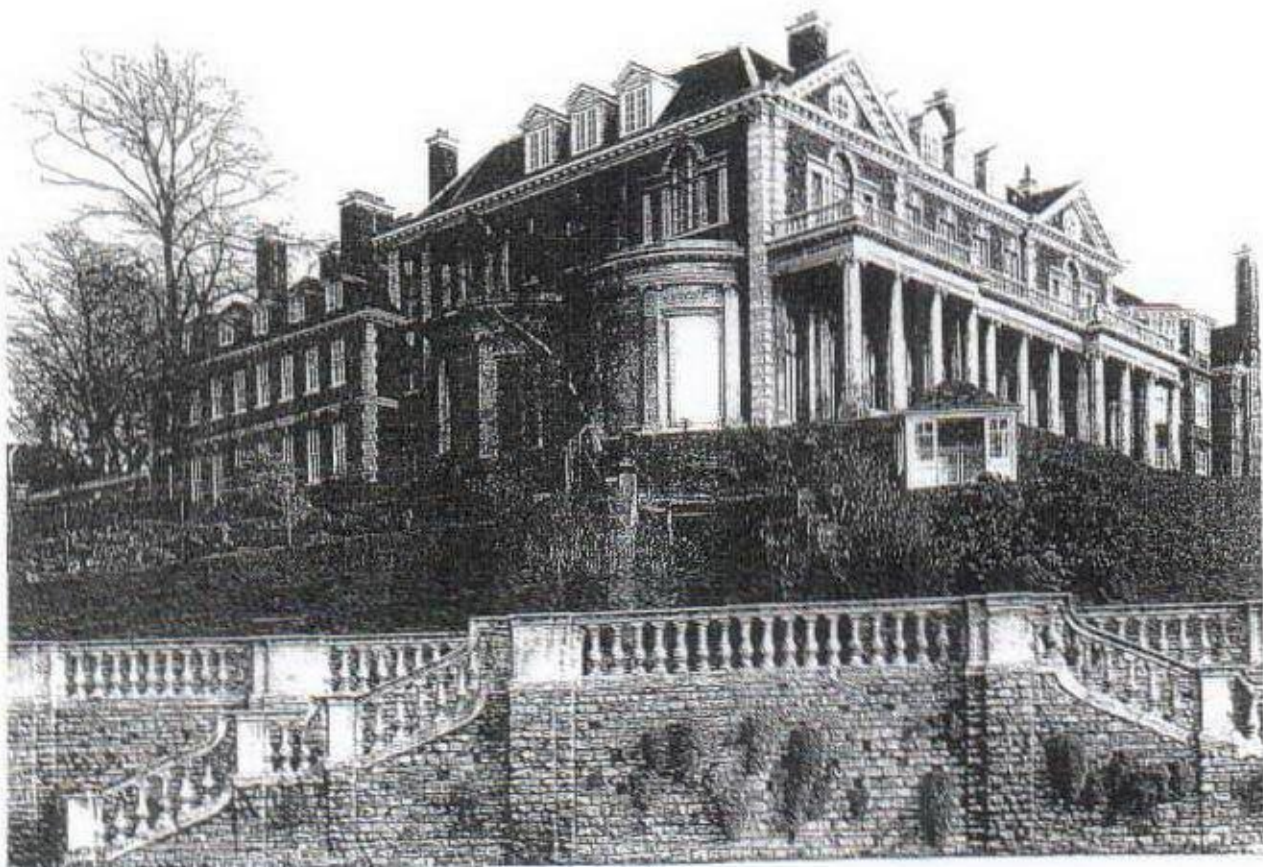


WITANHURST  
HIGHGATE

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE SURVEY

*commissioned by*

MOUNIR DEVELOPMENTS SA



JOHN BROWNING ASSOCIATES

*in collaboration with*

THE ADAMS LOXTON PARTNERSHIP AND PARKLANDS CONSORTIUM

MAY 2000

**WITANHURST  
HIGHGATE**

**GROUNDS DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
Volume 1  
SURVEY**

*Commissioned by*  
**MOUNIR DEVELOPMENTS SA**

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## WITANHURST HIGHGATE

### Introduction

This study was commissioned by Mounir Developments SA in Autumn 1999. The study was required by the Section 106 Agreement dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 1999, between Mounir Developments SA and the London Borough of Camden. The owners realised the historic importance and the outstanding quality of the gardens, but they were also aware of the gradual deterioration of the structural fabric, the tree cover and the clarity of the design. Their aim was to establish a Restoration and Management plan which would secure the future of the gardens, based on the two basic principles of conserving and enhancing the area in its entirety as a site of historic importance whilst also maximising its potential attraction to visitors and residents alike.

The gardens were designed by Harold Peto in 1913, on a site already ornamented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and enlarged by Percy Cane in the 1920s. In 1929 Seeley and Paget continued to extend the grounds and created a new entrance forecourt and lodges.

As well as the Gardens, the house in 'Queen Anne' style with its south west garden front with projecting bays and long colonnade of Ionic pillars, is listed as a building of special architectural or historic interest, Grade II. In the design for the house, the architect, George Hubbard retained just one wing of the earlier house, Parkfield when he built the magnificent new Witanhurst. The inspired relationship between the gardens and the house must secure for the site a recognition as one of the outstanding gardens of the early twentieth century and an unusual example of the work of these designers.

# WITANHURST HIGHGATE

A Survey of the Gardens and Structures prepared as Volume 1 of the Grounds  
Development Plan

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## WITANHURST, HIGHGATE

### HISTORICAL SURVEY SUMMARY

#### Survey

##### *Archive Research*

Detailed research into the history of the gardens has included primary and secondary sources. Collections sources referred to include; London Metropolitan Archive, Camden Local Studies and Archive, Holborn Library, The Highgate Institute, Royal Institute of British Architects, Drawings Collection, (RIBA) English Heritage, (EH) and the Royal Horticultural Society Linley Library (RHS).

The information emerging from the above research has been underpinned by an analysis of the broader historic developments, employing material which includes: published works on Highgate and district: directories and guide books; postcards; maps views biographies and other texts relating to the Crosfield family.

A close study of the contributions of individual designers to the site has included: George Hubbard, Harold Peto, Percy Cane, the Seeley and Paget partnership, and has been enlarged by broad contextual research into the aspirations and achievements of Peto and Cane, as evidenced in other work and their writings.

##### *Field Survey*

An understanding of the historic development of the site has been further informed by field analysis. This has been undertaken first by reference to the survey plan commissioned from A.R.P. Services. The detailed layout of the garden has not been recorded for some years, therefore the survey was an essential starting point. Comparison with early maps particularly the first edition 6" O.S. published in 1873 and the second edition, 25" O.S. published in 1914, has been most instructive.

