

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



Tanners, Sevenoaks



January 2012

Tanners

Sevenoaks, Kent

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the owners of Tanners for allowing us to visit their garden, and for their generosity in freely giving us their time and the benefit of their knowledge

INTRODUCTION

This site dossier and description has been prepared as part of the **Review of The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District 2011 - 2013**. This site is one of many sites that have been researched, visited and written about across the District and as a consequence has been included in the revised list of Historic Parks and Gardens covered by the District Council's Planning Policies. The list is not conclusive and further gardens may be added over time as research continues or information comes to light

The research was carried out by volunteers of the Kent Gardens Trust with support and training from the project consultant Virginia Hinze. The project was supported by English Heritage and Kent County Council.

The extent of the area identified represents the remains of the designed landscape and does not necessarily cover all remaining elements or the historical extent of landscape changes and takes no account of current ownership. Further Information is available from the contacts listed below. The partnership would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much of their time, effort and hospitality to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

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www.kent.gov.uk

Kent Gardens Trust
www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Age: The site exhibits evidence of early C18 and C20/21 landscape design features, providing a contemporary garden and parkland setting to the C20 house.

Rarity and survival: Tanners is almost certainly the only known record of an early C20 surviving garden designed in 1928 by the renowned horticulturalist, Sir Harold Hillier (archive material relating to Hillier's 1920s gardens has been destroyed). Significant features of the Hillier garden remain including: box parterres, yew hedges, terracing, a pond and the remnants of a rock garden together with surviving signature plants including Scots pine, acers and camellias.

Part of the garden includes parkland formerly belonging to the adjacent mid C18 Combe Bank Estate (grade I Palladian villa set in a grade II* listed garden, National Heritage List). Significant features include an ornamental lodge of circa 1830 (grade II listed and also formerly part of the Combe Bank estate), and veteran specimen trees including sweet chestnut, oak and cedar.

Historic association: The well-known landscape architect, Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, and the nurseryman, Roger Platts, have both been responsible for early C21 garden conservation projects, including the laying out of a new gravel drive across the park (by Longstaffe-Gowan). Notable owners include the eminent judge, Lord Michael Nolan (1928-2007).

SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT
WESTERHAM
BRASTED
TQ 4743 5562

TANNERS

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

A formal garden with terraces, laid out in the 1920s by Sir Harold Hillier, with further developments during the mid to late C20 and early C21, surrounding a late 1920s house and set within woodland and C18 parkland.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Tanners lies in the ancient parish of Brasted, recorded as Briestede in the Domesday survey of 1086, on the western border of Kent (Hasted). The house stands on land formerly comprising arable farmland, meadowland and woodland (tithe map and apportionment 1837-48). In 1907, a leading industrial chemist, Ludwig Mond (1839-1909), purchased this land along with the adjoining early C18 Combe Bank estate (included on National Heritage List at grade II*). On his death in 1909, ownership passed to his son, the chemist and archaeologist Sir Robert Mond (Raybould, Greenaway). In 1921, under Mond's direction, the Combe Bank estate was divided into lots, and put up for auction. There was no sale until a second auction took place in 1925 (Sales Particulars of 1921 and 1925), when a Mr Scott Arnott purchased three lots amounting to c10 ha of land. In 1928, Arnott built the house known as Tanners (first recorded on the fourth edition of the OS Map 1929-1952) and commissioned the horticulturist Sir Harold Hillier (1905-1985) to design and lay out the garden. Although there appears to be no surviving documentary evidence of Hillier's design, it was confirmed by Lady Whilhelmina Kilmaine, the daughter of Scott Arnott, that Hillier had laid out the garden in 1928 (pers.comm. between Lady Kilmaine and Lady Margaret Nolan, a subsequent owner of Tanners). On Arnott's death, ownership passed to his widow who continued to live at Tanners until her death c1950. It then passed to the Hindley family who sold off 6ha of land to the north of the house. In 1955, a Michael Patrick Nolan, later to become Baron Nolan of Brasted (1928-2007), and Lady Nolan, took possession of the house and a garden that had been neglected in the early 1950s (pers.comm. Lady Nolan, 2011). They then began a programme of garden restoration and re-planting that continued over the next thirty years, including, in 1967, the re-acquisition of 6ha of land sold by the Hindleys (HM Land Registry Plans of Title). Hillier's rock garden and ornamental pool were restored, ornamental planting was replaced, and a small arboretum created (photographs 1981-2 private collection). Following severe damage during the October 1987 storm, when 178 trees were lost, a major new planting scheme was undertaken to replace them (pers.comm. Lady Nolan, 2011). The garden was open to the public under the National Gardens Scheme for 20 of the years between 1974 and 1998 (NGS data).

