

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Medway



Jacksons Recreation Ground and Fort Pitt Gardens, Chatham



November 2013

Jacksons Recreation Ground and Fort Pitt Gardens, Chatham

Chatham, Kent

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INTRODUCTION

This site description and accompanying dossier have been prepared by the Kent Gardens Trust as part of its wider review of ***The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens***. This part of the review, carried out for Medway Council in 2013 -14, covers sites within the Medway local authority area with the aim to:

- a) Review the historic nature, content, current state and significance of the sites currently identified in the ***Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens*** for the Medway local authority area along with others identified by Medway Council. The review has been undertaken using English Heritage's criteria for identifying the significance of local heritage assets to provide a consistent approach. The revised list of sites has the potential to support development of a Local List of historic sites in Medway should the Council wish to progress this in future¹. The list of sites researched and evaluated in this review would be subject to consultation as part of any Local List development and is therefore not intended to be final.
- b) Inform future funding applications for historic spaces by the identification of significance
- c) Inform future conservation and/or any development of sites by the identification of the significance of key historic character, features and association including that of setting and viewpoints.

The extent of the area identified represents the current surviving area of the designed landscape, the boundary line generally reflecting the maximum extent of the historic gardens or parkland (although there are exceptions such as where land has been irreversibly lost to development). The boundary line takes no account of current ownership. Further information is available from the contacts listed below. The partnership would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much of their time, effort and hospitality to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Medway Council
Greenspace, Heritage
& Library Services
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
ME4 4TR
www.medway.gov.uk

Kent County Council
Heritage Conservation
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XX
01622 696918
www.kent.gov.uk

Kent Gardens Trust
www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk

English Heritage
www.english-heritage.org.uk

¹ English Heritage (2012) 'Good Practice Guide to Local Listing'

SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT

**JACKSONS RECREATION GROUND AND
FORT PITT GARDENS**

ROCHESTER

TQ 749 677

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Jacksons Recreation Ground, Fort Pitt Gardens and Victoria Gardens form an interconnected group of three late C19 to mid C20 public gardens and parks in which remnants of their original design survive. All three are laid out over the redundant, surviving remnant earthworks surrounding the former C19 Fort Pitt, their landforms reflecting the underlying topography of the earthworks. The sites thus have archaeological potential; they are also a repository for both local and national collective memories of Chatham's vital role in the defence of the United Kingdom from the C18 to the end of World War II. The sites represent Rochester and Chatham's response in the C19 and early C20 to providing open space for the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants plus local acts of philanthropy: Victoria Gardens commemorates Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 while the land for Jacksons Recreation Ground was donated by the Mayor of Rochester, John Howard Jackson, in 1914. All three sites contribute to the scenic quality of the wider area through the panoramic views they offer over the towns, the River Medway and beyond and in views from the historic New Road, the main route between Rochester and Chatham since 1783.

SITE DESCRIPTION

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The hill site of Fort Pitt, south of Chatham, appears to have been farmed from at least Roman times (finds by workmen in 1932: Fort Pitt, John Cooper Kent County Library 1976). During the C18 the War Department purchased the land in order to defend Chatham docks from the south. This marked the start of anti-invasion defences against the perceived threat of a French invasion during the Napoleonic Wars. The purchase was confirmed by act of parliament in 1762 (English Heritage Kendall 2005) with the 12h (30 acres) of land initially used as a troop encampment. Debbieg the chief Engineer at Chatham describes in a letter dated October 1783 that "*a great quantity of chalk to make lime has been dug there...two fields...have been ploughed up for the purpose of picking stones for the New Road..(and)...sod has been cut for banking up the sides of the above road*" (Kendall 2005). A B Walker's map of Chatham dated 1781-83 shows two roads approximately 100m apart running parallel to each other east to west across the hill site. The most northern of these roads is referred to by Hasted in his History of Kent published in 1798 as '*a new road (the current New Road forming the sites' northern boundaries) cut of late at a very great expense, by the authority of parliament, to avoid the inconvenience of passing through....*' the centre of Chatham. The southern road would have been built

over during the construction of a military hospital which commenced on the site in 1803. It was not until 1805 that defensive works of the fort began around the hospital (Kendal 2006). Fort Pitt House, standing on the 'new road' centrally along the northern boundary of Jackson Recreation Ground, was built in c1800 as the Clerk of Works House and was subsequently officers' accommodation attached to the military hospital at Fort Pitt.

Significant earthworks are shown on John Handfield's map of 1813 linking the fort with Delce Tower 400m to the west, positioned to control access to Rochester Bridge.

A plan of the City of Rochester by R Sale in 1816 records the 'new road' forming the northern boundary to the land now owned by the Board of Ordnance of the War Department. This plan also shows the terrace (referred on William Bushell's later city map of 1822 as 'Ordnance Meadow'), now containing the bowling green and tennis courts as a separate enclosure. It is possible that the terrace, which is not part of the fort's earthworks, was a source of building material (as mentioned by Debbeig in 1783) and was created during the construction of the new road prior c1785, or was possibly the location of a lime kiln as Bushell's map does record a lime kiln approximately 500m to the east.

Fort Pitt appears to have been completed by 1813 (Kendall 2005) and retained as such into the 1820's. However in 1828 it was converted to a hospital for invalided soldiers and by 1847 an asylum for servicemen was built within an enclosed section of the fort. By 1849 it became a general military hospital. In 1860 Florence Nightingale started the first Army Medical School on the site whilst waiting for the completion of a new school at Netley (Howard c1993).

The Tithe map and apportionment of 1841/2 confirms the Ordnance Department's ownership and describes the land as "pasture" occupied by various tenants. Owing to its military use, the 1st edition OS map (1862-1875) omits all details associated with Fort Pitt but the earthwork scarp, formed by the creation of the terrace which runs east to west immediately south of the bowling green and tennis courts, is clearly shown.

