

# The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Medway



## The Vines, Rochester



November 2014



# **The Vines**

## Rochester, 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  
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ME4 4TR  
[www.medway.gov.uk](http://www.medway.gov.uk)

Kent County Council  
Heritage Conservation  
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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**

**THE VINES**

**ROCHESTER**

Centred on 574262 168268

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The site is called The Vines because as its name suggests this is where the monks of the Priory of St Andrew were granted land to have their vineyard in 600AD by St Augustine, the land being granted back to the church post dissolution and remaining in the ownership of the Dean and Chapter of the cathedral ever since. Its proximity to the city wall means it has potential for archaeological value while the continuity of ownership has resulted in the survival of an extensive archive documenting the changing economic and social history of the site.

The Vines is associated with notable people. Restoration House that overlooks the site is where Charles II stayed on his progress to London. There is strong evidence that Charles Dickens used Restoration House to represent Satis House in '*Great Expectations*' and there are several drawings of The Vines in this context. He also referred to The Vines in his novel '*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*' as the Monks Vineyard. The site is also an important part of the history of the adjacent Kings School Rochester for which it served as a playing field during the mid C19.

The Vines has been a public open space since 1880 when it was first leased by the Corporation of Rochester and trees were planted along its main avenue (the Broad Walk) and bollards (listed grade II) were placed at two of the entrances. The Friends of The Vines have supervised the management of the site since 2008 and have achieved a Green Flag award every year. The site is a tranquil, green space in the centre of Rochester, the mature trees providing shade and a feeling of a long-established space which, with its view of the cathedral spire, evokes the typical character of an English cathedral.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

In about the year 600, Ethelbert, King of Kent, was instructed by St. Augustine to build a church at Rochester in honour of St. Andrew with a monastery adjoining it. St. Augustine in 604 appointed Justus to be bishop and placed secular priests in the monastery. Portions of land both within and without the walls of the city were given to the monks so that they could maintain themselves. It is assumed that the land outside the city wall was the place where the monks had their vineyard and therefore was called The Vines. During the C13 and C14, in the records of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral, a vineyard is mentioned, with a curtilage described lying next to the city wall on the one side of

the Priory vineyard and one headland extending to Crow Lane. Grapes and a small vine are also described (Records of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral, Medway Archives and Local Study Centre).

In 1539, following the dissolution of the monasteries, St Andrews Priory church was converted to Rochester's cathedral and a dean, chapter and canons were installed; the lands of the Priory were given to Henry VIII's supporters. However in 1558 these lands (which included The Vines) were given back to the cathedral and The Vines has remained in its ownership until the present day (2014) although they have always been leased out to various people.

That The Vines should serve as a permitted public thoroughfare is stated in the cathedral records of 1599. These say *'if the marsh wall should break under heavy tides, all people connected with the cathedral can use The Vines as a way through.'* (Records of the Dean and Chapter).

In 1661 the Records refer to the site as a four acre field, leased to Sir Francis Clarke, the owner of Restoration House across Crow Lane to the east of The Vines. In 1695 it was leased to a William Brockenham and the Records say *'a messuage was built on The Vines with a quickset garden fence taking in a grove of young elms'*. During the next few years it was leased by various people. In 1732 a timber survey lists 21 trees felled at The Vines for the use of timber. By 1755 the records state that *'there is a garden extending into the Vines and another messuage'*. it is now described as being 3 acres of land and the elms as a small grove.

The first definitive map of Rochester which was included in Denne's Guidebook of 1772 represents The Vines as abutting the outside of the city's southern wall with a grove of elm trees in the western corner, the reduction of open land to 3 acres being accounted for by the quickset garden fence. Hasted's map of Rochester of 1798 also depicts The Vines with the elm grove.

In 1790 George Gates is the lessee; a well is dug on the west side of the site and pipes laid to relay water to houses nearby. Gates is using the land for cattle grazing; the records stating that only sheds for cattle may be built on the site.

R Sale's map of Rochester dated 1816 clearly show the quickset fence and the messuages that have been built in the site's south western corner; the grove of elm trees is also evident.

