The Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Appeal Reference: APP/C1435/W/23/3321978

Planning Appeal by Gleeson Land

Land at Downland Farm, Uckfield

Proof of evidence

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Lake Wood: A Designed Historic Landscape

Summary

The following abbreviated history about Lake Wood has been written to enhance the knowledge about this specific site in the light of the application of Downlands Farm WD/2022/1637/MEA and subsequent appeal by Gleeson. There are severe concerns about the impact that the development would have on Lake Wood, which is essentially a picturesque type woodland garden dating from the late C18. It is located to the south of the development, and in close proximity. This analysis mainly covers the period from the late C18 to the present day. The inevitable increased footfall would have a negative impact on the fragile and unique ecosystems, which has not been covered in this historic analysis but is more than adequately considered elsewhere in the objections to this development. Increased footfall would also have a damaging impact on the managed natural and historic fabric of Lake Wood. It may also have impact on the buried and fragile archaeology of the Mesolithic.



WD_2022-1637 MEA Block Plan130902

Lake and Lake Wood

Early History-The Mesolithic (10,000 to 8,000 BCE)

The shelters at the Rocks, Uckfield, are members of a group of rocks-shelters formed in outcrops of sandstone in Sussex and Kent. The Ardingly Sandstone outcrops straddle the B2102 (Rocks Road) west of Uckfield. To the north of the road is Lake Wood with sandstone outcrops to the north and south of the lake. Many of the shelters to the south of the lake are flooded, although some survive at a higher level, but to the north of the lake most of the long sandstone outcrop lies at sufficient height above the lake to contain the possibility of several metres of excavatable deposits.

Excavations, by M. F. Hemmingway, took place in 1979 on the dripline of a deep shelter in Lake Wood Rocks North, the presence of burnt stone in a badger throw out close by, the favourable aspect and position, together with a potential depth of deposit of several metres, led to selection of the site. From the subsequent excavation, when little was found, it was thought that the shelter line had been retreating rapidly (it is steeply sloping towards the lake), and any finds would be found further from the rock face. The excavations then investigated the rock shelters to the south of the road which were much more fruitful. Hemmingway concluded that explorations at the Rocks had confirmed the archaeological interest of the site and further work should be carried out at the Lakeside rock shelters.[1] This was never done. The HER, MES4826, (Historic Environment Record) states that some 10,000 artifacts were recovered in the form of flint implements, mainly microliths. Mesolithic material occurs over an area in excess of 10,000 square metres in the site south of the road.

A number of worked flints were recovered in and around Lake Wood, by the Streatfeilds, probably found in badger throws which proves the presence of prehistoric activity here.



Image 1 Rock Shelter Lake Wood (N)



Image 2 Worked Flints Lake Wood environs.

[1] Sussex Archaeological Newsletter NO. 34, August 1981 & 38, Dec 1982

The Streatfeild family were one of the larger landowners in and around Uckfield and the first was the Richard Beard Streatfeild in 1710 who owned the Copwood estate. His nephew, Richard Thomas Streatfeild had bought the Rocks House and farmlands in 1784, which included one half of Lake Wood and later inherited the Copwood estate in 1789, which included the western half of Lake Wood and Butchers Wood. Richard Thomas started to develop and plant Lake Wood, which was continued by his son, Richard Shuttleworth Streatfeild (RTS) (1805-1851).

In the Yeakell and Gardner map of 1778 the definition of this area is poor, but it does show a lake, similar in shape to the lake depicted in later maps, surrounded by woodland with the Rocks House surrounded by a more open landscape *(Fig 1.).* Before the purchase of Lake Wood by the Streatfeilds this lake had been known as Old Rocks Pond or Uckfield Pond, this is likely the pond on the Yeakell and Gardner map.

