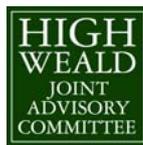


# The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Tunbridge Wells Borough



## Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens, Tunbridge Wells



April 2009



# Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens

Tunbridge Wells, Kent

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

### SITE DESCRIPTION

### LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Boundary map.

FIGURE 2: Key views map.

FIGURE 3: Key features map.

FIGURE 4: Aerial photograph.

### FIGURES ONLY ON CD

FIGURE 5: John Bowra, *A Survey of Tunbridge Wells and all Places of Note Within a Mile and a half of the Chappel* (1738).

FIGURE 6: Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1867).

FIGURE 7: Ordnance Survey 2nd edn 6" map (1897).

FIGURE 8: Ordnance Survey 3rd edn 6" OS map (1907).

FIGURE 9: Postcards of Happy Valley 1912.

FIGURE 10: Postcard of steps to the cold bath from Rustall Common 1914.

FIGURE 11: Extract from Edward Hasted, 'Parishes: Speldhurst', *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 3* (1797), pp. 275-300.

FIGURE 12: Extract from Richard Pelton, *Illustrated guide to Tunbridge Wells and the neighbouring seats, towns, and villages* (Tunbridge Wells, 1881), p.82.

FIGURE 13: Photographs of Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens  
February 2009.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

With many thanks to the owners 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 <a href="http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk">www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk</a>	Kent County Council Heritage Conservation Invicta House County Hall Maidstone ME14 1XX 01622 696918 <a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>
Kent Gardens Trust <a href="http://www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk">www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk</a>	High Weald AONB Unit Woodland Enterprise Centre Hastings Road Flimwell East Sussex TN5 7PR 01580 879500 <a href="http://www.highweald.org/">www.highweald.org/</a>

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

KENT

BEACON HOTEL COLD BATH  
AND TEA GARDENS

TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
TQ 5564 1391

## **SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST**

An early C18 pleasure garden, including a spring-fed cold bath and a series of three descending ponds, set in a wooded valley. Its surviving features were incorporated into a tea garden in the early C19 and, subsequently, into the private garden of an 1894 house (Rusthall Beacon).

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons, to the west of Tunbridge Wells, lay in the Manor of Rusthall, which originated as a Saxon 'den' or clearing in the Wealden forest used for pasturing pigs. The town of Tunbridge Wells takes its name from the neighbouring and much earlier Tonbridge (which was known as Tunbridge until the late C19), with 'Wells' denoting its status as a spa. Its development as a spa town and resort began in 1606 when it is said that Dudley, Lord North, discovered a chalybeate spring there (*400 years of the Wells*). Several years later, two of the principal springs were enclosed by local landowner Lord Abergavenny and became known as Tunbridge Wells (Hasted).

The lack of accommodation at the Wells led to the construction of many new houses and lodgings in the surrounding districts, including at Rusthall. By 1660, it also had an assembly room, a bowling green and other places of entertainment (Taylor). By 1687, the Lord of the Manor of Rusthall, a Thomas Neale, had also begun to develop land around the Wells, including a colonnade, which in 1700 was renamed The Pantiles. The Rusthall assembly room was also moved nearer to the Wells at Mount Sion (Burr). In 1708, a Mr James Long, who owned properties in Marylebone, London, and in the parish of Speldhurst, near Tunbridge Wells (TNA), provided further diversions for visitors when they were not taking the water at the Wells by building a cold bath (or plunge pool) and waterworks set in an ornamental garden on land leased from the Abergavenny estate.

On Long's death in 1715, his estate was inherited by his nephew Robert. It is not clear whether Robert Long or a subsequent occupier allowed the pleasure gardens to become 'waste and wild' (Burr), but by 1780 the cold bath there was no longer in use (Pelton). A Miss Mary Berry visiting in 1807 wrote in her diary that 'there are the remains of hewn stone steps and yew hedges ... and the cold bath beautifully clear' (Lewis). In the same year, the garden, with woodland and farming land, were leased to a Mr Thomas Huntley.

