

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



Underriver House, Sevenoaks



Supported by

November 2012

Underriver House

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 rarity: The site exhibits evidence of its C18 compartmentalised form as well as C19 and C20 garden features, all of which now provide a traditional setting for the grade II house

Survival: Significant boundary structures survive including the C18 wall beside the road on the west and to the south along the site of the earlier Shoads Manor and C19 kitchen garden walls on the north and east sides

Surviving garden features include a late C19 sunken croquet/tennis lawn, a Victorian shrubbery, and a mid C20 water garden.

The pleasure grounds contain several surviving mature ornamental trees, their size suggesting a mid C19 planting date

Historic association: The origin of the house in c1700 has local associations being built by Richard Goodhugh, a High Sheriff of Kent, and later in the C19 it was owned by Judge Advocate General Davison who paid for the building of the village church. The architect of the church, George Gilbert Scott, also undertook the mid C19 enlargement of the house.

The place has strong physical associations with Samuel Palmer, the C19 landscape painter, who called the hamlet of Underriver his 'Golden Valley'. He and another of his group of fellow painters known as The Ancients, lodged at Underriver House and the old Shoads Manor the buildings of which are thought to be the subject of his 1840 painting *'Farm Buildings'*.

The house was also the birthplace at the beginning of the C20 of the internationally- celebrated cookery writer, Rosemary Hume

Archaeological potential: The site has archaeological potential in the form of the surviving footings of Shoads Manor

SITE DESCRIPTION

SEVENOAKS
SEAL
KENT
TN15 0SD

UNDERRIVER HOUSE

TQ 5664852144

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

A garden comprising compartmentalised formal areas, notable specimen trees and informal lawns dating from the C18, C19 and C20 surrounding an early C18 house with C19 additions. The painter Samuel Palmer (1805 -1881) and a fellow artist from his circle, known as the 'Ancients', lodged at Underriver House and Shoads Farm (the former Shoads Manor), Palmer referring to the location as "The Golden Valley"; his painting 'Farm Buildings' c1840 may depict Shoads Farm. Rosemary Hume, the internationally-known Cordon Bleu cook, was born at the house in the early C20.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Underriver House is a 'Plain but pleasing seven-bay house of c 1700, built for Richard Goodhugh in 1697' (Newman 2012). It was built on the footprint of a previous building and incorporated a Kentish hall house dating to c 1640. It replaced a much earlier house of the Manor of Shoads just to its south which fell into ruin at the end of C19. The name Underriver derives from the Saxon *sub le ryver* meaning 'under the hill' and is not connected to the word river.

The Andrews, Drury and Herbert map of 1769 records a Mrs. Goodhugh as owner of 'Little Underriver', which includes the area of Underriver House, and shows it surrounded by a substantial compartmentalized garden including an orchard, with the earlier Manor of Shoads still visible in the grounds to the south. In 1790 Henry Woodgate of Riverhill House, which lies approximately 2km to the west, bought the property but never occupied it himself. By 1840 the Tithe map shows the owner as Francis Woodgate (his son) letting the house to a Charles Townsend. About this time Francis Woodgate (the grandson) occupied the now renamed Shoads Farm. Charles Townsend was still in occupation when Samuel Palmer described him in a letter dated 1840 as '*that blessed farmer and yeoman Mr. Townsend*' whose property '*teems with fruit poultry cyder milk cream and fine spring water*'. The authors of '*Underriver, Samuel Palmer's Golden Valley*' suggest that the painting 'Farm Buildings' c1840 by Samuel Palmer could well be of Shoads Farm, then tenanted by 'old Mr. Featherstone' with whom he lodged. Francis Woodgate (the grandson) moved into Underriver House c1841. Woodgate died in 1855 and the house was eventually sold in 1862 with the estate agent's sales' particulars describing '*lawn and pleasure grounds, walled garden, orchard ... the whole abundantly supplied with abundant spring water.*' The house and 970 acres (Sales Particulars) was bought by John Davison QC, later Judge Advocate General. Davison paid for the building of St. Margaret's Church in the village, designed

