

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



Bradbourne Lakes Park, Sevenoaks



August 2011

Bradbourne Lakes Park

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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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A public park, originally laid out between 1740-61 as a picturesque landscape of lakes and waterfalls, forming the setting for a house of the same period. The house was demolished in the 1930s and the landscape park reduced to its current extent during the C19 and early C20

AGE

Although recorded as an historic estate since the C12, the present park is a good example of a designed Picturesque landscape, laid out in 1740-61.

RARITY AND SURVIVAL

The surviving features of the designed landscape which consist of five interconnecting lakes made by damming the branch of the River Darent, is largely unchanged from when it was laid out in the mid C18.

AESTHETIC VALUE

Some of the original picturesque water features such as waterfalls built of local ragstone survive and together with the lakes and tree cover, have high scenic quality

EVIDENTIAL VALUE

The site is well documented through maps, sales particulars and, especially, the Bosville - Macdonald family and estate papers, Henry Boswell being responsible for the picturesque layout

HISTORIC ASSOCIATION

Until C16 the history of the site is linked with the nearby nationally-important estate of Knole

LANDMARK STATUS

The lakes and water features make a significant contribution to the quality and character of the surrounding townscape

SOCIAL AND COMMUNAL VALUE

The park is an important resource both to the local people who visit the park regularly and as a habitat for wildfowl, providing an extensive scenic green space in a now very built up area.

SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT
SEVENOAKS
SEVENOAKS PARISH

BRADBOURNE LAKES PARK

Landranger sheet 88
TQ 520561

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

A public park, originally laid out between 1740 and 1761 as a picturesque landscape of lakes and waterfalls, forming the setting for a house of the same period. The house was demolished in the 1930s and the landscape park reduced to its current extent during the C19 and early C20.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Bradbourne Park lies in the hundred of Codsheath and parish of Sevenoaks. The earliest records come from the reign of King John (1199-1216) when the estate was jointly owned with Knole; subsequent changes in ownership reflect the rise and fall of the holders in royal favour. The earls of Albemarle, of Pembroke and the Bigod earls of Norfolk succeeded each other over the years until the Grandison family sold the property to Walter de Pevenley (or Pemley) who, Hasted thought, built the first mansion in the reign of Edward III (1327-77). Subsequently passing to the Isley family, the property was eventually exchanged with the Crown in 1539-40 (Hasted).

Sir Ralph de Bosville, clerk to Queen Elizabeth's court of wards, purchased the property in 1555 (Ogley) and after the queen had, reputedly, stayed at Bradbourne Park, she granted a new constitution to Sevenoaks School in 1560 (Hasted). Following Sir Ralph's death, in 1580-1, the estate was owned by succeeding generations and branches of the family until 1761 when it passed to Sir Richard Bettenson, a still more distant relative (Hasted).

Early in the C17, the grandson of the original Sir Ralph, another Ralph, had built a chapel, with the permission of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, on a small hill some quarter a mile southeast of the mansion which, no longer used for its original purpose by 1700, became known as the Clock House (English Heritage, grade II listed building). However, it was his more distant relative, William Boswell, who inherited the estate in 1682 and this subsequently passed to his son, Henry, in 1740. It was he who carried out major rebuilding of the house and grounds, damming the branch of the River Darent which flows northwards through the park. This involved complicated engineering works and produced a series of six interconnected lakes to the east of the mansion with a view to the Clock House beyond. An alternative explanation of the origin of this building is that it was a pair of mid C18 estate cottages Gothicised to provide a picturesque feature (Stoyel). On Henry's death in 1761, his successor, Richard Bettenson, is said by Hasted to have produced improvements to the park and it is his name which is shown as occupier on the Andrews map of 1769 (Kent History and

Library Centre). However, he died without issue and the property passed to Dr Thomas Lane in 1785.

During the C19, there were frequent changes of ownership and parts of the Bradbourne Park estate were sold off. In 1833, the property had been auctioned by Mr George Robins in three lots, the mansion with gardens and park amounting to 45 hectares and two further lots of more distant agricultural and woodland amounting to 60 hectares. The sales details contain an attractive engraving of the house and immediate surrounds viewed from the east, showing part of the park (Kent History and Library Centre. U 851/P1). The mansion lay c.150 metres south of the present A25 and separated from this by meadows. To the east lay the succession of six lakes connected by a stream. To the south and west was park and woodland while further to the south was agricultural land on gradually rising land.

