

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



Chart Cottage, Sevenoaks



January 2012

Chart Cottage

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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the owners of Chart Cottage for giving access to the garden, showing and allowing us to copy their private research papers.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Rarity: The garden retains a few elements of Jekyll's design; the majority such as paths, herbaceous borders and a kitchen garden are late C20 reconstructions albeit based closely on Jekyll's original plans and plant lists.

Aesthetic Value: The reconstructed and replanted areas demonstrate Jekyll's original proposals in style and quality. Her layout and planting plans illustrate typical elements of her style nationally.

Group Value: the garden is one of two gardens in the same parish originally designed by Gertrude Jekyll, the admiration of the occupants of her work in Chart Cottage's garden generating a subsequent commission from them in their later home at Stonepitts Manor.

Evidential Value; The commission for Chart Cottage has an extensive archive of original drawings, planting plans and plant invoices held at Berkeley College, University of California.

SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT
SEVENOAKS
SEAL PARISH

CHART COTTAGE

TQ 569566

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

A series of formal garden compartments designed and laid out in the early C20 by the gardener and writer Gertrude Jekyll, surrounding a C16 timber framed house.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Situated in Seal Chart, Chart Cottage is in the parish of St Lawrence. Prior to this being established in 1867 Seal Chart was part of the parish of Seal, which in turn was originally in the combined manor of Kemsing and Seal. For many years most of the land was included in the St Clere estate, centred in Kemsing. The Domesday Book records that Geoffrey of Rots controlled this manor with part of the 840 acres also under the jurisdiction of Richard of Tonbridge (Hasted).

Little is known about Chart Cottage until 1830 when it was bought by William John Monson the 6th Lord Monson, when he acquired Chart Lodge estate together with several other properties nearby, to use as staff accommodation. He was an amateur historian and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. It remained as part of the estate until 1965 when Mrs Patterson, the daughter of the 10th Lord Monson sold it after his death in 1958 (Lady Emma Monson).

During the C19 the Gasson family were associated with Chart Cottage; Parish Overseers' records for Seal Chart show John Gasson in residence in 1835 while Olley Gasson is recorded as the tenancy owner or occupier on the Tithe Apportionment 1839. The 1841 Census shows her living in Seal Chart and described as a farmer. At this time the Cottage and grounds covered just over 3½h (8 acres). In 1889 a Frederic Charles Lupton gave his address as Chart Cottage (The Times). Subsequent census records fail to clarify occupants of the Cottage.

Bernard Blunt and his wife were tenants in 1911 and it was he who wrote to Gertrude Jekyll in September of that year asking if she would undertake the design of the garden at the Cottage as he had read several of her books. He had been living in Finland where he had been frustrated with the lack of garden and months of cold weather. He gave Jekyll carte blanche with her designs, putting in just a few suggestions and requests. He wanted to remove the laurel hedge around the croquet lawn and thought old fruit trees were past their best and could go. As well as roses and sweet peas he especially asked for lilies and hibiscus shrubs. When the designs came back he expressed his pleasure at the inclusion of medlar and quince trees and wondered if a group of standard

red currants could be added. There is no indication that Jekyll visited the site as she enquired if there was a sewage tank after receiving the initial survey plan from Blunt (letters between Blunt & Jekyll). Jekyll explained that she couldn't supply large shrubs such as lilac and rhododendron but her planting notebook quotes prices for many of the herbaceous plants such as lavender, clematis, roses and peonies. Details of the plant bills sent to Blunt are also recorded (Jekyll's planting notebook).

Following the Blunts' occupation Lady Rhondda and Helen Archdale rented Chart Cottage from 1921 until at least May 1925. There followed further short lets including Leonard and Mabel Bate (1930), Athol and Rosemary Benjamin (1933) and Major & Mrs Richard G Wilson (1935-39 & 1945-54). During the Second World War, it was rented by the Earl of Darnley who took up residence for a while but later sublet to Dusan Simovic (Prime Minister of the Yugoslav government in exile). Finally the Winches of Boughton Place, Boughton Monchelsea, Kent took on the tenancy (electoral registers).

Chart Cottage was eventually bought by Sir Eric and Lady Faulkner (Director and Chairman of Lloyds Bank Ltd 1968-84) in 1965 from Lord Monson's daughter, Mrs Patterson.

