

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Swale District



Sheppey Cemetery, Isle of Sheppey



Sheppey Cemetery

Isle of Sheppey, Swale

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

SITE DESCRIPTION

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Entrance notice board

FIGURE 2: Boundary Map

FIGURE 3: Key Views Map

FIGURE 4: Aerial Photograph 2016

FIGURE 5: 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map (1862-1875)

FIGURE 6: 2nd edition Ordnance Survey Map (1897-1900)

FIGURE 7: 3rd edition Ordnance Survey Map (1907-1923)

FIGURE 8: 4th edition Ordnance Survey Map (1929-1952)

FIGURE 9: Ordnance Survey Modern Map (2013)

FIGURE 10: Cross of Sacrifice - Commonwealth War Graves Commission
(2020)

FIGURE 11: General view (2020)

FIGURE 12: Victorian grave (2020)

FIGURE 13: Jewish section (2020)

FIGURE 14: Pastureland boundary (2020)

FIGURE 15: Sheppey cemetery plot plan

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Tony Ponting for his help at the Minster Gatehouse Museum.

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

**SHEPPEY CEMETERY
WESTERN AVENUE
HALFWAY**

ISLE OF SHEPPEY

Centred on NGR 593075 173122

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

Sheppey Cemetery, formerly known as Sheerness and Sheppey Cemetery was established by the General Sheppey Cemetery Company Limited in 1857. Two existing burial grounds on Sheppey were due to close and Sheerness had a rapidly-growing population with an important dockyard. The cemetery is still in use (2020) and is maintained by Swale Borough Council. There are some ornate Victorian graves in the oldest part, many military graves from both First and Second World Wars and a small Jewish section, separated from the main area.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Evidential

The cemetery contains both First and Second World War graves, not grouped together but scattered across the site. These are looked after by The Commonwealth War Graves Commission. A cross of sacrifice was erected at the centre of the cemetery and this is identical to those seen in British War Cemeteries throughout the world.

A small section of the cemetery, separated off by a privet hedge from the main area, contains eleven Jewish graves. The old Jewish cemetery in Hope Street closed in 1855.

Historical

Sheppey Cemetery dates from 1857, one of five cemeteries for which Swale Borough Council is responsible. The others are Bell Road, Murston and Iwade Cemeteries, all in Sittingbourne, and Love Lane Cemetery in Faversham.

More cemetery space in was needed in mid-C19 as Sheerness was developing fast owing to both the dockyard and tourism. In response to the Public Health Act (1848) and the Burial Act (1855) land was bought for new cemeteries, many laid out as a rectangular grid as at Sheppey, and insalubrious burial grounds were forced to close.

The cemetery is the only one on the Isle of Sheppey not attached to a religious denomination.

Aesthetic

The oldest part of the cemetery contains many ornate graves and monuments, surrounded by a variety of mature trees including many yew. The Western Avenue end has pleasant views over pastureland.

Communal

The cemetery is still in use (2020) for both burial and cremation. Located in the centre of Halfway this public space is well-used regularly by local residents for walking their dogs and by children playing.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

East of Halfway Road important archaeological remains were found in the late 1990s at the Wimpey Homes Abbots Mead site. There was evidence of occupation during the Neolithic, Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, Late Iron Age, Saxon and Medieval periods. The majority of features seem to date from the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and include two possible round house structures, one adjacent to a pit that contained a perforated ceramic slab, pottery sherds and animal bone. In addition, a Saxon antler and bone comb of Northumbrian manufacture, if correctly identified only the second to be found south of Yorkshire, was discovered at the site. The site also lies in an area known to contain Medieval/post-Medieval saltworks although most of these are on slightly lower ground to the north. The main archaeological interest at the cemetery relates to features associated with the cemetery itself. These include surviving features such as the pattern of pathways but also the buried remains of the mortuary chapel and Cemetery Lodge.

CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sheppey Cemetery, formerly known as Isle of Sheppey Cemetery (1963) was established by the General Sheppey Cemetery Company Limited in 1857. The company comprised seven local gentlemen, all residents of either Blue Town or Mile Town, Sheerness, who subscribed to an equal share in the company which had a registered address of 9 Hope Street, Sheerness. The shareholders were: George Elliot (grocer), Charles Atkins (gentleman), Sidney South (collector), John Cole (stationer), Stephen Hare (gentleman), Joseph Henry Burley (baker), Thomas Morton Rigg (stationer).

