The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Swale District



Queenborough Park, Queenborough

August 2023

Queenborough Park

Queenborough

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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 -23, 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 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.

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 **QUEENBOROUGH PARK**

QUEENBOROUGH

Centred on 590670 172250

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

EVIDENTIAL

Queenborough Park is a public garden opened in 1891 in which the original layout survives with modifications, though there are unlikely to be any surviving plantings.

HISTORICAL

Queenborough was a medieval new town, founded by Edward III in 1368, which developed little over the following 500 years. The Park is sited on a small area of the original common land of the Borough, at the western end of the High Street next to the estuary. The Town Council's hopes for increased prosperity grew with the arrival of the railway in 1860, a reformed borough charter in 1885, and improved ferry services to the continent. One of the marks of this renewed confidence was the provision of the Park – a late example on a small scale of a Victorian municipal amenity.

AESTHETIC

A small but important area of open space in an urban setting. The tree planting along the boundaries provides height for the western termination of the north side of the High Street, and a contrast with the flatness of the estuary beyond the sea wall.

COMMUNAL

Queenborough Park has been a public open space since its opening, with seating for visitors. The memorial to HMS Wildfire III Queenborough, dedicated in 1996, provides a focus for annual commemoration of an important local contribution to naval defences in World War II. Other local events are also held in the Park.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Queenborough Park is located close to the centre of the medieval market town of Queenborough. Notable features in the vicinity include the medieval High Street and former market place, possible medieval tenement plots to the east of the garden and the surrounding medieval borough itself. On the basis of current

evidence, it is possible that previously unknown archaeological features of interest survive at the site.

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

A small late-19th century municipal garden with late-20th memorial to HMS Wildfire III Queenborough, the World War II minesweeping base

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

From 1361 Edward III began the construction of a castle on the Isle of Sheppey to defend the western end of the Swale. He planted a settlement there which became a royal borough, naming it in honour of his Queen, Philippa of Hainault. To attract settlement the charter of incorporation (10 May 1368) conveyed the privileges of holding two markets a week, two fairs a year, the right to elect a mayor and two bailiffs, and independence from the jurisdiction of the Cinque Ports. But the town failed to prosper as more accessible ports developed. It consisted of a single street (the High Street) leading westward from the castle to the estuary, with burgage plots on either side. According to Maurice Beresford, the mediaeval town never grew beyond this nucleus. The castle lost its defensive role, fell out of repair, and was eventually sold by the Commonwealth Government after 1650, subsequently being demolished by the purchaser.

The naval fort and dockyard at Sheerness, only two miles north of Queenborough, were greatly strengthened after the Dutch attack of 1667, and provided both a rival to its neighbour and a source of profit. Queenborough had gained the right under Elizabeth I in the 1570s to send two burgesses to Parliament. This privilege was an important element in the fortunes of the borough until it was disfranchised by the Reform Act of 1832. Hasted described Queenborough in 1798 as *"but a poor fishing town, consisting chiefly of alehouse-keepers, fishermen, and dredgers for oysters; the principal source of wealth to it being the election for members of parliament, which secures to some of the chief inhabitants many lucrative places in the ordnance, and other branches of government."*

The corruption of some of the "chief inhabitants" in the early 19th century, with mismanagement of the oyster fisheries, led to a continued decline until the coming of the railway to Sheppey in 1860. The Swale was bridged for the first time by a line from Sittingbourne to Queenborough and Sheerness, operated by the London, Chatham and Dover Railway Company (LC&DRC). In 1876 a short spur line was opened to Queenborough Pier, where a continental mail steamer service operated to Flushing.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1883 threatened to remove the prized borough status of Queenborough, but a new borough charter in 1885 secured the town's continuing rights and privileges and marked a return of civic pride. One of the manifestations of this renewed confidence was the opening of Queenborough Park on 1 July 1891. The minute book of the Town Council of the Borough of Queenborough, and local press reports, fill out the story.

The Park occupies a 0.18ha block of land on the western edge of the town to the north of the High Street. Evidence for the earlier use of the site is limited. The Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing for the Isle of Sheppey (1790s) is lost, as is the 1845 Tithe map and award for Queenborough. A plan at KHLC produced for a lawsuit in 1778 (U38/03 part 2) shows that the site was part of Queenborough Green, 275 acres of common land owned by the Borough freeholders and used for sheep grazing. This is confirmed by the Parliamentary Enclosure map and award of 1856 (Q/RDc/21), which shows the site as a marshy area or pond to the west of the built area of the town. The 1st ed OS 25" map (surveyed 1864, published c1866) shows a vacant site. This is confirmed by reported comments at the opening ceremony that as the land belonged to the freeholders it could not be sold by the Town Council and was being used only to graze "Bishop's donkey" and to accommodate a lapsed annual fair.

