

*Brief History of Witanhurst 1960s to present*

Lady Crosfield died in 1963, her husband having predeceased her in 1938, and Witanhurst passed to her heir, Paul Crosfield. In 1966 the house was put on the market and from that time on has been vulnerable to redevelopment because of the exceptional size of the site so near to central London. In 1967 permission was applied for demolition of the mansion in order to

build 121 flats in ten acres, including one eight storey block and several of three storeys. This led to much public protest because of the effect on the view from Ken Wood towards Highgate. The scheme was modified to 89 houses and 15 flats and outline planning permission for residential development was granted in 1969. After public pressure the mansion was spot listed in 1970, and it also falls within the Highgate Village conservation area designated in 1968 which in 1972 was raised to 'outstanding' conservation area status. Local conservation groups campaigned for the GLC to buy part of the estate to add it to Hampstead Heath, but this failed. In 1971 it was acquired by Pamilion Properties and there were plans to turn Witanhurst into a heart hospital necessitating a large extension to the mansion. There would also be 21 houses built in the grounds. In 1977 the house was refurbished for private occupation, and in 1979 there was a public enquiry over luxury homes to be built in part of the grounds. In 1985 a substantial portion of the grounds, including the woodland areas, kitchen garden, The Limes, and nursery grounds were sold. Subsequently the properties numbers

37-40 Highgate West Hill, which were part of the Witanhurst estate, have been sold.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Section based on VCH Middlesex vol 8 ( 1985 ) p.138; Metropolitan Archives GLC files and Holborn Library 89.3 Ephemera on Witanhurst