The tithe map of 1840 (Kent History and Library Centre) shows a similar appearance and the apportionment states that the area belonging to the house had been reduced to 38 hectares and was in the ownership of Henry Hughes while the rest of the estate belonged to eight other people (Kent Archaeological Society).

The building of two railway lines to the east and west further reduced the lands and effectively held the mansion clasped in a figure 'Y' probably resulting in the changes which were made to the planting. By the 1860s, paths lined with deciduous trees had been laid out to the northernmost lake with shrubberies nearer the house. To the west more extensive formal planting which included conifers appear to have been made to screen the mansion to the southwest from the new railway. Further plantings to the east of the five southern lakes would have served a similar purpose in order to hide both farm buildings and the eastern branch of the railway. By this time two of the lakes had been joined so that there were now a total of five, forming the present day grouping. It was the lakes which provided the main vista to the southeast from the mansion (OS 1862-75).

In 1867, Mr Francis Crawshaw, an eccentric wealthy owner of coal mines and iron foundries, bought Bradbourne Park (Dunlop). He was famous locally for erecting a large bell, weighing some two tons, near the southwest side of the house which he rang at regular intervals to the irritation of the inhabitants of Riverhead. He added a bell tower to the Clock House in which a smaller bell was hung (Love and Pickford). In addition, as a result of his interest in druidical law, he brought stone monoliths from the West Country and erected these in the grounds and their positions and arrangements are clear from the ordnance survey map of 1897-1900. By the end of the century, the property had been bought by Mr Multon Lambarde and passed to his son, Major William Gore Lambarde in 1896. It was he who sold off the contents in 1926 and then the house in the following year (Dunlop). The mansion was finally demolished in 1937 but the Clock House remains 400m to the east beyond the Park boundary but screened by a belt of trees.

Dunlop goes on to say that “the land was purchased by Mr George Goff and by him was then passed to the New Ideal Homesteads Company. It was a very fortunate outcome for the people of Sevenoaks that, by agreement between these two purchasers, the chain of artificial lakes in the Hall (mansion) grounds, first laid out by Henry Bosville in the middle of the eighteenth century, were offered to the Sevenoaks Urban District Council to be a public park and recreation ground”.

The land passed to the Council in 1935 and streets were laid out on the greater part. Domestic building took place over the next 30 years, finally surrounding the last remaining 3.5 hectares of the park to the east, south and west (OS 1929-52).

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Bradbourne Lakes Park lies 2 km northwest of the centre of Sevenoaks, the northern boundary bordering Bradbourne Vale Road (A 25), ½ km east of Riverhead. The 3.5 hectare site is roughly hourglass shaped, approximately 350m from north to south and 100m wide. It is bordered to the west by the gardens and houses of Robyns Way, to the south by those of Lake View Road and to the east by those of Lambarde Road. The varied fences and hedges of these properties provide the boundaries to the grounds. The park is divided approximately in half by Betenson Avenue which runs east-west and half way along this road is a small car park near the main entrances to the Park.

The level site lies astride a small tributary of the River Darent which has been landscaped to produce five interconnecting lakes. The ground slopes gently from south to north, allowing very shallow waterfalls to carry the water from one lake to the next and finally into the river. Mature trees with underlying secondary growth and grassland provide a landscape which serves as an amenity for local people.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrances to the park are in Betenson Avenue which is lined on both its north and south sides by a wooden, 4 foot palisade fence. In both sides is a gate providing entry for pedestrians to the grounds. By the southern gate is an information notice board and behind this is a large ‘standing’ stone, moved there from a previous site beside Bradbourne Park House.

