

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



Ashurst Park, Speldhurst



March 2009

Ashurst Park

Speldhurst, Kent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

SITE DESCRIPTION

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Boundary map.

FIGURE 2: Key views map.

FIGURE 3: Aerial photograph.

FIGURE 4: Map of listed buildings at Ashurst Park.

FIGURE 5: Listed buildings at Ashurst Park.

FIGURES ONLY ON CD

FIGURE 6: William Mudge, *A New and Accurate Survey of Kent* 1801.

FIGURE 7: Tithe Map (1843.)

FIGURE 8: 1st edn 25" OS map 1870 Sheet 60/9.

FIGURE 9: 3rd edn 25" OS map 1909 Sheet 60/9.

FIGURE 10: Revd edn 25" OS map 1936 Sheet 60/9.

FIGURE 11: Photographs of Ashurst Park January 2009.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the owners of Ashurst Park for commenting on the site description.

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

ASHURST PARK

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

SPELDHURST

TQ 5344 3987

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

An informal garden with lakes, woodland and winding walks laid out in the early C19 around a Victorian mansion, set in parkland with mature trees.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The historic parish of Ashurst lay in the southernmost part of Kent, on its border with Sussex and separated from it by a tributary of the River Medway.

'Aischerst' is mentioned in the C12 records of the Church of Rochester and is thought to have taken its name from the Saxon word *ascas* (ash trees) and the British *byrst*, meaning 'the wood of ashes'. In 1798, it was described as 'hill and dale, the western part is woody, the soil a stiff clay, wet and miry, and rather unfertile' (Hasted). The only house of note was Ashurst Place, situated in the eastern part of the parish on the east side of Ashurst Plain. In 1823 William Cobbett on his 'rural rides' reported that the only buildings there were 'a mill, an alehouse, a church, and about six or seven other houses' and in 1839 it remained 'a parish without anything like a village attached to it' (Pigot).

The site of the current Ashurst Park estate is on the previous land of Ashurst Plain. At the turn of the C19, only farm buildings are shown on its north-east boundary with a few cottages along the road to the nearby village of Fordcombe (Mudge). By 1823, a Mr William Fowler Jones, a Sussex Justice of the Peace, had bought land on Ashurst Plain and had constructed a mansion there named Ashurst Park (CKS; newspaper cuttings). His daughter Catherine inherited in the early 1840s and in 1843 held the property with some 70ha, which included the mansion with an orchard, a garden, pleasure grounds and plantations (Tithe Map). By 1847 a George Green, a 'principal landowner' of the parish is documented at Ashurst Park (Bagshaw). He may have been responsible for the substantial changes made to the mansion by the early 1860s comprising a new kitchen garden and stable block and the laying out of pleasure grounds with ornamental lakes (1st edn OS map). However, the magistrate George Field, documented as 'gentry' of Groombridge in 1858 (Melville) and in residence at Ashurst Park by 1863 (Brackett), is known to have made improvements to the two lodges and the stable block (listed building description) in the mid-1860s and may have acquired the property earlier than 1863.

Ashurst Park was requisitioned by the army during World War Two, but remained in the Field (from 1920 Field-Marsham) family until 1954, when it was bought by a Mary and Ernest Beck. By 1970 Lord Wykeham Stanley Cornwallis was in residence and remained until his death in 1982, when the estate of 161ha was offered for sale (*Courier*). It was bought by 'an English company',

but was offered for sale again in lots in 1984. The mansion and its immediate grounds of c.8ha was offered with 'an area of formal woodland planted with thousands of bulbs' and with 'wide lawns, many varieties of rare flowering shrubs and specimen trees' (Sales Particulars). It was bought by a Mr and Mrs B. Dennis for conversion to a residential convalescent home for the elderly and renamed Fernchase Manor. The stable block and lodges were sold off and converted for private housing and part of the park to the north-west, together with the farmland, was sold (Sales Particulars). The parkland was eventually developed as an independent hospital site (now, 2009, BUPA Tunbridge Wells Private Hospital).