## SECTION 1: HISTORICAL SURVEY FIGURES



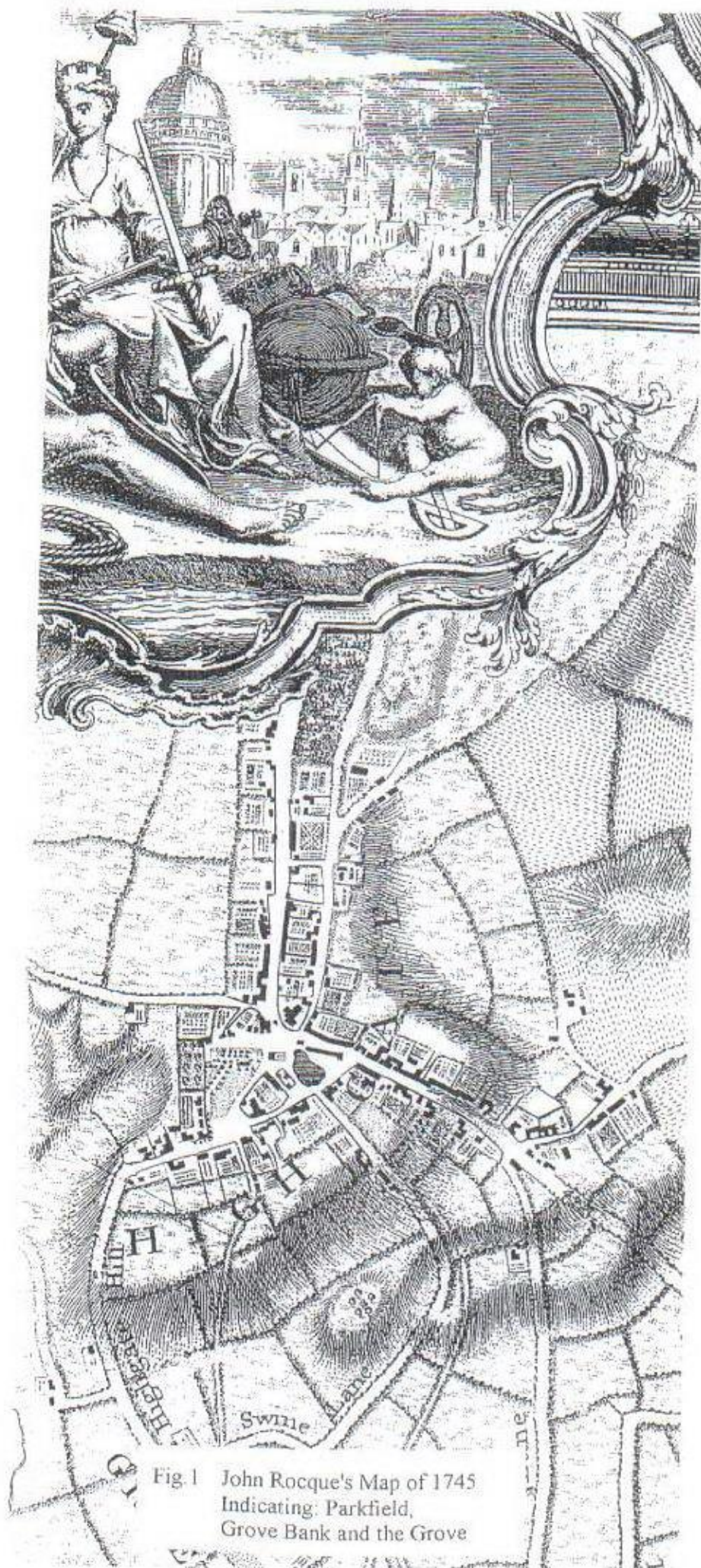


Fig 1 John Rocque's Map of 1745  
Indicating: Parkfield,  
Grove Bank and the Grove