Well-marked paths run from these two entrances allowing access for the visitor to all parts of the park. The network of paths connects with those from two other entrances, one to the south, from Lambarde Road, and the other to the north, from Bradbourne Vale Road. Both of these entrances are through pedestrian gateways, set in 4 foot palisade fences.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

There are no buildings within the present park which is centred on the lakes which formerly lay to the southeast of Bradbourne Park House. The site of the demolished mansion lies 50m to the west, outside the boundary of the current park, and is occupied by the houses on Robyns Way.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

There are four lakes in the southern part of the Park lying in the form of a letter 'p', the first lake forming the tail. These are approached from the main entrance in Betenson Avenue by a tarmac path which leads southwards across mown grass for 50m to the eastern side of the first, northernmost lake. The lawn extends around the western, northern and eastern sides of this lake and contains various specimen trees planted in the last c50 years. The first lake is roughly square (c.25x25m) and the edges are retained by stonework, reinforced at a later date with concrete. An outlet in the northern bank carries water through a culvert, under the path into the small branch of the River Darent flowing northwards. A hedge of mixed deciduous trees (especially silver birch, sycamore, beech, willow and alder) with an undergrowth of smaller trees (hazel, hawthorn and holly) separates the path from the stream.

The path continues southwards for a further 50m to reach the eastern side of the second lake (c.75x50m). From this point, there are views to the northwest across the first lake and to the southwest across the second lake, the two being separated by a band of trees (alder, sycamore and willow) extending east to west. The second lake had been formed by 1862 (OS map) from the amalgamation of two of the original mid C18 lakes and, again, the banks contain signs of early construction in the form of dressed stonework.

From the viewpoint, a stone overflow carries water eastwards under the path into the Darent branch stream, flowing north. The way continues southwards along the eastern side of the second lake for 50 metres to the third lake where the path divides, one branch of it leading south-eastwards for a further 50m to the extreme southern boundary of the Park and the entrance into Lambarde Road while the other continues along the northern bank of the third lake. This lake is the largest of the group (c.100x40m) and is rectangular in shape with banks partly earth and partly stone, though retained along the northern margin by the addition of plastic shuttering. It contains two small islands with trees. The lake is surrounded by mature trees, mainly alder with occasional plane, many 15-20 metres high, and by similar undergrowth to elsewhere. There is no access to its southern and western banks because of the closeness of the adjacent property *boundary fences*.

The path leads westwards for 70m along the northern bank of the third lake, crossing two outflows to the second lake, before reaching the fourth lake (c.30x25m) and turning northwest between this and the second lake through a continuing cover of trees. After 50m, the path crosses the junction of the fourth and second lakes which is formed by a small waterfall (less than 1m)

constructed of stone and brick entering the second lake at its south-western corner. The path continues northwards round the western side of the second lake and emerges from the tree cover to continue across the lawn to the west of the first and most northern of the lakes before finally rejoining the eastern path and returning to the main entrance on Betenson Avenue.

These four lakes (originally five) are the remains of the landscaping carried out by Henry Boswell in the early C18 and are apparent in the engraving of 1833. The present fifth lake is reached by crossing over Betenson Avenue into the northern section of the Park, the entrance standing at the same point at which the water from the southern group of lakes crosses under the roadway in a culvert, marked by ragstone parapets. From this entrance, three tarmac paths lead northwards for 50m *alongside* the stream, through rougher grassland and scrub, until reaching the southern point of the fifth lake. In this part of the Park, the tree cover is denser and of similar species but with the addition of some specimen trees planted in memory of individuals (Liquidambar and Metasequoia) and shrubs (Forsythia, lilac and Lonicera)

This lake is c.80x30m; its banks are constructed of stone and are heavily wooded (alder, sycamore and ash) with a much denser undergrowth. Halfway up the eastern side of the lake is very large plane tree of c9m girth. Because of the trees and the closeness of adjacent properties the banks are only accessible on the lake's eastern side along which the path continues northwards for c.120m until crossing the lake's outlet and finally emerging at the northern entrance to the Park on Bradbourne Vale Road. At this point the water from the outlet reverts to its origin as a branch of the River Darent flowing northwards under the road to join the main river 200m further north.

