

# The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



## Upper High Street Gardens, Sevenoaks



January 2012



# Upper High Street Gardens

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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[www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk)

Kent Gardens Trust  
[www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk)

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Age, rarity and survival:** The site survives as an example of a 1930s walled urban garden layout by named designers, later developed as a public garden.

**Historic association:** the site is associated with the local donor family (The Constant family) and with numerous other local organisations such as the Girl Guides and Women's Institute who have contributed memorials in the form of trees and plaques.

**Social and Communal:** The garden is perceived as having significant local identity and is well-used as an important local oasis of greenery and peace in otherwise built-up surroundings.

**Landmark Status:** The site is a significant local landmark; the garden can be seen from the street through sections of railings in the boundary walls which themselves are key features in the built fabric of the High Street.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

KENT  
SEVENOAKS  
SEVENOAKS PARISH

UPPER HIGH STREET GARDENS

Landranger sheet 187  
TQ 531544

## **SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST**

A small (0.25ha) garden, laid out in the mid C20 on land which was gifted by a local resident, a Miss Constant, as a permanent public garden for the town of Sevenoaks to commemorate her parents.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

Upper High Street Gardens date from 1949 when the garden, a site which was owned by Miss Constant who lived in the 'Old House' on the opposite side of the road, was given by her to Sevenoaks to commemorate a 'JC' 1855-1935 and 'SLC' 1861-1948. A report in the Sevenoaks Chronicle (29<sup>th</sup> April 1949) referred to it as a 're-constructed garden' and reported that it was officially given to Sevenoaks Council following a service at St Nicholas Church. The keys were handed over by two great-grandchildren of Mr and Mrs Constant. Joseph Constant of 'The Old House' 18 High Street appears in Kelly's directory (1934 p581). The electoral registers of 1929-35 list Joseph Constant and Sarah Lily Constant as resident in 'Old house'. From 1948 the house ceases to be listed and is (2011) incorporated into Sevenoaks School as the *International House*.

Sevenoaks Town Council records show the Gardens as being gifted to the then Urban District Council, now Sevenoaks Town Council, by Joan Constant on 22nd April 1949 as a tribute to her parents, for perpetual use as a garden only, with the request that the memorial tablet set in the northern boundary wall be maintained. It was also requested that grave nos. 1152 and 3748 in Greatness Cemetery, Sevenoaks, and the walls and fencing around the garden be maintained.

The site appears as a field on the tithe map of 1841. During the early C20 (OS 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> edn 25" maps, 1897-1900 and 1907-1923) it appears as a nursery with greenhouses. By 1929 (4<sup>th</sup> edn) the land appears to be a field again. Sevenoaks Historical Society in '*100 Years of Growth*' refers to the garden as having been laid out as a flower garden for Miss Constant in the 1930s by Redgrave and Patrick. However no further information on their involvement or possible partnership has been found.

The Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area Appraisal of 2008 refers to the Gardens as 'the only notable area of open space within the town'. It also states that the name Six Bells Lane is derived from the original peal of six church bells (suggesting a pre 1750 date for the name as the bells were replaced *in* the 1750s with a peal of eight) and that the sound of the bells, view of the church tower and links with the garden are important features of this area.

The Sevenoaks Official Guide of 1958 refers to the Gardens as being given to Sevenoaks by a Miss Constant and her family as a tribute to her parents and to remain a public garden for all times. There was a rose planting ceremony in 1995 for the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations and in 1998 the northern boundary wall was rebuilt. Four flowering cherry trees and a commemorative plaque were donated in 1999 by the local Women's Institute members to celebrate the Millennium. In 2009 fifteen rose trees together with a plaque were planted in the Gardens by the Girl Guides to celebrate their centenary. The Gardens remain in the ownership of Sevenoaks Town Council which also maintains them.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES AND LAND FORM SETTING**

The Gardens are sited on the west side the A225, Upper High Street of Sevenoaks, 110m north of the Parish Church of St Nicholas and close to the start of the commercial centre