The suggestion of using this area of waste land for a garden was raised during discussions by the Town Council on a suitable way to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee (1887). No progress was made at the time, but the idea returned in 1890 when the then Mayor, Mr A W Howe, offered to meet the expense of setting out and planting the area as a garden if the Town Council would pay for fencing it. The offer was accepted, and Mr Howe's own gardener, Mr Kadwell, laid out the site. He received an honorarium of £5 from the Council. Early reports refer to a garden rather than a park; it was recognised that the site was too small to provide facilities for sport and recreation, and a field for that purpose was found elsewhere.

The opening of the garden on 1 July 1891 was described at length in a report in the Sheerness Guardian and East Kent Advertiser of Saturday 4 July, a copy of which was pasted into the Town Council's Minute Book for 1885-99 with the report of the meeting of the Town Council on 2 July 1891. There was another extensive report in the Sheerness Times, also of 4 July.

The opening ceremony was performed by Mr George Byland Roche, Director of the LC&DRC, and the presence of other senior representatives of the railway company and the ferry company shows how closely the Park was associated with the hoped-for economic resurgence of the Borough. Linked with this was the aspiration for Queenborough people to have the amenities of a prosperous late-nineteenth century town. These themes were summed up on the archway decorated with flowers at the entrance to the gardens, with the words "Welcome to the People's Garden" in the centre, flanked by "Prosperity to Queenborough" and "Recreation pleasure and health". The proceedings involved a procession of schoolchildren led by a brass band, games and tea for the children in a neighbouring field, and a luncheon for the adults with many toasts and a presentation to the Mayor. There are no details of the layout and planting; the Sheerness Times Guardian simply reported that "The garden has several seats for the accommodation of visitors and is laid out with trees and flowers of the choicest description."

The management of the garden fell under the Town Council's Surveyor, with the Town Sergeant acting as park-keeper. It appears from press reports of Council meetings that even after his mayoralty Mr Howe continued to meet some of the

cost despite the minor irritations of maintaining even a small public open space. Occasional damage to trees and plants was recorded, by “juveniles” and sometimes livestock, and gates had to be locked. The garden survived, however, with relatively little change, and was used for public events such as concerts and a marquee associated with the annual Queenborough Regatta.

The original layout, shown as Queenborough Park in the OS 25” second edition (revised 1896), consisted of a perimeter path with a central north-south path, and a single entrance at the south-east corner. By the time of the third edition (revised 1906) the central path had gained a circular feature, which appears from a contemporary postcard to have been mounded and planted. The fourth edition (revised 1931) shows the circular feature intersected by an east-west path. An RAF aerial photograph from May 1946 shows this quadripartite layout, as does the OS 1957 National Grid 1:2500 map. Further aerial photographs at Kent Archives from 1960 and 1971 appear to show the Park denuded of its railings and with little planting, although these photographs were taken in winter. By 1971 the Park had gained a combined public convenience, shelter and electricity sub-station on the western boundary near the southern end.

The Town Council retained responsibility for maintaining the Park until 1968, when the Municipal Borough of Queenborough was merged with the other Sheppey local authorities to form the Municipal Borough of Queenborough-in-Sheppey. This arrangement lasted until the local government reorganisation of 1974, when Sheppey became part of the new Borough of Swale.

A group of planning applications by Swale Borough Council between 1992 and 1995 mark the transition of the Park to its current design. The public conveniences etc were replaced by a new toilet block in the south-west quadrant which included provision for showers – no doubt aimed at the sailing community using the nearby “hard”. A new boundary wall and railings were provided, and selected trees felled. The alignment of the paths was adjusted so that the north-south lengths were parallel to the western boundary, and the shape of the central feature was changed to a chevron, set transversely across the intersecting paths, and bearing in the north-west quadrant a flagstaff formed from the upper part of a ship’s mast. A plaque dedicated in 1996 commemorates the World War 2 minesweeper base, HMS Wildfire III Queenborough, which operated from a pier 370 metres north of the Park.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Queenborough Park is a roughly rectangular level area of about 1800 square metres, with rounded corners, lying north of the High Street at its western end. The High Street, the original main street of the Borough, runs for about 600m westwards from the site of the castle to the sea wall, but extends beyond it as a roughly surfaced “hard” for small boats. The church lies on the north side of the High Street about 350m west of the castle site, and the Guildhall of 1793 equidistant between the church and the Park.

The north and south boundaries of the Park are parallel, with the eastern boundary at right angles. The western boundary adjoins a 5m wide walkway along the sea wall (Figure 8), which is raised on shallow steps so that the Park itself does not have sea views (though it would have done when first opened). To the north the Park is bounded by North Road, originally an informal back lane to the High Street, and formally confirmed as an accommodation road at the time of enclosure. To the east is Park Road, and to the south the High Street (Figure 9). The Park is included in the Queenborough Conservation Area, and there are views from within it to the group of Grade II listed buildings of 18th century origin, including the former Castle Inn, at 3-9 High Street (Figure 11).

