

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Medway



Wigmore Park, Gillingham



September 2014

Wigmore Park

Gillingham

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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
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Chatham
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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

WIGMORE PARK

MEDWAY

GILLINGHAM

NGR: 579873 164329

SUMMARY AND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A late 20C park created by Gillingham Corporation in response to local demand in the early 1960s, in an area of rapid housing development, demonstrates the role of the local authority in providing public open space and, in so doing, protecting an area of ancient woodland. A more recent planting of deciduous trees and mixed shrubs creating an effective screen from the surrounding houses and thus the park provides a quiet green oasis to which local residents can retreat. It is also an open space, for a variety of recreational activities with a children's play area and tennis courts, which is valued by local residents and, at the same time, providing a meeting place where people greet each other.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Wigmore Park lies in the hundred of Chatham and Gillingham and the parish of South Gillingham. An area of ancient woodland, it formed part of the 174 hectare Wigmore estate lying in Gillingham, Bredhurst and Rainham belonging, at the time of his death in 1885, to Edward Winch of Chatham. Bequeathed to his sons, Richard and George, the estate was sold to Emma, wife of Percy Portway Harvey of Westcliff-on-sea, in 1909 for £6500. At this time, the estate consisted of orchard, arable and woodland with a small farmhouse in two tenements, a gamekeeper's cottage and homestead (sales details Wigmore Estate).

By 1900, maps (OS 2nd ed.) show considerable felling had taken place and, in 1914, a 16 hectare area of woodland lying between three woodland tracks marking the line of the future estate roads, Wigmore Road, Fairview Avenue and Bredhurst Road, was sold by Emma Harvey to individuals for building, under strict conditions. The plots, roughly 10m x 40m in size, lay around the perimeter of the woodland site leaving the central 3 hectare area open. This was initially managed as pasture and then orchard (OS map 4th ed.) The plots were required to be fenced and either a single dwelling house to the value of £200, or a semidetached house of £350, could be built. The rest of the plot could be used as garden or meadow (Harvey papers).

Some access had been left to the central area which, during and after the Second World War, was partly used for allotments. Following the war, Gillingham Corporation started to acquire some of the properties as they came up for sale 'for the purposes of their functions' and at least one was bought by compulsory

purchase. Access was needed from all three surrounding roads because, in 1952, there had been plans for a health centre which was never built (Medway Council).

According to Hutton ('Off the Beaten Track'), it was a complaint in the early 1960s that there were no parks in the area which led to the creation of both Wigmore Park and playing fields at Kings Frith. By 1964, the Council had secured ownership of the northern two thirds of the central area (land registry maps) and by 1971 had sufficiently secured the future of the park and accesses to be able to sell off several unwanted properties which it had acquired 20 years earlier, to private buyers (Medway Council). The park was opened by 1978; exact date unrecorded.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Wigmore Park lies 4.5km southeast of Gillingham and 3km southwest of Rainham. It is reached from junction 4 of the M2 via the A278 where a roundabout 0.6km north of this junction allows access to Wigmore village to the east. The park is reached 1km north along Wigmore Road.

The 3ha site is roughly triangular in shape with a maximum length of 300m and width of 200m. It is bordered by the houses and gardens of Wigmore Road to the west, Fairview Avenue to the south and Bredhurst Road to the east, the park's boundaries with all three formed from varied wire or wooden fences and hedges, including sections of 2m high spiked steel fencing.

The level site is situated on the North Downs and surrounded by the extensive housing estates of the parish of South Gillingham.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

There are three entrances to the park, one from each of the surrounding roads. Each is approached across the pavement and marked by a 1m high steel safety barrier on the edge of the road. At the Bredhurst Road entrance, 2m high spiked steel double gates (2m x 2m) are placed centrally in the 20m length of similarly-designed fencing. Immediately to the south of the gateway (outside the fence) is a very large sweet chestnut tree (c.6.5m in girth).

The entrance in Fairview Avenue has similar gates in its perimeter fencing but set 20m back from the road, the approach path being bordered on either side with low growing shrubs. Set immediately inside these gates is a swinging steel gantry to prevent high vehicles entering the park. On Wigmore Road, the steel fence and gates are similar in size but of a late C20 design. All the gates are closed and locked at night for security purposes.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The park is laid out as mown grassland with some mature trees (mainly oak) and a late C20 planting of ornamental trees providing an open landscape. From the

Bredhurst Road entrance a 4m wide tarmac pathway extends westwards for 40m. It is bordered by grass and low mixed shrub borders with occasional flowering cherry and silver birch trees. At its westward end the path joins a another tarmac path which runs on a roughly semi-circular course from the Fairview Avenue entrance in the southern corner north-westwards to the Wigmore Road entrance, forming a perimeter route round the eastern and northern sides of the park.

The 200m northward and westward length of the perimeter path is irregularly lined by mixed deciduous trees and c15 dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) the park was opened in the mid-seventies. In the furthest north-west part of the park, 50m east of the Wigmore Road entrance, is a children's playground.