The nearly-rectangular shaped garden is 0.25 acres (0.10ha) in area and is fully enclosed by brick walls of varying heights, the two longer walls running east/west. The wall to the north is some 2m high and adjacent to commercial premises. It is bounded on its south side by the steeply west-sloping Six Bells Lane with its old Kentish half timbered houses and on the north side by High Street shops. The steeply sloping meadowland to the west below the 1.5m high north-west wall is now (2011) a housing development. The exterior of the 2m high southern wall increases in height to accommodate the fall in ground level and comprises ragstone below the brick. It is fortified at intervals with stone buttresses, its height allowing a view over it from the Gardens to the houses in the lane. The wall that fronts on to the High Street is 22 metres in length, runs north-north-west/south-south-east and follows the A225 road. This wall comprises sections of wrought iron railings set on a low (40cm high) plinth between brick pillars which are topped with square stone slabs, allowing views into the garden from the street. The railings are decorated with scrolls and arrows along the top.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The Gardens are entered directly from the pavement, which runs along the west side of the High Street (A225), through a wrought iron gate sited at the north end of the wall which runs in a north-north-west direction.

### **THE GARDEN**

Six Bells Lane which borders the garden at its south end slopes steeply downhill from east to west. To accommodate the fall in the land the garden is divided into two areas with steps down to the lower, westerly area. The areas are separated by a row of shrubs and trees supported by a ragstone retaining wall with the connecting steps sited at the north end of the wall. The two areas are similar in size. The upper garden is formally laid out in a central circular

design with an early C20 well head at its centre. This structure consists of a circular ragstone wall which is four stones high with a ring of flat stones as a coping and a decorative wrought iron arch above it. A ring of paving encircles the well with three longer paths radiating from it; one to the east, one to the north and one to the south with a short path to the west completing a Celtic cross shape. Following the circular paving pattern are beds with hybrid tea roses. The intervening areas are laid to grass with specimen flowering cherry trees. The arms of the cross meet a path which runs parallel to the south, north-eastern and north upper garden boundary walls and which eventually leads to the steps to the lower garden. Four benches are placed at intervals around the garden, two along the front north-eastern wall and one at each end of the arms of the cross. Against the other walls are beds of shrubs and small trees.

The lower garden has a tear-drop-shaped lawn with an asphalt path around it. There are shrub beds between the path and the boundary walls. A small brick and timber shelter containing a bench stands at the far westerly end. Steeply sloping meadowland lies to the west below the 1.5m north-west wall behind this shelter but is blocked from view by trees and shrubs. Another bench is sited to the north side of the path. Two specimen cherry trees are set in the lawn.

The only reference to a design principle for the Gardens' layout is quoted in 'A Presentation of Parks: A survey of Amenity Parks and Gardens in Kent (Kent Gardens Trust, undated but c1995, p21), as follows:

*"The most ancient of garden formulas was used to create this pleasant retreat for local residents. The four-fold layout of the upper garden, with water represented by the well-head at the centre, symbolises the Garden of Eden, fertility, timelessness and Paradise. In the hot sun, aromatic shrubs and flowers give off their scents. Flowering cherries, Prunus Kanzan, shade the lower grassy area where there are seats and a rustic shelter (source unreferenced).*

There are two plaques on the north wall of the upper garden. One is a commemorative plaque for JC 1855-1935 and SLC 1861-1948 stating that the garden was given in their memory by their children to Sevenoaks in 1949. The other plaque records that four cherry trees were planted in 1999 to commemorate the Millennium by the Women's Institute.

## REFERENCES

### Books and articles

Chronicle and Courier, article & photograph on dedication of Gardens (29<sup>th</sup> April 1949 p3)

*Sevenoaks Official Guide* (1958) p29

Telephone directories of Sevenoaks and Neighbourhood (1929, 32,33,34,35 and 40) printed and published by the Caxton and Holmsdale Press.

Sevenoaks Historical Society, *100 Years of Growth in Sevenoaks Services* (undated) Longmere Press

## **Maps**

Tithe map for Sevenoaks 1840 (Kent History and Library Centre)

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edn 6" 1862

Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 6" 1897

Ordnance Survey 3<sup>rd</sup> edn 6" 1907

Ordnance Survey 4<sup>th</sup> edn 6" 1929

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edn 25" 1869

Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 25" 1896

Ordnance Survey 3<sup>rd</sup> edn 25" 1909

Ordnance Survey 4<sup>th</sup> edn 25" 1937

## **Illustrations**

Aerial photograph 2003

Upper High Street Sevenoaks (at Six Bells Lane) by C Essenhigh Corke from a sketch by W. Knight in 1640, *English Homes and Villages (Kent and Sussex)*,

Lady Hope, 1909 (pub J Salmon,

85 & 87 High Street, Sevenoaks)

High Street at Six Bells Lane, Sevenoaks, c1860 (private collection).