The tithe schedule of Rochester (1839-1842) establishes the ownership of The Vines to be that of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester cathedral and, for the first time, the present (2014) path that runs diagonally from the north-western corner to the south-eastern corner of the site is shown, James Darch is named as occupying the land which is in use as a market garden and pasture; this use is verified in the Records as £1.2s was paid to James Darch for making a hedge in the Vines in December 1841. The elm grove is apparent in the south east corner very specifically showing seven elms. The map shows that a well had been dug in the eastern corner. In 1831 Samuel Lewis, describing his visit to Rochester, says the *'city is well paved and lighted with gas and has an ample supply of*



*water from an excellent field called The Vines'* (A Topographical Dictionary of England, vol. 3).

In 1820, and again in 1843, the Dean and Chapter are recorded as stating that *'The Vines should preserve the ancient privilege as a place of recreation for all persons connected with Rochester Cathedral and Kings School'*. The site provided a playing field for the school until 1865 when it became too small. A print by William Dadson of 1825 shows boys playing cricket in The Vines. The school subsequently bought the Paddock (described as pasture on the Tithe schedule 1839-1842) from Christ's Hospital who had been its owners since the dissolution of the monasteries. The Paddock is situated across Vines Lane to the south west of The Vines. The School also impinged physically on The Vines as it was expanding and in 1880 School House was built in the south-eastern corner on Crow Lane.

Dadson's 1825 print shows a rough hedge separating the main School site from its playing field on The Vines. By 1875 a (contemporary photograph) show rough and overgrown brambles separating the sites though by 1880 when School house was built, a photograph of that date shows the brambles replaced by a shrubbery with a flower bed which extended north-eastwards to a surviving section of city walls incorporated within the School's grounds.

Once the school had vacated its playing field on the site in 1885 it was leased to the City of Rochester Corporation. The first edition OS map (1862-1875) show for the first time another path running from the south-western corner to the north-eastern corner of the site, the two paths intersecting at the centre.

In 1909, in his book *'The Months of the Year'*, the Rev. Pemberton Lloyd, who was a pupil at Kings School, wrote *'on the other side of the school you have what in my time used to be a football ground called The Vines but it is now a most refined and tastily laid out park with seats but still called the Vines'*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS map (1897-1900) shows for the first time an avenue of trees planted along the path that runs from the north west corner to the south east corner, this is now called the Broad Walk (information about The Vines [www.medway.gov/leisure](http://www.medway.gov/leisure) ). An 1880 photograph in the Medway Centre for Study and Archives shows an avenue of newly planted saplings alongside this path showing that the park was probably laid out during this time.

An illustration of Restoration House and The Vines by G Kitton (1856-1904), the Victorian woodcarver and engraver who studied the life of Charles Dickens, clearly shows the seven elms, a caption beneath says that this illustration is of Satis House, the home of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (*The Victorian Web*). In the novel, Pip describes crossing Priory Gardens as he approaches the house. A similar illustration by Robert Langton in the book *'Charles Dickens and Rochester'* also depicts Restoration House as Satis House and The Vines as Priory Gardens. Dickens also uses The Vines in *'The Mystery of Edwin Drood'* which is set in Rochester; here he has Edwin meeting Rosa in a place called the Monks Vineyard which is near the cathedral.

During the C20 photographs depict the Vines as a pleasant public park and all C20 OS editions show the avenue of London Plane trees along The Broad Walk and the seven elms. Records from Rochester Corporation record that the seven elms were felled in the 1960s because they were deemed to be in a dangerous condition and it is here that they are first referred to as 'the seven sisters'. Whitebeams were planted as replacements but these were vandalised soon after they were planted in 1970 so were removed. The plaque that was instated when the Whitebeams were planted is now in the bed on the north east side of the site, it says, *'These seven Whitebeams..... replace the seven sisters that were taken down in 1965 beneath which Charles Dickens walked on his last visit to Rochester 3 days before his death on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1870.....'*. There are a few Whitebeams in this bed which may have replaced those that were vandalised.

In the storm of October 1987 many of the Plane trees in the avenue were blown down. During the next twenty years The Vines became neglected and the vegetation over grown until in 2007 Medway Council tidied up the shrubberies and resurfaced the Broad Walk with a top-dressing of tar and gravel.