In the mid-C19 there was an increasing need for more burial space as the population of towns and cities was growing rapidly. Existing churchyards were full and the Public Health Act of 1848 led to the closure of insanitary burial spaces. It was common for new cemeteries to be constructed by private companies. The Sheppey Cemetery Company was advised to find new ground as Minster Abbey Churchyard was to close in 1855 and the workhouse cemetery only had capacity to provide for another 10 years.

The land for the cemetery was purchased at a cost of £450 by the company from Edward Henry Banks (c1835-1860) of Sheppey Court who sold part of the land around the Court. The land was locally called Four Acres although it was estimated for sale at three acres. The 1st edition OS map (1862-1875) shows a cemetery area of 1.3 ha (approx 3 acres).

Minster and Sheerness formed a single parish with poor relations between the old rural community of Minster and the fast-expanding urban Sheerness. Both communities were pleased when Sheerness became a separate parish between 1851 and 1861 censuses. Halfway was a hamlet between the two.

The C19 was a period of rapid growth for Sheerness. The original Royal Navy Dockyard had been established in C17 but the building of a new, much bigger, dockyard was started in 1813 and completed in 1830. Sheerness became a fashionable watering-place with the building of the Royal Hotel and elegant terraces replacing insalubrious "rookeries". From a fishing village the town grew to having a population of 18,000. Holy Trinity and The Dockyard Church as well as Sheerness Pier were built in 1830's and in 1860 the railway from Sittingbourne to Sheerness opened.

Between 1897 and 1923 (2nd and 3rd eds OS), an additional 0.8 ha rectangle of land was purchased, enlarging the cemetery to the south-west. By the mid C20 (4th ed OS 1929-1952) the cemetery had been further enlarged, this time to the north-west, so doubling its original size. A later extension was added taking the area further to the west.

The Sheppey cemetery was acquired from the Cemetery Company by Sheerness Urban District Council in 1944 and the company was wound up. The cemetery was subsequently passed, upon local government reorganisation, to Queensborough in Sheppey Borough Council and then to Swale Borough Council.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Sheppey Cemetery occupies a level site of 7.4 ha on the western side of Halfway Road (formerly Halfway House Road), A250, approximately 400 metres north of Halfway Houses and 2 km south of Sheerness.

To the north of the cemetery stands Sheppey Court, listed Grade II. This was built as a country retreat for Sir Edward Banks (1770-1835) grandfather of the Banks who sold land to the cemetery company. Sir Edward Banks was an important building contractor with many well-known London projects. Locally, he contributed to the building of the naval dockyard at Sheerness and founded Banks Town, which later became Sheerness-on-Sea.

Initially the only buildings near the cemetery were the adjacent Sheppey Court and some small houses 200 metres away on the main road at Halfway. Over

time both sides of the road from Halfway to Sheerness were developed near the cemetery, leaving pastureland to the west.

The boundary of the cemetery consists of a mixture of wall, wooden fencing and wire fencing. Along the main road there is a low wall surmounted by a picket fence affording a good view into the cemetery from the road. The southern edge, bordering Lynsted Road, has a 6 ft brick wall as far as the junction with Belmont Road. From here westwards to the Western Avenue entrance, the cemetery is divided off from private housing by a mixture of high closeboard wooden fencing, brick wall and waveney panels. West of Western Avenue within the cemetery are a couple more houses, lodge, toilets and cemetery administration buildings. There is also an area being used for new burials. To the north and west, the cemetery abuts pastureland and the boundary is an open wire fence. This fence continues east along the northern boundary as far as the early C21 housing development on part of Sheppey Court estate, known as The Old Dairy, which is screened by a high closeboard wooden fence.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to the cemetery is at its western end where Western Avenue extends northwards into the cemetery and forms a turning circle. A small area of the cemetery by Western Avenue has been carved out to provide a car park, with a narrow pedestrian entrance to the cemetery.