In 1999, Tanners was purchased by the present owners who in 2004 acquired another c14ha of parkland to the east and south east, including Combe Bank Lodge, listed grade II, which prior to 1925 formed part of the Combe Bank estate (Combe Bank Estate map 1921). This land is also included within the boundary of the grade II* registered park and garden of Combe Bank (English Heritage National Heritage List). The present owners have continued to develop and restore the garden. Tanners remains in single, private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Tanners stands on southward-sloping ground, with views to the south overlooking the valley of the river Darent (flowing from west to east through the village of Brasted at the foot of the North Downs), and to the south-east, towards the wooded hills of the Greensand Ridge. The c24ha site lies on the eastern edge of Brasted, north of the A25, between Sevenoaks, c7km to the east, and Westerham, c3.5km to the west. The site is bordered by Rectory Lane and Brasted Hill Road to the west, a fenced boundary to a private property to the north, Combe Bank Wood to the north-east, Combe Bank lake and Sundridge recreation ground to the east, and the river Darent to the south.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to Tanners is at the very south of the estate on the north side of the A25 towards the outskirts of Brasted. Its entrance lodge (Combe Bank Lodge, circa 1830, listed grade II) has a half-octagon-shaped front with a low-pitched slate roof. It is two storeys high and three windows wide, with coursed rubble masonry and ashlar dressings (part of listed building description). The gateway, and a curved stone wall (listed grade II), lie immediately west of the lodge. A white-painted, seven-bar wooden gate with a curved timber brace is set into the gateway. A smaller wooden gate, of similar style with a diagonal brace, adjoins the main gate. The gates are supported by three 2-metre high stone piers.

Beyond the gates, a gravel drive, formerly a track to the adjacent Combe Bank estate (OS map 1st edition 1862-75), runs first in a northerly direction between a laurel hedge for c20metres, before reaching a stone bridge (restored 2006) spanning the river Darent. The bridge, supported by stone piers, is dressed with short Renaissance-style balusters and stone coping forming a narrow parapet above (photographs, private collection). Passing over the bridge, the drive ascends for c0.5km in a northerly direction, through an avenue of horse-chestnut trees. The drive then meanders in a north-westerly and then south-westerly direction for c0.5km, through open parkland studded with a variety of trees, and a wild flower meadow, to arrive at the gravel forecourt on the main, north front of the house (Todd Longstaffe-Gowan map). This drive, designed in 2004 by the landscape architect, Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, and opened in 2005, replaced the route from the east as the main approach and offers extended views across the parkland.

The former main entrance to Tanners lies on its eastern boundary, on the east side of Rectory Lane, close to the junction between Brasted Hill Road and Coles Lane. A gravelled drive passes through a five-bar wooden gate supported on each side by wooden piers, and ascends in a south-easterly direction for c30 metres, before bearing east to arrive at the north-facing front of the house. The drive runs between various mature specimen conifers and evergreen shrubs, including a blue cedar (*Cedrus atlantica glauca*), an 'Umbrella Pine' (*Sciadopitys verticillata*), and a flowering *Magnolia grandiflora*. At the head of the drive, to the west of the house, stands a Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron 'Pendulum'*) thought to be part of the original 1928 Hillier planting (pers.comm.). The drive opens out onto an irregular-shaped gravel forecourt, immediately north of which lies an area of lawn with ornamental planting, designed by the garden designer and nurseryman, Roger Platts, to include newly-planted clipped yew balls and box parterres (photographs – private collection).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Tanners is a two-storey high, six bays long, domestic dwelling designed by the Lincolns Inn architects Frank L. Atwell and G E S Streatfield, and built in 1928 by local builders, R Durtnell & Sons Ltd. It is constructed of Kentish red brick with tile-hung cladding, reflecting an English Vernacular style (architectural drawings, private collection). It has a pitched, tiled roof and brick chimney stacks, one of which extends the length of the western elevation. The eastern wing was designed originally with a flat roof, but was replaced with a pitched roof by the Nolan family to complement the character of the house and to provide an additional storey (pers.comm.). Immediately south and attached to the house stands a small, walled courtyard, formerly used for oil storage tanks and now (2011) laid out as a courtyard garden. About 5 metres to the east of the house stands an oak outbuilding (constructed 2003) used for car ports and a log-store.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

