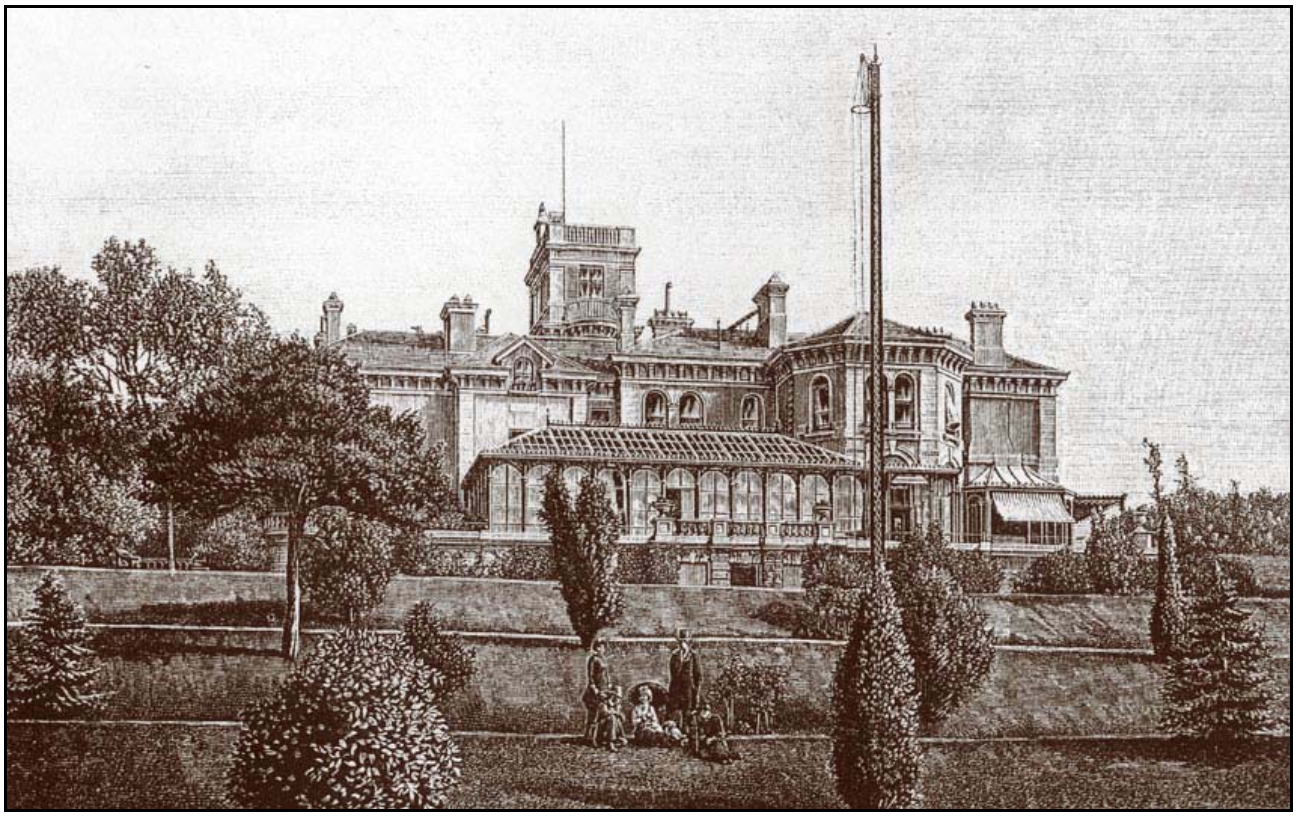
The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Tunbridge Wells District



Sherwood Park, Tunbridge Wells

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Kent Gardens Trust

ENGLISH HERITAGE

Supported by

Kent County Council

September 2012

Sherwood Park

Tunbridge Wells, Kent

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INTRODUCTION

This site dossier and description has been prepared as a follow-on action from the **Review of the Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Tunbridge Wells Borough 2009**, and should be read in conjunction with the full project report which can be found at http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/. This site is one of many sites that have been researched, visited and written about across the Borough and as a consequence has been included in the revised list of Historic Parks and Gardens covered by the Borough 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.