Mr and Mrs Peter Collacott bought the property in 1987 by which time the original Jekyll design had been abandoned and the garden mostly laid to lawn. Working with Jekyll's original designs and planting plans the Collacotts have endeavoured to faithfully re-create the gardens as much as possible. The project is still ongoing but the garden layouts on all but the north side are already restored to their 1911 appearance. Where possible the same species, varieties and colours of plants have been used but where Jekyll's varieties are now unobtainable the nearest modern equivalent has been used. The rose garden has been especially difficult to restore as the soil is not particularly suited to roses therefore more tolerant, modern varieties have been planted whilst still adhering to Jekyll's suggested colour scheme.

The property remains in private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Chart Cottage lies on the north side of Styants Bottom Road in the hamlet of Seal Chart, 1.5km east of Seal Village and on the A25 and approximately 3km northeast of Sevenoaks.

The site lies approximately 140m above sea-level within the northern extremity of the Weald of Kent (designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), in a valley bottom west of Oldbury Hill, on which there is a vast Iron Age hill fort. Some sizeable areas of ancient woodland survive to the south with the north mostly given over to arable farming on undulating, stony countryside.

The Cottage and garden occupy an area of approximately 0.8 h (two acres) and are bordered to the north by agricultural land, the west by Watery Lane, the east by Chart Farm and the south by Styants Bottom Road.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main south front entrance to Chart Cottage is approached from the north side of Styants Bottom Road through a wooden gate opening onto a gravel drive. This approach is shown on Gertrude Jekyll's design extending the existing drive. It heads due north for approximately 35m before curving eastwards and widening into a parking area to the north of the house. Just west of the drive on the curve and about 12m from the house is the remains of a belt of pine trees. Although they pre-date Jekyll's design she incorporated them adding larger shrubs below. They provide shelter from the northwest winds although several of the trees were lost in the Great Storm of 1987. An additional approach from Styants Bottom Road runs along the eastern perimeter of the formal garden leading initially to a garage adjoining the parking area and then to a further outbuilding at the extreme northeast of the garden. This second approach, part of Jekyll's design, first appears on the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map dated 1907-1923.

In the late 1800s a single path led at ninety degrees from the road to the front door and then eastwards to the rear of the house (2nd edition OS map 1897-1900). However, the first edition OS map (1862-75) only shows a path leading diagonally across the garden from the road to the front door, suggesting a direct access route to Chart Lodge across the road for the staff of Lord Monson.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Chart Cottage (Grade II listed), built C16 or earlier is a two-storey timber framed building. It has a high pitched tiled roof, hipped on its western end with remains of a jetty. It has been considerably altered and extended; alterations include the addition of modern square-paned casements. The first floor is tile hung; the ground floor is built in random rubble masonry with red brick dressings (LB description).

GARDENS

The south and east sides of the Cottage are bordered by York stone paths enclosing narrow flowerbeds against the building's walls. On the east side, the slabs are set in an irregular pattern and widen into a terrace before continuing as a path to the garage on the eastern boundary of the main garden.

Beyond the path this eastern side of the garden it is mostly laid to lawn surrounded by mature rhododendrons and enclosed by a mixed hedge of holly, beech and sycamore, varying in height from 3 – 4 m. The rhododendrons date from before Jekyll's plan although she suggested that they should be retained and improved. The lawn is bisected (west/east) by two parallel lines of substantial wooden trellis, supporting climbing roses. Between the lines of trellis is a mown grass path edged with mixed herbaceous beds with roses

leading to a stone bench under a pergola, forming a focal point. The bench is framed by a clipped yew hedge (c3m tall). This framing device is used again in the far south-eastern corner for a stone figure on a plinth installed by the present owners. This area of garden was formerly the kitchen garden as shown on the survey plan sent by Blunt to Gertrude Jekyll in August 1911.

To the south of the Cottage, a combination of low clipped box hedges or single bricks edge several formal beds of mixed herbaceous plants. Stachys and bergenia, favoured by Jekyll, feature predominantly. The beds are intersected by mown grass paths. At the southern extremity the boundary with the road is formed by a continuation of the mixed hedge with further mature rhododendrons in front. Prior to Gertrude Jekyll's layout, a path flanked by herbaceous beds and lawn, led directly from the porch to the road.

