

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



Blackhurst Park, Royal Tunbridge Wells



June 2009

Blackhurst Park

Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent

INTRODUCTION

SITE DESCRIPTION

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Boundary map.

FIGURE 2: Key views map.

FIGURE 3: Key features map.

FIGURE 4: Aerial photograph.

FIGURE 5: Map of listed buildings at Blackhurst Park.

FIGURE 6: Listed buildings at Blackhurst Park.

FIGURES ONLY ON CD

FIGURE 7: Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1868). Sheet 60/12.

FIGURE 8: Ordnance Survey 2nd edn 25" map (1897). Sheet 60/12

FIGURE 9: Ordnance Survey 3rd edn 25" map (1909). Sheet 60/12.

FIGURE 10: Ordnance Survey Revd edn 25" map (1936). Sheet 60/12.

FIGURE 11: Estate map 1917 reproduced in Barnes.

FIGURE 12: Ernest Arthur Rowe, *The Rose Pergola at Blackhurst House, Tunbridge Wells*. Watercolour probably about 1917.

FIGURE 13: Ernest Arthur Rowe, watercolour of Blackhurst House 1917. Reproduced in Barnes.

FIGURE 14: Photographs of Blackhurst Park 1981/82 .

FIGURE 15: Photograph of Blackhurst shrubberies 1998. Sales Particulars.

FIGURE 16: Photographs of Blackhurst Park February 2009.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the residents of Blackhurst Park for allowing access to the gardens and commenting on the text.

INTRODUCTION

This site dossier and description has been prepared as part of 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 Councils Planning Policies. The list is not conclusive and further gardens may be added over time as research continues or information comes to light

The review for Tunbridge Wells Borough was a pilot project to establish a partnership and methodology for the review of the compendium across Kent and provide an example of good practice across the County and the region. The research was largely carried out by volunteers of the Kent Gardens Trust with support and training from the project consultants Virginia Hinze and Dr Barbara Simms.

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.

Planning Services Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Town Hall Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1RS 01892 526121 www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk	Kent County Council Heritage Conservation Invicta House County Hall Maidstone ME14 1XX 01622 696918 www.kent.gov.uk
Kent Gardens Trust www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk	High Weald AONB Unit Woodland Enterprise Centre Hastings Road Flimwell East Sussex TN5 7PR 01580 879500 www.highweald.org/

SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
TQ 6060 4020

BLACKHURST PARK

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

A terraced garden set in formal lawns, shrubberies and walks and with adjacent parkland, laid out around a house designed by the architect Decimus Burton (1800-81) in 1836-38.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1820, John Ward, later MP for Leominster (1830–1) and High Sheriff of Kent (1835), purchased land on the outskirts of Tunbridge Wells to the north of Pembury Road on which to build a speculative residential estate. In 1828, he commissioned the young architect Decimus Burton (1800-81) to design what became the Calverley Estate, a picturesque residential park later described as a 'prototype garden suburb' (*Country Life*). The Calverley Estate was not completed until 1839 but was influential in the development of other residential parks and private houses in the Tunbridge Wells area (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*). In 1828, Ward had also bought an additional 364h of land south of the Pembury Road for development from the adjoining Sandown Estate. In 1836 he granted a building lease for 90 years for c.6.5h of this land to a Mr Ford Wilson, who commissioned Burton to design a house there. The house, named Blackhurst, was completed in 1838 and is illustrated in Greenwood's *The Epitome of the Kent* of the same year.

Census returns record the Wilsons as in residence in 1841 and the family remained there until 1863 when Mrs Eliza Wilson died, a year after her husband. During his residency Wilson bought additional land around the house and extended the estate to c.28h, although before his death he sold some 6.5ha and Little Mouseden Farm, part of his original holding (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*). The 1st edn OS map of 1862 shows a house with adjoining stable block and kitchen garden set in treed parkland. On Mrs Wilson's death Blackhurst reverted to the Ward Estate and John's son Arthur became the sole owner.

The house was tenanted from then onwards, although the occupants are not recorded until 1878, when a retired manufacturer, William Wilson Morley, was in residence (Census data). He also purchased farmland around Blackhurst, which he retained when he moved to Eastbourne in 1881. In 1886 the railway builder, Sir Samuel Morton Peto, retired to Blackhurst with his wife and lived there until his death three years later (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*). His wife remained in residence until her death in 1892, when Arthur Ward sold the property to a Frederick Frank.

