

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 22 December 2009

Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year

Crowsley Park

Our first visit to the BBC owned area of the park (the park hosts the antenna farm which is connected to the Caversham listening station 4 miles away, which has been there since 1943) took place at the end of November supervised by the ubiquitous Tony Austin. We were working next to the North Lodge clearing brambles and hawthorn.

We were treated at coffee time to the story of a story relating to the original owners - The Baskervilles and their fractious relationship with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who stayed nearby.

Crowsley Park, or as it is termed in ancient writings Crouchley Park, is the seat of Henry Baskerville, Esq. This estate originally belonged to the Aldsworth family. The park contains about 160 acres, and it is well stocked with deer, and finely wooded. The mansion is a brick building, with an embattled parapet and square towers, erected about the time of James II. It was purchased by the present owner in 1845, and has since been much improved.

The gated entrance by the North Lodge is flanked by two veteran cedars (Lebanese and Atlas) now called Conan and Doyle (see photo below).

The family crest of the Baskervilles had hounds on it. Above the front entrance porch over the Coat of Arms was a large hound. The entrance stone gateposts were topped with a stone 'hellhound' with a spear through their mouths! According to an ancient Norse legend, if the spears are dislodged from the mouths of these symbols of suppressed evil, the crack of doom will ring out the end for us all.



Could it be that The Hound of the Baskervilles was written to spite the family because of the aforementioned relationship?

Even more bizarre is an account of experiences at Crowsley Park during WWII by Dennis Faulkner - this can be found on the BBC Website - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/24/a7158224.shtml>

Enjoy reading chapter 8 - "A Very Strange Affair"

