

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Swale District



Grove Park and Rose Hill Woods, Sittingbourne



June 2022

Grove Park and Rose Hill Woods

Sittingbourne, 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 Swale Borough Council in 2020 -22, covers sites within the Swale 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 Swale local authority area along with others identified by Swale Borough Council. The review has been undertaken using Historic England'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 Swale 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.

Swale Borough Council
Conservation and Design
Swale House
East Street
Sittingbourne
ME10 3HT
www.swale.gov.uk

Kent County Council
Heritage Conservation
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XX
www.kent.gov.uk

Kent Gardens Trust
www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk

Historic England
www.historicengland.org.uk/

¹ English Heritage (2012) 'Good Practice Guide to Local Listing'

KENT

GROVE PARK AND ROSE HILL WOODS

SITTINGBOURNE

Centred on 588570 164250

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

EVIDENTIAL

An early C20 public park in which much of the original layout for the playing of cricket remains. The demolished Rose Hill house and kitchen garden were recently excavated and recorded by the Historic Research Group of Sittingbourne. Records of previous owners are held at Kent History and Library Centre and at the legal department of Swale Borough Council.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Grove Park lies immediately adjacent to Roman Watling Street which now forms the A2. As such there is potential for archaeological remains relating to Roman roadside activity to be discovered although none are known from the immediate area. Archaeological remains on the site are mostly likely to derive from the use of Grove Park as a recreation ground, and the former Rose Hill house and gardens. It is known that footings of the Rose Hill building still survive as do other garden features such as paths and boundary walls.

HISTORICAL

Grove Park was gifted to the local authority in 1931, the adjoining Rose Hill woods being purchased by the local authority in 1977. The creation of the public park and the provision of features within it benefited from a philanthropic act of a local resident.

AESTHETIC

The remains of two avenues, which predate the site's use as a public park, lead up to Rose Hill woods which overlook the park. Individual specimen trees, again predating the public park, provide the setting.

COMMUNAL

Grove Park and Rose Hill woods, both open to the public, together form a site popular with walkers and dog owners. A variety of sports have been played throughout its history including cricket, hockey, tennis and rugby football. More recently, the pavilion and its associated buildings provide fitness suites, changing facilities and headquarters for various clubs.

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

A public park laid out in the 1930s and extended in 1977 by the purchase of the adjacent derelict Rose Hill house, subsequently demolished, and garden. The park comprises amenity grassland, wooded slopes, pre C19 avenues and specimen trees, pathways, cricket pitch, children's play area and 1930s pavilion which has been extended to provide additional facilities.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The land which is now known as Grove Park was originally part of Bobbing manor. Bobbing Court, demolished early C18, lay 500m to the north, on the eastern side of the road to Sheppey and just south of St. Bartholomew's parish church. According to Hasted's History and Topographical Survey of Kent, 2nd edition, Volume 6 page 192, published in 1798, a Thomas Tyndale had bought the manor in King William's reign (1689-1702) and his descendants continued to own the land throughout the C18. The 2nd edition of Hasted's History is also the source of the earliest record of a building within the area which was to become Grove Park. It states that Arthur Gore from Ireland had built on Lieutenant-Colonel William Tyndale's land a few years before "*a small shooting seat which has been further improved by his cousin Sir Booth Gore*" The property is not mentioned in Hasted's 1st Edition, published in 1782, but the 2nd Edition also includes map of Bobbing which identifies the house as standing on Gore Hill together with a "*toll of elms*" leading from it south to the main A2 road. This suggests the house was originally built in the late C18. Hasted records that the house commanded a fine view southward to the London Road and beyond. The "*toll*" is shown in more detail as an avenue on the Ordnance Survey (O S) map of 1797 and the house is shown as a group of buildings within an orchard.

The Land Tax assessment for 1798 shows that Booth Gore was in residence at Gore Hill and remained there until 1800. It may be that he was in residence before 1798, but it was only then that the property became liable to tax.