By 1909 Frank had built a west wing onto the house on the site of a former conservatory (3rd edn OS map) and made changes to the internal layout. He also planted a woodland area with a sunken garden c.60m south-west of the house and a grass, yew-lined staircase on the east side of the kitchen garden (3rd edn map, Kent Compendium). When Frank died in 1915, the Blackhurst Estate was inherited by his sons Robert and Sir Howard, the latter a founding partner of the estate agents Frank, Knight and Rutley. Blackhurst served as a Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital during World War One but in 1917 was offered for sale with 68h as 'one of the most attractive properties of its area and character ... [with] a beautiful miniature park, admirably arranged grounds and a productive kitchen garden' (1917 Sales Particulars). Two watercolour paintings by the artist Ernest Arthur Rowe depict the house and the rose pergola about this time.

The property was bought by a Thomas Bolton who extended the house, built a retaining wall with a tennis lawn at its foot, repositioned the ha-ha and, during the 1920s, laid out new features in the garden, including a rockery, with the assistance of various gardeners, including Herbert Maxwell, Henry Lazell, Mr Dane and Mr Broom (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*). When Mr Bolton died in 1937, Blackhurst was sold to the architect and land speculator Alfred M. Cawthorne who let it to a tobacco company during World War Two.

In 1944 the property was bought by Kent County Council then transferred to the Ministry of Health which ran it as a preliminary nurses' training school from 1949-69, after which it was converted to accommodation for Tunbridge Wells' National Health Authority staff (*Civic Society Newsletter*). During this period the ornamental gardens were well maintained (1981/82 photographs), though the kitchen garden was neglected.

In 1994 the newly formed Weald of Kent Community National Health Service Trust (previously the Tunbridge Wells Health Authority Community Unit) refurbished Blackhurst as its headquarters. Renovation took place under the supervision of The Lawrence Hewitt Partnership and John Mowlem Construction but the gardens were excluded from the works and became neglected (Kent Compendium). In 1995, the Blackhurst Conservation Group embarked on a programme of restoration of garden features including the original paths, a grotto, lily pond and Japanese garden and the gardens were open under the National Gardens Scheme from 1995 until 1998 when the property, with 0.14h of the adjoining ornamental gardens, was bought for development in 1998 (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*). Two estate cottages, a lodge, the parkland and farmland were sold separately.

In 2004 Blackhurst house, the stable block and adjoining garden was restyled and sold as a gated development comprising with four separate dwellings: Eaton House, Blackhurst Hall and The Grange were formed from the house itself with the fourth comprising the C19, single-storey stable block, renamed The Old Courtyard. The whole property, known as Blackhurst Park, remains in communal private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Blackhurst Park lies within a residential area on the eastern outskirts of Tunbridge Wells. It is set back from the road in a sheltered position on the Pembury sandstone ridge, some 152m above sea level and with its southward-sloping parkland affording fine views over the undulating farmland and woods on the Kent and Sussex borders. The c.6.5h site is approximately 3km north-east of the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells and 1km south-west of Pembury. The site is bordered to the north by Pembury Road, to the west by Hall's Hole Road and to the south by Cornford Lane. The open grounds of Oakley School form the eastern boundary.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Blackhurst Park is entered on a tarmac drive leading from a recessed area on the east side of Hall's Hole Road, some 40m south-east of its junction with Pembury Road. Inside the entrance, on the north side of the drive, is a C19, two-storey Tudor-style lodge (Blackhurst Cottage) designed by Decimus Burton in 1836-38. It is built of sandstone to first floor level with timber and render above and a tiled roof. Immediately east of the lodge the drive passes through a pair of 2m high, C20, wrought iron entrance gates hung on sandstone piers with wrought iron ball finials from which there are views of the house. Nineteenth and C20 OS maps show that the original gates were positioned immediately adjacent to Hall's Hole Road with the lodge standing within the grounds. The new gates were placed in their present positions in 1994 as part of the National Health Service refurbishment of the house as its headquarters.

The drive, gravelled onwards from the gates, then runs for approximately 75m in a north-easterly direction along the length of the north-west principal front past the former house entrance on the north-west front and to reach a small car parking area enclosed by a 3m high rhododendron hedge a few metres north of the former stable block.

The drive is also flanked on its north side by a similar rhododendron hedge with a grass verge at its foot which forms the current property boundary; a similar grass verge runs along the foot of the north-west front of the house. Prior to the 1998 redevelopment the drive arrived at a forecourt on the north-west front, from which there were views northwards over a lawn studded with trees (now in separate ownership as the lodge garden).