Immediately to the west of the house, and part of Hillier's 1928 design, is a south-facing formal garden, c15m x 14m. It mainly comprises a series of rectangular-shaped box parterres planted with roses and divided by narrow areas of lawn. The garden is enclosed on three sides: to the north by a c4m high brick wall adjoining the front of the house and extending westwards; to the west by a laurel hedge; and to the east by the side elevation to the house. A wrought-iron gate set into the brick wall opens onto the north-east corner of the parterre garden. Above the north wall a wisteria grows to a height of c10m extending at right angles through the laurel hedge, below which stands a large ornamental terracotta urn. The open, southern edge of the parterre garden is laid to lawn and overlooks a shrubbery.

To the south, garden front of the house lie three descending levels of terraced gardens c65m x 60m, which form the major part of Hillier's design. Below the house walls are narrow beds planted with climbing roses and wisteria, enclosed by low box-hedging. Immediately beyond the box hedging, a flagstone and

gravel path runs along the length of the house, beyond which a c5m broad area of lawn forms the first of the three terraced gardens. This top terrace is bordered to the south by clipped yew-hedging c3m high, surviving from Hillier's 1928 layout, with herbaceous borders below. The herbaceous borders were re-designed by Roger Platts in 2005, replacing, and widening to c2m, Hillier's narrow borders. A central flight of six stone steps, flanked by two stone pedestal vases, lead downwards in a southerly direction to the c10m broad second terrace where lies a cruciform-shaped ornamental pond planted with lilies and iris and surrounded by flagstone paving (restored further in 2011) with stone pedestal vases at each end. Immediately west of the pond, lie the remnants of Hillier's rock garden, now (2011) a narrow area c3m long, mainly planted with ferns.

To the east and west of the pond, and approached from the top terrace by flagstone steps, are areas of shrubbery that include several varieties of mature acers, rhododendrons and camellias, thought to have been planted by Hillier (pers.comm.). The shrubbery merges into a woodland area with mown paths that lead southwards. Beyond the pond, sloping paths lead further south for c30m to the third terrace c15m broad, with a swimming pool, bordered by flagstones, an area of lawn, and more ornamental planting. On the north side of the pool, an uprooted tree (since removed) has formed a natural alcove in the bank. On the south side, c5m south-west of the pool, three mature Scots pine trees, c80 years old, grow closely together, reflecting Hillier's style of planting for this garden (pers.comm.).

The third terrace is terminated to the south by post and rail fencing which forms an intermediate boundary between the formal terraced gardens and a c150m wide field which slopes steeply downwards for c90m to the southern boundary of the site. A mown grassy area runs eastwards from the swimming pool, and parallel to the wooden fencing for c10m, before widening and ascending north for c15m towards the house. A newly planted (c 2011) herbaceous border, c3m wide and, bordered on its west side by a clipped yew hedge, lies to the north-west of the path. To the north-east of the path stand two remaining cherry trees (planted by the Nolan family to replace a wide herbaceous border) and three mature oak trees, underplanted with spring-flowering bulbs. To the east of this widened path lies a mature woodland grove (recorded on the first edition OS map) planted with a mixture of coniferous and broad-leaf trees, including more old oaks. A path runs from the southern boundary of the grove, c10m east from the swimming pool, first eastwards then ascending northwards adjacent to the wooden intermediate boundary fence. After c20m, there is a flight of six flagstone steps built in 2009 of re-cycled stone, flanked at the top by two small stone vases. From the top of the steps, there are commanding views north and east over the site's open parkland towards Combe Bank Wood and beyond its southern boundaries towards woodland on the Greensand Ridge.