by George Gilbert Scott in 1865. The house was also enlarged around this time with a substantial extension to the south façade reputedly (pers.com) under the direction of the same architect. This replaced the large greenhouse or conservatory on the south wall, recorded in one of the earliest photographs of the house (dating from approximately 1860) showing Francis Woodgate sitting on the steps up to the porch, and mentioned in a letter from a relative, Mrs. Anne Nouaille, in 1846: *'Everything is so nice and so very comfortable at Underriver. I walked around their garden; they have a beautiful greenhouse and all the flowers most gay and splendid but alas! The disease is amongst the potatoes and it was very sad to look at them'*. Davison died suddenly in 1871 and in 1897 the family sold much of the estate including just under 1000 acres of the surrounding land although they retained the house, garden and adjacent outbuildings. From 1907 the house was let to the Peplow family who with their Hume cousins all lived in the house until 1917. Rosemary Hume, the Cordon Bleu cookery writer, was born there in 1907. In an early C20 photograph a replacement conservatory is visible to the east of the loggia against the south wall of a wing added in the C20, all now (2012) demolished (sales particulars). In 1917 the Davisons were forced to sell and the property was bought by a Colin Campbell. In 1924 he was able to buy back about 130 acres of the original estate land including a farm known as Goldings (now Underriver Farm) which lies to the south on the west side of the road, as well as further land, bringing the total to over 339 acres. According to Winnie Peacock, a housekeeper to Mr Campbell from 1917-1934, the whole of the rear garden was turned over to fruit and vegetable growing to feed local farm workers during the Second World War (pers.com). The estate remained in the Campbell family until 1978 when it was broken up and sold off. Underriver House with its lodge and around five hectares were sold to a Mr di Nova, an Italian tomato baron, and his English wife who started to replant the garden. A domestic tragedy forced the sale again in 1986 when John Coletta bought the house. A music producer, he managed various bands including Deep Purple, Whitesnake and Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow. The bedroom areas of the house were remodelled to accommodate celebrity guests including Charlie Drake who was a friend of Coletta. Coletta sold the property to a Mr. Davies, a local house builder and developer. Davies went bankrupt shortly after this and the house was repossessed by Barclays Bank and sold again in 1993, at this stage the garden being in a largely derelict state. Two cedar of Lebanon trees, brought down in the 1987 storm, were still lying where they fell (pers.com). The house remains in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM and SETTING

Underriver House lies on a slight knoll about 1km east of the village of Underriver on Underriver House Road, 3.5km north-west of Hildenborough and the B245 Tonbridge to Sevenoaks road. Sevenoaks is 4kms to its northwest and Tonbridge 6.5kms to its southeast. Rising behind the property to the north is Oak Hill, part of the wooded slopes of the Greensand ridge which runs roughly southwest /northeast. The area south of the ridge is Samuel Palmer's

“Golden Valley” with gently rolling countryside, narrow roads and fields and meadows edged with hedges and hedgerow oaks and other native species.

The site of approximately five hectares is bounded to the west by Underriver House Road, to the north by a track leading to its former barn and stable yard (now in separate ownership) and to the east and south by the woodland and farmland with hedges and trees which until the 1897 sale formed part of the estate. The west front of the house overlooks meadowland with groups of trees on the west of the road.

ENTRANCES and APPROACHES

The entrance to Underriver House is on the east side of Underriver House Road, through a recessed opening in a C18 boundary wall about 220m long. The wall is roughly 2m high and built of seven courses of stone blocks topped with coping stones. The gate piers, of the same date, are now hung with C20, wrought-iron electric gates.

