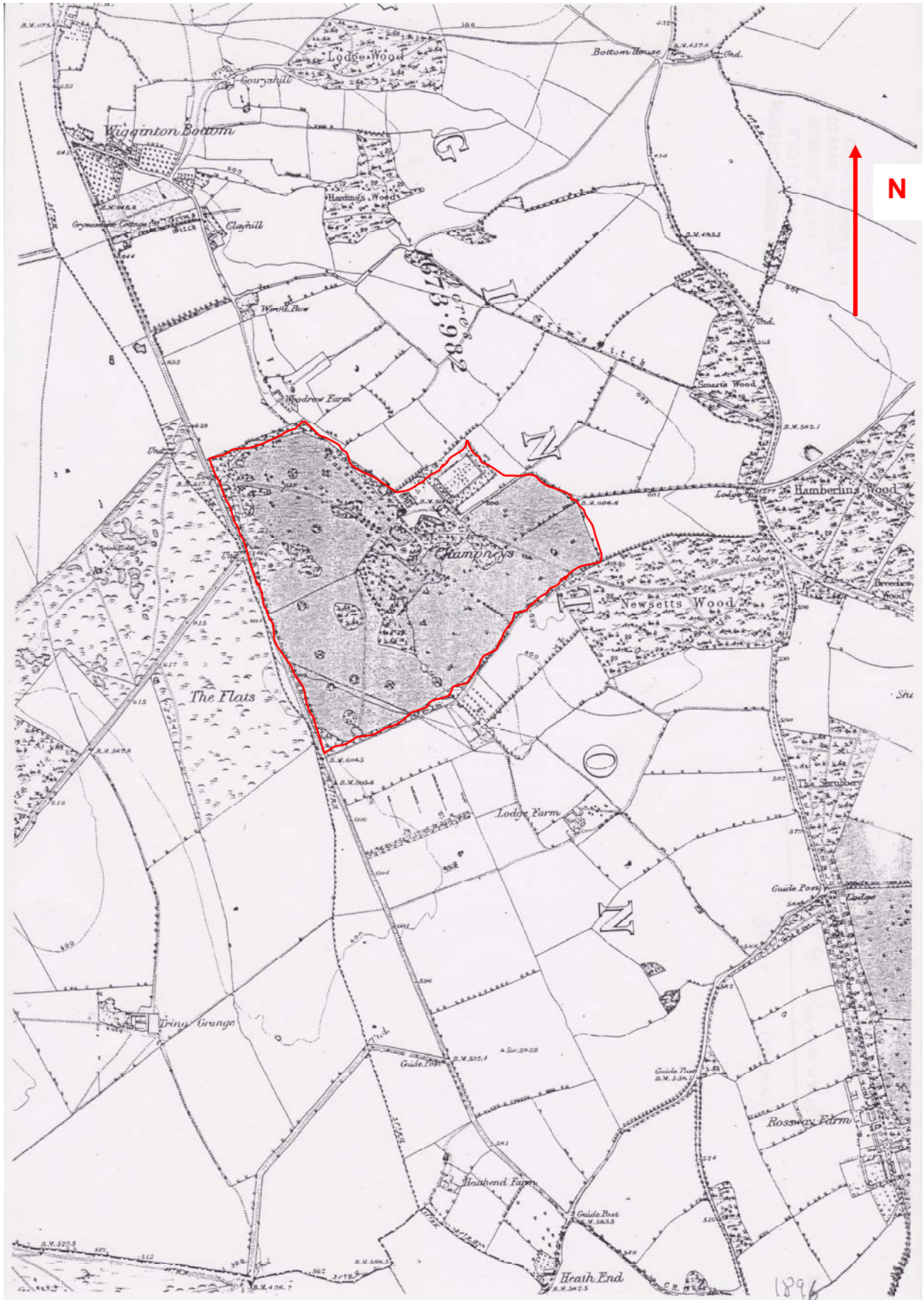
The layout of the sweeping lawns and mature trees to the southeast of the mansion shown on the 1898 map is still intact although the perimeter belt has thickened to include a once-discrete clump in the park. Two tennis courts have been built to the southeast of the ornamental boundary.

Walled Kitchen Garden: Currently laid to grass but with the original cross paths still visible and remains of shed/greenhouses (shown as greenhouses on the 2nd edition OS map 1898) against the northwest wall. The longest cross path was formerly lined with fruit trees and further trees were planted outside the east, west and south walls. The site of the greenhouses on the outside of the NW wall is now used as an access road. The slips to the southwest of the garden are now used for car and lorry parking.