Approximately fifty metres from the intermediate boundary, a semi-circle of open post and rail fencing creates a further visual barrier between the parkland and the garden. Twenty metres north of the flagstone steps, and 30m north-east of the house, stands a hard tennis court c20m x 15m, bordered by wire fencing. An oak pergola, supported by brick pillars, constructed in 2010, runs

immediately parallel to the east and north sides of the court and is planted with climbing roses, vines and wisteria. Beneath the pergola, bordered by lavender and low box hedging, runs a mown grass path, divided by a one-metre square area of Kentish brick paving, set at right angles on the north-east corner of the pergola. From this corner there are further commanding views of the site's parkland north-eastwards towards Combe Bank Wood, and Combe Bank fishing lake beyond.

To the north of the garden areas, beyond the new drive, is a c 6ha area of grazing land with an adjoining paddock, stables and barn located in the south-west corner. Further south, on the site's western border there is a small arboretum (aerial map 2011).

PARKLAND

To the north-east, east and south-east of the garden lies c14 ha of parkland. It is largely studded with broadleaf trees, including mature oak and sweet chestnut, three of which may be over 500 years old (pers.comm). Sparrow's plan of Combe Bank, 1773, and the OS maps (first to fourth editions) show that the parkland's landscape has changed little since the late eighteenth century. There is a grove to the north-east comprising broadleaf and coniferous trees, including cedars (first to fourth editions OS maps). An avenue of horse-chestnut trees, c100 years old, probably planted by the Mond family (though first shown on the 4th edn OS map), grow alongside the track which now forms part of the new drive. The avenue stretches c350m from just beyond the stone bridge near Combe Bank Lodge in the south-east, to the edge of the woodland grove in the north-east.

KITCHEN GARDEN

A kitchen garden lies c35m north-east of the house, enclosed by clipped yew and holly hedging. There are three entrances: the first, a wooden gate set into the hedge, lies to the east. The second lies to the north and leads via a wooden gate to a small enclosed paddock; the third lies to the south and is approached via a wooden pergola and a wrought-iron gate. The L-shaped garden, c25m x 20m and laid out in the 1920s, remodelled with new pathways in 2007, comprises a series of small beds bordered by low box-hedging and timber-edged raised beds for vegetables, separated by brick pathways. A Victorian-style greenhouse (constructed in 2007) stands as a centrepiece to the garden. Towards the far north-eastern corner, and close to a wooden shed, grows a mature weeping willow.

REFERENCES

Books and articles

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G Raybould, *Combe Bank, Sundridge, Kent: A History* (Combe Bank Educational Trust 1986), p.17

F Greenaway, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Mond family (per. 1867-1973), chemical manufacturers and industrialists* (Oxford Univ. Press 2004-11)

Maps

Plan of Combe Bank, 1773, John Sparrow (Kent History and Library Centre ref. W/U4 P1)

Tithe map and apportionment for Brasted Parish, 1837-48 (Kent History and Library Centre ref. Brasted CTR 42-B)

Ordnance Survey map: 25" to 1 mile

1st edition (1862-75)

2nd edition (1897-1900)

3rd edition (1907-1923)

4th edition (1929- 1952)

Plan of the outlying portions of the Combe Bank Estate, Kent (sale by auction by Messrs. Knight, Frank and Rutley), 1921

Location map of Tanners

Aerial map 2011

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan plan for proposed drive to Tanners across Combe Bank Park, not to scale, 26th March 2004

Illustrations

Miscellaneous archival photographs of rock garden and ornamental pool, 1981-2 (in private collection and reproduced by the KGT)

Photograph of bridge from the north side, before restoration (Peregrine Bryant, Architecture & Building Conservation) and site photograph (September 2011) of bridge after restoration

Photographs of Roger Platts' designed area opposite north-facing front porch, and herbaceous borders below yew hedge to the south of the house, 2011 (private collection)

Frank L. Atwell and G.E.S. Streatfield's architectural drawings of 1928 house (private collection)

Misc. photographs of garden, shrubberies, woodland and parkland (2011)

Archival items

Combe Bank sales particulars for 1921 and 1925 (KHLC ref. W/U4 E3)

HM Land Registry Plans of Title No. K44 393 (4/11/55) and K288 127 (June 1967)

Letter from Lady Nolan to Mr Deakin October 15th 1984.