Opposite the entrance, on the west side of the road but forming part of the site, is a small enclosure featuring a formal duck pond edged with large brick coping stones and surrounded by mown grass. Around its west perimeter are wooden railings backed by a hedge while the east roadside boundary has wrought iron railings. The pond's origin may have been a clay pit (1st edn. OS 1862). Immediately inside the gate on the north side of the entrance drive is a lodge. This single storey house probably late C19 in date with later additions (1st edn. OS 1862) is part brick, part stone with a tiled roof and a wooden porch. An asphalt drive rises up a gentle incline for 90m in a north-easterly direction to encircle a round flowerbed in front of the entrance door and porch on the west front of the house. On the north side of the drive are several notable trees, including a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), the remnants of an avenue recorded on 1st edition OS backed by a shrubbery of the same period which has been recently (2012) renovated with new underplanting of ferns and other ground cover. On the south-east side of the drive only a specimen yew now survives from C19 layout generally together with more recent shrubs including a variegated pittosporum. Where the shrubbery meets the north-west side of the house an informal paved area backed by a yew hedge gives access to the garages screened by the greenery.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The Queen Anne house, built for Richard Goodhugh in 1697, has C19 additions although the C20 wing to the rear has now (2012) been demolished. The floor plan of the present house is roughly E-shaped with the eastern end of the Victorian south wing made larger by the single-storey kitchen area to form a kitchen yard. The early house is constructed of stone laid in continuous courses with flint infilling. It comprises two storeys plus dormers and has a good modillion cornice with a hip tile roof. There are sash windows with bars removed. The projecting porch in the centre of the west façade is late C19 as is a bay window and addition to the south side. There are three casement dormers with tiled roofs facing west. The chimney stacks are late C19.

Underriver House, together with the coach house to the north and the stable block to the east (both these two now in separate ownership) form a group around a cobbled stable yard and are all grade II listed.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The gardens lie to the east, south and west of the house. The kitchen courtyard on the east side of the house is paved with limestone flags (under construction 2012) At the east end of the rear north wing is a raised bed with a retaining stone wall built against the high stone wall forming the north- east boundary with the coach house (now in separate ownership) and with formal topiary trees planted along it. Furthest from the house at its eastern end this bed becomes a raised platform which is then extended south along the back of the south end of the stable block. Four brick edged beds set into the paving, each planted with privet balls and a specimen topiary tree, frame a narrow rill running east-west parallel with the raised bed.

Along the open, south side of this now remodelled courtyard is a 1.5m high stone wall with a wrought iron gate which leads into a water garden dating from between the wars (pers. com.). This has a deep rectangular fish pool lying east-west in the centre, surrounded by flagstones and protected by railings. Shrub borders frame the garden to the north and south. To the east, where water cascades down four steps into the pool, a 'window' has been cut through the brickwork at the top of the wall behind to give a view. On the west side, an area for dining lies below the big bay windows of the kitchen. Beyond the garden is a broad gravel path running the entire length of the south façade of the house and continuing past the low shrub border of the water garden. Tucked into the side of the south wall of the rear single storey kitchen wing is a C20 tile-roofed wooden loggia which replaced an earlier C20 extension and conservatory. A stone wall with an older window opening supports the eastern end of the loggia where an old wisteria clothes the wall.

Facing south, below the gravel path, lies a more formal, sunken lawn, laid out in the late C19 for tennis and croquet (archive photos and sales particulars). Stone steps opposite the casement window on the south wall of the house lead down to it. On its eastern edge a raised bank about 45m long forms the boundary along the top of which is a pleached lime walk (planted C21) with a gravelled surface. To the east of this and lying parallel to it is an herbaceous garden backed to the east and south by clipped yew hedges. It features a broad stretch of grass under a wide pergola running the length of the garden which is planted with climbers and has deep beds on either side. A wooden bench in front of the hedge draws the eye to the far south end. A narrow grass path lies along the hedge on its east side through which an archway with a wrought iron gate gives access to a rose garden. Completely enclosed within clipped yew hedges, this garden contains rectangular beds either side of a gravel path which widens in the centre to incorporate a seating area framed by a topiary yew feature in each corner. At the far, east end, another arch cut through the hedge leads into an orchard. None of the trees date back earlier than just after the First World War and most have been replanted in C21.

Beyond the south end of the herbaceous garden and pleached lime walk are two sequoia trees and an oak tree which date back to late C19 (1917 Sales particulars). A circular log cabin stands in their shade. Immediately south is a hard tennis court, built in the 1970s and screened to the west and north by clipped yew hedges. West of the tennis court is a paddock and, to its south (as far as the site's southern boundary) is an arboretum, planted on the site once occupied by the Manor of Shoads (known from at least the mid C19 as Shoads Farm and the subject of Palmer's painting of c1840) of which its well and some footings are still visible (pers.com).