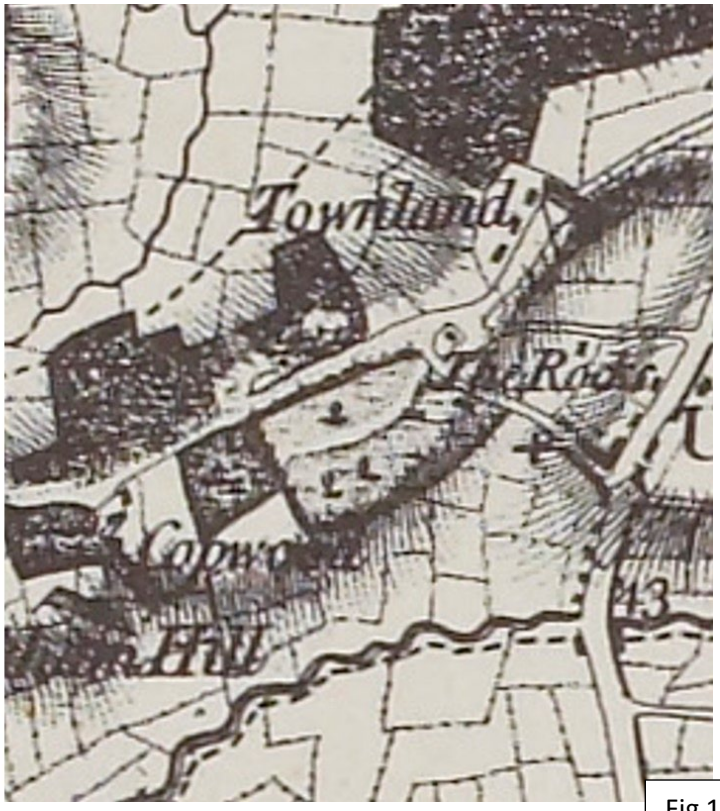


Fig 1 1778

In the Figg map of 1786 part of Copwood, and other lands the eastern corner, shows Lake Wood, as a familiar shape with the early carriage drives stretching westwards to Shortbridge and north-eastward towards Budletts *(Fig 2).* The carriageways are said to have been built in 1789 and possibly the dam at the same time. Accounts, held by the family gave evidence that RTS constructed the two main drives, which ran from Shortbridge Lodge in the west and the other to Budletts Lodge in the north, exiting at Budletts lodge on the former A22. Budletts Lodge still exists and has the appearance of early C19 small sandstone lodge with later brick additions *(Image 1)*. The stone, probably Ardingly sandstone is of good quality ashlar blocks. The road's surface still exists in the garden of Budletts lodge, some 5-10 cm deep and appears to be of packed chalk in this location. This roadway is still traceable through the woods and falls within the Downlands site on the far western boundary.