The care home later moved to a purpose-built building (Ashurst Park Care Centre) on land adjoining the hospital. At that time the mansion reverted to a private home, but retaining the name of Fernchase Manor. The property remains in single private ownership; new owners (from 2008) have renamed the property Ashurst Manor and are renovating the mansion.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Ashurst Park, its mansion set well back from the road, stands on a slight eminence above the undulating landscape of its parkland to its south-west. It lies 5.5km west of Royal Tunbridge Wells, approximately 1km south of Fordcombe and 2km north-east of Ashurst village. The c.40ha site is bordered to the east and north-east by the B2188 (Fordcombe Road) and to the south by the A264, which runs east from Tunbridge Wells to Ashurst. Stubbs Wood Farm and its fields form its north-west and west boundaries.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Ashurst Park is approached from the west side of Fordcombe Road. A winding tarmacadum-surfaced drive continues in a south-westerly direction for some 300m through grazed pastureland, then passes through a white-painted, five-bar, wooden gate. From here onwards the drive is bordered by mature laurel, rhododendron and exotic conifers including Scots Pine and Wellingtonia (many in poor condition). The drive descends on its approach to the mansion, then ascends again to arrive at a gravelled forecourt. The entrance front of Ashurst Park mansion enjoys fine views south and south-west over a sloping lawn planted with C20 shrub beds to the adjoining pasture and woodland (now in separate ownership). Enclosing the lawn on its north side is a small woodland of mature trees including several Wellingtonia (2009, in poor condition). The lawn is enclosed on its south-west by a 1m high 250m long Ionicera hedge separating the garden from the parkland.

The drive continues from the forecourt for some 150m in a south-easterly direction between 1.5m high clipped conifer hedges then passes between 2m high, square section, white, rendered piers with ball finials on which hang a pair of 1.5m high wrought iron gates with an adjoining pedestrian entrance to its east. Once through the gates the drive, from here onwards a track, winds gently in the same direction for a further 500m to reach Langton Lodge (listed building grade II) at the junction of Fordcombe and Ashurst Roads. The lodge, designed

by the architect George Devey c.1864, has a façade of coursed sandstone ashlar, timber-framed gables and a peg roof (listed building description). In 1843, the only entrance to Ashurst Park was from the site of Langton Lodge on the south-east property boundary (Tithe Map). The drive then passed through woodland before emerging into the well-treed parkland on its approach to the mansion. By the 1860s Langton Lodge had been constructed and the drive was extended northwards from the mansion for 550m to a second lodge, also designed by Devey (Newman). This second lodge (Fordcombe Lodge) is situated 150m further north-west along the Fordcombe Road than the current entrance (1st edn OS map). Both lodges are now in separate private ownership.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Ashurst Park mansion (listed grade II) is a three-storey, stuccoed building with slate roofs probably built in the early 1800s but substantially altered and added to in the 1850s or 60s (Tithe Map; 1st edn OS map). The additions included a two-storey wing on its north-west service end, a single-storey wing on its south-east end and a central portico 'flanked by symmetrical pavilions projecting to the front' (listed building description) on its south-west, entrance front. A loggia supported on Tuscan columns links the wings across the centre (Newman). At the same time, an attached three-bay garden pavilion facing south-east was constructed on the north end of the garden front. The pavilion has a central rounded arch with a pediment over and the bays each side have stone balustrades and a parapet with urns (listed building description). A rectangular conservatory (c.10m x 15m) was also built on the garden front at the south end of the main three-storey building to form an enclosed terrace to its north (now demolished). It was described by Pevsner as 'Quite a handsome composition'.

