

# The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Medway



## The Strand, Gillingham



March 2016



# **The Strand**

## Gillingham, 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 future<sup>1</sup>. 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](http://www.medway.gov.uk)

Kent County Council  
Heritage Conservation  
Invicta House  
County Hall  
Maidstone  
ME14 1XX  
01622 696918  
[www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk)

Kent Gardens Trust  
[www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk)

English Heritage  
[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> English Heritage (2012) 'Good Practice Guide to Local Listing'



## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

**KENT**  
**GILLINGHAM**

NGR: 513928 0565724

**THE STRAND**

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Strand is home to one of Britain's earliest open air-pools. It is the country's only remaining riverside salt-water pool and is the only surviving shoreside open-air pool in Kent. Its situation in a densely populated, low income industrial area, and not dependent on the fluctuating popularity of a seaside town, is unusual and has been a significant factor in its continued patronage and survival. The pool's sloping sides and distinctive free-form contours remain unchanged since the original sculpting of the river mud flats in 1896.

The Strand has provided riverside access and leisure facilities to many generations of local residents of Gillingham and the surrounding Medway towns for well over a century. Popular with families it has been the source of happy and enduring childhood memories. Memories that are rooted within their community, the unique and wonderful riverside setting and memories that imbue pride, belonging and a sense of place.

## **SUMMARY**

A riverside leisure park that developed around an open-air pool that opened in 1896 and expanded during the interwar period.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

During the second half of the C19 there was an increase in river traffic on the Medway. Steamboats were often prevented from calling at Gillingham as the river was continually silting up. To overcome this, a 220m long pier was built which was completed in 1894. On the leeward side of the pier there were 3 mud islands. Children would fill the gaps to form a mud pool and collect water as the tide rose. When they had finished swimming they would drain the pool and catch the fish they had trapped.

Mr Baker Thomas Cuckow, a local businessman, saw an opportunity in creating a permanent sea water bathing pool in the depression between the mud flats. With an initial investment of £ 1,000 Mr Cuckow created the pool using disused railway carriages as as changing rooms and wooden fencing was used to enclose the pool area. The pool opened on June 27th 1896 with a special sports programme including underwater swimming, water polo matches and a greasy pole competition. The incoming tide, filtered through sand beds, would fill the pool and it was emptied via a sluice gate.

Between 1896 and the early 1920's the pool became an increasingly popular summer attraction and visitor numbers steadily increased. It is during this period

that the ownership of the bathing pool transferred to Gillingham Corporation and became known as The Strand.

Increasing visitor numbers and an increased emphasis on public health and sanitation resulted in the first significant modernisation and expansion of The Strand between 1921 and 1926. Chlorination, aeration and filtration units were installed in the bathing pool and the railway carriages serving as changing rooms were replaced with new, purpose-built wooden changing rooms and a 3m diving board was added. The area of the site increased to an area of 3.2ha following the reclamation of the marshland to the east of Gillingham Pier and the acquisition of a muddy creek that lay to the west of Gillingham Pier and went inland for 68m (The muddy creek was gifted to).

The reclaimed land adjacent to the Medway was hard-landscaped creating an esplanade along the riverfront and inland from the esplanade was open grass and paths for recreational purposes. Between the River Medway and esplanade tons of sand were dumped on the muddy shoreline to create a beach. This 'beachfront' saw the transition of The Strand from a bathing pool to a 'pleasure resort'. The Strand's popularity resulted from its proximity to densely populated Gillingham, a 'fixed salary' town where most residents, dockers and their families, had to look within the town for their pleasure and amenities. This interwar period also saw the addition of a putting green, car park, cafe, pony rides and a timber hexagonal bandstand that attracted large crowds on Sunday afternoons. The cafe rented out deck chairs and in the mid 1930's annual deckchair rentals reached over 30,000 and annual attendance figures reached over 80,000.

The second significant Interwar development of The Strand took place in the 1930's. In 1935 1.6 ha plot of land adjacent to the site's southern and eastern boundary was added to The Strand following the re-siting of Gillingham's outfall sewage works. A muddy creek that lay parallel and west of Gillingham Pier was gifted to Gillingham Corporation by the Rochester, Gillingham and Chatham Gas Co. The parks committee borrowed £ 8,000 from the government to drain the muddy creek and created 2 concrete pools; a larger boating pool 103m x 14m and a smaller paddling pool 46m x 14m. At the public enquiry, prior to the construction of the 2 pools the Town Clerk said "the pools are designed to take the children from their present haunts in the river itself to the more wholesome surroundings of a paddling pool...it is impossible to prevent the children from wallowing in the river mud but if we can place them in these more wholesome surroundings we are going to do it".

The boating pond and padding pool added further to the Strand's appeal as Britain entered WW2. The active promotion of the British government for stay-at-home holidays, to save fuel and money, ensured that the Strand remained a popular venue throughout the summers of WW2. The river traffic to and from Chatham dockyard, air raids, doodlebugs and presence of The Strand's army observation post were frequent reminders that the country was a war.

In 1948 a miniature railway described as 'The wonderful Steam Miniature Railway' was officially opened by the Mayor of Gillingham Alderman P J Bruce.



The 9 inch gauge line ran along the Southern boundary of the putting green. 1949 saw Gillingham Borough Council provide swings and roundabouts purchased second-hand from a fairground company. 5 tennis courts were built on the land that was previously the outfall sewage works.

In 1974 the fairground swings were replaced and a new brick bandstand was built. A 1.5ha allotment plot, on the eastern side of The Strand and 1.8ha of an orchard on the Strand's southern boundary were acquired and an 'L' shaped pitch and putt golf course was created. A few years later the pitch and putt golf course was extended when the remainder of the orchard was grubbed. In the later part of the 1970's the steam engine was replaced with a miniature replica of an Intercity 125 train and the train tracks were extended to run around in a loop around the perimeter of the putting green.

