

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



Crittenden, Brenchley



July 2009

Crittenden

Brenchley, Kent

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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

CRITTENDEN HOUSE

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

BRENCHLEY

TQ 6572 4348

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

Informal lawns enclosed by landscape of glades with mature trees, shrubs and water gardens laid out in the 1950s by the plant collector Ben Tompsett (1915-2000) on the north-east, east and south-east fronts of a C17 house.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

From the C14 the Brenchley area flourished with trades associated with cloth making but from the C16 to the C18 it was also an important centre for iron working and much of the area's ancient woodland was felled to provide fuel for furnaces and clearings for hammer ponds (Hasted). The wealth generated from these industries was used to construct many 'mostly old-fashioned timbered buildings'. At Crittenden House, although the origins and names of the early owners are unrecorded, the core of the house is timber framed and is characteristic of a Wealden farmstead of the early C17 (listed building description).

The earliest evidence of the layout of Crittenden House and grounds is the 1862 OS map which shows a house and farm buildings with two large ponds. To the north of the house an orchard and an oast house are shown extending into farmland and woodland, although the extent of the Crittenden land holding is not known (Tompsett). By 1897 the house had been enlarged, a third pond had been dug in former woodland to its east and the orchard had been further extended (2nd edn OS map). The house was again enlarged in the early C20 but no changes appear to have been made to the grounds (4th edn OS map). In the 1920s farmland to the west of the house was sold off (Clark) and by 1934 Crittenden House and its remaining land had become the premises of Kent Hop, Fruit & Stock Farms Ltd (Kelly).

In 1946 the farmland to the west of the house was bought by Mr Ben Tompsett, a fruit farmer from Yalding, to extend his apple and pear orchards. In 1955 he also bought Crittenden House from the then owner, a Mrs Spikernell, who offered it for sale as 'a genuine period residence of outstanding charm and character' (Clark). At the time, however, Tompsett described the house as 'barely visible behind a hedge and through a mass of bushes' and with c.1.6ha of 'wilderness'. During the subsequent four years he restored the farmhouse and outbuildings and, with the help of the landscape gardener, F. G. T. Manners, laid out a garden. He also stocked the ponds with Golden Carp, Golden Orfe and Silver Rudd to 'give colour and bright movement' (Tompsett). Tompsett also sought advice from the notable plant collector Captain Collingwood Ingram of The Grange (Benenden) and the Royal Horticultural

Society adviser, Mr Tuffin, on the planting of 'a beautiful wild garden' and obtained 'many fine specimens ... from old gardens and nurseries [and] kind friends'.

The garden was opened to the public under the National Gardens Scheme from 1959 until Tompsett's death in 2000 during which time he transplanted many mature trees, established a rhododendron collection, experimented with the effects of night lighting on foliage and textural plants and brought back new specimens from plant hunting expeditions in South Africa, Chile, China and the Soviet Union (*Telegraph*). His achievements and the Crittenden garden were celebrated in a number of articles and photographs (Huxley, Whitsey, Mitchell). Wright described it as an 'informal plantsman's garden dominated by shrubs, exotic trees and some perennials, yet with strong design qualities'.

During the late C20 Oast House and Crittenden Farm Bungalow (west of the house) were sold and a separate access track was built to serve the two properties and also late C20 Walnut Tree Farm constructed on adjoining land north of the house. They remain in separate, private ownership.

A Mr Richard Harding and his wife, Fiona, bought Crittenden House in 2001 and sold to the present owners in 2004. The property remains in single, private ownership but the garden has not been open to the public since 2000.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Crittenden House lies within a landscape of undulating fields, orchards, scattered copses and woodland that characterizes the Kentish Weald. The site lies about 50m above sea level on a ridge that is part well-drained Tunbridge Wells sands and part iron-rich Wadhurst clay. It is situated 1.7km north of Matfield, 1.7km south-west of Paddock Wood and approximately 7km north-east of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

The c.1.6ha site is bounded to the south-west by Crittenden Road, to the west, east and south-east by access roads to adjacent C20 Walnut Tree Farm and to the north by the Farm's garden.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Crittenden House is entered off the north side of Crittenden Road through a five-bar wooden gate set in a 1m high yew hedge which encloses the property from the road. Immediately beyond the gate a rolled gravel drive runs in a northerly direction for 50m between lawns offering views over the gardens to its east to reach a forecourt on the west, principal entrance front of the house. The drive then continues northwards some 80m to join an access road to Walnut Tree Farm.