Eighty metres to the north of the mansion is a C19 brick stable and coach house courtyard block (listed building grade II) with red tile roofs, now partly converted to housing (Lake Cottage). The single-storey stable wings with chamfered stone plinths and sandstone ashlar dressings are built onto each end of a coach house which has an attic (listed building description). The coach house, which includes the original groom's accommodation, is surmounted by a clock tower and cupola with a bell bearing the date 1867. The courtyard is completed by a brick wall on the fourth (south) side.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The ornamental gardens lie on the north-west, north-east and south-east fronts of the mansion. A terrace paved in concrete slabs (now, 2009, under repair) runs along the north-east front, partly on the site of the demolished C19 conservatory. The garden pavilion on its north end remains in good condition; a few metres to its north-east the remains of a rockery survive, now overgrown with moss and weeds. The gardens immediately north-east of the terrace are laid to lawn (now, 2009, rough grass) with a few mature trees (oak, beech, conifers) remaining from a C19 planting. They are enclosed on their north-west and north-east sides by woodland. To the south-east a 1.5m high conifer hedge forms a boundary with gardens to its west, now in separate private ownership.

One hundred metres to the north-east of the mansion lays a lake of some 0.5ha with a second lake of similar size sited 140m to its east adjoining C17 farm

buildings now partly converted to housing (Mudge). A third 0.8ha lake lies 150m north-east of the mansion on the south-east boundary of the kitchen garden (first shown on the Tithe Map) The lakes are shown on maps from 1862, but the banks are now inaccessible due to tree and shrub growth (1st edn OS map). The routes of earlier walks (now grassed) can be traced in the lawns. From the 1860s a walk ran along the north-east front of the mansion leading from both ends to winding walks that crossed and encircled the lawn and woodlands.

One hundred and fifty metres south-east of the mansion is a wire-enclosed tennis court screened on its east by the hedge along the drive. A few metres to its south are wooden stables with a corrugated roof.

PARKLAND

The undulating parkland to the west of the mansion is managed as grazed pasture with some mature, oaks and beeches, together with two cedars (in poor condition) surviving from the 1800s (1st edn OS map). One hundred and fifty metres north-west of the mansion are the low brick and tile buildings of the private hospital with the care home 80m to its north. Both are set in landscaped grounds and screened from the mansion by a small copse.

KITCHEN GARDEN

One hundred and fifty metres north of the mansion is the C19 kitchen garden comprising three walled compartments. These compartments are shown on the Tithe Map but only became part of the Ashurst Park estate in the 1860s when acquired for an estate kitchen garden. The 1st edn OS map shows a building (now, Black Lion House, listed grade II) standing on Fordcombe Road with a number of adjoining and freestanding glasshouses within the largest compartment (c.90x40m) with the third lake forming its south-west boundary. A frameyard is attached to the exterior of this compartment's north-east wall. Attached to the south-east wall of this same largest one is a third compartment (c. 50mx50m), since demolished. The frameyard now forms the entrance yard to Black Lion House with the main kitchen compartment laid to grass.

REFERENCES

Books and articles

- Edward Hasted, 'Parishes: Ashurst', *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 5* (1798), pp. 276-79
Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser (26 August 1823)
Maidstone Gazette and Kentish Courier (2 and 9 September 1823)
William Cobbett, 'Aug. 30th to Sept. 1st, 1823: Sussex and Kent', *Rural Rides in the Counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex ...* (London, 1830).
Notice of death of Jane Jones, *The Court Journal: Gazette of the Fashionable World* (12 October 1833), p. 702
Kelly's Directory of Kent 1834, 1839, 1891, 1913
Pigot's Directory for Ashurst 1839
Bagshaw's Directory for Ashurst 1847
Melville & Co's Directory of Kent 1858
Brackett's Guide to Tunbridge Wells 1863
Kelly's Directory of Tunbridge Wells 1914

Canterbury and District Directory 1916
Kelly's Directory for Ashurst 1934
Newman, John, *West Kent and the Weald* (Pevsner's Buildings of England series, 1969), p. 137-38.
'Mansion sells for a Million', *Courier* (30 April 1942).

