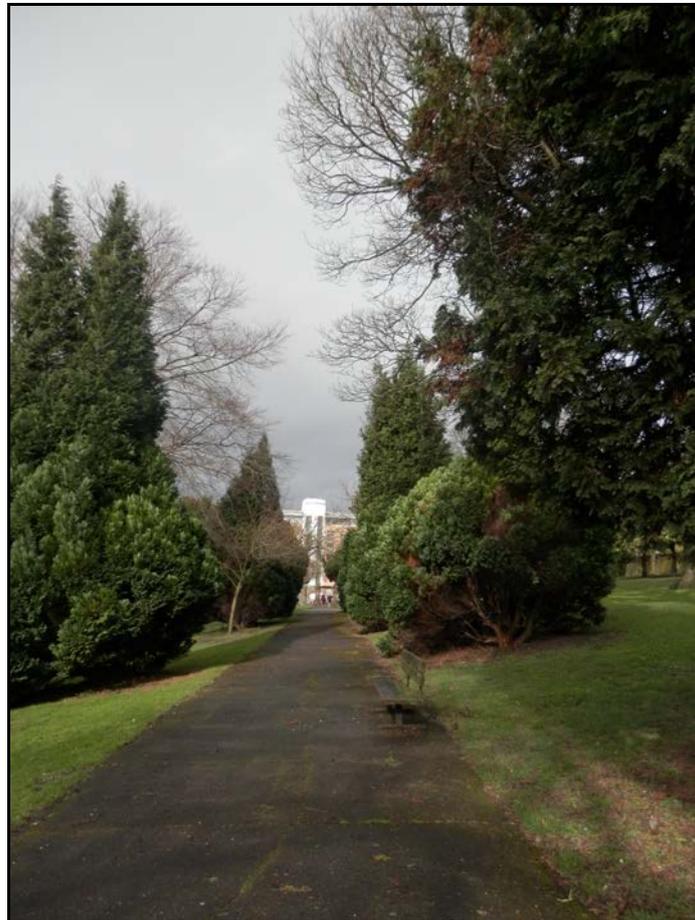


The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Medway



Town Hall Gardens, Chatham



September 2014

Town Hall Gardens

Chatham, 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 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
Dock Road
Chatham
ME4 4TR
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
Medway

TOWN HALL GARDENS

NGR: 576001 168037

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Town Hall Gardens survive as representative of a common – and in this case early (1828) - origin of civic open space in Chatham: the gifting of land from military to civilian ownership by the Ordnance Board. First gifted to, and laid out by, Chatham parish as an overspill burial ground, its later transfer to the Corporation (in 1903) for public open space is also a common use of the period for redundant and closed burial grounds. The Gardens represent Chatham Corporation's response to providing and preserving public open space under the Open Spaces Act 1877. Typically of such sites, there is significant archaeological potential as features of the burial ground such as boundary walling, entrance gateway, path layout and remnants of tombs were retained, and survive today (2014) within the surviving layout, as were headstones although these are relocated against the walls. Also typically for such early C20 sites, the Gardens were laid out by the Corporation, probably by the Borough Surveyor, reflecting local civic pride in creating such spaces. Elements of the early C20 design, which was conventional, probably survive in the tree planting, as do a number of early C19 trees which contribute to the aesthetic of the Gardens by reflecting, with the headstones, their earlier use as a burial ground.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site, formerly the Rope Works, was developed as a burial ground and opened in May 1828 when the existing churchyard at St Mary's in Dock Road became overcrowded due to the growing civilian and military population. The land was acquired by the parish of Chatham as a gift from the Board of Ordnance. By the mid-1860s (1st edition 25" OS map 1862-1875) the site is known as Chatham Burial Ground and includes boundary walls, an entrance gateway on the north-western boundary, some building(s) in the north west corner and a central pathway leading from the entrance towards the south east plus two side paths linking to a lower path also running north-west to south-east. Burials continued until 1870 when a new cemetery opened in Maidstone Road.

Following the erection of the Town Hall (adjacent to Rope Walk in central Chatham) in 1900, the closed burial ground was considered for use as open space and the Town Council minute book for 1902 refers to a list of the tombstones and monuments being deposited for inspection at the Town Clerk's office. On 8 April 1903 the Town Council's minute book records a resolution that the: "*corporate seal be affixed to the petition of the Rector and Church wardens of Chatham and the Town Council to the Lord Bishop of Rochester for a faculty for the conveyance of the disused churchyard to the Corporation for the laying out as open space and this was duly sealed.*" The space was conveyed from

Chatham Parish to Chatham Corporation on 9 September 1903 for its preservation and use as a public recreation ground under the Open Spaces Act 1877.