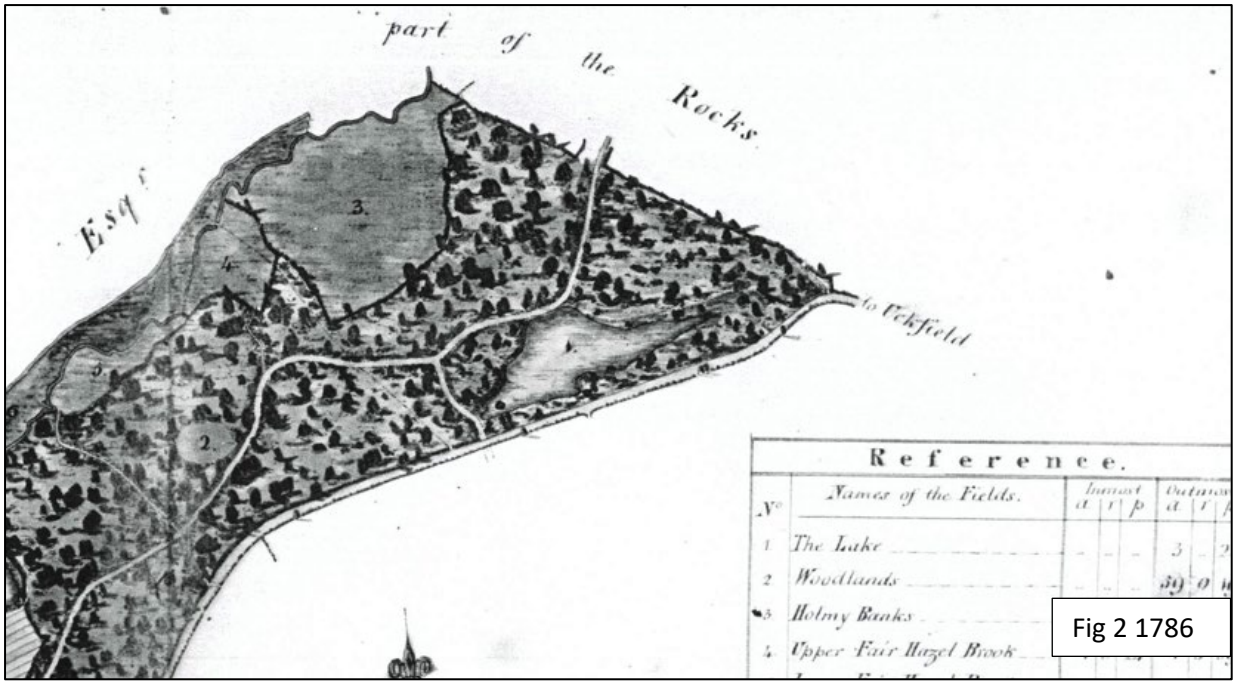


Fig 2 1786

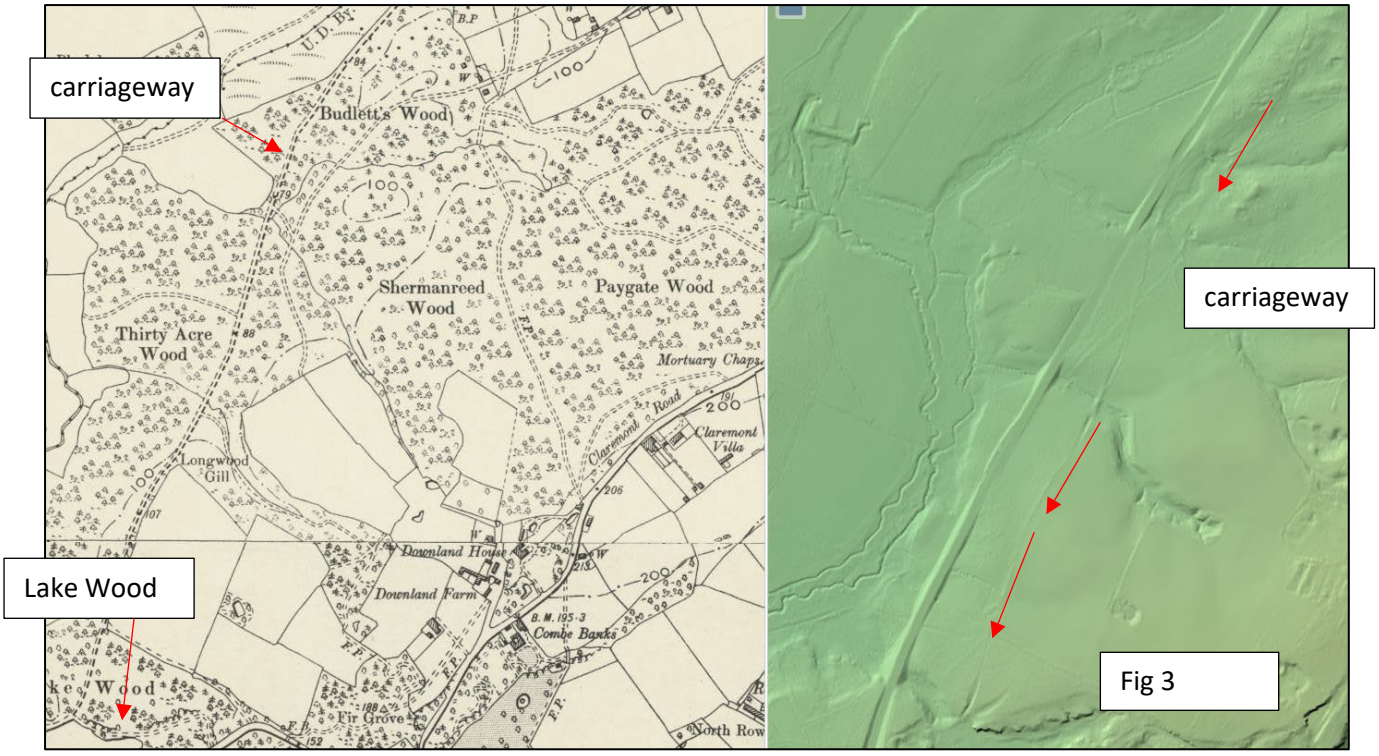


Budletts Lodge

Image 1

These roads were connected to the road that formed the drive southwards to Rocks House which ran through a tunnel under the road, the carriage drive passed over the dam at the western end of the Lake. It is said that RTS's mother, Anne Prime had suggested to her son, in a letter dated November 1840, that he might use the services of the well-known landscape gardener, William S Gilpin. It is not known whether he did but there was book by William Gilpin in library at Rocks House. 'Practical Hints on Landscape Gardening '1835. In 1836 Anne refers to the architect of the new Rocks House, Sidney Smirke, mentioning both lay out and elevation. Apparently, advice was also sought from Lord Sheffield of Sheffield Park who had work done of Sheffield Park by Capability Brown. Regrettably no details of the planting were found or who was actually consulted. (*Notes signed by Pamela Scarlett Streatfield 1990*).

National Library of Scotland OS image side by side lidar



The above map depicts the carriageway running NNE-SSW from Rocks Park, via Lake Wood and northwards. The lidar images shows that the carriageway still exists and can be seen on the lidar images just to the west of the red arrows, contrary to what is stated in the Downlands Heritage Addendum (1.76): '*No trace of any track or route through this woodland on the western boundary of the site was observed during the site visit*'. It can be found on the ground, within the woodland, sometimes as a raised embankment, sometimes as a flattened 'road surface' on the extreme western edge of the development site and as a hollow way exiting from Lake Wood.



Image 2 Carriageway

The main changes and landscaping were implemented between 1826 and 1851 by Richard Shuttleworth Streatfeild (RSS), the son of RTS, had inherited the estate after the unexpected and early death of his father. Advice sought from Lord Sheffield, whose garden had been designed by Capability Brown influenced the planting at Lake Wood in the opinion of the Woodland Trust who took ownership of the site in 1993 to protect it from