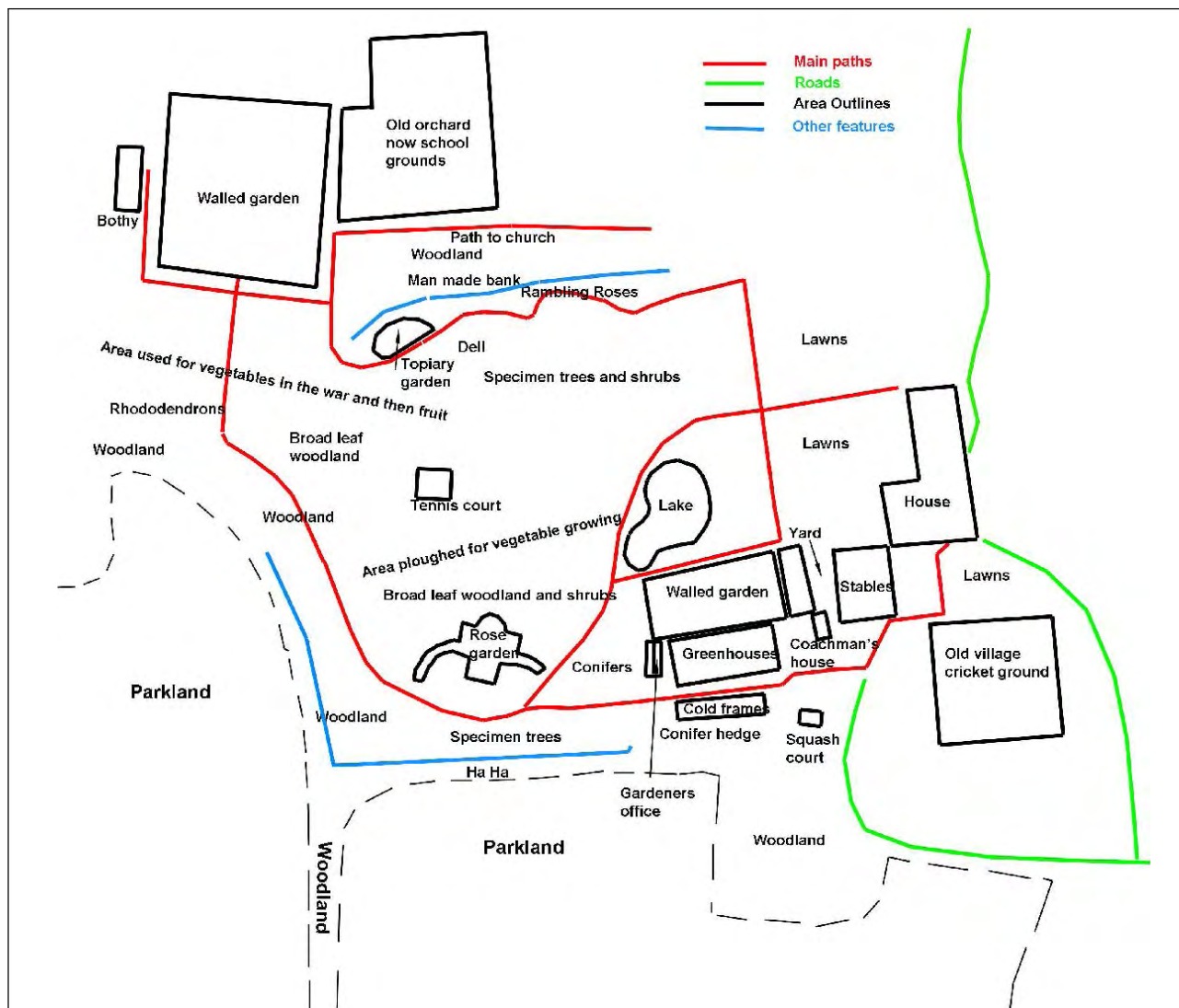
Site Focus: Joyce Grove

Pre-1900 the car parks to the south of the present house were the Nettlebed village cricket green. In 1903 Robert Fleming bought 2000 acres (most of the village) and gave the present cricket ground and pavilion to the village, to compensate for the loss of the previous facility. Subsequent to Fleming's death in 1933, the house and 30 acres of land was gifted to St. Mary's hospital Paddington in 1938, by the Fleming family. It was then used for training nurses and as a convalescent home. Finally the hospital decided to sell it to Sue Ryder in 1978.

Because the house pre-dated mains water and electricity, everything had to be supplied locally in a sustainable fashion. For fresh water, the main house had a well 350 feet deep and in addition had green water supplied from rain water run-off, as well as hot water; so most facilities in the house had three taps. The rain water was stored in large underground tanks which were below the yard and under terraces surrounding the house. In addition there was a pond called Wanbourne pond (now filled in) which was used to supply the narrow gauge steam engine which hauled the clay from the hill to the kilns (there were many active kilns at the time Joyce Grove was built, some large and some owned and operated by one-man). Fleming piped water from Wanbourne pond to the house, the lake, the gardens and on to the troughs in the park for the livestock. All the waste from the house was piped away to deep bore holes in the parks. At some point in its history there was also a generator house with battery storage, which supplied electricity to the house.

The outline map gives an indication of the layout of the gardens prior to the Second World War, as well as the present layout.

The stable yard to the south of the house had accommodation above for the stable lads and an awning to protect riders and coaches from the weather which was originally glass covered. Next to the stable yard is the Coachman's cottage and another large yard which housed the coke boilers used to supply hot water to the house. Beneath the entrance to the walled garden from the yard was the mushroom cellar. The greenhouses, of which there is very little trace, had three independent coke boilers which supplied hot water that was piped around them. There was a grape viney and camellia houses where there are now the wooden sheds used to store sale items for the Sue Ryder home. The greenhouses were also used to grow peaches and nectarines. Some were canted from the wall of the walled garden and others were free-standing in parallel rows. To the south of the main path past the stables and yards were an extensive area of cold frames used to bring on the flower and vegetable produce. The old open store beyond where the greenhouses used to be was a boiler house and next to this by the entrance to the



walled garden is the head gardener's office and seed store. The other side of the brick wall to these buildings were the heated fig house and palm house.

