

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



The Grove, Royal Tunbridge Wells



May 2009

The Grove

Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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

THE GROVE

TUNBRIDGE WELLS
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
TQ 5843 3895

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

A small wooded area donated as public open space in 1703 and formally laid out with walks in the C19.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Grove (sometimes referred to as Mount Sion Grove) lies at the centre of an urban area of Tunbridge Wells (Mount Sion) which until the early C17 was a remote corner of the Manor of South Frith (*Historical Atlas of Tunbridge Wells*). 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*). Its popularity grew so greatly during the C17 that in 1684, Viscountess Purbeck, the owner of Mount Sion, realized its potential for development and began selling off plots of land to provide lodgings and other facilities for the visitors who came to take the waters.

The Grove, which was originally a small wood surrounded by open heathland, remained part of the Manor until April 1703 when Viscountess Purbeck's son, the Duke of Buckingham, placed the area in trust 'to be continually preserved for a grove and shade, and walks, for the use of all the inhabitants' (Brackett). By 1738 Mount Sion was occupied by substantial properties, many of which were lodging houses (Bowra) and was described as 'in the full bloom of prosperity' (Burr). In 1782 The Grove contained 200 oak and 10 beech trees surviving from the original wood as well as many smaller trees (Hasted) and is still shown as woodland on Greenwood's map of 1821. By 1830, however, the area appears to have been formally laid out with at least one tree-lined walk (Dodd), although this is not shown on the Tithe Map.

In 1863, many improvements were carried out under the direction of the Reverend William Law Pope, minister of King Charles' Church in the Pantiles and honorary curator of The Grove (Beavis). His actions in removing aging trees and replacing them with new ones led to accusations of vandalism, against which he defended himself in a pamphlet in 1868. By that date Pope had planted nearly 100 trees of 31 species, along with around 400 shrubs and argued for moving away from the exclusive use of oak and beech, saying that diversity 'is suitable to a Grove, as distinguished from a wood' (Beavis). His publication lists the trees he planted as well as recording the land sold for development around The Grove and the effect on its mature trees of the new railway tunnel built below it. In 1876 The Grove is shown as laid out with a

perimeter path, a main axis from south-west to north-east and a cross-axis from west to east (Pelton).

In 1889 the town of Tunbridge Wells was incorporated and the new Council, chaired by Tunbridgeware maker, Thomas Barton, took over the management of The Grove. He embellished it with ornamental gates, iron railings, seats and lamp standards, the Council's plan also showing the open space populated with mature trees (1889 plan). Changes were also made to the path layout and a bandstand (brought from Warrior Square, St Leonards) was installed (3rd edn OS map; postcards). Press cuttings describing Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 reported that The Grove held a spectacular musical event 'almost Parisian in variety, beauty and extent' with 'over 7000 coloured lamps and Chinese lanterns [and] festoons of fire on and around the fine old trees' (Beavis). A children's playground was introduced in 1899 and a summer pavilion for concert parties was added in the early years of the C20. A local resident of 1911 recalled 'happy hours in The Grove: bowling our hoops, whipping tops, skipping, playing hide-and-seek in the shrubbery ... and chalking hopscotch markings on the paths ... much frowned on by the Grover, who was a sort of full-time caretaker and gardener' (Douglas).

During World War Two, much of The Grove, including the bandstand, was requisitioned by the military and the ornamental iron railings and gates were dismantled for the war effort (Beavis). In 1946, The Grove was in a poor state of repair; the bandstand was demolished and in 1947 a 'scheme providing for the reinstatement and improvement' was recorded in Council minutes. Improvements continued in subsequent decades with new tree plantings and reinstatement of seats although the summer pavilion was dismantled.