In 1988 Councillors threatened to close the Strand as visitor numbers were declining and it was deemed unprofitable. In 1989 a huge protest was mounted and, following a temporary closure and essential renovations, the Strand was re-opened in 1991. During this period the boating lake and paddling pool were filled to create additional parking. In 1995 the brick bandstand was demolished and a new paddling pool was built in the place of the bandstand. Also in 1995 the putting green gave way to an 18 hole crazy golf course

In 1996 the centenary of the Strand was celebrated between July 28 and Aug 3rd. The Strand remains the only open air swimming pool in the Medway towns and continues to attract crowds on warm days during the school summer holidays. The other attractions are less popular and the Strand is now suffering from inadequate maintenance and under-investment.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM and SETTING**

The Strand is situated on the south shore of the river Medway, 1.5km north of Gillingham Town Centre. The Strand occupies approximately 9ha of which the pitch and putt golf course accounts for 4.2ha. The site is loosely rectangular in shape with the main axis running from east to west and parallel to the banks of the river Medway.

The northern boundary is formed by the river Medway and to the south the site is bordered by the A289 Pier Road, a busy dual carriageway but from which it is screened by a dense tree belt. To the west the Strand borders a gas works and boatyard. Front the riverfront the first 120m of the western boundary is a 8m high open metal fence enclosing a long, narrow rectangular boating club on 2 sides. Then the western boundary is delineated by a 2m high concrete wall. The concrete wall was constructed in the late 1930's when the boating pond and paddling pool were constructed. The eastern boundary borders a housing development.

The Strand lies on flat ground just above sea level. The land to the immediate south rises up gradually from the river towards the town centre, its urban

industrial landscape of narrow streets and terraced housing forming the main views southwards from The Strand. Views northwards look across the Medway towards Hoo Island and the Hoo Peninsula, an exposed rural landscape with open farmland and clusters of huge industrial buildings. A major edifice across Medway is the Kingsnorth Power station which is currently being demolished. At low tide a large expanse of coastal marshes and creeks are exposed; to the east are the secluded wetlands of Yantlet Creek and beyond the docks of the Isle of Grain.

## ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The single vehicular entrance to the Strand is via the Strand Approach Road that is a northern spur off Pier Road. The main entrance is marked by a large welcome sign and site map in the north-west corner of the most centrally located and easily accessible car park. A tarred road continues within the Strand to provide access to 3 overflow car parks. The long narrow car park to the northwest of the main car park occupies the site of the former boating pond and paddling pool that were filled in in the 1960's.

The Strand can also be reached from the east via the Saxon Shore Way, Kent's long distance coastal footpath. The route follows the banks of the Medway as it enters the Strand from the east but then diverts inland as there is no access along the river frontage on the site's western boundary.

## LEISURE PARK

The leisure park comprises several separate areas, each dedicated to a particular activity. They are described in the order in which they

The salt water, open-air concrete pool is an organic, loosely rectangular shape 43m x 83m with a paved surround. Its size, shape and distinctive sloping sides have remained since its original construction in 1896. Within the pool an inner circle of concrete islands were added in 1991 creating a series of smaller pools and an outer channel for a 'lazy river', the longest in the UK. On the southern side of the pool is a 40m x 8m brick building, with a turnstile entrance and changing rooms. This brick building replaced the wooden changing huts on the southern length of the pool and the wooden block that ran along the western side of the pool has been demolished. The pool area is enclosed by a 2m height concrete fence decorated with painted murals on the exterior wall.

3 distinct triangles of open grass, separated by tar paths, lie to the south and east of the open-air pool. In total the 3 triangles cover 0.8ha and account for the area of tidal marshland that was reclaimed in the late 1920's. The largest triangle immediately to the south of the open-air pool is the site of the children's play bordered by 1m high bow top fencing. This enclosure has been the site of the play area since the original fairground swings and roundabouts were installed in 1949, replaced in 1974 and again more recently. The second triangle of open grass is to the east of the open-air pool and adjacent to the shore line. A shallow paddling pool is located here and was built to replace the original timber bandstand that was demolished in 1974. The padding pool is

build on elevated ground enclosed by bow top fencing. The open grass surrounding the paddling pool slopes up an inclined bank to meet the fencing. The third and smallest triangle lies to the south of the play area and to the north of the main car park. On the open grass are several picnic tables and across the tarred path on the eastern side lies the cafe and public toilets. These buildings have been rebuilt and modernised since their original construction in the 1930's but remain on the same site.

The miniature railway track encloses a .7ha rectangular area to the east of the bandstand and south of the river front. Passengers board and alight from the train at the railway station adjacent to the river front. Within the area bordered by the railway track is a crazy golf course, partially shaded in the summer months by the tree canopies. At the western end of this area is a large sand-pit and play area. Prior to the installation of the miniature railway in 1948 this area was open grass since the late 1920's when The Strand was expanded.

The along the north-eastern, eastern and southern boundaries of The Strand is a 4.3ha 9 hole pitch and put golf course. In 2014 the course was modified to include football golf.

A 1.4ha rectangle of land lies due south of and behind the miniature railway circuit. This area of land was the Gillingham outfall sewage works until the 1930's when the sewage works were re-sited. Within this area are the Strands five tennis courts, a 5-a-side football pitch and an overflow car park. There are, in addition, other operations; a sewage pumping station, an archery club and a children's day nursery.

## **REFERENCES**

### **Books and articles**

RA Baldwin, 'The Gillingham Chronicles', 1998, (Baggins Book Bazaar).  
J Guy, Gillingham, Then and Now', 1981, (Chalice Publications).  
N Tomlinson, 'The Book of Gillingham', 1979, (Baracuda Books).  
'The Strand Centenary, 1896-1996', Gillingham Borough Council.