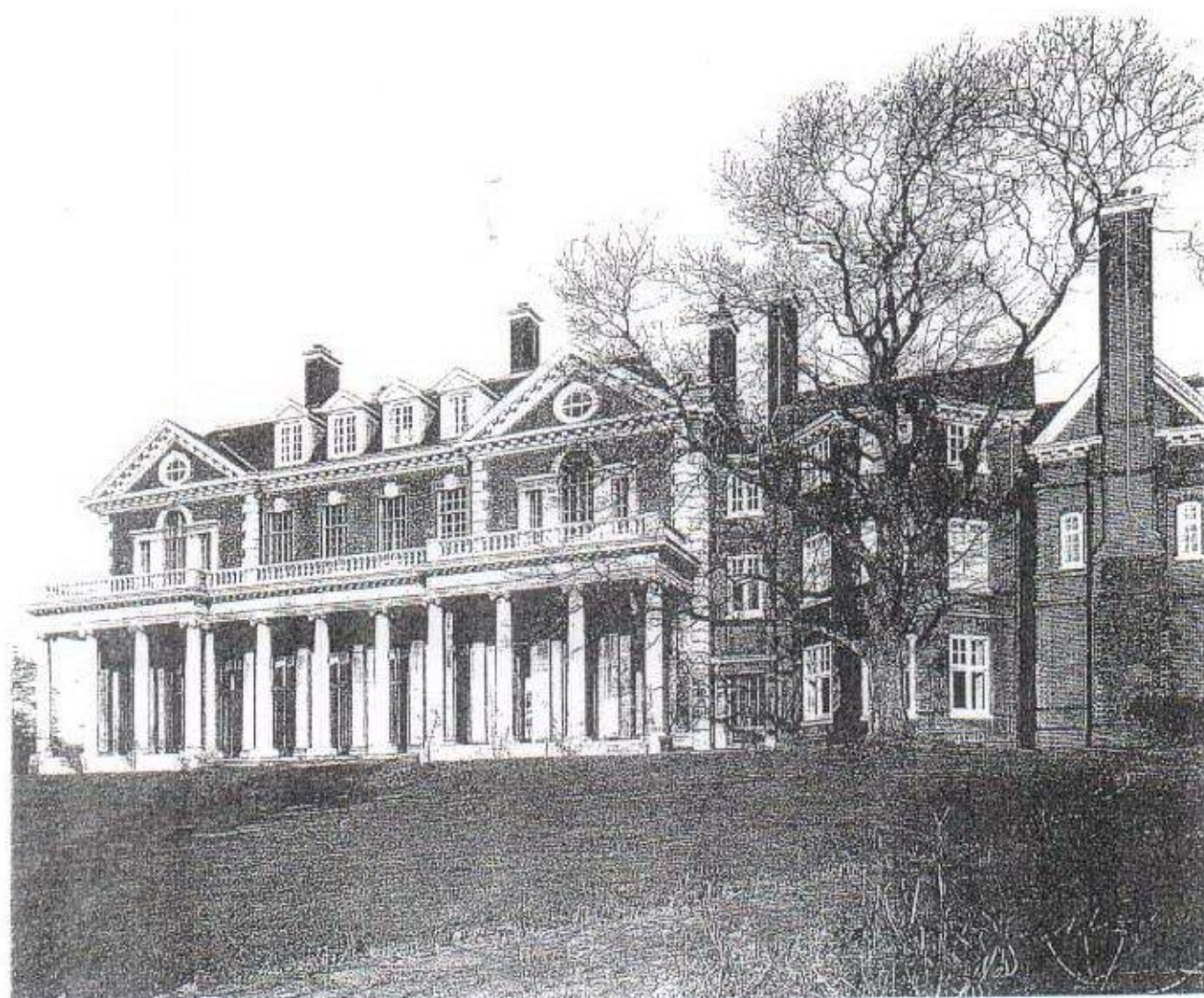
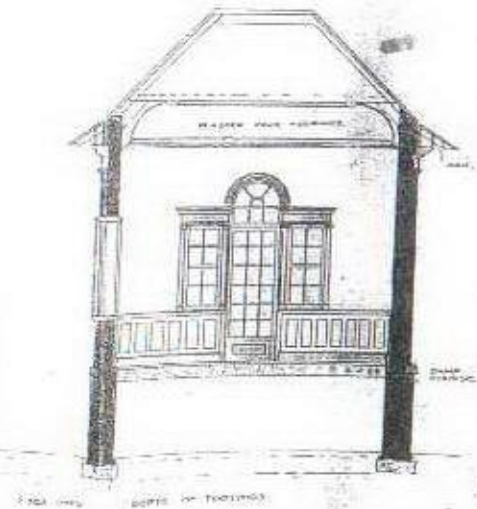
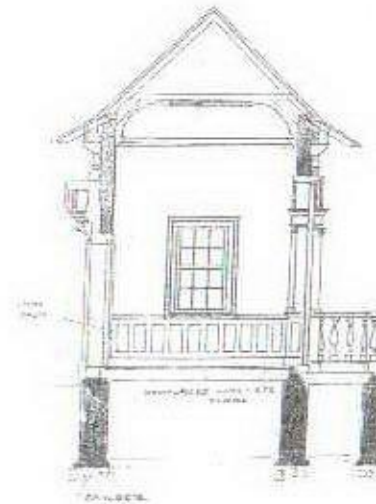
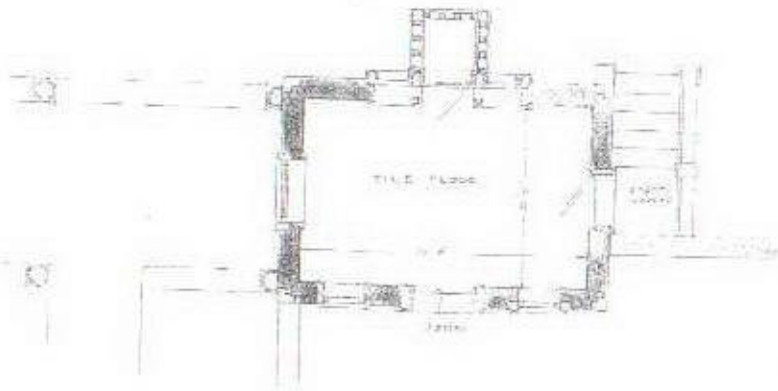
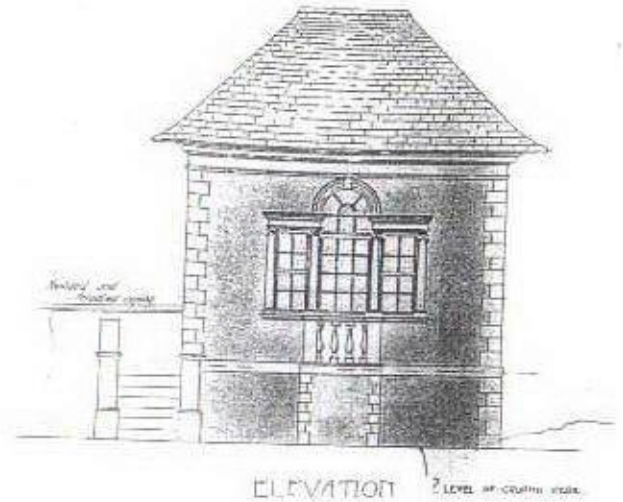


Fig 12 Loggia on the south west front of the Mansion  
with lawns and paths leading to the garden below  
GLC Photo. Library  
Metropolitan Archives 90.0.HIG 71/1504