Various initial plans attributed to Charles Day, the Borough Surveyor, the Vestry Clerk, the Chairman of the Vestry and the Town Clerk show the proposed improvements (Medway Archives) including one showing 'lavatories for Ladies and Gentlemen' and a fenced 'short cut' path leading directly to the Great Lines, presumably to facilitate access when the Gardens were closed. Another dated 31 March 1903 shows a structure in the centre, a central path and two curved ones at the south-east end. None of the plans appear to be a final version; however the central path and two curved paths were implemented, as shown on the 3rd edition OS map (1907 -1923). This also shows deciduous and coniferous tree planting, two greenhouses and a building in the north-west corner.

The minute book for the Highway and Works Committee records on 14 January 1905 the name was changed from the Old Burial Ground to Town Hall Gardens; they were formally opened on 14 June 1905, the event being recorded on the inner western wall of the entrance gateway by an inscription recording the names of Chatham Corporation's Mayor, Town Clerk and Borough Surveyor. The 'Chatham News' also records the opening under its editorial "Jottings By the Way": 'Visiting the Old Burial Ground at Chatham or the Town Hall Gardens as they are popularly known, I was impressed by the neatness of the beds and the brightness of the flowers – in spite of Thursday's heavy rain. The benches looked stately and the hedges well cared for in contrast to the derelict headstones and the paths which have subsided.' For the opening most of the gravestones were moved to the two walled boundaries on the north-east and south-east sides.

The layout of the Gardens is first recorded in 1907 (3rd edition 25" OS map 1907-1923). The only obvious entrance, through a gateway on the north-west boundary, and larger buildings on the south-west boundary, were both shown on the earlier OS maps and are likely to have been used in connection with the management of the burial ground. The 1907-1923 map also shows for the first time two greenhouses near the north-western corner and a layout of paths comprising a perimeter route within the boundary walls, a central one and linking cross paths to form a diamond shape, plus two linking, curved paths towards the south. An adjacent, military burial ground (to its north-east) is marked as disused at this date and by 1929 (4th edition OS map (1929-1952) is not labelled so presumably any remains were transferred elsewhere by then and the site closed sometime after the mid-1950s (OS 4th edition). This site is now, 2014 a public car park.

The Corporation's Burial Committee which also managed the parks and open spaces records in the minutes for 10 July 1950 that one of the greenhouses is surplus to requirements; it seems that up to that date both greenhouses were used for all the Corporation cemeteries and parks horticultural work. However the 4th edition OS map (1929-1952) still shows two greenhouses so presumably their removal didn't happen until later.

Since the early 1950s (OS map 1929-1952) the following changes have taken place: the western arm of the southern curved paths has gone, as has the south-west boundary path and boundary wall; there are now two sets of steps leading down to Rope Walk. On the southern boundary, a new path links the Gardens with mid/late C20 housing at the north end of King Street. The entrance gateway structure and railings survive on the north-western boundary.

In June 2008, supported by the Chatham World Heritage body and facilitated by local artist Fiona Watt, a time capsule, containing local residents' mementoes of the meaning of Chatham's heritage, was buried. Medway Archives hold the capsule key which is not to be opened for at least 30 years.

The site is owned and managed by Medway Council which was formed in 1998 from the City of Rochester, Borough of Chatham, Strood Rural District and Gillingham Borough Council.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Town Hall Gardens lie 250m inland from the east bank of the River Medway, in the centre of Chatham, east of the main A231 (The Brook) and south-west of the Great Lines Heritage Park. The site is roughly rectangular in shape, 240m in length and 60m in width with an area of c1.4ha; it slopes steeply from north-east to south-west.

Views out of the site to the west are contained by the backs of buildings on the Brook, including the Old Town Hall (now, 2014, the Brook Arts Centre) and other more recent municipal buildings. Views out in other directions are limited by the boundary walling although the steep slopes of the Great Lines are visible beyond the eastern boundary.

The north-eastern, north-western and south-western boundaries (abutting Whiffens Way car park, the Great Lines Heritage Park and Rope Walk respectively) are formed by brick walls (2m high) with stone-capped piers, all probably surviving from the former burial ground. A photograph c1931 (Medway Archives, Couchman Collection) shows them topped by low, vertical spiked metal railings which are fixed to the walling with metal brackets at intervals (part of a bracket survives). The north-western boundary is marked by mid/late C20 vertical, green painted metal railings set onto a low brick wall with a stone coping. The coping contains holes indicating the existence of earlier metal uprights, possibly railings removed for the 'War Effort'. The south-western boundary is open to the road (Rope Walk) although a photograph c1925 (Couchman Collection) shows that it was formerly also enclosed by a brick wall although without railings, possibly suggesting that new railings were added to all boundaries between c1925 and c1931. The wall and railings on the Rope Walk boundary were presumably removed completely when two additional entrances were constructed, giving access via steps from Rope Walk. The brick work and concrete slabs used for these suggest a mid-late C20 construction date.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The Gardens are entered on foot at five formal entrance points: one each on the north-east, north-west and south-east sides and two on the south-west. The north-western one is through an imposing entrance gateway which comprises a portico with a flat roof of stone slabs supported by metal sections, with uprights in brick with stone bases. Above the entrance gateway a memorial stone commemorating the opening of the burial ground contains an inscription marking its opening in May 1828 and recording the names of the Clergy of St Mary's: the incumbent, the Reverend Mathew Irving B D Minister and the churchwardens Thomas Jarvis and William Hills. A memorial stone was later erected on the inside of the gateway's western wall to a Sergeant Feeney, shot by another soldier in Chatham Barracks in 1834. Also surviving within the gateway is, on its eastern side, the stone panel commemorating the acquisition and opening of the Gardens by Chatham Corporation. The original metal gates dating from 1828 have been removed, although evidence of fittings set into the walls survives.