At the south end of the pleached lime walk, stone steps lead west down the bank to the continuation of the gravel walk which follows a straight line along the southern boundary of the croquet lawn towards the road frontage. The garden area sloping down from the house to the west and beyond the croquet lawn to the south is managed as rough mown grass. 30m from the south-west corner of the house within this area is one of the largest copper beech trees in Kent (pers.com/OS 2nd edn.). There is also a specimen horse chestnut nearer the road and a small rustic pond in the extreme south west corner. Most of the road frontage is screened by an informal belt of trees and shrubs on the garden side of the frontage wall except for a central section allowing views to and from the house. West below the turning circle in front of the house are four clipped yews. Around the south-west corner of the house, softening the junction of the turning circle with the gravel walk which skirts the house, is a dry garden.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The kitchen garden lies to the east of the house behind the stable block and extends south as far as the hedge of the rose garden. It was laid out in the C21 as a substantial, 10m wide L-shaped fruit and vegetable plot with brick paving and raised beds edged with wood. At the northern end, behind the old stable block, are a glass house and other outbuildings also built in the C21. The garden occupies part of a former C19 kitchen garden which comprised a rough square of about 0.35 ha. with surviving 2m high brick walls on its north and east sides (2nd. edn. OS map 1897-1900). However, after the 1978 sale, a strip of land alongside the north wall was sold to the owners of the coach house. The remainder of this area still belonging to Underriver House is laid to grass.

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Ordnance Survey 3rd edn. 25" map (1907-23)

Ordnance Survey 4th edn. 25" map (1929-52)

Illustrations

Sales Particulars Norton, Hoggart & Trist 1862

Sales Particulars Knight, Frank & Rutley 1917

Sales Particulars John D. Wood/Taylor & Tester 1978

Archival items

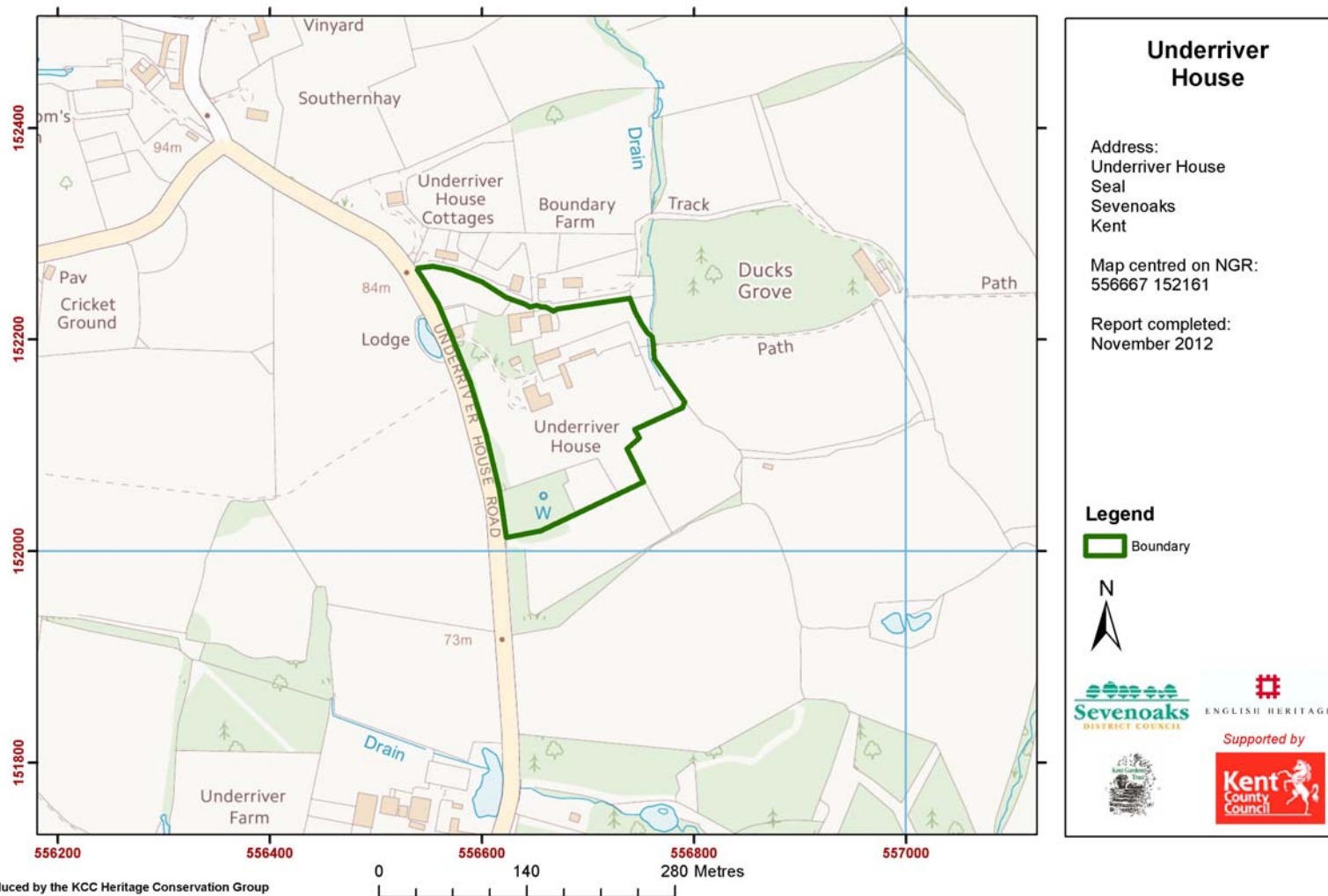
Maps, conveyances, photographs in private archive