Email exchange with National Garden Scheme research department, 25th August 2011

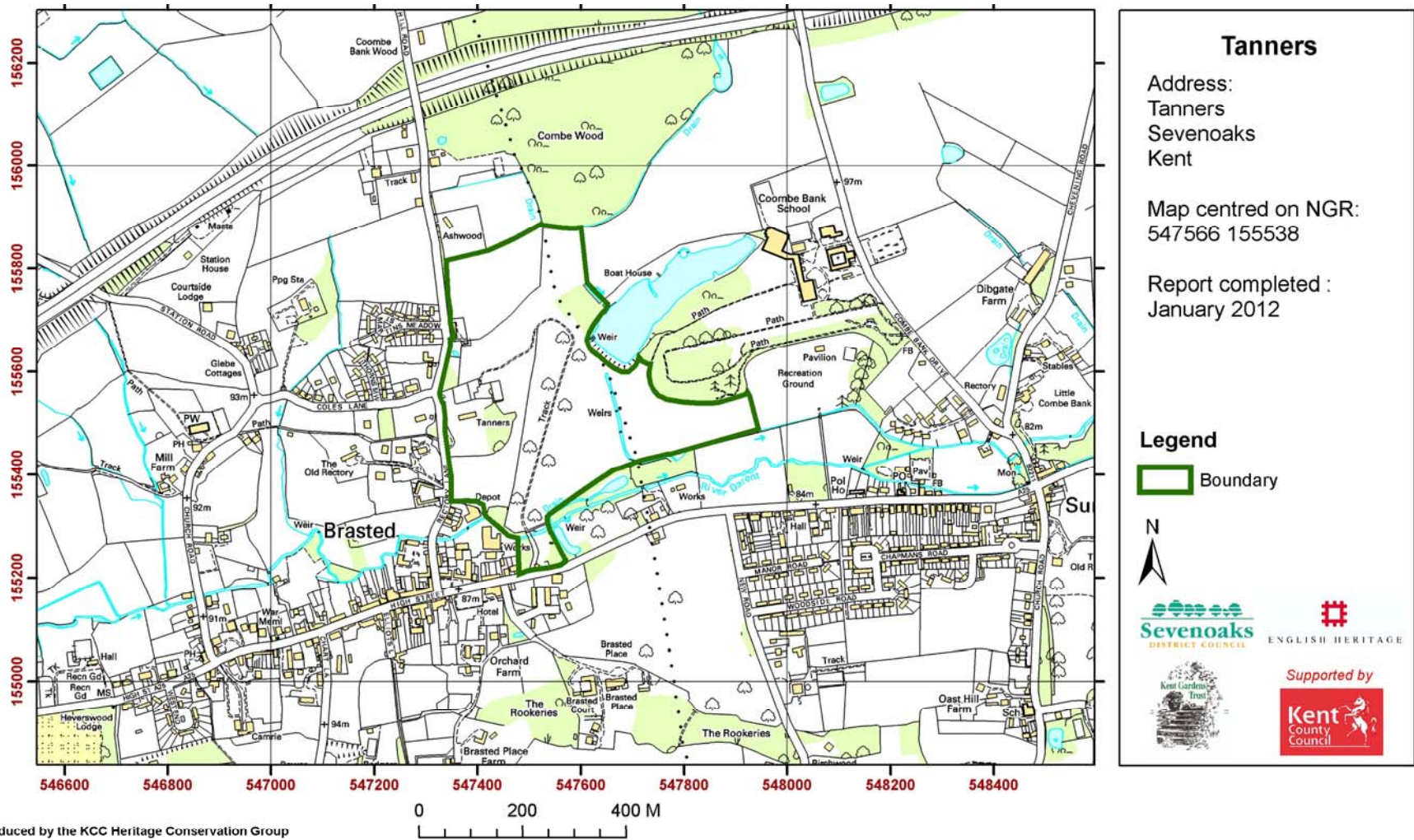
British Listed Buildings, English Heritage Building ID 356894

Research by Paul and Beverley Howarth.