The first meeting of The Friends of The Vines was held in 2008, their main objective being to make The Vines a pleasant place for the community. The Friends and local schools work in partnership with Medway Council to manage the site which is also used for events. The Vines has been awarded a Green Flag from 2008 to 2013 and in 2009 it won the Conservation Award from the City of Rochester. The site remains in ecclesiastical ownership though leased to a public body.

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

The Vines is a 1.2ha rectangular site situated in the City of Rochester, some 200m west of the north/south Corporation Street (A2) and 250m south of the Cathedral. Surviving sections of the city walls stand 20m to the north-east of the site. The north-eastern end is visually dominated by Restoration House which stands on the east side of Crow Lane and School House which is adjacent to the site's north-eastern corner. The site otherwise is set within the surrounding well-treed grounds of the buildings of the Kings School. The cathedral spire can be seen from the site to the north.

The site is enclosed to the south-east by cast iron railings for 70m along Crow Lane. The 200m south-western boundary with Vines Lane is unfenced and planted with shrubs; the Paddock, which serves as Kings School playing field, lies on the immediate west side of Vines Lane. To the north west 50m of the boundary is formed by a brick wall which incorporates two gateways leading into the grounds of Davies Court (also part of Kings School). Oriel House, the residence of the head master of Kings School, stands at the north-western corner (outside the site), its brick wall forming the site's boundary for 50m on the north side. The rest of this boundary comprises a wooden fence which runs for 120 m south-eastwards to meet Crow Lane.

## **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

There are five formal public pedestrian entrances to The Vines, one at each of the four corners to serve the two diagonal paths that intersect in the centre of the site. A fifth entrance lies on Vines Lane, 50m west of the south-east entrance. The south-east entrance, at the junction of Vines Lane and Crow Lane has four cast iron, octagonal bollards, each facet of which is panelled with fluted caps (c1840, listed grade II). The north-east entrance on Crow Lane is directly opposite Restoration House and has two similar bollards, also listed grade II.

## **GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS**

The rectangular site is completely flat and is laid to lawn and crossed by two diagonal paths which intersect at the centre. The main path (First seen on The Tithe Map and as the only path) is now known as The Broad Walk and runs north-west to south-east and is lined with an avenue of London Plane trees of varying maturity (First seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition OS Map 1897-1900) The second path (First seen on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS Map 1862-1875) runs from south-west to north-east, is narrower and, at its north-eastern end, frames a view of Restoration House. 10m wide borders planted with shrubs and bulbs enclose the entire perimeter of the site apart from where it abuts Davies Court at the north-west end. The lawns between the paths are dotted with a few mature trees here and there.

## **REFERENCES**

### **Maps:**

Hasted's map of 1798, Hasted, Edward, *The History and Topographical Survey of Kent*. Second Edition vol. 4 (1798) Medway Archives and Local Study Centre  
Map of Rochester 1772, Denne & Shrubsole, *The History and Antiquities of Rochester and its Environs* (London 1772) Medway Archives and Local Study Centre.

Sale R, Map of Rochester, 1816, loose copy, Medway Archives and Local Study Centre

Tithe Map of St Margaret's Rochester and Tithe Schedule

OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 25" map (1862-1875)

OS 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 25" map (1862-1875)

OS 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 25" map (1907-1923)

OS 4<sup>th</sup> Edition 25" map (1929-1952)

### **Reports:**

Buchanan, Odette (The Friends of the Vines) *The Vines, An Historical Understanding* (2011) copy with author.

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Denne & Shrubsole, *The History and Antiquities of Rochester and its Environs* (London 1772)  
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[www.medway.gov.uk/leisure](http://www.medway.gov.uk/leisure) (The Vines) accessed March 2014.  
[www.victorianweb](http://www.victorianweb) Accessed March 2014

**Archive material:**

Records of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral, Medway Archives & Local Study Centre