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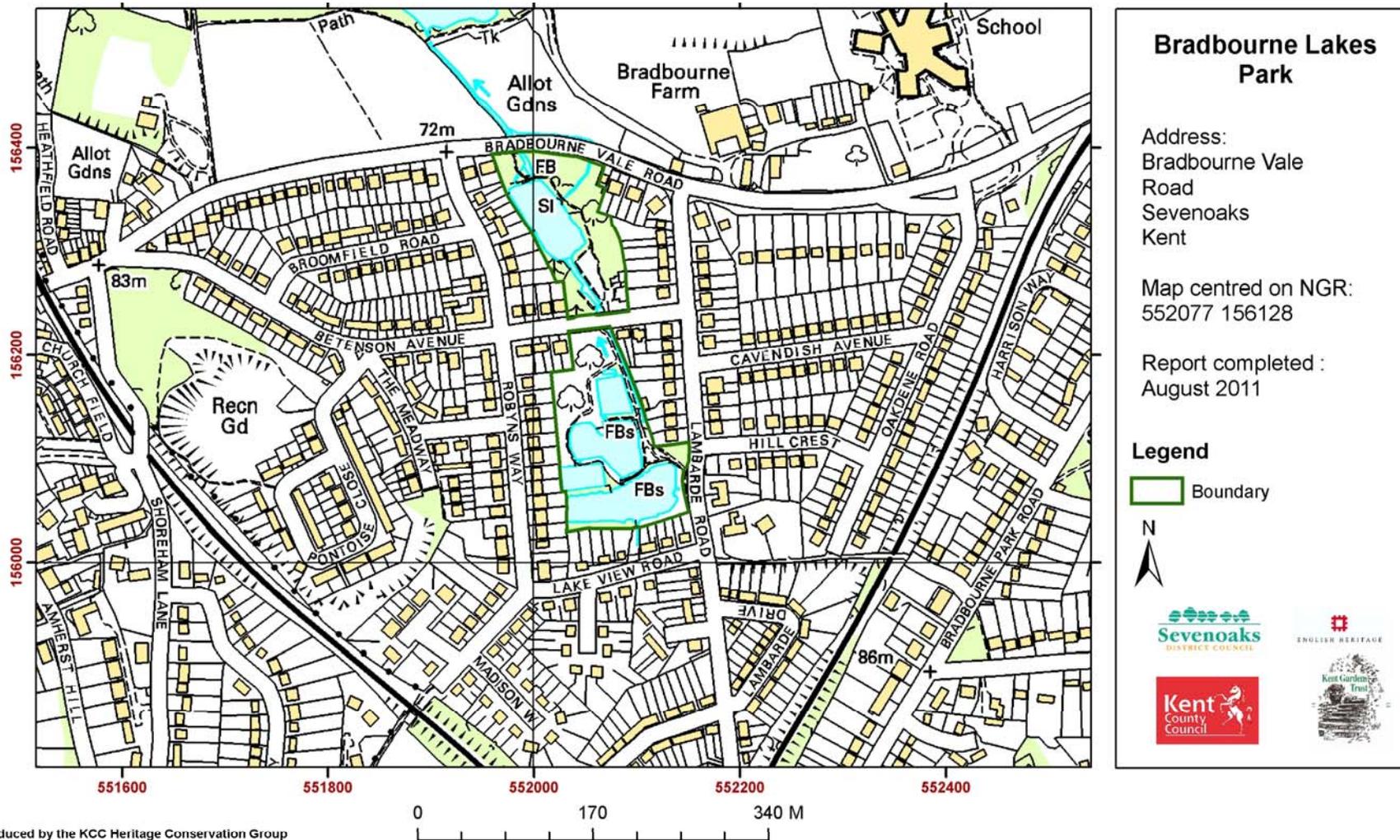
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Fig. 1 Boundary map



