

# The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



## Morants Court, Sevenoaks



*Supported by*

March 2012



# **Morants Court**

Sevenoaks, Kent

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## INTRODUCTION

This site dossier and description has been prepared as part of the **Review of The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District 2011 - 2013**. This site is one of many sites that have been researched, visited and written about across the District and as a consequence has been included in the revised list of Historic Parks and Gardens covered by the District Council's Planning Policies. The list is not conclusive and further gardens may be added over time as research continues or information comes to light

The research was carried out by volunteers of the Kent Gardens Trust with support and training from the project consultant Virginia Hinze. The project was supported by English Heritage and Kent County Council.

The extent of the area identified represents the remains of the designed landscape and does not necessarily cover all remaining elements or the historical extent of landscape changes and 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.

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Kent Gardens Trust  
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## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Age and survival: The site exhibits some residual features of late C19 and early C20 layouts. It provides a contemporary setting for the grade II house of different periods from C15 on, now divided into four residential units

Outline features of the garden laid out by Meyerstein remain: the (now, 2012) overgrown former water garden and shrubbery (now woodland) as well as the former rose garden and ponds (now a paddock).

Historic association: The house was the home of Sir Edward Meyerstein, philanthropist and sometime High Sheriff of Kent, from 1912 until his death in 1942

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

KENT  
CHEVENING  
SEVENOAKS  
TQ 5006 5793

MORANTS COURT

## **SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST**

Garden laid out in the early C20, with rose garden, water garden and shrubbery by Sir Edward Meyerstein (of which little survives) around a house of different periods from the C15 (its oldest part) to its considerable extension and re-fronting in the C20.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The earliest surviving record of Morants Court is a land grant document of 1272 signed by William Moraunt, who claimed the manorial title in 1293 from the Archbishop of Canterbury at Otford. The land of the manor lay partly in the parish of Chevening and partly in the manor of Otford; as a sub manor of Chevening it held its own manorial court. Sir William Moraunt, Sheriff of Kent in 1337 and 1338 in the reign of Edward III, added to the estate, buying land in Chevening and Brasted. Morants Court is marked on maps from 1575 (Saxton, Symonson, Mudge). By 1594 the estate, 339.5 hectares in area, was sold to William Blackwell of London.

In 1712 the house and estate were sold to Pendock Price of Westerham, the Price family retaining ownership for many years. Hasted (published in 1797) notes that the court baron for the manor continued at that time, under the jurisdiction of the duchy of Lancaster; evidence of a first-floor court hall survives in the present-day house. The Mudge map of 1801 shows a number of buildings on the site but there is no identification of gardens or parkland. Maria Fry, daughter of Thomas Price, inherited the estate in 1804; following her husband's death it passed to their son, John. At this time the house and estate were leased to William Tonge and in 1809 and 1811 Fry mortgaged the estate to Tonge for a total of £12,500. On Fry's death in 1818 the estate passed in trust to his daughter Mary. The tithe map of 1842-4 shows the house with a number of buildings to the east, listed in the apportionment as "house, garden and yards." The garden lies to the south; the "yards" may contain farm buildings grouped around a possible horse pond; an orchard lay to the west of the house. In 1847 an Act of Parliament was obtained to overturn the trusteeship established by Fry's will, allowing Morant's Court House and estate (298 ha.) to be sold in 1848 to Tonge, for £30,000. The sale map shows a more extensive range of buildings to the east of the house than in the tithe map.

By the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the 25" Ordnance Survey (1862-75) Morants Court Farm has been laid out, c. 300m to the north of the house at the far end of the main approach route and the number of buildings to the east of the house is much reduced. This physical separation of farming-related activities appears to coincide with development of the pleasure grounds. The OS map shows an

area of mixed woodland traversed by the entrance drive to the north east of the house, with a grassed area to the south and an orchard to the west. The Tonge family association with Morants Court continued until 1912, although latterly William's heirs did not farm the estate themselves; tenants were resident at Morants Court in the 1881 and 1891 censuses and according to the Property Survey of 1910. This last source (*A History of the Parish of Chevening*, not traced) listed grounds of c.8 ha comprising mansion, garden, stable and entrance lodge, with surrounding parkland. A map included in the tenancy agreement of 1904 shows that the layout of the grounds around the house was essentially unchanged from that in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the 25 " Ordnance Survey.

