

5. THE BLETCHLEY PARK MANSION AND ITS PREDECESSORS

(SP 86750 33750)

Summary

The Bletchley Park mansion -- as it is commonly called -- is surrounded by the remnants of 18th- and 19th-century landscaped grounds and gardens. A modern surface car park lies to the north-east, and a wartime hut (Hut 4) to the south.



Figure 5.0.1 The Bletchley Park mansion, from north-east (© English Heritage AA048017)

The mansion was erected as a modest gentleman's residence c.1878-81, then greatly extended to create a small country house (fig. 5.0.1) in several phases between 1883 and the mid-1920s. The style is eclectic and exuberant, predominantly Old English, with borrowings from other late Victorian and Edwardian trends. The principal façades, which face gardens to the south and a carriage sweep to the east, combine red brick, pale ashlar dressings and mock timber framing to decorative effect, with projecting bay windows of different shapes and sizes, crenellated parapets, shaped gables and a varied roofline punctuated by tall brick stacks articulated by pilasters. While the main rooms occupy an L-shape, with

ranges facing south and east, the service rooms are concentrated to the north-west. Modern accretions are minimal, affecting only the centre of the south frontage.

The mansion was the third significant house to be built in this part of the estate. The first was Water Hall, erected in 1711 by the antiquarian Browne Willis, on a site to the south-east of the present-day house. Of Palladian inspiration, it comprised a symmetrical block of three storeys flanked by pavilions. By the late 18th century it had fallen into disrepair, and by 1806 it had been demolished.

A farmhouse existed in the vicinity of Water Hall in 1780; this was probably the same farmhouse that stood to the north-west of the Water Hall site as late as 1871. Together with its outbuildings (a dairy and stables), it would have been demolished prior to the construction of the present mansion. It seems to have stood on the site now occupied by a lawn, to the south of Hut 4. Contrary to some accounts, none of its structure was incorporated within the mansion.

Between 1871 and 1881, when it appeared on the first edition Ordnance Survey map, a new house -- the core of present-day mansion -- had been built (figs 5.0.2 and 5.0.3). This gentleman's residence must have been the creation of one of three different owners: Spencer Richard Harrison, who owned the estate between 1865 and 1877; a Mr Coleman, who reportedly owned the estate in the 1870s; or Samuel Lipscomb Seckham, who became the owner in 1877. Seckham was by far the most likely builder. As an architect and surveyor he had experience of property development in Oxford, and he is known to have taken out a mortgage for £7,000 in 1878. Shortly after the Bletchley Park mansion was completed, in 1883, Seckham sold the property to Herbert S. Leon.

Herbert Leon undertook extensive enlargements and alterations in several phases, remodelling the principal façades and improving the gardens around the house. He died in 1926, followed by his widow in 1937. The estate was then sold to a developer, Hubert Faulkner, who reportedly began to strip out the fixtures and fittings of the house prior to demolition. In 1937, however, the house and much of the estate was acquired by Admiral Hugh Sinclair to house the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) and elements of MI6 in the event of a war. Throughout the war (1939-45) it accommodated various sections of GC&CS, including the Directorate. Minor alterations were made, and a telephone exchange annex (now demolished) was erected on the south front.