developers. The influence in planting could be seen, from the large exotics and other non-native species surviving around the lake, such as the royal fern and rhododendrons that were planted between 1800 and 1850. The specimen trees included Coastal redwood *(Sequoia sempervirens)* Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron gigantium)* and Monterey pine *(Pinus radiata).* RSS also created and planted a water garden, later infilled due to lack of maintenance. The dramatic outcrops of the Cretaceous Ardingly sandstone were utilised for dramatic effect and the boat house, steps and tunnel were carved out of the sand rock on the south side of the lake. A sandstone block wall was built on the boundary along Rocks Road which is still extant today.

Some of the nature of the layout of a designed space can be seen depicted in the Ordnance Survey 1874-1878 map. 'The gardenesque' nature of the environs of Lake Wood with the rock outcrops to the east, smaller paths around the perimeter of the lake and the carriageways with their connection to the house and landscape gardens are well represented *(Fig 4).*



Fig 4

Little appears to be known about the layout of the garden immediately surrounding the house, to the south of the lake and the road and the rest of Rocks Park 'garden'. From map evidence *(Fig 4)* the grounds were laid out as a 'park like environment'. The above map depicts a more formal garden in the north-eastern corner with an open landscape stretching southwards with rock outcrops stretching east to west along the northern perimeter. A tunnel was cut through these rock outcrops

to Lake Wood which still exists today and can be used by residents of Buckswood Grange. This proves there is still an active connection between what was the Streatfield House and the residences today. This is contrary to that which is stated in the Downland Heritage Addendum, Jan 2023, which states:' *Nonetheless, it is clear that it now survives as an isolated remnant of the wider grounds of The Rocks, and there is no longer any direct connectivity with the former mansion house to the south of Rocks Road'*. In fact, it remains as it was designed, somewhat hidden and secretive.