PARKFIELD HIGHGATE  
 111 CROSTOWN LANE  
 GAZEBO BY ROSE GARDEN

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## WITANHURST, HIGHGATE

### LANDSCAPE SURVEY

#### Views and Vistas

##### *Peto's Design*

The experience of walking through the gardens at Witanhurst quickly reveals the care that went into establishing a series of views and vistas which are afforded from designated points. This is especially true of the north-west and south-west fronts of the building where Peto's attention to detail has ensured that it is still possible to see many of the views for which he planned. The main views are shown on Plan 1

There are a number of striking design features which provide viewing platforms and are themselves the subject of vistas. These are the sites that appear with regularity on photographs: the staircase and viewing terrace and the terraced garden are the most important, but there are also other features such as the summer house which no longer exist. There are also broader views which embrace the magnificent landscape to the south and west across the lower valley towards Hampstead Heath. This magnificent view remains today and with the exception of the Lombardy poplars planted along the boundary of the garden is much as it was when Peto carried out improvements to the garden.

##### *The East Garden*

The interesting topography of the gardens was to provide an elegant location for Percy Cane's East garden, designed within the remnants of old walls. He provided a shelter and viewing platform which focused on the view to the west towards Kenwood.

#### Arboricultural Survey

See Arboricultural Survey, is shown on Plans 6 to 10, and schedule 1.

The site has the benefit of an abundant tree cover. Many of the trees are of some age, associated with early plantings and the original designs of Peto and the subsequent planting of Percy Cane. An arboricultural survey of the existing trees undertaken in May 1999 and 2000, recorded the position, species, crown, girth, age, stem type, type, and condition of each tree surveyed: see plan 2 and schedule 1.

The age of the trees has been assessed and they have been catalogued into three main periods which are as follows:

- Pre-1929
- 1930-1945
- Post-War

Although elements of the original design can still be recognised, a great deal of natural regeneration has occurred, particularly of sycamore and birch. The location of the trees within the above periods are shown in Plans 2 to 4.

## Ecological Survey

### Summary

A number of areas with a variety of species have been identified. These are described below and shown in Plan 5.

### Bank

A large bank extends through the centre of the western side of the Garden, which is west facing with full sun and in some places shade from the individual planing groups growing along the bank. The infrequently mown grass and herbage within this area contains a range of species of ecological interest, including, sheep's sorrel, pignut and sweet vernal grass, which are typical of unimproved pasture of rich botanical interest. A variety of invertebrates were observed including solitary bees and wasps.

### Lower Lawn and Former Tennis Court

The area of coarsely-mown grassland in the lower part of the garden is divided into two. The area to the north which was once two grass tennis courts and the area to the south which was a formal lawn and in places is very damp. As is the case with the steeper bank to the west this bank is also infrequently mown and contains species including Yorkshire fog, rough meadow grass cock's-foot creeping and meadow buttercups, common vetch, common sorrel and yarrow.

### Upper Lawn

The upper lawn next to the mansion is more regularly mown and the grass is shorter with species of less interest but does include cat's-ear, yarrow and daisy. The steep bank below the house included common species including bird's-foot trefoil, common sorrel, yarrow and ribwort plantain. Sheep's sorrel was also found which reflects the acidic nature of the soils within the garden. A few common herb species are present, including cat's-ear, yarrow, daisy. The steep strimmed bank below the portico. Common herb species included common bird's-foot trefoil, common sorrel, yarrow, ribwort plantain. Also present is the less common species, sheep's sorrel, which reflects the naturally acidic character of the soils.

### Boundary Planting

A variety of shrubs and mature trees have been planted along the western and northern boundaries and within the central area of the garden. These offer habitats and nesting sites for a range of birds and should be retained wherever possible. The larger trees are common lime, oak, horse chestnut, cherry and sycamore. Although no evidence was found from observation on the ground of bats activity or roosts, where pruning or tree removal is proposed, these trees will need to be checked in detail to ensure that there are no bat roots present. Several of the existing trees are covered in ivy which is a valuable food resource and cover for insects and some small birds and should, therefore, be retained. There are also dead wood stumps in the area of the garden which have been left and are also valuable habitats for a variety of invertebrates and fungi.

### Central Planting

Although this section of the site is an area of trees and grass, there is dappled shade. Along the western edge exist wavy hair grass and foxgloves, the characteristic flora of acidic open woodland.