A close inspection of the detailed layout of the site has been undertaken, which has helped to identify the extent to which the historic landscape survives. This has included an analysis of the main features: vistas, trees and vegetation, water features, paths, surfaces, edge treatments, planting lines and groupings.

#### Historic Development of Witanhurst, Highgate

The gardens at Witanhurst are, in fact, the most recent development of a long history of the site and the Queen Anne house previously known as Parkfield. Among the most outstanding elements of this history, still visible on the site include remnants of the earlier landscape; the 1913-14 design of the gardens by Harold Peto, then at the height of his career; the creation of the east garden by Percy Cane and the new entrance forecourt and lodges by Seeley and Paget in 1929.

- \* Much of the historic design in terms of circulation patterns, structures, details of surface finish and planting, have been eroded, replaced or are in poor condition.

## Conclusions

### *Early Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Gardens*

Gardens and orchards already existed on this site by 1745. During the nineteenth century the site continued to grow from the four acres existing in 1801 to eleven acres recorded in the 1889 sale catalogue when the house had an extensive conservatory, and detached billiard room and also included a separate detached property, The Limes in Fitzroy Park.

### *Peto Legacy*

Sir Arthur Crosfield and his wife Domini carried out extensive improvements to the grounds, commissioning two of the foremost designers of the early twentieth century. There is considerable evidence of Harold Peto's work still visible, including the gardens around the house, the grand staircase and terrace, tennis lawns, loggia and the formal terrace gardens.

### *Percy Cane*

Percy Cane's small formal garden to the east of the mansion executed in the late 1920s was small but complex. He provided a formal garden and summerhouse on a site which was steep and irregular and partially enclosed by walls from the demolished Dorchester House. In his description of the borders within the garden the care taken with the design is most apparent.

### *Entrance forecourt and lodges*

The architects Seeley and Paget were responsible for creating a new entrance to Witanhurst and designed two new lodges, North and South lodge which formed a gatehouse to the property. They also created a longer approach and formed a new walled enclosure in front of the house. The enclosure was laid out in a pattern of circles and semi-circles divided by stone paths and inset with pebbles.

### *Changing Ownership*

In 1963 Lady Crosfield died and Paul Crosfield inherited Witanhurst. In 1966 the property was put on the market and has recently been the subject of a series of development proposals. The current application proposes conserving both the house and gardens and the intention is to restore the site to something of its former glory.



## Witanhurst

### Introduction

The mansion of Witanhurst at Highgate, in its present form, is a relatively recent creation of eighty years ago, but it incorporates part of a much older property, Parkfield, which was built at the beginning of the eighteenth century, remodelling or replacing an earlier house. The early history of this site is therefore that of Parkfield, a classical house which itself had many additions prior to its purchase in 1913 by Arthur Crosfield, a wealthy soap manufacturer.

Arthur Crosfield employed the architect George Hubbard in 1913 to transform Parkfield into a 'Queen Anne' extravaganza, its architectural style taking its cue from the architecture of the existing house, and resulting in a mansion of sixty-four rooms, the second largest private house in London after Buckingham Palace. Crosfield renamed his house Witanhurst, from 'witangemot' the Anglo-Saxon Parliament said to have given its name to Parliament Hill, and 'hurst' from the ancient forest of Middlesex a remnant of which he liked to think was preserved in his eleven acres of grounds.<sup>1</sup>

### The History of Parkfield

Witanhurst is in Highgate, the northern part of the parish of St Pancras. For over 400 years Highgate, lying only five miles from the centre of London on the route of the Great North Road leading out of the centre of London has, because of its elevated position, attracted a number of fine houses. The history of many of these houses, built by the nobility, wealthy London merchants and city men as select houses and country retreats, is complex and as a result of a dynamic land market and changing architectural taste they have been subject to many alterations of both fabric and boundaries. The earliest and largest properties have generally been demolished and their grounds built on. One of these properties was Dorchester House, a Tudor house with extensive walled gardens on the Highgate West Hill road which was demolished by the late seventeenth century and in part of its walled garden, the prestigious row of houses now known as The Grove were subsequently built. Parkfield to the west of Dorchester House, both properties having once been in the same ownership, was probably rebuilt in the early eighteenth century and another property, Grove Bank, was built on the site of Dorchester House. These are shown, together with the hilly terrain, in somewhat schematic form in John Rocque's map of 1745 (fig.1).<sup>2</sup> The relative position of these properties is shown on (fig.2).<sup>3</sup> Parkfield was in the ownership of the Crutchfield family from 1774 until 1843. In 1804 John Crutchfield was occupying Parkfield with gardens, orchard and the Home Field amounting to over four acres.<sup>4</sup> Parkfield, although not named, is shown on a map of 1801. Lying off Highgate Hill, with the mansion, offices, outbuildings and gardens of 'Crutchfield (sic) esq.' in two roods and three perches, an orchard and garden beyond of one rood and three perches, and the Home field of three acres and two roods, making a total of over four acres (fig.3).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carol Shaw 'Witanhurst - Highgate's Great Enigma' in *Buzz* no. 120, Autumn, 1992 p. 10

<sup>2</sup> John Rocque, *Map of the County near ten miles round London begun 1741 and ended 1745*

<sup>3</sup> Taken from John Richardson *Highgate its History since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Barnet, 1983) p.94

<sup>4</sup> Camden Local Studies and Archives, Holborn Library, Terrier Book to the Engraved Map of the Parish of St Pancras by John Tompson, 1804

<sup>5</sup> Holborn Library, Map of the Parish of St Pancras by John Tomson, 1801