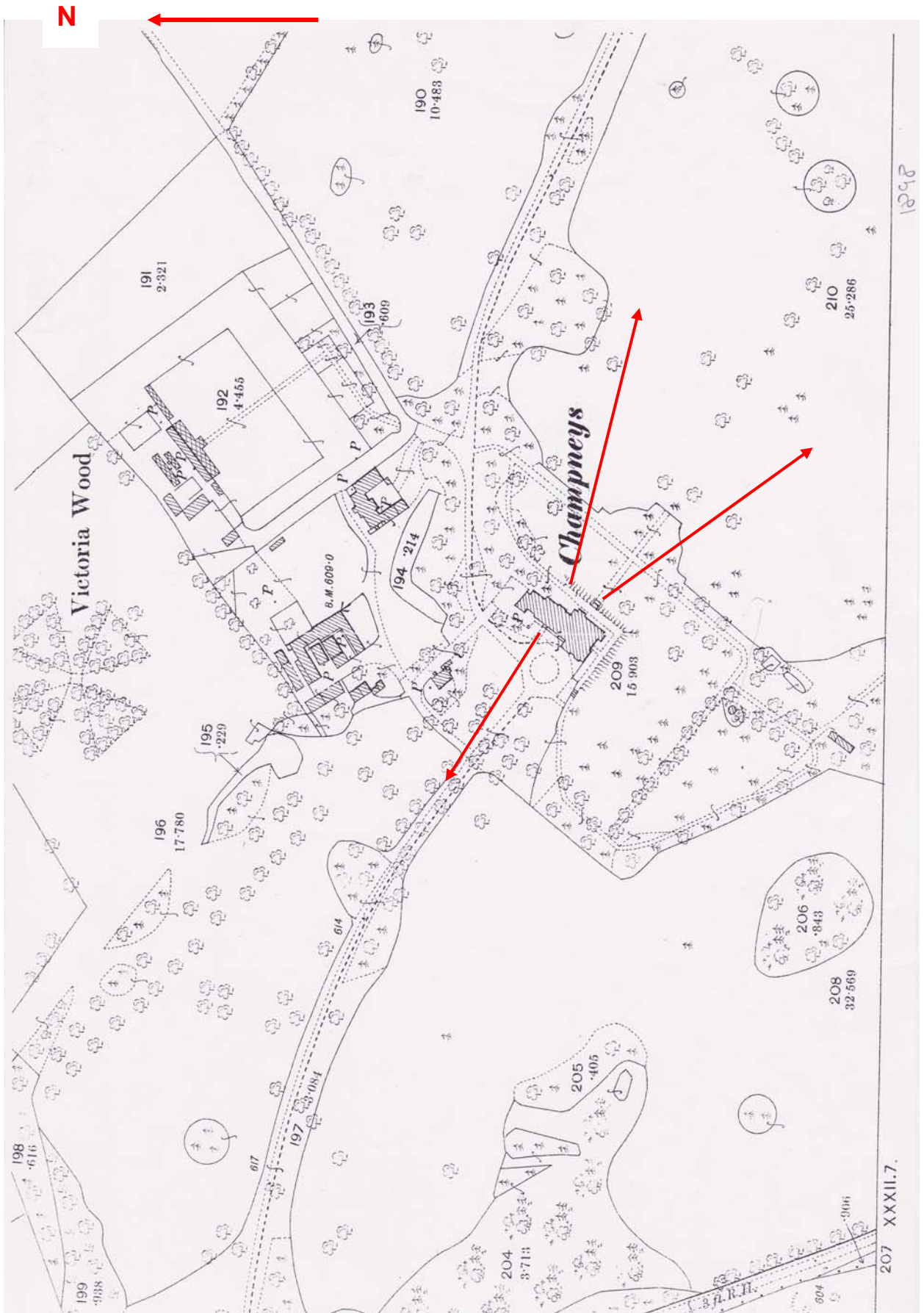
Park: The layout of the planting today follows a very similar pattern to that on the 1896 OS and 1925 OS maps. There are mature *Wellingtonias* planted in the 19th century. A pond north of Champneys House has a north-west projecting arm, and is on the Wigginton tithe map as a moat in a field marked Moat Meadow; the field to the north is Moat Field. A pond NW of the house (SP 94652 08842) has the shape of a decoy pond. The woodland and parkland alongside the main road has been developed with single houses set in spacious gardens, although the buildings are screened from the estate with trees.

Victoria Wood (qv): To the north of the mansion and northwest of the walled garden is Victoria Wood. This was planted in the form of a Victoria Cross but is now rather ragged.

Important people associated with site:	
Owner: Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (c.1535), Rothschild family	
Resident: Stanley Lief, Health spa pioneer	
Soldier: James Osborne	
Assessment of significance: Small Estate showing the Rothschild 'House-style' and still largely intact. Significant as the 1 st spa/health resort of modern Britain.	
Principal Uses: Hotel, Spa, Conference Centre	
Public Access/Rights of Way: None	
Designations: (e.g. Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Area, Listed Buildings, EH Register of Historic Parks & Gardens, Tree Preservation Orders, SSSIs, Nature Reserve, National Trust, County Wildlife Site, etc)	
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	
Green Belt	
Landscape Character Area: 110 Ashlyns and Wigginton Plateau	
Sources of information:	
Site visited by: Hertfordshire Gardens Trust	Date: 2009



Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1896 Sheet XXXII Scale 6":1 Mile



Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1898 Sheet XXXII.3 Scale 25":1 mile