

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



## New School, West Heath, Sevenoaks



January 2012



# **New School, West Heath**

Sevenoaks, Kent

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## **INTRODUCTION**

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

FIGURE 1: Boundary map

FIGURE 2: Key views map

FIGURE 3: Key features map

FIGURE 4: Aerial photograph

FIGURE 5: Map of listed buildings at New School, West Heath

FIGURE 6: Listed buildings at New School, West Heath

## **FIGURES ONLY ON CD**

FIGURE 7: J. Andrews, A Drury and W Herbert, '*A Topographical map of the County of Kent in Twenty Five Sheets*' (1769)

FIGURE 8: William Mudge, '*An Entirely New and Accurate Survey of the County of Kent*' (1801)

FIGURE 9: Greenwood, Map of Kent (1821).

FIGURE 10: Tithe Map. Sevenoaks Parish (1840) Kent History and Library Centre.

FIGURE 11: Estate Map 1847

FIGURE 12: Estate Map 1862

FIGURE 13: Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map (1862-1875)

FIGURE 14: Ordnance Survey 25" town map (1869)

FIGURE 15: Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25" map (1877-1900)

FIGURE 16: Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 25" map (1907-1923)

FIGURE 17: Ordnance Survey 4th Edition 25" map (1929-1952)

FIGURE 18: Aerial Photograph Auction Catalogue 1998

FIGURE 19: C Essenhigh Corke, *The Rhododendron and Azalea Garden*, (1908)

FIGURE 20: Painting of the Japanese Garden (private ownership)

FIGURE 21: *Ash Grove in Kent the Seat of the Miss Otways*, Aquatint, drawn by JG Wood, engraved by Wm Green 1820-30

FIGURE 22: Photographs from sales brochure of 1931 (in private ownership)

FIGURE 23: Sir J Reynolds P.R.A. Portrait of Sarah Mayne, (now in Maryland in the USA)

FIGURE 24: Photograph of the Japanese Garden 2011

FIGURE 25: Photographs of the American Garden 2011

## 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.

Development Services  
Sevenoaks District Council  
Council Offices  
Argyle Road  
Sevenoaks  
TN13 1HG  
01732 227000  
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Kent County Council  
Heritage Conservation  
Invicta House  
County Hall  
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)

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Age, rarity and survival: The garden has significant surviving layout and planting remnants of a rhododendron and azalea garden, probably dating from the 1790s and celebrated throughout the C19 in local literature as the 'American' garden. Also surviving is a walled garden of the mid 1860s and the site of a Japanese Garden of 1905.

Several mature Wellingtonias surviving as mature trees appear to date from the 1850s and are therefore early examples of the introduction of this species in 1852.

Evidential value: the site is recorded in a range of archival material including local literature, paintings, photographs and C19 estate maps and private diaries.

Historic association: The house and grounds are associated with Diana, Princess of Wales who attended the school from 1973 – 1977; several cherry trees planted to mark events in her life survive and the whole estate was purchased by Mohamed Fayed in 1998 as a memorial to the Princess after her death.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

KENT  
SEVENOAKS

NEW SCHOOL, WEST HEATH

Landranger sheet 187  
TQ 527529

## **SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST**

Gardens and lawns set in parkland with mature trees, laid out from the early to mid C19 to the south of a mid C18 house, occupied by a school (since the 1930s) attended by the late Princess of Wales. The gardens include a woodland garden of rhododendrons and azaleas known since the C19 as an American and a Japanese Garden.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

John Smith, a soldier reputed to have fought at Minden in 1759 and a friend of Lord Sackville of Knole, acquired the estate of Ash Grove in 1764 (estate records) and built the present mansion (also called Ash Grove) soon after. Mortgage documents describe associated coach houses, barns, stables and other buildings plus several parcels of land (totalling some 30 acres or more), also a mill and field and 5 tenements or cottages. Smith sold Ash Grove to a Sarah Otway in 1774. Sale documents included in the estate records mention orchards and gardens.

Between 1799 and 1821 a Christopher Cook owned the mansion and much of the surrounding land. In 1821 he sold Ashgrove to William Haldimand who had significant remodelling done in 1828 by George Basevi (a pupil of John Soane) in classical grey brick. Haldimand and his brother had previously used Basevi to design and construct Belgrave Square in London.

By 1842, the owner and occupier of Ash Grove mansion and 63 acres of land was a magistrate, one Alexander Glendining (tithe awards). Conveyancing documents of 1862 record ownership of the mansion, land and cottages passing from Glendining to the Hon. Rev. Frederick Baring, an estate map of this period stating that estate comprised 109 acres 21 perches (44.2 hectares).