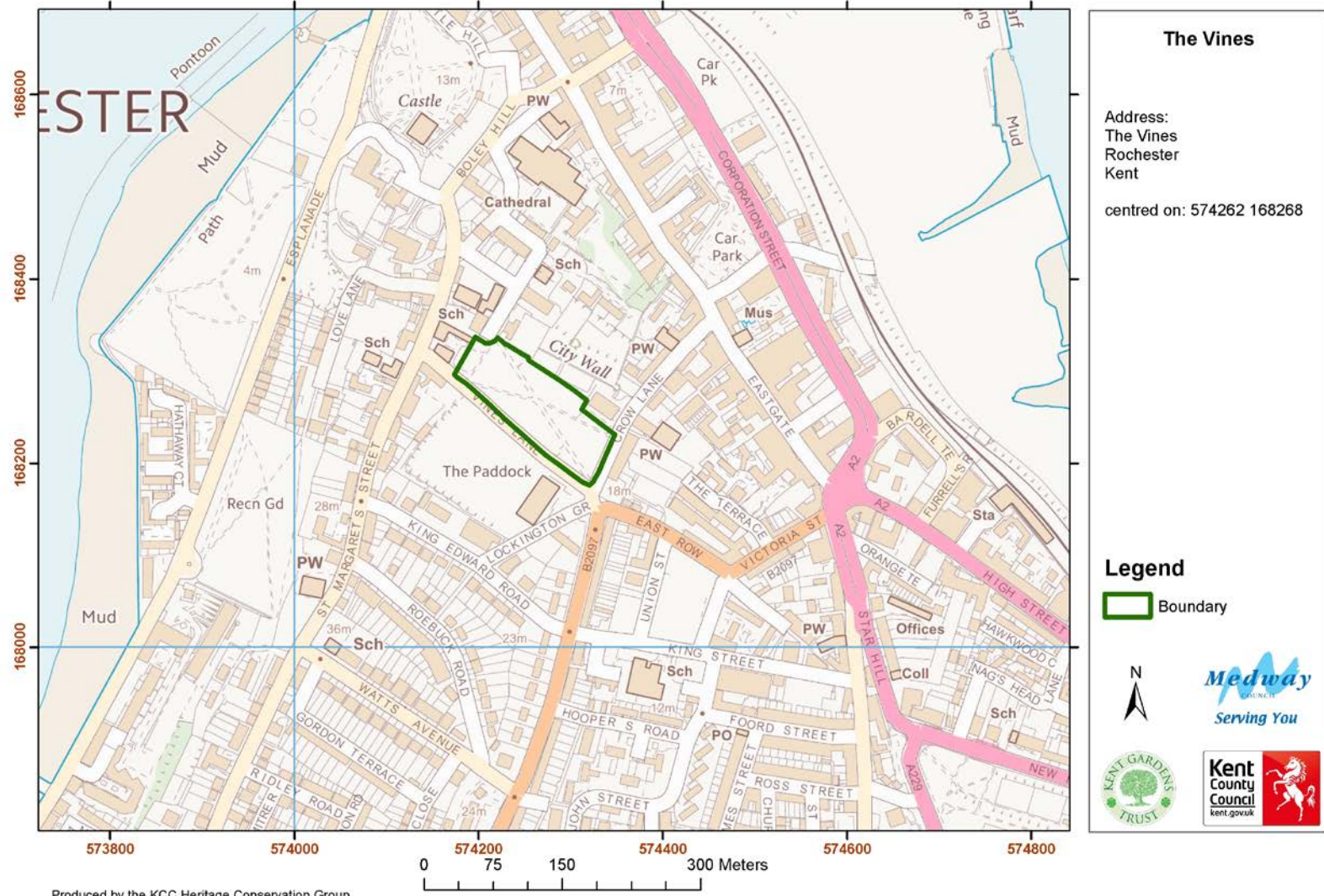
**Illustrations:**

Photographs and postcards of The Vines, 1880 photograph of newly planted saplings  
Photographs showing the hedging between the grounds of School House and The Vines, 1875 to present day; General views dating from 1880 to present day.  
Medway Archives & Local Study Centre  
William Dadson: Lithographic print of a pencil drawing of Rochester cathedral seen from the south in the Vines; cattle & cricketers present; (plate no.10).  
Produced for 'Sketches of the Picturesque in Rochester and its Vicinity', published by William Dadson in 1825 (Reproduced with the kind permission of the Guildhall Museum, Rochester).

