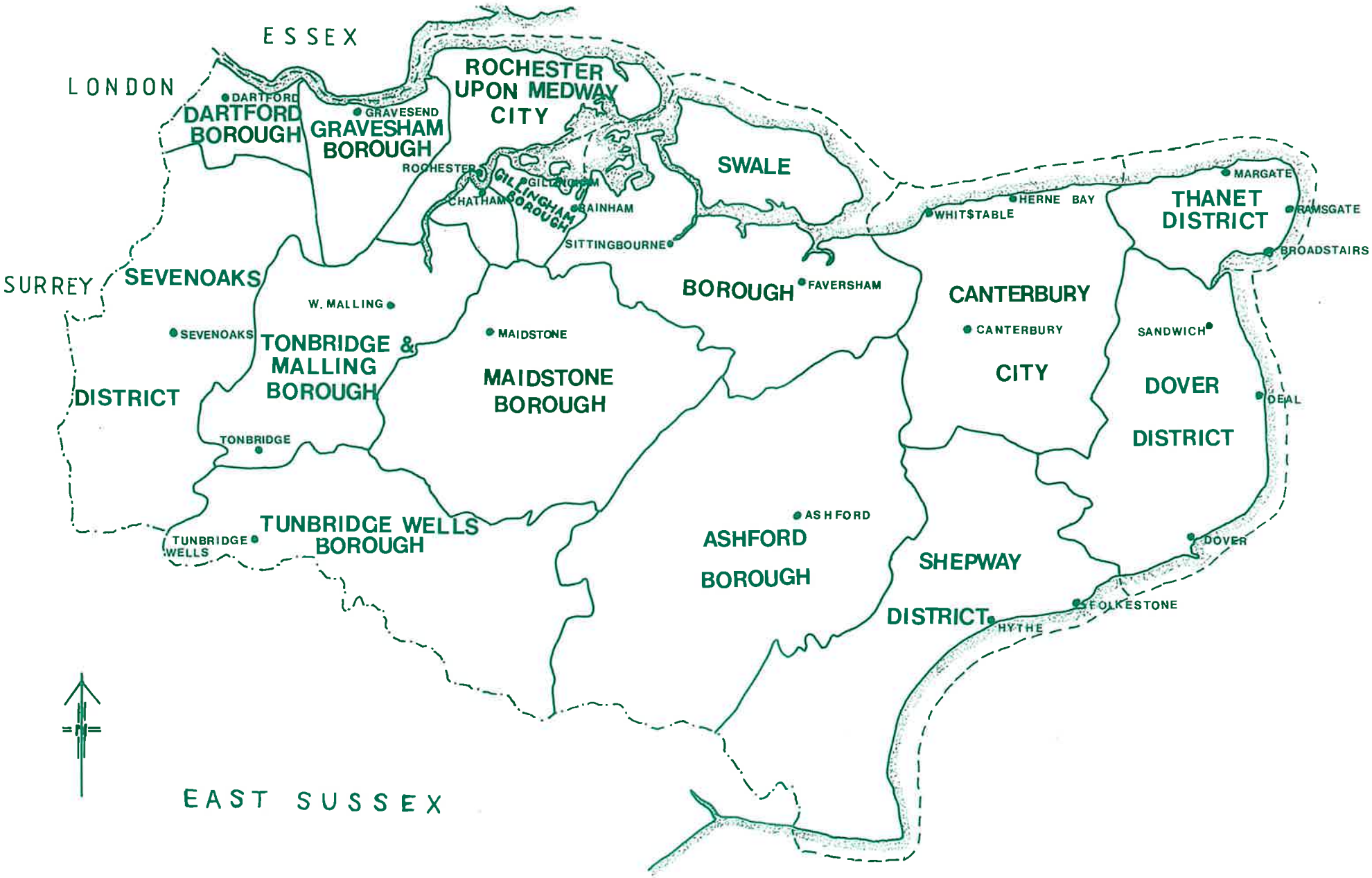
A Presentation of Parks

A survey of amenity parks and gardens in Kent



KENT GARDENS TRUST



Kent District Council Areas

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Foreword

The survey of amenity parks and gardens of Kent was carried out during 1992 to 1994 by Kent Gardens Trust. This followed the earlier surveys of 'The Historic Gardens' and 'The Smaller Gardens' of the county.

The aim was to investigate the extent and diversity of the public parks; to record their historic, aesthetic and social values to the county; to consider the uses and changes to which these sites had been subject during their time as public amenity space; to focus attention on the future of public parks and gardens in Kent.

The survey and publication were made possible by two generous grants from Kent County Council. Kent Gardens Trust is most grateful for this support, and for the assistance of Kent County Council personnel, Dr John Williams, Mr David King, Mr Tony Turner, the Heritage Services and the Design Studio.

The team of dedicated recorders and researchers was Tricia Adam, Jane Brightwell, Jean Cobbald, Pat Davidson, Elisabeth Hall, Jean Lear, Barbara Marchant, Martine Matthews, Joyce Onslow, Douglas Short, Joy Short and Annetta Troth. Drawings by Jean Cobbald.

They would like to acknowledge with thanks the help of the Park Managers and officers of the Departments of Arts and Leisure, Client Services, Engineering and Recreation, Environment Services, Landscape and Leisure Services of the 14 District Councils of Kent. Many individuals, including Dr Brent Elliott, Dr Ivan Hall, Mr David Lambert and Dr Jane Longland gave help, information and encouragement. Anabil McAleer and Spain Brothers, Canterbury, provided invaluable editing skills and office resources.

Introduction

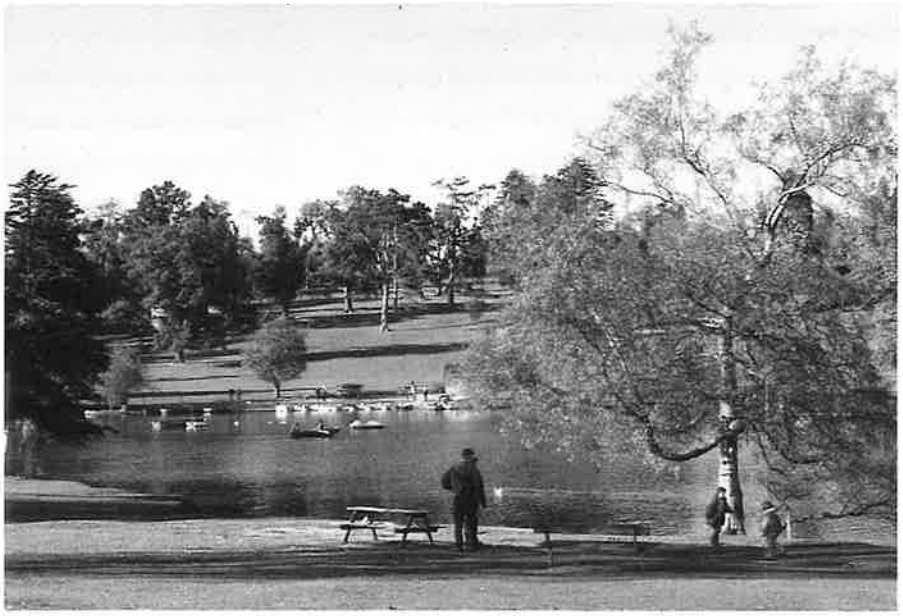
Parks are for people and their pleasure. Generations of Kent's townspeople have appreciated their local park for its space and tranquillity: as a pleasant place to sit or walk; not least, for the leisure facilities available to citizens of all ages.

Few would readily forego the amenity of a good urban park; it enhances the character of the town and contributes to the social and environmental well-being of the community.

Local Authorities have no statutory duty to provide or maintain municipal parks, although this responsibility is administered as part of the provision of all services.

The foresight of local councils over the past 150 years has endowed Kent with a valuable heritage of parks and gardens which reflect the needs of the population for both urban and country open space. The county has benefited also from the social awareness of a score of philanthropic landowners, aldermen and entrepreneurs who have donated or bequeathed and secured in trust many tracts of land for the common good. Some grounds have been acquired and funded by public subscription.

Parks are a community asset that successive generations inherit with a clear obligation to maintain for posterity. Their importance is underestimated and their future has been threatened by Local Government re-organisation and financial restrictions. Reduced levels of care and supervision can lead to decline and encourage vandalism of park features. There is increasing pressure to re-develop for more leisure facilities and housing, and often, erosion of boundaries for road schemes.



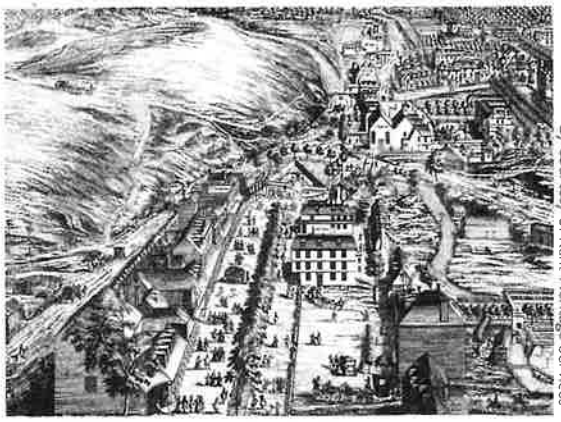
The Lake, Dunorlan, Tunbridge Wells.

The history and character of more than 70 municipal parks and gardens in Kent, comprising over 1250 hectares of public amenity space, are described. They are in daily use, year in and year out, uncelebrated and largely unknown except to local residents.

The Origins and History of Public Parks in Kent

Medieval common land, owned by the lord of the manor, was the earliest form of public open space, where tenants could exercise various rights and hold public gatherings. Although most of Kent was enclosed by 1600, Dartford and Penenden Heaths escaped by reason of their low fertility and poor agricultural potential, being brought into public ownership at a later date.

From 1600, the story of the public park in Kent is linked with the growth of the spa, the seaside resort and the pleasures of recreation.



By courtesy of Kent Heritage Services

Birds-eye view of Tunbridge Wells, with Upper and Lower Walks. (Badeslade 1791)

The discovery and promotion of the medicinal virtues of the chalybeate spring at Tunbridge first attracted the sick, and then the nobility who brought with them all the customs and trappings of a fashionable spa of Stuart times. The daily saunter to take the waters required a public promenade: Tunbridge Wells is remarkable for the raised Walke of 1638 which was funded by public subscription and was later paved as 'The Pantiles'. The social round could be varied by a visit to The Grove on Mount Sion which, in 1703, was the first ground in Kent to be secured as an amenity for the benefit of local inhabitants. Margate was promoting the therapeutic advantages of sea-bathing as early as 1730, long before Dr Richard Russell's treatise on the medical virtues of sea water was published. Visitors arrived from London by land and sea, expecting the amenities of a spa. Margate's famous bathing machines and bath-house were supplemented later by the Assembly Rooms, the Parade, bowling-greens, tavern and teagardens and the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital.