Baring is reputed to have begun building the walled garden which is born out by an estate map of 1862 and a description from a contemporary diary: 'In about 1860 the Hon. Rev Frederick Baring employed a Mr Punnet of Tonbridge to *"enlarge and virtually rebuild the house. In addition to building the western end of the house he also put up stables, a dairy, & started the walled garden and gardener's house beyond the American Garden* [Lady Norah Hodgson's diary]

Frederick Baring died in 1868 and his widow sold Ash Grove to Kirkman Daniel Hodgson. He added to the estate by purchasing in 1874 land from the adjacent Sevenoaks Park estate. Deeds of family land transfers in 1875 describe the estate as comprising a 'Mansion house with park, lawn, woods, plantations,

shrubberies, gardens, orchards, yards, vineries, hot houses, orchard houses, offices, coach houses, stables, farm buildings, paddocks, closes and parcels of land' to a total acreage of 109 acres plus land from Sevenoaks Park Estate of 24 acres. Lady Norah records again in her diary in 1880: *'My husband added the second floor to the house as we needed nurseries etc. He also bought Longspring Wood and made up the size of the place to 380 acres (153 hectares). The small gates into the azalea garden were bought by my husband.'*[Lady Norah's diary]. Kelly's Directory records that *'The estate is noted in 1891 for its vineries, azaleas and rhododendrons* while Salmon's *Guide to Sevenoaks* of 1901 refers to it as *'a small estate, picturesquely situated to the south of the town'*.

In 1907 the estate (recorded as 70 acres) was sold by Rob. K. Hodgson to Edward Kraftmeier, a county magistrate (Kelly's Directory) and is again noted for its vineries, azaleas and rhododendrons. In 1915 Kraftmeier changed his name to Kay.

The estate was sold again in 1931 to a Miss Elliot and West Heath School moved in. Additional buildings to the area north east of the mansion were added to accommodate the school during the C20.

The school ran for 65 years, its pupils including, from 1973 to 1977, Diana Spencer (later Princess of Wales), before going into receivership in 1997. In 1998 all the contents of the house were sold by auction including the plaques that had marked the cherry trees planted to commemorate Princess Diana's engagement, marriage and the Princes' births. Because of Diana Spencer's past association with the school, Mohamed Fayed bought the estate in 1998 as a memorial to the late Princess and it is now a Centre for children who suffer from emotional trauma and known as the New School at West Heath.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

New School at West Heath lies on the south-western outskirts of Sevenoaks, roughly equidistant between the A225 Tonbridge road and the A21. The site is located on Ashgrove Road, a tree lined lane running roughly east/west which is reached from the A225 via Weald Road, a turning off the west side of the A225 c.5km south of Sevenoaks town centre.

The 14ha (35 acre) site is bounded by the heathland of Sevenoaks Common to the south and north west. To the south east it is bounded by Weald Road to the east of which is a dense C20 housing development. On the north east is Ashgrove Road. Part of the south-westerly boundary is formed by a wall of the site's walled garden.

The site lies on a ridge above the Sevenoaks Weald to the south, in undulating Wealden countryside surrounded by heathland to the south and west and the suburbs of Sevenoaks with their wooded lanes to the north and east

## ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The school is approached on its north-east boundary from Ashgrove Road via the Lodge Gate. Immediately within the site to the west side of the entrance is Lodge House, a timber framed C20 house replacing an earlier lodge (estate map of 1862). The house was an *Ideal Home Exhibition* display house from the 1950s (per comm). On the east side of the entrance behind a ragstone wall are other residential buildings. These are owned and used by the school with the exception of the one closest to the entrance which is now in private ownership.

A 194m long tarmac drive curves to the south-east to arrive at a hedge-enclosed turning circle and the principal entrance of the mansion. Access to the turning circle is through ragstone piers with pinecone finials and wrought iron gates. During WW2 the urns on top of the front gate piers (1931 sales brochure) were damaged by bombs and were replaced by the current finials. Around this drive the garden areas are laid to lawn and shrubs.

At a point 170m south-east from the Lodge Gate the drive splits into three. The route straight ahead in a south-easterly direction goes to the mansion while the south-westerly fork continues for a distance of 48m before branching off between stable buildings (now, 2011, in school use) to the stable courtyard adjacent to the mansion. The fork continues for a further 75m to where C20 classrooms are sited. The easterly fork curves to the rear of the mansion and at approximately 100m from where it branches off, reaches an indoor swimming pool.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The two storey mansion, listed grade II and dating from circa 1760, was built for John Smith by an unknown architect, in "Gothick" style. It was remodelled circa 1828 by Basevi for William Haldiman. Following some minor, later C19 alterations, an east wing of principal rooms was added in the early C20 in neo-Stuart style, the architect is not known. This early C20 east wing is of grey brick with Portland stone dressings and a tiled roof, hipped at the east end and contains the full height staircase hall. The north facing principal entrance has a projecting stone pedimented porch with four Tuscan columns. To the rear is an unusual wooden tented verandah with six columns and fretted cornice. The original house in "Gothick" style consists of the current west wing; it has the early C19 former stable courtyard by Basevi attached to it. This two storey ragstone building has a crenellated parapet and wooden Gothic cupola, the latter having a clock face and metal weathervane. The inside of the *mansion* retains some of the original features.