**Research Cilla Freud**  
**Editor Virginia Hinze**

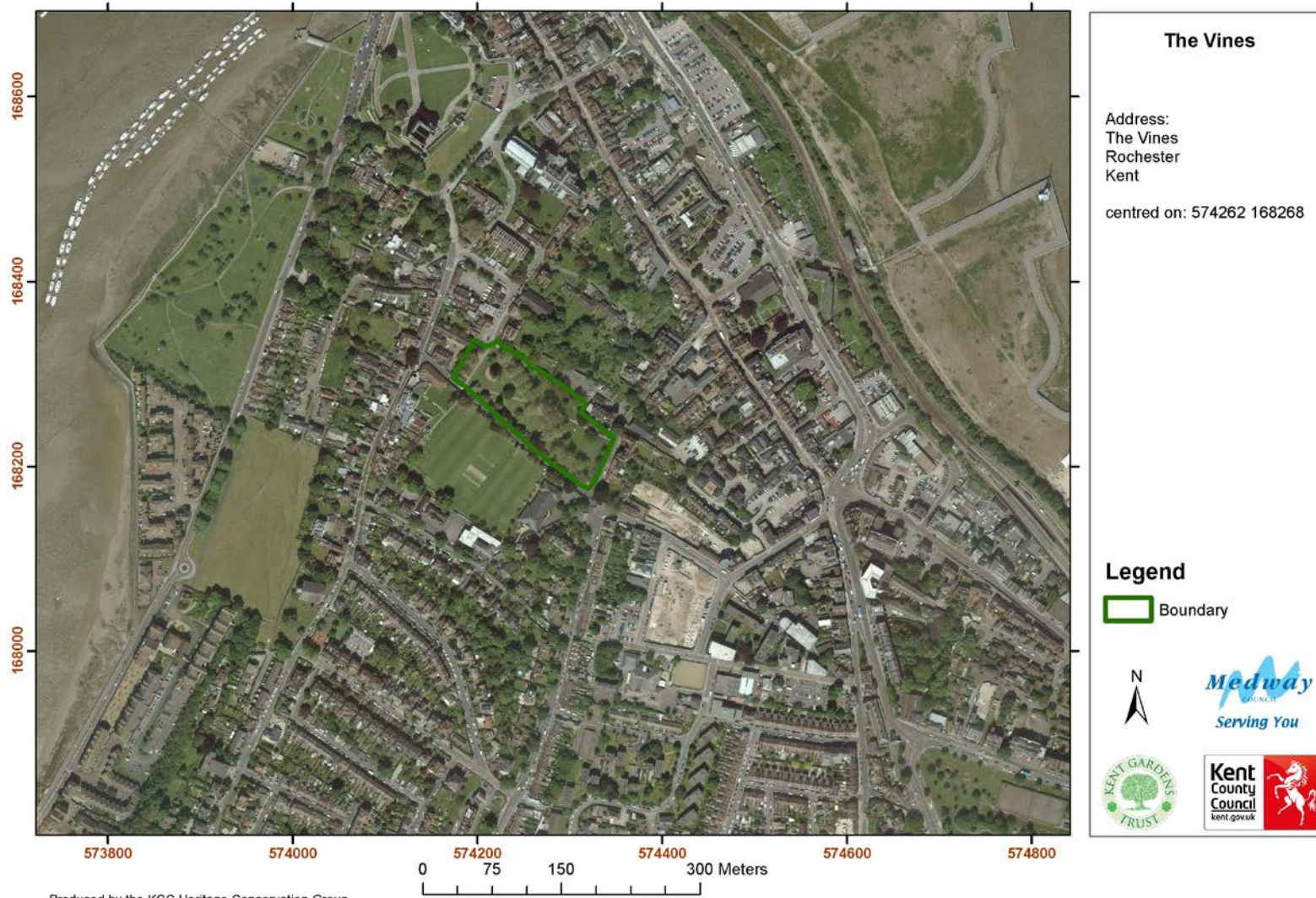
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Fig. 1 Boundary map