Maps

William Mudge, *A New and Accurate Survey of Kent* 1801
Tithe map and apportionment 1843

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 1870 Sheet 60/9
2nd edn 25" map 1898 Sheet 60/9
3rd edn 25" map 1909 Sheet 60/9
Revd edn 25" map 1936 Sheet 60/9

Modern Mastermap 1:10,000 2007
Map showing listed buildings within Ashurst Park boundaries 1:5,000

Illustrations

Aerial photograph 2003

Archival items

Papers relating to the diversion of the highway between Rustall Common and Gipps Cross. CKS ref. Q/RH/2/177
Unattributed or undated newspaper cuttings.
Sales Particulars, Joyes Leppard (1984).
English Heritage Listed Buildings entries: undated.

Research by Jane Davidson
Description written by Barbara Simms
Edited by Virginia Hinze
March 2009

Fig. 1 Boundary map

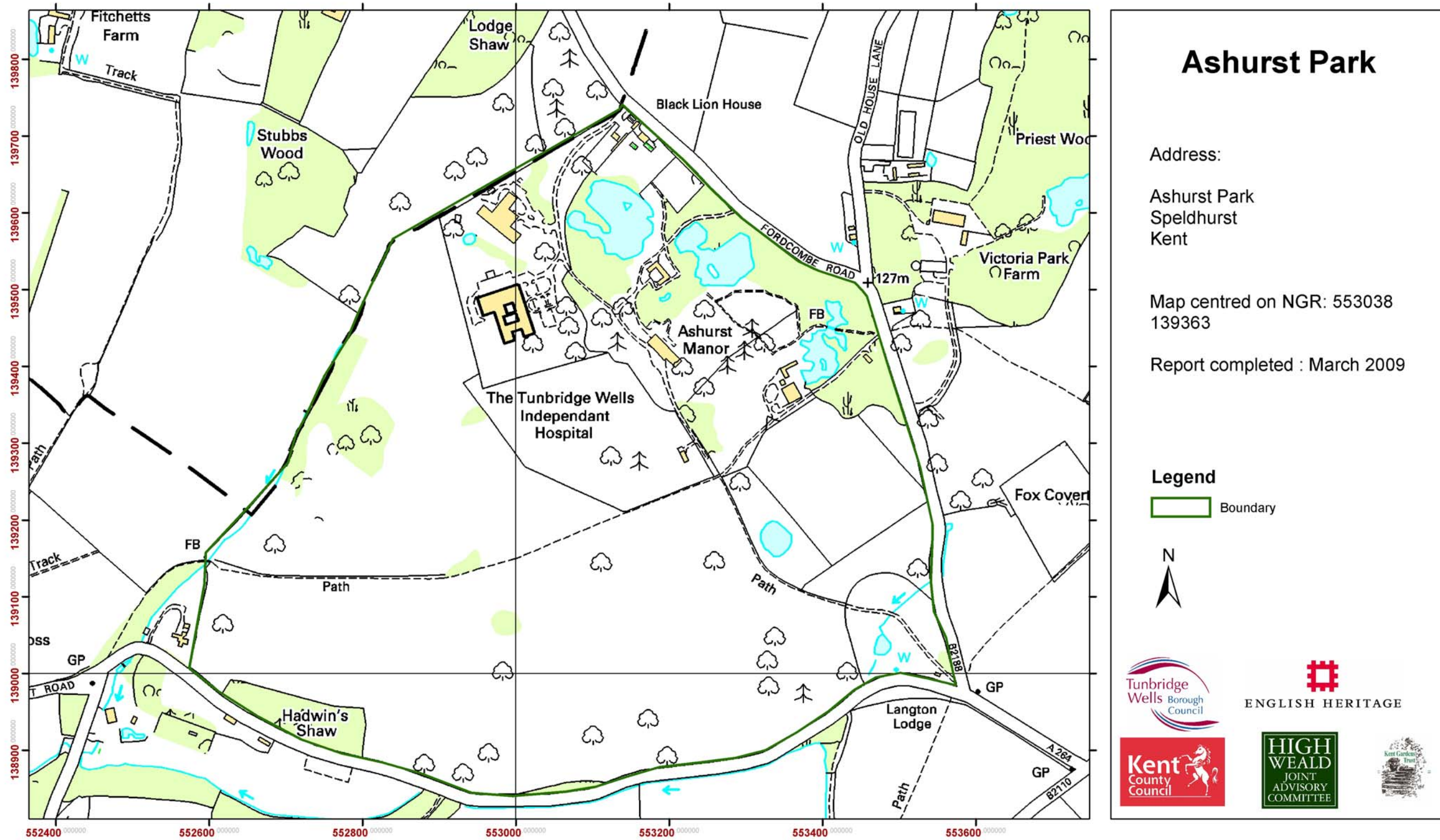
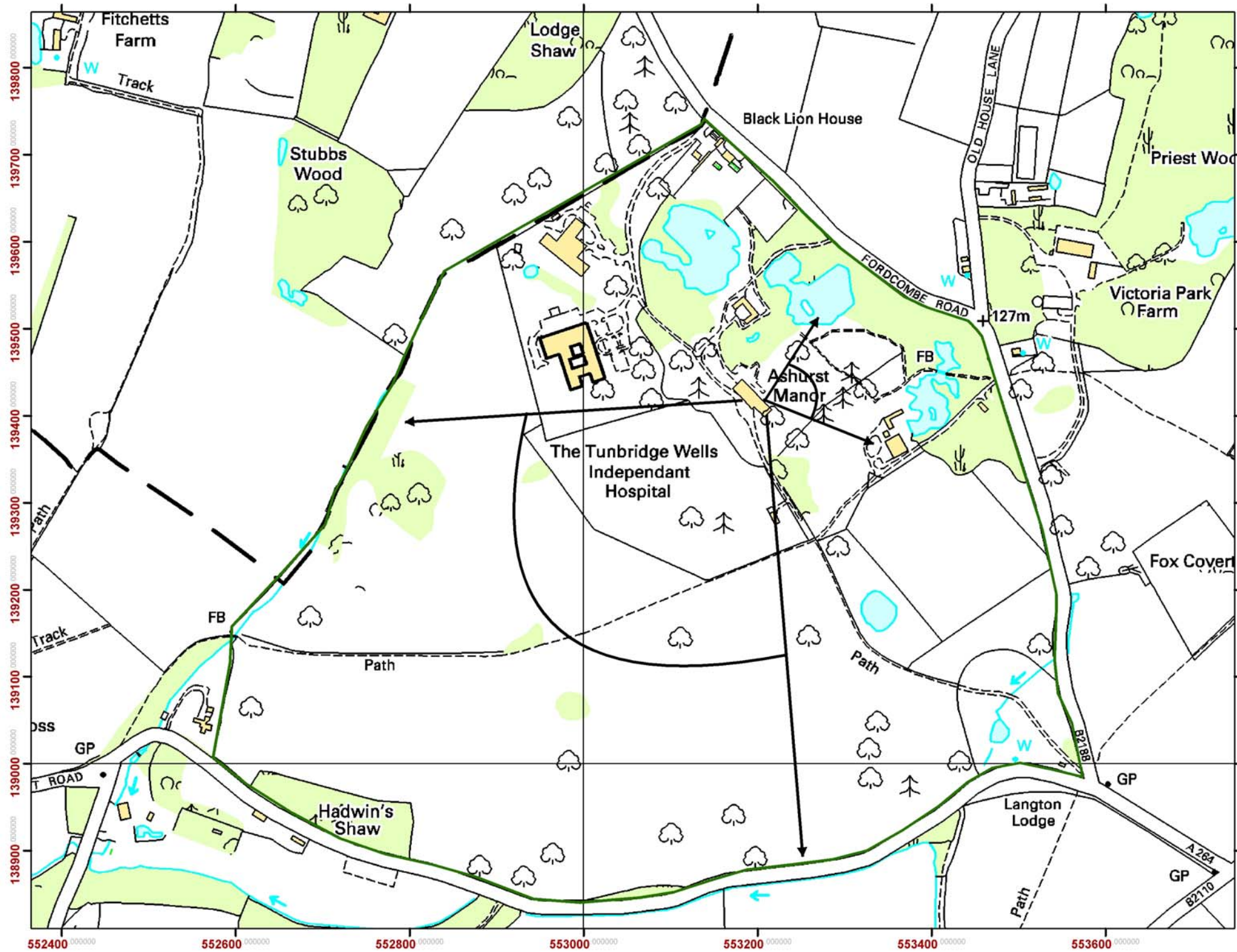


