

3.1 THE SETTING

Bletchley Park lies on the east side of the old village of Bletchley in north Buckinghamshire, but west of the railway station and the modern town (fig. 3.1.1). The railway line, constructed by 1853, divided the 580-acre estate as it was then constituted. The Parish Church of St Mary's is situated to the east of the Park, and close by is the likely site of the medieval manor. The land now constituting Bletchley Park was originally part of a large medieval estate associated with this lost manor house. The presence of the 'lake' represents the remnants (although slightly enlarged) of one of the medieval fish ponds.

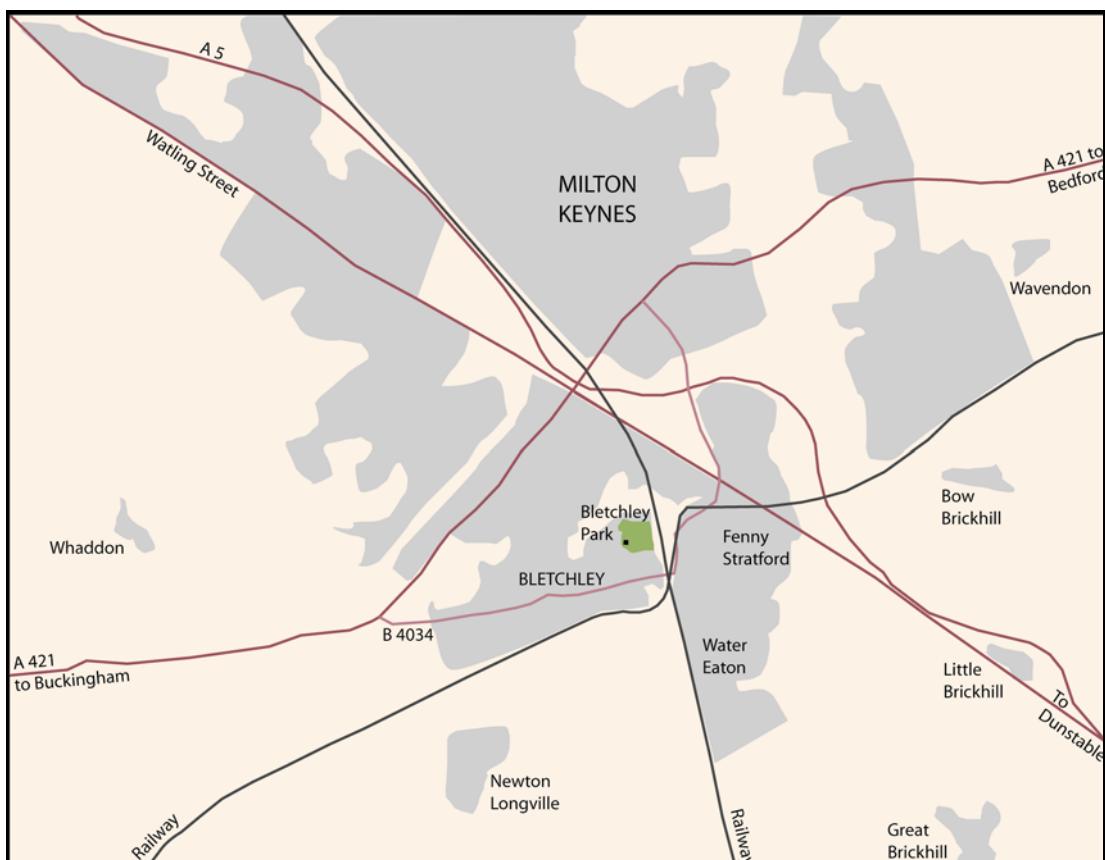


Figure 3.1.1 Location map, Bletchley Park and surrounding area (© English Heritage)

Although much of the Bletchley Park estate continued in use as farmland in the post-medieval period, a formal landscape was created in the 18th century around a Palladian house, built in 1711 and demolished by 1806. Elements of that landscape survived the radical reshaping of the grounds undertaken by Sir Herbert Leon in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but are now extremely elusive. On the other

hand, much of Leon's gardens, and the extensive planting which he carried out to the east of the house (fig. 3.1.2), have survived and make a crucial contribution to the setting of the buildings on the site.



Figure 3.1.2 Detail of 1937 Auction Map, showing Home Farm (at top), railway station, cricket ground, lake, house and associated kitchen gardens. Also visible are the remains of the 18th-century avenues of trees, as well as the dense 19th-century planting (courtesy of Bletchley Park Trust).

The estate was broken up after the death of Leon's widow, and in 1938 the Government Code & Cypher School (GC&CS) acquired only 58 acres of land, surrounding the mansion. This holding increased slightly in the course of the war, as land was required for new buildings to the north. The wartime estate remained intact until British Telecom left the site in 1993, but since then parts of the site have passed into different hands and there is a danger of it contracting still further in the near future. Today, the chief threat to the site comes from development pressures affecting land both inside and outside its boundaries.

Despite the erection of suburban-style housing in and around Wilton Avenue in the late 1930s, the setting of the Bletchley Park estate remained largely rural in character until the early 1960s, when modern developments began to encroach on its margins. The suburbanisation of the environs of Bletchley Park accelerated after 1967, when Bletchley was incorporated into the New Town of Milton Keynes. To some extent, however, the surviving estate was cushioned by the railway line (to the east), by the parish church (to the south-west) and by farmland which had been acquired by GC&CS from the developer Hubert Faulkner (to the north).



Figure 3.1.3 Detail of aerial photograph, 28 August 1961, showing housing development to the west of the Park and a recently completed access road to the new houses under construction on the kitchen garden site (© Crown Copyright. MOD. RAF/543/1426 2F43 FR:0380)

Post-war developments which have impacted on the setting of the Park include a grammar school, built to the north of the cricket ground and now demolished, and a modern secondary school, built more recently on the cricket ground itself. To the west, housing was erected on the site of the kitchen gardens in the early 1960s (fig. 3.1.3), and to the south, Wilton Avenue was more intensively developed as empty plots, created by Faulkner in the late 1930s, were filled. The area to the north of the present site (fig. 3.1.4), however, remains largely undeveloped, stretching as far north as the site of Home Farm. While two farm cottages survive, the farmyards and farmhouse have been replaced by an industrial estate.



Figure 3.1.4 Detail from aerial photograph of 2003, showing Home Farm cottages (top, below industrial estate); modern housing to the west of the mansion and church (left) and the empty site north of the cricket ground (right), until recently occupied by a school (© English Heritage 23 September 2003 NMR 23235/16)

In recent years the pressure for housing in and around Bletchley Park, already strong given the proximity of the railway station, has increased greatly. This is largely due to the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) identifying Milton Keynes as a target area for approximately 70,000 new homes. Certain tracts of land are particularly vulnerable. Block G and the former farmland to the north of the site are already in the hands of a developer, although planning proposals have thus far been refused. The wartime cafeteria and the site of the demolished dormitories on Wilton Avenue are currently subject to planning proposals. The site of the demolished grammar school, adjoining the southern boundary of the Park, is also likely to be redeveloped. All these developments will have to be treated with particular care if they are not to impact adversely on the appearance and character of Bletchley Park.