Virginia Hinze (editor)

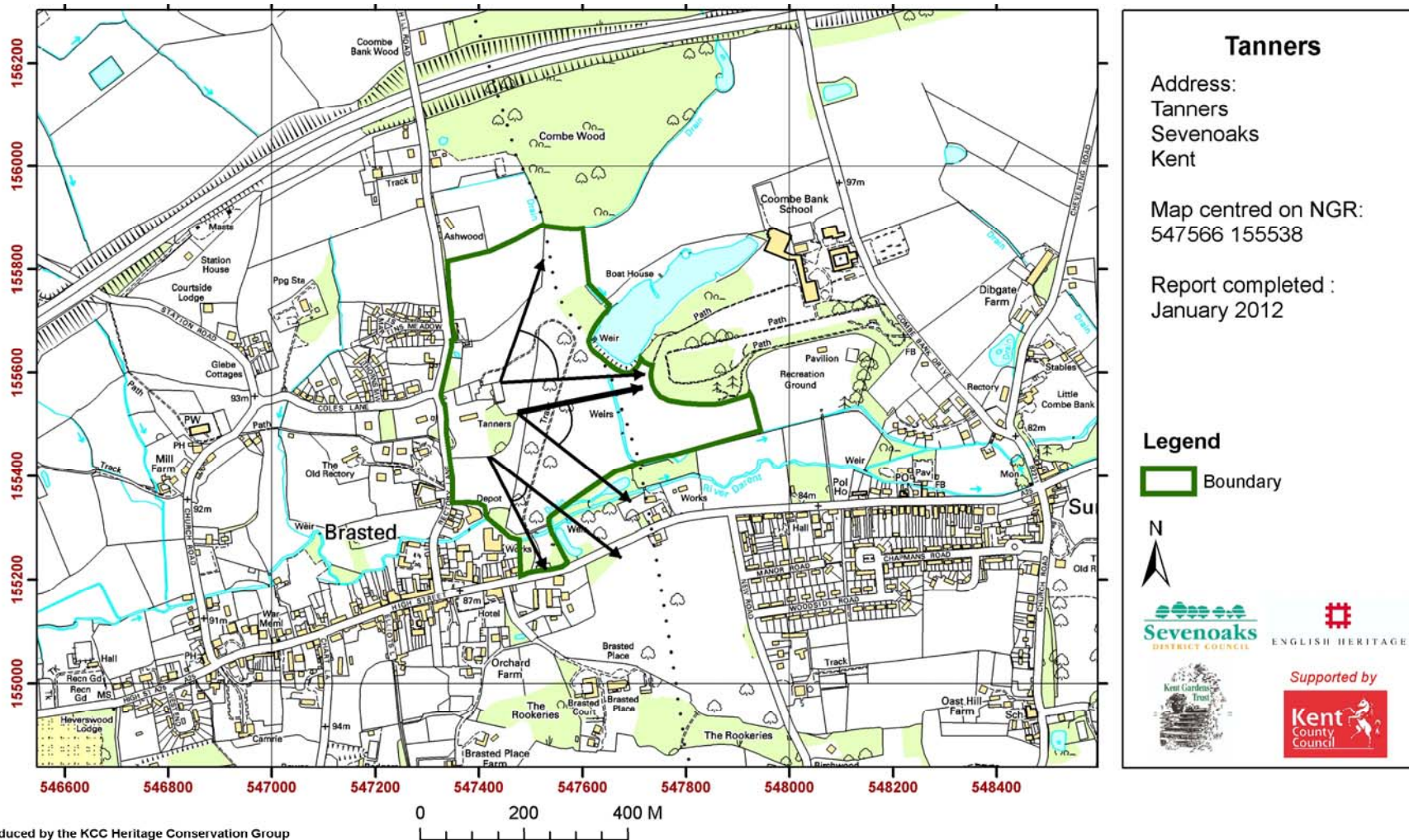
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Fig. 1 Boundary map