The drive, reverting to tarmac, continues from the house for a further 60m in a north-easterly direction past two C19 cottages (Gardeners Cottage and Woodmans Cottage) to the entrance to the former kitchen garden, some 40m east of the stable block. A service drive which formerly ran in a southerly direction for c.25m from Pembury Road to the stable yard is now gone.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Blackhurst Park house (listed grade II) was completed by 1838 in an Italianate villa style to the designs of Decimus Burton (1800-81) and was described in 1838 by Greenwood as 'a very elegant structure'. An accompanying illustration

showed the house from the south with a conservatory built onto its west end. The house is a long, irregular, slate-roofed, two-storey building constructed of sandstone from a local quarry opened for construction of the Calverley Estate in 1928. Barnes commented that the milk-white colour of Calverley sandstone 'soon became discoloured by weathering to darker browns and greys, which did not throw up the lights and shadows of Burton's design detail and must have disappointed him' (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*). In the early 1900s the conservatory was demolished and replaced by a two-storey wing in a similar architectural style to the original and internal changes were made. The house was again refurbished internally as part of the 1998 development but Burton's external 'architectural trademarks' survive, including 'the triple-arched window beneath a pediment, with the characteristic low-pitched roof of slates' (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The ornamental gardens lie on the south-east side of the house and comprise a formal terrace with lawns and walks enclosed by shrubberies, as laid out in the C19 and early C20. The south-east, garden front opens onto a raised terrace that runs the whole length of the house. It is paved in granite setts with a lily pond forming a central feature, the former surrounding flower beds of which are now (2009) filled with large cobbles. The terrace is supported by a c.1m high sandstone retaining wall surmounted by stone urns (some are concrete replicas) that runs the length of the house. From the terrace there are views east, south and west across the lawns and shrubberies and distant views south to the parkland (in separate ownership) beyond the ha-ha where mature trees survive from C19 plantings (now, 2009, in poor condition) and undulating farmland beyond.

At the far south-east end of the terrace a flight of seven stone steps, flanked by low stone walls surmounted at each end by a pair of urns, descend to a second, narrow terrace supported by a similar stone retaining wall. A gravel path runs the length of the second terrace between grassed borders then sloping gently westwards to reach lawns and shrubberies on the west end of the house. At the south-east end of the gravel path a steep flight of steps descends from the lower terrace and winds through an early C20 rockery (now with over mature shrubs) to the lawn which is enclosed on its south side by the ha-ha some 20m from the house. OS maps before 1929 show the position of the ha-ha as immediately below the gravel path on the second terrace but it was moved further away to its current position by Thomas Bolton before his death in 1937 to allow the construction of a tennis lawn. The rockery was constructed about the same time and possibly a stone sundial and 2m high bird table on an octagonal base located nearby are also from the same period.

Barnes suggested that Burton laid out the structure of the grounds at Blackhurst Park (*The House and Gardens of Blackhurst*) and certainly the layout of the path system, shrubberies, walks and the terracing survives from that shown on C19 maps (1st, 2nd, 3rd edn OS maps). 1917 Sales Particulars describe the grounds as 'tastefully laid out with wide lawns, Japanese Garden and Rock Cave, Croquet Lawn, Tennis Lawn, Rose Garden, Pergola and Herbaceous Border' and there are contemporary illustrations of the rose garden and pergola.

None of these features now survive in their original state, although by 1996 work had begun on restoring the Japanese Garden, Rock Cave and Rose garden some 50m south-west of the house and the croquet lawn has been reseeded.

PARKLAND

Parkland to the south and south-west of the house (in separate ownership) is separated from the ornamental gardens by a grassed, earth bank ha-ha and is managed as rough grass with some surviving mature trees. Parkland to the north-east of the house was sold off in 1988 and has been developed with three private houses with gardens. Until the early 1900s a footpath (gone by 1929, 4th edn OS map) ran from Blackhurst across the park and fields to Muxelwell Farm, Blackhurst's former home farm, c.300m south-east of the house.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The brick-walled C19 kitchen garden (c.40m x 60m) survives some 40m south-east of the house and is in separate private ownership. It is now unused and laid to grass. The 2m high walls sustained damage in the 1987 storms and remained unrepaired during the occupancy of the National Health Service, when the garden within them was used as a car park. The walls remain in poor condition (2009). Maps from the 1860s show it as divided into two sections with a central axis and perimeter paths and with slip gardens on its north, south and east sides. A number of buildings and glass houses are shown in its north-west corner, possibly forming a frame yard (1st edn OS map). Additional glass houses were built in the frame yard during the late C19 and an additional vegetable garden is mentioned in 1917 (Sales Particulars). In 1996 during local health authority ownership half of the kitchen garden was used as allotments by the residents but at that time the remaining section was neglected and the glasshouses (now gone) were dilapidated.