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Kent Gardens Trust
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SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT SHERWOOD PARK
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
TQ 603405

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

A public open space with village green status comprising woodland, a lake and footings of garden structures, surviving features of an ornamental and shooting estate laid out around an Italianate mansion of c1867 (demolished 1995) later owned and developed by Charles William Siemans the founder of the international electrical engineering company of that name.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The estate in which the current property lies was first recorded as part of the Manor of Southborough in the southern section of the Lowry of Tunbridge, which included the as yet undeveloped town of Tunbridge Wells.

The Manor of Calverley, in Tunbridge Wells, was owned by William Strong and passed to Thomas Panuwell who died in 1750. He left the seat to Thomas Smith, a friend who took on the name Panuwell. He died in 1786 and the property was inherited by his eldest son. A John Ward had acquired the estate's land by 1829, which became known as the Calverley Estate soon after the architect and developer Decimus Burton was employed to design much of the housing. The land that was to become the Sherwood Park estate was bought by retired solicitor, John Guy in about 1867 to build an Italianate mansion house surrounded by some 68 hectares of ground. It is assumed that he named the house after his mother-in-law whose maiden name was Sherwood (Chris Jones, Civic Society Newsletter). The Guy family stayed until about 1874 when Charles William Siemans, a German-born electrical engineer, bought the property. The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey (1897) map shows a substantial country residence set on a high point to give far reaching views over the surrounding countryside and to the rear of the mansion, extensive terracing created on the slope falling away from the house. This is also shown on contemporary illustrations. (CD TW Civic Society). This map also shows several cottages and outbuildings, which include garages, stabling and those associated with a farmery. A walled kitchen garden northeast of the mansion has also been built by this time. It isn't possible to say who built these features because of a change in ownership between the publication of the first two OS maps. On the 1st edition OS map 1862 the area is shown as woodland.

After establishing the international company, Siemans became a British subject and was elected a fellow of the Royal Society for his work on heat and energy. He introduced electricity to the house and grounds, experimenting with arc-lights in the greenhouses and powering estate machinery. He probably constructed the lake with three islands and the boathouse.

He died in 1883 but his widow, now Lady Siemans, stayed on until her death after which an accountant Benjamin Woollen bought it. He used the estate for shooting game. He was Mayor of Tunbridge Wells from 1906 until his death in 1909. The next occupant was a John Smith who was in residence until 1920 when a banker called Ernest Errington-Wales bought it. When he put it on the market in the 1930s it was described as suitable for golf, hunting and shooting.

The estate once stretched to 68 hectares to include several enclosures of pasture and arable land but by 1901 it was just 47.75 hectares (Bracketts Compendium). The schedule of the 118.5 acres included parkland, pasture and plantation areas. It described 'beautiful, well-timbered pleasure grounds with wide spreading lawns, studded with specimen trees, two excellent tennis lawns, herbaceous borders, masses of rhododendrons, flower beds and borders' (sales particulars 1930).

A proposal to turn the house and grounds into a successful spa centre by Dr A J D Cameron didn't materialise although it did take the name of The International Clinic and Spa. At the beginning of the Second World War, in September 1939, it was taken over by Guys Hospital and became a School of Dentistry.

After the war the western half of the estate along Sandhurst Road was developed as private housing and the Sherwood Council Estate was built by the local authority on the northern section. The house remained unoccupied until 1950 when it became the administrative offices of Tunbridge Wells Hospital Committee and remained so for 45 years.

Eventually (1995) the property, with its immediately surrounding land of about 1.2 hectares was sold to developers Gleeson Homes Ltd who demolished the main house and replaced it with flats and houses. It was initially re-named Cumberland Park but is now known as Badgers Holt. The remainder of the mansion's grounds (c19 hectares), to the east of the local authority housing estate, forms the Sherwood Park site.