Research by Peta Hodges and Paul Lewis

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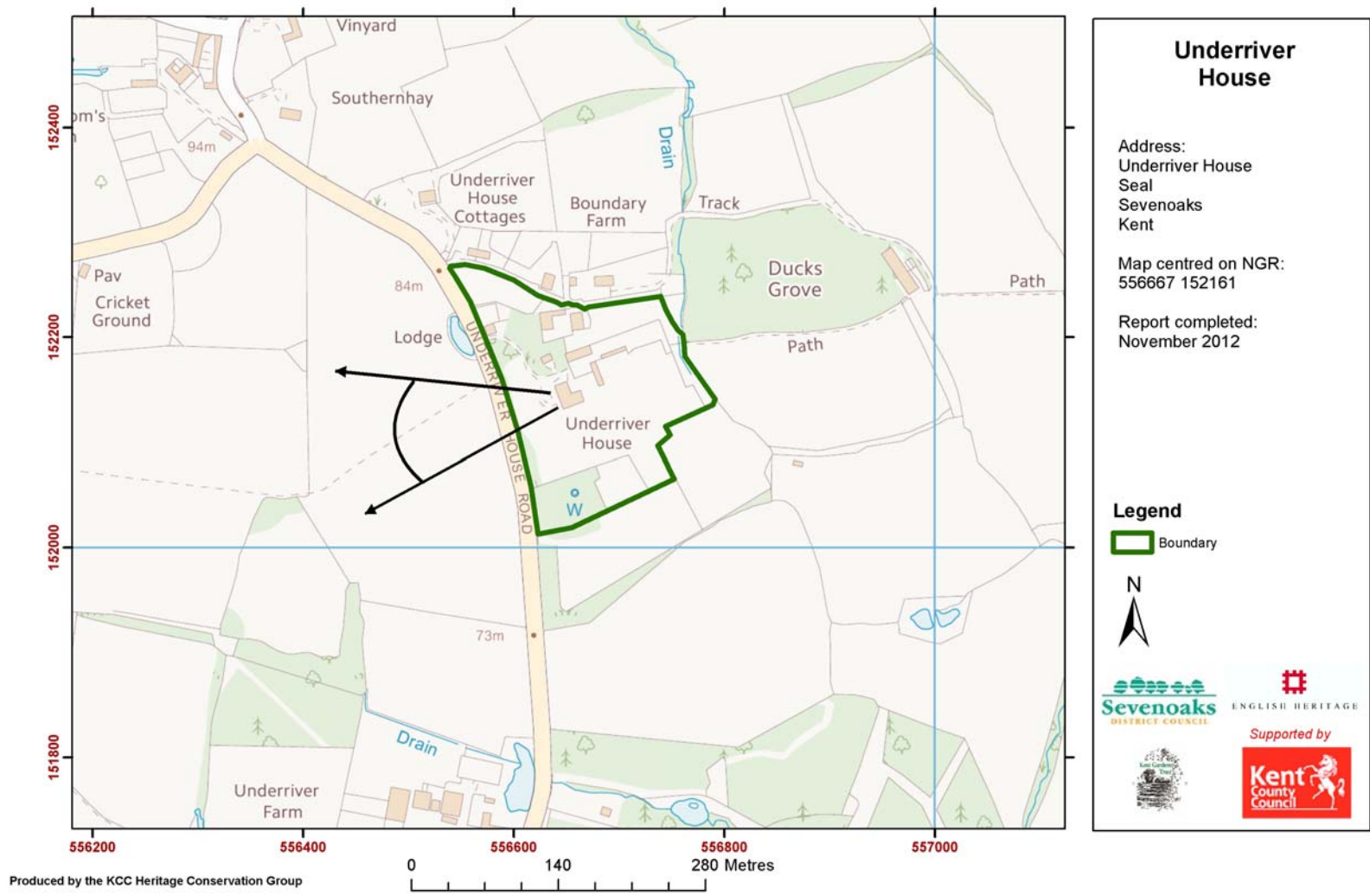
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Fig. 1 Boundary map