At the central point of the eastern boundary, providing access from Halfway Road (A250), the road to Sheerness, is a double entrance with wooden gates, wide enough to allow vehicles to enter through one gate and leave by the other. This provided the principal entrance to the cemetery as first laid out in the mid C19.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES AND GRAVES

There are no buildings within the main part of the cemetery. The original mortuary chapel stood on the eastern boundary between the two gates of the double entrance; it was demolished in the latter half of C20. A lodge, also part of the original layout and called Cemetery lodge, formerly stood on Halfway Road, at the south-eastern corner of the site; this has also now gone.

The cemetery is laid out as a grid with clear pathways throughout.

In the centre of the cemetery stands a cross of sacrifice erected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The cemetery contains 128 burials of servicemen of the 1914 – 1918 war and 38 of the 1939 – 1945 war, positioned throughout the cemetery. Of the 38 WWII burials 18 are unidentified, all of them Merchant Seamen.

Notable burials in the cemetery are Uwe Johnson (1934-1984), a well-known German writer who lived in Sheerness, and Sergeant Frederick Peake (1828-1906) who fought and was wounded in the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava.

There have been several German military burials from both World Wars. WWI: Two seamen of the cruiser Mainz of the German Imperial Navy, Stokers Hantz and Kulpman, were buried on 30th September 1914. The duty was undertaken by the Admiralty with Royal Naval Reserve men carrying the coffins and a crowd of four hundred gathered respectfully around the graves.

WWII: Pilot Hauptman Hermann Prochnow's body was washed ashore in June 1940 after his plane had been shot down in Suffolk. He was given an honourable funeral with an R.A.F. Escort and firing party. His coffin was draped with a Swastika flag and borne to the graveside by six airmen and officers. In 1962 Prochnow's body and those of 9 other German military were exhumed and reburied in the new Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery. The War Graves Commission therefore ceded these plots back to the Council.

At the very north-eastern corner of the site is a small area, 11 m by 11 m, separated from the main cemetery by a privet hedge, designated as the Jewish section. It contains 11 graves; seven of the headstones bear the name "Jacob", the others are illegible. Before the founding of Sheppey Cemetery, Jewish burials were in a small cemetery in Hope Street, Sheerness. By 1853, there were only 15 seat-holders in the synagogue and the Hope Street cemetery closed in 1855. The Jewish section at Sheerness and Sheppey Cemetery was presumably part of the original 1850s layout (1st ed OS).

Many large monuments are to be seen in the oldest (eastern) part of the cemetery near the main road. Of note amongst these are the monuments of the Banks family and of a few other local affluent families. This eastern side also contains a number of old yew trees. Historic mapping (1st ed OS) shows the eastern boundary lined with deciduous trees, with a few conifers by the northern boundary and others scattered throughout the cemetery.

OTHER

At the Western Avenue entrance there is an information board with the cemetery plot plan.

REFERENCES:

Books, articles, websites

Sheila Judge, *The Isle of Sheppey*

W. H. Studt, *A Chronology of the Isle of Sheppey*

Lisa Tyler, *The History of Sheppey*

Tony Pointing, *Index to Sheppey Cemetery records (booklet)*

Tony Pointing, *Index to Sheppey Cemetery records (CD)*

Parsons' Isle of Sheppey Directory and Guide 1902:

<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4/id/167111>

Marcus Roberts, Sheerness and Blue Town:

www.jtrails.org.uk/trails/sheerness-and-blue-town/history

Historic England remembrance: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1259760>

Facebook: The Sheppey History Page

Maps

1st edition Ordnance Survey Map (1862-1875)

2nd edition Ordnance Survey Map (1897-1900)

3rd edition Ordnance Survey Map (1907-1923)

4th edition Ordnance Survey Map (1929-1952)

Ordnance Survey Modern map

Tithe Map c1840

Archival Items

Isle of Sheppey General Cemetery Company Ltd, incorporation document
(*National Archives, Kew : BT 41/324/1880*)

Isle of Sheppey General Cemetery Company Ltd. Details of shares held each year
(*National Archives, Kew; BT 31/30672/233*)