In 1818 new tea gardens were separately laid out 'by an industrious gardener' on a ridge to the cold bath's north-west, on land leased to a Thomas Hollamby (Clifford). Twenty years later, under a Mr. W. Wix, the tea gardens had become

an established part of the local visitor attractions (Rusthall Manor Map; Stidolf Map). By 1862, a number of buildings (named Rock Cottage) are shown on the tea gardens' site, with orchards in the sloping fields to their south (1st edn map). The cold bath and its associated ponds are depicted in the wooded valley to their south-east with access from the east via a pathway from Tunbridge Wells. Two years later, a Robert Blake Byass leased 36ha of land from the Abergavenny estate, including the site of the cold bath pleasure gardens and tea gardens. He built a new house (Nevill Court) on the eastern section of the land, leaving the pleasure gardens untouched. The lease for the entire site was transferred to his sons on his death in 1873 (Taylor).

In 1888 the Nevill Court estate was sold and six years later Rock Cottage and the cold bath site (renamed Happy Valley) were leased to a Walter Harris, later Lord Mayor of London (3rd edn OS map). He demolished Rock Cottage and built a new house (Rusthall Beacon) to the designs of architect Sir Robert Edis (2nd edn OS map). In 1910 the house and grounds were sold to Colonel Sydney Sladen, Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, and his wife, who laid out private ornamental gardens, incorporating the woodland and pleasure gardens, and stocked the ponds with fish (*TW Advertiser*, 3rd edn OS map). In 1921, the Colonel died, but his wife remained at Rusthall Beacon until her death in 1936, when the property was offered for sale with pleasure grounds of some 10ha. From 1938 and through World War Two the house was used as a residential home for Jewish refugee children.

In 1950, a Mrs Yeo and a Miss Bassett bought the property and converted it to an hotel (sales documents). Rusthall Beacon had several changes of ownership during the subsequent forty years, but continued throughout as an hotel with ornamental gardens. In 1991, the current owners acquired the property (renamed Beacon Hotel), which included the site of the C18 pleasure garden. It remains in single, private, commercial, ownership, with the gardens available for the use of hotel visitors.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING**

Beacon Hotel stands on a sandstone ridge at the north-western tip of a steeply sloping and wooded site with fine views south to Friezland Wood and east to Tunbridge Wells Common. Sandstone outcrops characterize the landscape of both Tunbridge Wells and Rustall Commons. The hotel is approximately 1.5km west of Royal Tunbridge Wells, 2km east of Langton Green and 8km south of Tonbridge with the A26 (Tunbridge Wells-Crowborough road) running some 1.2km to its south-east. The c.8ha site is bordered to the north-east by Tea Garden Lane, which descends for c.3km in a southerly direction from the A264 (Langton Road) to High Rocks Lane, to the south-west by agricultural land and to the north by Rusthall Common. The south and east boundaries are formed by gardens of the adjoining private houses (formerly the lands of Nevill Court)

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The north-east facing entrance front of Beacon Hotel is approached from the east side of Tea Garden Lane. A tarmac-surfaced car park at this entrance is bounded on its north and east sides by the woodland of Rusthall

Common. The car park was part of the former tea gardens site and a track from its north side leads through the Common's woodland, winding c.200m north-eastwards along the top of a sandstone ridge to reach the top of the flight of 105, C18, stone, steps down to the cold bath. A second car park is located some 10m further south along Tea Garden Lane, on the hotel's south-west front. From here there are wide views south and east over the hotel's valley gardens and, more distantly, to Tunbridge Wells. John Bowra's map of 1738 shows the position of the steps on a sloping, wooded, valley site below Rustall Common.

#### PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Beacon Hotel (formerly Rustall Beacon) was built in 1894 as a private house and designed by architect Sir Robert Edis. It is an irregular, L-shaped, two-storey house constructed of brick with tile-hanging on the first floor and with a tiled roof and tall chimney stacks. A window forming three sides of an octagon, with a cupola above, projects from the first floor of the south-west front. As the ground drops sharply on its south-east side, the south-east front has three storeys with a basement and a terrace above at ground level. A single-storey extension has been added on the south-west front.

#### GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The ornamental gardens lie on the south side of the hotel. The south-east garden front opens onto a terrace with a flight of ten brick steps on its south-west end descending towards three further, broad, grassed terraces retained by grass slopes. From the terrace there are fine views over the garden's wooded valley and Tunbridge Wells Common. A second steep flight of concrete slab steps leads to a grassy slope which descends to the topmost of the three terraces (c.70m x 40m). The second terrace (c.100m x 70m), some 5m below, is possibly on the site of an early C20 lawn with specimen conifers and two tennis courts (Sales Particulars). Below again is the third terrace, which is semi-circular in shape (c.70m x 50m) and enclosed by woodland on the site boundary. The top two terraces are enclosed on the west side by a clipped conifer hedge and on the east by the garden's wooded valley. A path from the east side of the second terrace descends through the woodland to the cold bath site. These terraces were planted as orchards by the 1860s (1st edn OS map), but by 1907 had been laid out as lawns studded with trees (3rd edn map).

Some 159m south-east of the hotel, within the wooded valley, is the site of the cold bath; only the foundations of its structure now survive (2009), along with the spring and remnants an avenue of mature yew trees (now in poor condition). Fifty metres south of the cold bath is the northernmost of three spring-fed ponds, which sit one below the other, with their water supply descending by means of pipes and cascades. The ponds, which are lined partly with puddled clay and partly with stone, are c.2m deep and cover a total area of c.0.56ha (Taylor). The ponds are enclosed on their west and south sides by a path and mature rhododendrons. Grass walks cross the top of the second and third ponds to allow views across the water which is now encroached upon by self-seeded trees. In the third pond is also an island planted with rhododendrons. From this pond's south-east side, water flows into a stream which continues on into woodland on the southern site boundary.

In 1766, the spring-fed cold bath was described as ‘adorned with amusing waterworks, and a handsome house over it, in every room of which was something curious, calculated to surprise and divert the company’ (Burr). It is thought to predate the cold baths at Tunbridge Wells by about 50 years (Taylor). In 1911, when it was part of the new ornamental gardens at Rustall Beacon, planting in the valley included evergreens, rhododendrons and herbaceous plants with roses and climbers (*TW Advertiser*). Particulars for the 1936 sale also mentions pleasure grounds of some 10ha consisting of a chain of lakes planted with water lilies, stocked with trout and with an islet covered with rhododendrons. At that time, the cold bath was described as set among rock, herbaceous and shrubbery gardens and ornamental woodlands.

## REFERENCES

### Books and articles

Benge Burr, *The History of Tunbridge Wells* (Tunbridge Wells, 1766), pp. 46, 59, 61, quoted in Taylor (2000), pp. 5, 7, 8.

Edward Hasted, ‘Parishes: Speldhurst’, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 3* (1797), pp. 275-300

Theresa Lewis (ed.), ‘Thursday 15 October 1807’, *Extracts from the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry*. Vol. 2 (London: Longmans & Co, 1865), p. 332, quoted in Taylor (2000), p. 8.

J. Clifford, *Guide to Tunbridge Wells*, 3rd edn (Tunbridge Wells, 1823), quoted in Taylor (2000), p. 8. 1st edn 1818.

Richard Pelton, *Illustrated guide to Tunbridge Wells and the neighbouring seats, towns, and villages* (Tunbridge Wells, 1881).

‘The Mayor’s Garden Party’, *Tunbridge Wells Advertiser* (30 June 1911), p. 10.  
*Tunbridge and Rustall Commons - A History and Natural History* (Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery, 2001), pp. 122-23

Kristina Taylor, ‘The Oldest Surviving Pleasure Gardens in Britain; Cold Bath, near Tunbridge Wells in Kent’, *Garden History* 28/2 (Winter 2000), pp. 277-82  
*400 years of the Wells* (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society local history monograph no. 5, 2005)

### Maps

John Bowra, *A Survey of Tunbridge Wells and all Places of Note Within a Mile and a half of the Chappel* (1738). Detail reproduced in *Garden History* (2000), p. 279.

T. Stidolph, *A Map of Tunbridge Wells and the Local Act District* (1838). Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone.

Map of Manor of Rustall 1850, referenced in Taylor (2000), p. 9.