Sevenoaks 2003 (Aerial Imagery UK)

Ten photographs: seven of the gardens Gardens, one of the house and two of the graves 2011(B Piper)

## **Archival Items**

Electoral registers of 1929 – 1935

*Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area Appraisal (2008)*

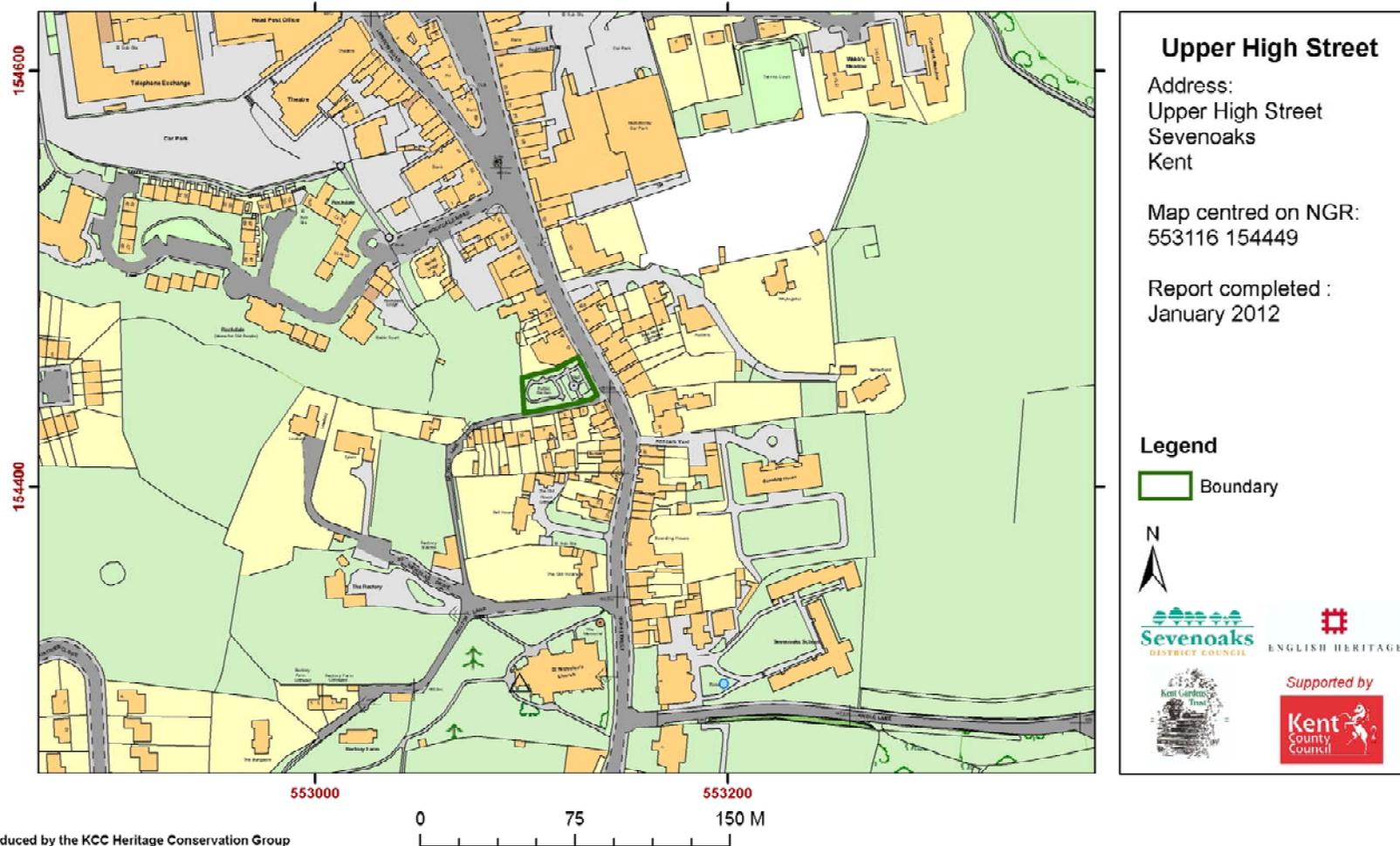
<http://www.parksandgardens.ac.uk> – A survey of amenity parks and gardens in Kent.