During the October 1987 storm many trees were lost but a planned replanting scheme, promoted by the Friends of the Grove, is now (2009) beginning to mature. The site, which has a Green Flag Award, remains the property of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council whose policy is to preserve the landscape according to the aims and objectives of The Grove's benefactors while maintaining it to modern standards.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The Grove lies on high ground within the residential area of Mount Sion and enjoys fine views west over Tunbridge Wells to the Common. The 1.8ha site is located some 100m east of Tunbridge Wells High Street. It is bounded to its east by Buckingham Road and to its south-east by Claremont Road while the north, west and south-west boundaries abut the C18 and C19 properties in Mount Sion.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance is from the south, from the west end of Claremont Road at its junction with Buckingham Road. To its west is a garden store, constructed on the site of a 1940s air-raid shelter. The entrance from Birdcage Walk at the north-east corner of the site is the only one with an entrance feature. The way in

is through the southern arch of a pair of mid-C19, stuccoed arches flanking a stuccoed wall on the property boundary (listed grade II). The arches' square Doric columns support a heavy cornice. Pelton's 1876 map shows only three entrances, but in 1889 the new Tunbridge Wells Council proposals included all the present ten entrances.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The Grove, roughly oval in shape, is laid out and managed as rough grass which is informally planted with birch, oak and beech trees, many surviving from C19 plantings (some in poor condition). Its boundaries are enclosed variously by fences, railings and brick walls along the inside of which are mixed shrubberies, some of their plants also surviving from the C19.

A tree-lined, gravelled path, some 10m wide and formally lined with lamp posts and benches, runs 150m north from the main, Claremont Road entrance to form the Grove's major, south-north axis. It is crossed by two secondary, diagonal paths. The site also is encircled by a perimeter path, some 450m in overall distance and joined at various points by smaller paths from the pedestrian entrances. The south-north axial path divides the site into two unequally sized areas of approximately 1.1ha and 0.7h; in the smaller, eastern area, approximately halfway along the path is a children's playground which occupies the site of the C19 bandstand and the playground built in 1899 (2nd edn OS map; photographs). The Grove retains its woodland character and the path layout as shown on established in 1889.

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Maps

- John Bowra, *A Survey of Tunbridge Wells and all Places of Note Within a Mile and a half of the Chappel* (1738).
Edward Hasted map of Tunbridge Wells 1778.
Charles Greenwood, *Map of the County of Kent* 1821.
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Pelton's *New Map of Tunbridge Wells* (1876) in *Pelton's Shilling Guide*
Tunbridge Wells Improvement Plan 1889

OS maps 1st edn 6" 1870
 2nd edn 6" 1897
 3rd edn 6" 1907
 4th edn 6" 1929

OS maps 1st edn 25" 1870 Sheets 60/15 and 60/16
 2nd edn 25" 1896 Sheets 60/15 and 60/16
 3rd edn 25" 1909 Sheets 60/15 and 60/16
 Revd edn 25" 1938 Sheets 60/15 and 60/16

Modern Mastermap 1:25,000. 2007.

Map showing listed buildings within The Grove site boundaries 1:5000.

Illustrations

Joseph Josiah Dodd, pencil drawing of 'Duchess of Kent's House, from the Grove' (c.1830).

Early C20 b/w postcards of Mount Sion Grove 1907.

Aerial photograph 2003.

Archival items

Plant list 1864-68 from Rev. W. L. Pope, *A Word About the Grove* (1868).

Council minutes 1891-1967 (TWBC).

English Heritage Listed Buildings entries: undated.

Ian Beavis, Notes on The Grove (2003).