Fig. 2 Key views map



Ashurst Park

Address:

Ashurst Park
Speldhurst
Kent

Map centred on NGR: 553038
139363

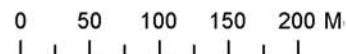
Report completed : March 2009

Legend

 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group



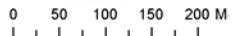
This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. 100019238. 2007

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

Fig. 3 Aerial photograph



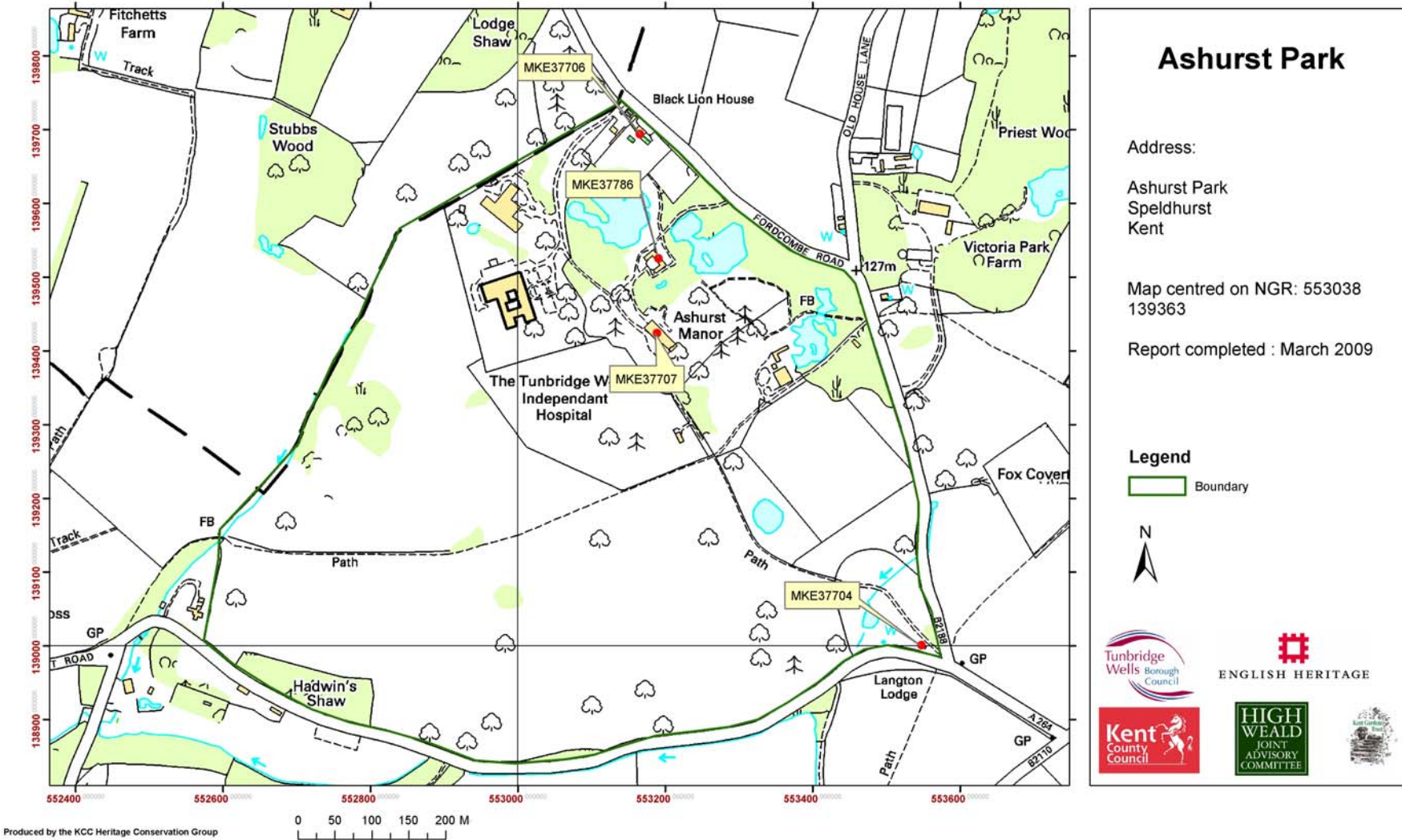
Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group