### **Maps**

Ordnance Survey 1st edition, 25" map, (1862-72), sheet 19/4.  
Ordnance Survey 2nd edition, 25" map, (1897-1900).  
Ordnance Survey 3rd edition, 25" map, (1907 -1923).  
Ordnance Survey 4th edition, 25" map, (1929-32).

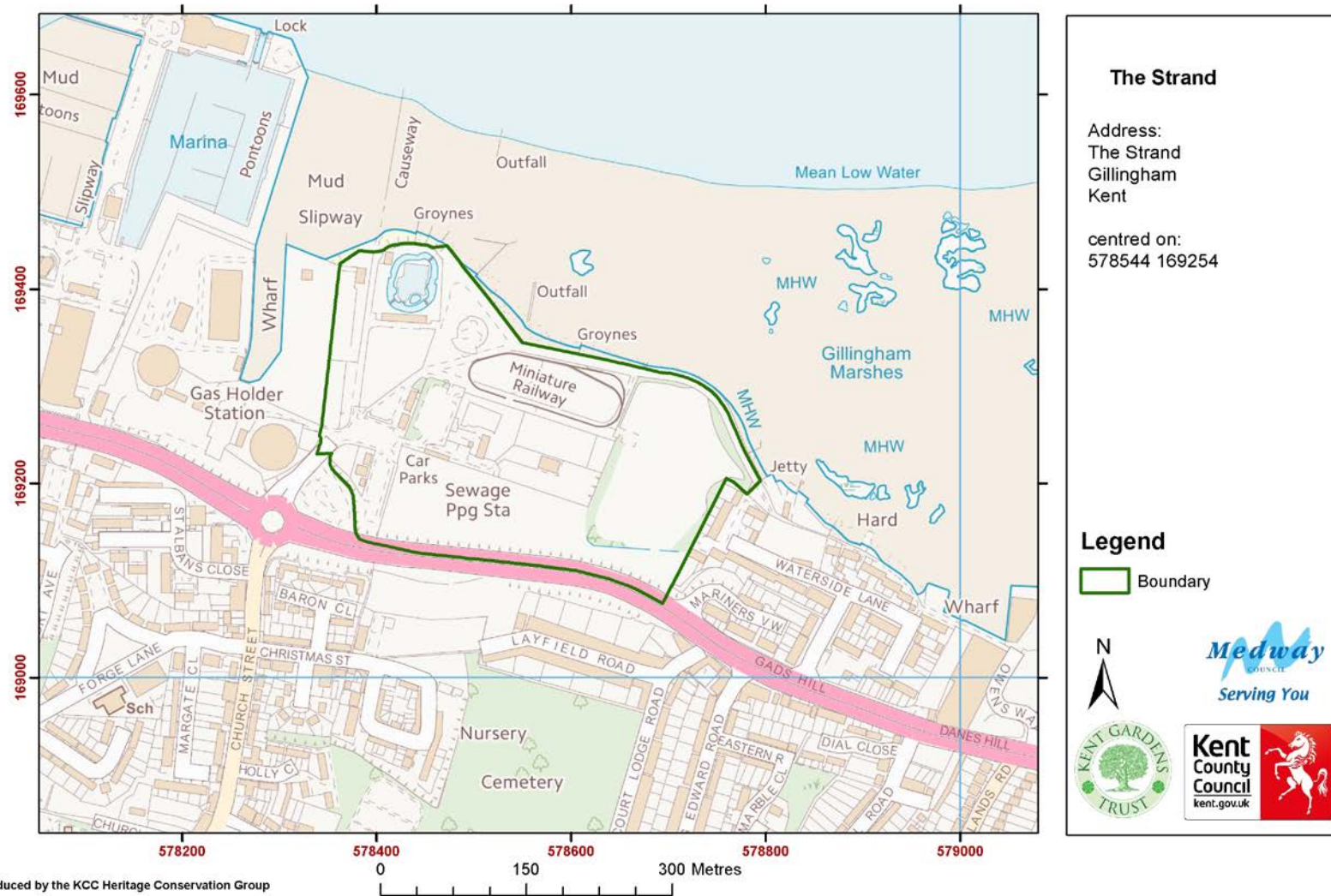
### **Newspapers**

Chatham Star. 10.01.1989, 11.02.1989 and 28.05.1991.  
Medway Messenger. 05.09.2003.  
Kent Today. 'Splashing out for pool's centenary', 29.07.1996.