An orangery on the south wall of the mansion to the west of the cedar tree, as recorded on OS maps from 1862 to 1896, had gone by 1929 (OS

edition of 1929 – 52). The site of the orangery is now occupied by a dance studio.

## THE GARDEN

Adjacent to the south-east face of the mansion is an area laid to a 50m broad lawn, with a cedar tree on a bank at the western end. Steps lead up from the lawn to the top of the bank. The lawn was previously the site of Italianate parterre (pers. comm. school staff and field evidence on a 1998 aerial photograph revealing underlying patterns of a circular form divided radially). The parterre was later made into a sunken rose garden by Baring who owned the property from 1862-68. A photograph dated 1931 show flowerbeds (now gone) at the east and west ends of the lawn. The now (2011) unused open air swimming pool 75m to the north-west of the mansion, a remnant of the previous school's occupation from 1932, is to be filled in 2011 and used as a parking area.

A path from the cedar tree leads in a south westerly direction for 153 metres towards the walled garden, along the north-eastern side of which is an area densely overgrown with rhododendrons and azaleas which is the site of the celebrated 'American Garden' referred to in the 1891 Kelly's Directory. The garden is entered through wrought iron gates which are approximately 34m from the north-east corner of the walled garden. An article in the 1917 edition of *Kentish Homes* refers to *'the famous rhododendron plantation'* saying of the rhododendrons that *'some of these are over 46 feet high and are said to be the highest in England. They were planted in about 1790 and at the same period an inner fringe of azaleas was planted which are now great trees'*. Most of the rhododendrons are now (2011) *R. ponticum* rather than the species and varieties shown in a painting by Essenhigh Corke of 1908. This painting shows the avenues of shrubs flowering in rich hues of red, yellows and pinks. Neatly trimmed paths bordered with grass separate the flowerbeds. On the 1862 OS 25" 1<sup>st</sup> edition town map the layout of the American Garden can clearly be seen with the pathways marked. Traces of these pathways can still be seen (2011)

120 metres to the east of the mansion is a further area of overgrown vegetation surrounding a silted-up pond. Remnants of bamboo and azaleas are all that remain of the Japanese garden which was laid out by Mrs Kraftmeier and influenced by her trip to Japan in 1905 (painting, private collection). The painting shows the garden having a curved wooden bridge straddled a pond with water lilies, and azaleas fringing the water. Rotting remnants of wood are all that remain of the bridge, reputedly a copy of the Shinkyo Bridge, a sacred bridge near the town of Nikko in Japan (pers.comm. school staff). The painting was given to the school and now hangs in the dining room. On the 1869 OS 25" town map the water source used for the Japanese garden can clearly be seen as an elongated oval pond set in open grass near the tree lined south-easterly site boundary. By 1929 (OS 25" 4<sup>th</sup> edition) this pond area has a garden set around it with specimen shrubs and a bridge across the middle. Two flying bombs badly damaged the Japanese garden in the last two months of WW2.

The present owners are currently (2011) seeking help to restore both the Japanese and American garden.

## THE PARKLAND

The park has an open character dotted with groups of specimen trees. From the Lodge Gate the main drive to the mansion passes through mown grassland that is now laid out to both east and west as sports fields. To either side of this main drive are several mature trees. Eighty four metres south of the Lodge Gate entrance, on the west side of the main drive to the mansion, is a large mature sweet chestnut. To the east and north-east of the drive are two Wellingtonias each approximately 25metres in height (tree survey 2007 – Hayden's Arboricultural Consultants) The height suggests that the trees are in the region of 150 years of age and therefore may well have been planted in the late 1850s very soon after their introduction date of 1853.

There are two further Wellingtonias, one c17 metres south of the swimming pool and the other c200m south of the mansion, at the southerly tip of the broad belt of trees which forms the eastern site boundary. To the west of this belt are several specimen oaks.

On the inner edge of the broad, densely treed boundary belt that runs in a south-westerly direction from the Lodge Gate to the most westerly of the school out buildings are 4 cherry trees. These were planted in a ceremony attended by Princess Diana in the 1980s to mark her engagement, marriage and the birth of her two sons. The trees are now (2011) being overtaken by self seeded sycamore and elder. The area of the park bounded by these trees and the main drive to the south of the Lodge Gate is laid out as sports fields.