In September 1796 Colonel William Tyndale sold the manor of Bobbing including the recently rebuilt Bobbing Court and its lands to Valentine Simpson, an innkeeper in Sittingbourne. The archives at Kent History and Library Centre (KHLIC) contain, amongst the deeds for Bobbing Court farm, small undated pieces of paper in C19 hand, ref U1877/T1, one of which reads:

"Bobbing near Sittingbourne – To be let and entered upon at Michaelmas next, a neat Dwellinghouse consisting of two Parlours, a Hall & Kitchen on the Ground Floor, 6 Bed Chambers on the first Floor and two in the Atticks – good cellars, a Pleasure and Kitchen Garden, a Fishpond, good stabling & every other office & convenience for a small genteel Family, & with or without about exceeding good 5 acres of Pasture Land.

The above Premises are situated on an Eminence & commands a most beautiful view of the adjoining Country in the most desirable part of the pleasant village of Bobbing, distant about a 1/4 mile from the London Road to Dover, & near the Road to the Isle of Sheppey.

Enquire of Mr Simpson, Rose at Sittingbourne."

On the reverse is written "*Advertisment of Bobbing House*"

On another piece of undated paper filed with the same deeds is written a similar description headed "Country House Bobbing" The descriptions do not fit that of Bobbing Court and presumably refer to the house on Gore Hill. In 1801, a Mrs Frances Montresor became a tenant of the house on Gore Hill and also agreed to rent adjoining land at an annual rent of £7.00 for seven years. Frances had previously lived at Belmont Place at Throwley, near Faversham until the death of her husband in 1799. While living at Thowley her husband, John Montresor, had major improvements carried out to the house, designed by architect Samuel Wyatt, which included the walls clad with pale yellow rectangular tiles to give appearance of yellow brickwork. Similar tiles have been found at Gore Hill during recent excavations carried out under the supervision of the Historical Research Group of Sittingbourne in 2016/17.

During the early part of the C19 the Land Tax records indicate the tenancy of Gore Hill passed from Frances Montresor to Henry Montresor (her son) and then to William Fairman. The Bobbing Tithe Award schedule dated 13 May 1839 states that the property on Gore Hill was owned by Rev George Simpson with a William Augustus Munn being the occupier. Frances Montresor died in 1826, having lived at Gore Hill for 25 years. In two codicils to her will, dated 16 June 1822, she used the alternative name of Rose Hill for the house which, from that date, was the only name used.

In 1838 C Greenwood produced a book "*An Epitome of County History, Volume I County of Kent*" which refers to Rose Hill on page 276 as "*Rose Hill, in the Parish of Bobbing, the residence of William Augustus Mann, Esq*". It goes on to describe the house as "*a modern building, in the cottage style, pleasantly situated on an elevation north of the London and Canterbury road, about ½ mile east from Key Street, and 39 miles from the Metropolis.*" An illustration of Rose Hill is contained in the book which depicts a two-storey brick house with a thatched roof; sash windows; and an entrance porch with rectangular glazed panels probably C19. The print shows a driveway and a lawn to the front (south) of the house and the Tithe map (c1840) indicates a yard, outbuildings and a kitchen garden to the rear (north) of the house. The tithe award schedule describes the property as "*House, Lawn, Stable, Yard and Garden*" covering in excess of one acre together with the surrounding land described as "*shrubbery*" producing a property in excess of six acres, although the map shows the majority of this shrubbery as lying alongside the access roads from the Dover Road to the house. The Tithe schedule details other land owned by the Simpsons which includes the area between Rose Hill and the A2 road (which was to become, in the early C20, the public park known as Grove Park), as well as a large area of land adjacent to, and to the north of, Rose Hill (currently, 2021, forming more sports pitches, Grove Park Primary School and C20 housing).