The site is surrounded by late C20 black-painted square section metal railings with plain finials, set on brick walls with stone capping. The height of wall and railings varies on different sides of the park; on the north and east the wall is 0.9m high and the railings 0.78m – a total height of 1.68m. The wall is laid in English garden bond (three courses of stretchers to one of headers). On the south side the wall and railings curve down to a height of 1.5m before rising again on either side of the main entrance. On the west the site is partly bounded by the projecting toilet block, north of which the walling reduces to 0.25m and the railings to 0.7m. This boundary is recessed to form three canted niches for trees on each side of an ungated entrance, two outside the railings and the central one inside (Figure 10).

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main 2.5m-wide entrance from the High Street is in the middle of the southern boundary, where the wall is recessed. Late C20 painted metal gates with openwork metal gate piers are topped with a semi-circular metal overthrow containing red-painted letters “QUEENBOROUGH PARK”. On the western boundary there is a 1m wide entrance south of the toilet block, and a 3.2m-wide ungated entrance north of it, both with late C20 openwork metal gate piers topped with red-painted metal ball finials.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

As originally laid out in the late c19, a perimeter path, set with wooden seats, runs round the gardens about 3-4m within the boundary walls/railings. This forms a border of varying width planted with deciduous trees, hardy shrubs and a few perennials. The six niches on the western boundary contain field maples. Birch, flowering cherry and sycamore are found in the northern border, with more sycamore to the east. Along the southern boundary are a purple-leafed cherry and a plane tree to the east of the main gateway, and a cherry to the west. None of the trees are original plantings. A World War II sea mine is on display in the border near the north-east corner.

Within this perimeter path the design reflects the late C20 reworking, with a grassed area divided into four by intersecting paths running approximately NNW to SSE, and WSW to ENE.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

The only building within the Park is the late C20 public toilet block with shower facilities, in the south-west quadrant. The construction is of blockwork, painted off-white, with a slate roof with terracotta ridge tiles resting on oversized brackets. The block is surmounted by a square cupola with clock.

OTHER FEATURES OF INTEREST

In the north-west quadrant, set where the paths intersect, is a 4m square of asphalt bordered with brick and containing the upper part of a ship's mast which forms a flagstaff (Figure 12). Supporting metal cables run from the mast to a black-painted steel base at each corner of the square. A phosphor bronze plaque is set into the brick border along the south side of the square:

HMS WILDFIRE III QUEENBOROUGH

> This plaque commemorates the lives of those who died during the Second World War whilst stationed at this Royal Naval base. Minesweepers, including converted trawlers, operated from a pier which stood some 400 yards north of this point. Their dangerous task was to keep open the allied shipping routes by clearing mines from the Thames Estuary and English Channel.
>
> *"Let light perpetual shine upon them"*

The plaque was originally dedicated in September 1996 (local press report). It is recorded as a war memorial by the Imperial War Museum. The Queenborough & District Naval Ensign Association, a charity, holds an annual parade and service of commemoration in the Park.

REFERENCES

Books and Articles

Maurice Beresford, New Towns of the Middle Ages, 2nd edition 1988, Alan Sutton Publishing

English Heritage, Queenborough, Isle of Sheppey, Kent: Historic Area Appraisal, Research Department Report Series no. 39/2006

Swale Borough Council, Queenborough Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy, March 2011

Maps

Enclosure map of Queenborough 1856 (Kent History and Library Centre, Q/RDc/21)

Ordnance Survey 25” to 1 mile: sheet Kent XIII.13 1st edition (surv. 1864 publ. c1866)

Ordnance Survey 25” to 1 mile: sheet Kent XIII.13 2nd edition (rev. 1896 publ. 1898)

Ordnance Survey 25” to 1 mile: sheet Kent XIII.13 3rd edition (rev. 1906 publ. 1908)

Ordnance Survey 25” to 1 mile: sheet Kent XIII.13 4th edition (rev. 1931 publ. 1933)

Ordnance Survey National Grid 1:2500 sheet TQ9072-A surv. 1956

Illustrations

Aerial Photograph, Historic England, May 1946 - raf_106g_uk_1444_rp_3141

Aerial photograph 1960 (Kent History and Library Centre KHLC/img/PH/1/QUE/5)

Aerial photograph 1971 (Kent History and Library Centre KHLC/img/PH/1/QUE/17)

Archival Items

Minute book of the Town Council of the Borough of Queenborough 1885-98 (Kent History and Library Centre Qb/AM/8)