The north-eastern entrance, which is connected by a path into the adjacent Great Lines Heritage Park, is up three steps through the wall and the south-eastern one through a gap in the wall where surviving uprights attached to the wall are evidence of a former timber gate. The south-western entrances are roughly centrally placed and consist of two sets of brick and concrete steps. In the south-east corner there is evidence of a further, former entrance point in the wall where a short length of paving slabs lead to a gap, now (2014) blocked with horizontal metal bars.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The Gardens are predominantly laid to close mown grass and planted, mainly formally as individuals alongside the paths, with deciduous and coniferous trees, some isolated mature shrub specimens and six formal, roughly oval shaped mixed shrub beds, three either side of the central path. Trees comprise mature English and Irish yews, which probably survive from the early C19 burial ground planting, also variegated holly, sycamore, beech, cherry, silver birch, and various cypresses which are in a less mature state and which may survive from the Corporation's planting of the Gardens in c1925 (Photographs Couchman Collection). Shrubs are mainly evergreen and include species such as Pittosporum, Choisya, Euonymus, and privet. There are daffodil bulbs in the mown grass along the open boundary with Rope Walk. The shrub planting and youngest trees appear to date from the late C20.

The paths comprise a system of formal routes mainly 3m wide except at the north-western entrance where the path widens to 4m to meet the gateway. The layout comprises a central path, perimeter paths along the north-east and south-west boundaries which bisect to form a diamond pattern, an additional curved path at the south-eastern end and a 'dead end' spur at the south-western end. They are surfaced with tarmac and stone-edged in parts, with evidence of a stone slab base visible beneath the degraded sections. Photographs of c1925 (Couchman Collection) show stone slab pathways.

The former gravestones and memorials, in granite and marble, are mainly erected upright against the north-east and south-east walls. Those against the now (2014) ivy-clad north-east wall are generally in better condition than those on the south-east wall. A few tomb bases and memorials remain in situ in the grass, also now being colonised by ivy.

Photographs of c1925 and c1931 (Couchman Collection), show a mixture of lawns, mature and newly-planted trees and shrubs and seating. Some of the shrubs are formally clipped and circular or triangular beds are planted with bulbs and other flowering plants.

By 1952 (OS 4th edition), little change has occurred to the layout and planting, with the two greenhouses still in place. Today (2014) the greenhouses and adjacent buildings have gone as have the spiked railings topping the brick boundary walls and the brick wall on the south-west boundary. The formal flower beds have been replaced with shrub beds. Late C20 timber and metal-framed seats are set in grass adjacent to the paths, all facing west down the sloping site to rear views of the Town Hall and other contemporary office buildings. Towards the south-eastern end is a small, surfaced and equipped children's play area c10m by 25m, set lengthways into the slope with timber sleepers to form a retaining wall and the whole fenced to exclude dogs.

REFERENCES

Maps

Tithe map (Chatham) c1840 Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Strood
OS 25" to 1mile: 1st edition 1862-1875, centred on 576001 168037
OS 25" to 1mile: 2nd edition 1897-1900, centred as above
OS 25" to 1mile: 3rd edition 1907-1923, centred as above
OS 25" to 1 mile 4th edition 1929-1952, centred as above

Illustrations

Selection of Photographs – Couchman Collection c1925-1931 Medway Archives
DE402/17/3,26L,27L &U,29L &U,30.31U and 32L
Aerial photograph 2012 – Kent County Council Heritage Conservation Group