The 2nd and 3rd editions of the OS maps (1897-1900 and 1907-1923) again omit details of Fort Pitt but do record the surviving earthworks to Delce Tower. A section appears to have been removed adjacent to Pattens Lane (now City Way) on the sites' western boundary. The OS editions also show footpaths, many of which are still in existence although routes are interrupted by the later new features such as the bowling green and tennis courts. The footpath which runs along the top of the scarp to the bowling green is on the line of the southern road shown on A B Walker's map of Chatham dated 1781-83

In 1871 the land now occupied by both Fort Pitt Gardens and the Jacksons Recreation Ground was acquired by the City of Rochester on a short tenancy from the War Department as a public recreation ground at a rental of £56/annum. Rochester Council approached the War Department requesting to be consulted if the land was to be put up for sale.

In May 1909 negotiations commenced and a contract was entered into for the purchase of the land at £190/acre with the Council agreeing to a covenant that the land always be used as a public recreation ground. In October 190xx Chatham Town Council purchased the Victoria Gardens (qv) to the immediate east, which they had laid out as a pleasure ground in 1897.

During 1910 the grounds and additional land to the south and east (in the Borough of Chatham) were used by the Bath and West and Southern Counties Society for their annual agricultural show (Bath Record Office). An enquiry was held on 7 March 1911 for the Council to borrow £4200 for the purchase which aroused considerable public interest being reported fully in local press on 11 March (Chatham News).

In 1914 the City of Rochester Corporation was informed that a citizen had purchased the land from the War Office and had presented it to the City under a deed of gift, to be held as recreation grounds (History of Rochester 1928). The area later known as Jacksons Recreation Ground was opened to the public on 9 March 1914, when the Mayor "*hoped that it would be better laid out with cricket pitches, tennis courts, possibly a gymnasium and caretaker's lodge*". It was hoped to raise £1500 before next winter and the Mayor and Mayoress offered £100 and £50 respectively (Chatham Observer 11 March 1914). Although both sites appear to have been enclosed by park fencing, evidence suggests that it was only Jacksons Recreation Ground that was opened to the public at this date as early C20 photographs show sheep still grazing on the land later to be known as Fort Pitt Gardens (Couchman Collection DE402/17/25U) It was not known until some months after that the donor was the then Mayor, Councillor John Howard Jackson who had been elected Mayor of Rochester on 16 November 1912 and re-elected 15 November 1913.

It is not recorded whether the ground now known as Fort Pitt Gardens was part of this original tenancy and subsequent purchase. Early C20 photographs refer to Jacksons Recreation Ground as Fort Pitt Gardens (Couchman Collection DE402/10/15U), suggesting that the whole area was so called, prior to its western part being renamed once it became public knowledge that Jackson was the benefactor. An early C20 photograph shows sheep grazing on the steeply sloping ground and the area enclosed by park fencing (Couchman Collection DE402/10/22(U)).

On 24 October 1928 a granite tablet was unveiled by the Mayor with the inscription reading "*City of Rochester: This recreation ground was presented to the city of Rochester 1914 by Councillor John Howard Jackson JP Mayor of this city 1912-1914*". At the unveiling the Mayor stated that the Ground of 17 acres was originally very rough ground with a footpath from the Vicarage to Five Bells Lane, but now had tennis courts and more recently a bowling green had been added (Chatham News 26 October 1928).

The 4th edition OS map (1929-1952) shows several changes to the sites. City Way (formally Pattens Lane) has been widened on its eastern side creating the slope that runs along the western side of Jacksons Recreation Ground. The slope immediately to the south of New Road is shown for the first time and the

scarp slope to the south of this has been remodelled to allow construction of the bowling green and tennis courts. The central sports field terrace has been created together with the terrace which was to become the location of the children's playground. By 1938 a football pitch had been laid out; council correspondence dated August 1938 stated that the "football pitch was not to be re-turfed but maintained in safe condition" (Medway Archives RCA/CS1/15/4).

Aerial photographs, taken by the RAF during the late 1940s, indicate that both grounds were used extensively during the war. Defensive earthworks are shown running from the north-east corner of the Jacksons Recreation Ground south-west to City Way and then southwards alongside City Way. A structure which may be a reservoir is located on the terrace where the children's playground is now situated and scars on the sports field survive from military activity. Fort Pitt Gardens provided air-raid shelters dug into the chalk for the hospital on the opposite side of New Road. Reinstatement of Jacksons Recreation Ground took place in 1948 with photographs of that date showing pale strips of ground replacing the defensive works.

Fort Pitt Gardens were established in 1946 when the Parks Committee re-profiled the naturally steep slope into the Gardens. Lime trees were planted along the boundary with New Road and fresh turf laid over the sites of the hospital air-raid shelters with flower beds on the terraced slopes. New paths and seating was also constructed. It was also planned to build a low stone wall boundary with New Road when labour and materials were available (Chatham News 2 April 1948). In 1961 a road widening scheme for New Road involved the rebuilding of this low stone wall and the replacement of the limes with a line of cherry trees (Couchman Collection DE402/10/27).

Both sites are owned and managed by Medway Council which was formed in 1998 from the City of Rochester, Borough of Chatham, Strood Rural District and Gillingham Borough Council. In 2013 the Council carried out an audit of both Victoria Gardens and Jacksons Recreation Ground following an amassed developer contribution of £160,000 to improve recreation facilities at both sites. In response to this audit a report detailing potential future investment opportunities was produced. This has been discussed with Heritage Lottery Fund with a view to potential submission of a Parks for People funding programme application.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The adjacent sites of Jacksons Recreation Ground and Fort Pitt Gardens lie about 1km west of Chatham town centre and 1.5 km southeast of the city of Rochester, to the immediate south of New Road. Fort Pitt Grammar School and the University for the Creative Arts lie to the east. The roughly triangular sites slope steeply from the south-east to the north-west, their heights varying between approximately 50 and 22 metres above sea level on a ridge of grey marl chalk with very thin or non-existent topsoil.