Research and description by Terri Zbyszewska

Harriet Jordan (editor)

Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 1 Entrance notice board



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 2 Boundary map



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 3 Key views map



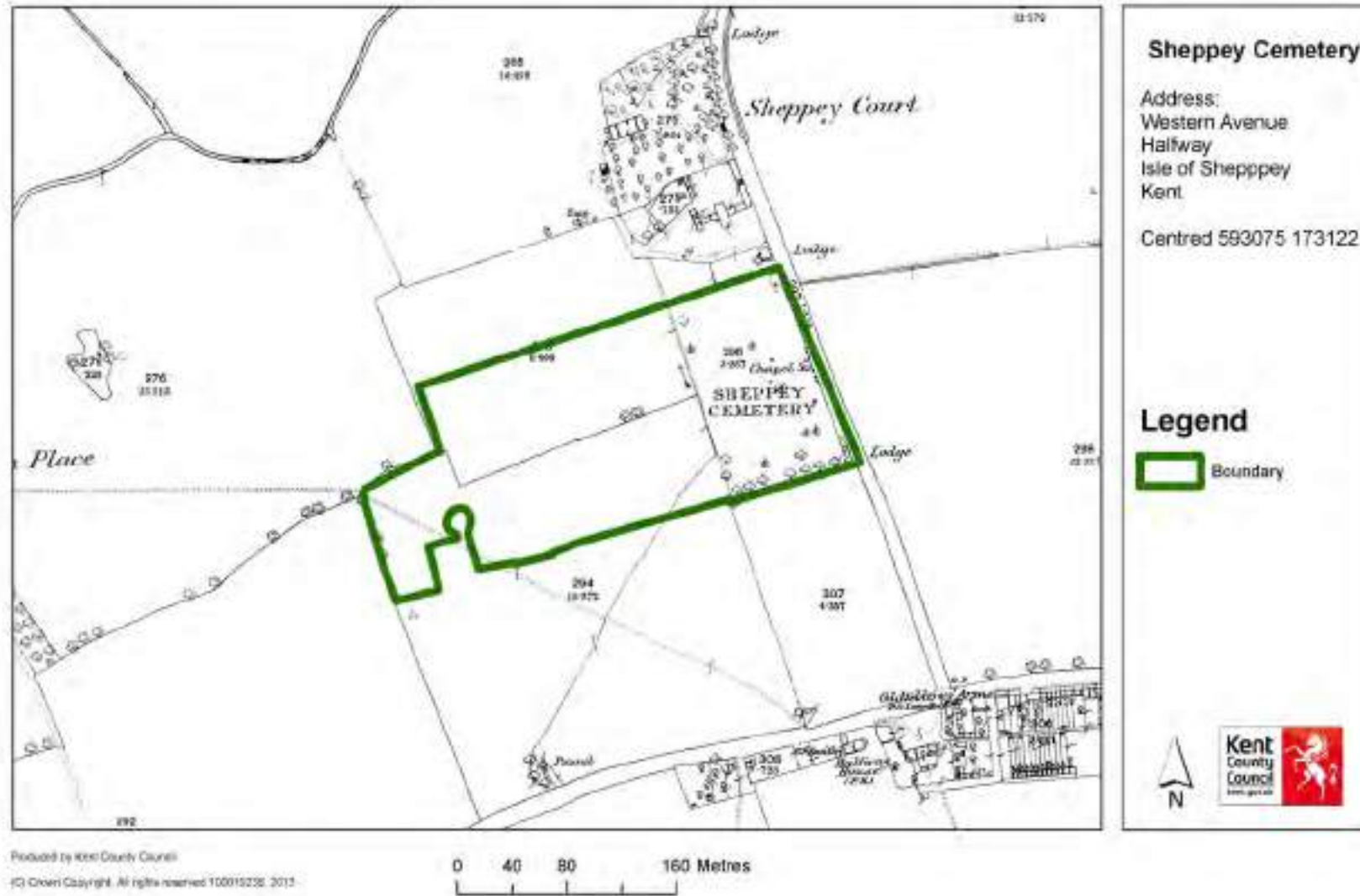
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 4 Aerial photograph (2016)