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

OS maps      1st edn 25” map 1867 Sheet 60/11  
                  2nd edn 25” map 1897 Sheet 60/11

3rd edn 25" map 1909  
Revd edn 25" map 1936

Modern Mastermap 2007 1:10,000

### **Illustrations**

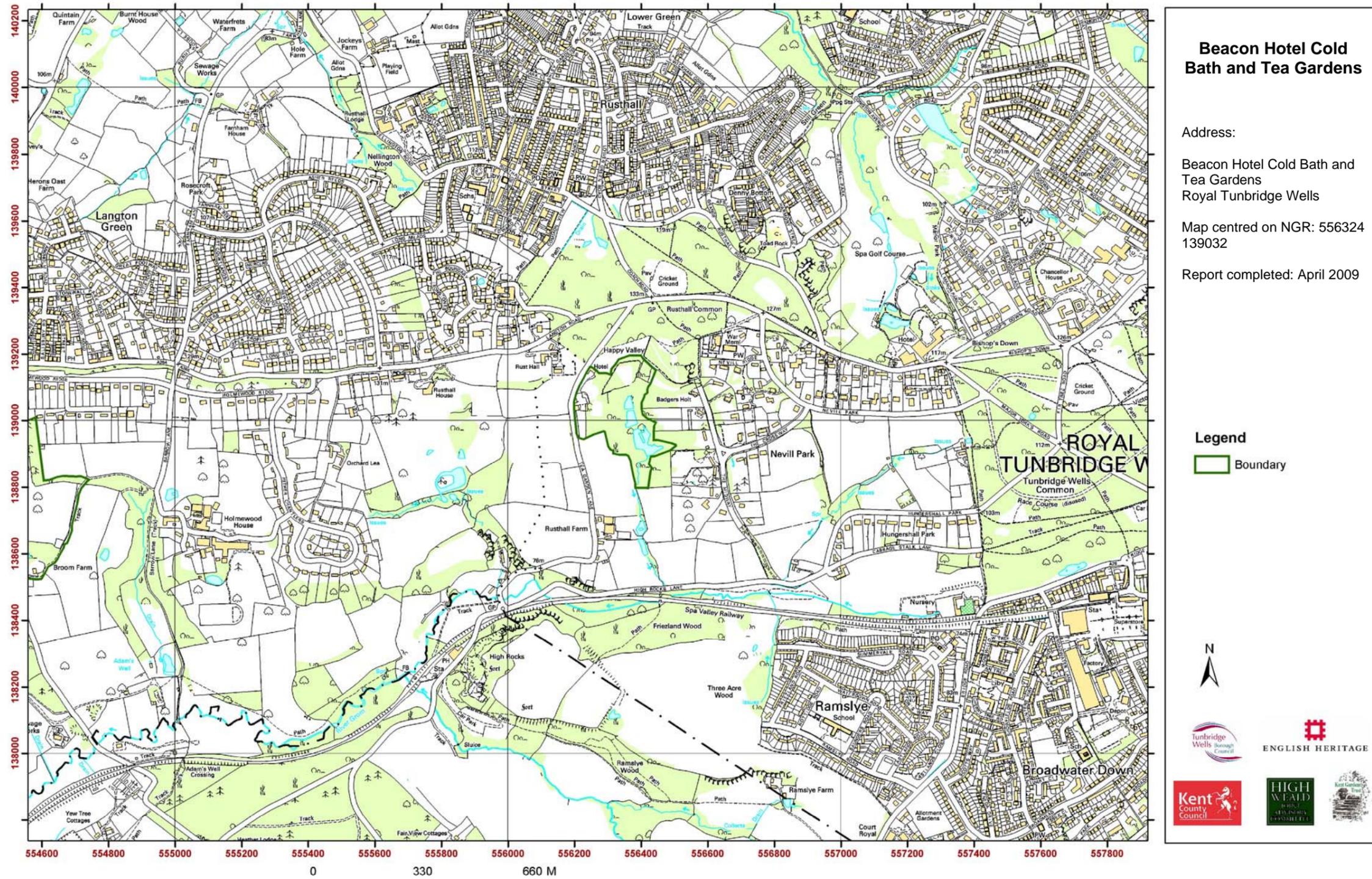
3 postcard views of Happy Valley c.1912.  
Postcard of steps to the bath. Stengel & Co. Berlin 1914.  
Aerial photograph 2003.