Jacksons Recreation Ground's triangular c9ha (21 acres) site lies west of Fort Pitt Gardens, between City Way to the west and New Road to the north. The

New Road boundary is unfenced, although a low stone wall, approximately 600mm high, constructed from broken paving stones, identifies the boundary from a point 40m south of the junction along City Way eastwards along New Road for 250m to the boundary of Fort Pitt House. This low stone wall replaces the original park fencing shown on early C20 photographs (Couchman Collection DE402/10/15U). Its eastern side is bounded at the northern end by a chain link fence hidden by a hedge behind which is a brick retaining wall up to 10m high which originally formed the moat to Fort Pitt. The remainder of the eastern boundary and the short southern boundary consists of iron railings obscured by an overgrown hedge behind which runs a recently (2013) constructed access road. The 400m western boundary along City Way is unfenced but controlled by a line of painted metal bollards with a gated barrier for vehicular access at the southern end. The footpath which runs along the top of the scarp to the bowling green is on the line of the southern road shown on A B Walker's map of Chatham dated 1781-83

At the highest point on its southern boundary the site lies approximately 50m above sea level. The ground falls steeply to the northwest offering extensive views west over Rochester and to the northwest and north over the Medway River and beyond to the Frindsbury Peninsular

Fort Pitt Gardens lie adjacent to the east and occupy 1.2ha (3acres) of steeply sloping land immediately to the south of New Road. Victoria Gardens lies to the east, Jacksons Recreation Ground to the west and the University for the Creative Arts to the south. Fort Pitt Gardens are unfenced. Their northern boundary along New Road is a low stone wall formed from broken paving stones similar to that demarking the New Road boundary of Jacksons Recreation Ground. This wall extends around its eastern boundary on Fort Pitt Hill Road, which separates these Gardens from Victoria Gardens. Early C20 photographs show that park fencing (similar to that at Jacksons Recreation Ground) enclosed this area (Couchman Collection DE402/17/25U). The southern boundary is formed by an uneven unmetalled road with pavements on both sides. Concrete strip footings along the back of the pavement survive from a former iron boundary fence now (2013), gone. The London to Chatham railway line runs in a tunnel under these gardens.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Jacksons Recreation Ground

At the New Road/City Way junction, 1.5m high brick piers either side of a path and the remains of a gate post adjacent to the eastern pier survive from an early C20 formal entrance to the Ground. A photograph of c1920 shows the brick piers approximately 2.5 m high supporting iron gates. Iron railings extended either side of the piers along the back edge of the pavement. Photographs taken early C20 show the iron railings also extending along New Road (Medway Archives Couchman Collection). There are four more pedestrian entrances along New Road: two within the first 100m from the junction and a third which provides access to the bowling green a further 100m eastwards along New Road. At the eastern end of New Road a further entrance

onto a block paving path running southwest to the rear of Fort Pitt House also has a surviving wrought iron gatepost, suggesting that this is another of the early C20 gated entrances to the Ground. Undated draft byelaws for the Ground have a pencil note added: *“there is public footway through the grounds and consequently it is never closed to the public”* (Medway Archives RCA/L1/2/4/5) Early C20 photographs which show the grounds enclosed with gated entrances

Two entrances are provided along the eastern boundary at the north and south end of the University for the Creative Arts. The entrance at the south end is gated but kept open by ivy which totally obscures it. A barrier at the southern end of City Way provides a vehicular entrance to the sports field. In the north-east corner, at the junction of New Road and City Way, various tarmac footpaths provide pedestrian access into the Ground.

Fort Pitt Gardens

The principal entrance is located on the eastern boundary and is marked by low piers, formed from broken paving stones, either side of the path. This path extends to a western entrance close to New Road. Four stepped entrances are spaced evenly along the southern boundary leading to paths which connect to the principal east/west path.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Fort Pitt House lies within the northern boundary of Jacksons Recreation Ground with its own entrances onto New Road. The house was built c1800 by the War Department as the Clerk of Works house for the construction of Fort Pitt. The building is two storeys, white painted with a grey slate roof with various C20 additions on the east and west sides. A 1m high brick boundary wall separates the grounds of Fort Pitt House from Jacksons Recreation Ground on the east side, although the height is increased to 2m alongside of and to the rear of the property. Corrugated iron sheeting forms the boundary on the south side while various original and C20 outbuildings provide the boundary with the bowling green on the west side. Sale's map of Rochester dated 1816 and the Tithe apportionment of 1841/2 indicate that gardens existed to the south of the house on land now within the boundaries of Fort Pitt House. The house and outbuildings are now in use by various departments of Medway Council.

GARDENS

The principal feature of **Jacksons Recreation Ground** the Ground is the large (approximately 100 x 70m) sports field. It is laid out on a terrace, located directly over the now barely-visible earthworks to Delce Tower, cut into the natural slope on the uphill side and built out from it on the downhill side. The field is currently (2013) used for a variety of different events including fairs and circuses. In the past football matches were played there but there is no evidence that football is now (2013) played. In 1910 the Bath and West and Southern Counties Society held their annual agricultural show over the entire Ground and on additional ground in the former Borough of Chatham to the south and east.

Four tennis courts and a bowling green, covering an area of 120 x 30m, occupy a terrace which runs parallel to and approximately 10m south of New Road. The tennis courts were established in the early 1920s with the bowling green a few years later (Chatham News 26 October 1928). The tennis courts are screened by a conifer hedge along the west side and a privet hedge along the north boundary. The bowling green is currently (2013) leased by Cranbourne Bowling Club whose association with the green stretches back for at least sixty years (Medway Archives RCA/C51/15/4) The bowling club has a single storey clubhouse and separate toilets and are considered to have been constructed c1925 (Chatham News 26 October 1928)

A grass bank between the tennis courts the bowling club and New Road is laid out with ten flower beds and a line of ornamental trees equally spaced along the New Road elevation. These beds have been in existence for at least sixty years as a former resident commented on them in 1951 (Medway Archives RCA/C51/15/4). More flower beds are located to the west of the tennis courts around the various entrances at the junction of New Road and City Way together with a variety of ornamental trees.

Immediately to the south of the tennis courts is another terrace (approximately 120 x 30m) cut into the natural slope, part of which is occupied by a children's play area which was refurbished in 2009/10. This terrace first appears on the 4th edition OS map (1929-1952) and survives from military construction during the 2nd world war, possibly incorporating a reservoir (Magnus Alexander c2008).

Other features include a skate/bmx park built in 2007/8 and located along the eastern boundary towards the southern end. Pockets of ornamental trees are planted around the ground, including on the eastern boundary by the gate to the University and around a circular rose bed now (2013) in poor condition to the east of Fort Pitt House. The path between the tennis courts and the playground is lined with ornamental trees including sycamore and Norway maple.