**Research and written by Caroline Jessel**  
**Virginia Hinze (editor)**

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

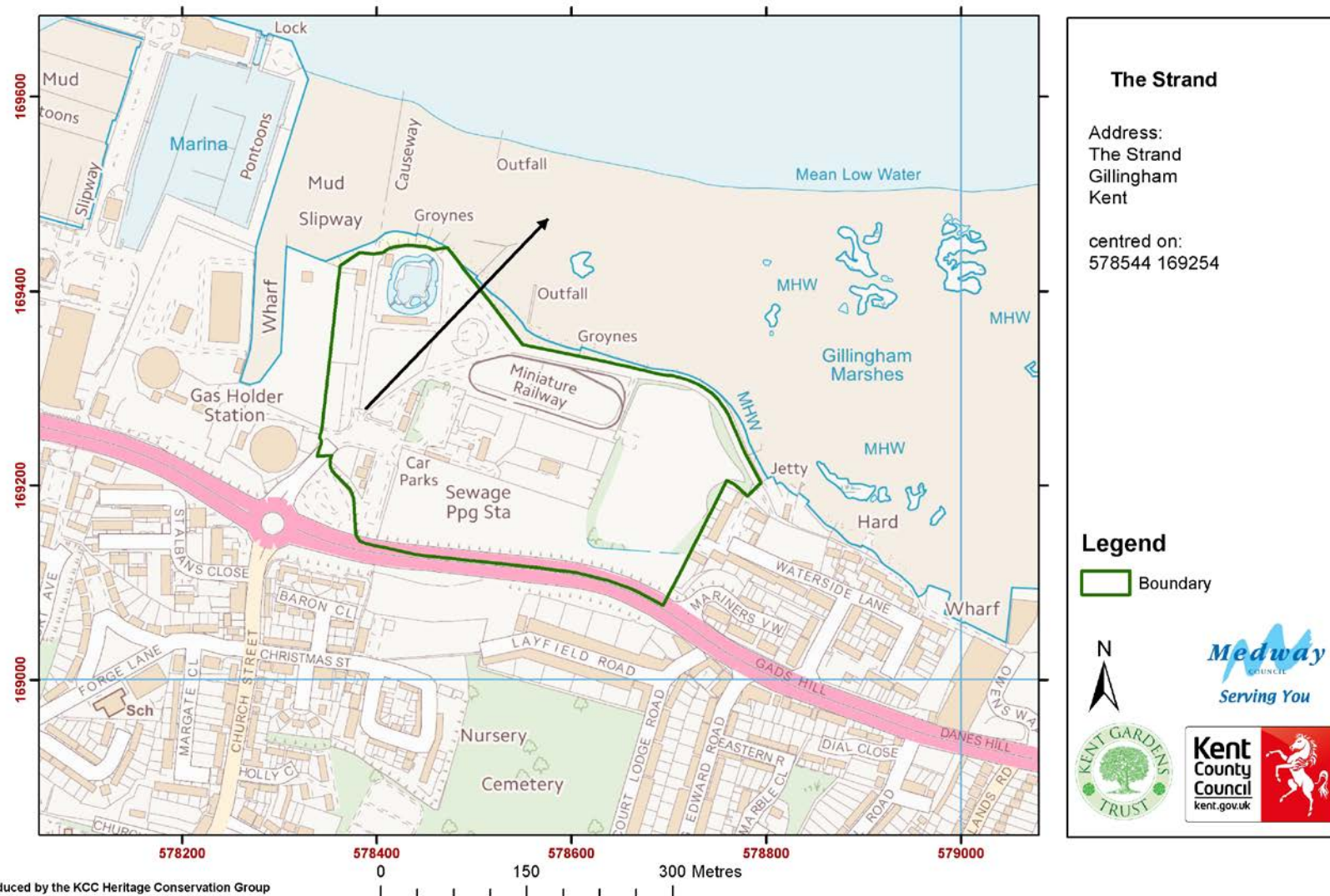
Fig. 1 Boundary map





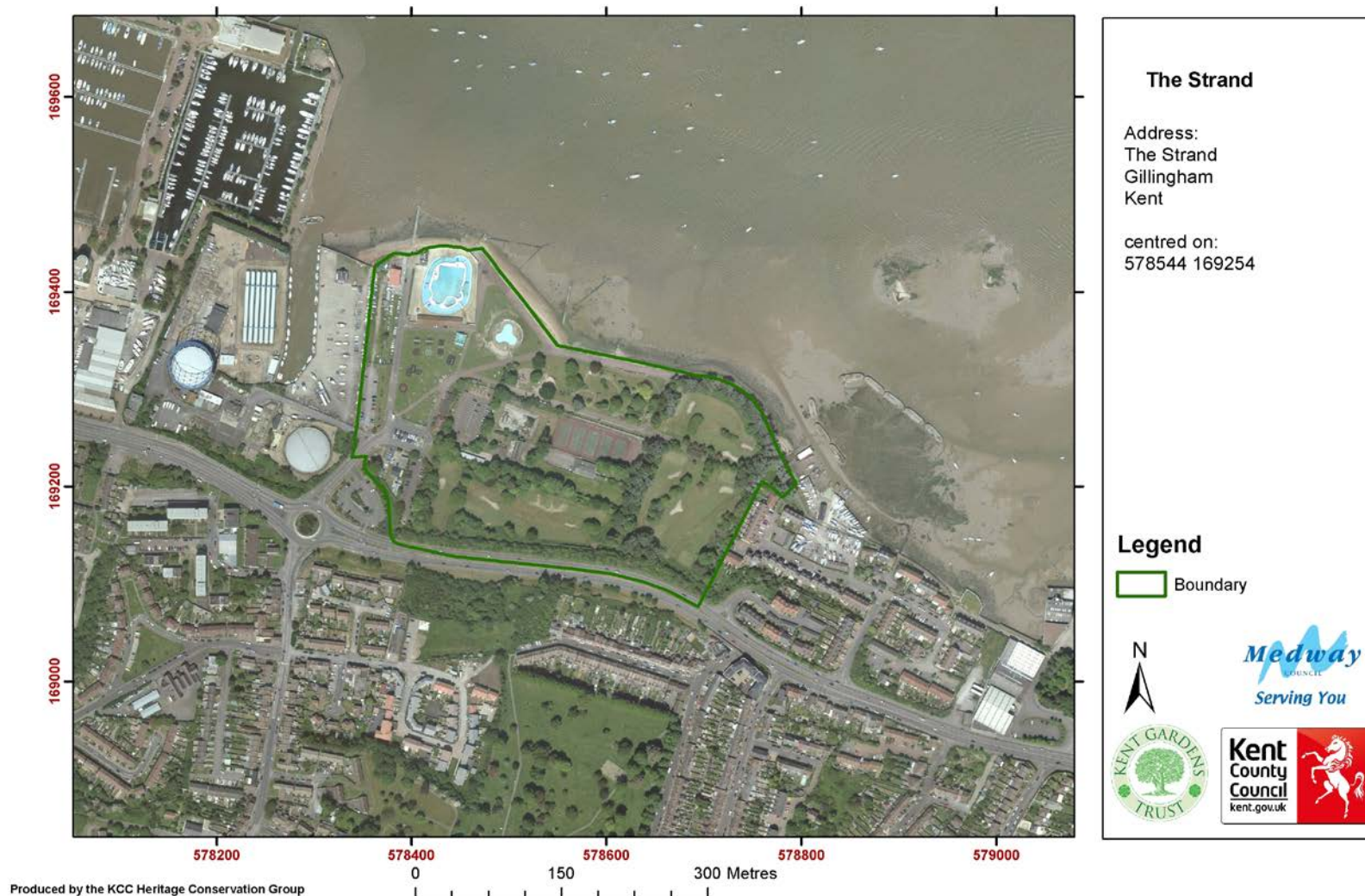
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Fig. 2 Key Views Map