### **Archival items**

Documents relating to estate of John Long 1715. The National Archive PRO 11 545, PRO 32 59/131.  
c. 1818 map of Speldhurst, Terrier of Kent and Sussex estates, Abergavenny MSS. CKS Ref U787.  
Rustall Beacon Sales Particulars 1936. Messrs Frank, Knight and Rutley.  
Details in Taylor (2000), p. 13.  
Documents for the sale of Rustall Beacon to Miss Bassett and Mrs Yeo 1950.  
East Sussex Record Office Ref. ABE/3.5  
Kristina Taylor, *An Historical Report on the Gardens of the Beacon Hotel Rustall, near Tunbridge Wells, also known as Cold Bath and Happy Valley*.  
Unpublished report 2000.

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

Fig. 1 Boundary map



**Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens**

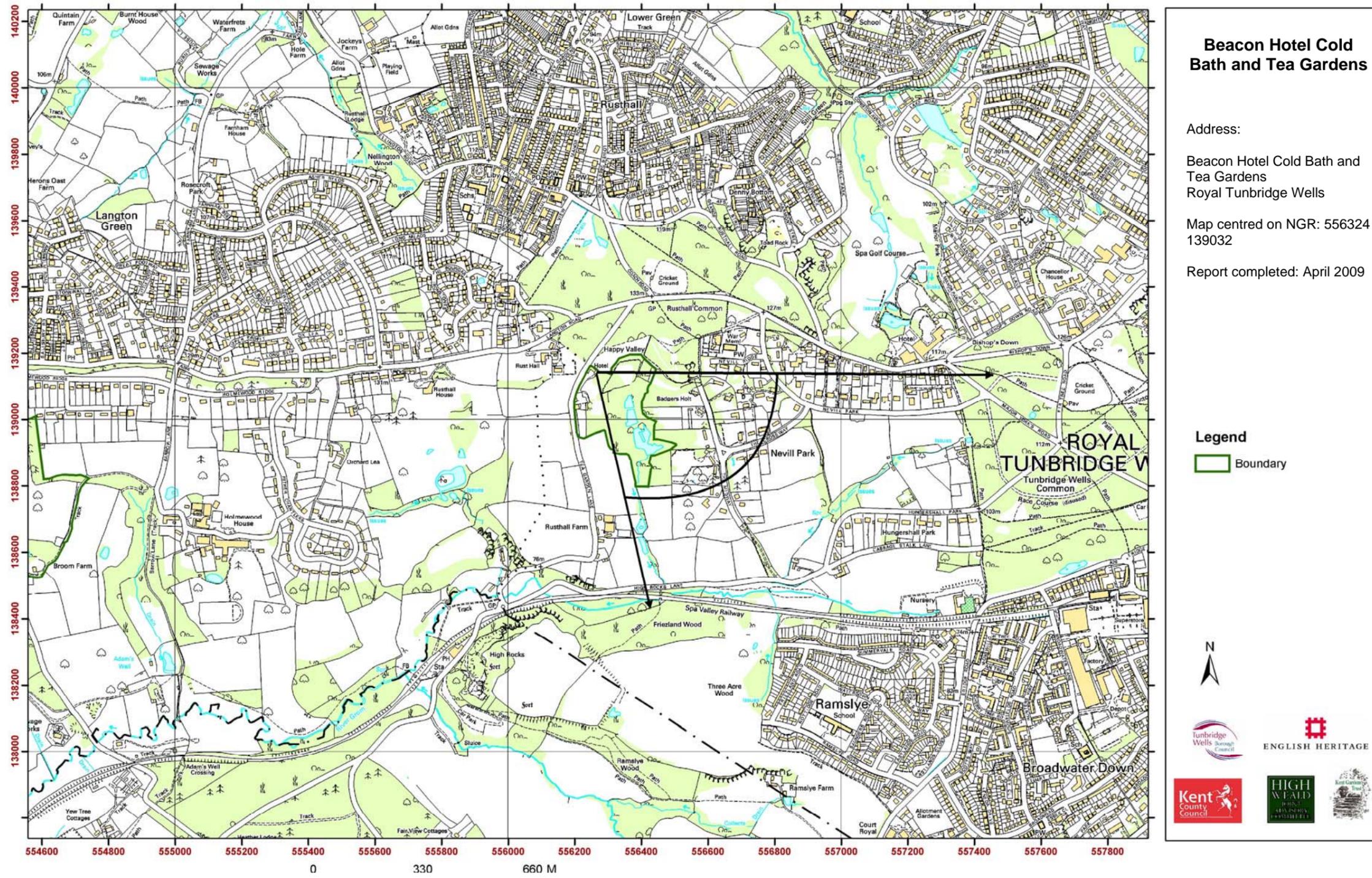
Address:  
 Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens  
 Royal Tunbridge Wells  
 Map centred on NGR: 556324 139032  
 Report completed: April 2009