REFERENCES

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Maps

OS maps 1st edn 6" 1862
 2nd edn 6" 1897
 3rd edn 6" 1907
 4th edn 6" 1929

OS maps 1st edn 25" 1868 Sheet 60/12
 2nd edn 25" 1897 Sheet 60/12
 3rd edn 25" 1909 Sheet 60/12
 Revd edn 25" 1936 Sheet 60/12

1917 estate map in Barnes (1996).
Plan of gardens in 1993 (private collection).
Kent Gardens Compendium map 1996.
Modern Mastermap 1:10,000 2007.
Map showing listed buildings within site boundaries 1:5000 2007.
TWBC Planning Services map 2008.

Illustrations

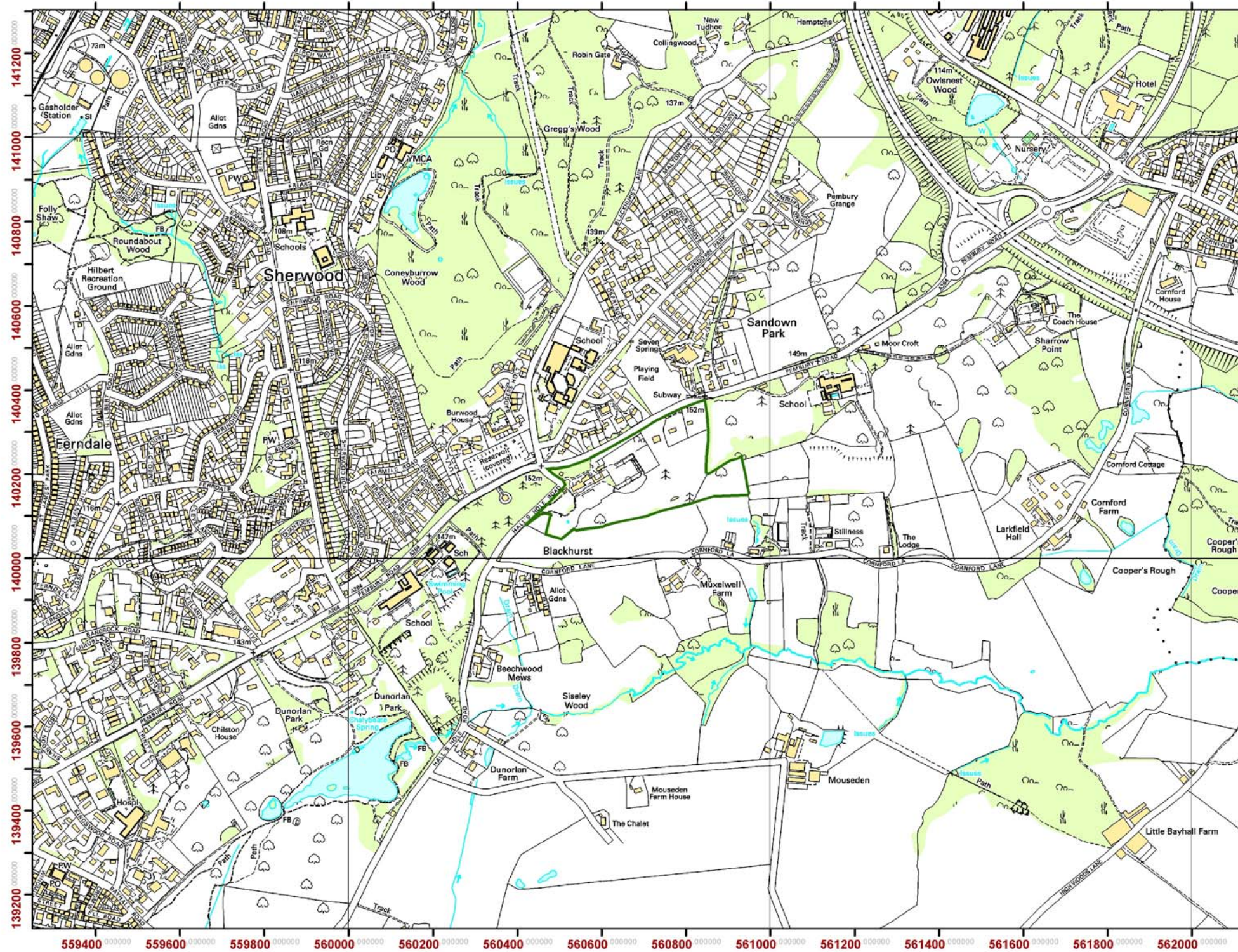
T. J. Rawlins, *Blackhurst. The Residence of Ford Wilson Esq.* (1838).
Lithograph in Greenwood. Also reproduced in Barnes (1986).
Ernest Arthur Rowe, *The Rose Pergola at Blackhurst House, Tunbridge Wells.*
Watercolour probably about 1917.
Ernest Arthur Rowe, watercolour of Blackhurst House 1917. B/w reproduction in
Barnes (1996).
1917 b/w photograph of house in Barnes (1997)
Planning application drawings for Blackhurst by architects W. Hobbs and Sons
1919. TWBC.
Undated photograph of the rose garden reproduced in Barnes (1996).
3 colour photographs 1981/82 (a) south faces with terraces (b) Victorian
shrubberies (c) view south.
Aerial photographs 2003.