Valentine Simpson died at Bobbing Court in 1832 and on his death his younger son George inherited Bobbing Court and its estate, including Rose Hill. George had taken holy orders and became vicar of Bobbing from 1818 to 1840. Bagshaw's Directory of 1847 states that Rose Hill was the seat of Reverend

George Simpson and his son George Stringer Simpson. The 1851 census confirmed that the Simpsons were still in residence at Rose Hill although by now the son was the vicar of Bobbing, the elder George Simpson dying in April 1854. The 1861 census records that Richard Callaway, gardener, was living at Rose Hill cottage.

The Return of Owners of Land of 1873 showed that the Reverend George S Simpson together with Percy Simpson, his brother, were the principal landowners in Bobbing of 713 acres. George continued to live at Rose Hill until his death on 20 October 1888 when the house passed to a relative, the Reverend William H Simpson, his brother Percy having predeceased him on 11 March earlier that year. In December 1898, under the Enclosure Acts 1843 to 1882, various exchange of lands occurred between William H Simpson and Sybilla Lucy Hilton who was a younger sister of George Stringer Simpson and Percy Simpson. Rose Hill and its grounds of 4½ acres were transferred from William H Simpson to Sybilla. Although Rose Hill was served by two accesses from the main Dover to the south only one access was transferred, suggesting that William H Simpson retained the ownership of the other access. Sybilla's husband, Henry Hilton, who was rector of nearby Milstead between 1843 and 1850, was succeeded by the Reverend William Hilton Simpson, possibly a sibling of George and Sybilla.

The three censuses between 1881 and 1911 identify the occupants of Rose Hill. Walter Stagg, a wool stapler (grader of wool) and fell-monger (dealer in animals hides), and his family were tenants between 1891 and 1908 (included in the Sittingbourne Directory for that year). By the 1911 census Guy de Mattos and his family were in residence with Percy Pearson and his family occupying the gardener's cottage. The Sittingbourne Directory of 1926 records that Admiral Herbert William Gibbs Doyne was living at Rose Hill with his gardener and chauffeur, Bill Culmer, living in the gardener's cottage with his wife Ivy. Doyne had purchased Rose Hill for £1600 from Lucy Florence Hilton on 26 April 1920. Lucy had inherited the property on 23 November 1915 on the death of her husband, Henry George Hilton, who had inherited it on the death of his mother, Sybilla Lucy Hilton on 11 March 1902. The conveyance of sale identifies the property in two parts, the first being the "*dwellinghouse, stables, outbuilding, cottage and garden*" of 2 acres and 26 perches and the second an adjacent area of 2 acres and 36 perches to the south known as "*the Park*" which on the attached map includes a tennis court. Access to the property was via the western avenue with Doyne and Lucy sharing the cost of repairs of the approach road. Doyne was also required to erect a fence along the southern boundary. The rest of the land which was to become Grove Park, was owned by Lucy who had by now inherited all land surrounding the Doyne property.

On 13 October 1928 Lucy sold the Grove Park land (15a,1r,24p) for £2,000 to the Watling Trust Limited whose offices were at 52 West Steet, Sittingbourne. On 28 August 1931 the Watling Trust agreed that the Trustees of Core Court Cricket Club could lease part of the grounds for 299 years at an annual rent of 2/-. The cricket and hockey clubs had had an annual tenancy to use the ground at Bell Road in Sittingbourne until 1931 when this land was developed for housing.

The Watling Trust conveyed the Grove Park land to Sittingbourne and Milton U.D.C. on 13 October 1931, but subject to the lease with the cricket club.

George Andrews and his son Harold, who were Managing Directors of Smeed Dean, the local brickworks, had been associated with both Core Court cricket and hockey clubs, with Harold holding the position of Chairman of both clubs in 1929. With the help of the Andrews family and the County Fields Playing Association, the cricket club bought the freehold of the central area of the Grove Park land which lies between the grounds of Rose Hill and the A2 Dover Road. The club installed services and constructed a pavilion at the north end of the ground. George had bought the surrounding adjacent land intending to give it to the Council to be used as a public open space. In order to protect the area from possible future development, however, George and the cricket club agreed that the whole area should be transferred to the Council ownership, with the club having a 199-year lease on the central area; this remains the situation today (2021). George died in 1934 and a memorial of his gift was installed on the ground, which was unveiled by his wife on 3 July 1937. The memorial included seats, drinking fountains and a plaque recording George's gift. The memorial was later dismantled but the commemorative plaque was reinstalled nearby.