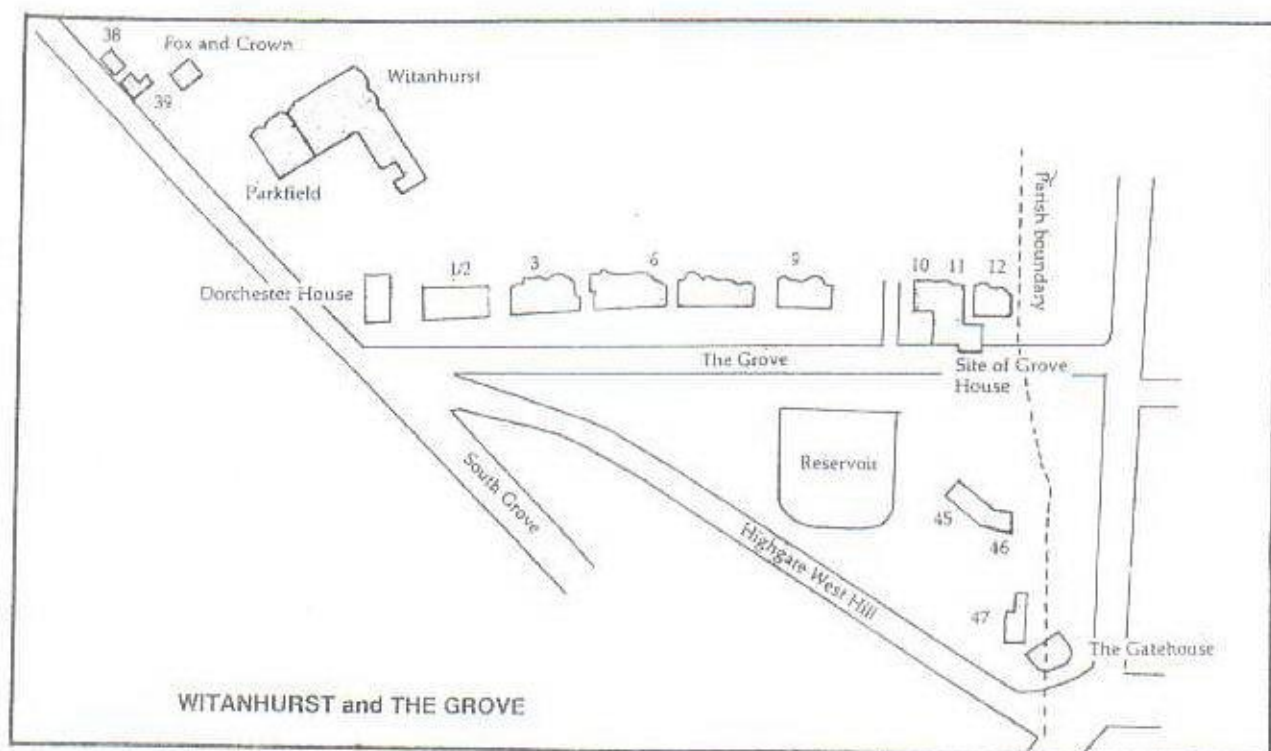


Fig 2 Relative positions of Parkfield  
Witanhurst, Dorchester House,  
and the Grove

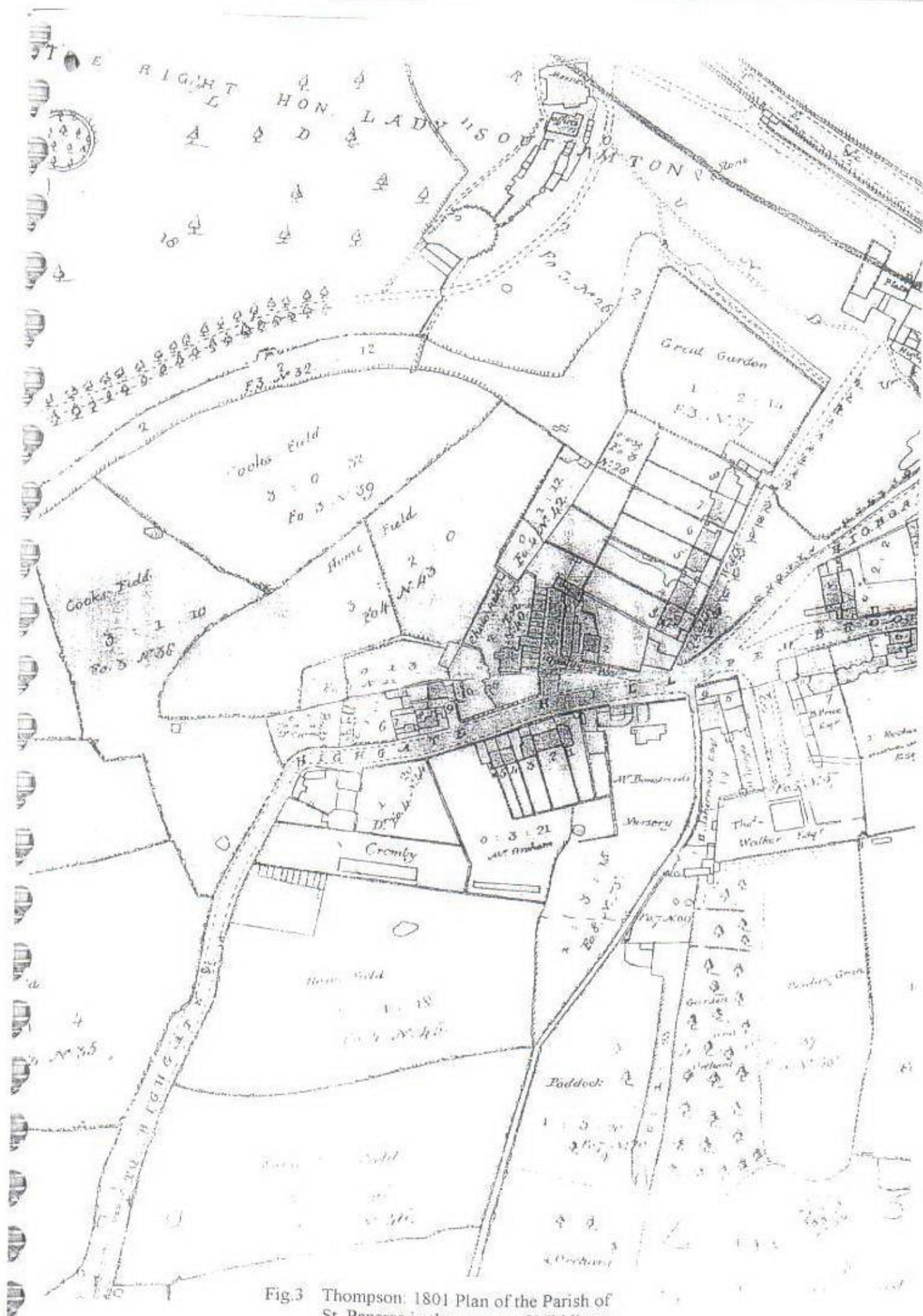


Fig.3 Thompson: 1801 Plan of the Parish of St. Pancras in the county of Middlesex