Archival items

Census data 1841, 1851, 1861, 1881.
1917 Sales Particulars. Reproduced in Barnes (1996).
Sales advertisement in *Country Life* (22 January 1938). Reproduced in Barnes
(1996).
1998 Sales Particulars (private collection).
2004 Sales Particulars (private collection).

Research by Peta Hodges
Description written by Barbara Simms
Edited by Virginia Hinze
June 2009

Fig. 1 Boundary map



Blackhurst Park

Address:

Blackhurst Park
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent

Map centred on NGR: 560670
140190

Report completed :
February 2009

Legend

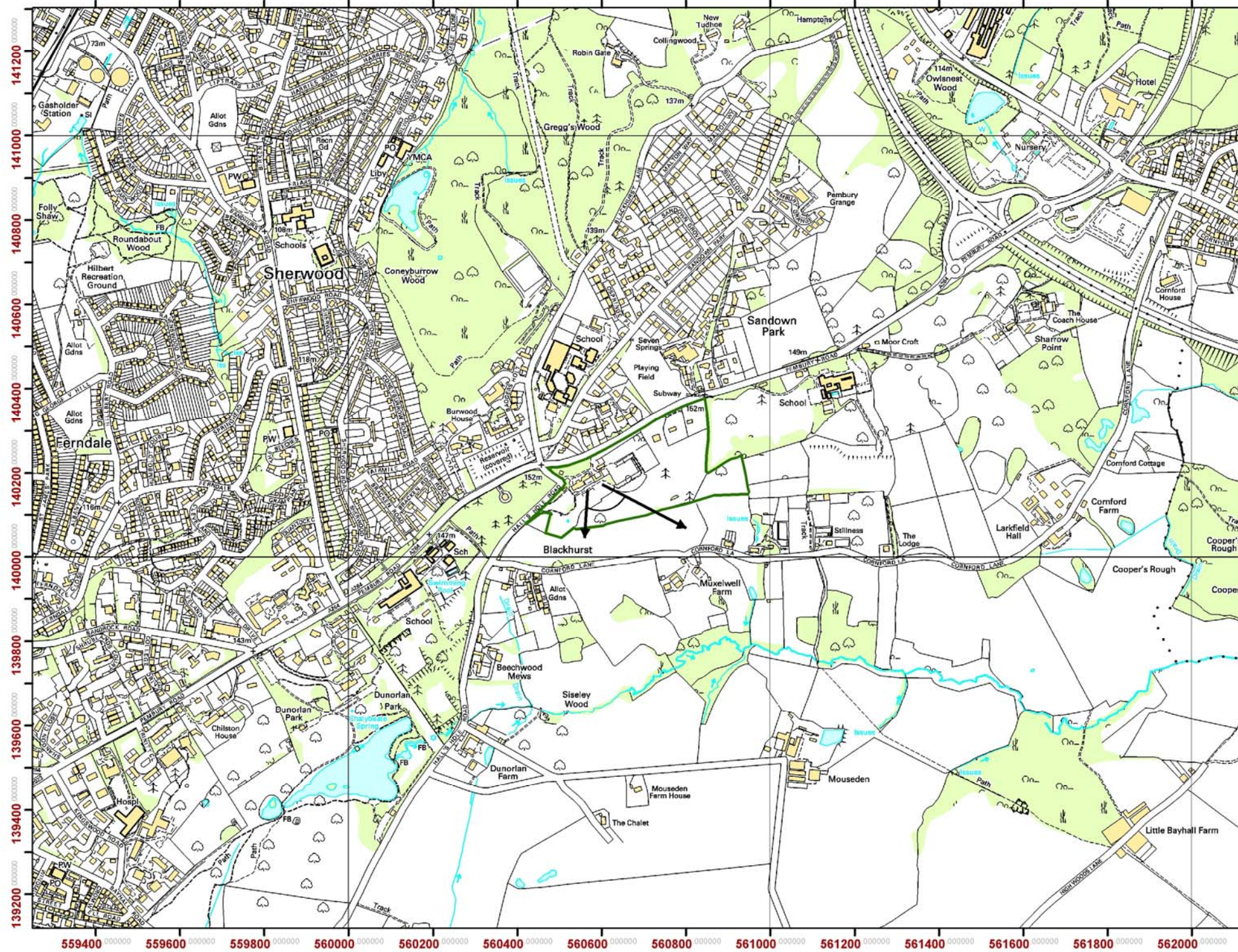
 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 2 Key views map