### Water Storage Tank

This concrete lined pond water storage tank lies in the north-west corner of the site. Now derelict and surrounded by overhanging trees the water is full of organic material and weed including duckweed. A large patch of bittersweet was also observed. [The concrete edge to the pond is a danger to small mammals which are unable to get out of the pond. There is also



danger to young children due to the steep surrounding slopes which face into the water body. Despite these negative aspects, the water tank if remodelled with gentle side slopes and more light, would provide the habitat for a wide range of marginal and aquatic species. A remodelled pond would be safer for both children and wildlife.

#### *Notifiable weeds*

Areas of Japanese knotweed, *Reynoutria japonica*, are present within the garden and should be eradicated before any restoration work is undertaken.

#### *Protected Species*

No evidence of protected species, including bats or badgers, was found. The derelict pavilion in the centre of the garden and the larger trees were checked for bats but no evidence of a roosting site was found. However, the pavilion is to be restored and at this time the building will be checked before and during the work to ensure no roots are present. Evidence of the activity of foxes was found but no evidence of badgers.

#### *Evaluation*

The site's main value lies in the following.

- The elements of the flora that are characteristic of acid grassland and woodland, and have affinities with the natural flora of Hampstead Heath.
- The age and relative lack of disturbance of the site, together with certain habitat features (sunny banks of varied vegetation structure including some bare soil; old stonework; and, particularly, standing dead wood), which make it likely that there is considerable invertebrate interest.
- The mixture of habitats, including scrub, grassland and mature trees (again, relatively undisturbed) which creates suitable habitat for a variety of common birds.

Inevitably, the gardens will be subject to greater disturbance in future, and the restoration of, for example, the formal gardens will reduce their value as feeding areas for garden birds.

Species recorded in May 1999.

#### Flowering plants.

Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*  
Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*  
Herb bennet *Geum urbanum*  
Ivy *Hedera helix*  
Blue alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*  
Goose-grass *Galium aparine*  
Stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*  
Ivy-leaved speedwell *Veronica hederifolia*  
Bluebells *Endymion non-scriptus*  
Spanish bluebells *E. hispanica*  
Lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*  
Nipplewort *Lapsana communis*  
Daisy *Bellis perennis*  
Creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*  
Meadow buttercup *R. acris*  
Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*  
Oxford ragwort *S. squalidus*  
Groundsel *S. vulgaris*



Red dead-nettle *Lamium purpureum*  
 Petty spurge *Euphorbia peplis*  
 Hawksbeard *Crepis capillaris*  
 Willow-herbs *Epilobium parviflorum* and other non-flowering spp.  
 Hairy willowherb *E. hirsutum*  
 Thale cress *Arabidopsis thaliana*  
 Common vetch *Vicia sativa*  
 Creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*  
 Spear thistle *C. vulgare*  
 Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*  
*R. crispus*  
 Rape *Brassica napus*  
 Red campion *Silene dioica*  
 Great plantain *Plantago major*  
 Lanceolate plantain *P. lanceolata*  
 Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.  
 Hairy bitter-cress *Cardamine hirsuta*  
 Clustered mouse-ear *Cerastium glomeratum*  
 Honesty *Lunaria annua*  
 Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*  
 Japanese knotweed *Reynoutria japonica*  
 Garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata*  
 Sow thistle *Sonchus oleraceus*  
 Hop trefoil *Trifolium campestre*  
 White clover *T. repens*  
 Wall lettuce *Mycelis muralis*  
 Yellow corydalis *Corydalis lutea*  
 Pignut *Conopodium majus*  
 Red clover *Trifolium pratense*  
 Cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis*  
 Cat's ear *Hypochoeris radicata*  
 Common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*  
 Yellow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*  
 Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*  
 Herb robert *Geranium robertianum*  
 3-cornered garlic *Allium triquetrum*  
 Bindweed *Calystegia sepium*  
 Hedge mustard *Sisymbrium officinale*  
 Black medick *Medicago lupulina*  
 Ivy-leaved toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*  
 Corn salad *Valerianella locusta*  
 Great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*  
 Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*  
 Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*  
 Ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria*  
 Bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*  
 Cut-leaved cranesbill *Geranium dissectum*  
 Greater periwinkle *Vinca major*  
 Chickweed *Stellaria media*  
 Self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*

#### Trees and shrubs

Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*  
Hybrid limes *Tilia x europaea*  
Horse chesnut *Aesculus hippocastaneus*  
Elder *Sambucus nigra*  
Gean (wild cherry) *Prunus avium*  
Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*  
Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*  
Birch *Betula pubescens*  
Silver birch *B. pendula*  
Willow *Salix caprea* probably hybridised  
Sallow *S. cinerea*  
Weeping willow *S. x babylonica* (probably)  
Crack willow *S. fragilis*  
Sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*  
Hazel *Corylus avellana*  
*Rhododendron ponticum*

(NB This list does not include all the planted trees and shrubs in the garden; only those that are native, naturalised or of special value).