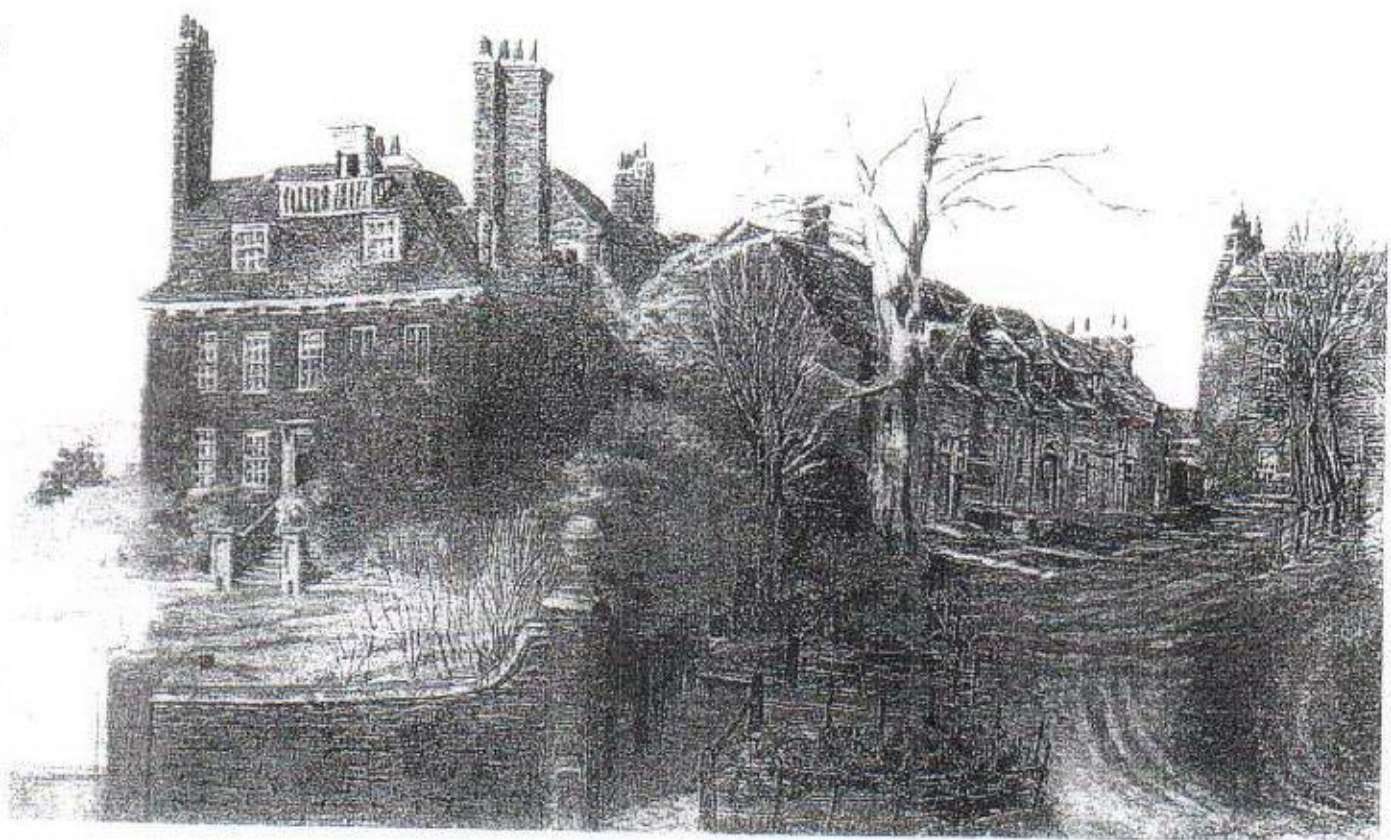


Fig 4 Parkfield, prior to its alteration by  
Walter Scrimgeour after 1889



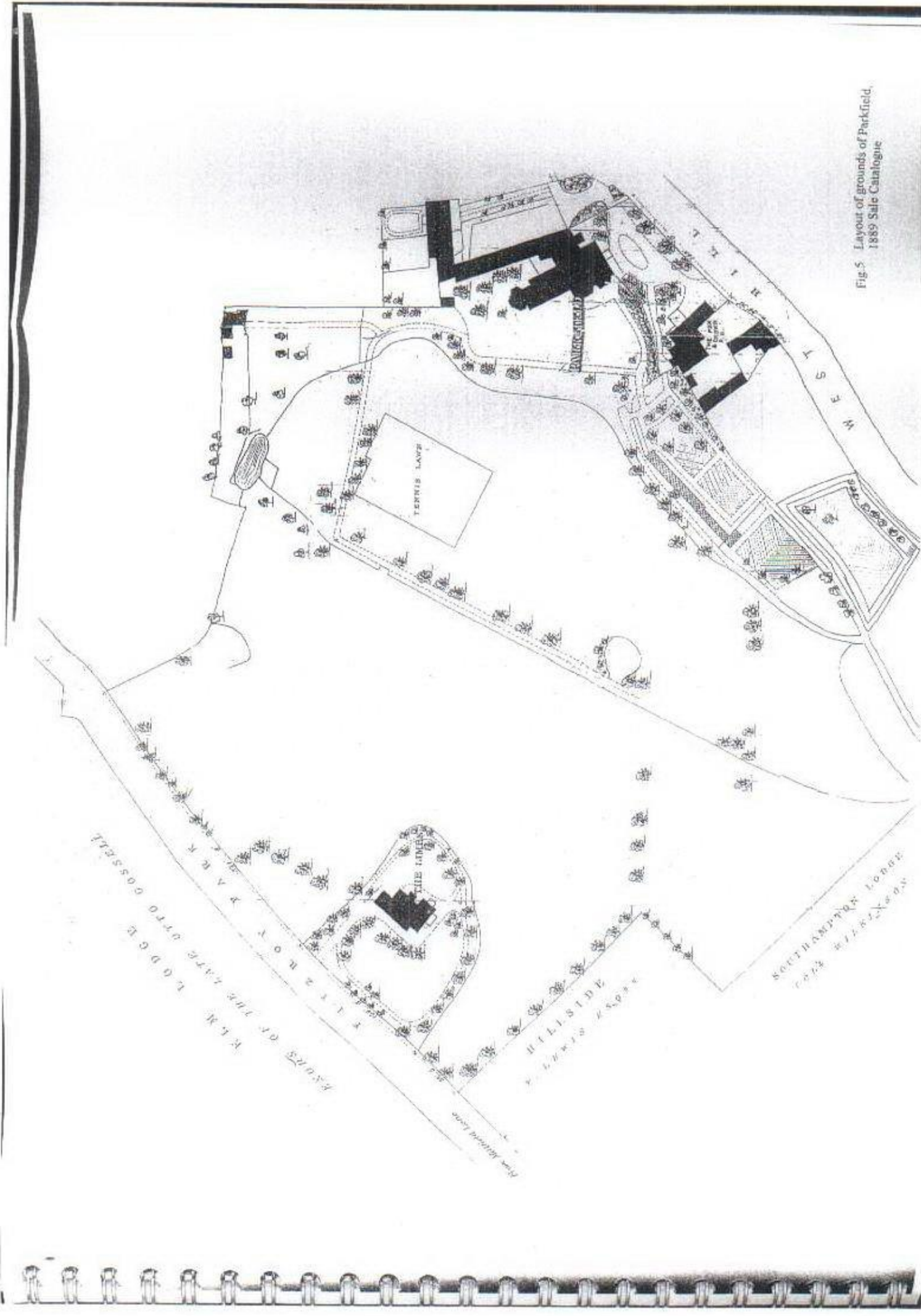


Fig. 5. Layout of grounds of Parkfield, 1889 Sale Catalogue

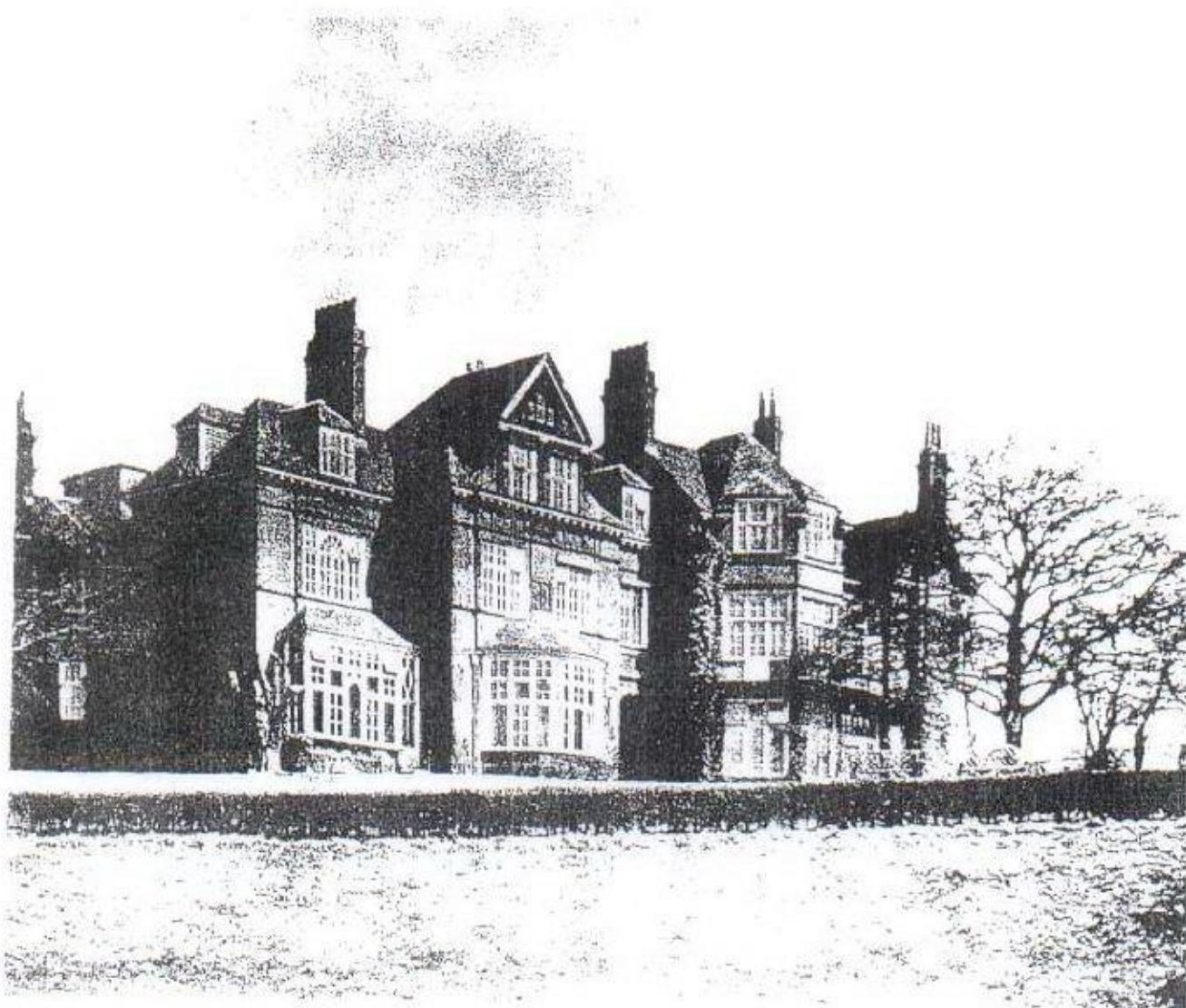


Fig.6a Walter Scrimgeour's improvements  
to Parkfield: Front elevation



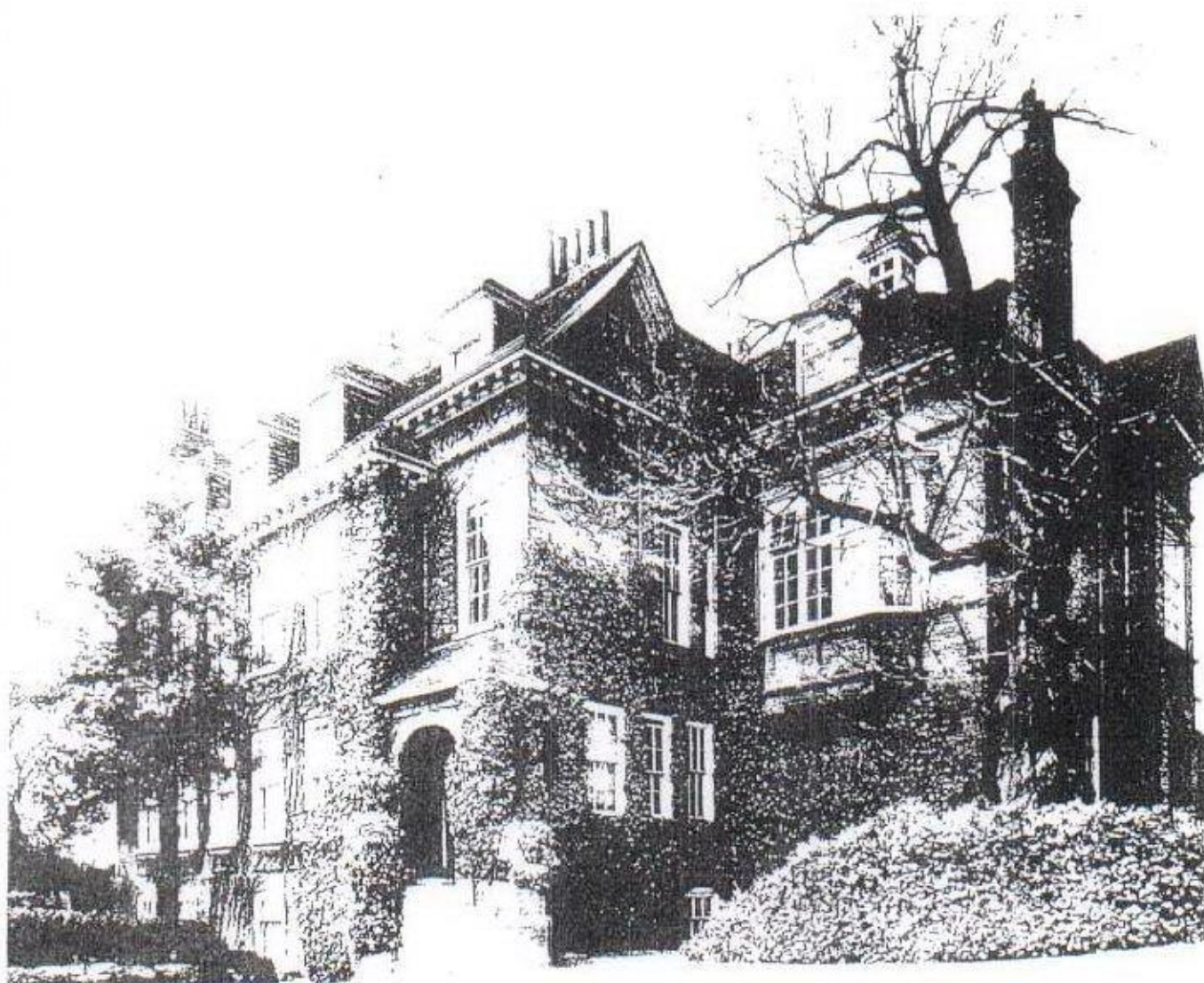


Fig 6b Walter Scrimgeour's improvements  
to Parkfield: Rear elevation



Fig 9 1985 Land Registry drawing  
Title Number NGL517259

Fig.9 1985 Land Registry drawing  
Title Number NGL517259

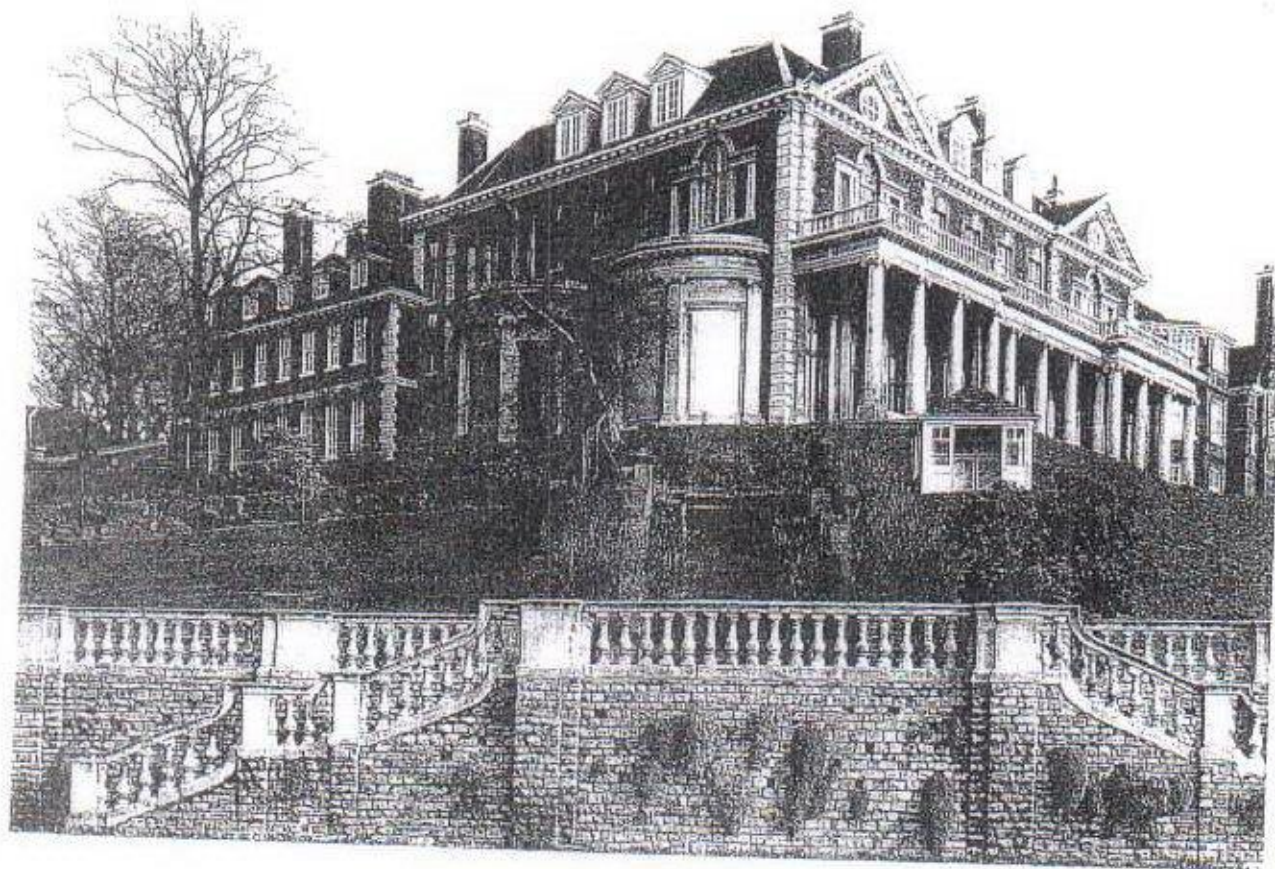


Fig. 11 The Grand Staircase and double flight of steps to the tennis lawn, 1971. GLC Photo. Library Metropolitan Archives 90.0.HIG 71/1524