Blackhurst Park

Address:

Blackhurst Park
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent

Map centred on NGR: 560670
140190

Report completed :
February 2009

Legend

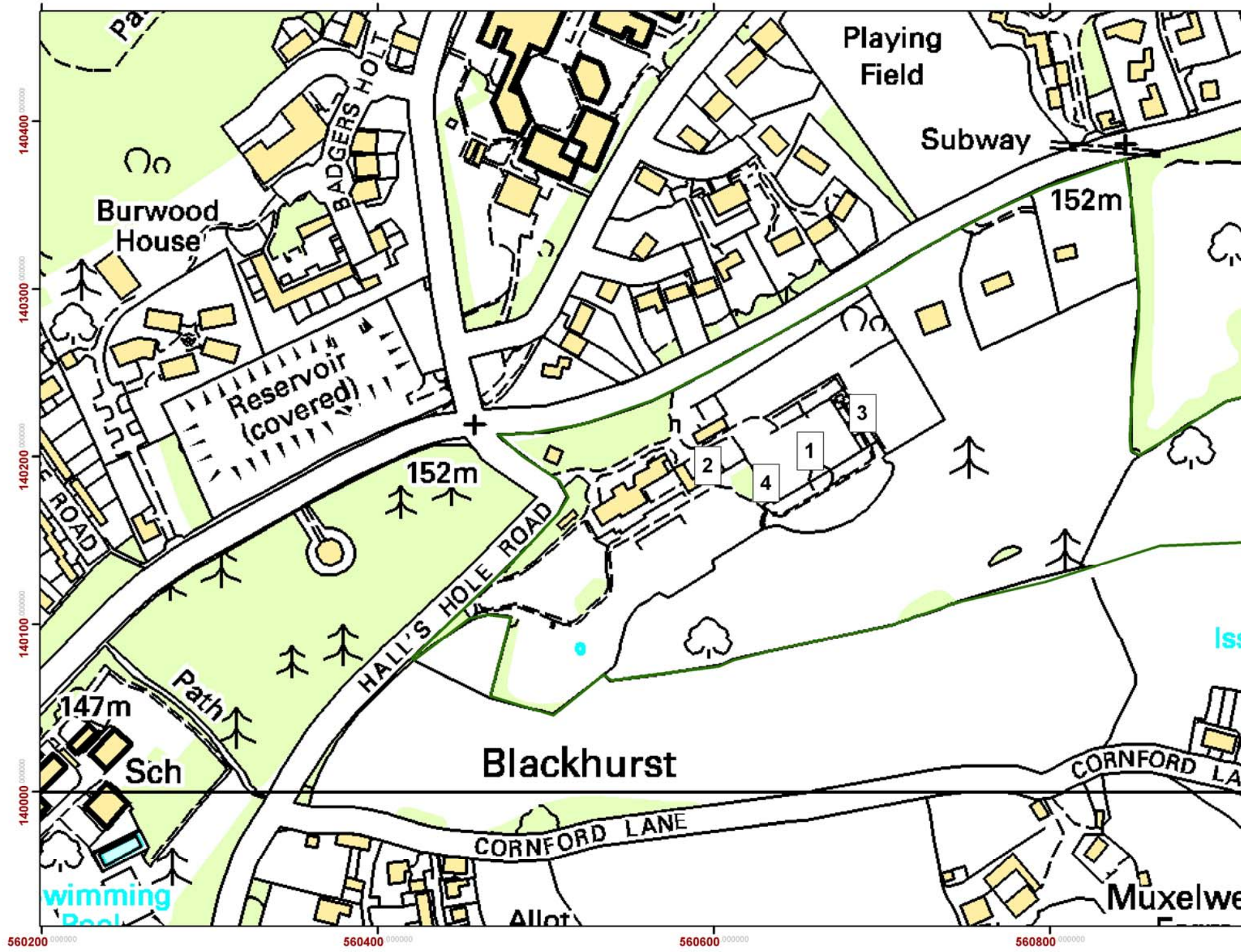
 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 3 Key features map