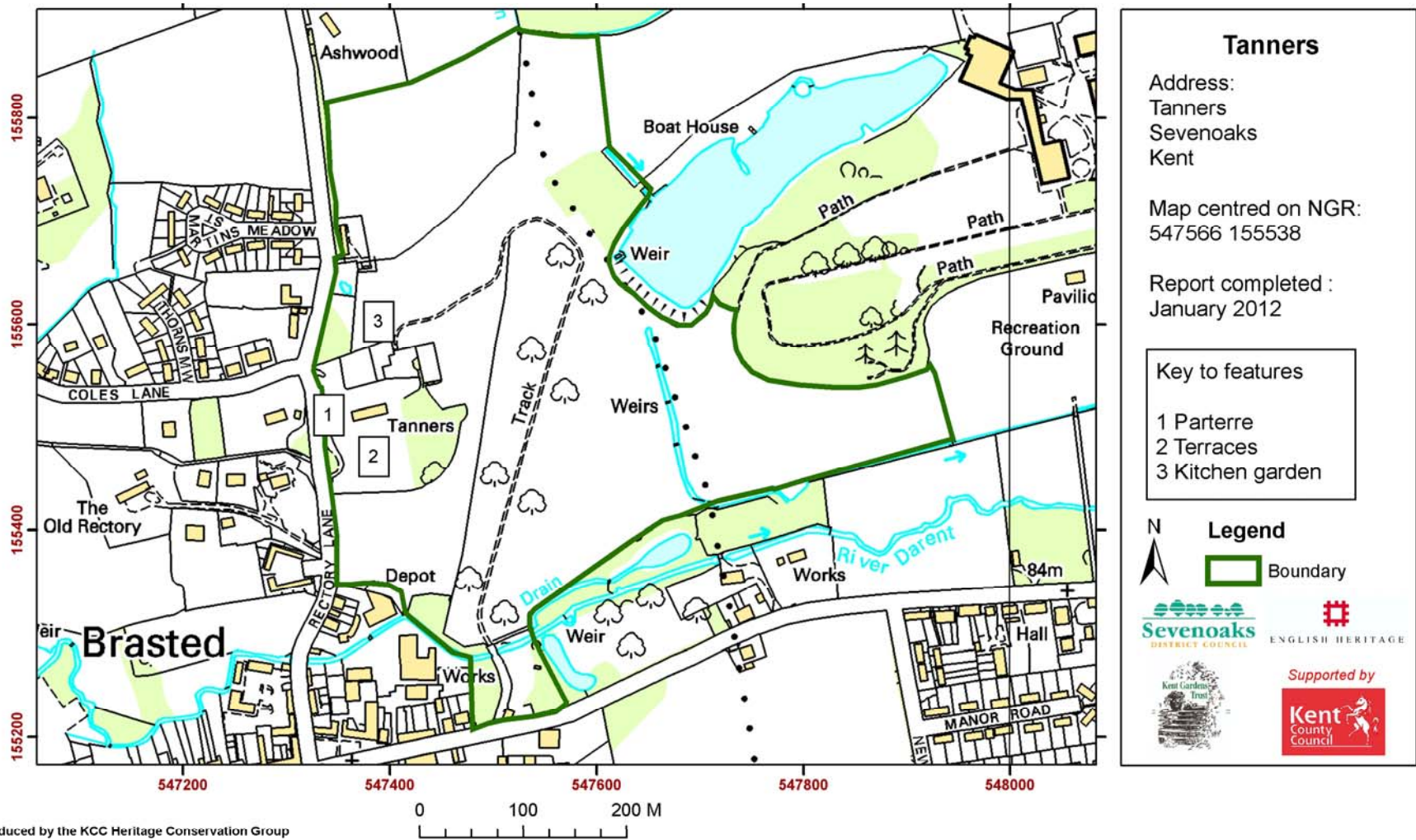
Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