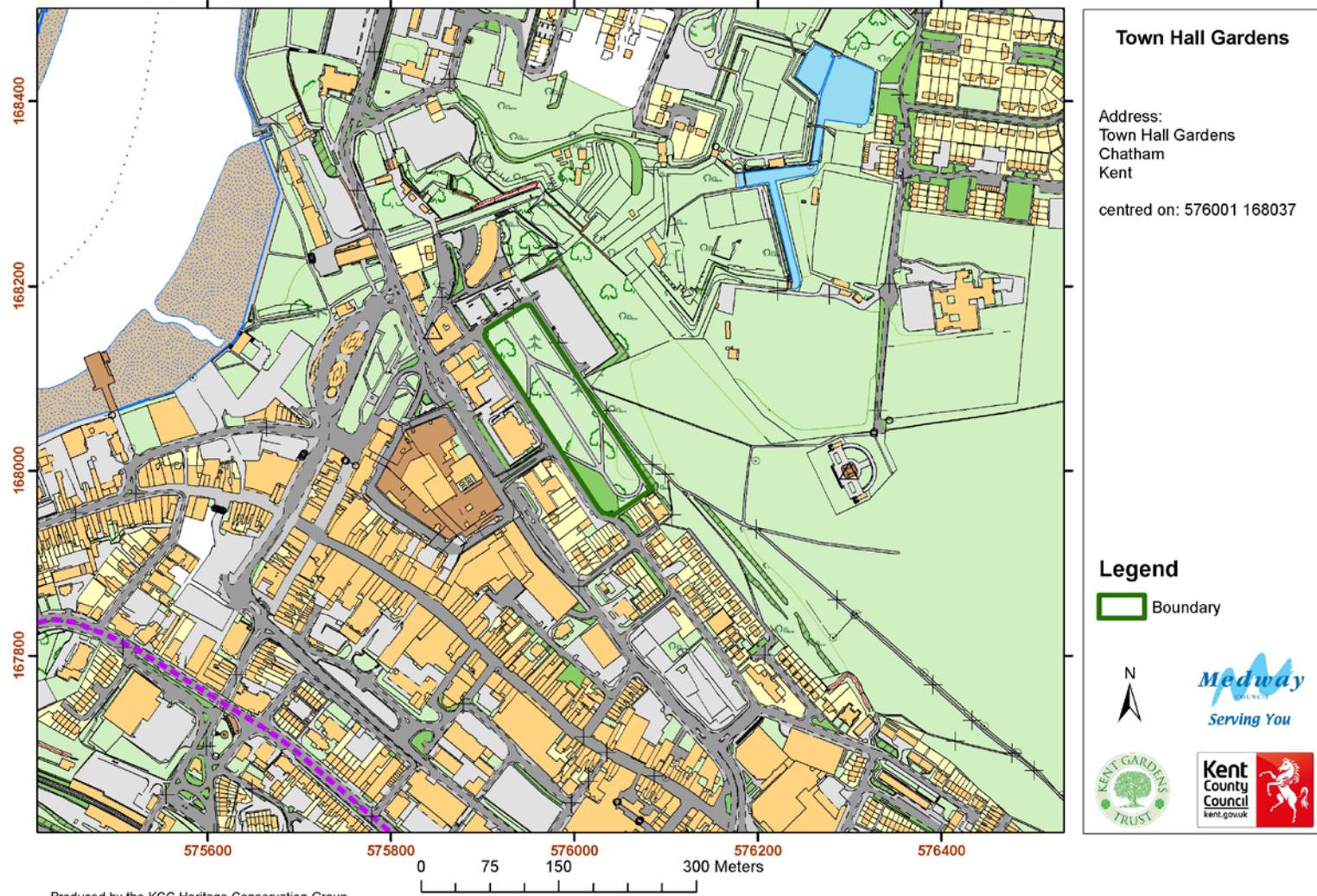
Archival items

Town Council and Chatham Borough Minute Books, Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Strood
Various proposal plans, some attributed to Charles Day, Borough Surveyor, Vestry Clerk, Chairman of the Vestry and the Town Clerk, one dated 31 March 1903, some with pencil marks, none noted as final, Medway Archives
Chatham News Index, newspaper articles, Medway Archives