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

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

Fig. 4 Map of listed buildings at Ashurst Park



shaped brackets. Central doorway contains a C20 door (narrower than the original opening); fielded 2-panel door with fanlight and pedimented doorcase. Steps up to the door have been removed. Flat brick band at first floor level. Timber eaves cornice and parallel roofs are both gable-ended. 2 front gabled dormers with shaped bargeboards. Rear has a 3-window front of C19 12-pane sashes about a central doorway.

Interior: Was not available for inspection at the time of this survey but front is said to include a great deal of original carpentry detail. Quadrant walls: House is set back from the road. From each end of the front C18 or C19 quadrant walls curve forward in a broad sweep to square section terminal piers. Walls are English bond brick with sandstone coping. Tall walls ramping down in a curve as they turn to the front.

Vegetable garden walls: The large vegetable garden to let (southeast) and rear of the house is enclosed with a tall C19 brick wall, flying bond red brick with stone coping a chamfered plinth and interrupted by a series of pilaster-like external buttresses.

Stable courtyard: A stable courtyard to right (north west) of the house is enclosed by a similar tall brick wall. Carriageway entrance on the north west side has brick piers and another gateway to the rear of the house though the south east side has square sections and stone piers with moulded caps. C19 stable here is also sandstone, gable-ended with peg-tile roof. It contains 2 front doors.

Kent Historic Environment Record reference: MKE37707

TQ 53 NW SPELDHURST FORDCOMBE ROAD (off), ASHURST
PARK 7/481 Fernchase Manor (Ashurst Place on O.S.) 25.4.90 Grade II

Large house. Early C19 with later C19 reglazing. Stuccoed with slate roofs; stacks with rendered shafts.

Plan: The house, set in parkland, faces south west. Approximately rectangular plan with a double depth main block in the centre, flanked by symmetrical pavilions projecting to the front with a portico between. Central entrance into a large stair hall, principal rooms to left and right heated by end stacks. Single-storey block at the right end (possibly a later addition) with a second entrance on the right end. 2 blocks adjoining at the left end.

Exterior: Main block 3 storeys, pavilions 2 storeys, right end block single storey; left end blocks 2 and 3 storeys. Hipped slate roof to left end block, other roofs concealed behind parapets. Chimneyshafts with moulded cornices, some retaining original C19 chimneypots. The central part of the house is symmetrical 3:5:3 bays, the 3-bay pavilions to left and right canted, the 7-bay Tuscan portico across the front with the outer bays angled towards the pavilions. The 5-bay block has pilasters to left and right and flanking the entrance bay, a moulded band at second floor level and below the parapet which has a moulded cornice carried on fluted moulded brackets. The parapet is crowned with a swan-necked pediment on a bracketted base. The pediment, with an obelisk finial, is carved with a Renaissance grotesque. Ground and first floor windows are tall 2-pane plate glass sashes with moulded architraves and rectangular panels over. The first floor windows have shouldered architraves. Second floor windows have eared architraves. The portico has 3 steps up; a moulded entablature crowned with urns with scrolled supports. Pilasters to each bay of the ground floor of the centre block have moulded capitals and acanthus consoles supporting plastered beams to the columns. The flat roof of the portico is top-lit with circular lights with moulded plaster cornices. The canted pavilions have moulded cornices below the parapets, which have sections of balustrading. Moulded bands at first floor level and above the first floor windows. Ground floor windows with moulded architraves, and floating cornices, glazed with tall 2-pane plate glass sashes, the centre window of the right hand pavilion converted to a French window. The first floor windows have moulded architraves and baluster-shaped aprons and are similarly glazed. The single-storey right end block,