Council correspondence dated December 1963 records a shelter in Jacksons Recreation Ground being "again damaged" but its location is not given and is now (2013) gone (Medway Archives RCA/C51/15/4). The remains of concrete bases also survive around the Ground where seating was located but is now removed.

Little remains of **Fort Pitt Gardens** which were laid out post war in 1946. They currently (2013) comprise amenity grass with some close-clipped evergreen shrubs. Three rose beds on a terrace create a feature at the eastern end of the site. The tarmac paths, now (2013) in poor condition, traverse the site from east to west occasionally leading to a mixture of semi-mature ornamental deciduous and conifer trees some of which may originate from the 1940s.

REFERENCES

Books and articles

Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the county of Kent* (London 1798)

F. F. Smith, *History of Rochester* (1928)

John Cooper, *Fort Pitt* (Kent County Library 1976)

J Howard, *Fort Pitt: Chatham's Unique Site: Designed to Protect, Adapted to Care, Modified to Educate* (Privately published c1993)

P. Kendall, *Defending the Dockyard-the Story of Chatham Lines* (Unpublished report, English Heritage 2005)

P. Kendall, *Historic Barracks in Medway* (Unpublished report, English Heritage 2006)

Magnus Alexander, *An earthwork analysis of Jackson Recreation Ground* (English Heritage 2008)

Medway Council, *Victoria Gardens Chatham and Jacksons Recreation Ground Rochester-History of the Parks and future vision with funding options.* (2013)

Maps

A B Walker, *Chatham* (1781-83)

John Handfield Map 1813 (National Archives)

R. Sale, *A Plan of the City of Rochester in the County of Kent* (1816)

William Bushell, *Map of City of Rochester and Liberties* (1822)

Tithe map (St Margaret's Parish) 1841/2 Medway archives and Local Studies Centre

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition (1862-1875)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition (1897-1900)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition (1907-1923)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 4th edition (1929-1952)

Illustrations

Various photographs from Couchman Collection 1914 to 1961 Medway Archives DE402/10/15(L), 15(U), 22(U) and 27 and DE402/17/25U

Aerial photographs taken by RAF (1945-48)