An engraving (Ash Grove in Kent, the Seat of the Miss Otways, 1799) shows a well laid out mature park with cows grazing in the foreground, suggesting that a park had been laid out by this date by John Smith. The view is drawn from the southerly aspect of the mansion. The surviving cedar tree to the immediate south of and to the west end of the mansion appears quite large in the print although conical in shape which suggests that it is still a young tree. OS maps from 1862 onwards, and a photograph in the 1931 sales brochure, show many more trees in the parkland between the Lodge Gate and mansion than currently exist. Heavy losses were sustained in the October 1987 hurricane which brought down many of the beech and chestnut trees.

## KITCHEN GARDEN

182 metres south-west of the mansion is the walled garden, c0.5 ha in size and surrounded by 2m high brick walls. It is now (2011) in separate, private ownership with a house (The Garden House) built after 1998 (sales particulars of that date show the walled garden as overgrown but not built on) and mostly laid to lawn with a tennis court and separate garage block.

The estate map of 1847 shows a garden (divided into 4 quarters and separated by paths) sited in the same position as the current walled garden which was begun by Frederick Baring in about 1860. The estate map of 1862 and 6" OS

1st edition map of the same year both record the structure of this garden, the OS map's greater level of detail clearly identifying several greenhouses and fruit trees. By 1869 (25" OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition) the garden has greenhouses and hothouses and a potting shed (taken down in 2011 by the school as it was deemed in a dangerous condition). The 1869 map shows the garden divided into three areas with paths and fruit trees outlining the areas.

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- David Gore, *Soldiers, Saints and Scallywags- History of the Otway/Maynes* (published 2009)

### Maps

- J. Andrews A Drury and W Herbert, *A Topographical Map of the County of Kent in Twenty Five Sheets (1769)*
- W Mudge, *An entirely New and Accurate Survey of the County of Kent* (1801)
- Greenwood, *Map of Kent* (1821).
- Estate Map (1847) Kent History and Library Centre Maidstone
- Estate Map (1862) Kent History and Library Centre Maidstone
- Tithe map 1840 (Kent History and Library Centre)
- Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edn 6" map (published 1862 - 1875)
- Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 6" map ([published 1897)

Ordnance Survey 3<sup>rd</sup> edn 6" map (published 1907)  
Ordnance Survey 4th edn 6" map (published 1929)

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edn 25" town map (published 1869)  
Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 25" town map (published 1896)

### **Illustrations**

C Essenhigh Corke, The Rhododendron and Azalea Garden, (1908) Lady Hope, *English Homes and Villages*, (1909), p290  
Painting of the Japanese Garden (private ownership)  
Shinkyō Bridge, Nikkō, Japan. ([www.orientalarchitecture.co](http://www.orientalarchitecture.co))  
Ash Grove in Kent the Seat of the Miss Otways, aquatint, drawn by JG Wood, engraved by Wm Green 1820-30 (grosvenorprints.com)  
Sir J Reynolds P.R.A. Portrait of Sarah Mayne, (now in Maryland in the USA. sold by Christies 1997. School has a copy)  
James Scott after Sir J Reynolds, Portrait of Sarah Otway, Mezzotint (1864) owned by the National Portrait Gallery London  
Portrait of Miss Elliot (headmistress of the first school; in private ownership)  
Portrait of Miss Skeat (headmistress of the first school; in private ownership)  
3 photographs from sales brochure of 1931 (in private ownership)  
Photographs from auction catalogue 1998 (in private ownership)  
Aerial photographs 2003, 2005 and 1998