The site, which is being transferred to the ownership of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council from the Local Housing Association, has enjoyed informal public access for many years and was formally declared a Town Green in 2010 and is in the future to be managed by a local trust. Local residents and conservation groups including the Friends of Sherwood Lake are already working to clear undergrowth, remove rubbish and make the area more amenable for local residents. Works are under way to repair the dam wall which is partly eroded and leaking.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM and SETTING

Sherwood Park lies on the northeast side of Tunbridge Wells, approximately 1.6 kms from the centre of the town in an area bounded by Badgers Holt housing complex to the southeast, part of Blackhurst Lane to the east, Sherwood housing estate to the west and Gregg's Wood to the southeast, north and northeast. The land is on a moderate slope, the highest point being 144m above sea level in the extreme southwest corner (the site of the former mansion) and the lowest point in the northwest, at the lake, 108 metres above sea level. Tunbridge Wells is within the High Weald of Kent (designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) on a ridge of hard sandstone. Sherwood Park is one of a number of areas of woodland and common ground surviving within and in close proximity to the town which lend it its park-like character. It occupies an area of approximately 19 hectares bordered to the northeast by further woodland with the back garden fences of housing on all other sides.

ENTRANCES and APPROACHES

The site can be entered from numerous points as there as there is no effective physical boundary. Access can be gained from private gardens that back onto the site or from Blackhurst Lane, where there are gaps in fencing. No clear access paths are now in existence. Sales particulars produced in 1930 (Harrods Ltd) state that the house was 'approached by three long gravel drives, bordered by specimen trees'. These are visible on the 2nd edition OS map (1897-1900) leading from the three lodge houses on Blackhurst Lane. The lodges survive as private residences with tracks leading from them into the wood.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The 19 hectares site is predominantly woodland of mixed ages and species, dense in places where self-seeded specimens have grown. Species include beech, oak, London plane, lime, holly and horse chestnut. The undergrowth is bramble and ferns with wild flowers such as bluebells. Amongst common rhododendron are some cultivated species. There are occasional veteran trees including several examples of black pine, although many were lost in the storm of 1987. The 1st edition OS map (c1862), that pre-dates the mansion, shows numerous paths criss crossing the unmanaged wood.

In the extreme north west area of the site is an ornamental lake, approx 0.9 hectares in size, surrounded by a path, which is virtually the only remaining feature of Charles Siemans' Victorian garden. Two of the original islands survive. It is still fed by the natural springs that were dammed to create it. There is no evidence of the path shown on the 2nd OS map from c1897 leading to the lake from the house.

On the south side of the lake are remains of brick walls beside a flat platform, possibly where a boathouse once stood (2nd edition OS map). An area of

Gaultheria shrubbery is adjacent. Amongst the undergrowth are several manholes and lengths of piping of varying age, possibly remnants of an earlier water system supplying two fountains visible in 1897 (OS map). A document of 1872 records John Guy building a pump house to take water from a natural spring to the house. (Chris Jones, Civic Society Newsletter)

In the southeast corner of the site, some 250m northeast of the site of the former house, wall footings or just brick rubble represent the scant remains of the walled kitchen garden shown on the 2nd edition OS map.

South of the walled garden, a few courses of bricks survive in the vicinity of demolished outbuildings which once included garages, stabling, cottages and those associated with a farmery (sales particulars 1930). A lodge on Blackhurst Lane northeast of the walled garden marks the northern extremity of the historic designed landscape, which merges with Gregg's Wood beyond.