Broadstairs, Ramsgate and Deal were developing as watering places from 1754, followed by Dover, Sandgate, Folkestone and Hythe by the end of the century.

Every aspiring resort had a Pleasure Garden, an early commercial park designed for the business of entertainment. Originating as bosky walks with sculpture or temples (Nash Court, Margate, 1763) these ventures developed as fashionable venues for music, dancing and social breakfasting (Dandelion, Margate, 1793).

Post-Napoleonic gardens were more extravagantly furnished, with a motley of water features, artificial temples, Swiss cottages, Turkish pavilions and Chinese arbours: all being illuminated for evening frolics as in Le Jardin de Tivoli, Margate, 1829. *(Below).*



By courtesy of Kent Heritage Services

They were ephemeral and subsequently lost to re-development (Ranelagh Gardens, Ramsgate), but were the forerunners of the seaside amusement park.

Early 19th-century Kent was predominantly agricultural and although there were pockets of deprivation in the towns, the county escaped the worst effects of the industrial revolution. Paddle steamer services brought an increasing flow of affluent visitors, as it was soon recognised that money made in the mill towns and potteries was more pleasurably spent on the Kent coast.

The age of social reform was imminent. In 1833, the report of the Select Committee on Public Walks, a belated and not entirely altruistic recommendation that time-off benefited the workers, launched the nationwide movement for public parks. Concern for the 'pale mechanic' and his leisure was seen as his need for fresh air and self-improvement, in place of beerhouses and brothels. This was translated into proposals for public parks offering 'rational' amenities, particularly by a pioneer designer, John Claudius Loudon.

His first major commission, however, was to develop the Royal Terrace Garden at Gravesend. By 1835, this small river port had been transformed into London's spa, with elegant facilities to attract the wealthy elite. The Terrace Garden was a local business venture and admission fees were charged.

Loudon's intricate lay-out and extensive collection of over 1000 labelled trees and shrubs, that aimed to instruct, survived only 60 years but was seminal in its design to influence many public parks that followed. It is possible to identify some remains of this garden by the Royal Terrace Pier.

Nearby, the Zoological and Botanical Gardens in a disused quarry at Rosherville, were an early zoo park in Kent. Commercial, educational and popular with day-trippers, they too lasted only until 1890.

Gardens at the coastal resorts continued to be created as part of commercial entertainment and were more a response to the coming of the railways, bringing an influx of middle class patrons, than a function of working class need. Nevertheless, the Bank Holiday Act of 1871 encouraged the less well-off to join the excursion traffic to the sea.

Mid-Victorian parks were designed for passive recreation, fenced and gated as a place apart from urban bustle. Leisure was given a framework of disciplined respectability in the ordered pattern of flower beds around a formal fountain pool and the bandstand, under the eye of a uniformed park-keeper. The high standard of horticulture attracted many families on Sunday afternoon outings to the park for educational interests.

Increasing provision for sports was initiated by the Recreation Grounds Act (1859) and became a worthy cause for benefactors (Radnor Park, Folkestone and Grosvenor Recreation Ground, Tunbridge Wells). At the time when cheap American grain imports had caused land prices to drop, the Public Health Act of 1876 gave local authorities full powers to acquire, develop and manage municipal parks. Rochester and Tonbridge both purchased their Castle grounds and small estates were bought cheaply for Recreation Grounds.

Growing civic pride towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign and her Golden and Diamond Jubilees launched several Victoria Parks in Kent.





Design for a Public Garden made for an English Corporate Ground. J.C. Loudon.
(The Gardener's Magazine Vol XII. 1836)

Patriotic bedding-out with red pelargoniums, blue lobelia and white alyssum vied with fashionable carpet bedding designs using dwarf foliage plants and succulents. The ultimate in high baroque bedding which was sculptural and three-dimensional, appeared in Edwardian parks and was a popular feature between the wars (Brenchley Gardens, Maidstone).



By courtesy of Dr. Brent Elliot

Sculptural bedding at Brenchley Gardens, Maidstone. A display of characters from Pickwick Papers to mark the centenary of Dickens's birth in 1912.

The location and accessibility of public open space was to be more constructively addressed after the Town Planning Act was passed in 1909. Jackson's Field, spacious and central, was achieved for Rochester and Chatham by 1914, and Clare Park for the West Borough of Maidstone.

The war restricted action and afterwards thoughts naturally turned to Memorial Parks (Herne Bay and Ashford) and to the erection of war memorials in existing central gardens.

It is said that one-quarter of England was up for sale after the war and, as a consequence, a rush of activity in Kent between 1920 and 1940 brought over 20 major parks and recreation grounds into being. Old estate gardens were simplified for public use and new larger parks with areas of open grassland and straight avenues of trees indicate the firm hand of the Borough Engineer on a lay-out for easy maintenance. The acquisition of Calverley Grounds, Tunbridge Wells, Westgate Gardens, Canterbury and the completely new Kingsnorth Gardens in Folkestone added horticultural style to the county's heritage of parks.

Legislation in 1921 allowed 'Health Resorts and Watering Places' to advertise and Kent promoted its 'Floral Coast'. As greater participation by town councils in resort development followed, 'leisure on the rates' was contested at Folkestone, particularly over the construction of the famous zig-zag path by James Pulham & Son. It was built to take visitors in bath chairs to the lower toll road and gardens and cost £2000, with £3000 for 23,000 ornamental shrubs. Courtstairs Chine was similarly designed as part of the St. Laurence development at Ramsgate in the 1920s.

Timely purchase by Kent County Council, with the help of London County Council, saved Lullingstone Park, Eynsford, from urban development and made it part of the Green Belt under the Act of 1938.

The second world war dealt a heavy blow to public parks. The coastal towns of Kent presented a scene of desolation: barricaded hotels looked out over beaches fortified against invasion; deserted buildings were flanked by neglected gardens as gates and railings were removed for munitions. Inland, parks were occupied by the Army (Mote Park, Maidstone) and filled with tank traps. Air raid shelters were dug in Dane John, Canterbury, and many parks were damaged by bombs and shells. Restoration took time and although Ramsgate was promoting 'Happy Holidays' again by 1947, parks and gardens were not returned to their former beauty until the late 1950s. Again, a number of private properties on the urban fringe were bought up by councils to provide more public open space for the future, and two of these were the work of notable landscape designers (Dunorlan, Tunbridge Wells and the Russell Gardens, Dover).

As a result of the creation of the Countryside Commission and legislation of 1970, country parks became eligible for Government grants.



A country park. 1974. Bushy Ruff, Alkham, Dover.

Kent Councils were not slow to develop these as they were considered economical to maintain and popular with car owners. Camer Park, Gravesham was the first, followed by Trosley Park, Manor Park and Haysden Country Park, by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. This type of natural park was particularly attractive to conservationists and the wildlife lobby, while urban gardens, still vital for children and the elderly, appeared less worthy of funding.

The gardens at the coastal resorts were maintained despite severe loss of custom and revenue to the attractions of the Spanish coasts during the 1960s and 1970s, but subsequent cutbacks underlined the importance of the tourist trade to the standard of many coastal gardens.

The recommendations of the Bains Report caused the parks departments to become part of the new leisure services departments and to compete for funds with all recreational services. It was the requirement for Compulsory Competitive Tendering for the maintenance of parks under the terms of the Local Government Act of 1988, and continuing cuts to park budgets, that began to raise fears for the future of urban parks.

It is clear that public response to gardens and parks is conditioned by a sense of expectation, of anticipation. Some look for the immortal landscape of childhood and of the past; for others, the opportunity for physical activity is paramount. As public amenities, parks have to be all things to all men and this survey shows how this is being achieved in Kent in the late 20th-century.

Ashford Borough Council

The **Memorial Gardens**, between Church Road and Station Road, Ashford, were originally glebeland that was acquired in 1924.

A civic consciousness about this garden confirms its status as a serene and secluded setting for the war memorial, which is approached from both east and west memorial gates by an avenue of chestnut trees.

Links with Europe are celebrated in tapestry bedding, depicting the escutcheons of Ashford and her twinned towns of Fougères and Bad Munstereifel.

Flowering trees and shrubs bring colour to each season, and in the special garden, made in association with Quest International, the fragrance of aromatic plants, the wind chimes and birdsong liven the senses.

Nearby, Vicarage Field, formerly the graveyard of St. John's Hospital, was acquired in 1951. It is a small green square with lime trees and shrubs, central to the town.

Victoria Park, Jemmetts Road, Ashford, was purchased as farmland in 1898. A large area of grassland with native and ornamental trees is being refurbished to serve the growing population of Ashford with improved access, new trees and provision for sport. Many water birds can be seen from a path by the River Stour.

The spectacular Harper Fountain in the park, was made for the 2nd International Exhibition at Kensington in 1862. It was taken to Olantigh Tower at Wye and subsequently bought and given to Ashford by Mr George Harper in 1912. Four large figures, representing the four continents, hold up shell fountains with smaller naiads supporting the pinnacle. It was restored in 1977, and again in 1990. *(see front cover).*

Amenity sites at Henwood, Singleton, Spearpoint and the Stour Leisure Park provide a variety of facilities for leisure pursuits in the borough.

Canterbury City Council

Dane John, by Watling Street, Canterbury, is an historic site with the tradition of free access since the 11th-century. In 1790, Alderman James Simmons transformed this rough ground into a pleasure garden for the people of the city.

Old maps show that little is changed today. The Dane John mound, an early defence of the city and now a scheduled monument, has a circular path to the commemorative pinnacle at the summit and gives access to the terrace walk along the top of the rampart within the city wall.

The view over the garden is of an avenue of limes which filters the sunlight across the lawns and flower beds and shades the war memorial. Elegant 18th-century houses form the background.

The Westgate Gardens, by the Westgate, Canterbury, were presented to the City by Stephen and Catherine Williamson in 1936. The heady mix of medieval architecture and ornamental gardens on either side of the gentle River Stour is a beguiling attraction for many visitors.

The Tower House incorporates a 14th-century tower of the city wall and is the focus of a garden first made 100 years ago. This is full of horticultural interest with colourful bedding, shrubs and climbers, roses and rock walls. The complement of older trees, which includes a venerable oriental plane, is being supplemented with new specimens. A walk follows the River Stour upstream beyond the children's playground.