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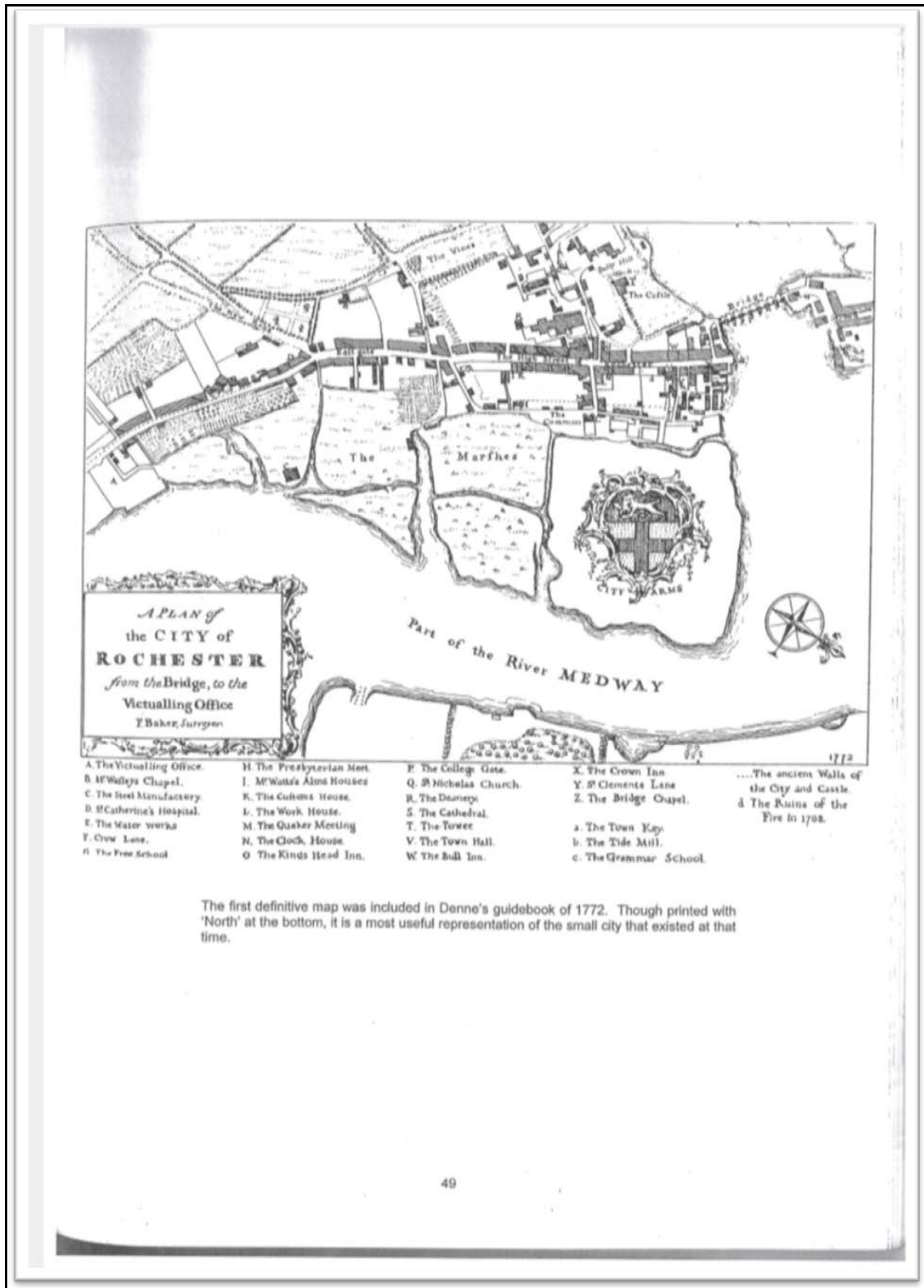
## Fig. 2 Aerial photograph (2012)



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group  
This mpa 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. 3 Denne and Shrubsole, map of Rochester (1772)



The first definitive map was included in Denne's guidebook of 1772. Though printed with 'North' at the bottom, it is a most useful representation of the small city that existed at that time.