The present drive to Crittenden House survives from at least 1862 (1st edn OS map) although at that time it continued northwards from the forecourt to the oast house 90m north-west of the house.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Crittenden House (listed grade II) is an early C17 farmhouse with C19 and early C20 alterations. It is a two-storey, timber-framed house with an attic under a peg tile roof (listed building description). The ground floor walls are of brick and there is tile hanging to the first floor. The east front is weather-boarded and has a C20 single-storey, lean-to built against it.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The ornamental gardens are on the north-east, east and south-east fronts of the house and are laid out as informal lawns enclosed by a landscape of glades with mature trees, shrubs and water gardens. On the east front, running the length of the house and on the site of a former mid-C20 rose garden, is a formal garden (c.20m x 20m) divided into quarters. Some 10m south-east of the house, and on the east side of an adjacent former farm building, a second, smaller, formal garden (c.15m x 15m), similarly divided, occupies the site of a former C20 kitchen garden.

A York stone terrace runs the length of the south front of the house from which there are views down over sloping ground to the largest of the three ponds shown on the 2nd edn OS map. It is a roughly circular pond (c.0.8ha) which lies c.20m south-east of the house. A second oval-shaped pond (c.0.4ha) lies 50m north-east of the house and a third small pond is 40m east within a group of trees. A C20 swimming pool constructed by Tompsett lies in a former orchard 90m north-east of the house (Huxley 1964).

The layout and planting of the gardens at Crittenden House survive from Tompsett's time, although neither retain the rich variety of plant species described in late C20 descriptions and photographs (Huxley, Mitchell). When he bought the property in 1955 Tompsett found that 'the three large ponds ... were choked and their banks covered with a thicket of trees and undergrowth. It [the house] had a small lawn in front, confined by a privet hedge, an impoverished kitchen garden at the side, and a neglected apple orchard at the back, bounded on the east by a belt of woodland'. According to one contemporary description Tompsett's improvements created a 'constant change ... between open grass, dense planting, water, steep banks and little wooded pathways [that] all combine to make a garden of much horticultural interest, visitor pleasure and peacefulness' (Huxley 1975).

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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" 1869 Sheet 61/2 and 61/3
 2nd edn 25" 1897 Sheet 61/2 and 61/3
 3rd edn 25" 1908 Sheet 61/2 and 61/3
 Revd edn 25" 1938 Sheet 61/2 and 61/3

Kent Compendium map 1996

Modern Mastermap 1:2,500 (2007)

Map showing listed buildings within Crittenden House boundaries 2007

Illustrations

3 black-and-white photographs of house 1956. NMR (Red Box Collection) Ref AA57/674-6.

B/w photograph of Crittenden House and hammer pond in Pike, p. 5.

3 colour photographs 1981/82 (a) rose garden (b) house from pond (c) aerial view

The former hammer pond at Crittenden House in Elisabeth Hall, *Historic Gardens of Kent* (1995), p. 52.

Aerial photograph of Crittenden House 2003

Archival items

English Heritage Listed Buildings entries (1988).

Kent Compendium entry 1996.