### **Archival documents**

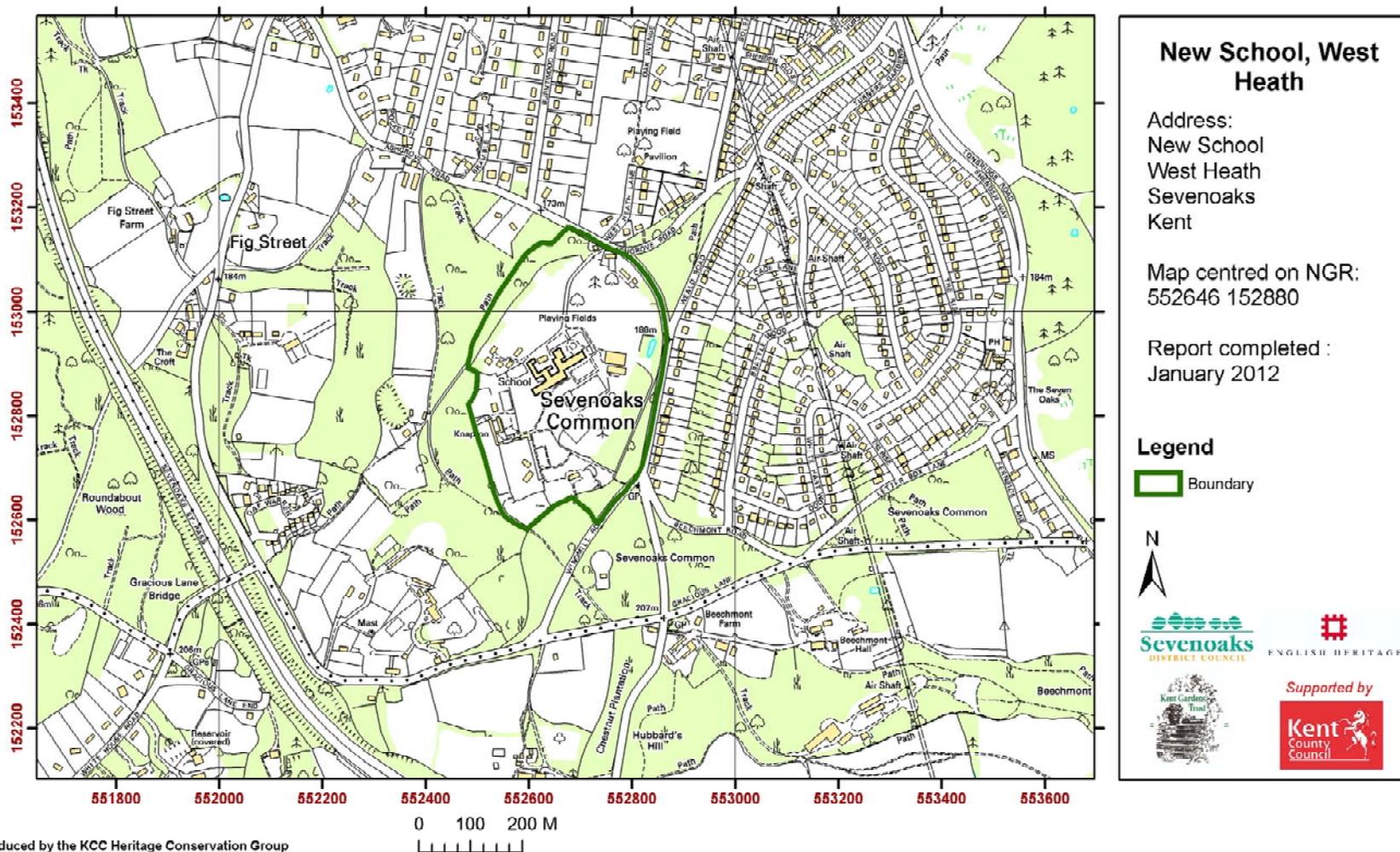
Lady Nora Hodgson's diary (private ownership)  
Sevenoaks Tithe Apportionment, (1840 Kent Archaeological Society).  
Listed Buildings descriptions 21 November 1997 (English Heritage Building ID: 468965)  
Census records 1841-1881  
Estate maps and documents held at Kent History and Library Centre Maidstone  
Architectural information on George Basevi's oeuvre  
[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)  
BBC record of Al Fayed purchasing West Heath. <http://www.newsbbc.co.uk>  
May 20 1998  
Tree survey document (2007 Hayden's Arboricultural Consultants)  
Auction catalogue 1998 (school ownership)