**Research by Barbara Piper and Paul Lewis**

**Virginia Hinze (editor)**

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## Fig. 1 Boundary map

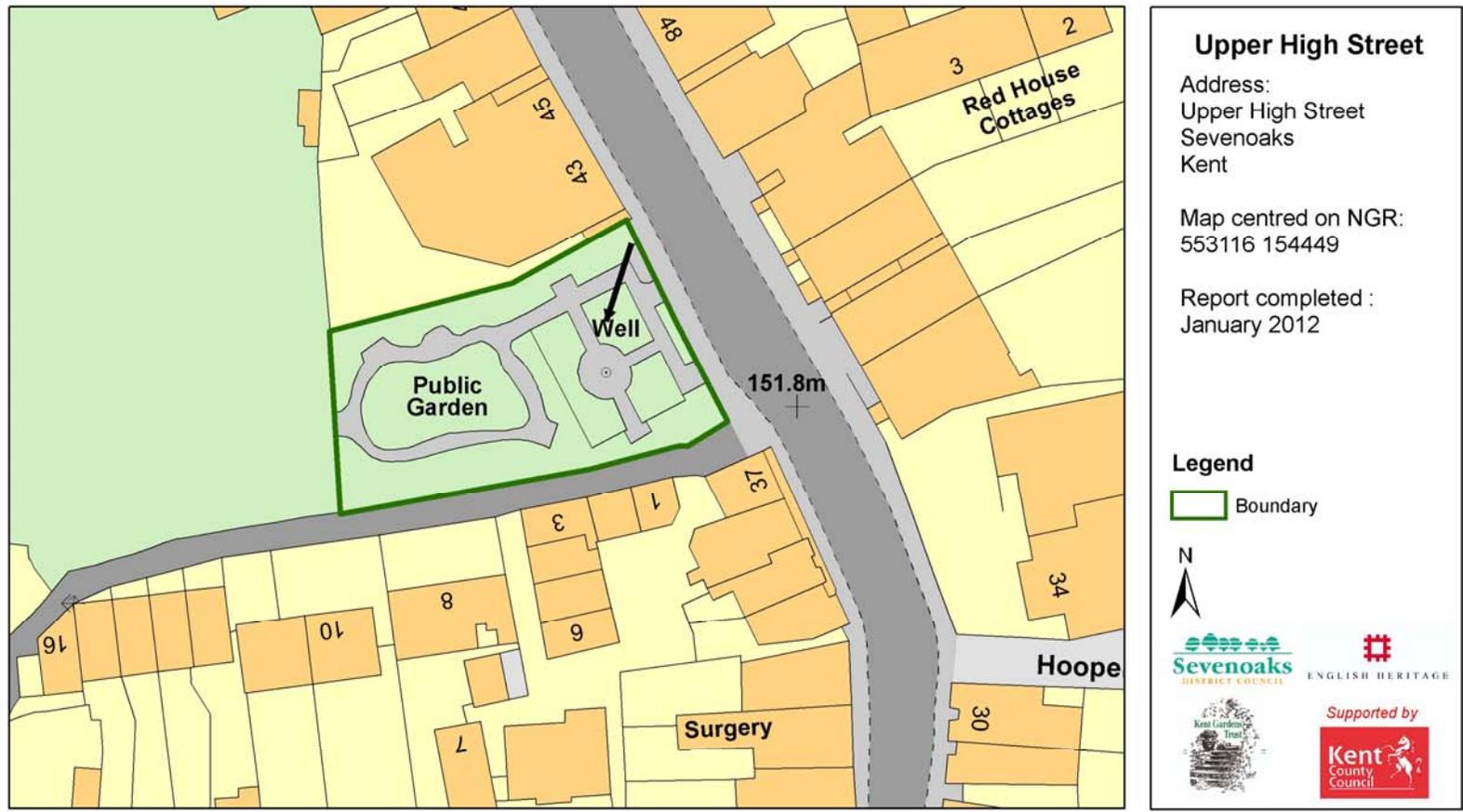


Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

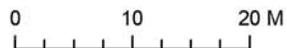
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## Fig. 2 Key views map