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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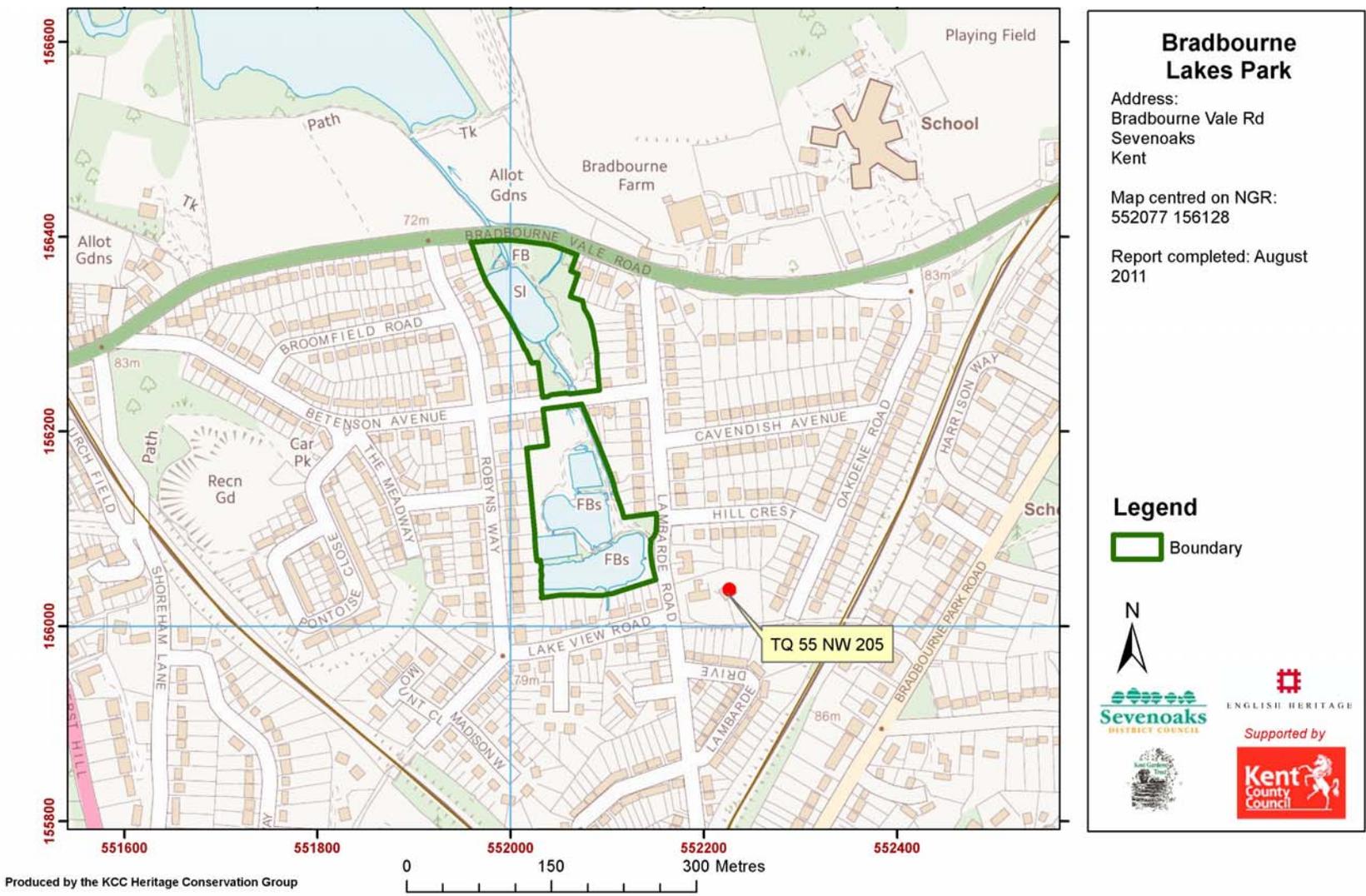
Fig. 2 Aerial photograph (2007)



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Fig. 3 Map of listed buildings at Bradbourne Lakes Park



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Fig. 4 Listed buildings at Bradbourne Lakes Park (from the Kent Historic Environment Record)

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 NW 205

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

TQ 55 NW/3/1 02A THE CLOCK HOUSE CLOCK HOUSE LANE
1. 1614 The Clock House II 2.

Originally a private chapel built by Sir Ralph Bosville of Bradbourne House in 1614. It remained in use as a chapel until, probably, the early C19, when converted into a dwelling. Building dated partly from C17 and partly early C19 and consists of a main wing and tower. 2 storeys, stone rubble. Casement windows with small square leaded panes. The west front has 2 windows with dummy point tops, and the south front is similar With a gable over. The tower is in the south-west corner. Originally crenellated, but the spaces between have been filled in with brick, A modern observation platform in wood has been added. Also modern wing to the east.

Listing NGR: TQ5222656036