St. Augustine's Garden, Lady Wootton's Garden and the Castle Keep are three small city gardens. Kingsmead, King George's, St Stephen's, Victoria, Thannington and Sturry Road Recreation Grounds were also visited and recorded.

The Memorial Park, Kings Road, Herne Bay, was an area of reclaimed marshland that was donated by Mr F G Hopkins in 1919. The original diagonal chines planted with chestnut trees focus on the memorial garden; the Avenue of Remembrance and the memorial gates were added in 1945. The reflection of clouds and trees in the water of the boating lake adds a significant dimension to the extensive level grassland. The new land drainage system, renovation of the memorial garden, renewal of many trees and the creation of a 'garden of the four seasons' will rejuvenate the park. There is considerable provision for tennis and bowls.

In 1993, new gardens were landscaped and planted at the Tower Gardens, Herne Bay Pier and the seafront. The Cherry Orchard, Herne, and Burton Downs, Herne Bay, have Recreation Grounds. There is a country park at Reculver.

Whitstable Castle, on Tower Hill, was purchased by Whitstable UDC for offices and a town park in 1935.



Clipped Box design surviving from the Victorian 'Old English' garden at Whitstable Castle.

The central feature of this park is the mid-Victorian castellated, turreted mansion, which incorporates the Tankerton Tower of 1792. The sheltered gardens serve well as a pleasant venue away from the more bracing seafront. The terraces and small sunken and topiary gardens lead to an informality of paths threading through shrubberies and copse which, even with later adjustments for public use, retain the spirit of a 19th-century garden. The formal garden has a central fountain and a fine display of roses.

There are Recreation Grounds at Swalecliffe, Wheatley Road, Westmeads, Columbia Road and Radfall, Chestfield.

Dartford Borough Council

Central Park, Market Street, Dartford, began with 'five acres of meadow', the gift of Col C N Kidd in 1904. This was augmented by purchases by the Local Council. The War Memorial Garden was funded by public subscription and the Garden for the Blind by Dartford Round Tablers.



By courtesy of Jamish Prints, Swanley.

Carpet bedding and summer display at Central Park, Dartford.

The long-standing reputation of Dartford parks for horticultural excellence is maintained despite cutbacks, with seasonal bedding in the geometric beds by the entrance gates, alongside the old canal path and in the memorial garden. The rose garden, island beds of herbaceous perennials, a winter shrub border and the scented garden, all combine to make this a town park for the garden-minded.

A new adventure playground is installed between the garden and the Darent River which flows alongside the park. Further afield are extensive sports grounds.

Dartford Heath is accessible from Heath Lane, Dartford. This ancient common is one of the largest tracts of public open space in Kent: it is a lightly wooded heath of oak, birch and hawthorn with areas of open grassland, gorse and bracken. Gravel, sand and chalk have been dug here for centuries, leaving large pits and mounds.

A series of trails are way-marked with intersecting narrower paths and some concrete roads that date from wartime use. The flora and fauna have been recorded and there is an abundance of bird species.

The people of Dartford had free access to The Brent from early times. A part was rescued from urban spread in 1903 by Mr Everard Hesketh, who paid for the creation of **Hesketh Park** and gave it to the people of Dartford as a recreation ground in perpetuity. It was set up with lofty ideals of beauty, healthy recreation and temperance, and as a place of enjoyment for all. There is cricket, bowling and a children's playground.

Behind the cottage-orne style pavilion is a valley garden, devised with hills and hollows, winding paths and grassed areas between groups of trees and shrubs. It retains the character of the Edwardian planting and has, amongst other unusual trees, a rare *Cotoneaster bacillaris*. The sundial of 1794 is an interesting example of a square wall dial.



Cotoneaster bacillaris at Hesketh Park, Dartford.

St. Edmund's Pleasance and the Bridge House Gardens are two small sites in Dartford. Beacon Wood Country Park is run jointly with Kent County Council and Kent Groundwork Trust, while Joyden's Wood (The Woodlands Trust) has special archeological, wildlife and recreational value.



Dover District Council

The gift of **Marke Wood Gardens** by Agnes Marke Wood of Walmer Place to the people of Deal in 1927 is recorded on the drinking fountain. There is a central pavilion for the sports grounds that are approached by avenues of ash, lime and alder. Cypress, birches, cherries and hawthorns are planted on the boundary.

Rose gardens are always popular in town parks: here, former allotment ground has been transformed with over 3000 roses, planted in a formal design of rosebeds within grass and paved paths. There is a brick-pier pergola and the entrance arch is in memory of Cllr Mrs Margaret Webber.

Walmer Green, the seafront walk at Deal, has some leisure activities. Victoria Park is being refurbished.

Bushy Ruff, Alkham Road, Kearsney, was bought in 1974, and is managed by the White Cliffs Countryside Project as a conservation and recreational area. The colonial style house was built in 1825 and is now a private nursing home.

Management of the lake, which was formed in 1794 to service the paper mill, has restored a valuable water feature. It attracts a variety of water-fowl and supports aquatic plant and insect habitats. *(Photo page 8).*

Trails can be followed to the wild flower meadow and through the hillside woodland to the former walled garden. Specimens of beech, cedar, yew and *Sequoiadendron giganteum* date from the original garden.

Connaught Park was the answer to a long-felt need for a public park in Dover, and was achieved in 1883 by the lease of land on rising ground to the north-west of the Castle. Voluntary public subscription covered the cost of landscaping, the lake, trees, shrubs, fencing, and the park-keeper's lodge.

A fine *Quercus ilex* planted by the Duchess of Connaught at the opening ceremony and a gothic drinking fountain induce a sensation of time past, furthered by the Victorian shelters near the tennis courts and playgrounds. Paths lead up the grassy slopes and through spinneys to the promenade along the northern boundary, from where there is a panoramic view of Dover, the Channel and the Western Heights.

Crabble Athletic Ground was initiated by a syndicate in 1896 for cricket and cycling, and included the football ground already in existence. It was bought out by Dover Council in 1902 as part of a plan to improve the town facilities.

In an amphitheatre, sheltered by pine and beech, and having fine views across Dover, the ground has been described as a cricketers' paradise. A path leads from the turnstiles at the lower entrance, through a beech grove to the Club house and terraces overlooking the ground. Two gatehouses flank the upper entrance used by motor traffic. The charm of the site is due in part to the Victorian flint and brick pavilion with its wooden verandah, dormers and weather vane turret.

Kearsney Abbey, an abbey in name only, was bought by Dover Town Council in 1945. The house was demolished in 1959. Since the 17th-century, several wealthy owners had developed the park by harnessing the River Dour to form an ornamental lake, taming the grassland and planting a collection of native and exotic trees. Cedars, yews, juniper, beech, ash, oak and lime, willows,

manna ash and a tulip tree can all be seen. A listed bridge carries the drive across the lake, where there is abundant bird life. The sham ruin where the river enters the park is built from genuine medieval fragments.

The Russell Gardens are part of the Kearsney Court estate that have been open to the public since 1951. The garden of the Victorian mansion was designed by Thomas Mawson in 1901. He made an important contribution to the art of garden design between 1900-1920 and this is one of the few examples of his work in Kent. His skill in linking house to garden by terraces and flights of steps to give views of lower gardens and sweeping lawns was demonstrated with style at Kearsney.

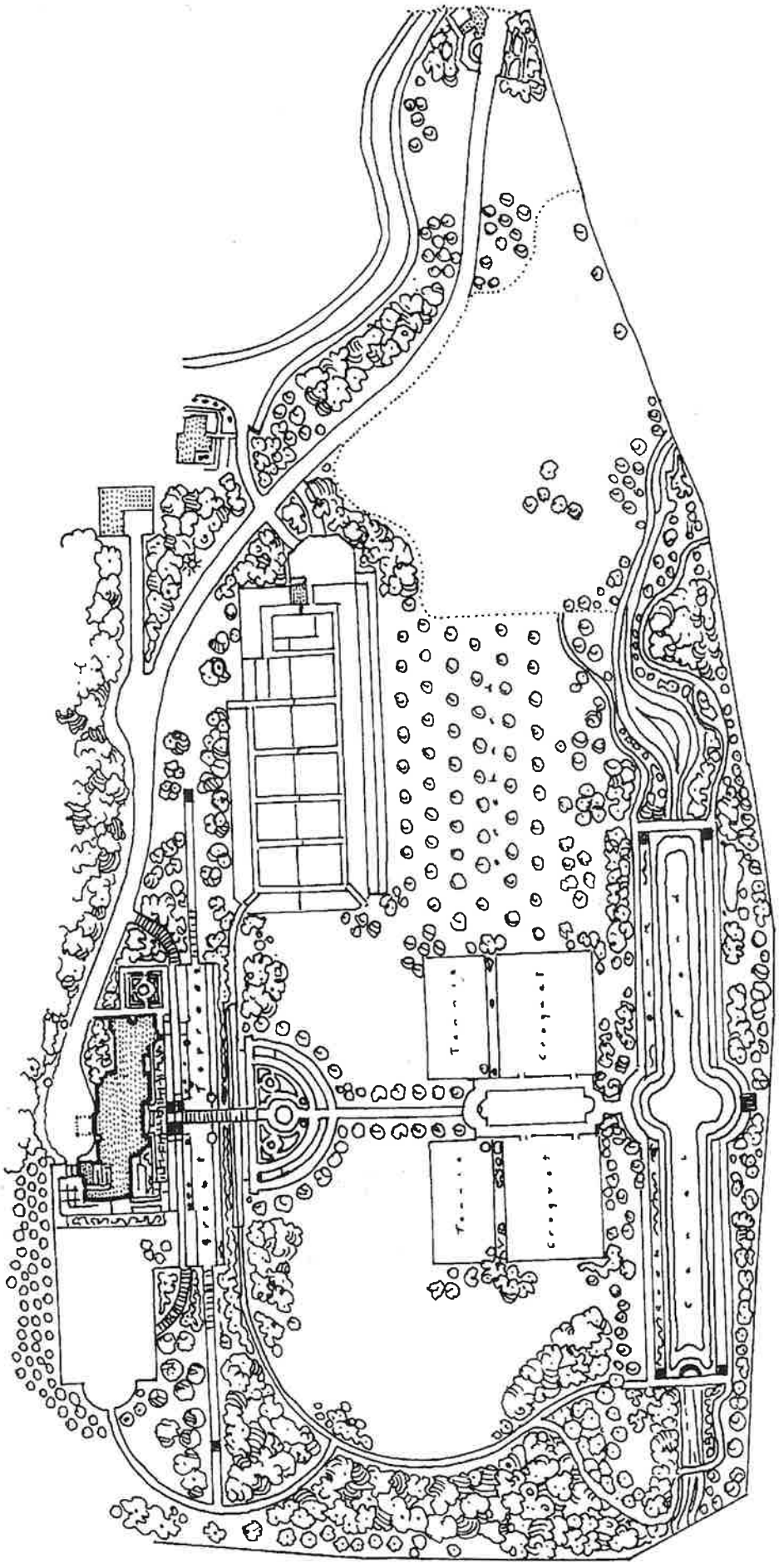
The lily pond of the upper terrace has been converted to a sunken garden and, flanked by tennis courts, is now a weaker counterpoint to the flight of structural ingenuity below. Mawson's use of the natural watercourse was inevitable and the canal with its pillared and balustraded pavilions was a grand climax to his design. *(Right).*

At Dover, Brook House Gardens, Granville and Marine Gardens on the seafront and Pencester Gardens were also visited and recorded. There are Recreation Grounds at the Danes and Elms Vale.