In 1912 the estate was sold to Edward (later Sir Edward) Meyerstein a stockbroker and philanthropist, who resided at Morants Court until his death in 1942. He developed the garden from the early 1920's creating a water garden with shrubbery and formal gardens with a pond and rose garden (pers. comm., letter from owner to KCC dated 1984, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn OS 25"(revised) 1938, map of estate prepared for auction in 1954). The 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition of the 25" Ordnance Survey (1938) shows a large fish pond in the wooded area to the east of the house, not shown in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (1907-23). A kitchen garden with several glasshouses has been laid out to the south west of the house. The grounds were taken over by the Home Guard during the Second World War, with consequent neglect of ornamental elements. The house was sold after the war to the Lloyd-Roberts family. Circa 1950 the property was divided into 4 separate units, the total associated land extending to c. 8 ha. The Gore-Cloughs, who owned the east wing built as a guest annex by Sir Edward in the 1930's, extended the south eastern boundary of the gardens in the 1950's, annexing part of an adjoining field, to create a tennis court. The large natural pond in the lower part of the garden was used as a bathing pool, its sides reinforced with concrete embankments. The house and gardens remain in multiple occupancy (four owners). The present owners of the major part of the gardens/pleasure grounds, extending to 3.6 ha., acquired the property of "Morants" (the east wing) in 1979, at which time the grounds were in a neglected state. The early C20 garden laid out by Sir Edward Meyerstein has not been restored. The former kitchen garden and orchard area was sold after the War for use as animal boarding kennels and is still used for that purpose.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

Morants Court lies 3.2 kilometres from the centre of the town of Sevenoaks, 1 km to the east of the village of Chevening, (within which parish it lies), and c 1km north west of the village of Dunton Green. The c. 8ha site consists of parkland (50%), paddock (30%), woodland (10%), formal gardens (8%) and orchard/vegetable garden (2%). It lies close to major lines of communication, being bounded to the north and west by the M25 motorway; the M26 motorway passes c. 0.35 km to the south east beyond intervening arable farmland and the A224 Sevenoaks to Orpington road passes 0.2 km from the north east boundary, separated by pasture land. Morants Court occupies a south-easterly-facing site at the foot of the North Downs, sloping down towards the valley of

the River Darent. The estate lies on a narrow band of Upper Greensand at the junction between the Lower Chalk and Gault formations. (British Geological Survey, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2010, sheet number 237).

## ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Morants Court is approached from the west side of the A224 (Morants Court Road) by a private, unsigned driveway with field gate at the entrance. The tarmac-surfaced single-track driveway is bordered by metal park fencing and traverses pasture land with some scattered trees. The drive runs westwards for 250 m, to the boundary of the property (wooded), from where two branches run southwards and south westwards respectively for 65 m.. The more easterly branch passes through an entrance marked by 1.5 m high stone pillars with stone cappings. It continues southwards skirting the edge of woodland to the east and with close board fencing to the western side (the boundary of Number 3) terminating at the forecourt of 'Morants' (Number 4). A timber construction double garage stands to its east side. The more westerly branch serves the other three properties (The Court - Number 1 - and Numbers 2 and 3), passing along the edge of the parkland to the north and then skirting the edge of the property, bordered by lawns to the north and terminating at a turning circle at the entrance to Number 1.

The present approach route was created in the late 1970's during the construction of the M25 motorway. Previously the main approach ran south from Sundridge Road to the north, meeting the present drive where it turns to run south (1<sup>st</sup> edition 25" OS map, 1862-75). A lodge house (first noted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 25" OS map 1897-1900, now demolished) marked this entrance. This route also linked Morants Court with Morants Court Farm, to the north of Sundridge Road. Following the motorway construction a second access route (tarmac-surfaced single track with bridge) was constructed across the M25/A21 to link Morants Court Farm with farm premises lying to the west of Morants Court and providing access to premises adjoining and formerly part of the Morants Court estate, now used as boarding kennels.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Morants Court, (listed grade II) is a large house of different periods, now divided into four residential units. Number 1 contains the earliest remaining part of the building, a 1<sup>st</sup> floor hall, probably early C15 and said to have been the place of a Court Leets. Externally only the north front and west end of this part are visible because of modern rear extensions. A slated roof replaces a much steeper pitched original, with eaves soffit and modern dormer. The front wall has been raised to allow for larger windows under the eaves giving lower pitch to roof with a tile hung 1<sup>st</sup> floor jetty retained above the brick ground floor. The ground floor walls are of white painted brick; those of the upper floor are tile hung. All this is Georgian with later alterations. The two- storey, three- window kitchen wing with high pitched tiled roof dates from circa 1700. A substantial extension to the south east of the main house was constructed in the 1930's as

a guest annex, built of white painted brick, with balustrading at first and second floor levels (Number 4). Number 3 is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century brick-built, tile-hung extension abutting the east side of Number 2 (Listed Building description and *Archaeologica Cantiana* 1986). The stables, lying to the south west of the house, have been converted into outbuildings for Number 1.

## GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

Garden enclosures lie to the north, east and south of the house and are mainly laid out as lawns. Two of the owners maintain adjacent garden areas to the rear (south) of the property consisting of lawns, borders, a rose garden and two small ornamental ponds. The former shrubbery and water garden to north east and east of the house is now a wooded area with a tennis court and paddock to the south.

The major part of the grounds is attached to Morants (Number 4), the extension to the south east of the main house. The gardens are approached from the forecourt through a stone archway immediately to the east of the house. A random-stone-paved terrace skirts the east and south fronts, to the south being edged by a 0.5m high stone balustrade. To the east of the house front lies a small rose garden with raised ornamental pond (stone work), backed by a stone path and wall, marking the north-east boundary of the garden enclosure. This may have been constructed by Italian prisoners during the Second World War (personal communication). A gateway with a 2.0 m wrought iron gate set in the wall behind the pond gives access to the area adjoining the garage. At the eastern edge of the rose garden a further gateway with a 1.5 m high wrought iron gate gives access to the site of the former water garden (now, 2011, gone). The main footpath from the house constructed in packed earth leads south east from the terrace, along the border between the rose garden and the main lawn through woodland into the tennis court area. A small wooden garden building stands to the north of the path at the entrance to the wooded area.

To the south of the terrace a c 70m long enclosure, tapering from a width of c 30m to c 5m, is laid to lawn with perimeter mixed borders. This slopes to the south east and is traversed by a 0.75m high stone ha-ha/retaining wall c.30 m south of the house. This crosses into the garden of Number 1 to the west and probably dates from the period of Sir Edward Meyerstein when a pathway was laid out along this axis (25" OS Revised edition, 1936-40). Mature trees and shrubs mark the eastern and southern boundaries. A mixed hedge marks the western boundary with Number 1 created when the garden was divided in c 1950. Near the house a 1.5m high wrought iron gate set in a 3m long section of stone wall provides pedestrian access to the adjoining property. The terracing to the front of Number 1 is of brick. The lawned area is c 100m by 30 m, with rose beds near the terrace; the ha-ha/retaining wall is bisected by a flight of three stone steps leading down to a croquet lawn. Mature yews, smaller trees and shrubs mark the western and southern boundaries. The formal gardens of the two adjoining properties are fully enclosed by the tree and shrub planting with no views to surrounding countryside.

Two further areas of the pleasure grounds lie to the south east of the house. The tennis court occupies a levelled area c. 60m by c. 50m running south west from the lower edge of the wooded area and accessed by the main pathway from the house. At the northern end is a small (c.75sq m) vegetable garden with fruit cage and small glasshouse. The tarmac surfaced tennis court occupies the major portion of the area, with a small orchard at the southern end. The southern boundary is marked by wooden rail fencing with a field gate to the eastern end, giving access to the paddock, managed as a meadow. Mature trees and shrubs mark the other three boundaries. The paddock was formerly part of the formal gardens (rose and water gardens) laid out by Sir Edward Meyerstein (personal communication). No visible traces of these remain. The land slopes down from the tennis court area and a mown path leads through grassland studded with small trees to the pond at the centre bordered by willow. A watercourse leads to smaller ponds towards the south of the site. All this land is now, 2011, much overgrown. Concrete edging to the pond installed in the 1950's to create a bathing pool is still visible. Close-boarded fencing runs along c. half of the northern edge of the paddock, dividing it from the boarding kennel premises. Trees and native hedge species border the remaining boundaries of the paddock. The trees to the north eastern edge are more mature, smaller trees and shrubs forming the remaining boundaries.

The woodland to the east of the present main access drive to Morants is the site of the water garden and shrubbery created by Sir Edward Meyerstein. It is traversed by a single 2m wide earth track, running north west/south east. To the southern end between the track and the edge of the formal garden the remains of the water garden can be identified in various rock features, channels and cascades c 27 m long, all now, 2011 in a dilapidated state and overgrown with ivy. This area of mature woodland, bounded by a field fence to the eastern edge, is composed of mixed deciduous/coniferous species, with yew and laurel providing evidence of the former ornamental planting.

There are smaller enclosed gardens lying to the north front of the main house, belonging to Numbers 2 and 3.

## PARKLAND

An area of parkland to the north of the house, bordering the M25, contains some mature specimen trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). The area is now reduced from that shown in the tenancy deed of 1904 (Kent History and Library Centre Accession number 7044), as a result of motorway construction (see plan of historic site).

