The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Medway



Broomhill Park
Strood

March 2014

Broomhill Park

Strood

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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 Medway Council in 2013 -14, covers sites within the Medway 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 Medway local authority area along with others identified by Medway Council. The review has been undertaken using English Heritage'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 Medway should the Council wish to progress this in future[1]. 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.

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Kent Gardens Trust
www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk

English Heritage
www.english-heritage.org.uk

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

LOCATION

KENT **BROOMHILL PARK**
MEDWAY
STROOD

Centred on 573068 170074

King Arthur Drive, Strood, Kent, ME2 3LZ

Broomhill Park lies 1km north-west of Strood town centre.

BRIEF HISTORY

Broomhill is believed to owe its name to the broom plant that was first grown on the hill during the C17, and continued to grow in profusion well into the C20. The history of the hill itself has been well-documented, particularly the recording of its strategic importance for various military campaigns from the times of the Romans (Buchanan).

In 1264, Simon de Montfort was believed to have planned his military campaign against Henry III on the site; in the1640s, during the Civil War, Cromwell's troops were ambushed on Broomhill; and during the Second World War air raid precaution posts and observation posts were set up on the hill to supplement early warning coastal radar systems.

In the early C20, during building works, the skeleton of an ancient Briton was uncovered together with his sword, dagger and an amethyst ring; in 1955 skeletons of mid- C17 origin were also found buried on the hill, probably victims of Spotted Fever prevalent in 1657.

Broomhill has also been important for agrarian farming, limestone quarrying and flour grinding. During the C19 there were a total of 8 windmills on or around Broomhill, but all had disappeared by the mid-C20.

Literary, royal and artistic connections with the site are also well-documented: the diarist Samuel Pepys was known to have travelled frequently up and down the hill on his visits to Rochester and Chatham; the site was also visited by Charles II following his restoration to the throne; and views to and from the hill have been recorded for posterity in sketches and paintings by William Hogarth (1697-1764) and J.M.W.Turner (1775-1851).

Following the First World War, government initiatives encouraged the population to grow their own food, and plots of land were offered for sale on Broomhill for use as allotments (shown on OS map 4th edn.); a few survive in the area but not in the park.

From the 1870s, housing development gradually encroached on the hill (OS map 3rd and 4th edns.) culminating in the 1950s with the building of double rows of

prefabs on former orchards, now the site of the park. By 1977, the remaining prefabs had been demolished, and following an appropriation order for further housing in 1978, the brow of the hill was designated as an 'open community space' by the council, "to prevent any further incursion on one of Medway's green spaces" (Friends of Broomhill). The park was opened in the early 1980s and the play area re-furbished in 1991.

In 2003, Medway Council published its Local Plan which gave Broomhill Park some protection as a designated open space.

In 2007, the community organisation, Friends of Broomhill, was set up and has been working in conjunction with Medway Council and Groundwork UK (an environmental charity), with financial support from the Big Lottery Fund, to create a community park with recreational facilities. All three organisations worked together to produce 'Broomhill Park – A Future Vision' (Friends of Broomhill website) which sets out options for the future development of the site, and provides background information intended to inform future consultations.

In 2010, Medway Council, supported by the Friends of Broomhill, published a comprehensive management and maintenance plan for the years 2010-15. The aim of this document is to set out how the park should be conserved and enhanced for the benefit of the local community.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Broomhill Park, owned by Medway Council, covers c4.5ha and lies on steeply sloping ground 240 feet (circa 80 metres) above sea level; it forms part of the North Downs ridge. The park's boundary comprises trees of mixed species, within which there are small areas of woodland, two children's playgrounds, large areas of lawn interspersed with specimen trees, and intersecting pathways. Pathways also radiate from the brow of the hill to all areas of the town; all entrances to the park are open. Throughout the park, the trees mainly comprise damson, cherry, hawthorn, field maple, hornbeam and horse-chestnut.

To the south of the park there is a c4ha area of privately-owned woodland, to the south-east of which lies a c3ha area of playing fields. At the summit of the park, east of the woodland, lies an area of shrubland, considered to be an important habitat for flora and fauna with recorded sitings of some rare species of plants. There is also a conspicuous mast. The summit offers far-reaching views (known locally as the Two Rivers view): to the north there are views of the river Thames and landmark sites such as Tilbury Fort and Cooling Castle; and to the south there are views of the river Medway and the surrounding towns of Chatham, Rochester and Frindsbury.

LISTING STATUS

Broomhill Park is not registered as a park and garden by English Heritage and there is no entry in Parks and Gardens UK; nor has it been included in the KGT Kent Compendium. There are no buildings, listed or otherwise, on the site.

CONCLUSION

The history of Broomhill is well-documented, and clearly the site has played an important part in the social, economic and industrial development of Strood. Its strategic importance, militarily, has been fully recognized throughout the centuries, not least during the Second World War.

The site as a whole is greatly valued by the community, particularly for recreational activities, dog walking and taking in the views at the summit.