The Bulwarks, Mill Wall, Rope Walk and **The Butts**, are four sections of the old town boundary providing an unusual public walk around the historic town of Sandwich. A wide path runs along the top of the steep, grassy ramparts that once formed the medieval defences. These are now shaded by tall limes and plane trees, and yew and hornbeam clothe the embankments. There are views over the inner town and outwards over the countryside. Information boards give the history of each section and of the Delf and Butt streams on either side of the wall. These attract water fowl and where there is adequate level ground, flowering trees and roses have been planted.

Sandwich has the Grazen Salts Sports Ground.





Thomas Mawson's plan for the terraced gardens at Kearsney Court.

Gillingham Borough Council

Gillingham Park, Canterbury Street. The population of Gillingham doubled in the last quarter of the 19th-century creating a vital need for recreational space. An area of pasture was purchased by the Council in 1903 from Brasenose College, Oxford. Part of the site was left as public open space and part was designed as an ornamental garden. Trees planted at that time give the park its character today, despite severe losses in the 1987 storm. Flowering cherries, holly, magnolia, almond and catalpa have been added with borders of shrubs, bulbs and seasonal planting providing colour. The mock-Tudor lodge of 1904 is in Council use.



Arbutus unedo.
The Strawberry Tree.



Fine trees at Gillingham Park.

The Strand at Gillingham was acquired in 1892 as a small creek off the Medway River estuary, and the first swimming pool was made in 1896. It was developed as a riverside pleasure-ground between 1921 and 1926 with additional facilities for 'holidays at home' during the 2nd world war. Now the Strand Leisure Park provides facilities for all the family with an open-air swimming pool, a boating lake, pitch and putt, crazy golf, tennis, miniature railway and an enclosed children's playground. There is a programme of tree planting in progress.

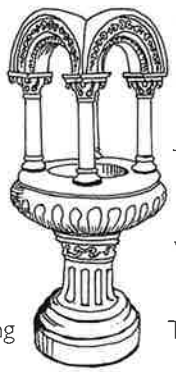
The Great Lines is an exposed open space in the centre of the Medway towns, owned by Gillingham Borough Council with Rochester-upon-Medway. Riverside Country Park has Berengrave Nature Reserve; and Darland Banks is a designated Nature Reserve managed in conjunction with Kent Trust for Nature Conservation.

At Rainham, Cozenton Park, Platters Park, Wigmore Park, King's Frith Playing Fields and the Recreation Ground were visited and recorded.

Gravesham Borough Council

Camer Country Park was established by the former Strood Rural District Council in 1971. As part of the Camer Park estate with an imposing 18th-century mansion, this country park evokes the ambience of landscaped parkland of that era.

A variety of trees date from the original planting and both native and exotic species have been added as replacement for losses in 1987. An avenue of limes has been planted along the former driveway.



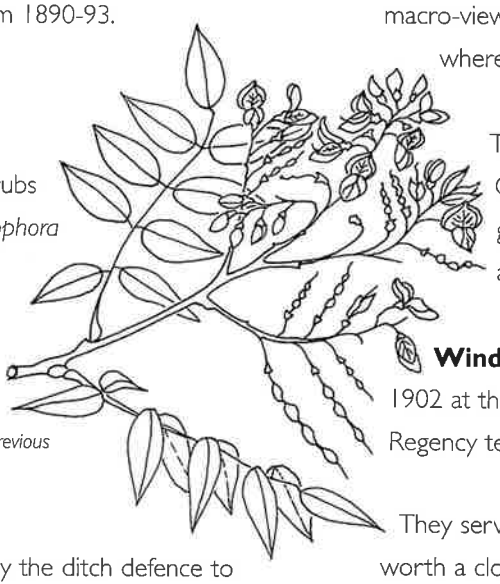
Victorian drinking fountain, Riverside, Gravesend.

Tracks and trails across the downland and through old Camerfield Wood attract many walkers.

Three gardens of differing character retain their individual identity within the **Riverside Leisure Complex** at Gravesend.

The walk through **The Gordon Memorial Garden** leads to the statue of General Gordon (by Doulton), which was erected to his illustrious memory when the garden was donated by G M Arnold, the Mayor from 1890-93.

The garden has good specimens of less common trees and shrubs set in lawns. A rare *Sophora japonica*, the Pagoda tree, *(right)* can be seen at the south entrance by the ornamental drinking fountain. *(See previous page).*



The Dell was originally the ditch defence to the Fort. It has been landscaped to be managed as a natural area for native flora and fauna, to be used as an educational resource. A raised broadwalk has been installed across the wetland habitat and pond; the upper level footpaths lead to an amphitheatre.

The New Tavern Fort guarded the entrance to the Thames from 1780. It was sold to Gravesend Corporation and converted into a garden between 1930-32.

The Fort garden could be wickedly seductive to small boys with an eye for a situation. The cannon and fortifications are somewhat softened, for those who come in peace, by judicious planting around the defences. The Rose Garden marks the site of the Fort House which was destroyed by a V2 rocket in 1944. The Victorian bandstand is a decorative construction with oriental pretensions.

Windmill Hill, by Rouge Lane, Gravesend, was developed by The Windmill Hill Pleasure Ground Company about 1840. The mill with its camera obscura attracted many visitors to the hill which was to form the climax of a grand town plan that was only partially achieved. There is an exciting macro-view of the Thames from the summit, where there is an historic beacon.

The site was acquired by Gravesend Corporation soon after 1920 and this grassy knoll continues to be developed and freely enjoyed.

Windmill Hill Gardens were opened in 1902 at the foot of the hill and opposite the Regency terrace, Clarence Place.

They serve for sport and recreation and are worth a closer look for the uncommon trees and shrubs planted there.

A memorial in a small formal garden commemorates the losses of two world wars and there is a classical granite obelisk erected to the memory of a local benefactor.

Northfleet UDC secured part of Wombwell Hall estate in 1929 to develop **Wombwell Park** Recreation Ground. It is a valuable open space surrounded by residential housing and provides for football, cricket, tennis and a children's play area. The Northfleet Bowling Club occupies a central area. There are some mature trees, decorative planting by the original entrance gates and a formal rose garden around the carpark. The bandstand was removed after storm damage in 1987.

Woodlands Park, Wrotham Road, Gravesend, was a public recreation meadow at one time, purchased by the Corporation in the mid-1930s and opened with due ceremony for the coronation of George VI in 1937. It is a useful

neighbourhood park for all the family, except dogs and cyclists who are not admitted.

Facilities include amenity grassland, a bowling green, tennis courts, crazy golf and children's playground, all individually enclosed. A rustic cafe opens during the summer. Several fine *Prunus subhirtella autumnalis* grace the George V memorial gates and tree planting of less usual deciduous hardwoods around the perimeter includes *Fraxinus excelsior jaspidea*, the golden ash.



George V memorial gates, Woodlands Park, Gravesend. (1937).

Maidstone Borough Council

The **Archbishop's Palace** was the medieval archiepiscopal residence in Maidstone. It was rescued from demolition by the Trustees of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Fund and transferred to Maidstone Council in 1904.

The long history of the Palace is reflected in the present grounds. The Infirmarer's Garden, recreated in 1994 within the walled garden, features a tunnel arbour and beds of herbs that would have been used in medieval times. Alongside the River Len there is a grove of trees that is representative of introductions to Britain over 400 years. A box-edged parterre in the approach drive is a recent endeavour to relate the later Jacobean facade of the Palace to the grounds.

Brenchley Gardens, by Maidstone Museum, were presented to the town by Mr Julius Brenchley in 1873 and have endured in the Victorian idiom for over 120 years. The cenotaph stands near to the original bandstand and space has been found for several displaced urban artefacts.

Trees shade the garden and a good range of flowering and evergreen shrubs give interest throughout the year. The tradition of colourful bedding schemes persists, as do the rosebeds, a scented garden and the carpet bedding displays by the entrance.

The only assessment needed of the social and aesthetic value of this garden is a recognition of its indispensable worth to the residents and visitors, shoppers and office-workers of Maidstone.

Clare Park Recreation Ground, Tonbridge Road, was created by Maidstone Corporation between 1914-17; subsequent re-imbursement by Sir Edward Sharp in 1923 was in honour of Lady Clare Sharp. Clare Park has the advantage of a sunny southern aspect. While it is levelled and furnished more for recreational activity than for horticultural interest, the facilities are in constant use and there is the pleasurable feel of a garden.

London plane, silver maple, beech and Scots pine provide shelter, with smaller flowering trees around the greens and courts also giving good autumn colour. Shrub borders have spring bulbs and summer roses.

Cobtree Manor Park was the bequest of the late Sir Garrard and Lady Tyrwhitt-Drake 'for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public'.

With this late 20th-century country park, the full role of the public park as originally conceived, has been revived. The educational importance of the mid-Victorian park seemingly faded away this century and horticultural excellence has been eroded in favour of sports.

Cobtree re-emerges with the Museum of Kent Life (learn about the past), Kent Trust for Nature Conservation (learn about conservation of wildlife), the Nature Trail (learn about flora and fauna) and, not least, the Arboretum, an extensive planting of ornamental trees and shrubs, labelled for the edification of eager gardeners, and a place of quiet beauty for everyone.

Mote Park was purchased by Maidstone Corporation from Lord Bearsted in 1929.

England's greatest contribution to the art of garden design was the 18th-century landscape park and, in this context, Mote Park appeals to the intellect as well as the eye. The mansion survives untrammelled on rising ground overlooking the valley of the Len, the lake and the groups of trees in an undulating landscape. The classical Doric pavilion and the distant view of the Downs are further inspiration.

The historic landscape on the western side of the park has gradually been eroded by the development of improved recreational and sporting facilities for the town, the provision of car parking and the planting of exotic tree species.