**Legend**  
 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group  
 This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. 100019238. 2007

Fig. 2 Key views map



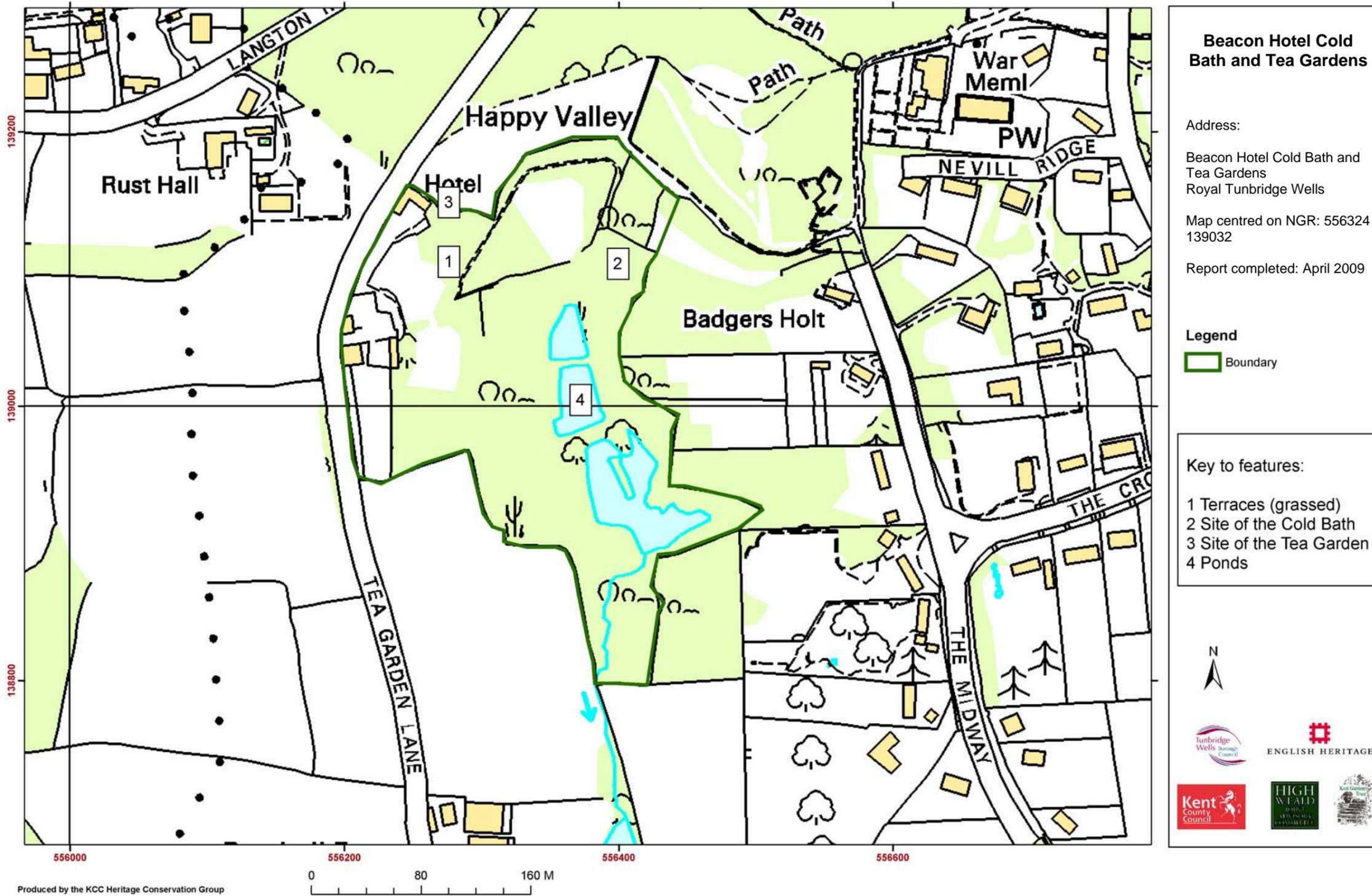
**Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens**