In 1843 Parkfield was sold to Allen Block who enlarged it in 1881.<sup>6</sup> Its appearance at this date shows an early eighteenth century front elevation, with a timber-framed wing, and possibly an earlier range at the rear (fig.4).<sup>7</sup> Block sold it in 1889 to a stockbroker, Walter Scrimgeour, of no. 5 The Grove.<sup>8</sup> The 1889 catalogue<sup>9</sup> gives a good description of the Parkfield estate at this date, which had nearly eleven acres. The house had been added to with an extensive conservatory and a detached billiard room, and had a long range of stabling. The estate included a separate detached property in Fitzroy Park, The Limes. It also included the three Grove cottages near no. 1 The Grove, and Sutton Cottage adjoining the public house The Fox and Crown on West Hill, which was also part of the estate. Parkfield was described as 'ripe for immediate building operations'. The pleasure grounds were 'tastefully laid out, and well timbered and shrubbed, and include an old fashioned garden, with grass paths etc., Kitchen and Vegetable gardens, a range of Vineries in three compartments, a Conservatory, two tennis courts, summer house, and well-timbered, undulating park-like paddocks'. The layout of the grounds in 1889 is shown in fig.5. This indicates that part of the boundary between the orchard and the Home field had been removed and some landscaping had taken place in the fields. The partly walled kitchen garden was still in the same position it had had by 1800.