Penenden Heath was the ancient Saxon centre of legal administration and, as a ground of common access, was the site of musterings of Kentish radicals through the ages. It was enclosed and presented to Maidstone as a recreation ground by the Earl of Romney in 1882. Tennis courts, bowling and putting greens are fenced in a formal garden adjacent to the heath where cricket and football are played.

In the garden, rhododendrons, azaleas and heathers thrive on the acid heathland sand. There is a separate children's playground.

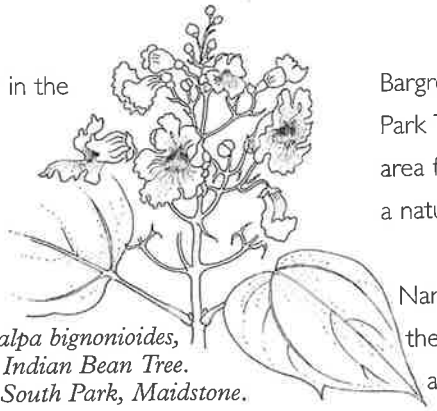


The Mote, seen from the classical Doric pavilion 'Erected by the Volunteers of Kent as a tribute of respect to the Earl of Romney, Lord Lieutenant of the County MDCCCI.' (1801).

South Park Recreation Ground is a pleasant neighbourhood park developed from meadowland and designed by Bunyards of Maidstone in 1929. Tennis courts, bowling and putting greens and their pavilions are incorporated into a garden setting.

The peripheral belt of trees shelters many flowering trees and shrubs. A fine specimen *Catalpa bignonioides* (Indian bean tree), the rose garden and the avenue of rambler roses are in flower in July. The ornamental urn in the lily pond (which may have come from Preston Hall) is

a copy of a Roman urn in the Vatican Museum.



Catalpa bignonioides, Indian Bean Tree. South Park, Maidstone.

The ground south of Armstrong Road was bought and donated to Maidstone for sports pitches in order to restrict the spread of quarrying.

Vinters Valley Nature Reserve was once part of Vinters park, an 18th-century park owned by the Whatman family, that was purchased by Kent County Council in 1952. The reserve, off Bargrove Road, is in the care of the Vinters Valley Park Trust. This is a new-style public amenity: an area for quiet recreation in a natural environment, a nature reserve and an educational resource.

Narrow paths traverse the steep wooded slopes; the grassland areas have a profusion of grasses and wildflowers, attracting butterflies and moths. The wetlands range from shaded carr to the open waters of the lake and the scrub provides cover for many birds and animals.

A listed ha-ha on the eastern boundary, an ice-house and several exotic trees date from the earlier park.

Rochester-upon-Medway City Council

The Paddock, occupies a prime urban site opposite the Town Hall in the centre of Chatham. The land formerly belonged to the War Department.

Although designed for convivial relaxation with seats shaded by trees, and decorative planting in beds on the lawns, the constant traffic movement around the site reduces its appeal. Its true value is environmental, as a foil to the urban landscape, bringing scenic diversity to the city centre.

The great anchor commemorates the presence of the Royal Navy and the Royal Dockyard in Chatham from 1547-1984.

The **Riverside Gardens** across Globe lane are more peaceful. Visitors pause to reflect in the shade of the trees beside the old cannons and watch the river traffic ply back and forth.

The Town Hall Garden, Whiffens Avenue, Chatham, was previously the burial ground for St. Mary's Church. Late 19th-century legislation allowed the conversion of disused burial grounds into public gardens. These green areas were particularly valuable to the elderly and the very young in the congested inner city areas where they occurred and nowadays they offer a quiet retreat from urban hustle.

The collected headstones stand together against the boundary brick wall and the ground slopes gently to the west with trees in groups or in association with shrubs. Yews and evergreens recall the history of the garden but the mixture with deciduous species is not sombre and there is considerable variety in the planting.

Land was leased from the War Department in 1897 for a public garden to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. **Victoria Gardens** provided much needed recreational space for the populous town of Chatham, where there were both naval dockyard and barracks.

From the level brow of Fort Pitt Hill, this large tract of amenity grassland slopes to the north-west, overlooking Chatham Reach and the town centre. There are wide paths lined by chestnuts and limes, replenished recently with deciduous and flowering trees. The attractive Victorian bandstand has a central position near the war memorial - a stone celtic cross.

Rochester Castle Grounds and Terrace were leased from the Earl of Jersey by Rochester Corporation in 1870 and purchased in 1883. The Castle is a Grade I listed property of English Heritage. The Castle grounds within the medieval curtain wall of the Norman stronghold have gradually diminished in horticultural and landscaping terms since they were created in 1870.



Rochester Castle grounds 1930.

The garden lay-out was swept away in 1931, leaving the monumental architecture of the Norman keep in a bold and simple setting with mature trees uncomplicated by exotic planting.

The view from the decoratively planted terraces is across **The Esplanade** to the river. A pleasure walk was first made alongside the foot of the Castle wall in 1829, and this in part survives.



Decorative railing by Castle Gardens.

The land by the river was marshy and had to be reclaimed for use. The present gardens were begun in 1961 as part of the Charter commemoration celebrations and have been expanded for riverside recreation. The stone balustrade came from Rochester's medieval bridge.

Eastgate House in the High Street, Rochester, was purchased by Rochester Corporation in 1897 for a museum to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

This elaborate example of late Tudor brick architecture now houses the Dickens Centre which is open to the public. The entrance gates once stood in front of the Guildhall.

The garden to the rear was remade in 1983, the major feature being Dickens's chalet which was brought from Gad's Hill Place after his death. Its image is reflected in the two formal pools in the paved garden below, which is brightened by beds of seasonal planting. Through a gate in the north wall is an informal garden with a pergola walk and arbour.

Jackson's Field, above the New Road, Rochester, was originally hired from the War Department in 1871 for public use, and purchased and presented to the city in 1914 by Cllr Howard Jackson.

The remains of old Napoleonic defences appear as grassy embankments on this high ground overlooking the city, with a panoramic view of the Medway river. Formal flower beds along the southern boundary present a variety of designs in carpet bedding. The tennis courts, the bowling green and the children's playground are in constant use.

The Vines, by Vines Lane, was leased from the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral in 1879.

Benedictine monks were skilled horticulturalists and on this ground in medieval times they cultivated vines for the Priory of St. Andrew. The plot has endured in the care of the church since then, and as a garden for public use and enjoyment in the late 20th-century ranks as one of the historic assets of the city.

The diagonal avenue of plane trees was planted in 1880 and has been partially restored since the 1987 hurricane. Level greensward is the setting for specimen trees, and the shrub groupings include many garden favourites.

Football and cricket pitches are provided at Luton Recreation Ground, Chatham, and Church Field, Rochester. Capstone Park has facilities for a wide range of country pursuits.

Sevenoaks District Council

Bradbourne Lakes Park was acquired by Sevenoaks District Council in 1935. The story of Bradbourne is well-documented from Saxon times, but the years from 1740-61 when Henry Bosville utilised a tributary of the River Darent to form a series of ornamental lakes, are the most interesting to this survey. The five lakes, linked by waterfalls and sluices, are embanked by stone verges, and covering a distance of a quarter of a mile are no mean feat of water engineering.

Paths follow the lakesides to north and south and the reflections of the muted greens of waterside trees are brightened by the aquatic birdlife.

A history of settlement at **Lullingstone Park**, Eynsford, can be traced back 2000 years and it was the establishment of the boundary banks, woods, pollard trees and open ground for the medieval deer park that forms the basic landscape of the park today. Later 18th-century restyling, the planting of introduced tree species in the 19th-century, followed by the effects of two world wars and contemporary recreational requirements, have all made their mark on this area of Kentish countryside. It continues, in essence, as a beautiful park for public enjoyment.
The Visitor Centre at Kingfisher Bridge, Eynsford, has many leaflets on all aspects of park interest.

Sevenoaks Town Council

Upper High Street Gardens in Sevenoaks *(right)* were donated in memory of Mr and Mrs Constant, by their children in 1949.



The most ancient of garden formulas was used to create this pleasant retreat for local residents. The four-fold layout of the upper garden, with water represented by the well-head at the centre, symbolises

the Garden of Eden, fertility, timelessness and Paradise. In the hot sun, aromatic shrubs and flowers give of their scents. Flowering cherries, *Prunus Kanzan*, shade the lower grassy area where there are seats and a rustic shelter.

Cricket was played on The Vine from 1734, some 50 years before the ground was given to the town by the Duke of Dorset. Seven oaks were planted here to commemorate the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902, and six had to be replaced after the hurricane of 1987.

On the southern side, **The Vine Gardens** can be entered from the High Street. This is a paved garden, under a creeper-clad pergola, which leads to a pond with a rustic bridge. Roses and herb borders form a fragrant approach to the grassy space adjoining the cricket ground. A listed pavilion, a bandstand and a band practice room all date from the 19th-century.

Judd's Piece, nearby on Hollybush Lane, is a small area of copse and grass given in 1948 by Mr Walter Judd.

In 1995, Sevenoaks Town Council embraced nature and transformed an abandoned allotment site into **The Environmental Park**. Children are to be closely involved with this project where the wetland area, the regenerated woodland and the grassland with wild flowers are all linked by a network of paths to the playground areas. *(See plan on inside back cover).*

Greatness Playing Fields and Hollybush Lane Recreation Ground are sports areas.

Swanley Town Council *(Sevenoaks Area)*

Hextable Gardens were once part of the grounds of Hextable House, and from 1891-1944 were the gardens of Swanley Horticultural College that were designed and maintained by the students, as part of their practical training.

Recently acquired by the Council, after some years of neglect, the terrace garden, the rock garden and pond area are being restored. There is a new rose arbour and planting, and a 'special needs' garden is being developed. A nature trail around the site passes many notable trees and shrubs. Opposite the original wrought iron entrance gates is an avenue of lime trees, known to date from 1650.

Hextable Park, opened in 1991, is one of Kent's newest public parks. It aims to please both sporting and environmental lobbies. There are football and tennis facilities and a playground. The natural areas - the pond, the wetland and copse - have explanatory plaques to help in the identification of trees, wildflowers and insects. Several local landmarks can be seen in the view from the Mound.

At New Barn Lane, derelict orchard and nurseries have been transformed into a modern public park: **Swanley Park** is accessible from a large area of north-west Kent. Grassland and trees are the warp and weft of the design. The tree species and cultivars, yet to mature, will in time contribute handsomely to the local landscape and complement the man-made lake.

The park offers a range of activities especially for families with children. There are boats for hire and the lake also caters for model boating. There is a model railway track, an adventure playground, a

paddling pool with a sand pit and a refreshment room with all amenities.