Address:  
 Beacon Hotel Cold Bath and Tea Gardens  
 Royal Tunbridge Wells  
 Map centred on NGR: 556324 139032  
 Report completed: April 2009

**Legend**  
 Boundary

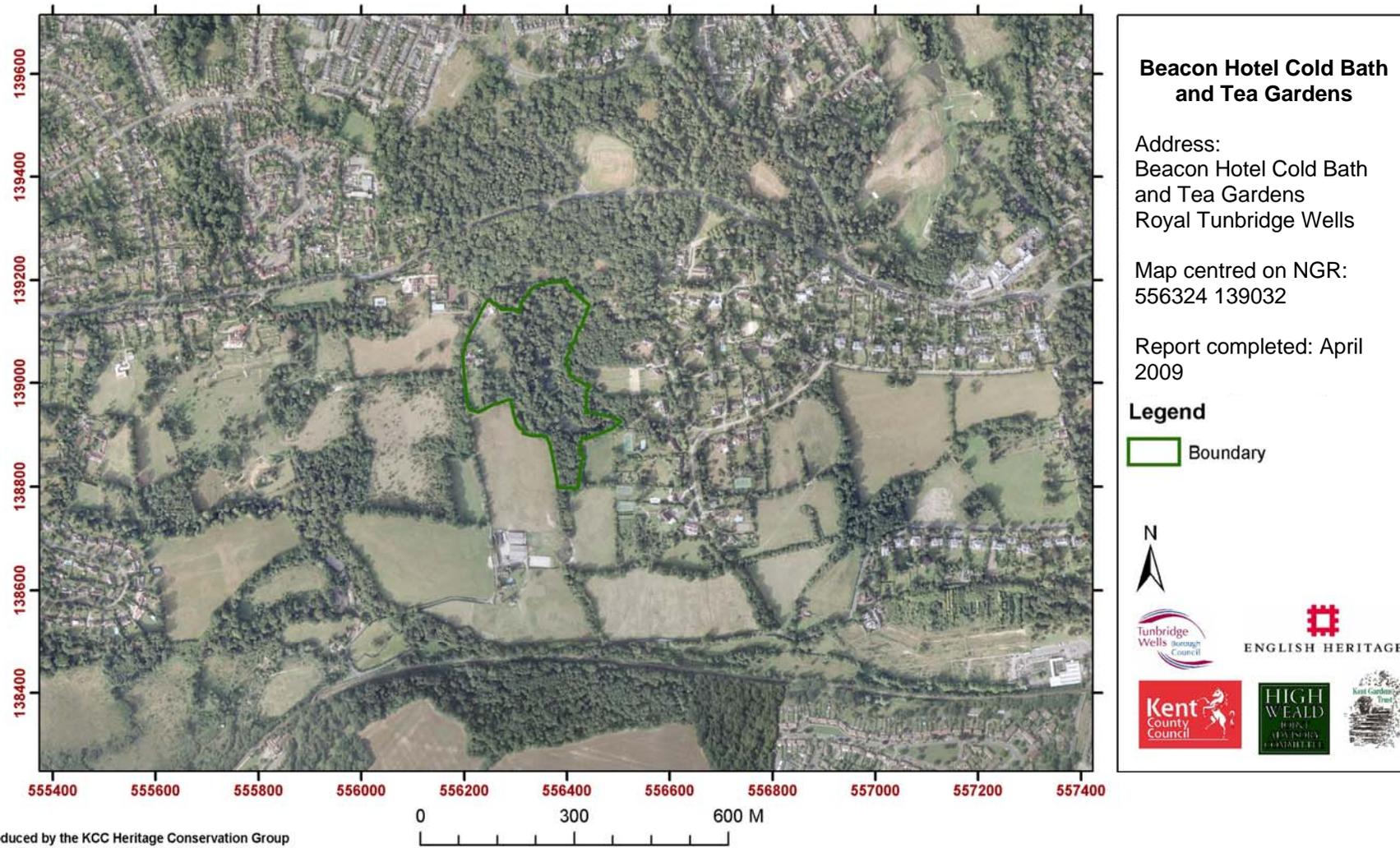
Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group  
 This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. 100019238. 2007

Fig. 3 Key features map



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

## Fig. 4 Aerial photograph



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. 100019238. 2007