During the 1930s and 1940s the cricket and hockey clubs maintained a full-time groundsman, except for during the 2nd world war when cricket matches continued to be played. In 1947 the two clubs were amalgamated to become Core Court Club. Jack Eaton took over as groundsman from the end of the war until 1958 when he was succeeded by Peter Reynolds until 2001. Peter created one of the finest hockey pitches in the south of England. During the 1960s the hockey club became very successful fielding three teams so that the two pitches at the Grove were no longer adequate. The club hired a ground in Crystals Lane in Sittingbourne until this was sold for housing a few years later. The Core Court Club raised funds to purchase land at the top of the hill to the north of Rose Hill where two hockey pitches and a cricket square were laid out. In 1974 the Gore Court Club was successful in obtaining planning permission to build new changing rooms, toilets, enlarged bar and kitchen facilities all being located around the original pavilion built in the 1930s.

Following the death of Admiral Doyne in 1936, his executors sold Rose Hill to Mr John Stocker of Manor House, Key Street on 15 February 1940 for £1000, having paid a deposit for the property of £100 in 1936. Mr Stocker died on 2 November 1950 but his wife, Catherine Jessie Stocker, remained at the house for a further twenty years. On the death of Mrs Stocker in 1973 her niece, Marjorie Lilian Bates, inherited Rose Hill. Marjorie was in discussion with a property developer who proposed building a number of houses on the site but this was refused by the local council in 1974/75. While empty the house was damaged by vandals and by fire and the local residents requested that it be demolished. Swale District Council eventually bought the site from Mrs Bates on 2 December 1977 for £16,500.

In the late 1980s there was a need for an artificial pitch for hockey. A proposal to lay down a pitch at the Grove produced local opposition, and the planning application was refused in 1988. With the assistance of Swale BC an artificial pitch was laid at Westlands School so now (2021) no hockey is played at the Grove. The top ground is now used by Sittingbourne Rugby Football Club which was established in 1976.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Grove Park lies alongside, and to the north of, the A2 London Road immediately to the east of Key Street and approximately 2km west of Sittingbourne. The 8ha (20 acres) site is bordered on the south side by a metal railing at the back of the pavement of the A2 road which is generally at a slightly higher elevation, with the boundary bank containing several mature trees including lime, oak, sycamore, holly and beech. A tree belt of mature oaks, ash and sycamore extends along the southern half of the western boundary, the northern half of this boundary is within a heavily wooded area which rises above the flat recreation area of Grove Park.

The northern boundary coincides with the edge of the woods which form the northern section of Grove Park. The remains of a concrete post and wire fence marks the original boundary between the former Rose Hill property and the adjacent sport pitches to the north. The eastern boundary is unfenced for approximately 75m along its southern half, being adjacent to Sandford Road. Fences to the rear of domestic dwellings form the boundary along the remainder.

Grove Park is comprised of two very different areas. The flat southern grassed area used for the enjoyment of various recreational activities and the northern wooded area which slopes down to the south, used by walkers. Glimpses of extensive views to the south continue to be lost as the site of the former house and gardens become more overgrown and more densely wooded.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to Grove Park is through an approximately 75m long open eastern boundary which extends northwards from the southern boundary. At the northern end of this section a short access road from Sandford Road provides vehicular access to the carpark which runs north to south along the eastern side of the park. A short access road from the north end of the carpark connects to a further gated and fenced parking area for visitors to the club.