Foot tunnel house side

Image 3



Foot tunnel Lake side

Image 4

The Icehouse is located close to the foot tunnel, house side. It was not found during the developer led survey.



Icehouse

Image 5

A beautiful sandstone wall of good quality Ardingly sandstone ashlar blocks was built alongside along the north side of Rocks Road, enclosing Lake Wood and is in good condition today. The way the lake and landscape were designed in C18 was intentional and not intended to part of the house and garden or view the house and lake as one vista but more as a 'secret, grotto-like picturesque landscape which was popular at that time.



Roadside wall

Image 6

There was a footbridge that connected the Rocks Garden with the eastern end of Lake Wood and Fir Grove all that remains of that today is some brick foundations set into the sandstone outcrop on the north side of the road. The footbridge survived into mid C20.

In the tradition of English Garden Design there are houses with gardens attached to make the most of the landscape from within the house and without. However, equally there was also a tradition of gardens that stood alone or have lost that connection, albeit much larger and grander ones as in Stourhead, and much closer to home in Sheffield Park. What helps to make Lake Wood unique is that the rocks forming the picturesque element of the landscape are natural, unlike Sheffield Park where the cascades are of manmade stone.

There is good evidence to prove that Lake Wood today is not cut off from the Grade 11 Listed Rocks House, it remains as it was originally designed. What has been lost is the 'park like' garden now under modern housing of the Rocks Park Estate.

As much as the lake, wood and adjoining house gardens were designed for pleasure and status, the surrounding woodlands were also used for economic benefit and there are various records in the newspapers of the time of coppiced underwood being sold, and in one case, standing trees. In 1834 there were six acres of underwood being sold from Lake Wood.[2] In April 1835 111 oak trees, in the Rocks Wood, were to be sold at Auction *and Mr Murrell of the Rocks will show this lot*, presumably still standing. In 1846, at 'a capital auction of underwood', Lot 2 consisted of two acres in Butcher's Wood, near the lake and others lots, nearby, on land belonging to RJS in Shermanreed Wood, Paygate Wood and Budletts Wood[3] . In a document, written by the Woodland Trust, it is stated that the pattern of coppicing was carried out in rotation cycles of 15 years which appears to have continued sporadically until the 1960's. The last Streatfeild owner, Commander N Scarlett-Streatfeild, used to sell coppice from the 'Rocks Wood' area, and it was this Streatfeild that did not want the drives to be used or seen as a permissive footpath and subsequently some were blocked at the edges of the wood, whilst the drives became overgrown. Two woodmen were employed in the woodlands and there was a steam driven sawmill at Downlands Farm[4] .

The Garden in literature and Science in late Edwardian/ Victorian times

Gideon Mantell (1730-1852) was a local obstetrician, geologist and palaeontologist who wrote a journal between 1818 and 1852. The value of this journal lies in its portrayal of contemporary manners, events, and long excursions, whilst working. On October 18th, 1820, he rode with Mr Relfe to the Rocks near Uckfield where: 'we had a most delightful ride: the rocks are picturesque and romantic, it is the most enchanting spot I ever witnessed. A beautiful shallop was moored in the water under a natural archway in the rock; the summits were covered with lichens, mosses and ferns and surmounted by birches, firs, and larches. Before we quitted this lovely lake the moon had risen, and the reflection in the water, heightened, if possible, the beauties of the scene. In 1826 he attended a 'Grand Fete at Rocks Uckfield'. In August 1831 he drove to Uckfield with his wife and son to leave his son, Walter at school. He strolled to the Rocks and approached them, on foot, by a public footway and: 'when we reached the borders of the lakes, a dandy young man was fishing in a boat who hailed us in insolent terms and ordered them to quit the premises.' Mantell was disinclined to quarrel with him as the scene was most enchanting. It was provoking to be deprived of the enjoyment of the scene by an upstart youth[5].

In 1820 the following picture *(Image 7)* was painted in the style of Henry Ogg which gives us the best representation of the picturesque garden image that the Streatfeilds had achieved and which Mantell had so well described. The painting is in private hands and reproduced here with permission.