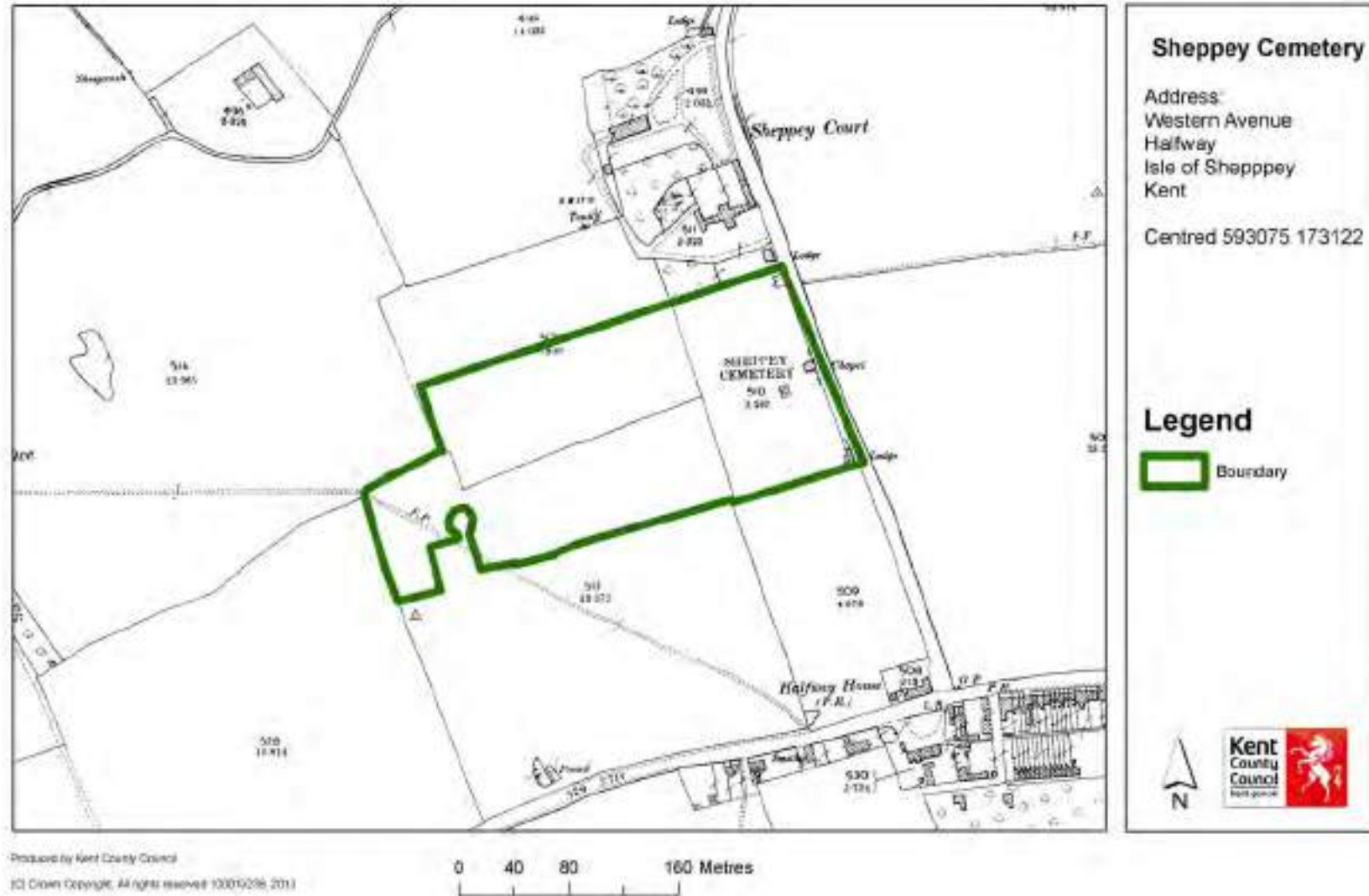
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25 inch map (1862-1875)