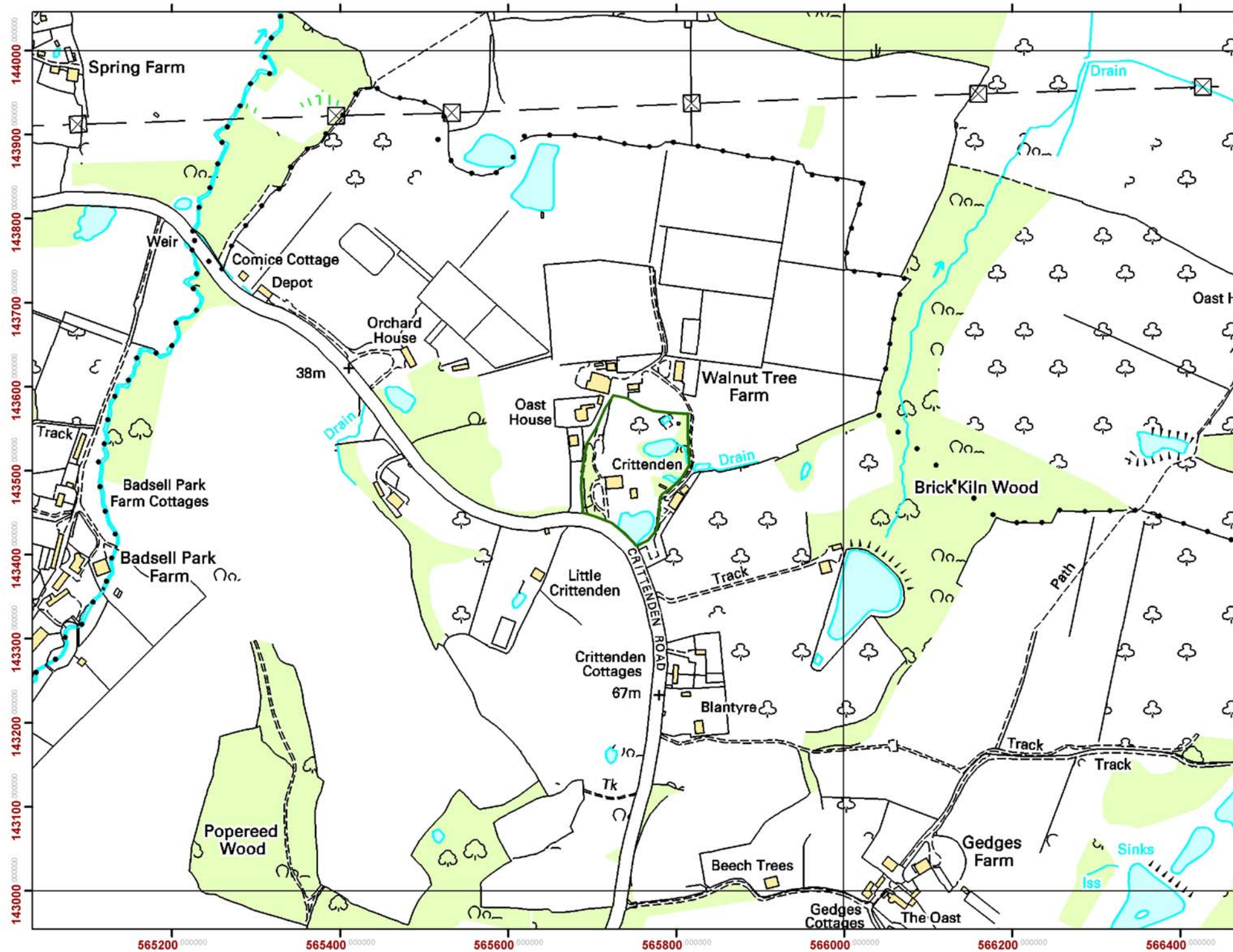
Research by Simon Maclachlan

Description written by Barbara Simms

Edited by Virginia Hinze

July 2009

Fig. 1 Boundary map



Crittenden

Address:
Crittenden
Brenchley
Kent



Map centred on NGR: 565753 143504




Report completed : July 2009

Legend

Boundary

N

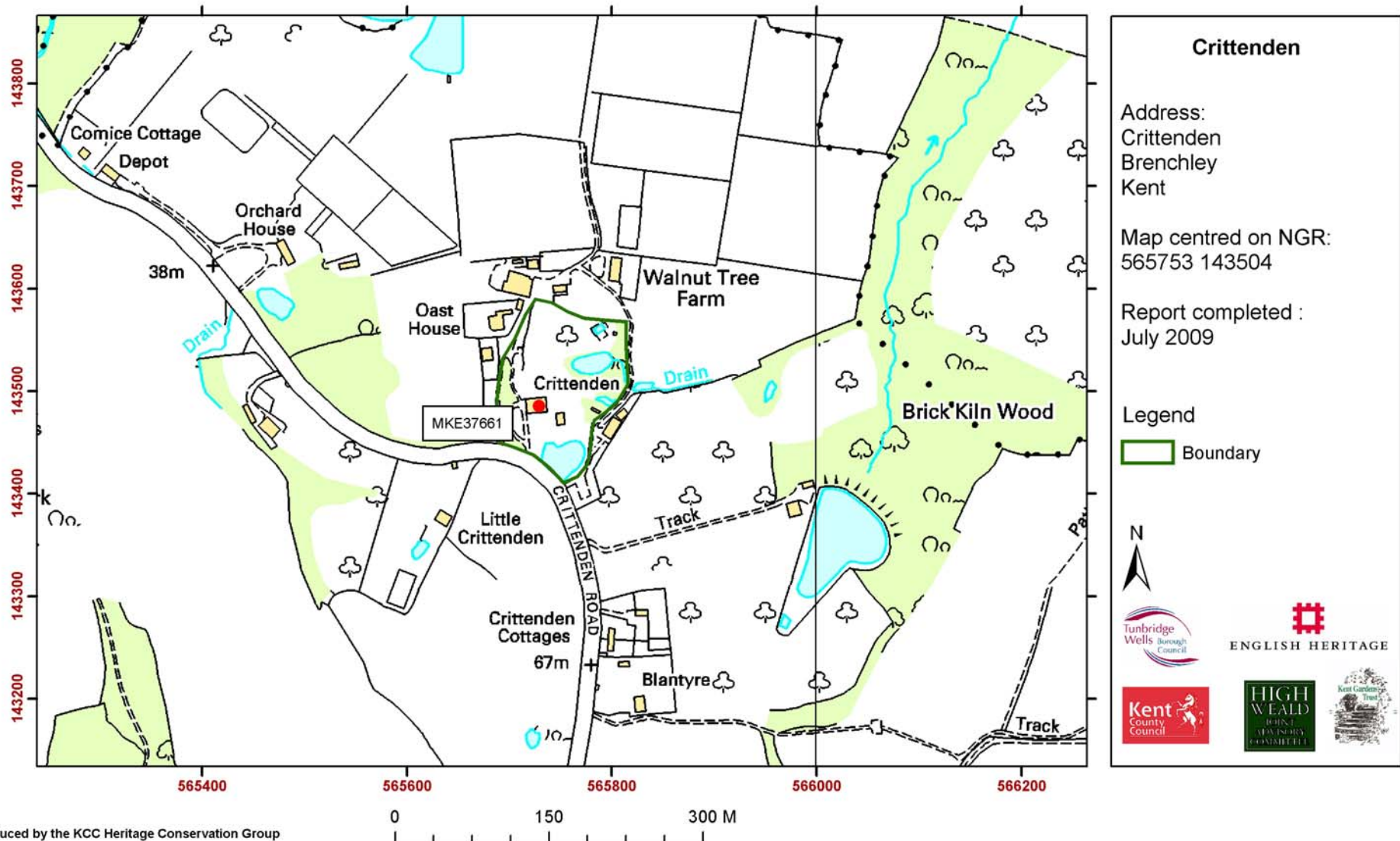




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Fig. 2 Map of listed buildings at Crittenden



Crittenden

Address:
Crittenden
Brenchley
Kent

Map centred on NGR:
565753 143504

Report completed :
July 2009

Legend
 Boundary

N

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

ENGLISH HERITAGE

Kent County Council

HIGH WEALD BOULEVARD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Fig. 3 Listed buildings at Crittenden

Kent Historic Environment Record reference: MKE37661

TQ 64 SE PADDOCK WOOD CRITTENDEN

6/326

Crittenden House 11.5.88

Grade II

Farmhouse. Early C17 with C19 and early C20 alterations. Framed construction, the ground floor underbuilt in brick, the first floor tile-hung; peg-tile roof; brick stacks.

Plan: The house faces south. 3 room lobby entrance plan, the 2 right hand (east) rooms heated from back-to-back fireplaces in an axial stack, the left hand room heated from an end stack. Rear outshut and late C19 or C20 rear addition.

Exterior: 2 storeys and attic. Asymmetrical 4-window front with a C20 plank door to right of centre with an open gabled porch on chamfered timber posts. 