Three ungated paved pedestrian access paths from the Dover Road occur along the southern boundary: these are located at either end of the park and opposite Wises Lane, approximately 100m from the western entrance. The western entrance is also wide enough for vehicles access but a barrier prohibits unauthorised access. This entrance also allows vehicular access along the full length of the western boundary for ground maintenance vehicles and access to a domestic dwelling located adjacent to the park at its northern end which is understood to formerly have been a groundsman's residence (pers. comm).

A pedestrian access path is also located at the northwest corner of the grounds which leads northwards to proceed along the western end of the top ground used by the Sittingbourne Rugby Football Club and the playing fields of Grove Park Primary School before crossing the railway line.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

The white painted pavilion with a slate tiled roof, constructed in the early 1930, is at the centre of the various buildings providing recreational facilities. The pavilion is elevated on a brick faced terrace to provide good views of the cricket field with steps leading down to the playing area. Either side of the pavilion, built in the 1970s, are single storey brick structures with flat roofs which provided changing rooms, toilets, enlarged bar and kitchen facilities. A two-storey structure with a flat roof, originally intended to be squash courts, was constructed on the western end of the complex in the 1970's This building is currently (2021) used as changing rooms and fitness suites known as 121 The Grove.

ROSE HILL WOODS

The site of the former Rose Hill house and accompanying pleasure ground is now (2021) covered with mainly deciduous trees, the majority of which are sycamore. The house was demolished in the 1970s but some evidence of former brick walls is still visible. Greenwood's book of 1838 showed lawns to the south (entrance) and east fronts of Rose Hill which were still present on the 1st and 2nd editions of the O S Maps. These first two editions, (1862-1885 and 1897-1890 respectively), indicate the details of the former kitchen garden and outbuildings at Rose Hill. The kitchen garden, mentioned in the 'advertizement'. was located to the north west of the house, protected by trees to its west and north sides and possibly a narrow orchard along the southern boundary. The kitchen garden was subdivided into six areas by paths, possibly edged with fruit trees, which connected to a perimeter garden path. A further path is shown just south of the garden extending along the length of the narrow orchard which returns on itself at the western end. More details are found on the 1st edition but the 2nd edition does indicate that a greenhouse had been installed. The open ground to the south of the pleasure ground lawn is shown with a perimeter of deciduous trees along the southern boundary before giving way to furse (scrubland) as the ground drops away down the slope.

The 3rd edition O S Map, published in 1908, shows that a tennis court had been installed on the open ground to the south-west of the house and a gap in the trees along the southern boundary permitted views to the south from the house. An aerial photograph taken in 1946, when the house was still occupied, shows that the gardens were still being cultivated and a perimeter wall or fence existed around the kitchen garden. A tree preservation order, produced in 1975 by Swale District Council, lists twenty-seven trees including oak, yew, holly, beech, sycamore and beech. Some of these have survived. Subsequent aerial photos taken in 1990 and 2008 show the slow encroachment of trees, mainly sycamore, on the site so that almost all visual evidence of former gardens and lawn have been lost.

GROVE PARK RECREATION GROUND

The recreation ground has seen many changes since it was established in the 1930s. Prior to this date it had previously been used by William Thomson for grazing his dairy cows. As laid out in the 1930s the central area remains as the cricket ground, the extent of which is still designated by a ring of wooden

benches marking the cricket boundary. Surviving trees, mainly oak and beech, from two avenues, form the boundary on both the east and west sides of the ground. Stumps of mature trees delineate the extent of these avenues which are shown on aerial photos of 1946 and 1980. The two avenues formed the approaches to the private residence Rose Hill and were probably planted early C19. Individual mature trees, an oak in the south-east corner, a sycamore in the south-west and a horse chestnut in the north-east provide part of the setting for the ground.

A children's playground has been constructed near southern boundary at the western end enclosed within a green painted railing. Modern day maps identify a skatepark near the western boundary which is now converted to a basketball practice area with adjacent seating. A small square concrete framed building with a pitched tiled roof is located on the western edge of the cricket boundary. The building, which was presumably was used by the scorer during cricket matches, has been vandalised and is no longer in use.