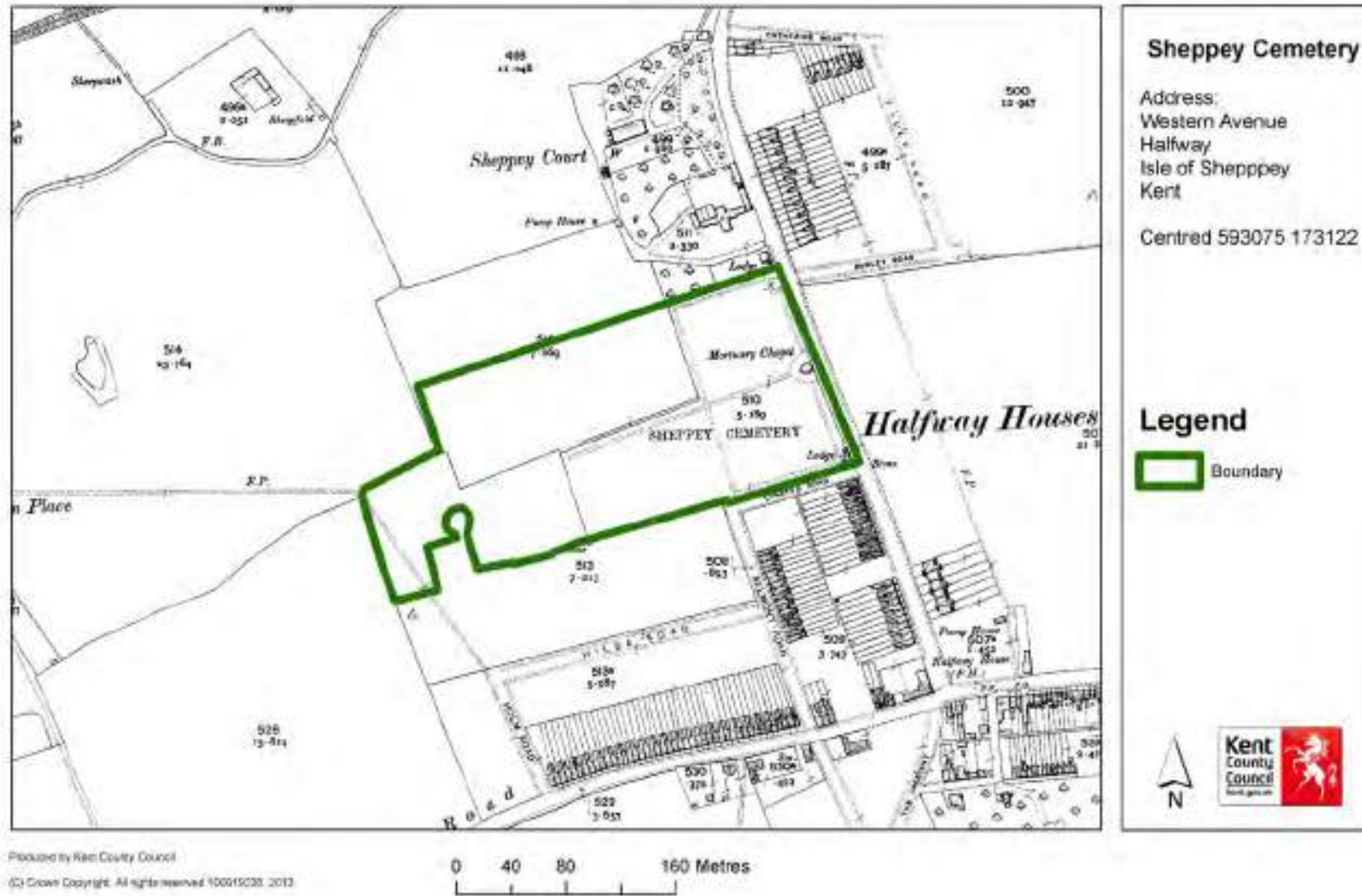
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25 inch map (1897-1900)