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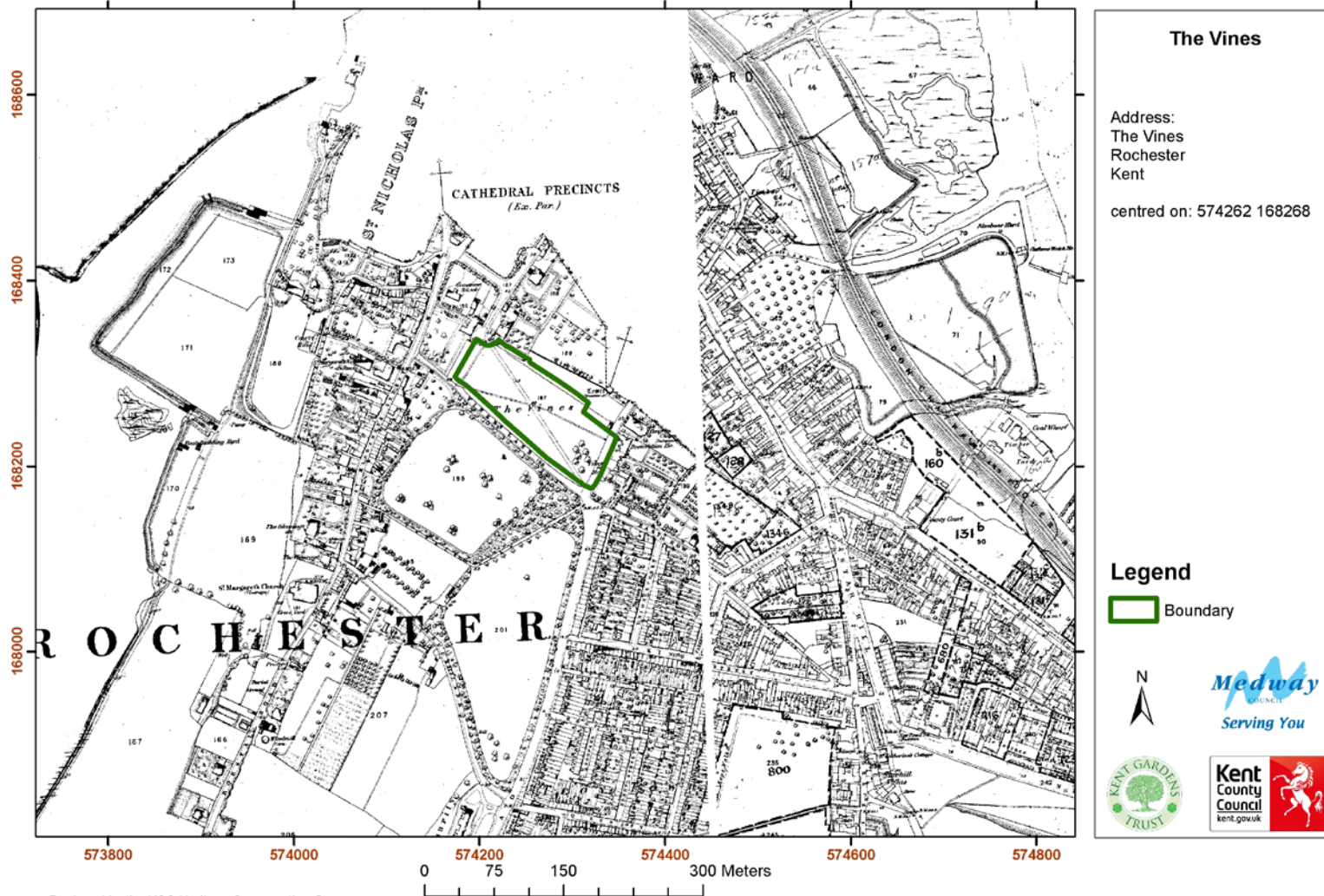
Fig. 4 Tithe Map of St Margarets Rochester