The north-east corner of the ground has recently been reseeded and is protected from the main cricket area by a metal fence. This area was previously used for tennis and the 1980 and 2008 aerial photos identify several courts. A 1975 map shows a tennis court in the north east corner of the ground which is now used for additional parking for users of the pavilion buildings.

The 4th edition O S map (1929-1952) identifies a drinking fountain in the south-west corner of the ground which was part of the memorial erected in memory of George Andrews who had gifted the ground to the local authority. The memorial was subsequently demolished but the plaque was later erected nearby. The 4th edition map also shows lavatories midway along the eastern boundary but these have now been removed.

REFERENCES

Books, articles, webpages:

Edward Hasted, Parishes: Bobbing, *The History and Topological Survey of the County of Kent* Vol VI (1798), pp. 192- 203

Christopher Greenwood, *The Epitome of County History, County of Kent* (London 1838) Plate opp. p.283

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Archaeologia Cantiana Vol XXVI Kent Archaeological Society (1904), p 188
Sittingbourne Directory, 1908 and 1926

Michael Fairley, Peter Judges and Dorothy Fairly, *Bobbing-Two Thousand Years of Kentish History* (Mifair Publishing 2007)

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Roger A C Cockett, *Rose Hill, Bobbing-An early Cottage Ornee near Sittingbourne*, (Kent Archaeological Society 16 September 2015)

Rose Hill House, The building, its owners and those who lived there. (Historical Research Group of Sittingbourne June 2017)

Maps:

Ordnance Survey Map British Library, ref OSD 113 (1797)

Tithe Map of Bobbing, 1841, surveyed 1840 (Kent History and Library Centre)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st Edition 1862-1875

OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd Edition 1897-1900

OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd Edition 1907-1923

OS 25" to 1 mile: 4th Edition 1929-1952

OS Modern Mapping

Illustrations:

Various aerial photographs 1946-2008, Kent Historic Environment Record

Archival Items:

Land Tax Assessment for Bobbing 1780-1832 ref Q/RPI/35) Kent History and Library Centre

Lease 27 September 1796 ref U1285/T9 Kent History and Library Centre

Conveyance 28 September 1796 ref U1877/T1 Kent History and Library Centre

Small paper "Advertizement" ref U1877/T! Kent History and Library Centre

National Archives PCC wills ref prob 11/1714/425 Frances Montresor

National Archives PCC wills ref prob 11/1807//52 Valentine Simpson

Tithe Apportionments for Parish of Bobbing, 13 May 1839, Kent Archaeological Society

U K Census 1851-1911

Order of Exchange 30 December 1898 ref U1877/T1 Kent History and Library
Centre Familysearch website Sibylla Lucy Simpson