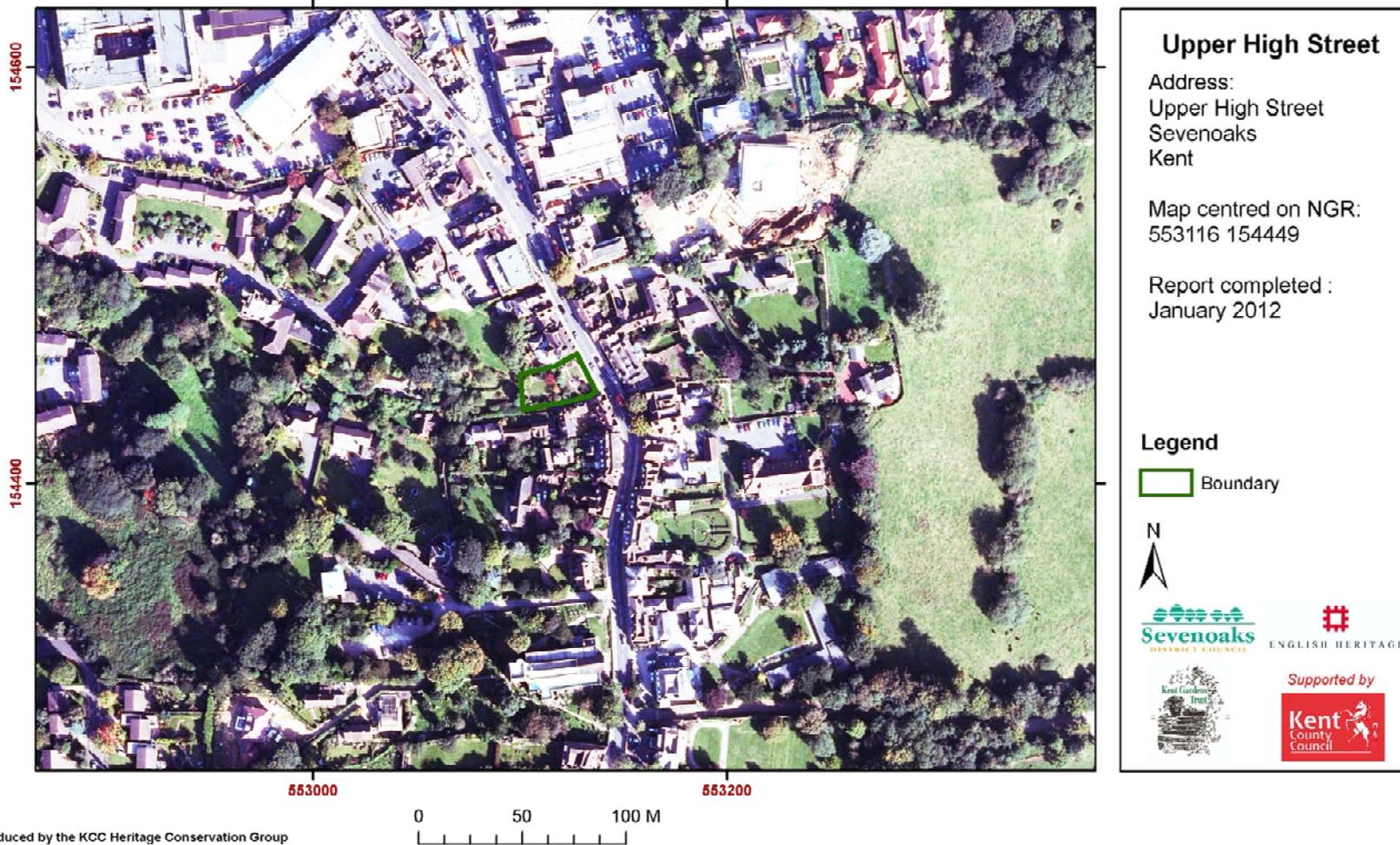
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## Fig. 3 Aerial photograph (2008)



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