Blackhurst Park

Address:

Blackhurst Park
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent

Map centred on NGR: 560670
140190

Report completed :
February 2009

Key to features:

1. Kitchen garden
2. Former stable block
3. Yew-lined staircase
4. Rockery

Legend

 Boundary

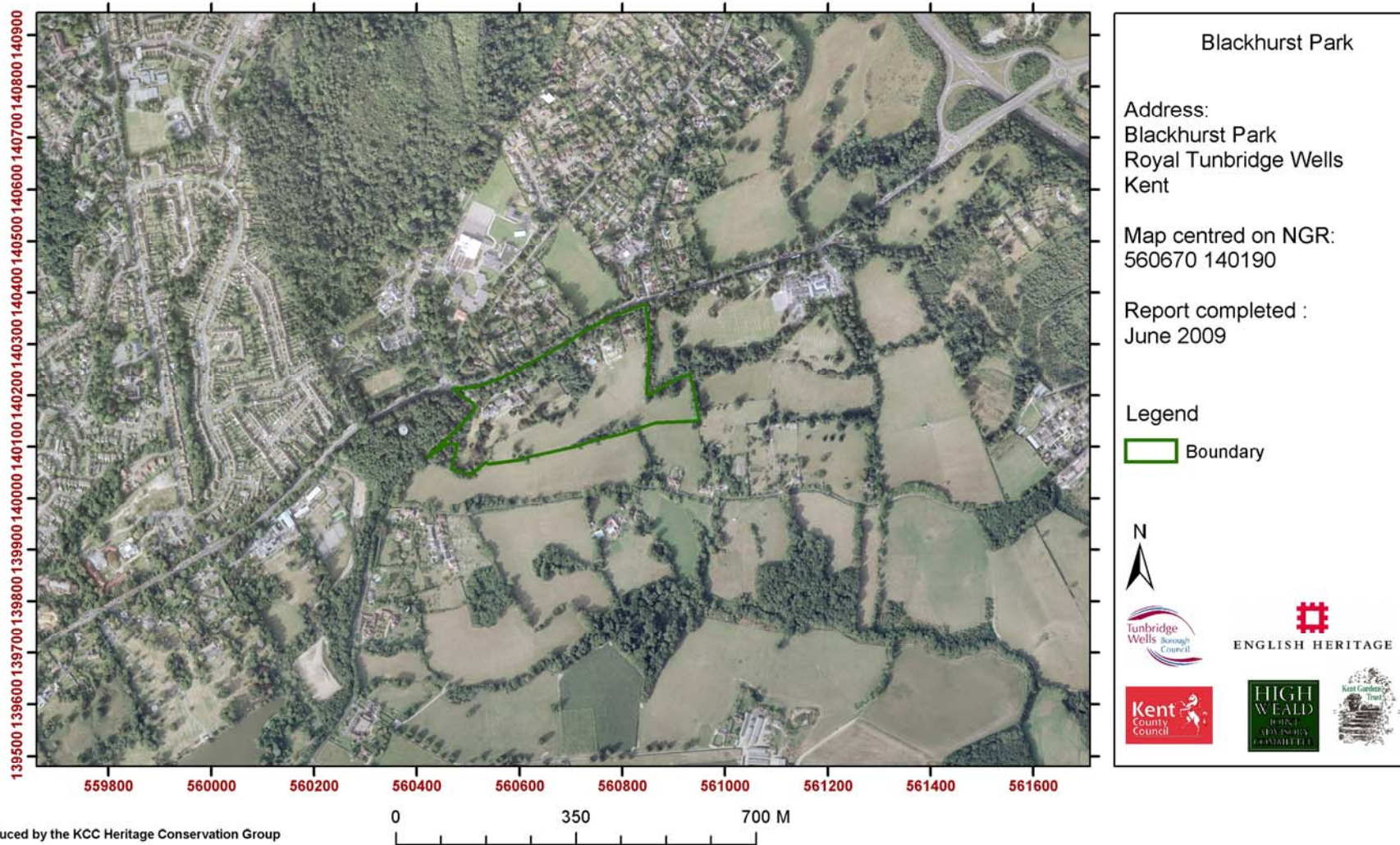


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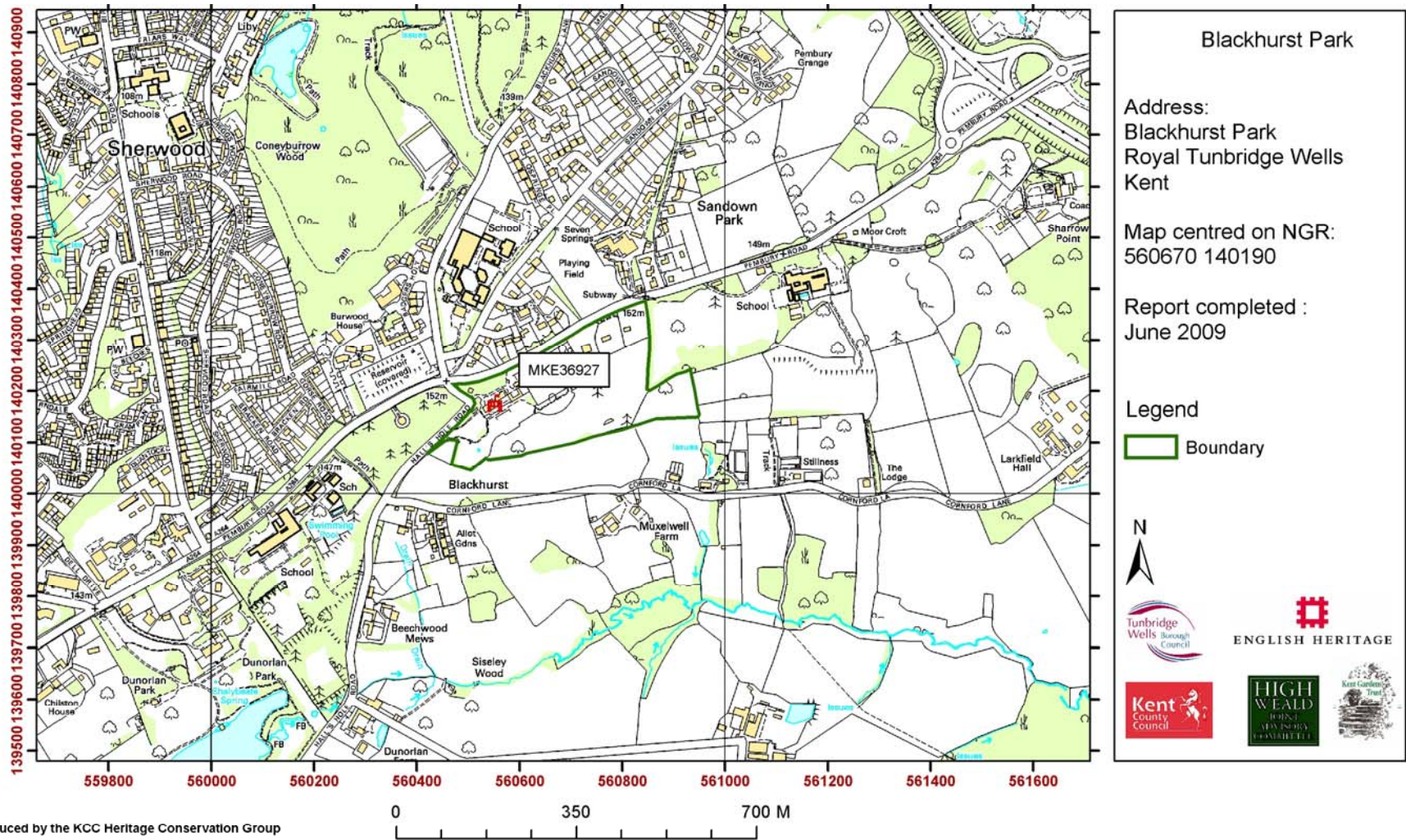
Fig. 4 Aerial photograph



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Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2009 review of Tunbridge Wells Borough

Fig. 5 Map of listed buildings at Blackhurst Park



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2009 review of Tunbridge Wells Borough

Fig. 6 Listed buildings at Blackhurst Park

Kent Historic Environment Record reference: MKE36927

PEMBURY ROAD 1. 1746

(South East Side)

Blackhurst TQ 64 SW 13/303 II

Grade 2. Early C19 in the style of Decimus Burton. 2 storeys stone of irregular shape. Slate roof. 3 open pediments with brackets. Windows are cambered single or 3-light sashes. Range of 2 storeys with slate roof and 5 sashes to the right hand side. Adjoining to the right again is a stable block of ashlar with pediment of 1 storey. Hipped slate roof and Sash windows. Blackhurst and the lodge to Blackhurst form a group.