[2] British Newspaper Archive Sussex Advertiser: 01/12/1834
[3] British Newspaper Archive Sussex Advertiser: 22/12/1846
[4] Notes written by Pamela Streatfeild

[5] Journal of Gideon Mantel, Surgeon, and Geologist. Curwen, E Cecil 1940: Oxford



Image7 (1820)

In the early C19 there was a postman poet from Uckfield, called Thomas Pentecost, who wrote some flowery poems about Lake Wood, one entitled 'The Island Grave' in which the rocks, water, island, and romantic cavern with tall cypresses are woven into the poem[6].

Final years of the Streatfeilds

R J Streatfeild died in 1931 and the estate passed to his only child, Annette, who died in 1937 and the estate came up for auction in 1938. A beneficiary of her estate was a second cousin who bought Rocks House and a large area of land, including Lake Wood. He was subsequently killed in WW11, after which his estate passed to his brother, Commander N J Scarlett-Streatfeild. The land and Lake Wood was managed by an agent, not very well, and when the Uckfield bypass was built in 1986 it was located right on the western extreme of Lake Wood, cutting into it. No correct measures were taken to protect the trees within the wood which consequently left this western edge open after the felling of some mature trees that had protected the woodland. The following year, 1987 the October hurricane caused much damage, blowing down many of the large specimen trees and approximately 100 oak standards, allowing the spread of invasive Rhododendron ponticum. Commander Scarlett-Streatfeild died in 1993 and the Woodland Trust has owned and managed Lake Wood since this time. The Woodland Trust describes Lake Wood today as: '*In the northern part of the site there is overstood mixed coppice (including hazel, hornbeam, and sweet chestnut this once part of the woodland which was managed for regular sales of underwood. The site is heavily used by local people but suffers from regular anti-social behaviour such as camping, fires, swimming litter and vandalism. This increased during the recent lockdowns in 2020-2021'.*

[6] Sussex Advertiser 12/09/1825

Conclusion

The significance of this site, attributed by the Woodland Trust, is as follows: The site is an interesting small-scale example of a designed historic landscape which has been allowed to develop naturally over 100+ years. In the past 20 years it has been sympathetically restored to remove the threat from invasive rhododendron and to preserve its historic features. In addition to its aesthetic and historic value the site contains important habitats such as veteran trees, sandstone outcrops, standing open water and ancient woodland. The site has been extensively studied over by local ecologists over a long time and has an impressive list of species including various rare and protected plants and animals.



The above image is from an undated postcard, probably early C21, late C20.

The lake obviously existed before the date of the somewhat stylised Yeakell and Gardner map and was known as 'Uckfield Pond' what its previous use was and how it came to be formed, is not known. However, it has existed in its present form for over two hundred years, depicted in the Figg map of 1786. In 1820, Gideon Mantel was praising the beauty of this picturesque spot. The Ardingly Sandstone that is prevalent in the area forms the backbone and natural setting of this landscape.

The dramatic outcrops of the Cretaceous Ardingly sandstone were utilised for dramatic effect and the boat house, steps and tunnel were carved out of the sand rock on the south side of the lake. A sandstone block wall was built on the boundary along Rocks Road which is still extant today. The tunnel under the road, which took the carriageways from the house and northwards through Lake Wood, also is extant, although blocked. The pedestrian access still open, although locked but residents have free access. The lake, which is dammed at the western end, is situated between the outcrops of Ardingly Sandstone, which themselves are good candidates for Mesolithic rocks shelters, known ones nearby. Possibly William Gilpin, if he did have a hand in planning this landscape, managed to execute a rare coup and 'plan' a garden that was almost entirely natural and in the spirit of the 'picturesque'. Extremely unusual in this part of south-east England not generally known for its designed landscape with upstanding rock formations with natural water features. This more natural

landscape is in contrast with Sheffield Park, although plentifully supplied with water the rocky outcrops cascades there are made of Pulham Stone. Whilst some of the original planting has been lost, mainly as late as 1987, some of the planting survives and the Rocks remain untouched and are a wonderful mixture of natural and managed, or manipulated to provide a stunning effect, as they did when first imagined.