slightly set back to the right is 4 bays, the narrower right hand bay blind, divided by pilasters with sunk mouldings and moulded capitals and bases; deep projecting cornice below the parapet. Segmental-headed windows with moulded architraves and faceted keyblocks, glazed with tall 2-pane plate glass sashes. On the right return a Tuscan portico with a blocked doorway and balustrades to each side. 2 adjoining 2-bay blocks at the left end, the far left end block 3 storeys, the other 2 storeys. Both have moulded bands at first floor level and above the first floor windows. Ground and first floor windows with moulded architraves and aprons, glazed with 2-pane plate glass-sashes, ground floor window left a C20 replacement. The 2-storey block has a moulded cornice below the parapet. The left hand block has 3 small first floor windows with a common sill on brackets and deep eaves carried on moulded brackets. The rear elevation is a plainer version of the front with a central single-storey bay with tall windows, the bays divided by pilasters surmounted by urns. Garden pavilion attached at rear left with a 3-bay east front with panelled piers and a central round-headed arch, moulded impost, a keyblock and pediment over. The bays each side have stone balustrades and a parapet with urns.

Interior: Not inspected but said to be well-preserved.

Kent Historic Environment Record reference: MKE37786

TQ 53 NW
7/479

SPELDHURST
Lake Cottage

FORDCOMBE ROAD (off), ASHURST PARK
Grade II

Stable block to Fernchase Manor (q.v.) formerly known as Ashurst Park. The stables have been partly converted to housing. 1867 (dated on bell); modest C20 conversion. Flemish bond brick with a chamfered stone plinth and sandstone ashlar dressings; red tile roofs; brick stacks.

Plan: South west facing. Symmetrically-arranged with a coach house in the centre and front left and right projecting stable wings forming a courtyard completed by a brick wall. The coach house has a rear centre wing.

Exterior: Single-storey stable blocks, coach house with an attic, surmounted by clock tower and cupola. Gabled roofs with coped gables with kneeler. 5-bay front elevation to the coach house which has a stone parapet and, in the centre, a gable containing a round-headed loft loading door, partly panelled and partly glazed, with a keyblock. A stone band across the front rises as a hoodmould over the doorways and windows. 3 segmental-headed coach house doors with keyblocks and original paired plank doors. The outer bays each have a pair of 2-light casement windows. Behind the coach house the clock tower has a clock face in a decorated frame, the cupola above with a lead roof and a wrought iron weathervane. The stable blocks have apex finials and shaped bargeboards to the gable ends which have stone quoins and round-headed windows. Stone bands rise as the hoodmoulds to the windows which have keyblocks and have been divided by brick lintels to the C20 casements with glazing bars below. The inner returns of the stable blocks have hollow-chamfered stone cornices over a brick dentil frieze. Stone bands rise to form the hoodmoulds of 2 doors (one on each side converted to a window), one flanked by 2-light casement windows. The stable blocks have C20 axial chimney stacks. The stable courtyard is completed by a quadrant brick wall with stone plinth and coping, the gate piers with low pyramidal caps above a brick dentil cornice. The rear elevation of the coach house block is in the same style as the front and includes some original round-headed horned 4-pane sashes. The coach house block includes original groom's accommodation with an original stack with a corbelled brick cornice to the shaft.

Interior: not inspected.

A handsome C19 stable block.