Walter Scrimgeour did not develop Parkfield as a building estate but carried out extensive additions to the house to make it into a large family mansion. The architect employed for the alterations was a friend of the family, John Malcolm, who added an extensive three storey wing to the rear of the house in place of the stables and outbuildings (figs.6a & 6b).<sup>10</sup> This necessitated new stables for the house which were built on the site of the Fox and Crown inn on Highgate West Hill, which Scrimgeour had demolished. A plaque was affixed to the stables commemorating the innkeeper who stopped Queen Victoria's carriage when her horses bolted in 1839. Two of the three Grove Cottages were demolished and their sites added to the garden together with a large shrubbery in an area which had formerly been a lane leading up to the cottages. The Ordnance Survey map of 1916 shows these changes but does not indicate any other major alterations to the grounds, and there were minor alterations to the range of glasshouses in the kitchen garden and a further tennis lawn in the pond garden (fig.7).

#### Witanhurst

By the time of the 1916 Ordnance Survey map Parkfield had been purchased by Arthur Crosfield and his Greek wife Domini (fig.8). It is said that during the First World War the house was offered to the government for a hospital and that Arthur Crosfield was knighted for this act.<sup>11</sup> Although various sources give the date for the rebuilding of Parkfield as 1913, other evidence suggests that the alterations were carried out after the War in 1920.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Richardson, *op. cit.* p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> George Gater and Walter H Godfrey (eds.), *Survey of London: The Village of Highgate (St Pancras Part I) Vol. XVII* (London, 1936) plate 50

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Holborn Library, Beal Collection, Sale catalogue of Parkfield by Debenham, Tewson, Farmer and Bridgewater, October 8 1889.

<sup>10</sup> Holborn Library newscuttings collection, *Express and News* October 22 1971

<sup>11</sup> Holborn Library newscuttings collection, *Hampstead and Highgate Express* 24 April 1971

<sup>12</sup> Richardson, *op. cit.* p. 93



The rebuilding of the mansion was on a massive scale with only the early eighteenth century entrance front of Parkfield, and small parts of Scrimgeour's additions being retained. The architect was George Hubbard (1859-1936), twice vice-president of RIBA and a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries who was a devotee of the Queen Anne and early Georgian tradition and whose additions for Witanhurst were in 'Queen Anne' style. The gardens too were extensively altered with much hard landscaping.

#### *The Gardens of Witanhurst*

The Crosfields carried out extensive improvements to the grounds in order to provide a fitting setting for the house. They commissioned work by two of the most prominent landscape architects of the day, Harold Peto (1854-1933) and Percy Cane (1881-1976). Harold Peto's designs for Witanhurst date from 1913-14 and were for extensive areas in the vicinity of the mansion including a grand staircase, terrace, tennis courts and loggia and formal terrace gardens, together with woodland gardens and new kitchen garden. The work by Percy Cane was for a small formal garden near the mansion, the east garden, executed in the late 1920's. The final alteration by the Crosfields was a new entrance forecourt and lodges by Seeley and Paget in 1929.

The gardens shown on the 1985 Land Registry drawing (fig.9), will be discussed individually under the following headings:-

- *Gardens immediate to the house*
  - *The Grand Staircase, terrace, tennis lawns and Loggia*
  - *Terrace gardens*
  - *Meadowland*
  - *Woodland gardens\* and kitchen garden\**
  - *The East Garden*
  - *Entrance forecourt and lodges*
- \* Now in separate ownership

#### *Gardens immediate to the house*

On the south-west side of the mansion the ground fell away sharply to the valley below, and the immediate vicinity of the house was given a simple treatment of lawned banks (fig.10). The bank to the north west of the house was later made into a rock garden, either just before or just after the Second World War (see fig.11). From the South west front of the mansion French windows gave onto a loggia, and from this, at its southern end, started a path system (fig.12) which descended down the slope firstly to the terrace gardens and then turned northwards towards the grand staircase. This led to the formal viewing terrace and via two flights of steps to the tennis lawns. From this path there were good views towards Kenwood which are also reflected in the view towards the house (fig.13). It is probable that this part of the circulation route was planned by Peto for this very reason for the grand staircase could have been continued up the slope to the house, providing a quicker route. Near the staircase there was a simple wooden summerhouse which gave sheltered views to Kenwood.

#### *The Grand Staircase, terrace, tennis lawns and Loggia*

The Grand Staircase designed by Harold Peto to give a formal approach to and from the gardens below, was focused on the NW/SE corner of the mansion (fig.14). The inspired siting of this feature was particularly dramatic and typical of Peto's schemes which: "*were always well related and gave the impression of having been determined by the site rather than planned on paper*".<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> David Otterwill *Edwardian Gardens* p.149.

The access path led into a circular enclosure from which a staircase of twenty nine steps descended down the slope. On the rusticated stone retaining walls were three piers on either side decorated with old Greek oil jars, whilst the crazy paving steps had a series of beds on either side (fig. 15a). At the bottom, herbaceous borders continued on either side of the steps along a terrace with planting planned by Peto to be at its height in June-July, the main tennis season. (fig. 15b).

From the terrace a double flight of balustraded steps led down to a double tennis lawn, an extension of an existing lawn laid out in the 1880s and mentioned in the 1889 sale catalogue. For the north side of the tennis lawn Peto designed an impressive brick and stone loggia measuring 15 feet by 49 feet, for which two plans survive of October 1913 and May 1914 (figs. 16 & 17). The main difference between the two plans is in the window detailing. The loggia included a small kitchen as its primary function was as a tea pavilion.

The tennis courts were a pivotal part of Lady Crosfield's entertaining. She herself was a noted amateur tennis champion and for thirty years gave pre-Wimbledon tennis parties attended by royalty and high society. Fig. 18 shows one of the double tennis courts in 1951 when Princess Elizabeth attended a tennis party and tea was served in the garden pavilion. The Grand Staircase is also shown on that occasion (fig. 19). A second double tennis lawn lay to the north of the first one and again this was probably an enlargement of a pre-existing lawn.

#### *The Terrace Gardens*

The terrace gardens were designed by Harold Peto in 1914 for the area which had been a kitchen garden since at least 1800. The new gardens were in three compartments, each one lower than the other, terminating with a pergola rose garden.

Plans survive for the middle section and for its gazebo adjoining the rose garden, together with a rough sketch for planting some of the pergola pillars. The first terrace garden had paths dividing it into four equal sections, whilst the middle garden had walls on three sides with a central path dividing the lawn which had four rectangular topiared yews (fig. 20). The fourth side was probably an existing older wall. The planting plan for the deep herbaceous borders included yuccas, achillias, salvias, asters, lupins, delphiniums and golden rod. Originally the middle garden was designed to have an early eighteenth century style gazebo in one corner as shown in Peto's plan of October 1914 (fig. 21). This was designed at the same time as the tennis loggia and had similar window treatments, but does not appear to have been executed. The gazebo would have adjoined the pergola garden which is shown in an earlier view and as it appeared in 1971 (figs. 22a & 22b).