The front south and east garden were maintained in accordance with Jekyll's design until the 1970s when the herbaceous borders were grassed over and by 1987 only ridges in the lawn suggested where paths had once been. In that year the Collacotts moved in and having discovered its provenance started to re-create the Jekyll designs as closely as possible.

A stone wall, about 1200mm in height forms the western boundary of the garden on the south front. An iron gate in the wall opens onto the entrance drive. A 2m wide herbaceous border lines the eastern side of the drive, against the wall, between the gate and road entrance, retained by a low stone wall at its northern end where it meets a further area of York stone terracing on the western side of the Cottage. On the western side of the drive as it begins to curve, there are three mature Scots pine trees. These are all that remain of a windbreak, in existence in 1911 and which Jekyll incorporated into her design and underplanted with shrubs.

Southwest of the drive, forming a border with Styants Bottom Road is mixed hedging containing a rough grass area studded with trees such as Holm oak. This planting continues northwards around the corner of the garden onto Watery Lane before graduating to a mixture of informally-planted mature shrubs. This area was proposed by Jekyll to be an orchard of fruit trees including apples, pears and medlars, now all gone. The shrubs appear from their size and age to be surviving specimens planted by Jekyll albeit originally in more formal beds. A small pond, extended by the present owners, in the extreme south west corner is first shown on the Tithe map of 1839 but was ignored by Blunt and therefore not featured in Jekyll's plans.

Contained within the informal planting of this corner of the garden is a formal rose garden (25m by 20m) enclosed by a yew hedge, about 3m in height. It comprises six beds of roses and stachys set in lawn and symmetrically arranged around a central sundial. This sundial, shown as a feature on Jekyll's rose garden plan, has been restored by the present owners. The rose garden replaced a croquet lawn.

The northern exit from the rose garden is down random cobbled stone steps into a shrub garden at a lower level to the rest of the garden. It extends

northwards some 30m and is composed of two mixed borders 4m deep on either side of a central lawn which terminates in an area of paving and another stone bench, again framed by a 3m high clipped yew hedge. North of the bench woodland occupies the garden as far as its northern boundary.

The northern part of the garden overlooks open countryside across a valley. The Cottage on this side faces a mown lawn beyond which is a kitchen garden bounded by a 2m high beech hedge. This is where Jekyll had drawn a kitchen garden that has been reinstated by the present owners after it had become a flowerbed by 1987. On the Ordnance Survey maps from 1862 until 1907 this area of garden is shown as an orchard.

On the Tithe map of 1839 the whole garden surrounding Chart Cottage is shown as meadow planted at regular intervals by specimen trees.

REFERENCES

Books and articles:

Hasted, Edward, 'Parishes: Seal', *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 3* (1798), pp.51-59
Country Life, January 23rd 1992, p44 – 47 – *Letter Perfect, Site Unseen* by Fenja Gunn
Lost Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll by Fenja Gunn, Letts 1991 p10 – 11 & p52 - 57

Maps:

Hundred of Codsheath, Hasted Volume 3 (1797-1801)
Tithe Map (Seal Parish) 1839 Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone
OS 25" to 1mile: 1st edition 1862-1875
OS 25" to 1mile: 2nd edition 1897-1900
OS 25" to 1mile: 3rd edition 1907-1923

Illustrations

A collection of photographs of Chart Cottage garden taken by previous and the present owners (private collection).

Archival items

Tithe Apportionments (Seal Parish) 1839, Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone
Electoral registers, Kent History and Library Centre
Kent Gardens Compendium entry 1996
Parks and Gardens UK entry
Gertrude Jekyll Designs for Mr Bernard Blunt, October 1911, 1-6 (University of California, Berkeley, USA - File IV, Folder 93)
Census Records - www.ancestry.co.uk
Extract from Jekyll Planting Notebook - Jekyll plant list with prices (Godalming Museum, Surrey)

Hampton & Sons 1986/7 - Sales Particulars
English Heritage listed building description
An undated letter to the present owners by Lady Emma Monson (wife of the 11th Baron) (private possession)
Letters to Gertrude Jekyll from Helen Archdale (private possession)
Declaration of bankruptcy of Frederic Charles Lupton - The Times, 4 June 1889
The Times 14 July 1933 birth notices
Richard Wilson 24 January 2011, anecdotal evidence and photos from the 1950s when his parents lived there.
Letter dated 13 October 1991 to the present owners from Mr C I Richmond-Watson, Kent Garden Trust member (private possession).