Archival Items

Plan of Showyard 1910 Bath Record Office

Articles from Chatham News 1911, 1928 and 1948

Articles from Chatham Observer 1914

Draft Bye-laws Medway Archives RCA/L1/2/4/5

Rochester Council correspondence Medway Archives RCA/CS1/15/4

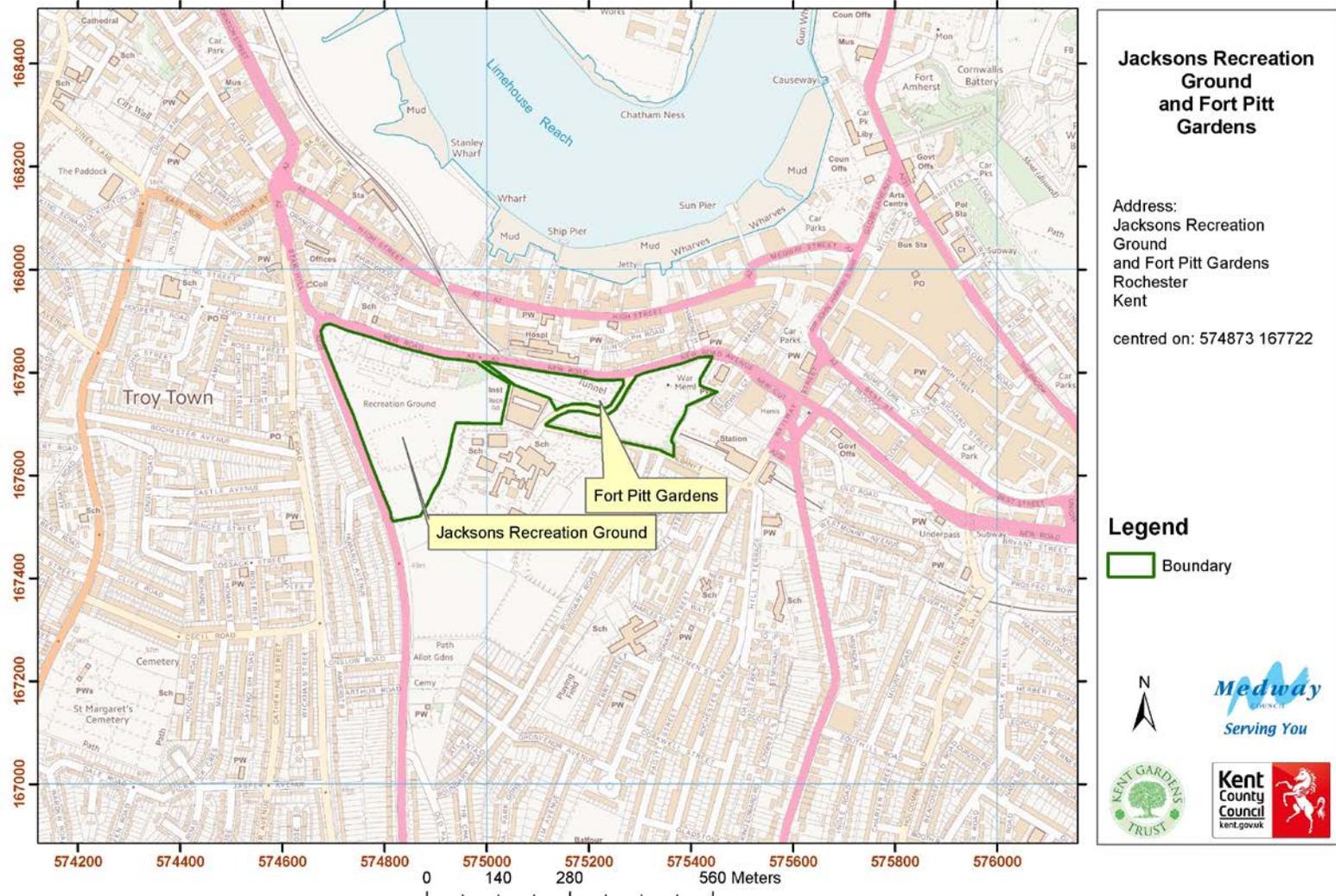
Kent Compendium entry no. 152 1996

Parks & Gardens UK entry 2007

**Research and written by Michael O'Brien
Virginia Hinze (editor)**

Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

Fig. 1 Boundary map



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Fig. 2 Key views map

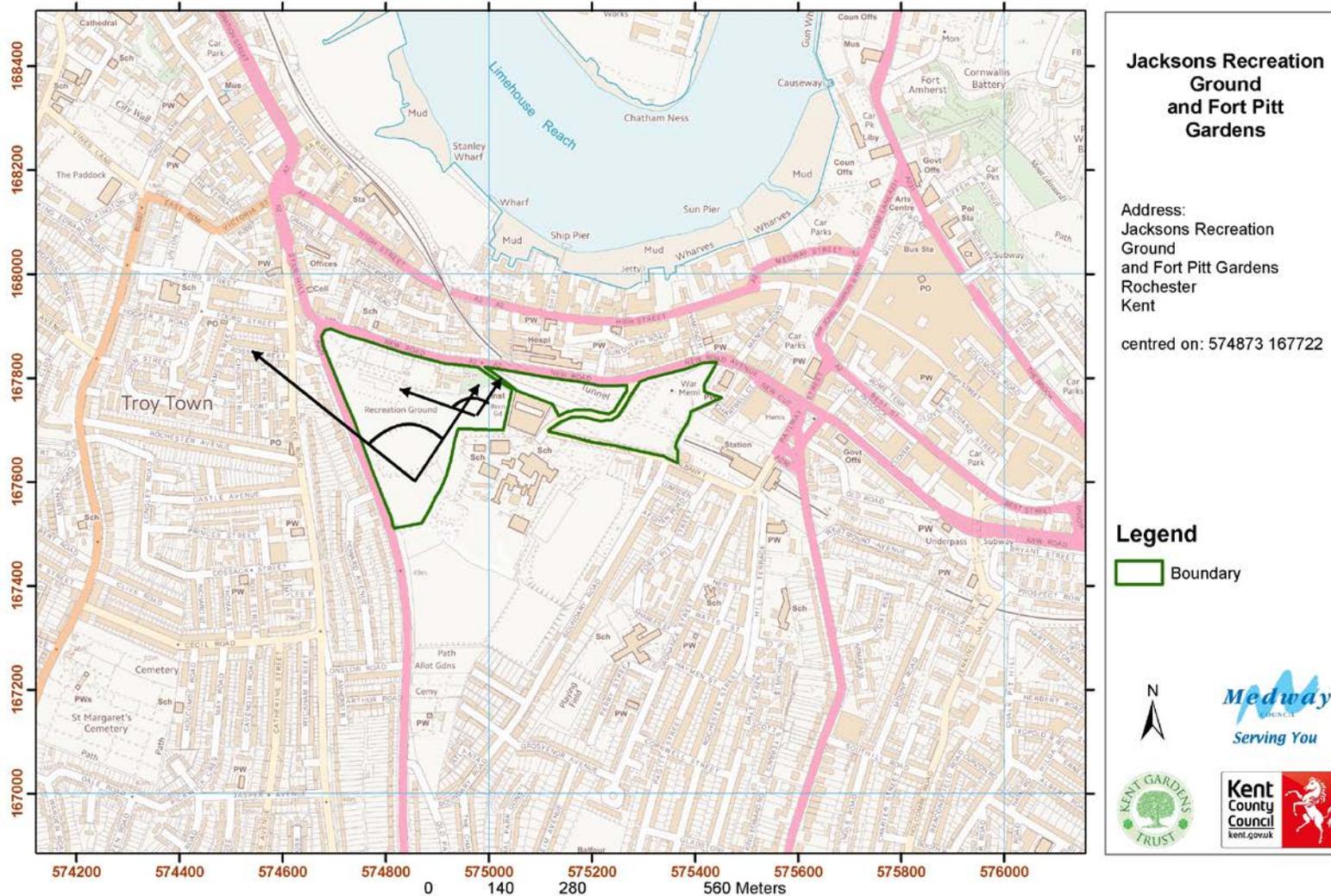
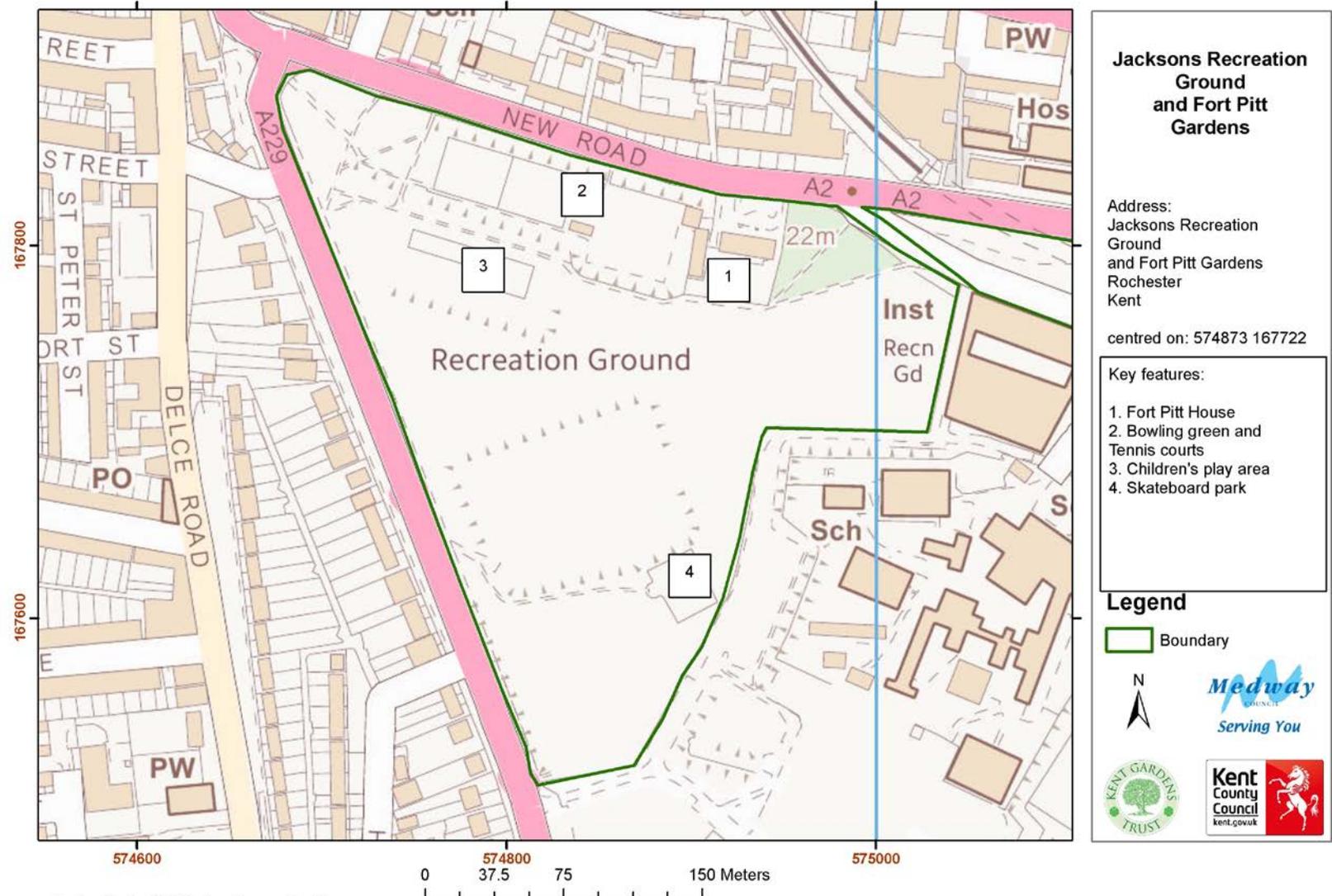