### **Research by Barbara Piper and Paul Lewis**

**Edited Virginia Hinze**

# Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

## Fig. 1 Boundary map



# Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

## Fig. 2 Key views map

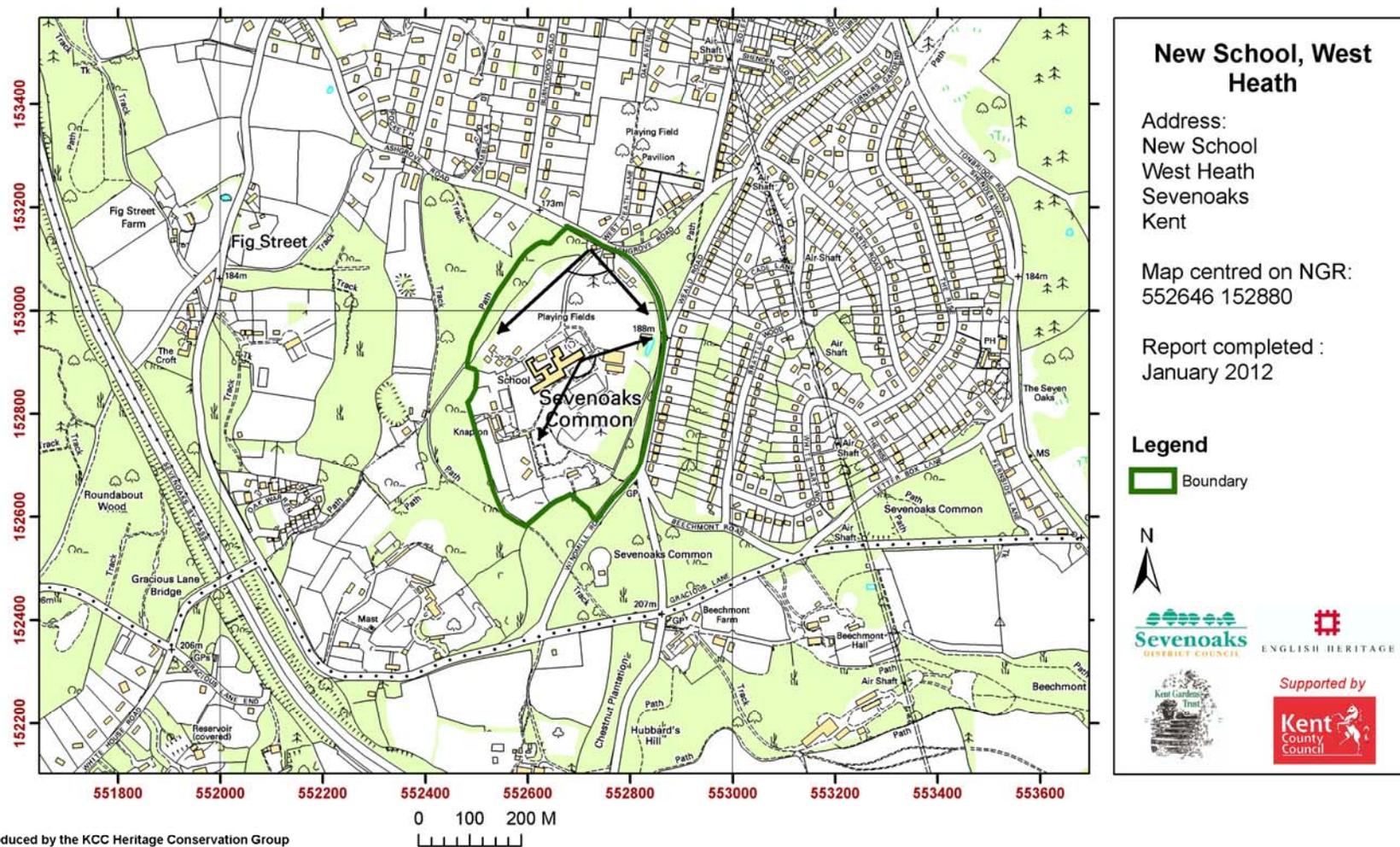
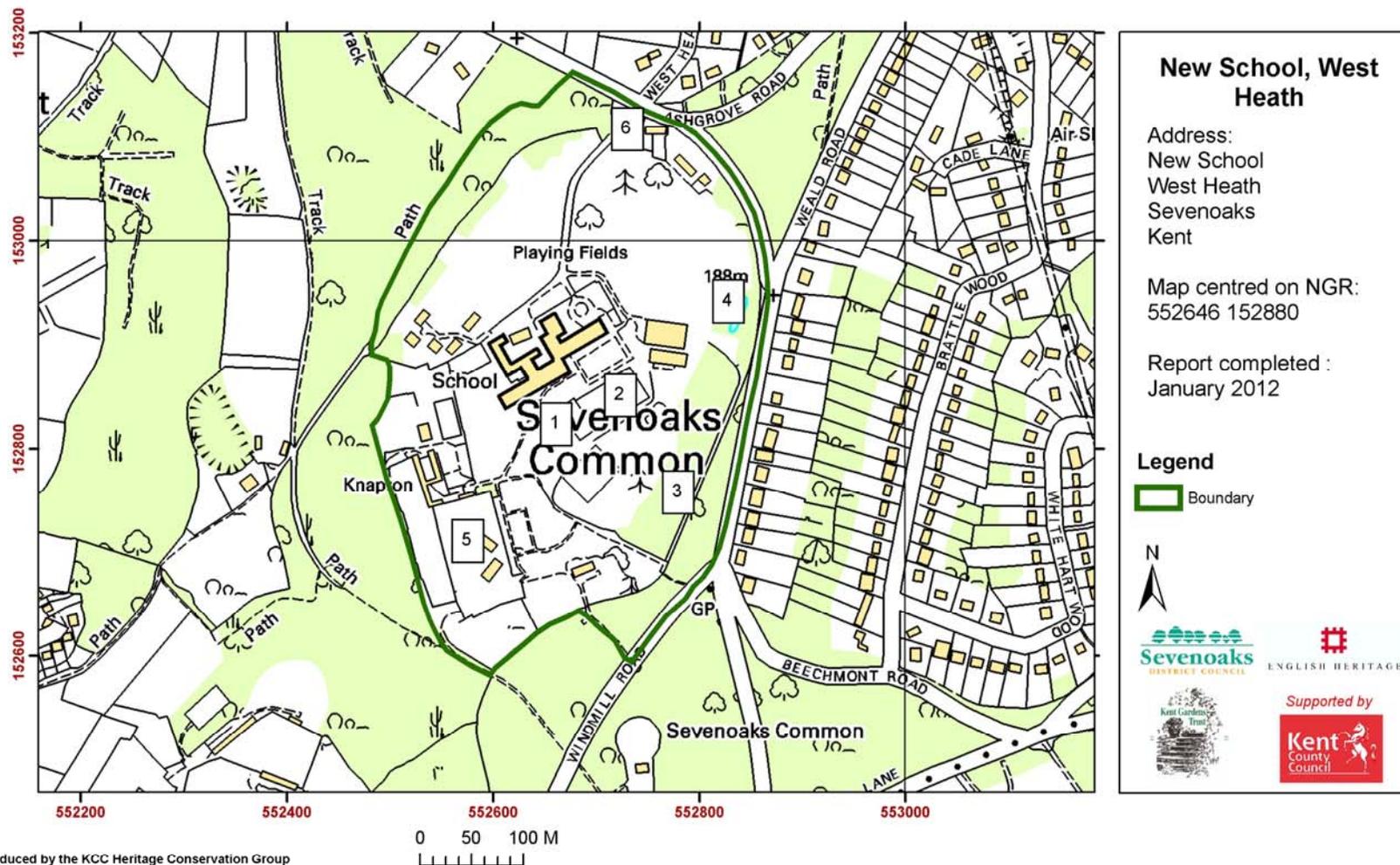