#### Grasses

*Holcus lanatus*  
Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*  
Sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*  
Timothy *Phleum pratense*  
Bent grass *Agrostis tenuis*

#### Pteridophytes

Common horsetail *Equisetum arvense*  
Scaly male fern *Dryopteris pseudomas* (probably planted)  
Male fern *D. filix-mas*  
Maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes*

#### Animal life

##### *Mammals*

Fox, breeding  
Hedgehog  
Grey squirrel

##### *Birds*

Magpie  
Green woodpecker  
Great spotted woodpecker  
Blackbird  
Mistle thrush  
Song thrush  
Hedge sparrow  
Wren  
Great tit  
Blue tit



*Invertebrates*

Two-spot ladybird *Adalia 2-punctata*

Spider *Pisaura mirabilis*

Mite gall *Eriophyes acerina* on sycamore

Mite gall *E. tiliae* on lime

Bumble bee, probably *Bombus lucorum*

Marble gall *Andricus kollari* on oak

Currant gall *Neuroterus quercusbaccarum* on oak

St. Mark's fly *Bibio marci*

## Considerations

The following recommendations made by the London Ecology Unit, aimed at retaining much of the wildlife value and hopefully improving certain aspects have been included in their entirety.

1. A management plan in which nature conservation is a major aim, should be prepared for the site. (This is rather stronger than the "programme of maintenance" stipulated in Condition 1). The plan should include the following.

- 1.1. **Trees**

Ivy should be retained on trees for its value to invertebrates and birds. Standing dead wood should be retained on trees for its considerable value to invertebrates and fungi, unless safety considerations make this impossible - in which case it should be retained on site close to the trees.

- 1.2. **Bats**

Although no evidence of any was found during my daytime visit, it is possible that bats roost in some of the trees. If any are discovered and if there is any risk of disturbance, English Nature must be contacted before proceeding with any potentially harmful work. (This is a legal requirement.)

- 1.3. **Grass banks**

These should be managed to retain, and improve, their characteristics of acid grassland, both for their flora and for invertebrates. Various regimes are possible, but at least the banks between the top lawn and the lower grassland should be unmown over the summer months. It is important that when they are cut, cuttings are removed to avoid the build-up of fertility in the soil. The banks should not be used by either conference visitors or RIBA scheme visitors.

- 1.4. **Lower area of grassland**

Although no doubt some areas will be regularly short-mown for the amenity of conference participants, it is suggested that a substantial part should be managed for nature conservation, by means of suitable mowing regimes.

- 1.5. **Areas of grassland**

Whatever the mowing regime, fertilisers and herbicides should be avoided.

- 1.6. **Acid woodland ground flora**

On the bank east of the pavilion, and north of the stone steps should be retained as this reflects the original vegetation of the Heath.

- 1.7. **Pond/swimming pool.**

It would add to the wildlife value of the site if the pond was retained for wildlife. It would require: (a) dredging, (b) re-profiling using to create shallow, sloping edges, (c) the felling of a substantial number of surrounding trees and shrubs to its south and west to improve the light regime and reduce leaf-fall, (d) stocking with appropriate native aquatic and marginal plants.

- 1.8. **Tennis courts** Whilst it is realised that the courts may be restored, it is suggested that the scrub on the eastern boundary be retained. Grass courts, whilst having little botanical interest, would have some value for feeding garden birds - at least out of the tennis season.'



- 1.9. **Boundaries of the site.** Whilst little management may be necessary, should any additional planting be required (e.g. perhaps in the north-west of the site) then suitable native species should be used. Bramble scrub is valuable as food and cover for invertebrates (e.g. butterflies), small birds and small mammals, and should normally be retained.
- 2.0 **Local training and employment opportunities** (Condition 3) relating to maintenance of the grounds should include training on relevant wildlife conservation principles and methods
- 3.0. **Interpretive material** provided for visitors under the RIBA scheme should draw attention to, and explain, the nature conservation value and management of the site.

SECTION2: LANDSCAPE SURVEY - DRAWINGS