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Fig. 2 Key views map



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Fig. 3 Aerial photograph (2008)

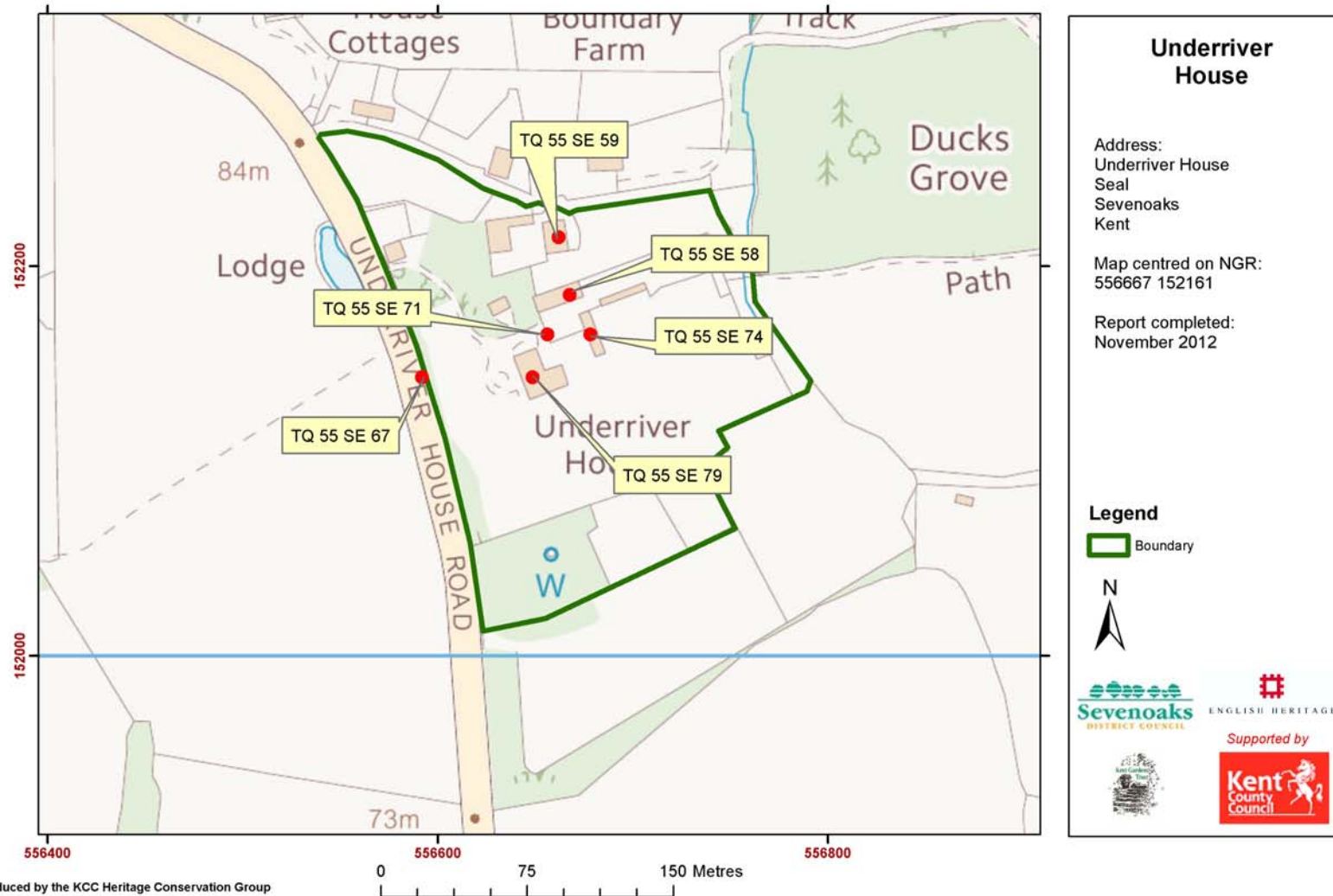


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Fig. 4 Listed buildings at Underriver House



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Fig. 4 Listed buildings at Underriver House (from the Kent Historic Environment Record)

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SE 58

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL UNDERRIVER
Barn to north of out- TQ 55 SE 47/1084 building to
north of Underriver House II
2. Probably early C18 three-bay bath. Weatherboarded with half hipped tiled roof. Aisle along east side. Queen strut roof. Fairly stout timbers, not close set. Flushed diagonal braces above half rail. Tall gabled wagon entrance with pigeon end. Extensions at both ends. Internal access platform to columnbarium in gable peak.
Listing NGR: TQ5666752186

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SE 59

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL UNDERRIVER
Outbuilding to North of Under River House TQ
55 SE 47/1081
II GV
2. L-shaped building of galletted coursed rubble, probably C18. 2 storeys, tiled roof. Projecting central gable with blocked round window above and carriage entrance with chamfered elliptical arch below. Casement windows. 2 large sets of modern garage doors at sides.
Under River House, the Outbuilding to North, Stable building to East and wall behind house form a group around cobbled stable yard.
Listing NGR: TQ5666152215

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SE 67

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL UNDERRIVER