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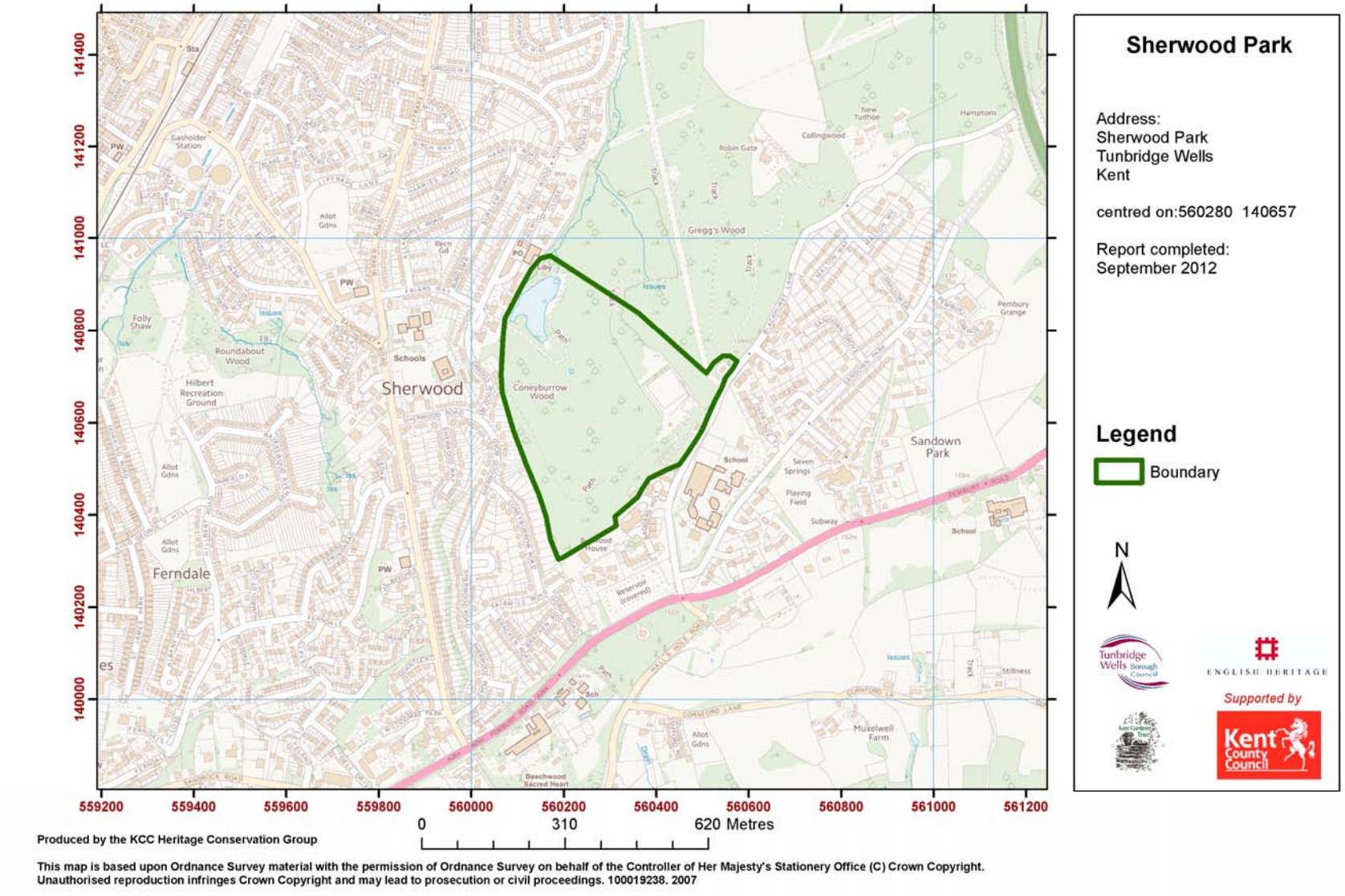
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Bracketts Compendium

Research by Jane Davidson and Geraldine Gifford-Moon.
Description written by Jane Davidson