Research by Geraldine Moon
Editor Virginia Hinze

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Fig. 1 Boundary map



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



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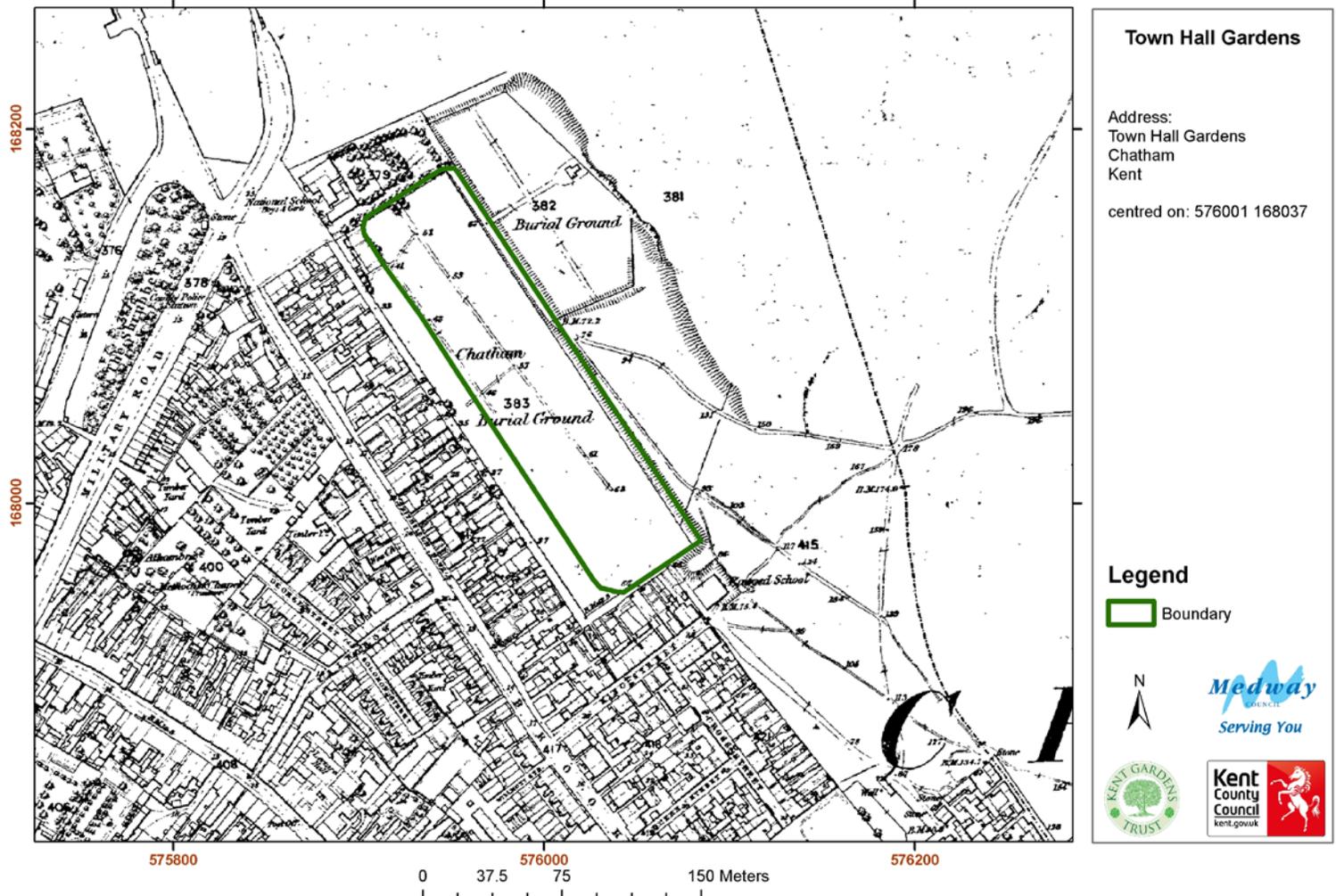
Fig. 3 Aerial photograph (2012)