Tree Preservation Order 1975 Swale Borough Council

Deed Packet files for The Grove and Rose Hill, Sittingbourne Borough Council

Kent Garden Compendium 1996 Number 124

Parks and Gardens UK entry reference id 1550

Kent Historic Environment Record Reference TQ 86 SE 294

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Edited by Harriet Jordan

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Fig. 1 Boundary map



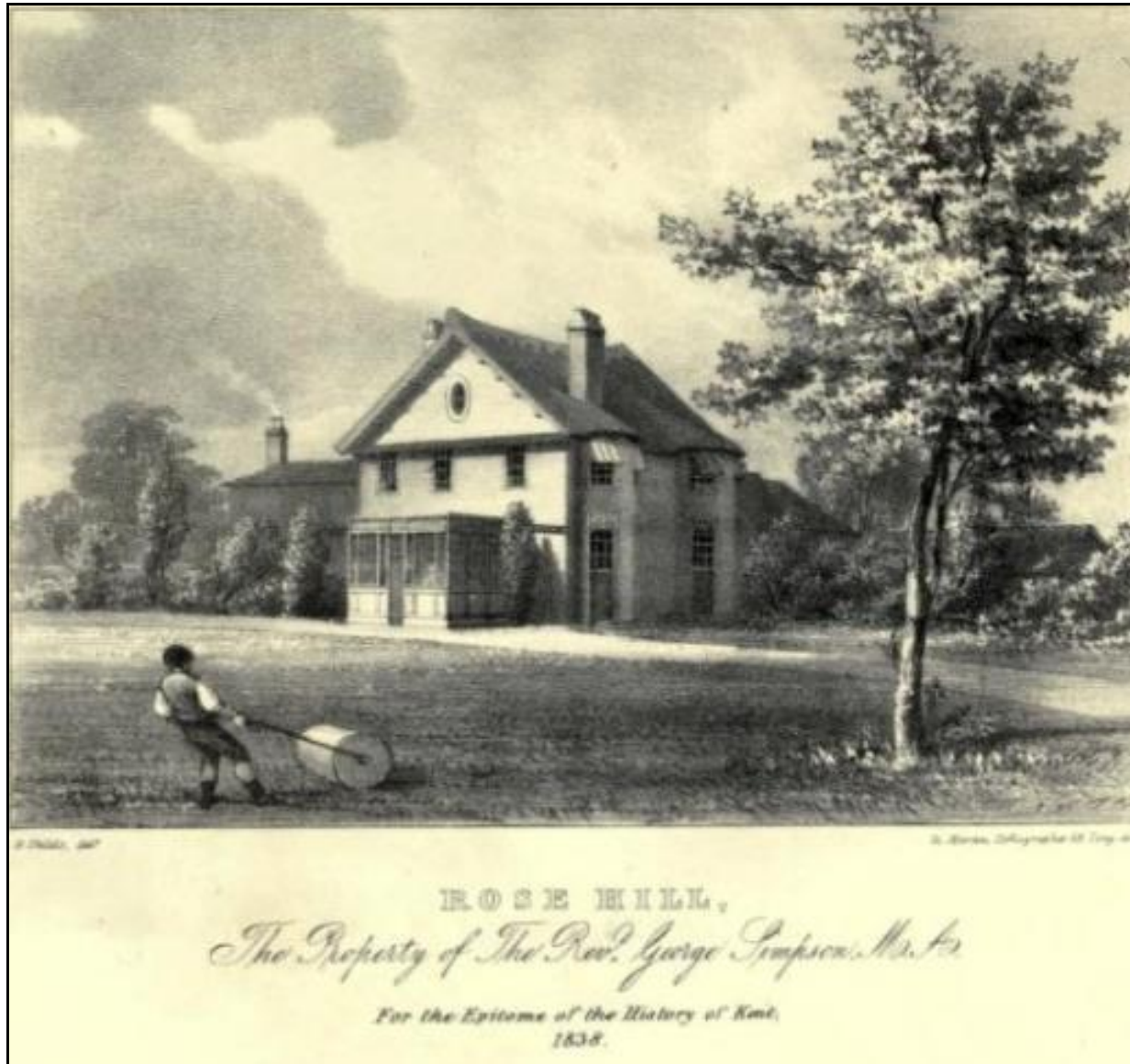
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Fig. 2 Aerial photograph (2016)



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Fig. 3 1838 Lithograph from Christopher Greenwood's *The Epitome of The County of Kent (1838)*



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Fig. 4 1841 Tithe Map of the Parish of Bobbing



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Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25” Map (1862-1872)



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Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25” Map (1897-1900)