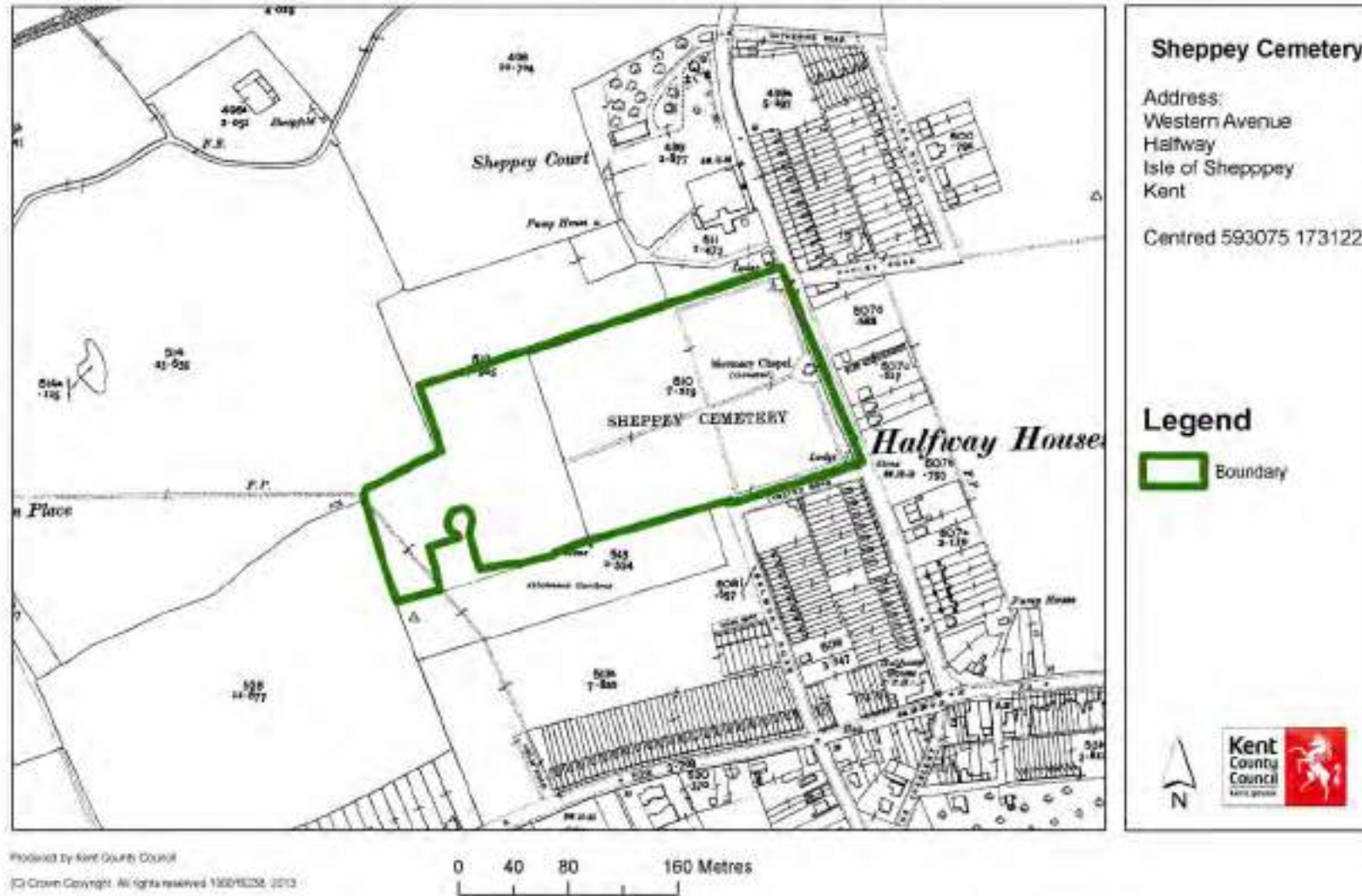
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 7 Ordnance Survey 3rd edition 25 inch map (1907-1923)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 8 Ordnance Survey 4th edition 25 inch map (1929-1952)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 9 Modern Ordnance Survey Mastermap data



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 10 Cross of Sacrifice - Commonwealth War Graves Commission (2020)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 11 General view (2020)



Fig. 12 Victorian grave (2020)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 13 Jewish section (2020)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 14 Pastureland boundary (2020)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2020 review of Swale Borough

Fig. 15 Sheppey cemetery plot plan