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group
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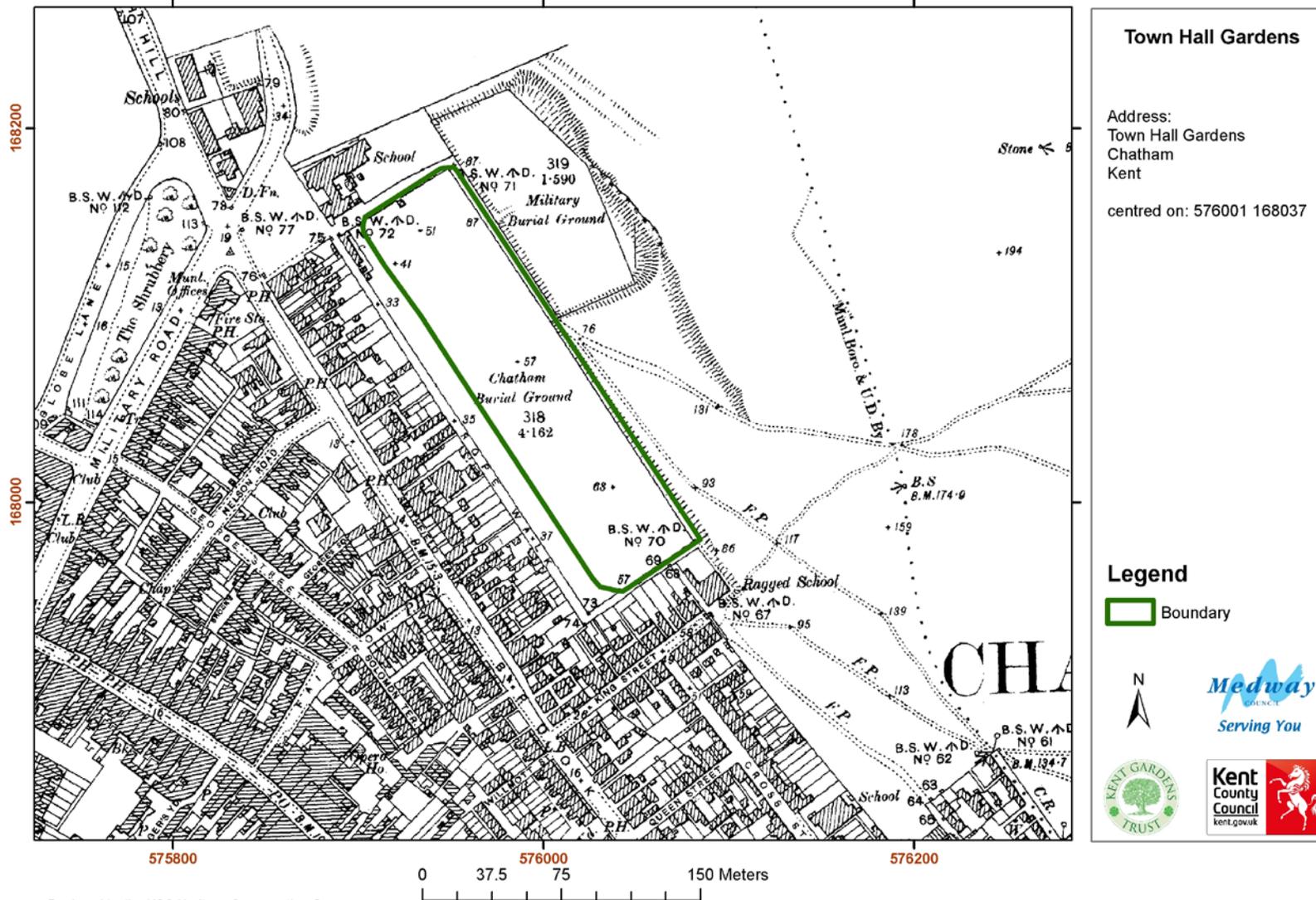
Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1862-1875)



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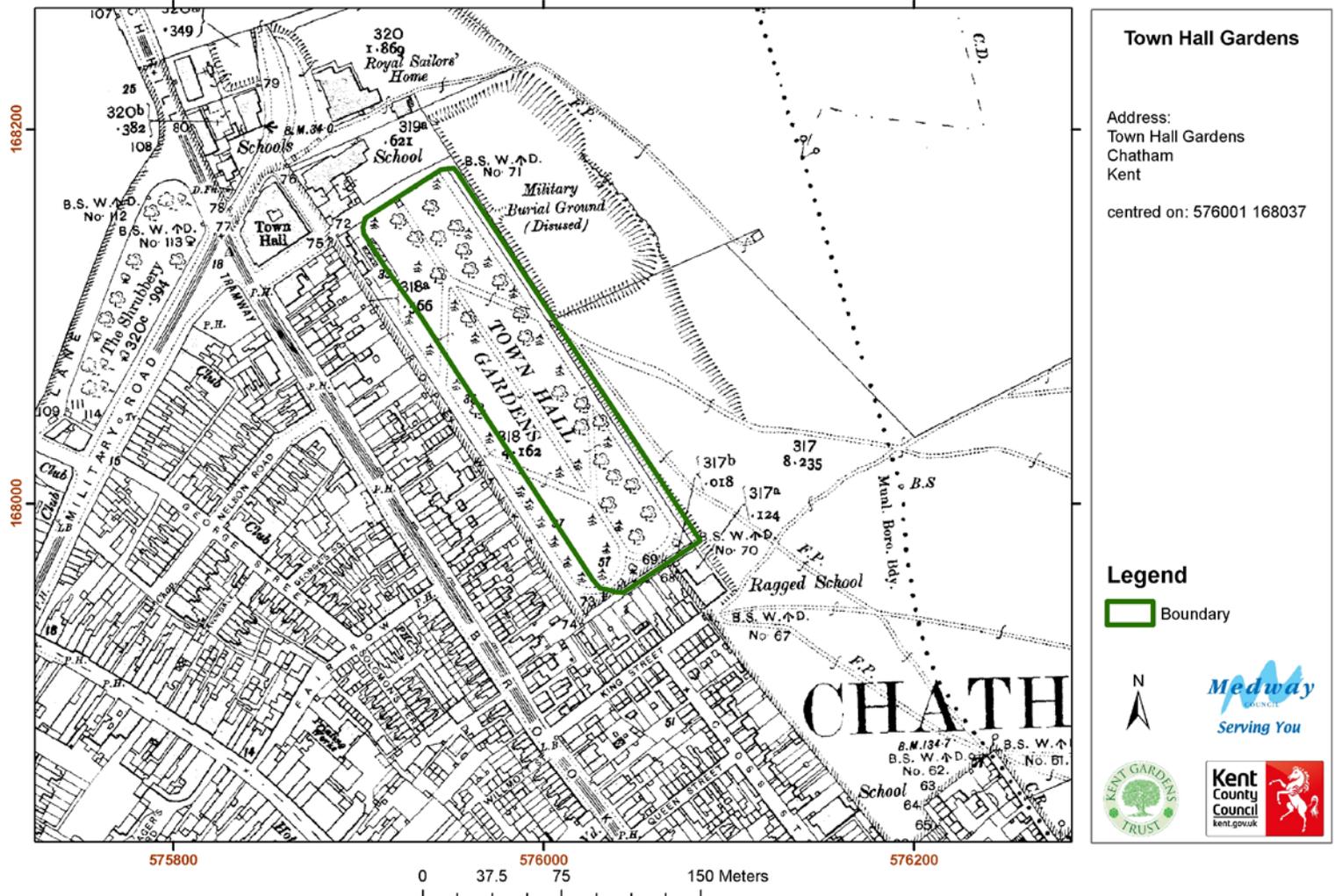
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