Immediately south of the playground is a group of mixed conifers planted in the last 40-50 years. Further south, these adjoin a belt of more mature trees which extends for 180m along the whole of the park's south-west boundary. It comprises first a group of ash and then sweet chestnut interspersed with oak. There are a number of isolated oak trees scattered over the central grassland and, together with this boundary belt, these more mature trees are probably survivors of the earlier woodlands recorded on the OS map (2nd and 4th eds.).

At the south-eastern end of the boundary belt, the southward section of the perimeter path leads to the entrance on Fairview Avenue. Two hard tennis courts are laid out 100m north from the entrance, on the west side of the perimeter path. Between the path and the boundary fences to the east is grass with some mixed shrub planting and, near the entrance, three rose beds.

REFERENCES

Books, articles

G. Hutton, 'Off the Beaten Track; A Short History of Bredhurst, Wigmore, Parkwood and Hempstead', 1993 (Meresborough Books)

Maps

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Ordnance Survey 2nd edn. 25" map (1897)

Ordnance Survey 4th edn. 25" map (1932)

Land Registry maps, 1965 and 1971, Medway Council legal department

Archival material

Sales details Wigmore Estate, Messrs Cobb, London, 1902, 06a DE SERIES 1001_1200/DE 1033 (MALSC)

Miss Emma Harvey, papers, 1926, 08 Medway Council MTC MR SERIES, MTC MR 093 (MALSC)

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Fig. 1 Boundary map



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group
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Fig. 2 Key views map



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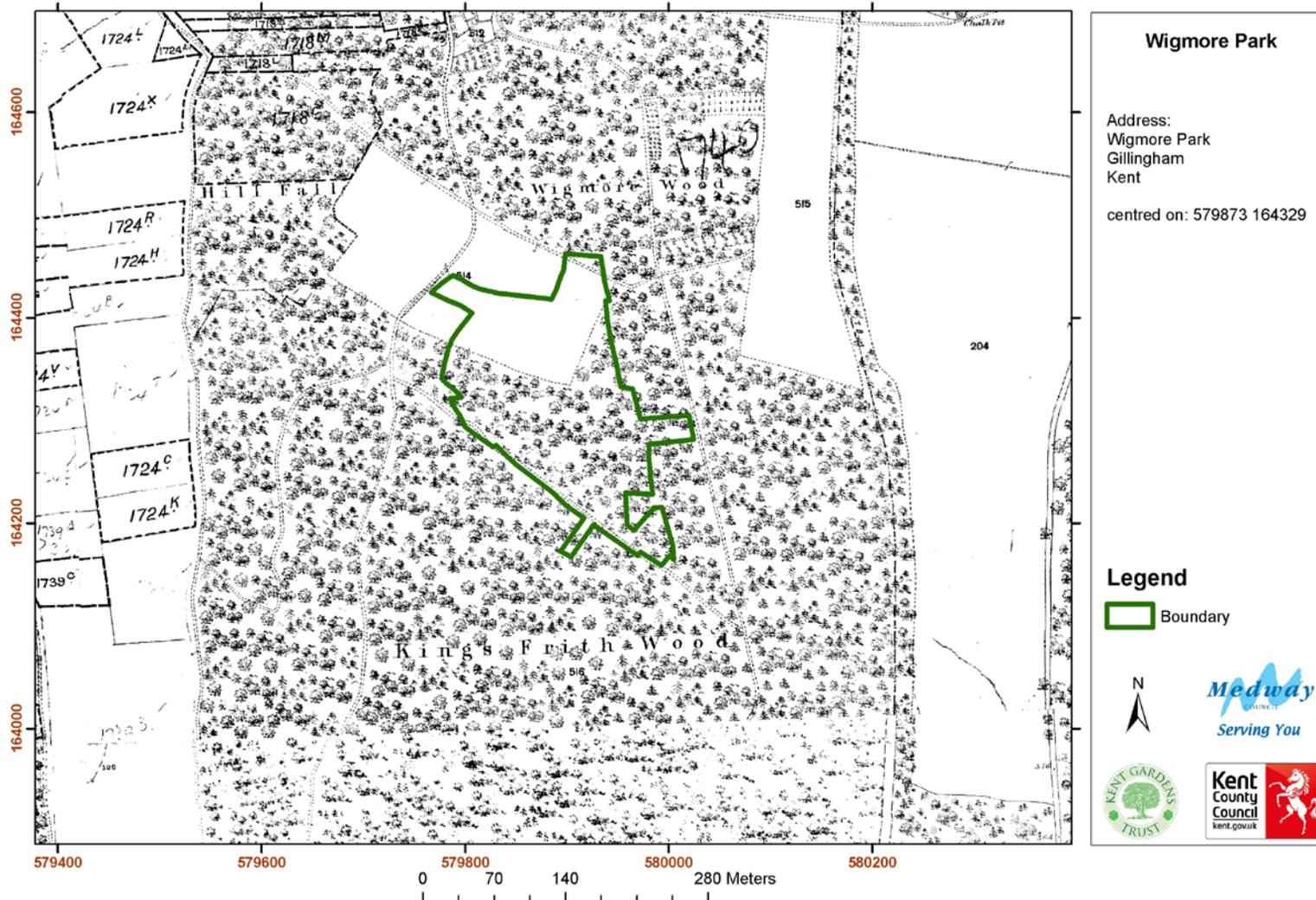
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Fig. 3 Aerial photograph (2012)