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

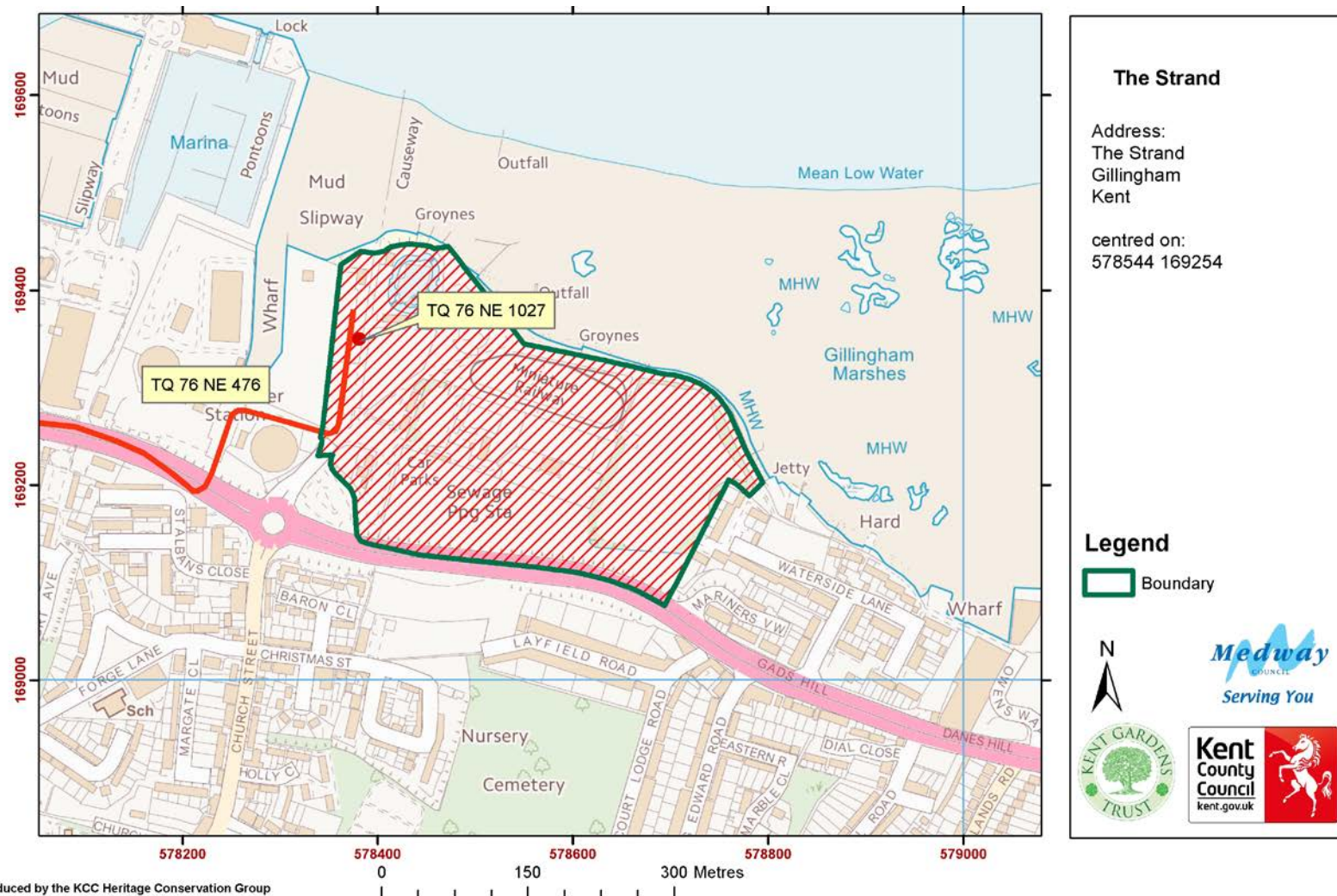
Fig. 3 Aerial photograph, 2012





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Fig. 4 Kent Historic Environment Record records



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved 100019238, 2013

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### Fig. 5 Kent Historic Environment Record report

**HER Number** TQ 76 NE 1027

**Record Type** Monument

**Site Name** Site of a post medieval Wharf, Gillingham

A wharf near the Gas Works in Gillingham, marked on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th edition Ordnance Survey maps (c.1891-1940). This area has since been developed and the wharf is no longer present.

#### **Monument Types and Dates**

WHARF ((pre) Post Medieval to Modern - 1891 AD? to 1940 AD?)

Evidence DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

#### **Description**

Wharf identified on the 3rd ed. OS map (1).

#### **Sources**

(1) Map: Ordnance Survey. 1905-10. Ordnance Survey 1:2500 3rd edition: 1901-1912.

#### **Location**

##### **National Grid Reference**

TQ 78381 69350 (point)

TQ76NE

Point

##### **Administrative Areas**

Civil Parish

GILLINGHAM, MEDWAY, KENT

County

KENT

Unitary Authority

MEDWAY

#### **Associated Designations - None recorded**

#### **Other Statutes and Cross-References**

Sites & Monuments Record - TQ 76 NE 1027

Active

- 60010

Active

- TQ 76 NE 1027

Active

#### **Related Monuments - None Recorded**

#### **Finds - None recorded**

#### **Associated Events/Activities - None recorded**



**HER Number** TQ 76 NE 476

**HER Number** TQ 76 NE 476

**Record Type** Monument

**Site Name** Chatham and District Tramway

Chatham and District Tramway opened in 1902 and closed in 1930.