## KITCHEN GARDEN

This area to the south west of the house was sold separately after the Second World War when the property was subdivided and has been used ever since as boarding kennels. A kitchen garden with glasshouses and an area of orchard is shown on the 1904 plan and the 25" Revised OS map of 1936-40. One remaining glasshouse is being restored (2011).

## REFERENCES

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*A History of the Parish of Chevening*, Chevening Parish History Group (1999), pp 99 – 102

*Bessell's Directory* 1847

*Kelly's Directory* 1899 and 1934

### Maps

William Mudge *A New and Accurate Survey of Kent* 1801

Tithe map (Chevening Parish) and apportionment, 1842 - 44

Sale map, 1848 Kent History and Library Centre ref. U1590/E41/1, 2

Map in leasehold indenture 1904, Kent History and Library Centre ref. Acc 7044

Estate map, 1920 Kent History and Library Centre ref. Acc 7044

Sale map, Goddard and Smith, Auctioneers, 1954

### OS Maps

1<sup>st</sup> edn 25" OS map 1862-75

2<sup>nd</sup> edn 25" S map 1897-1900

3<sup>rd</sup> edn 25" OS map 1907-1923

3<sup>rd</sup> edn 25" OS map (revised) 1936 – 40

3<sup>rd</sup> edn 1:50,000 Geological Survey, sheet 287

Modern Mastermap 1:2,500 2007

### Illustrations

Aerial photograph, 2003

### Periodicals, journals and proceedings

*Achaeologica Cantiana*, Vol 53 (1986), pp 235 -236

*Sevenoaks Chronicle* 6 February, 1942

### Archival items

Stanhope papers, Kent History and Library Centre ref. U1590/E41/42

Deeds relating to Morants alias Madams Court, Chevening Kent History and Library Centre ref. Acc 7044

Tonge Family papers, Kent History and Library Centre ref. U806/T1-27, E1-21, L1

Papers regarding purchase of part of the Morants Court Estate Kent History and Library Centre ref. U1590/E41/1, 2

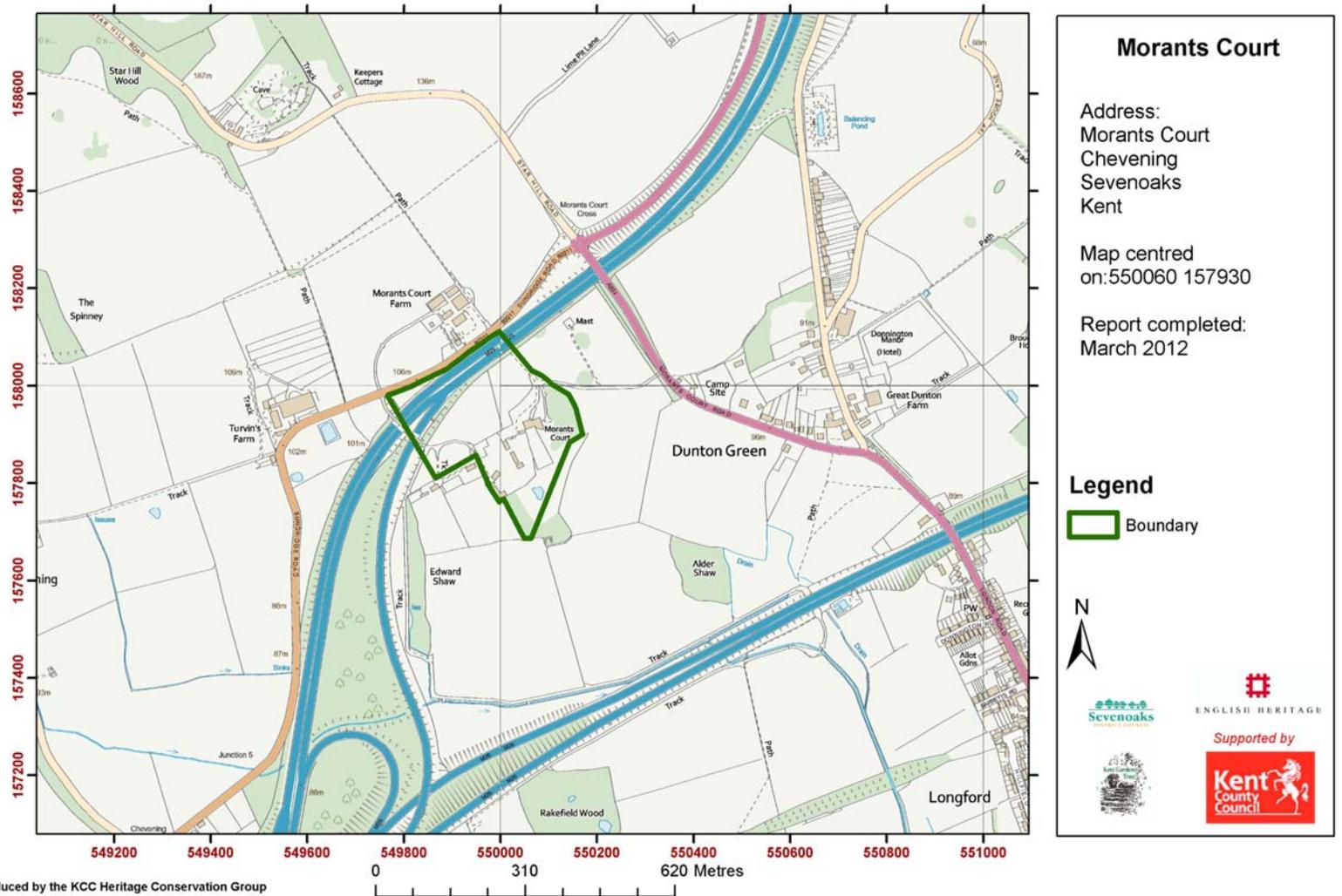
English Heritage, Listed Buildings entries  
Census data 1851-91  
Electoral registers 1947-50