Fig. 3 Key features map



Jacksons Recreation Ground and Fort Pitt Gardens

Address:
Jacksons Recreation Ground
and Fort Pitt Gardens
Rochester
Kent

centred on: 574873 167722

Key features:

1. Fort Pitt House
2. Bowling green and Tennis courts
3. Children's play area
4. Skateboard park

Legend

Boundary

N

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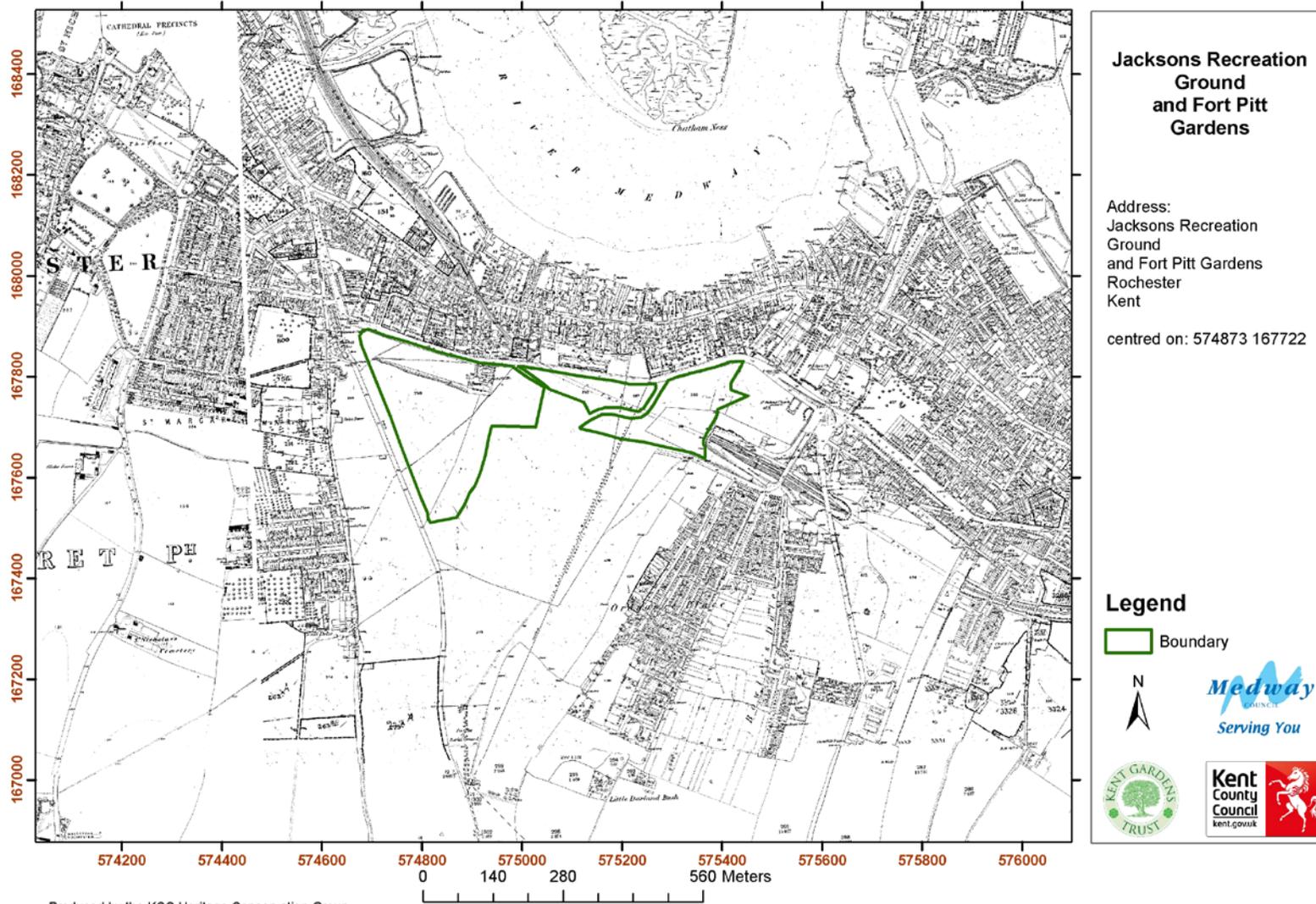
Fig. 4 Aerial photograph (2012)