Image 9 General view

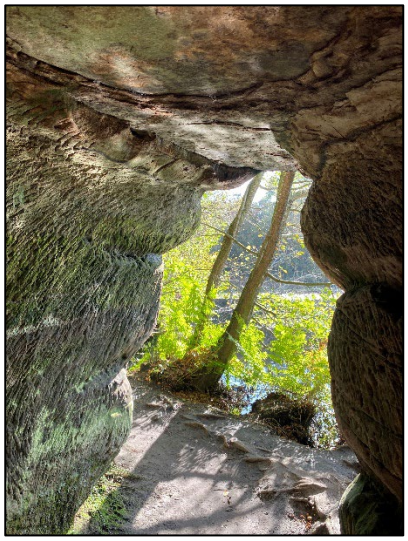


Image 10 Boat House

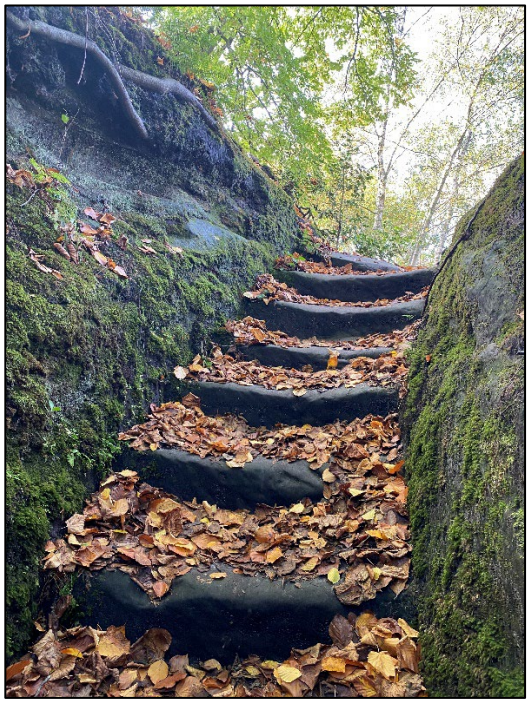


Image 11 Boat House steps

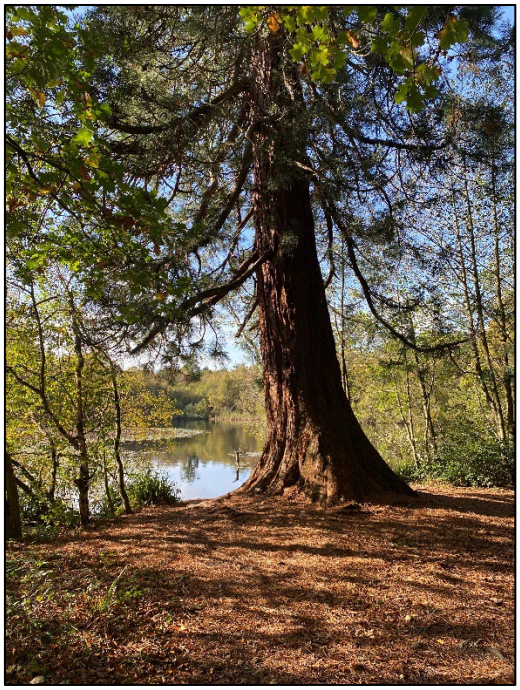


Image12 Giant Redwood & lake view

Whilst it is acknowledged that this landscape is in good hands under the stewardship of the Woodland Trust and in that sense the garden is in safe hands. It is the threat from adjacent development that causes concern with the inevitable increased footfall and changes to its

immediate surrounding landscapes and the ecological and hydrological damage that will occur. The final part of the carriage drive from the Downlands development is still extant and open *(Image 2)* and ingress from the development into Lake Wood would be easy.

It is hoped that the lake and it's woodland and sandstone historic setting together with its fragile ecosystems will not come under threat from any future development and that therefore, this unique garden needs the statutory protection that it deserves for it is a unique survivor, certainly locally and possibly nationally. Locally Buxted Park is a Grade 11 listed Park and Garden, but it is but a former shadow of its former glory and was so when it was listed. It would be fitting if the Lake Wood landscape is recognised, and so further steps can be taken to protect it.

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November 2022/September 2023