**Research by Jane Davidson and Michael O'Brien.
Description written by Jane Davidson**

Virginia Hinze (editor)

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Fig. 1 Boundary map

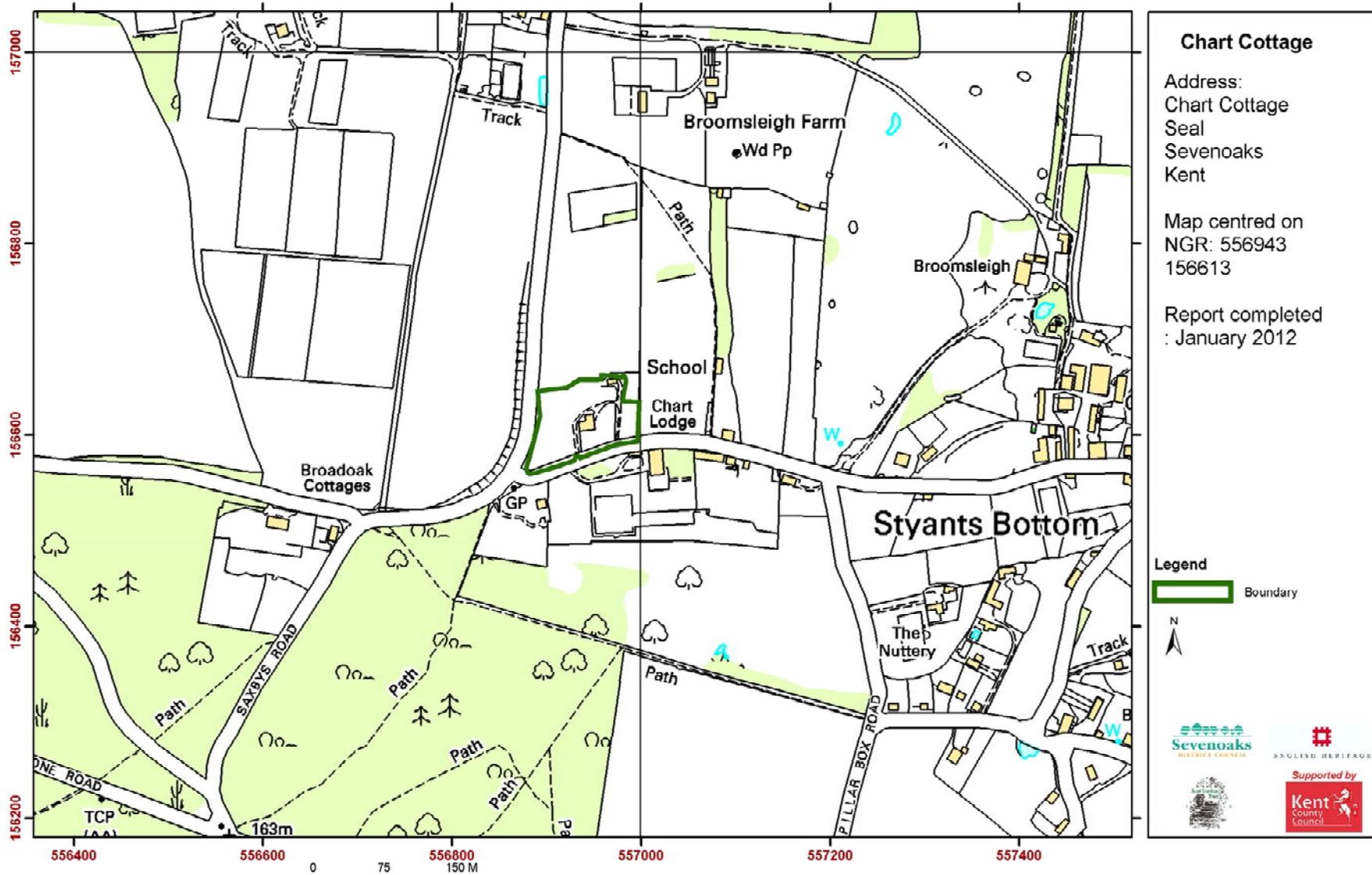