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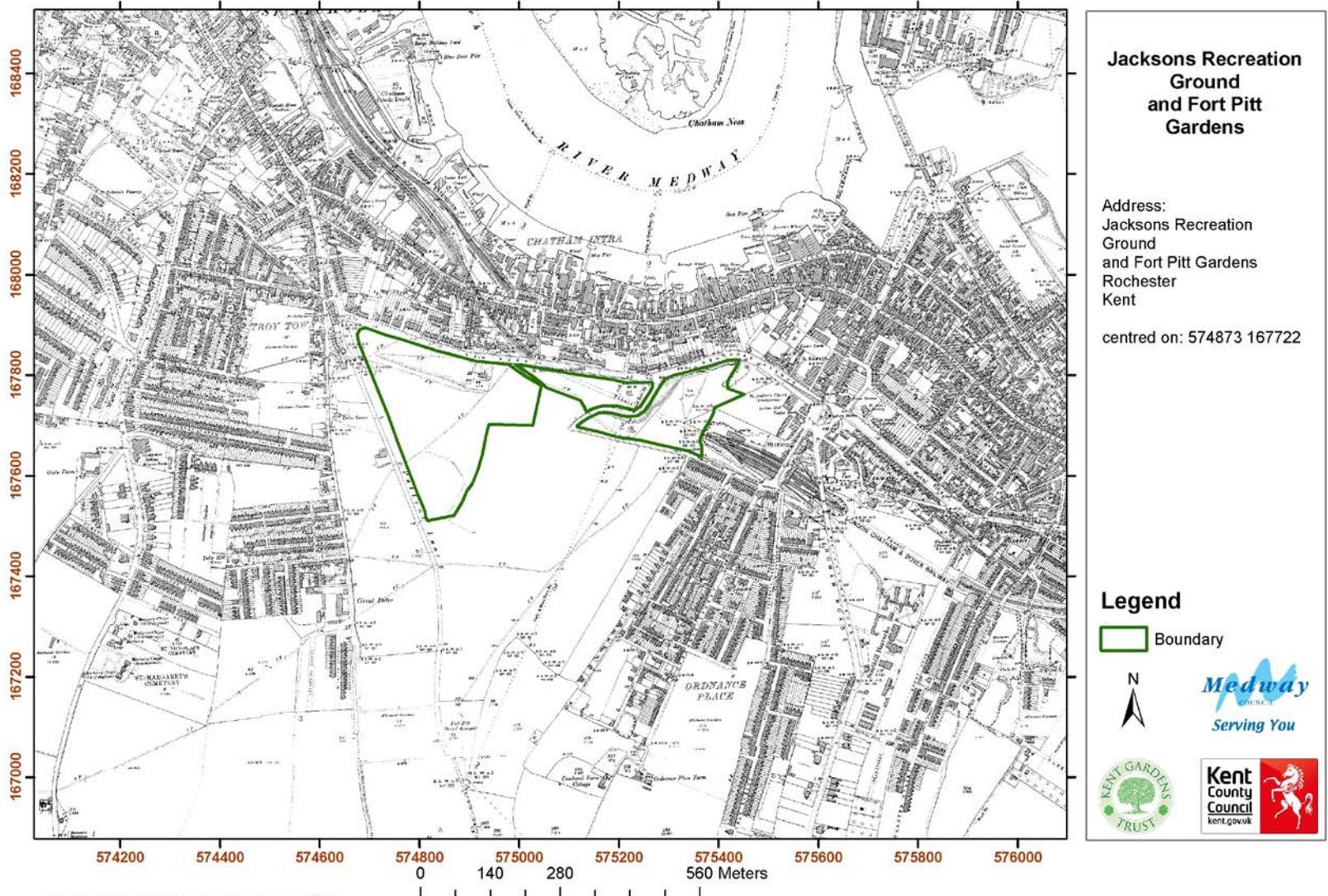
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1862-1875)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 2nd edn 25" map (1897-1900)