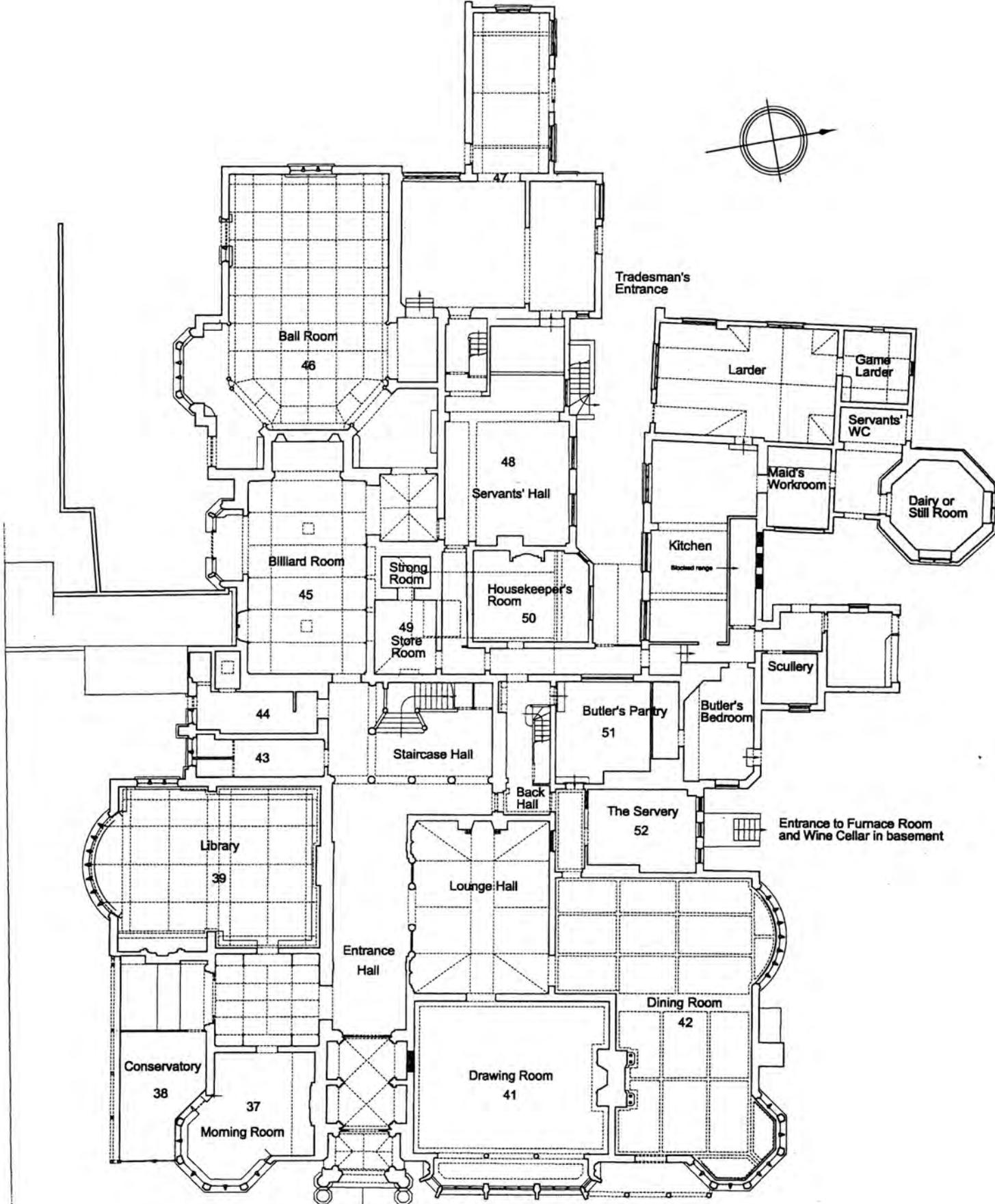
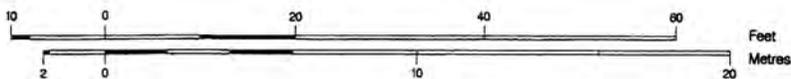


Figure 5.2
 Blechley Park Mansion,
 ground - floor plan
 (c English Heritage)