Hextable has a traditional village green, while Swanley Recreation Ground and Petham Park both have provision for sports.

Shepway District Council

A worked-out clay pit, renewed with fresh earth, was the gift of Lord Radnor to Folkestone in 1926. **Kingsnorth Gardens**, named after a former tenant, were created with the traditional panache of 'Floral Folkestone' and continue to uphold that reputation.



The Italian Garden in spring. Kingsnorth Gardens, Folkestone.

This is a garden of three descending terraces. In front of the shelter at the west end is a garden of bedding, pergola and pillar roses. Below is an Italian garden with formal ponds on either side of a fine weeping ash tree; clipped yews emphasise the geometric design of lawn and paving. In the lowest garden, beds of seasonal flowers vie in spring with shrimp-pink Acers *(Acer pseudoplatanus 'Brilliantissimum')*. Paths follow the sides of the garden where the banks are planted with drifts of herbaceous plants backed by flowering shrubs and sheltering trees of contrasting foliage colour. The garden is floodlit on summer evenings.

The mile-long, cliff top promenade at Folkestone, known as **The Leas**, has delighted generations of visitors with an unrivalled view across the Channel to France.

The ornate Victorian bandstand and the Edwardian architecture of erstwhile hotels confirm the cherished image of a seafront promenade. Wide lawns inset with beds of seasonal flowers, the scented garden and pretty hanging baskets add to the appeal of this 'Garden Coast' resort.

An unusual Victorian water-driven cliff lift and several paths, including the famous zig-zag path connect The Leas with the beach.

Formerly a recreation ground, **Radnor Park** was donated by the Earl of Radnor to Folkestone Borough in 1886.

Flowering cherries bring spring colour to the entrance by the mock-Tudor lodge and are followed by summer roses in the beds around the pedestal drinking fountain which, itself, is now planted with flowers in season. Avenues of chestnut, beech and lime trees line a large area used for sport and by visiting circuses. Permits are available for fishing the upper pond.

In a separate area by Victoria Hospital is a model boating pond, and a dell where paths follow the Pent stream through a shady valley.

Clifton Gardens, Westbourne Gardens and Augusta Gardens are private amenity gardens which belong to Folkestone Municipal Charities

and are maintained by the council. East and West cliff areas of Folkestone seafront and the Bayle Garden in the old part of town were visited and recorded. Cheriton and Sandgate have Recreation Grounds.

The land between the Royal Military Canal and the seashore at Hythe had been in public use long before the **South Road Recreation Ground** was laid out in 1920, to cater for cricket, tennis and putting. The recreational grassland is quartered by two main promenades: Wakefield Walk and Lucy's Avenue. They are variably planted with conifers, or with deciduous trees and shrubs and roses, to create garden walks that are maintained by the Town Council. The Hythe war memorial stands in a small decorative garden by the entrance from Ladies' Avenue on the western boundary.

Oaklands, housing the Council offices, was left to Hythe by Dr Arthur Randall Davies, and is a more intimate and informal garden with a children's playground and a bandstand.

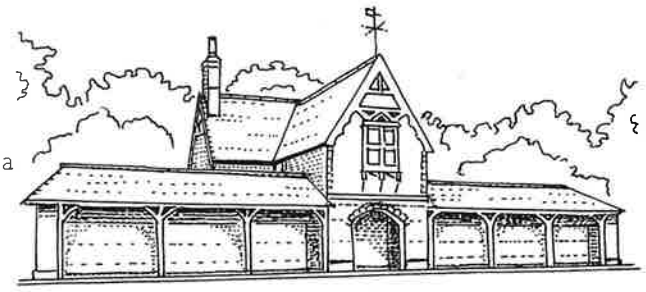
Swale Borough Council

The inauguration of **Faversham Recreation Ground** in 1860 was celebrated with a half-holiday and a grand procession.

The arrival of the East Kent Railway had launched a building boom: Gillow's Meadow, a traditional promenade, lying in the arm of the railway and in the path of development was saved by the Trustees of the Faversham Municipal Charities and by public subscription. The central area is bounded by broad avenues of lime and sycamore shading winding paths, and the ancient track to Macknade which crosses the park and the railway, is well-screened by mature trees.

The charming Victorian keeper's lodge with its summer house loggias is used and cared for by the Faversham Rugby Club.

The **Grove Park**, Key Street, Sittingbourne, was donated to the town by Mr George Andrew about 1900. The arboreal character and rural quality belies its urban situation within a district of residential housing, alongside the busy London road. Avenues of mature beech, oak and sycamore screen the east and west aspects and merge into a woodland walk on the slope beyond the cricket pitch. This is the setting for cricket on a summer's day, and makes Grove Park one of Sittingbourne's most popular recreation grounds.



The Summerhouse Lodge at Faversham Recreation Ground (1860).

Johnson House and Gardens on Burley Road, were given to Sittingbourne in memory of Mrs Eveline Elizabeth Johnson by members of her family in 1941.

The informal character of the undulating ground with meandering paths shaded by deciduous and flowering trees, and groups of shrubs giving cover to many garden birds, brings the pleasure of 'rus in

urbe' to this neighbourhood of terrace housing. A pious Victorian water trough with the inscription *'Everyone of us must give account of himself to God'* asserts the right of redundant street furniture to a haven in a municipal garden.

King George V Playing Field, originally part of the grounds of Gore Court, was acquired by Sittingbourne and Milton UDC and opened as a public playing field in 1937. The late 18th-century mansion was demolished in 1926 but the handsome redbrick Georgian coach-house and stables survive as the club-house and pavilion.



The 18th century Club-house and pavilion at King George V Playing Field, Sittingbourne.

Lime trees, chestnuts, oaks and sycamores date from the earlier parkland, with Scots pine to the east and a more recent chestnut avenue crossing the park. There is good access from the surrounding residential area to the new brightly coloured play equipment at the children's playground.

Sittingbourne is well-provided with further recreational areas at Albany Road, Milton, Kemsley and Murston.

On the Isle of Sheppey, Trinity Road Gardens, Sheerness, Minster Abbey and Gatehouse garden and Leysdown Coastal Park were visited and recorded.

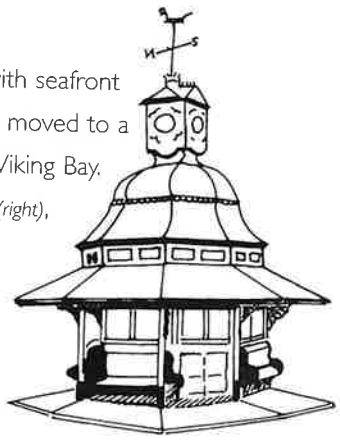
Thanet District Council

Pierremont Park, Broadstairs. The Hall was built in 1785 for Thomas Forsyth and the grounds were 'all of a beauty scarcely to be exceeded'. Even so, they were improved upon and in 1829 the Duchess of Kent and the young Princess Victoria stayed here. Broadstairs UDC leased, then purchased Pierremont Park for council use in 1927.

These are inviting gardens in the busy centre of the town. The holm oaks date from the first garden and there are many specimen trees, such as *Paulownia*, and an interesting association of showy plants in well-ordered beds. At the rear of the house, a fountain is the centre-piece of a charming garden, recently redesigned with new planting, a pergola and improved seating and paths.

In the wave of patriotic and commemorative fervour at the end of the 19th-century, Broadstairs launched the **Victoria Gardens** as a series of sheltered gardens along the promenade of the cliff top seafront. They were designed by J Cheal and Sons, Nurserymen, in 1892; some with flowerbeds, others with rockeries.

A bandstand is the building most frequently associated with seafront gardens and here it has been moved to a central position overlooking Viking Bay. The clock-tower and shelter *(right)*, faintly Anglo-Indian in style, is topped with a Viking ship for good measure.



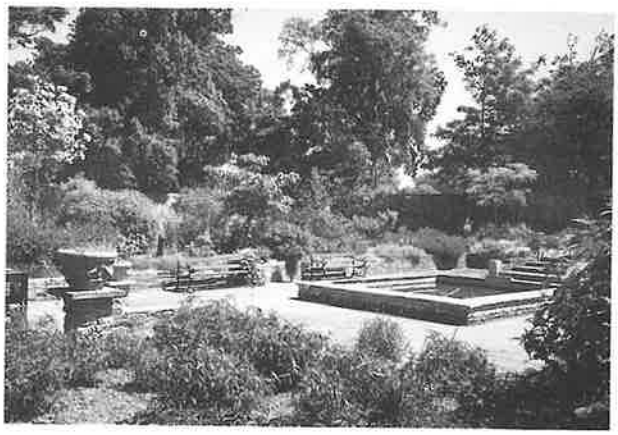
The arrival of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway in 1860 brought new prosperity to Margate and increased popularity as a resort. **Dane Park** was created in 1896 on land presented to Margate by Mr John Woodward. It was laid out to a purposeful design for both passive and active recreation and funded from the profits of speculative development nearby.

Ornamental entrance gates lead into walks amongst evergreen and deciduous flowering trees and shrubs, to a mosaic of seasonal planting on the terraces. Although the Victorian bandstand, the lake and the peacocks are but memories now, there is a memorial fountain of heraldic dolphins supporting basins, surmounted by a female figurine.

Hartsdown Park was purchased in 1928 and opened for public use the following year. A short avenue leads to the house, to the rear of which are the new Leisure Centre and swimming pool. There are some good specimen trees and shrubs but the emphasis is on amenity grassland for the golf course, the football pitches and tennis courts.

Adjoining Hartsdown Park is **Tivoli Park**. In 1830, Le Jardin de Tivoli was described as 'one of the most beautiful and romantic spots in Thanet' - a Pleasure Garden without peer for the entertainment to be had there. Today, left to its own devices and designated a nature reserve, it is appreciated by the birds and mammals now inhabiting.

Northdown Park was sold to Thanet District Council in 1939 on condition that it was kept as a public park. The first view of the Georgian mansion sparks promise of a parkland beyond: as 'amenity grassland' with linking groups of trees this now comes fitted with sports pitches. More serendipitous is the rare achievement in two enclosed gardens where 'tender, loving care' still keeps one step abreast of menacing budget cuts. The walled, Frank Matthews Memorial Garden *(below)* has a genial association of plants around a paved, sunken pool; the Dell, with the rock garden, is equally generous with garden virtues.