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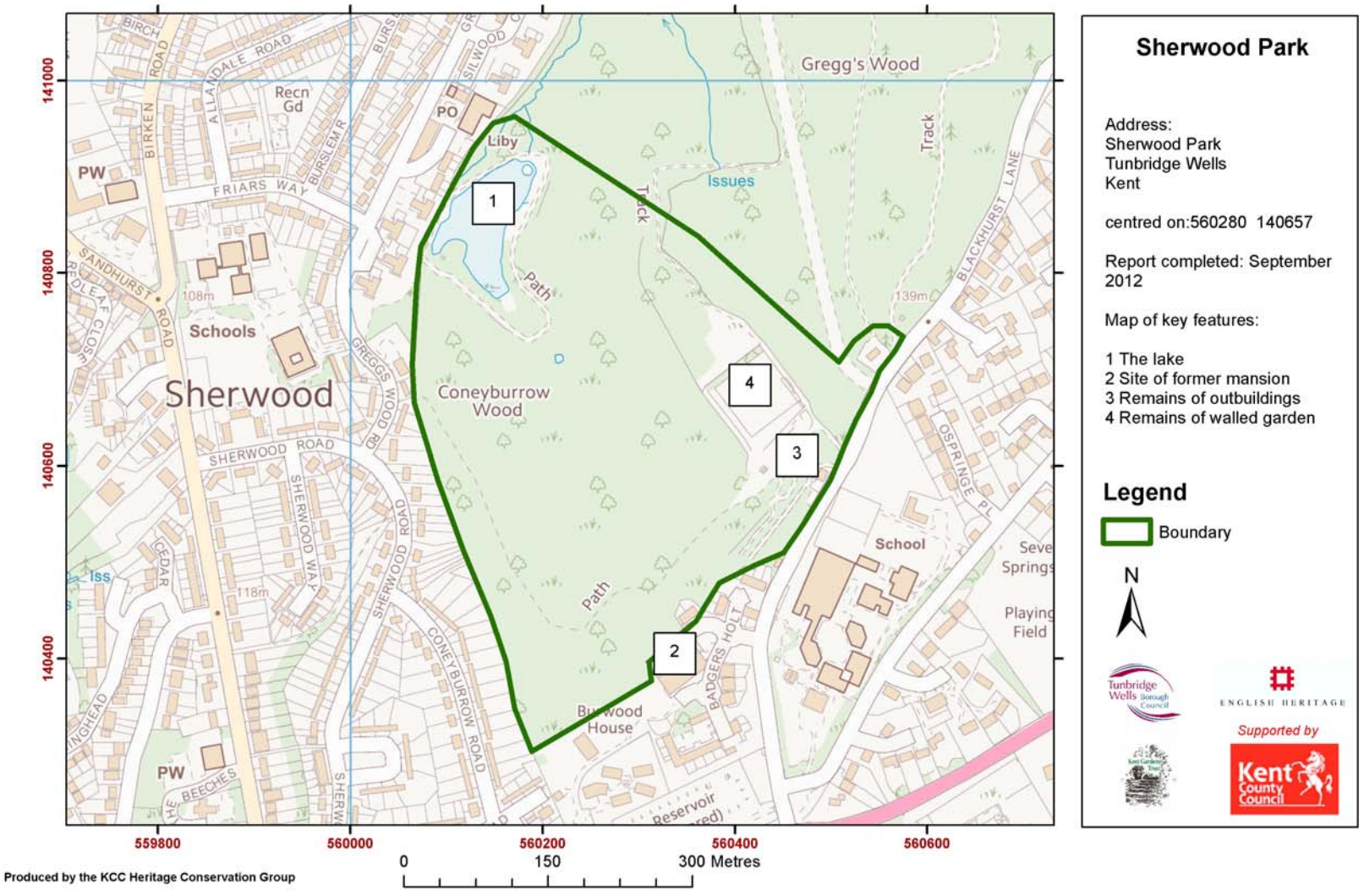
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Fig. 1 Boundary map



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Fig. 2 Key features map



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Fig. 3 Aerial photograph (2008)