As a landmark site, Broomhill is important for several reasons: its historic associations with literary, royal and artistic figures; the potential for future archaeological discoveries; a habitat for wildlife and a much valued community amenity. Broomhill's significance as a community amenity has already been recognised by Medway Council, as set out in the comprehensive management and maintenance plan covering the years 2010-2015.

Although the site as a whole is considered a significant heritage asset, the municipal park itself is of recent origin with major and continuing developments only since 2007, and, therefore, does not constitute an historic designed landscape. Additionally, other than its setting, it is considered that the park has no significant design features which distinguish it from other, similar, municipal parks. In the absence of an historic designed landscape falling within requisite English Heritage criteria, we have not completed a full review.

REFERENCES

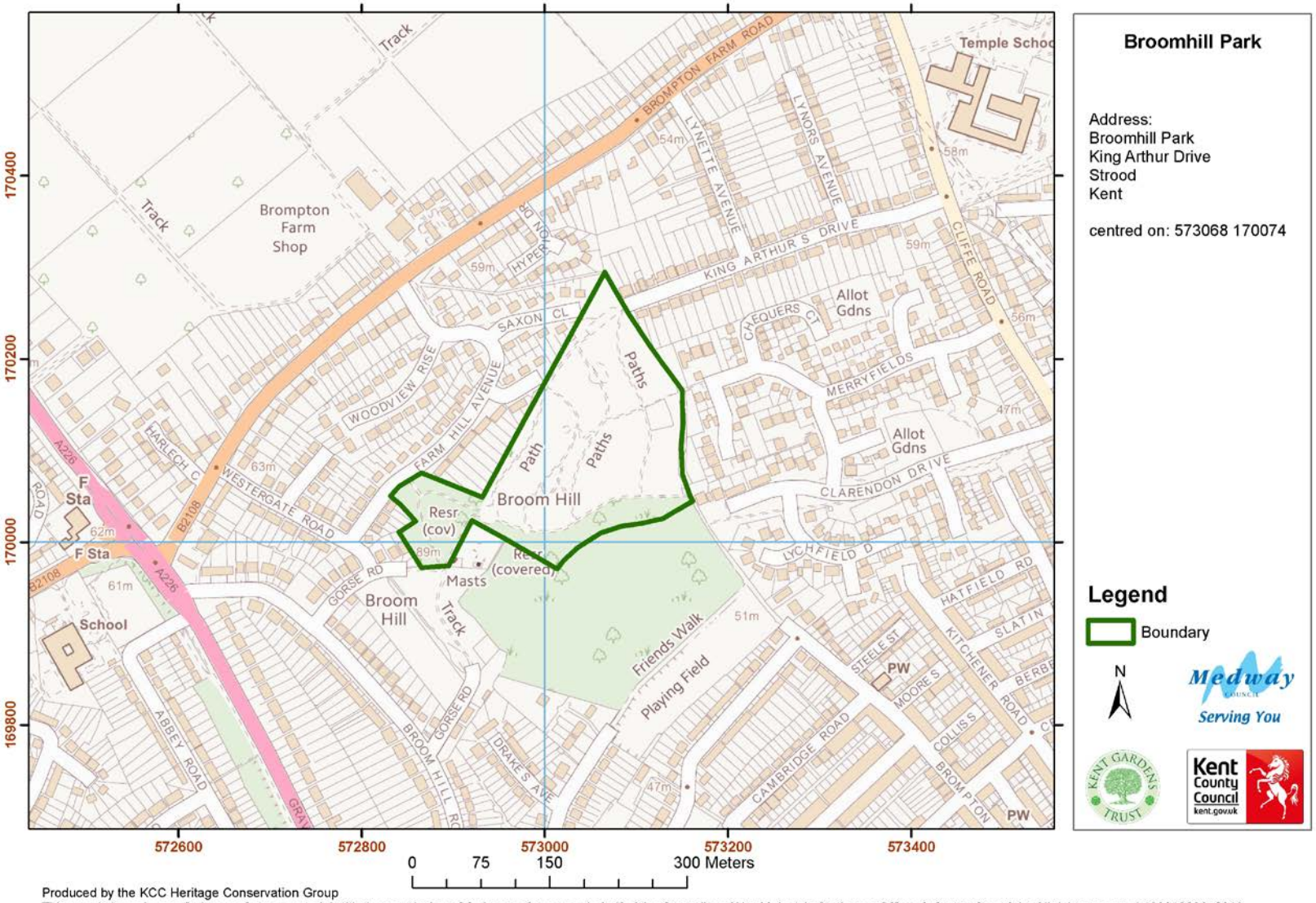
Ordnance Survey map: 25" to 1 mile:
1st edition (1862-75)
2nd edition (1897-1900)
3rd edition (1907-1923)
4th edition (1929- 1952)

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Medway Council *Broomhill Park 5 - Year Management and Maintenance Plan 2010 – 2015*
(2010) http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/BroomhillPark.pdf

Paul and Beverley Howarth
March 2014

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Fig. 1 Boundary map



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 2 Aerial photograph (2012)



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Fig. 3 Photograph of Broomhill Park