Enclosure award of Queenborough 1856

Researched and written by Caroline Bowdler
Harriet Jordan (editor)

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Fig. 1 Boundary map



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Fig. 2 Map of key features



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Fig. 3 Aerial photograph (2016)



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Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map (1862-1875)



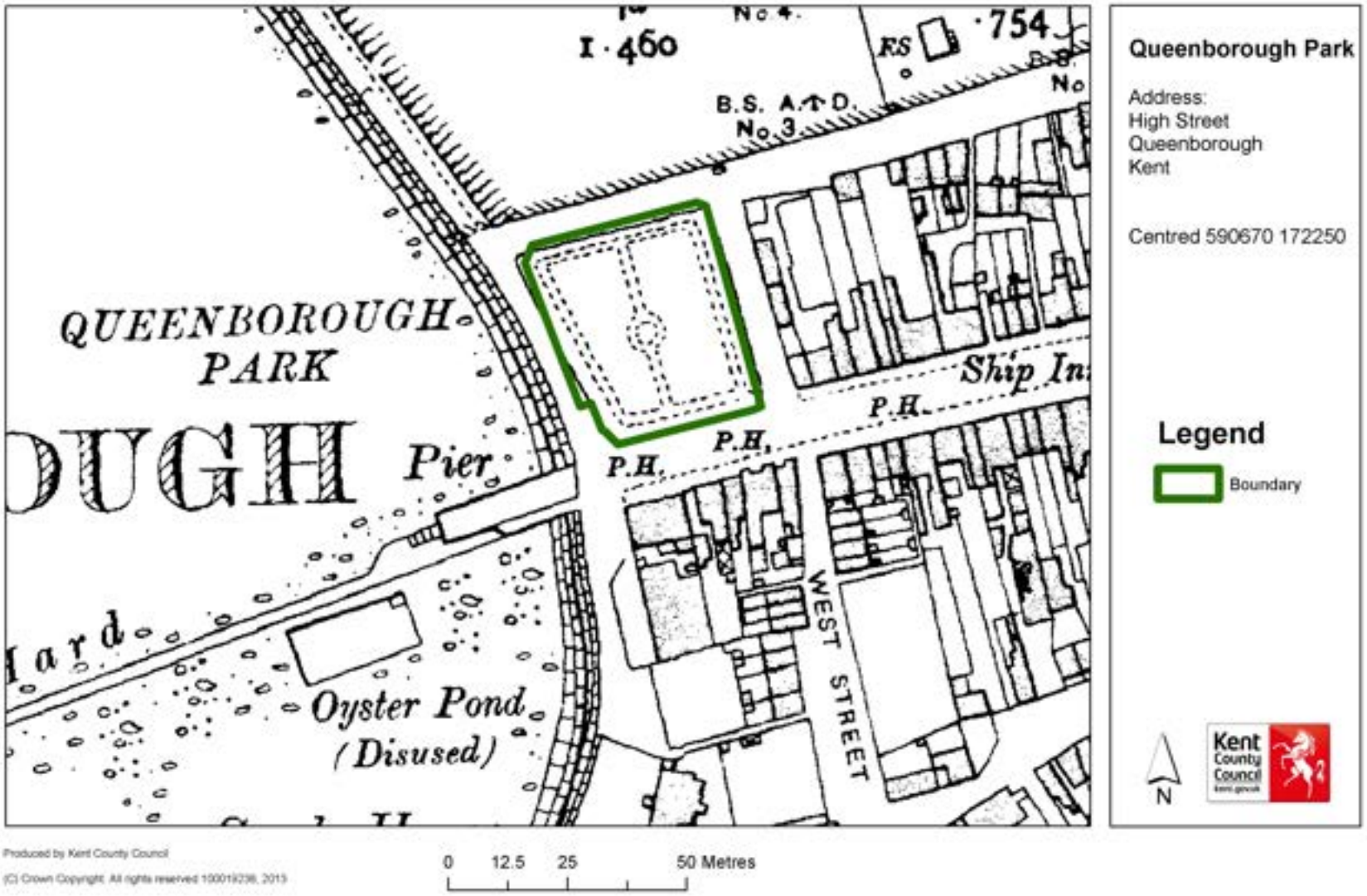
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Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25" map (1897-1900)



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Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 25" map (1907-1923)



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Fig. 7 Ordnance Survey 4th Edition 25" map (1929-1952)



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Fig. 8 Western boundary of Park in relation to sea wall (June 2023)



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Fig. 9 Southern boundary of Park and western termination of High Street (June 2023)



Fig. 10 View eastwards across Park from western entrance (August 2022)



Fig. 11 View southwards from Park to listed buildings at 3-9 High Street (June 2023)



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Fig. 12 Central feature commemorating HMS Wildfire III Queenborough, from north-west (June 2023)