Front boundary wall to grounds of Under River House
TQ 55 SE 47/1083
II
2. Long C18 wall of galletted rubble masonry.
Listing NGR: TQ5565351916

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SE 71

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL UNDERRIVER

Wall to North-East of
8E 47/1080

Under River House TQ 55

II GV

2. Length of wall of C18 stone work with gate piers.

Under River House, the Outbuilding to North, Stable building to East and wall behind house form a group around cobbled stable yard.

Listing NGR: TQ5665652165

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SE 74

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL UNDERRIVER

Stable building to East of Under River House TQ 55

SE 47/1082

II GV

2. Long 1-storey building of galletted coursed rubble with tiled roof. Small louvred vent turret on ridge. Dutch doors.

Under River House, the Outbuilding to North, Stable building to East and wall behind house form a group around cobbled stable yard.

Listing NGR: TQ5667952165

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SE 79

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL UNDERRIVER

Under River House TQ 55 SE 47/1079 10.9.54.

II GV

2. Queen Anne House with C19 additions and modern wing to rear. Stone layed in continuous courses with flint infilling. 2 storeys and dormers. Good modillion cornice. Hip tile roof. Sash windows with bars removed. Late C19 projecting porch in centre and C19 bay window and addition to right hand side. 3 casement dormers with tiled roofs. Late C19 chimney stacks.

Under River House, the Outbuilding to North, Stable building to East and wall behind house form a group around cobbled stable yard.

Listing NGR: TQ5664852144