Fig. 2 Key views map

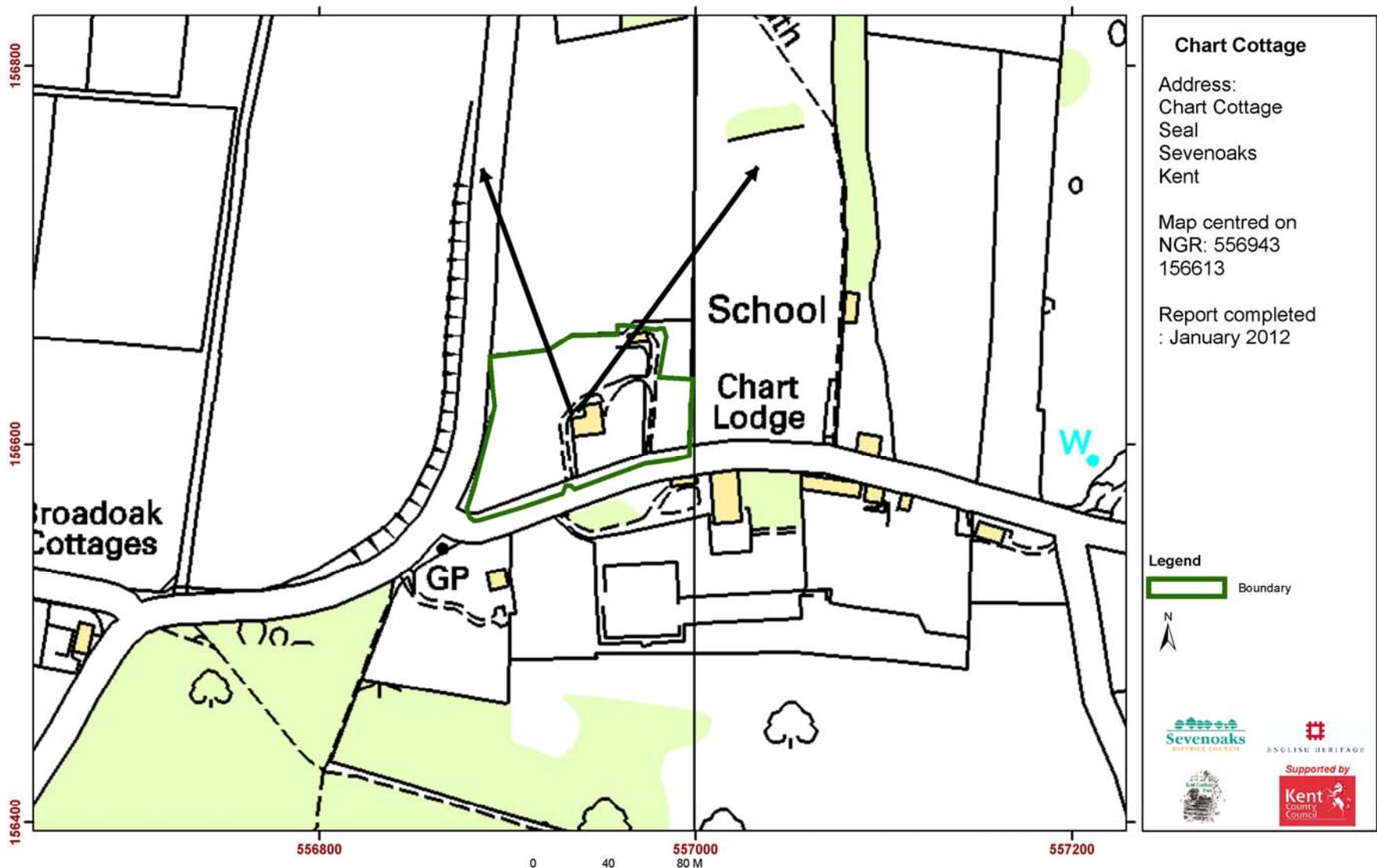
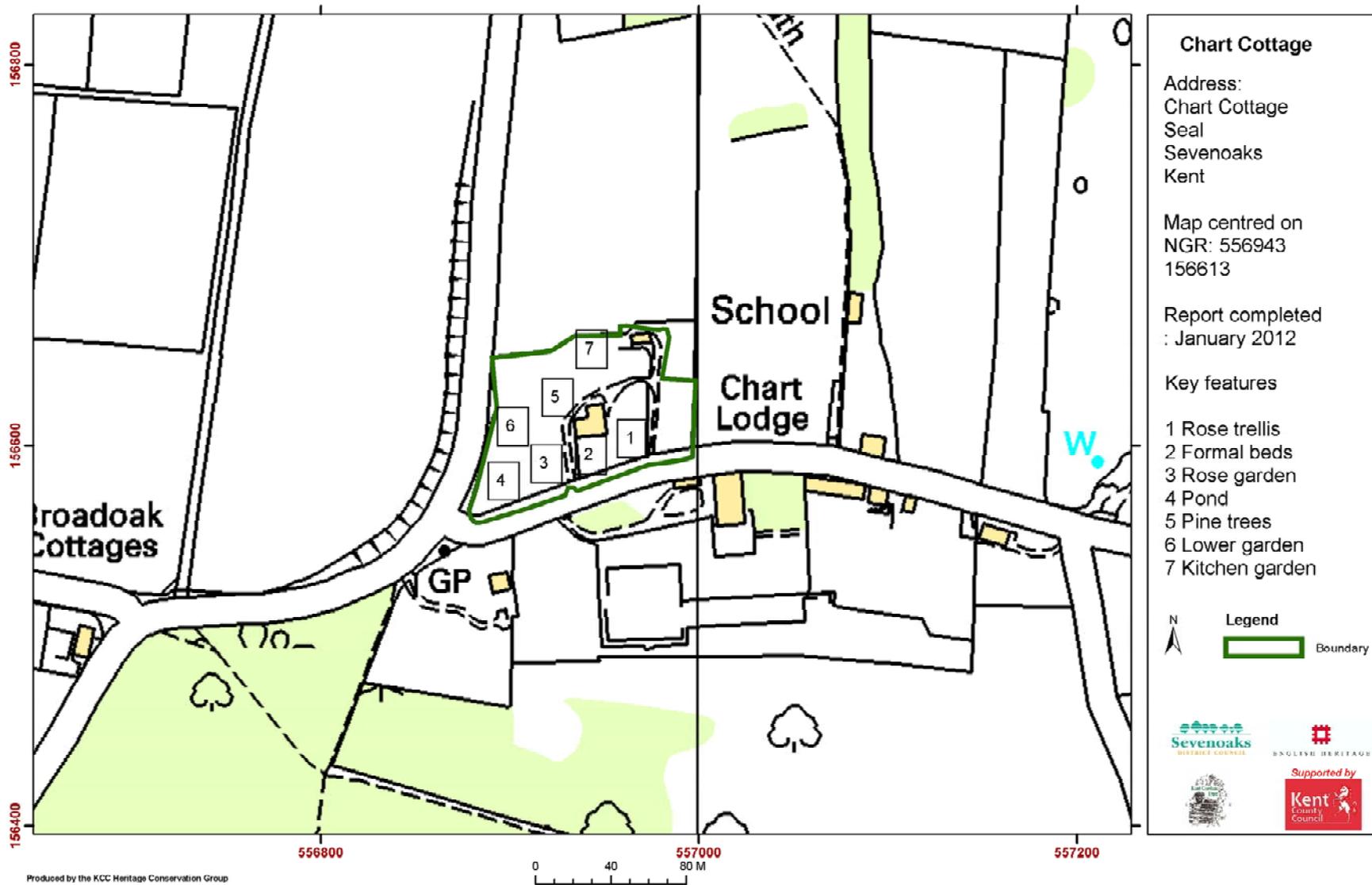