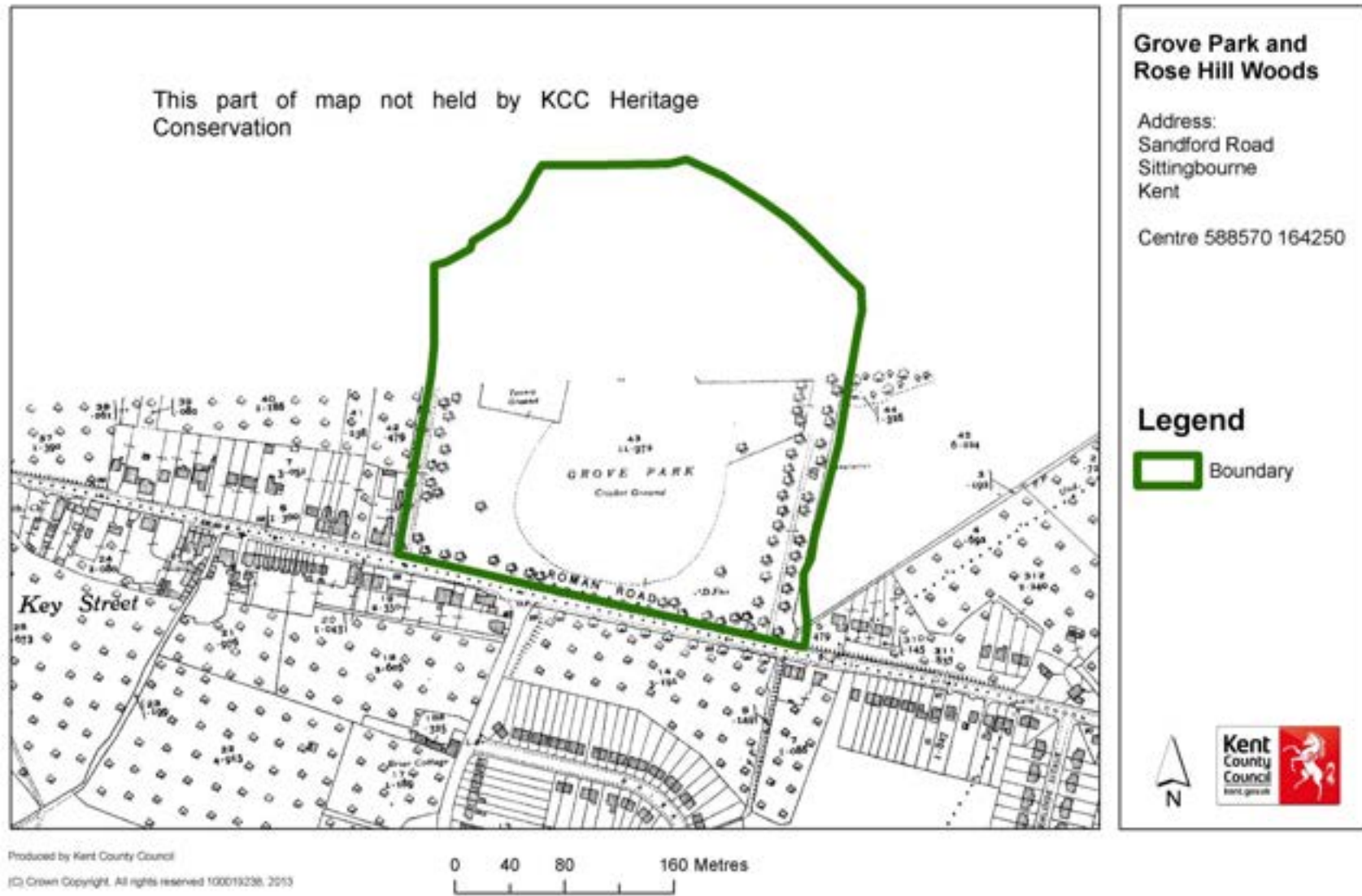


Fig. 7 Ordnance Survey 3rd edition Map (1907-1923)



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Fig. 8 Ordnance Survey 4th edition Map (1929-1952)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2022 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 9 Grove Park looking North-East



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2022 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 10 Grove Park looking South-East



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2022 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 11 Grove Park Children’s Play Area



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Fig. 12 Grove Park Specimen Holm Oak