The **Sunken Garden** is a feature of the promenade at Westbrook. Built in the years of the Depression, its sturdy construction has survived the neglect of war and the partial eclipse of the popularity of seaside resorts.
Access from the Royal Esplanade is down a double stairway to the upper terrace and then by wide steps to the lower lawns and the formal sunken grass 'pools'. Planting of the limestone rock walls has changed radically from the lush bedding displays of the 1930s to the present arrangement of hardy coastal shrubs, able to withstand the harsh maritime conditions. Not originally part of the scheme, 'pizzas' of seasonal planting have been introduced to the central lawns.

Courtstairs Chine is situated at the western end of the Westcliff at Ramsgate. It was developed as an ornamental walkway from the cliff top to the undercliff promenade and, as part of the St. Laurence complex, it was declared open by the Prince of Wales in 1926.

A large quantity of artificial Pulham stone was imported to create this rock garden which

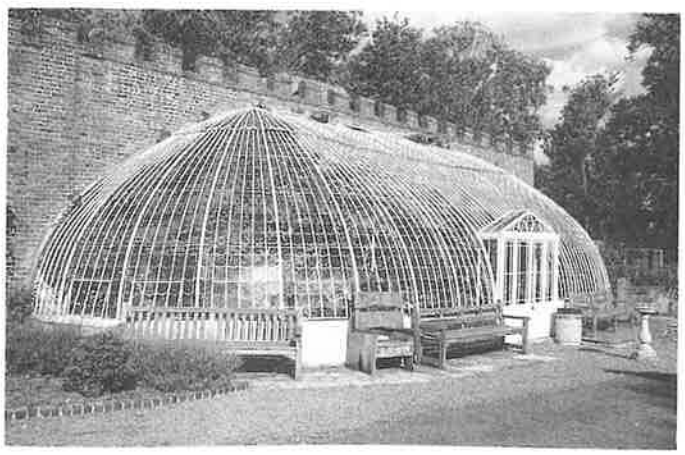
provides a sheltered environment for *Berberis, Buddleya, Deutzia, Colutea, Fuchsia, Olearia, Spartium* and *Tamarix*: all hardy shrubs which are able to withstand a coastal situation.

Ellington Park would have disappeared in urban development had not Ramsgate Corporation bought it for a public park in 1892. Old photographs show a glorious Edwardian park, as carefully composed as a symphony: a carriage drive ran through glades of trees and from a bandstand on a balustraded terrace, steps descended to an ornate fountain. There was an aviary and a pool, where a park-keeper surveyed his territory from a rustic bridge. There were many seats for families enjoying the brilliance of floral displays.

Today, under a canopy of trees, Ellington Park serves as 'urban green space' with only the surviving bandstand and a children's playground.

The parkland of East Cliff Lodge, the home of the philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore from 1831-1885, passed into the hands of Ramsgate Borough Council soon after 1946. Renamed the King George VI Memorial Park, it is a large area of grassland with a shelter belt of trees along the cliff top.

A garden in memory of Ramsgate's benefactor was made in 1985 after the restoration of the elegant **Italianate Greenhouse**. *(Below)*



This important early 19th-century curvilinear conservatory, with its porch and delicate overlapping fish-scale panes of glass, is the county's only public park conservatory.

Ramsgate Corporation bought the site on the East Cliff in 1912. **The Winterstoke Gardens** (also known as **The Helen Wills Memorial Gardens**) were laid out in the 1920s to a formal and architectural design. At the upper level were three water features with fountains separated by lawns and flower beds. The large, central circular pool is retained, the others have been restyled.

The rock garden below is built into the cliff with Pulham stone and planted with shrubs. There are steps down to the lower level where a curved, Doric colonnade provides a shelter looking out to sea over the undercliff. The pumps for the fountains are housed behind the colonnade.

Esplanade Banks and Gardens, Sea Road, Westgate-on-Sea. Only the basic structure of this Victorian promenade remains today. The path snakes round the headland, protected from the wind by grass banks and *Euonymus* hedging, exhibiting a distinct list to leeward. For hardy folk there are seats in sheltered places and some beds of brave flowers. Visit on a calm, sunny day.

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

Haysden Country Park was developed in the 1980s in an area of gravel workings along the River Medway. Water features strongly in the landscape as the river runs the length of the northern boundary from Haysden Lake in the west to Barden in the east. This park is both functional and visually refreshing. Paths and guided trails take walkers past a range of natural habitats supporting a variety of wildlife. There are facilities for water sports and exercise equipment is provided. Planted after the storm of 1987, Friendship Wood was a gift from Heusenstamm, Tonbridge's twin city in Germany.

Manor Park Country Park, West Malling, was opened to the public in 1976. It is owned and managed by Kent County Council.

Douces Manor lends its distant presence to the park but is separately owned. The landscaping and the lake speak the language of an 18th-century estate, without a retreat into romanticism. This is a country park in the modern idiom, with paths for walkers and the conservation ethic to the fore in the provision and maintenance of wildlife habitats. It is a pleasant place for picnics, for children to play and for the start of walks beyond the boundaries.

Tonbridge Castle, now a Grade I Listed Building, was purchased by Tonbridge UDC in 1899.

A ruined castle is uncompromising even within the setting of a public garden. The profile of the Norman motte, the solidity of the 13th-century gatehouse and the encircling curtain wall are well-balanced by the expanse of castle lawn within the bailey, where trees are largely confined to the perimeter. If purists find this too grand an image to embroider, many park devotees welcome the biannual message of floral bedding. The external grounds slope down to the walk alongside the Medway River, and the nearby pool and rockgarden.

Tonbridge Park has sports pitches, tennis and bowling, a swimming pool and recreational activities for children.

The site for **Trosley Country Park** was purchased in 1973. It is owned and managed by Kent County Council.

It lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and covers a large part of the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The view from the crest of the hill is over the Medway valley and across the Weald. The park forms part of a site of Special Scientific Interest and, within an Area of High Nature Conservation Value, is deemed biologically rich in flora and fauna. The park is managed for conservation of habitats as well as providing visitor facilities.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council provides picnic sites at Dene Park; Millhall, Aylesford; Oldbury Hill, Ightham; and Wrotham Hill viewpoint.



Summer bedding by the north side of the gatehouse. The curtain wall ascends the Motte at Tonbridge Castle. (1230-1260).

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

By a deed of 1703, the self-styled 'Earl of Buckingham' secured **The Grove** on Mount Sion, as 'a grove, shade or walke for the benefit of the inhabitants, lodgers and servants of Tunbridge Wells'. An entrance arch in classical style was erected. Visitors to the spa climbed Sion Hill to walk or drive through the grove of wealden oaks. The Grove was described as 'a place of umbrageous shade' in Victorian times when it was transferred to the care of Corporation. Time has thinned out the oaks, and more exotic species were planted for the restoration that was needed after the storm of 1987.

Calverley Grounds were originally the private gardens of the Calverley Hotel, part of the Calverley Park development of 1825, for which Decimus Burton (1800-81) *(right)* was the architect and planner. His inspired use of the sloping site created a romantic parkland with views over the distant countryside.

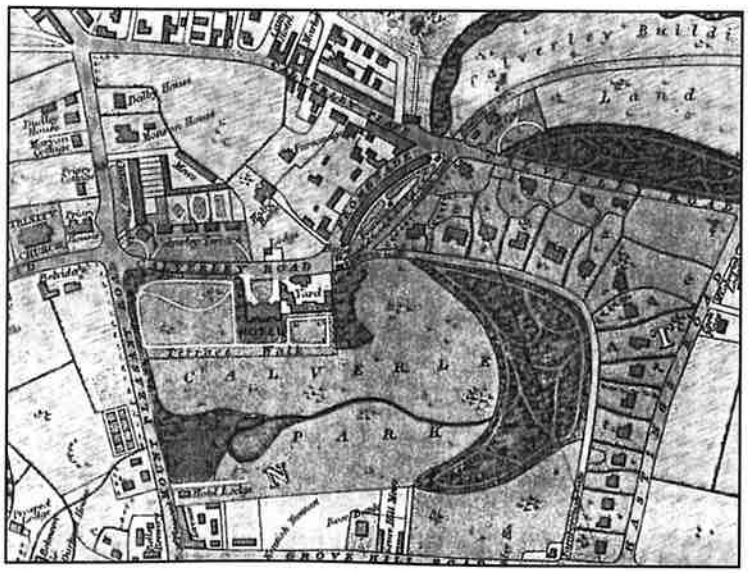


By courtesy of Hastings Museum & Art Gallery

The Grounds were purchased by the Town Council in 1920 and have been transformed over the years into the epitome of the traditional town park. There are recreational facilities, a bandstand, a tea-house, and decorative formal gardens of roses, herbs, shrubs and seasonal planting.

Dunorlan Park, Pembury Road, was purchased by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in 1951. Robert Marnock designed the park with a sense of theatre to match the grand Italianate mansion of 1850 (now demolished). He exploited the natural topography of the site to create a view from the terrace, of parkland sweeping down to the lake. A long avenue of deodars and Douglas firs links the classical temple on the hill to the elaborate fountain at the lower end. The loss of mature trees in 1987 called for considerable replanting but the main framework of the park still exists, as does the rock garden built by James Pulham.

Birds flock to the boating lake which is the main attraction of this popular park. *(See photograph on page 3).*



Plan of the Calverley Estate in 1839 from Colbran's Guide to Tunbridge Wells. The lower part of Calverley Park forms the Calverley Grounds today.

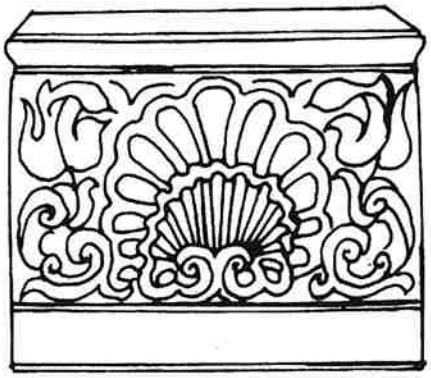
Tunbridge Wells Corporation developed the old reservoirs of Calverley Water Company, and an additional area presented by Ald Stone-Wigg to create **Grosvenor Recreation Ground** in 1889. **Hilbert Recreation Ground** was purchased and merged with it in 1931. Water is the most alluring of garden features, and both difficult and expensive to maintain. Only a

sturdy grotto now adds a touch of the picturesque to a small lake that survives from the idyllic garden that was created at Grosvenor. Fine trees, ornamental ponds, waterfalls and winding paths have been overtaken by sports facilities and more easily managed open space.

Hawkenbury and Mary Caley Recreation Grounds were also recorded and the playing fields at Allendale, Bayham Road, Cadogan, Colebrook and St. Marks visited.

The family of Ald Stone Wigg (first Mayor of Tunbridge Wells), subsidised the acquisition and development of **St. John's Recreation Ground** in his memory in 1899.