4 C20 3- and 4-light timber casements with leaded panes. The right return is weatherboarded with a C20 single-storey lean-to addition. Left side entrance with a C20 gabled porch on timber posts. Plank door and elaborate iron hinges. The rear elevation has a gabled late C17 staircase projection, a brick outshut and 2 C20 dormer windows to the upper part of the outshut. Roof half-hipped at ends; tall brick shaft to the axial stack, date panel thought to read 1608; projecting left end stack with ribbed decoration.

Interior: Not inspected on survey of 1989 but said to be unchanged since the 1988 listing where it is described as follows: "Dining room with large wooden fireplace bressummer with the carved initials GP and IA, 2 gabled alcoves and a 2-panelled wooden cupboard with butterfly hinges. C20 chamfered ceiling joists. Lounge has iron fireback depicting Adam and Eve and the tree of Knowledge said to have been removed from a demolished mansion. Study has a fireback of 1592 with a 2 headed eagle and crowns and a curved brick fireplace with wooden bressummer and coved hood.

Staircase bay has pegged rafters with no ridge piece and an oak dogleg staircase. First floor has gunstock jowled posts and some curved tension braces visible. Bathroom has a chamfered beam with lambs tongue stop. Old floorboards. Attic has very wide oak floorboards and 3 original C17 3-plank doors. Elsewhere in the house there are good copies of these made in the 1920s".

Roof: Not inspected but list description of 1988 records a staggered butt purlin roof.

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Fig. 4 Aerial photograph



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