Fig. 3 Key features map

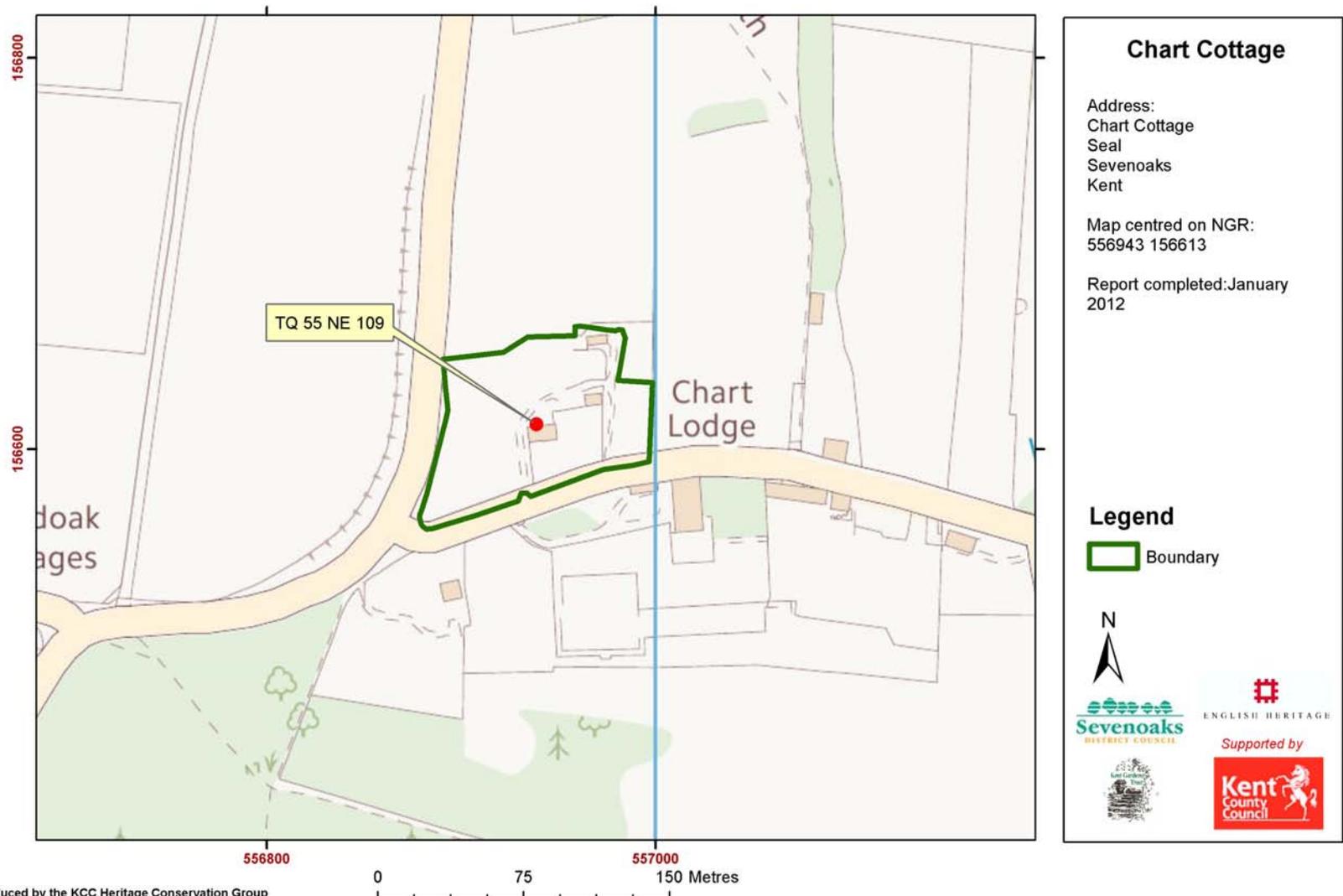


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Fig. 4 Aerial photograph (2008)



Fig. 5 Map of Listed Buildings



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Fig. 6 Listed buildings at Chart Cottage (from the Kent Historic Environment Record)

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 NE 109

The following is from the original listed building designation:

1. 5280 SEAL STYANTS BOTTOM

Chart Cottage TQ 55 NE 43/1067

II

2. C16 or earlier timber framed cottage. 2 storeys, 4 windows. High pitched tiled roof hipped at left. Considerably altered and extended. 1st floor tile hung, ground floor random rubble masonry with red brick dressings. Modern square paned casements. Remains of Jetty at West end.

Listing NGR: TQ5694056611