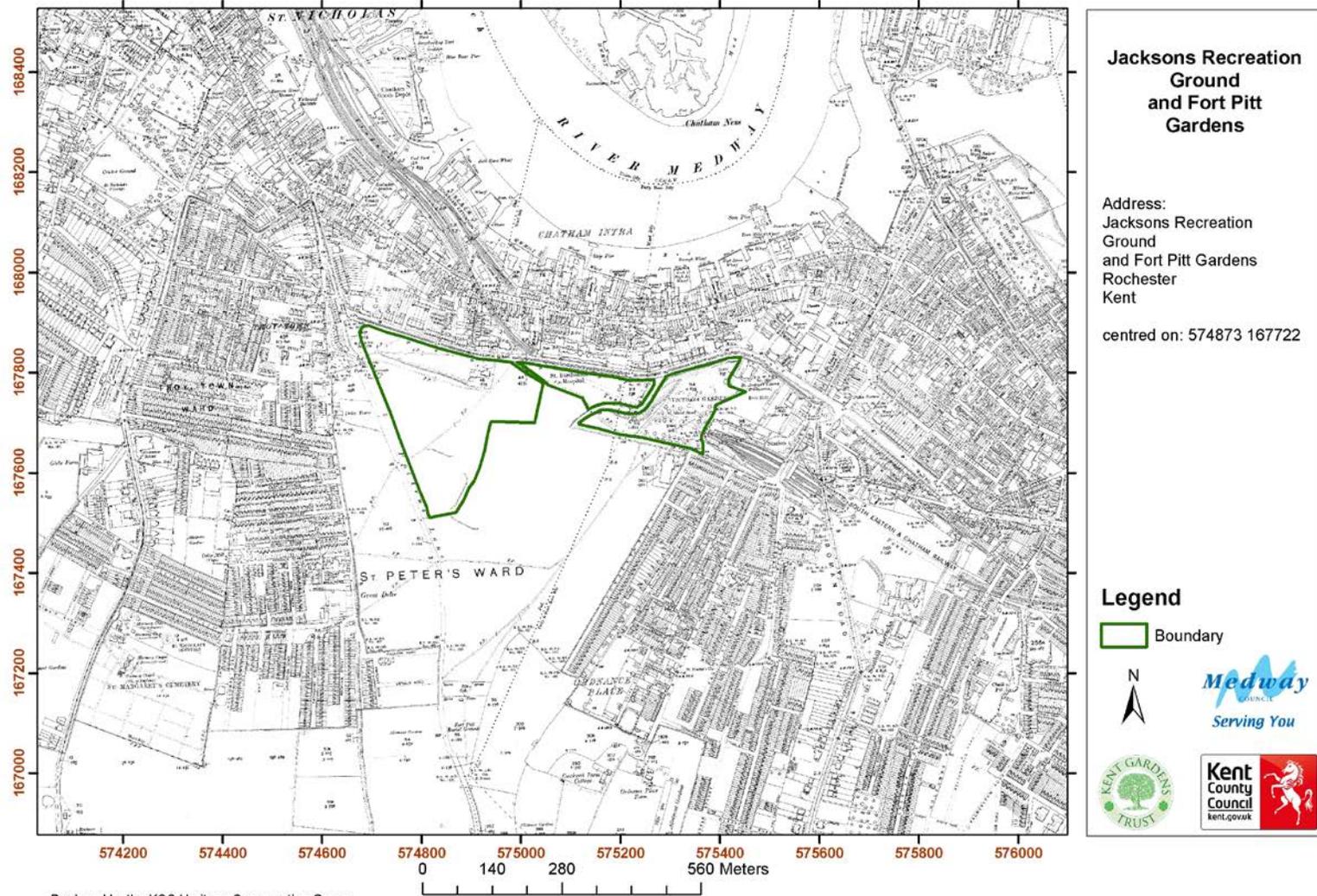


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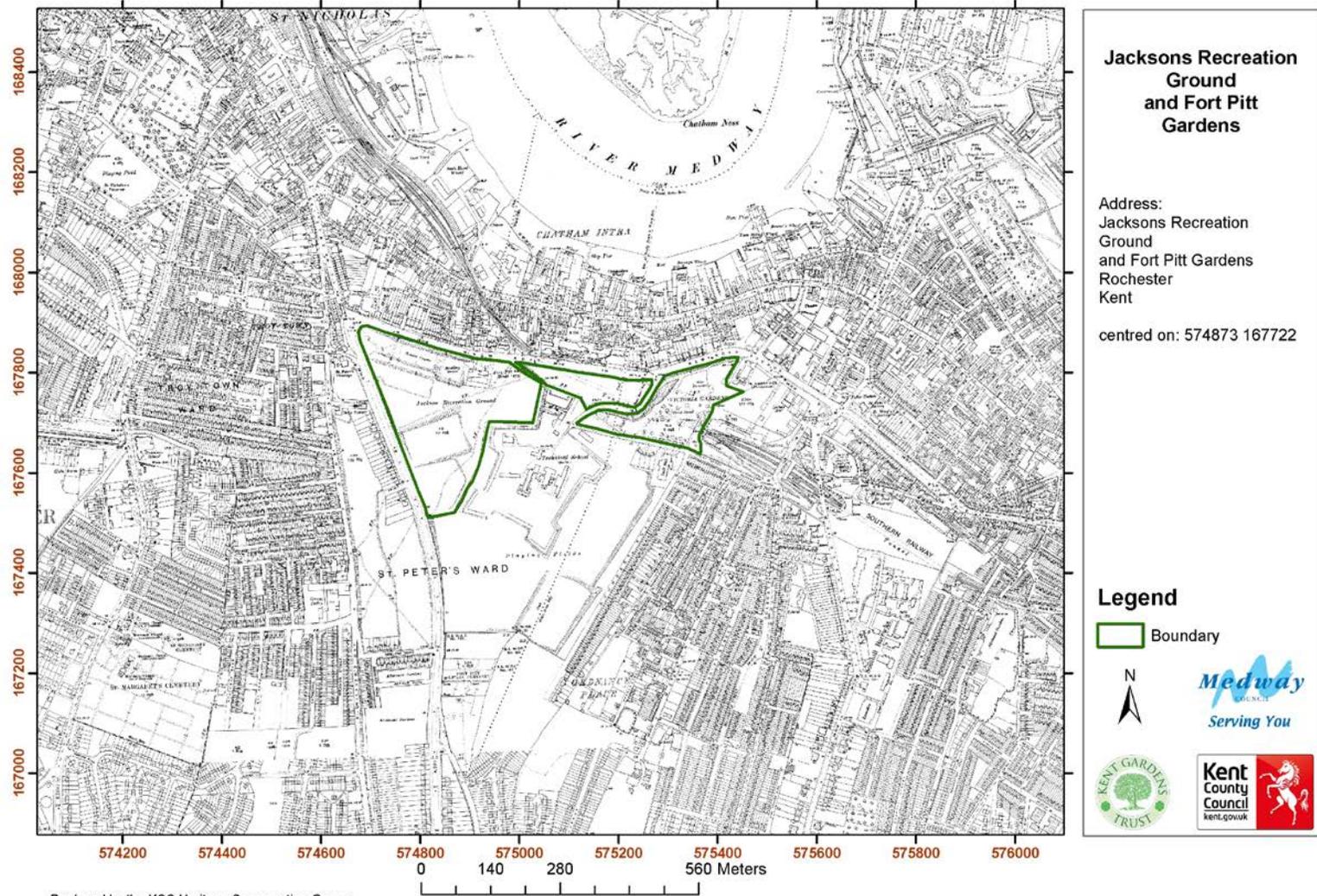
Fig. 7 Ordnance Survey 3rd edn 25" map (1907-1923)



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Fig. 8 Ordnance Survey 4th edn 25" map (1929-1952)



Jacksons Recreation Ground and Fort Pitt Gardens

Address:
Jacksons Recreation Ground
and Fort Pitt Gardens
Rochester
Kent

centred on: 574873 167722

Legend

- Boundary
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Fig. 9 Chatham Dockyard from Fort Pitt c1830



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Fig. 10 Opening of Jacksons Recreation Ground by Mayor J H Jackson 14 May 1914



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

Fig. 11 Entrance to Jacksons Recreation Ground c1920



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Fig. 12 Views of Jacksons Recreation Ground, 2013.