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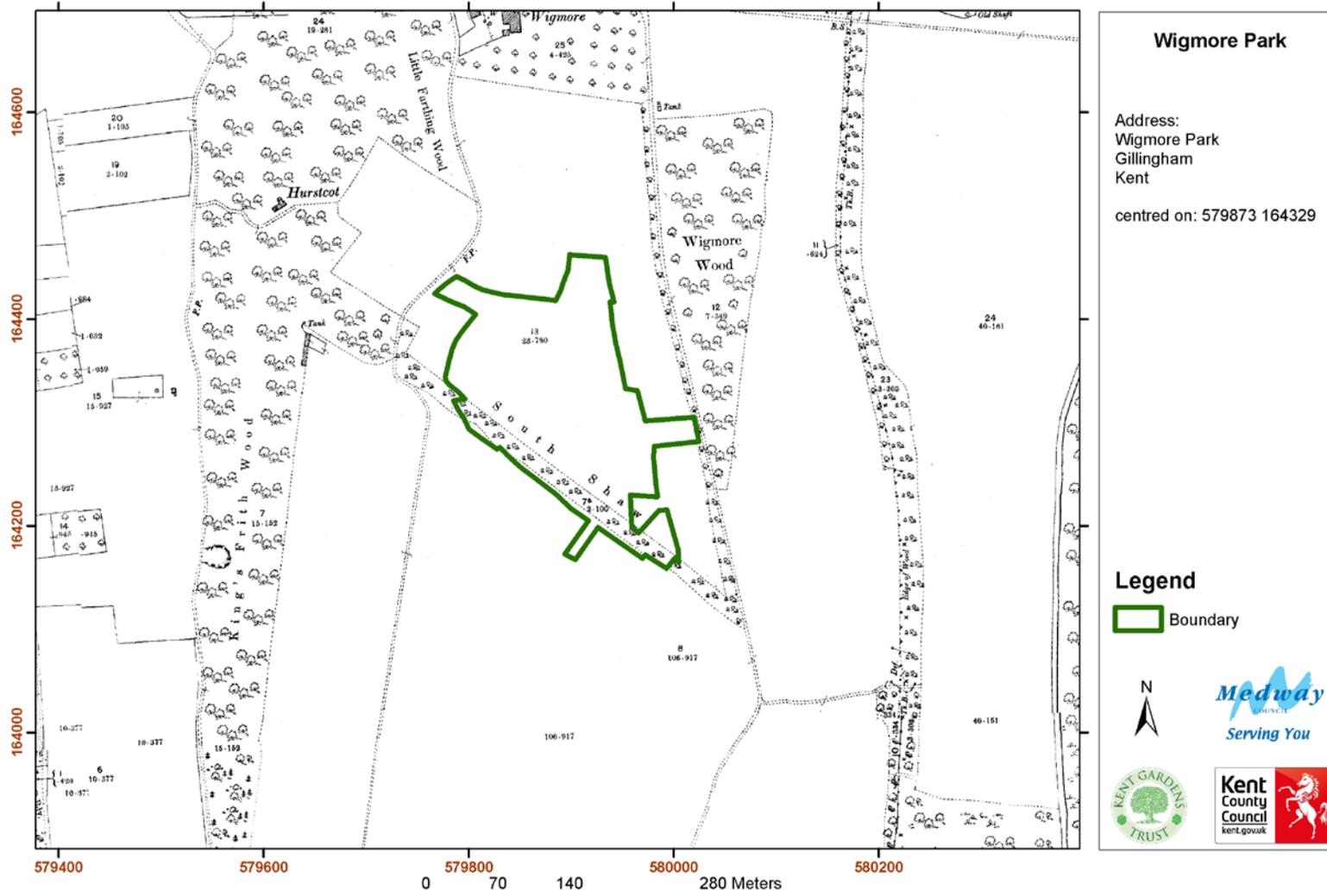
Fig. 4 1st edition 25" Ordnance Survey map (1862-1875)



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Fig. 5 2nd edition 25” Ordnance Survey map (1897-1900)



Wigmore Park
Address:
Wigmore Park
Gillingham
Kent
centred on: 579873 164329

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Fig. 6 4th edition 25" Ordnance Survey map (1929-1952)



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Fig. 7 Wigmore Park looking south from tennis courts



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Fig. 8 Wigmore Park looking west



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Fig. 9 Bredhurst Road entrance



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Fig. 10 Semi-circular path looking northwest