**Research by Susan Roome**

**Virginia Hinze (editor)**

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## Fig. 1 Boundary map



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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## Fig. 2 Key views map

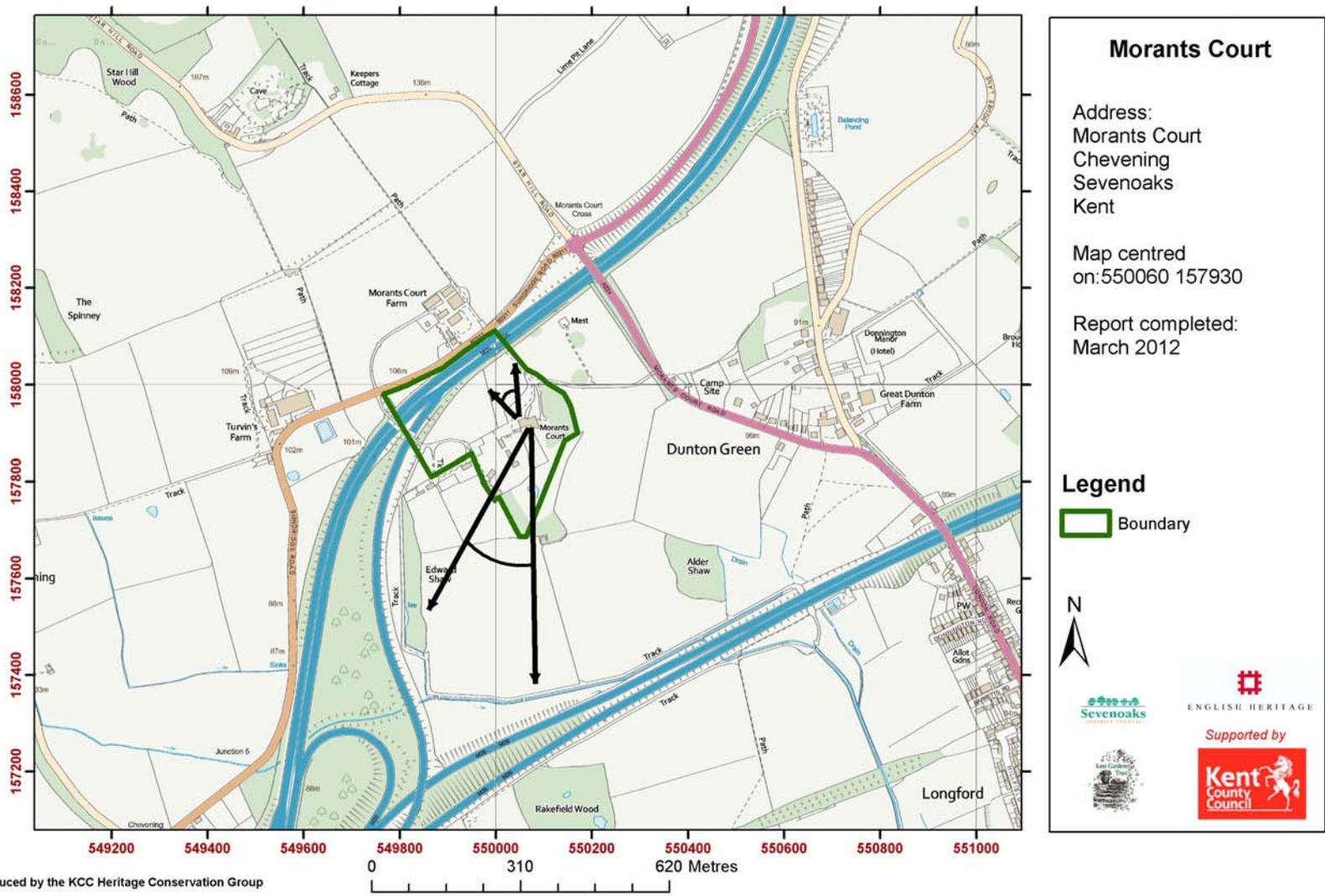
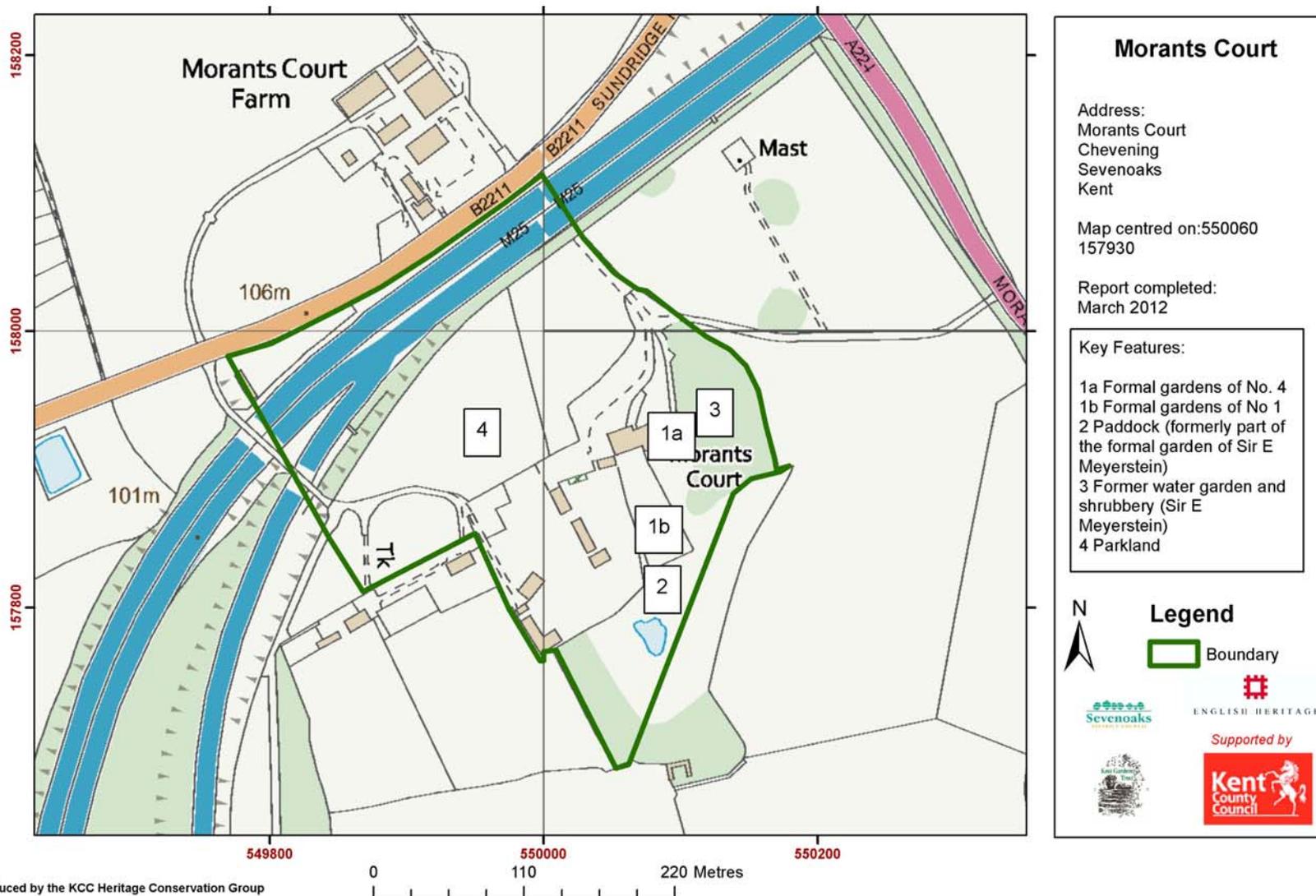
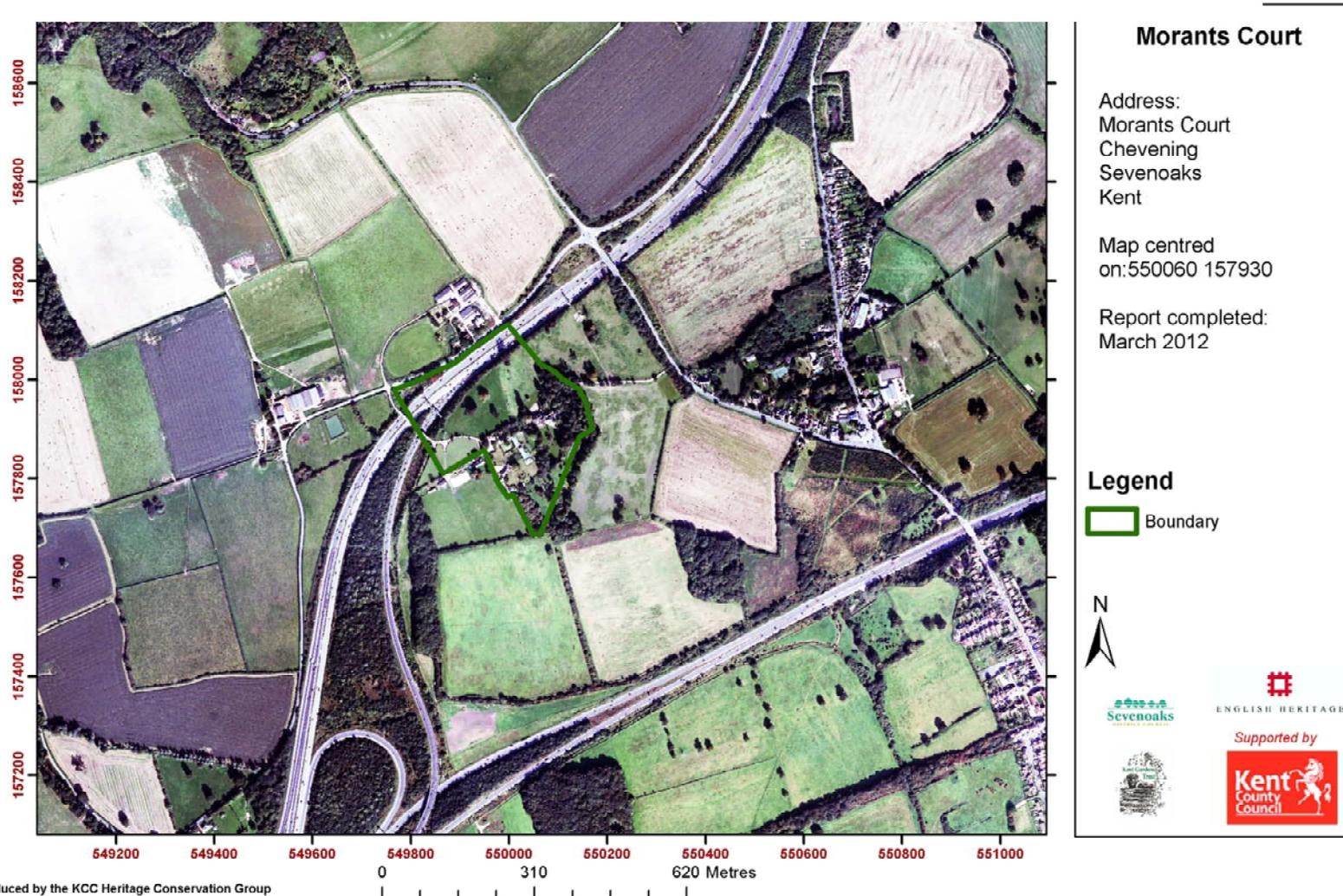