**Monument Types and Dates**

TRAMWAY (Modern - 1902 AD to 1930 AD)

**Description**

Catham and District Tramway opened in 1902 and closed in 1930. It was run by the Chatham and District Light Railways Company.

**Sources - None recorded**

**Location**

**National Grid Reference**

Centred TQ 7756 6787 (8834m by 4074m) TQ76NE Line

**Administrative Areas**

Civil Parish	GILLINGHAM, MEDWAY, KENT
Civil Parish	ROCHESTER & CHATHAM, MEDWAY, KENT
County	KENT
Unitary Authority	MEDWAY

**Associated Designations - None recorded**

**Other Statutes and Cross-References**

Sites & Monuments Record - TQ 76 NE 476 Active

**Related Monuments**

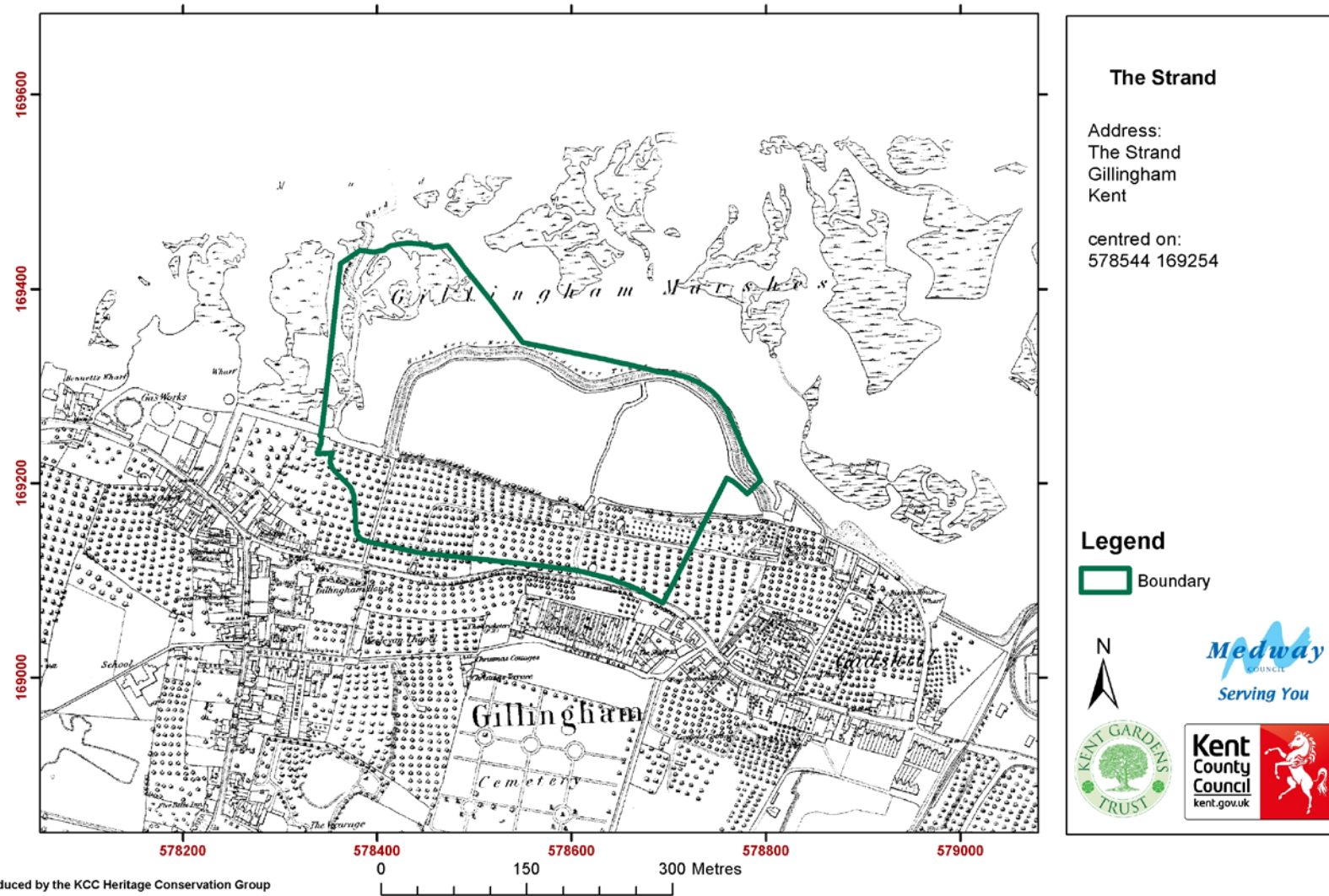
TQ 76 NE 291	Chatham power station	Contemporary Complex
TQ 76 NE 477	Luton Tram Depot	Contemporary Complex