Fig. 2 Key views map



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Fig. 3 Key features map



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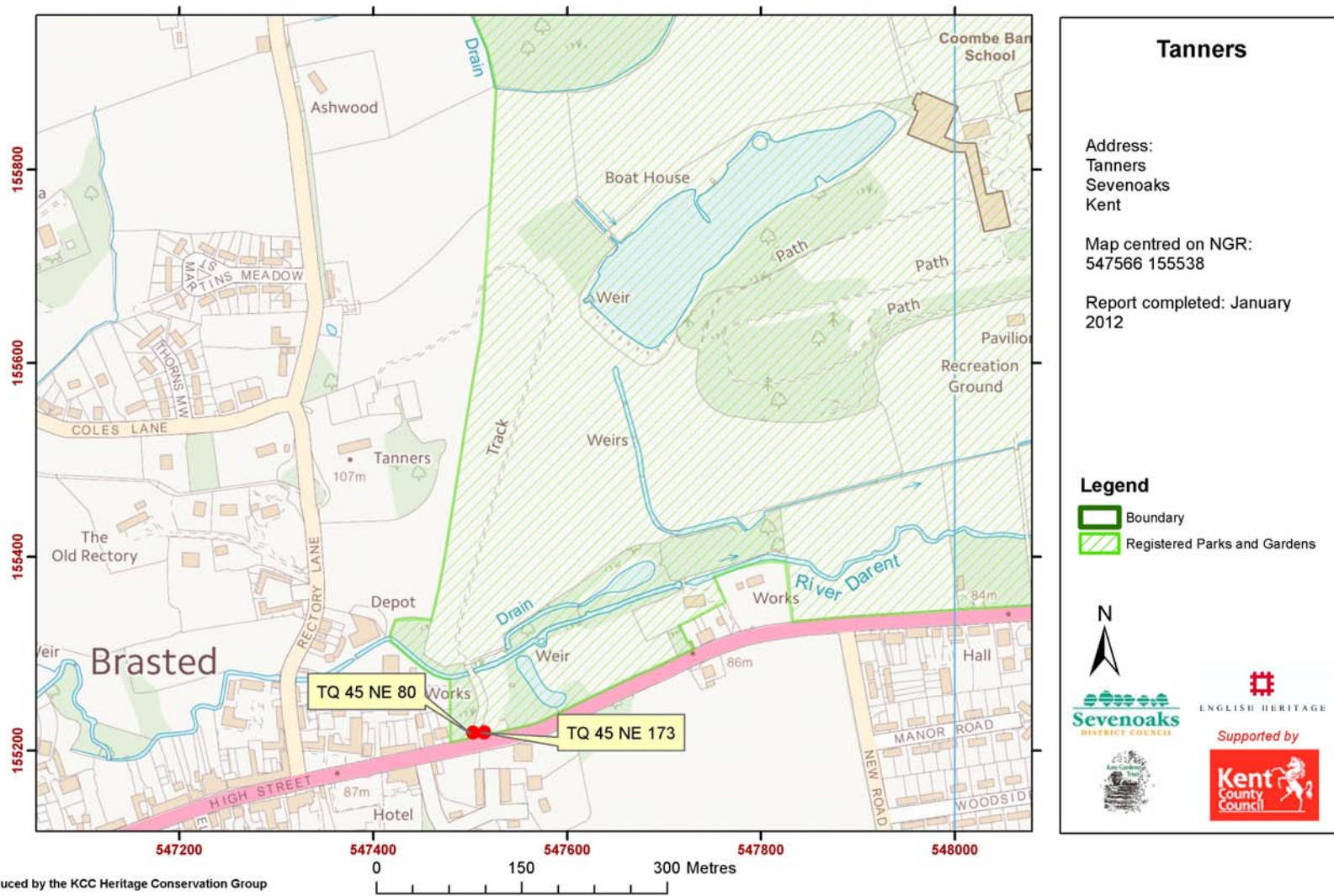
Fig. 4 Aerial photograph (2008)



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Fig. 5 Map of Listed Buildings and Registered Park



Tanners

Address:
Tanners
Sevenoaks
Kent

Map centred on NGR:
547566 155538

Report completed: January
2012

Legend

- Boundary
- Registered Parks and Gardens

N

Supported by

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