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



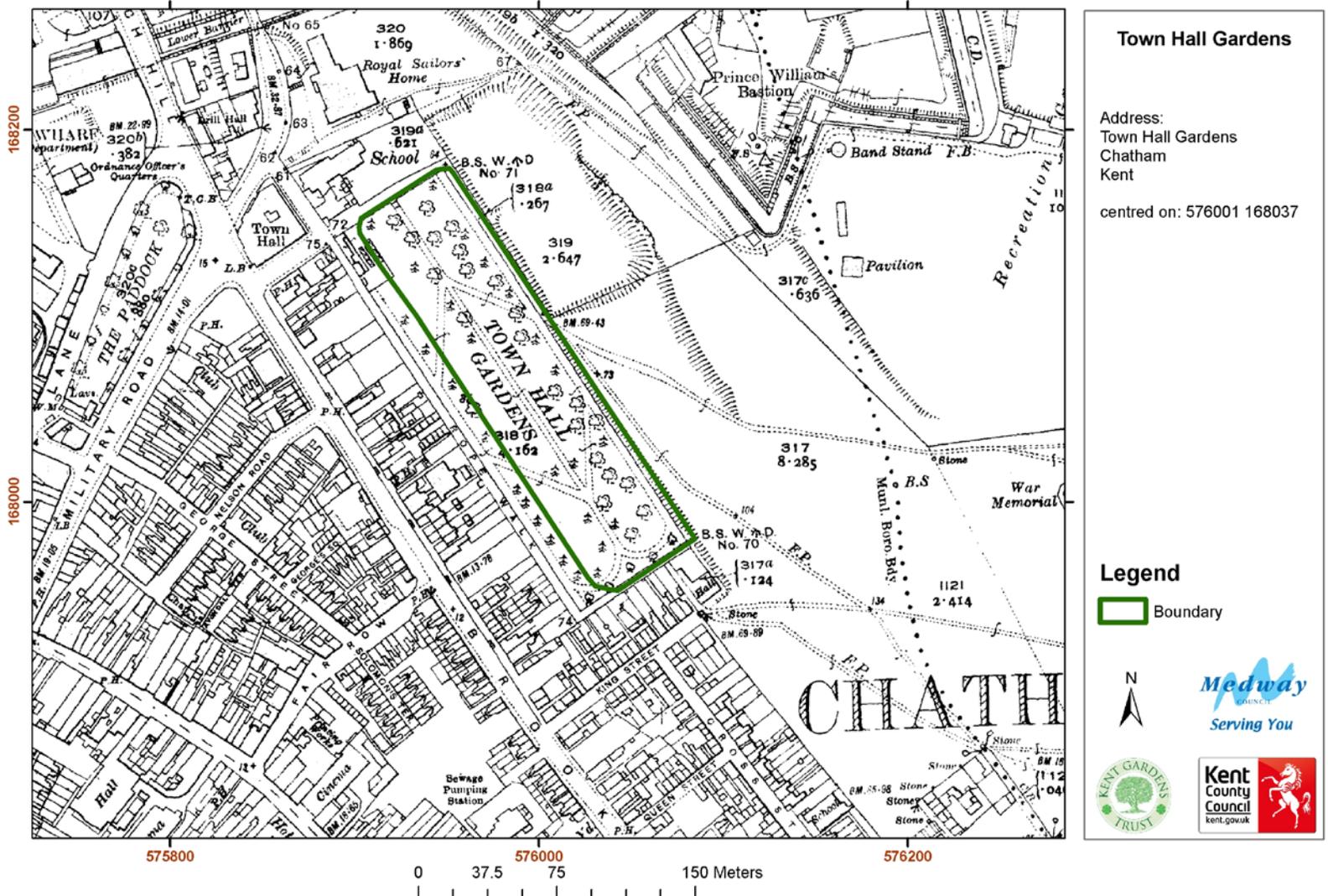
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2013 review of Medway

Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 3rd edn 25" map (1907-1923)



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Fig. 7 Ordnance Survey 4th edn 25" map (1929-1952)



Town Hall Gardens

Address:
Town Hall Gardens
Chatham
Kent

centred on: 576001 168037

Legend

 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group
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Fig. 8 Sepia tint photograph c1925 of Town Hall Gardens showing the gardens with greenhouses and view of the Town Hall – Image courtesy of Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre

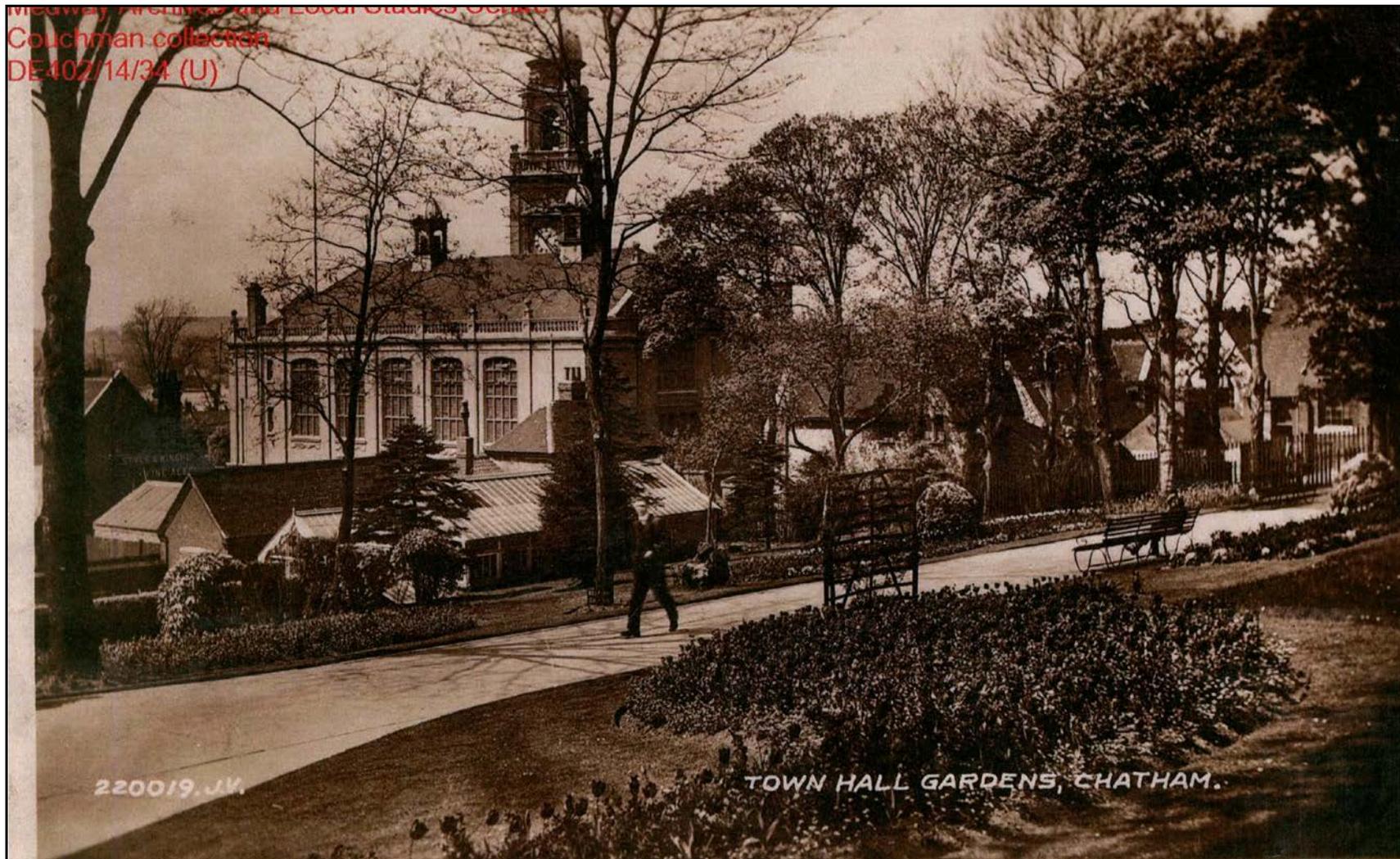


Fig. 9 Photograph February 2014 showing gravestones set against north eastern boundary wall



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Fig. 10 Photograph February 2014 showing view along central pathway lined with mature conifers looking towards north western boundary