Fig. 3 Key features map



**New School, West Heath**

Address:  
New School  
West Heath  
Sevenoaks  
Kent

Map centred on NGR:  
552646 152880

Report completed :  
January 2012

**Legend**

 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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## Fig. 4 Aerial photograph (2008)

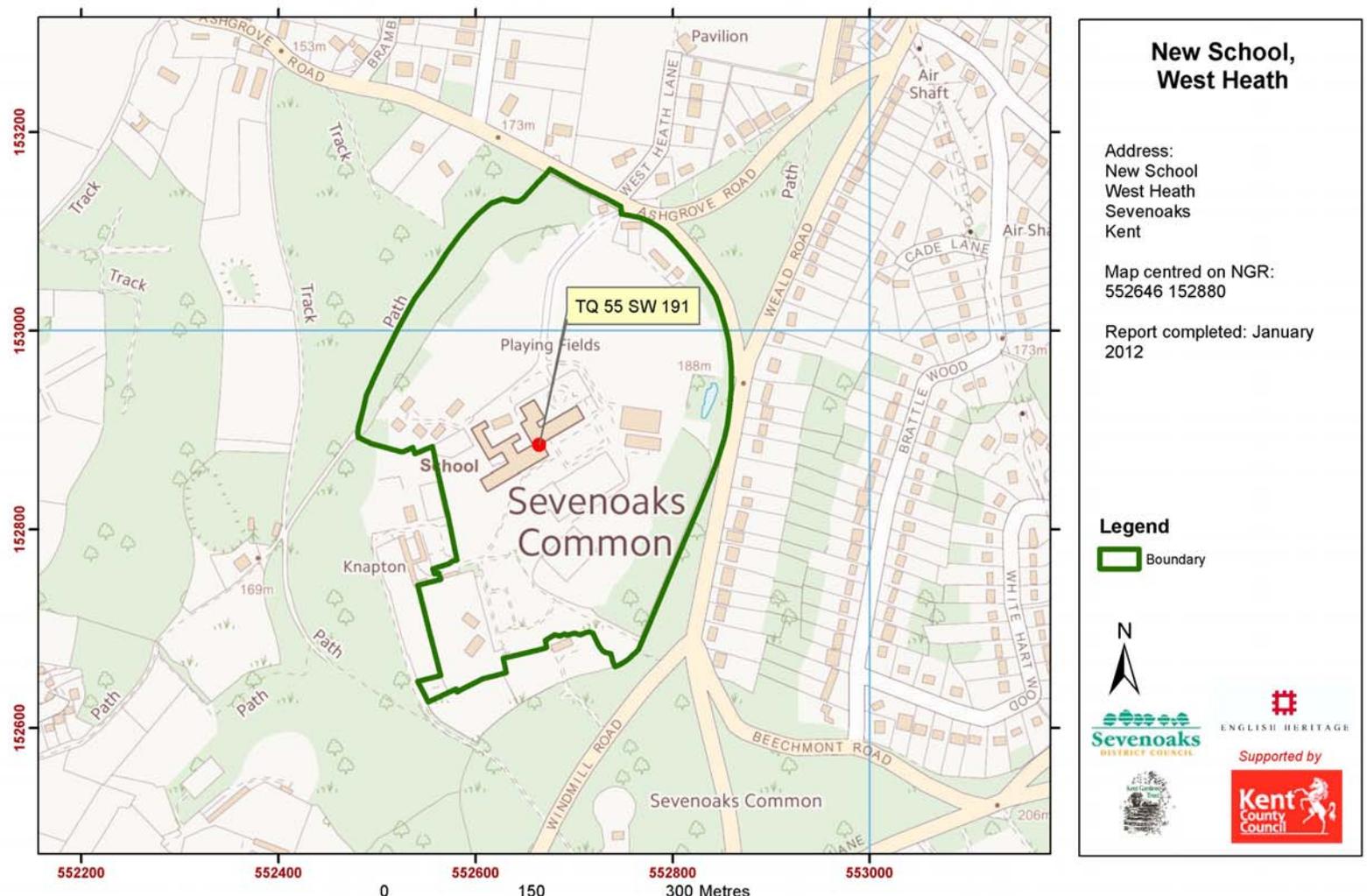


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# Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

## Fig. 5 Map of listed buildings at New School, West Heath



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 6 Listed buildings at New School, West Heath (from the Kent Historic Environment Record)

**Kent Historic Environment Record Reference: TQ 55 SW 191**

TQ 55 SW SEVENOAKS ASHGROVE ROAD

661/4/10010 West Heath School

II

Originally mansion house, later girls boarding school. Circa 1760, built for a John Smith esquire, architect not known, in "Gothick" style and called Ashgrove. Remodelled c1828 by Basevi for a William Haldimand, who financed much of the building of Belgrave Square. Following some minor later C19 alterations an east wing of principal rooms was added in the early C20 in neo-Stuart style, architect not known. In 1931, Ashgrove became a girls boarding school. The Post 1931 school additions are not of special architectural interest.

EXTERIOR: Early C20 east wing of grey brick with Portland stone dressings and tiled roof, hipped to east, with ridge tiles and 3 tall brick chimneystacks with stone cornices. Two storeys; five windows. Twenty four pane sashes with eared architraves. The two projecting bays contain the full height staircase hall.

Projecting stone pedimented porch with four Tuscan columns. Deep stone bracketed eaves cornice, string course and plinth. Side elevation has three 24-pane sashes with pediments to ground floor windows. The rear elevation has four windows, the end bays projecting with tripartite windows, pedimented to ground floor French windows. Central ground floor canted bay obscured by unusual wooden tented verandah with six columns and fretted cornice. West wing is original house in "Gothick" style in stock brick with some red brick dressings and tiled roof. Two storeys and attics; irregular fenestration. North front has three later C19 gabled dormers and stone cornice. First floor has three segmental-headed six-pane sashes with three pointed-headed French windows below. Octagonal turret to