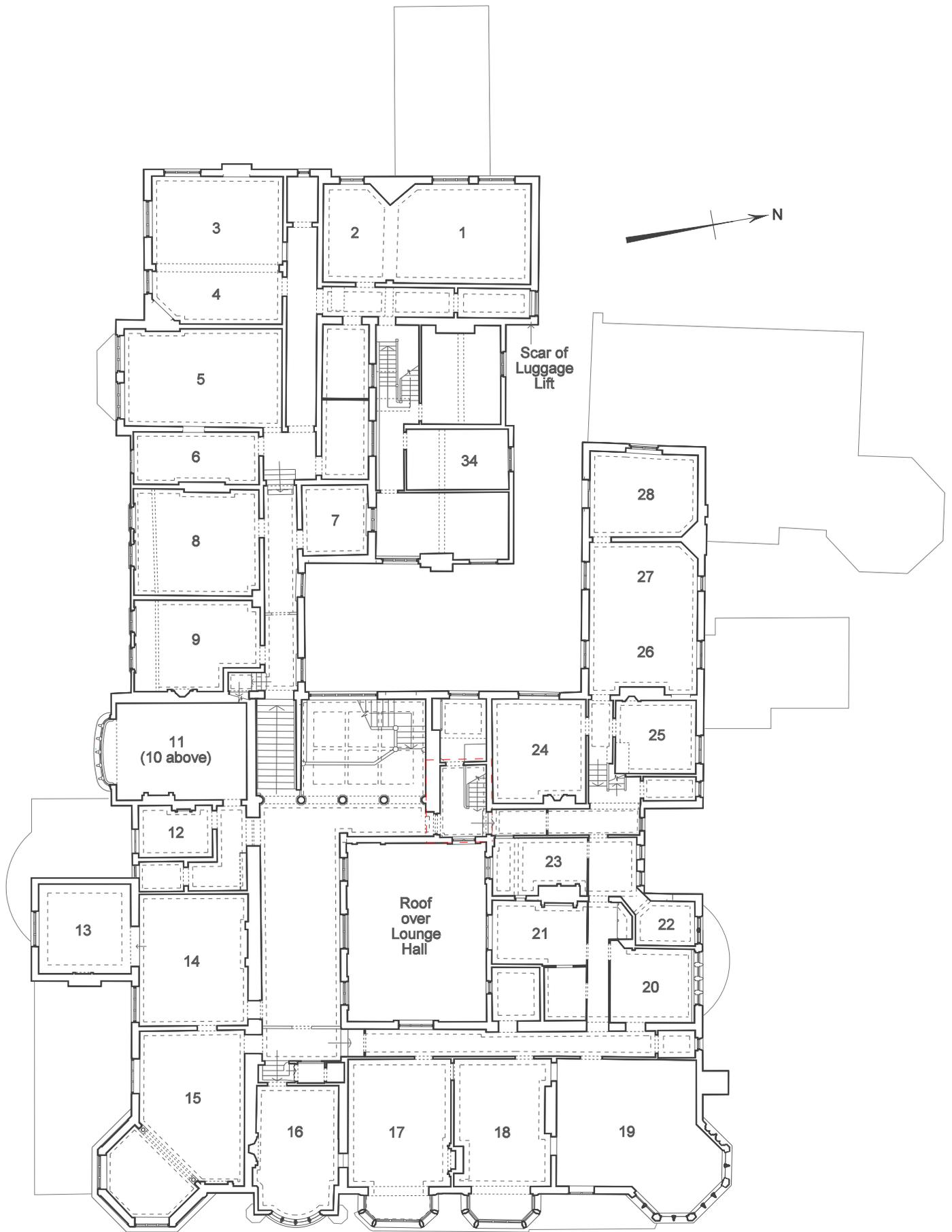
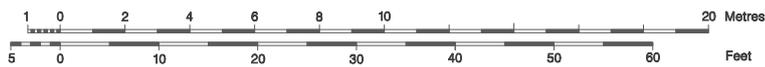


Figure 5.03
 Bletchley Park mansion,
 first - floor plan
 (© English Heritage)



The house never returned to domestic use. Until 1993 it was used as office accommodation by the General Post Office (GPO), later British Telecom (BT). It is currently occupied by the Bletchley Park Trust and is listed, grade II.