Research by Carole Leith

Description written by Barbara Simms

Edited by Virginia Hinze

May 2009

Fig. 1 Boundary map



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Fig. 2 Key views map



The Grove

Address:
The Grove
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent

Map centred on NGR: 558538
138937

Report completed : May 2009

Legend

 Boundary



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 3 Aerial photograph

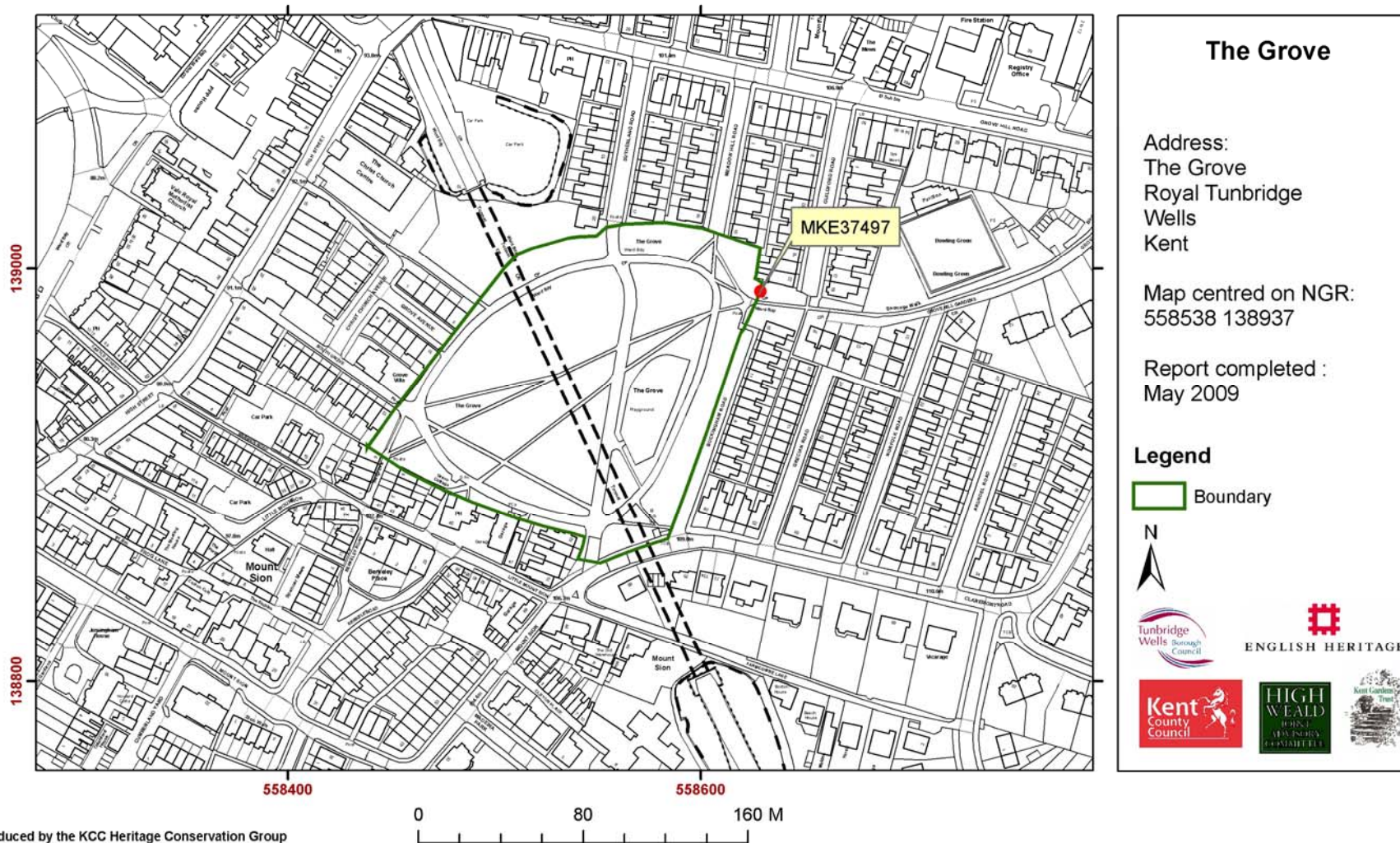


Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 4 Map of listed buildings



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Fig. 5 Listed buildings at The Grove

Kent Historic Environment Record reference: MKE37497

ENTRANCE TO GROVE HILL GARDENS

Listed Building

THE GROVE 1. 1746

Entrance to

Grove Hill Gardens TQ 5839 NE

8/193 II 2. Mid C19. This consists of 2 stuccoed pedestrian arches flanking a stuccoed wall. The arches have square Doric Columns. There is a heavy cornice over with a truncated pediment over each arch.

Listing