right, originally containing stair. Adjoining to right is a three storey section of which the upper storey is late C19. South front has two lower storeys of C18 or early C19 date with round-headed colonnade, sash windows and heightened parapet and late C19 gabled dormers. Attached to the south west is the early C19 former stable courtyard by Basevi which is mainly of coursed ragstone with galleting and slate roof. This comprises two gatepiers with pyramidal tops, two one storey pavilions with segmental arches, one storey former coach house with segmental arches filled in in C20 and two storey building with crenellated parapet and wooden Gothic cupola with clock face and metal weathervane. INTERIOR of original west wing retains large ground floor room, currently Canteen, with curved end with fluted columns with acanthus capitals, wooden fire surround with frieze of cherubs riding dolphins, pedimented overmantel, ovolo and anthemion and palmette cornice and three elaborate pedimented surrounds to fine quality six panelled doors. Early C19 service staircase with column newel. Cellar has brick floor and vaulted brick ceiling with wine bins. Service end has butler's quarters with panelled balcony and square wooden piers with strongroom below. Staff Dining Room has plain

mid C19 fireplace and built in late C19 wall cupboards. Electric room bells. East wing has impressive Staircase Hall with marble floor, full-height oak well staircase with turned balusters, newel posts with ball finials and deep plastered ceiling. Oak Room has plank and muntin panelling with corner cupboard and fireplace with Delft tiles and overmantel with strapwork centre flanked by round-headed arches. Adjoining room has early C19 fireplace with fluted Tuscan columns, frieze of paterae and griffins, panel of seated lady by statue of Zeus and eternal flame and marquetry inlaid floor. South west ground floor room has an early C19 fireplace with bronze caryatids of female satyrs, bronze frieze and marquetry inlay floor. Both these elaborate fireplaces appear to be by Basevi and were moved from the earlier part of the house. Dining Room has plastered ceiling with sunburst, fasces and wreath and marble bolection-moulded fireplace with carved swags above after Grindling Gibbons. Upstairs the Bursar's Office has a marble fireplace and the Headmistress' Study a marble Louis Quinze style fireplace. [See BOE West Kent and the Weald p517.]  
Listing NGR: TQ5266652889