The pergola garden was a double colonnade of stone Doric columns with oak beams and with an exedra at one end. Stone crazy paving paths ran between the colonnades and in the central space, divided by four paths, were rose beds. A rough sketch of the columns and some notes on the planting appear on Peto's design for another part of the gardens (see fig. 23). A recent article on Witanhurst noted that its gardens included 'the blue mosaic pool with its statue of Venus'.<sup>14</sup> This description is of the lower pergola rose garden but the statue and mosaics have been lost. Pergolas were still very fashionable at this date, and Peto was renowned for his use of stone colonnades in gardens. The inspiration for this design, however, may have been, in part, the stone pillared colonnades designed by Thomas Mawson in 1906 for Lord Lever, also a millionaire soap magnate, for his nearby residence The Hill overlooking Hampstead Heath.

<sup>14</sup> Shaw *loc. cit.* p. 10



### *Meadowland*

The formal landscaping designed by Harold Peto and Percy Cane were in proximity to the mansion. Important as these alterations were, it was the park-like grounds beyond which gave Witanhurst a special quality.

No new landscaping was done in this area by the Crosfields, apart from at the western end discussed below and as a landscape architect Percy Cane appreciated this:-

*There are Italian gardens terraced down on the west side of the central turf which extends, like a stretch of country park or meadowland, into the valley, and carries the eye in one broad sweep to the heights of Ken Wood beyond. So near to London it is an exceptional site.<sup>15</sup>*

After the Second World War areas of the meadows were leased as nursery grounds.

### *Woodland Garden\* and Kitchen Garden\**

The alterations to the kitchen garden to turn it into the terrace gardens necessitated a new kitchen garden. This was designed by Peto and made near the then bottom boundary of the estate with areas of informal planting and walks in the woodland areas on either side of it. Peto's rough plan of this area and that to the west of the pergola rose garden (fig.23) and his rough plan of the N W area beyond the kitchen garden up to the boundary with the property called Hillside in Fitzroy Park (fig.24) survive. A finished plan for the NW area also survives (fig.25) and shows that the new rectangular kitchen garden was designed with a wall on one side and three sides of privet hedge. Peto's informal planting in the woodland glade used large clumps of plants including native species such as bracken, gorse, butchers' broom together with tamarix, lilacs, berberises, philadelphus and large drifts of bulbs:-

*on both sides path bordered with broad stretches of primroses bluebell scilla campanulata and daffodils surfaced with vinca minor blue and white omphalodes verna, delicate ivies, groups of hypericum with Solomon's seal, and ruscus racemosus*

The area to the west of the rose garden was linked by a long path 'from glade' and was planted with catalpa, clerodendron, kerria and gorse.

### *The East Garden*

The east garden was the work of Percy Cane, and was created in the area once occupied by the three Grove cottages and their gardens. Two of the cottages were demolished by Walter Grimgeour in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and their area added to the garden. The third cottage was demolished in c.1929 and the whole area remodelled by Percy Cane. This work probably took place concurrently with the building of the new entrance lodge and alterations to the driveways. The area was partly enclosed by Tudor walls from the long demolished Dorchester House, which because of the slope of the land were buttressed. In his book *Garden Design of Today*<sup>16</sup> Percy Cane described the making of the east garden, 'a small old-world garden', for which he gave a plan (fig.26) and a view (fig.27):-

*On the east side of the house and in a space enclosed by massive brick walls mellowed with age, there was a piece of sloping ground more or less overshadowed*

<sup>15</sup> Percy Cane *Garden Design of Today* (1934) p 149

<sup>16</sup> Percy Cane *Ibid* pp 149-152

by old fruit trees. It was too uneven and steep to walk in with any comfort, and was of no particular interest - simply rough grass and trees.

The plan and sketch show how it was altered. The centre was cleared of trees so that sunlight now came into the old-world garden of brick paths, lawn, and flower borders into which it was changed. A red-brick path was laid under the heavily buttressed wall. Brick paths were laid down both sides, with steps introduced to conform to the fall of the ground. A brick path was also laid at the lower end, and this, with the old and massive brick wall enclosing it at sitting height, formed a terrace overlooking the lower gardens, to which it leads by a new stairway also of dark-red bricks. From this wall there is a wonderful view of the gardens, with Ken Wood in the distance.

As will be seen from the plan, these paths formed a sort of terraced square round the garden. The central octagon was also paved in red brick and partly enclosed by low walls, built high enough to retain the soil on the upper side. A flight of steps leads from the top walk into the brick space, in the centre of which a bird-bath is formed with brick and tiles, and octagonal in shape. This centre space is bordered with *Nepeta Mussinii*, and behind this delphiniums with lilies amongst them - a blue garden relieved by the ivory white of the lilies.

From here again, but on the further side, steps lead to a lower path, so that the way crosses the central space. In the angle formed by the walls in the far top corner, a garden shelter was constructed of brick piers supporting a pan-tiled roof. From here one looks towards Ken Wood, and again down the side path, the borders of which are filled with scarlet dahlias and crimson monarda, red geums and yellow heleniums, the grey-foliaged *Senecio Greyii* with its yellow flowers, apricot *hemerocallis*, and at the back of them the tall spikes of more delphiniums. It is a garden set in red-brick walls at least a century or two old, against which the colour of its flowers seem to take on an added value.

The summerhouse built in a corner formed by the higher walls was described elsewhere as being fitted with electric lighting, heating and telephone.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Entrance forecourt and lodges*

In 1929 a new entrance was created for Witanhurst to replace the original rather short driveway opposite the house. The new approach was from further up West Hill near the road to The Grove, via two lodge cottages forming a gate house, and named North and South Lodges. These buildings were designed in classical style by the architects Seeley and Paget and constructed using materials from demolished stables (fig.28).<sup>18</sup> To effect this Sir Arthur Crosfield must have purchased the stables of Grove House and possibly also the house itself, which was demolished in 1933.<sup>19</sup> The new entrance gave a much longer approach to the house, and the new driveway after forking to a service courtyard, led to a new walled enclosure in front of the mansion. This was laid out in a pattern of circles and semi-circles inset with pebbles separated by stone paths, possibly also designed by Seeley and Paget (fig.29). The driveway and adjoining areas were subsequently altered to provide more parking (fig.30).

<sup>17</sup> R. Webber *Percy Came* (Edinburgh, 1975) pp. 176-7

<sup>18</sup> London Metropolitan Archive GLC/DG/PTI/H/2/25 Witanhurst 1969-73

<sup>19</sup> London Metropolitan Archive GLC/DG/PTI/H/2/631