Grassland with trees and shrubs and herb borders add garden interest around the pavilion, tennis courts and bowling green. An Atlantic Cedar graces the entrance near to the Victorian glazed-tile fountain.



Glazed tile of the restored fountain at St. John's Recreation Ground.

The full records of the survey of amenity parks and gardens in Kent are held by:

Kent Gardens Trust,
The Historic Dockyard,
Chatham,
Kent, ME4 4TE.

Registered Charity No. 298861

Observations

Members of the survey team reported that the majority of public parks were maintained to a good standard and most were reasonably well used in many different ways. Town centre parks offer office workers and school children an alternative environment for lunch breaks and space for relaxation. Some city parks, by the very nature of their situation, are used purely as a thoroughfare. Many parks are popular with dog walkers resulting in excrement containers out-numbering litter bins at some sites. Almost every park contains a children's play area with the obligatory brightly coloured apparatus. Councils have problems reconciling the needs of young children with those of dog owners: there is either a ban on dogs within the park or an enclosed play area inaccessible to dogs but also to small children without an accompanying adult. Many dog owners with cars prefer to use the country parks and enjoy the freedom of a natural landscape to exercise their pets.



Notice board at the children's play area, Camer Park, Gravesham.

Some councils have display boards at the entrances to their parks naming the site, listing regulations, and sometimes giving visitor information. Other councils do not publicise their leisure areas and it is possible to enter and leave some parks such as Ellington Park, Ramsgate, with no indication it is a public amenity , or indeed that it has a name. Seats are totally absent in a few parks and others only contain basic benches unsuitable for the elderly. In many parks more sympathetic siting of seats would encourage visitors. The provision of litter bins is generally quite adequate although the design of some leads to litter dispersal in windy conditions, all too prevalent on Kent's coast.



The Bandstand, The Leas, Folkestone. (1895).

Maintenance costs and vandalism are the prime factors behind the loss of many features in Kent's historic amenity parks. Only eight bandstands remain, fewer fountains and just one glasshouse - the Italianate greenhouse in George VI Memorial Park, Ramsgate. Where park lodges are present and occupied, vandalism is noticeably less.

Council Strategy

The enormous spectrum of public parks and amenity areas which are the responsibility of the 14 district councils has already been briefly described. As might be expected, the differing styles and usages of parks create individual management problems and each council has its own priorities. All councils maintain their parks under schemes of compulsory competitive tendering, times and terms of contract varying in each district. Often council 'in house' services hold the contract and raise their own plants. Blanket contracts for a borough's parks stipulate uniform standards of maintenance, but in some cases key sites receive extra attention. Parks with a rich horticultural content are maintained as show pieces (Brenchley Gardens, Maidstone and Kingsnorth Gardens, Folkestone). As recreation grounds and country parks are less intensively managed the main expenditure is on grass cutting.

Increasingly limited budgets allocated to parks within the Leisure Services Departments mean that most councils find that maintaining the status quo of their amenity areas uses all available funds. Few are able to contemplate renovations of historical features or the landscaping of new areas. New parks are, however, being created in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells.

Surprisingly, few councils have undertaken visitor surveys in their parks and then only in one park, producing inconclusive results. Expense and lack of manpower have prevented more thorough investigation but Swale undertook a survey using the local press and replies indicated that the public would prefer more garden interest in parks.

Some councils have achieved the National Playing Fields recommendation of six acres recreation land per 1,000 population and this is now policy in all new developments (Thanet). Inevitably the centres of historic towns and cities will always fall far short of this optimum.

No council has produced leaflets describing individual parks, although some parks are included in general publicity leaflets for tourism and leisure. Many of Kent's parks are historically significant and public awareness of this aspect of the county's heritage would be greatly increased by making information leaflets available.

The problem of vandalism has been approached in several ways. Generally, the problem is worse in areas of high unemployment (Deal and Ramsgate) and the offenders are generally young people - as in Gravesend and Hextable. Ashford Council formed a covert surveillance team in an affected park, caught the gang leader and prosecuted the offenders, since when the park has been trouble free. Shepway is targeting schools, running competitions for bedding schemes and lecturing on the uses and maintenance of parks with particular emphasis on trees. Vandalism is already starting to decline. Gillingham has used semi-mature trees in a new planting scheme, to deter vandals.

Future Prospects

There is increasing support for the designation of historic public parks as Conservation Areas, and some agreement that a good management plan policy is effective as a form of protection.

Perhaps due to the general uncertainty created by possible re-organisation of local government, none of the councils has produced a long term management plan or statement of policy for amenity parks and gardens. Dartford Council has come nearest to this with the publication of a Draft Leisure Strategy. Whilst making no specific commitments, the Council 'seeks to control fully the cleanliness of public open spaces in respect of possible dog fouling, to maintain and develop effective security measures.....to prevent unacceptable behaviour by visitors', to undertake a detailed review of the services provided in their two main parks in order to improve quality and 'to find cost effective methods of protecting and expanding the range and quality of leisure opportunities for the public'. Public consultation is their next step. Perhaps more councils should adopt a similar strategy.

Gillingham Council has produced a very detailed 5-year management plan for the Great Lines. Tunbridge Wells Council has a future management plan for Dunorlan, which includes an extension doubling the size of the park. The 'Friends of Dunorlan Park' is being formed here. Only Ashford Borough Council has a plan for a new amenity area to be developed in the forseeable future. There is urgent need for more suppport from Government -perhaps from the Lottery or Millenium Commission Funds- for the future maintenance of parks. Most councils when asked how they would use extra funding stated that refurbishment of the historic parks would be a priority, with emphasis on the hard landscaping.

With a concerted effort in planning strategy and sympathetic conservation, the rich diversity and unlimited potential of Kent's public parks *can* be secured for the future.

Select list of amenity parks and gardens with historical features, horticultural interest and sports facilities.

Park or Garden	OS Grid Ref.	Area (ha)	Public Ownership/ Lease	Original Layout	Designer/(initiator)
Ashford Borough Council					
Memorial Gardens, Ashford	TR013423	c.1.3	1924-26	1924-26	
Victoria Park, Ashford	TR003423	c.10	1898	1898	
Canterbury City Council					
Dane John, Canterbury	TR147574	2.4	Early C16	1790	Ald Simmons
Westgate Gardens, Canterbury	TR144579	1.4	1936	1886-1912	S.Williamson
Memorial Park, Herne Bay	TR175678	c.3.5	1919	1919	P.Palmer
Whitstable Castle, Whitstable	TR113671	1.4	1935	1830-50	(Wynn Ellis)
Dartford District Council					
Central Park, Dartford	TQ545735	10.5	1903	1905	
Hesketh Park, Dartford	TQ554735	4.5	1903	1904-5	J.McIndoe VMH
Dover District Council					
Marke Wood Gardens, Deal	TR375507	6.4	c1927	1927	
Connaught Park, Dover	TR318425	12	1881-3	1882-3	E.May
Kearsney Abbey, Dover	TR287437	10.5	1945	1822	(J.M.Fector MP)
Russell Gardens, Dover	TR284438		1951	1901	T.Mawson
Bulwarks, Mill Wall Rope Walk and The Butts, Sandwich	TR326585 TR333581	5.8	Medieval	1384	
Gillingham Borough Council					
Gillingham Park, Gillingham	TQ777673	6	1903	1906	J.Redfern
Gravesham Borough Council					
Riverside Leisure Area, Gravesend	TQ655743	7.4	1890-93	1890	
Windmill Hill, Gravesend	TQ648735	3.6	By 1920	1840	
Maidstone Borough Council					
The Archbishop's Palace, Maidstone	TQ759555	0.1	1904	c1887	
Brenchley Gardens, Maidstone	TQ759561	1.6	1873	1871-2	McKenzie
Cobtree Manor Park, Maidstone	TQ747587	112	1964	C20	
Mote Park, Maidstone	TQ770554	182	1929	C18	
South Park, Maidstone	TQ764544	10.2	1929	1930	Bunyards
Rochester-upon Medway City C.					
Town Hall Garden, Chatham	TQ757683	1.5	1904	1905	
Victoria Garden, Chatham	TQ751678	2.5	1897	1897	
Castle Garden, Terrace and	TQ742685	4.4	1870	1869	
Esplanade Gardens, Rochester	TQ739684	1.6	1829	1980s	
Eastgate House Gdns, Rochester	TQ745683	0.3	1897	1897	
The Vines, Rochester	TQ743685	2	1879	1880	
Sevenoaks Town Council					
Upper High Street Gardens, Sevenoaks	TQ531544	0.2	1949	1949	(J.Constant)
The Vine Gardens	TQ531552	0.3	c1850	c1930	
Swanley Town Council *(Sevenoaks)*					
Swanley Park (New Barn), Swanley	TQ515695	22.8	1982	1982	
Shepway District Council					
Kingsnorth Gardens, Folkestone	TR221372	1.3	1926	1928	
The Leas, Folkestone	TR219363	5.7		1890	
Radnor Park, Folkestone	TR221375	8.1	1886	1686	Mr.Conquest
South Road Recreation Ground	TR345165	11	1915	1920-21	
Swale Borough Council					
Faversham Recreation Ground	TR020610	8	1860	1860	W.Masters
Johnson House Gdns, Sittingbourne	TQ899637	0.6	1941	Early C20	
Thanet District Council					
Pierremont Park, Broadstairs	TR394678	2	1927	1800-40	
Victoria Gardens, Broadstairs	TR398675	2		1892	J. Cheal
Dane Park, Margate	TR362705	7	1896	1898	
Northdown Park, Margate	TR379703	14	1939	C18	
Ellington Park, Ramsgate	TR375654	4.8	1892	C18-19	
Winterstoke Gardens, Ramsgate	TR392655	0.6	1912	1923	
Tonbridge & Malling Borough C.					
Tonbridge Castle, Tonbridge	TQ589466	5.3	1899	C11	
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council					
The Grove, Tunbridge Wells	TQ586389	2	1890	1703	John Buckingham
Calverley Grounds, Tunbridge Wells	TQ587393	4.8	1920	1850s	Decimus Burton
Dunorlan Park, Tunbridge Wells	TQ589395	15.2	1947	1850s	Robert Marnock

features
Civic Building
Gates, Arches
Lodges, Shelters
Memorials, Temples
Statuary, Memorabilia
Bandstand
Terraces
Water feature
Trees
Avenue
Shrubs
Bedding
Roses
Rock Garden
Herbs
Bulbs
Lawns
Pergola
Pavilion
Sports
Playgroud
Page

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Plan of Sevenoaks Environmental Park 1995

By courtesy of Sevenoaks District Council



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