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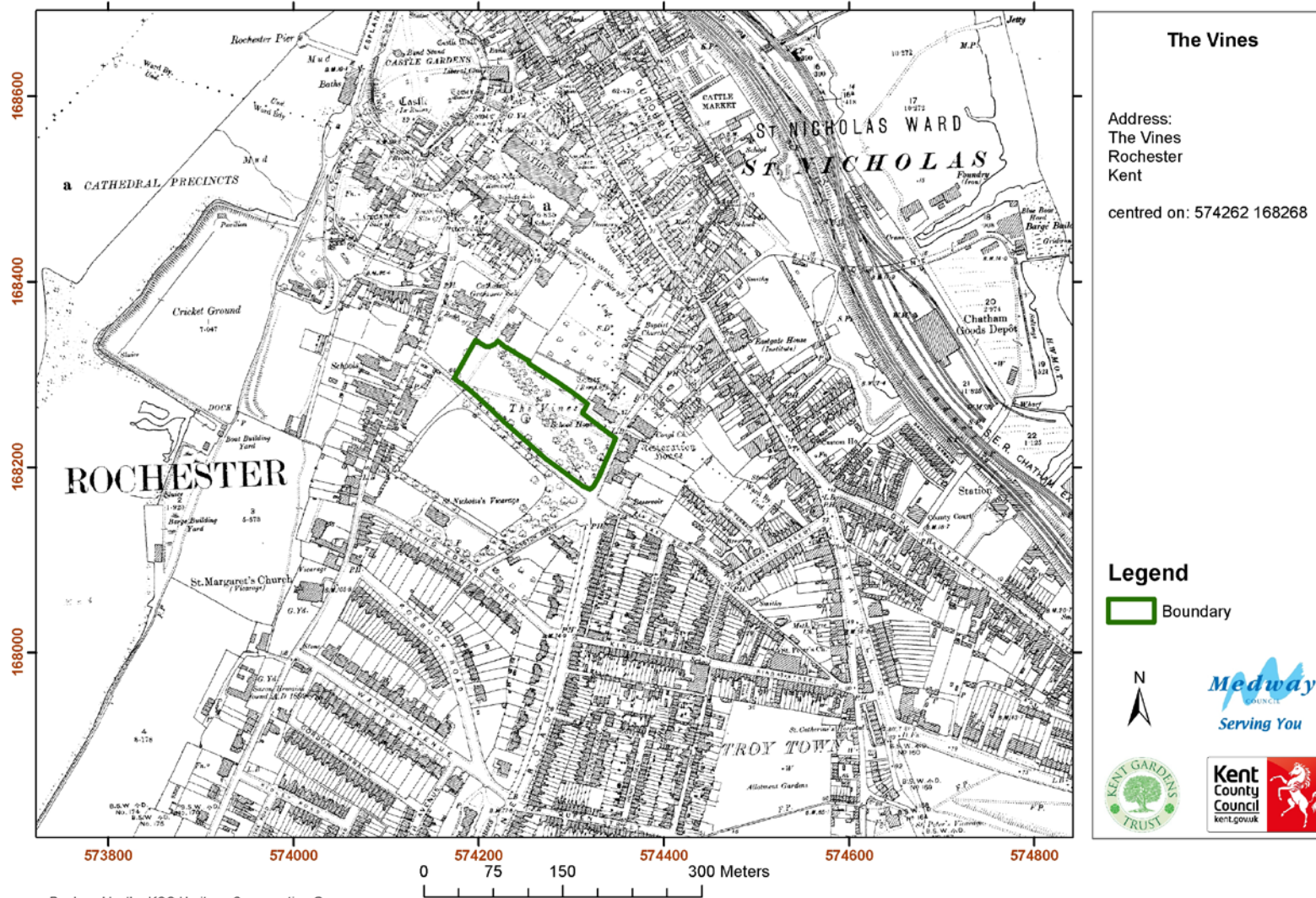
## Fig. 5 OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 25” map (1862-1875)



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Fig. 6 OS 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 25” map (1897-1900)



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Fig. 7 OS 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 25” map (1907-1923)



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Fig. 8 OS 4<sup>th</sup> Edition 25” map (1929-1952)



**The Vines**

Address:  
The Vines  
Rochester  
Kent

centred on: 574262 168268

**Legend**

 Boundary

 N

 **Medway**  
COUNCIL  
Serving You

 **KENT GARDENS**  
TRUST

 **Kent**  
County  
Council  
kent.gov.uk

Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group  
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Fig. 9 Lithograph of the Vines by William Dadson (1825). Reproduced with the kind permission of the Guildhall Museum, Rochester



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**Fig. 10 The south-east entrance at the junction of Crow Lane and Vines Lane showing the Broad Walk and avenue of trees. Grade II bollards in foreground. (March 2014 Cilla Freud).**



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**Fig. 11 The north-west entrance from The Precinct looking down the Broad Walk towards the south east entrance (March 2014 Cilla Freud)**



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**Fig. 12 The east entrance with Restoration House across Crow Lane. Grade II bollards at the entrance (March 2014 Cilla Freud)**





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**Fig. 13 The west entrance from Vines Lane looking towards Restoration House (March 2014  
Cilla Freud)**



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**Fig. 14 View of the cathedral from the north-west entrance. (March 2014 Cilla Freud)**