Fig. 3 Map of key features



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## Fig. 4 Aerial photograph (2008)

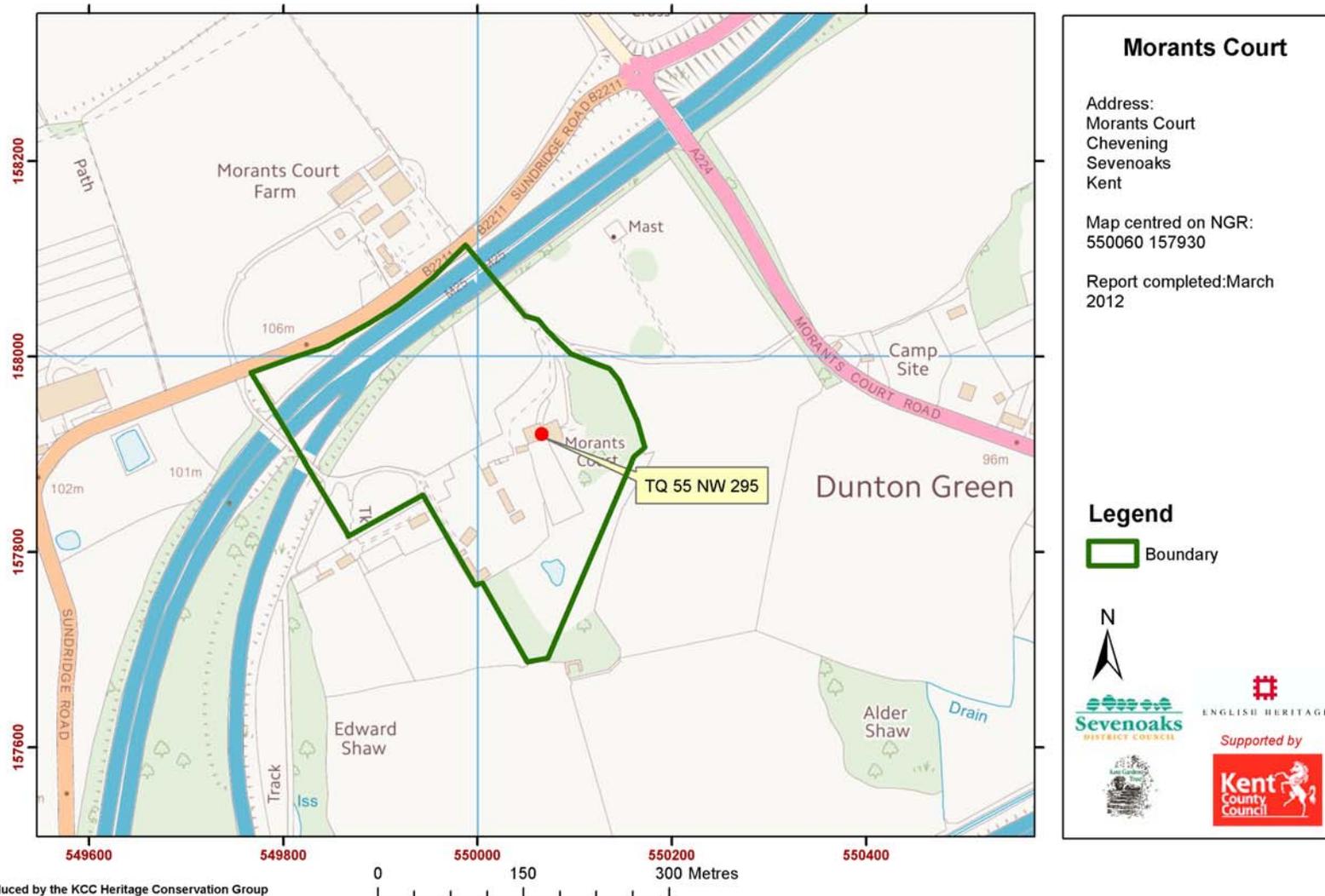


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# Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

## Fig. 5 Map of listed buildings at Morants Court



## Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

### Fig. 6 Listed buildings at Morants Court

#### Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 NW 295

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

- |                    |           |                               |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| 1. 5280            | CHEVENING | CHEVENING                     |
| Morants Court Road |           | Morants Court TQ 55 NW 42/156 |
- II
2. Large house of different periods, now as separate maisonnettes. Once the home of Sir Edward Meyerstein the philanthropist. Oldest part, probably early C15, is a 1st floor hall, said to have been the place of Court Leets. 3 bays with 2 crown posts. Very heavy rafters of even width. Ogee braces to plates and beams. Old plank floor. From outside, appearance of this part much altered. 2 storeys and attic, 2 windows. Roof now slated, with eaves soffit and modern dormer. Front wall raised to give lower pitch to roof. Tile hung 1st floor, jetty retained above brick ground floor. C18 and modern casements and 1 3-light sash. Modern double door. 2 storey, 3 window kitchen wing circa 1700. High pitched tiled roof. 1st floor band. Later stucco quoins; and dressings to late C18 sash windows with glazing bars. Rest of house is C19 and modern. For historical associations see Hasted's History of Kent.  
Listing NGR: TQ5006757912