The walled garden, next to the greenhouses, had a main path along the centre and smaller walkways towards the edges. The eastern end, near the house, was used to grow roses and had a flower border. The southern wall had beds of lily-of-the-valley; the western end was for raspberries and climbing blackcurrants with fruit tree espaliers and cordons. The walls were used to grow peaches and nectarines, plums and comice pears.

The old rose garden was surrounded by a yew hedge (which is now restored to its former glory) and the walkways were edged with slates, some of which still remain. The centre-piece was topped with a much larger urn than that present today. All the beds were filled with strongly scented rose bushes, not the shrubs we see now. To the south of the rose garden and main path is the Ha Ha, which separated the gardens from the parkland and prevented livestock entering the gardens. The Ha Ha is built using flint to the south and becomes brick after the corner where it faces west.

The old summer house at the far end of the gardens and facing the back of the house stood next to the hard tennis court which has long since vanished, but the summer house has been restored in recent years. During the Second World War the area to the north and west of the tennis court was a vegetable growing area surrounded by rhododendrons of various sizes. The strip between the tennis court and the lake was also a vegetable growing area, these areas of the garden which are now seen as open grassland were ploughed to allow vegetables to be grown. Twice a week a van arrived from St. Mary's hospital in London to collect crates of fresh fruit and vegetables. After 1947 fruit trees were planted in some of these ploughed areas and a few still remain today. The large walled garden to the west of the site is now owned by the council. It had a path across the middle with trees arched over a frame. The area was mostly a vegetable

garden but there were soft fruit cages for currants etc. and the walls were used for peaches, nectarines, plums and gages. Below the walled garden are the bothy block stables. Around the walled garden was a grass walk up to the church and along the wall were gooseberry bushes. The path was lined with laburnum and hawthorn. The school was built on what used to be the old fruit orchard.

The yew topiary garden, which is presently a long term restoration project, is shown below.



Stop Press

Reading Golf Club very generously hosted a lavish luncheon for the Green Gym to say thank you for the tasks completed during 2009 - many thanks to them from all the group.



The final steps

Badgemore Primary School

We have now finished our visits to the school and accomplished two remaining tasks. We cleared a small pond and added steps to give better access to the raised vegetable plots. We placed plastic sheeting on the ground before covering with wood chippings. Hopefully this will keep the paths clear of weeds.



Temple Island Meadows

It is always nice to have satisfied clients and Horace and his four friends seemed extremely satisfied with the willow that we were cutting down at the Temple Island site. They obviously found it just to their taste as they munched away at the leafy branches. For Horace and his friends are cattle – Angus cross White Park – that have been brought in by Tony Austin as an experiment to see how they cope with keeping down the sedge and other greenery on the site. They will be taken off again once the hemlock water dropwort shows signs of regrowth as it is poisonous to them.

But for the present they are doing a tremendous job grazing down much of the undergrowth and seem very happy. Most of the time they keep well away from the footpath and walkers but the willow that the Green Gym was cutting back was obviously a treat and not to be missed. They are jet black and friendly. Horace is the leader and very docile in spite of some pretty large horns. They fraternised quite happily. →



Tony had also brought in some sheep who as sheep do – had decided that the grass is greener And had decamped to see what was going on in the field next to the garden centre. Tony had a worrying time searching for them but luckily discovered their whereabouts at the end of the session. Obviously the fences were just regarded as a challenge!!

What was very satisfying was for the Gymmers to see the project moving forward and progressing after all the work that the group has put in on what is a lovely site. (Bright sun on the water, blue sky, birds overhead and Horace. What more could you want).

ST MARY'S CHURCHYARD, STREATLEY

Our two sessions in the churchyard were welcomed by the local community and we successfully completed the allotted tasks.

The main motivation for the work was to reclaim some extra area of the churchyard for future burial plots, as well as tidying up a few other features :

Removing a large Hawthorn from inside a Yew Tree.

Removing the rotten trunk of a long dead Yew.

Removing the broken-down fence and bushes, Ivy and Lilac growing through it.

We made good use of the fire trailer to prevent damage to the graveyard.

After all the clearance we then replaced the fence between the churchyard and the roadway.



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