**Finds - None recorded**

**Associated Events/Activities - None recorded**

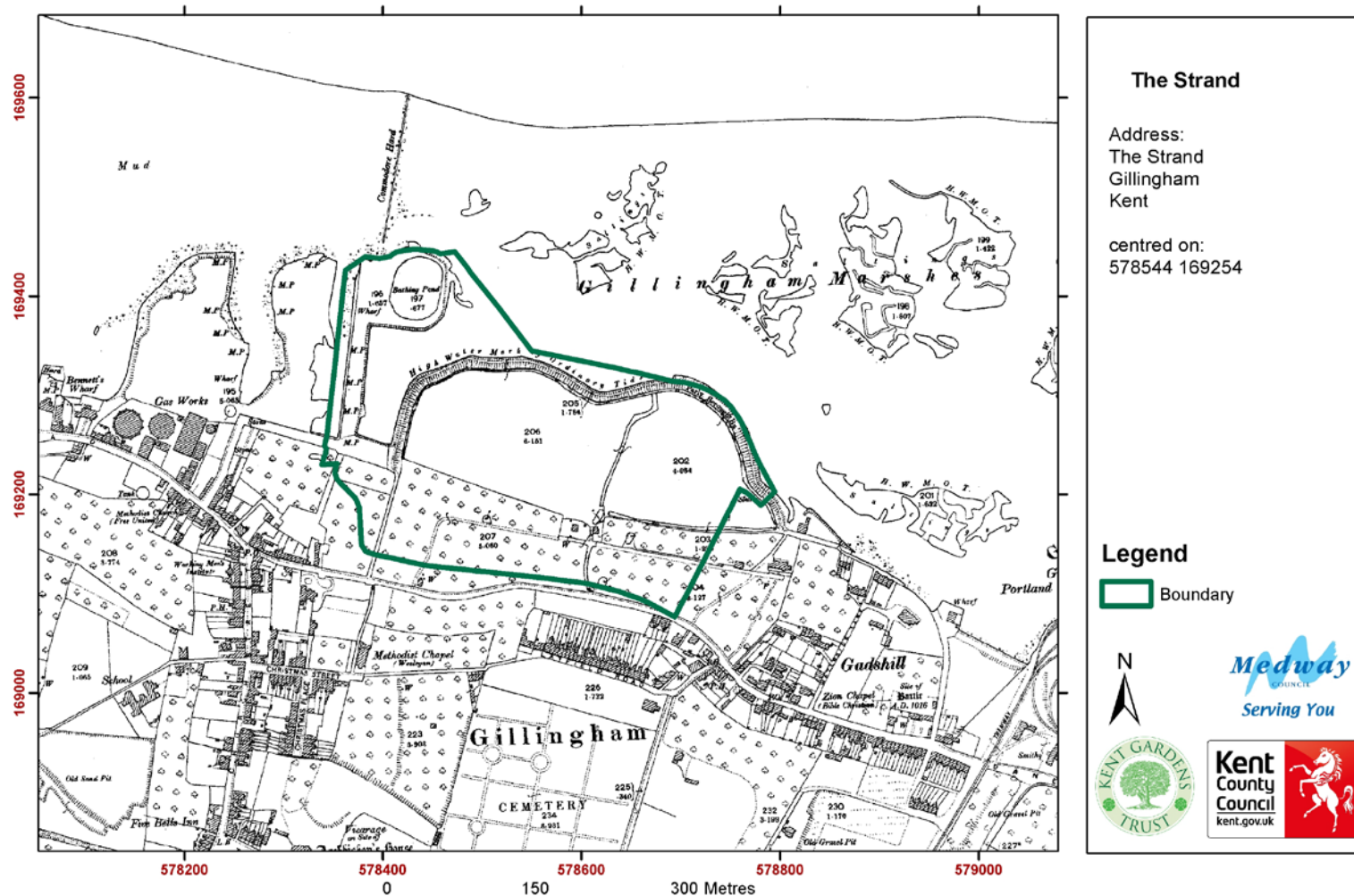
## Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 25" map, sheet 19 /4 (1862-72)



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

Fig.7 Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 25" map, (1897-1900)



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Fig.8 Ordnance Survey 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 25" map, (1907 -1923).





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Fig.9 Ordnance Survey 4<sup>rd</sup> edition, 25" map, (1929-32).

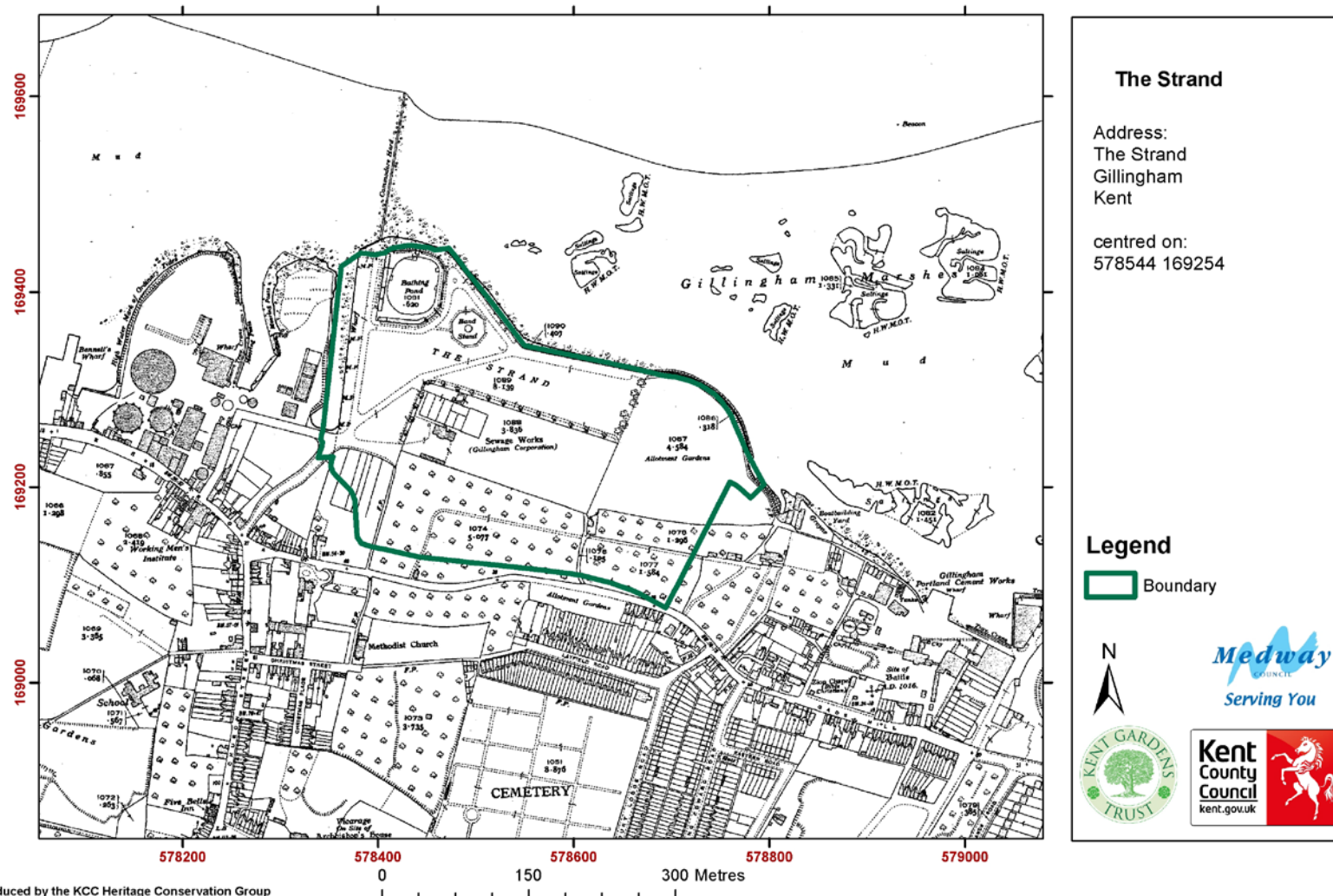




Fig. 10 Gillingham riverside c.1800. *Courtesy of Medway Archives and Local Studies (MALSC).*



Fig. 11 The Strand, mud flats c.1900, prior to the construction of the permanent pool. *Courtesy of MALSC.*



Fig. 12 The Strand c. 1920. *Courtesy of MALSC*





Fig. 13 The Strand c.1930. *Courtesy of MALSC*

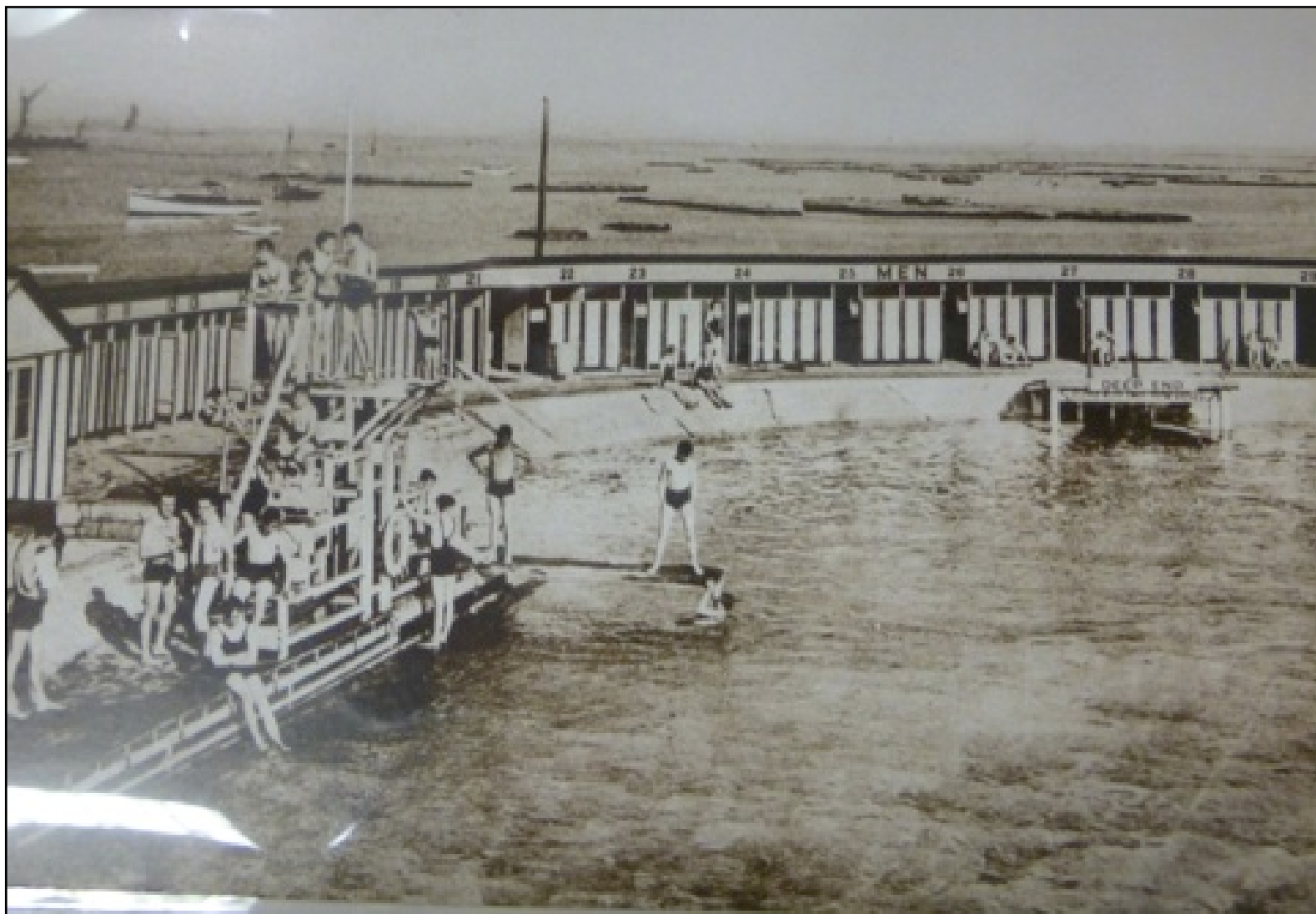


Fig. 14 The esplanade and beach in the 1930s. *Courtesy of MALSC*



Fig. 15 The Strand c.1930. *Courtesy of MALSC*





Fig. 16 The Strand. *Courtesy of MALSC*



Fig. 17 The Strand c.1950. *Courtesy of MALSC*

