

Fig.7 A plan and description of the situation and content of several pieces of woodland in Lamberhurst, the property of Elizabeth Wilson gentlewoman and sisters 1770 (detail). CKS reference U200P2.



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Fig.8 Austen, Saxby & Playfoot *Map of Kent* 1796 (detail). CKS ref U200P3.

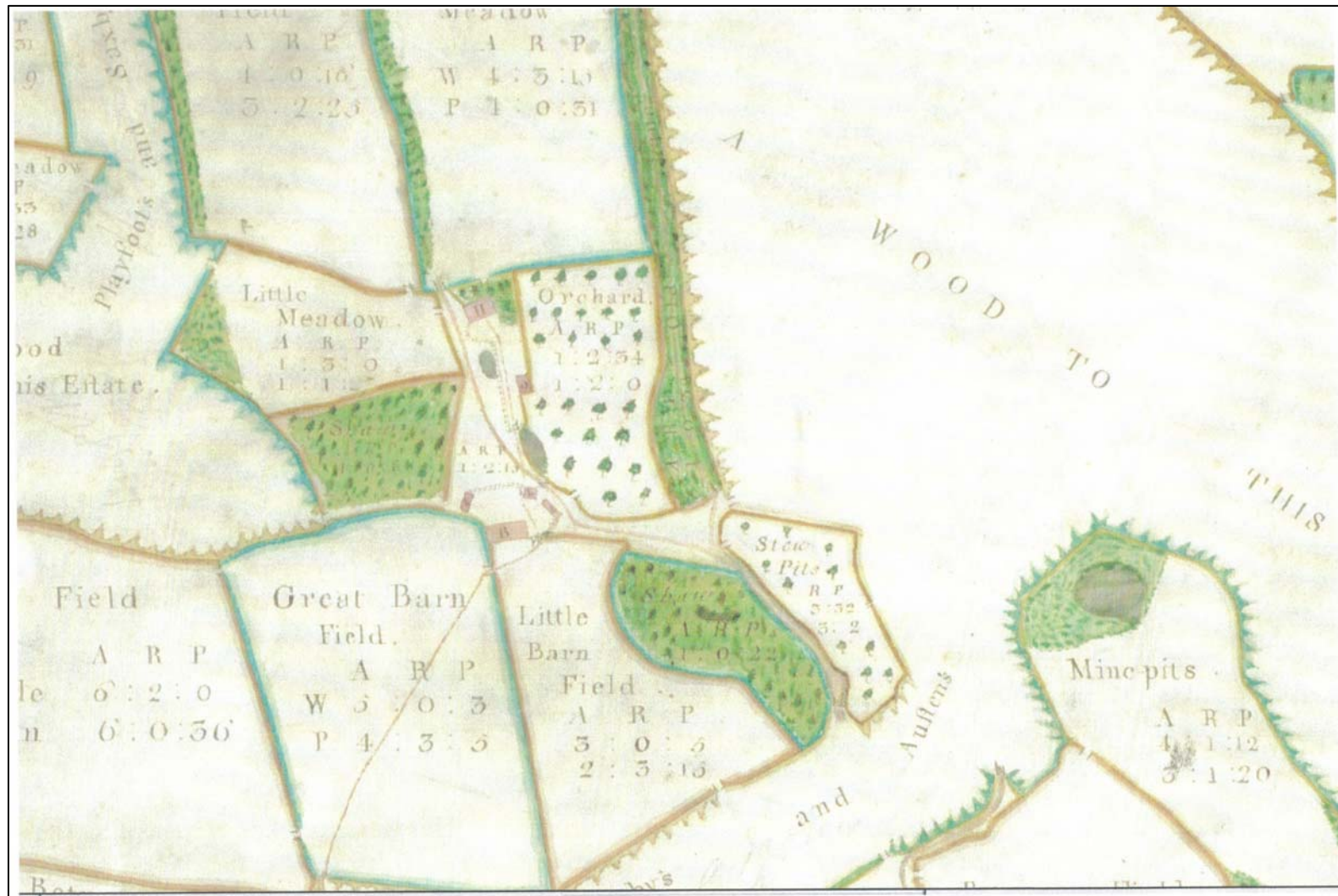


Fig. 9 Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1867). Sheet 69/3.

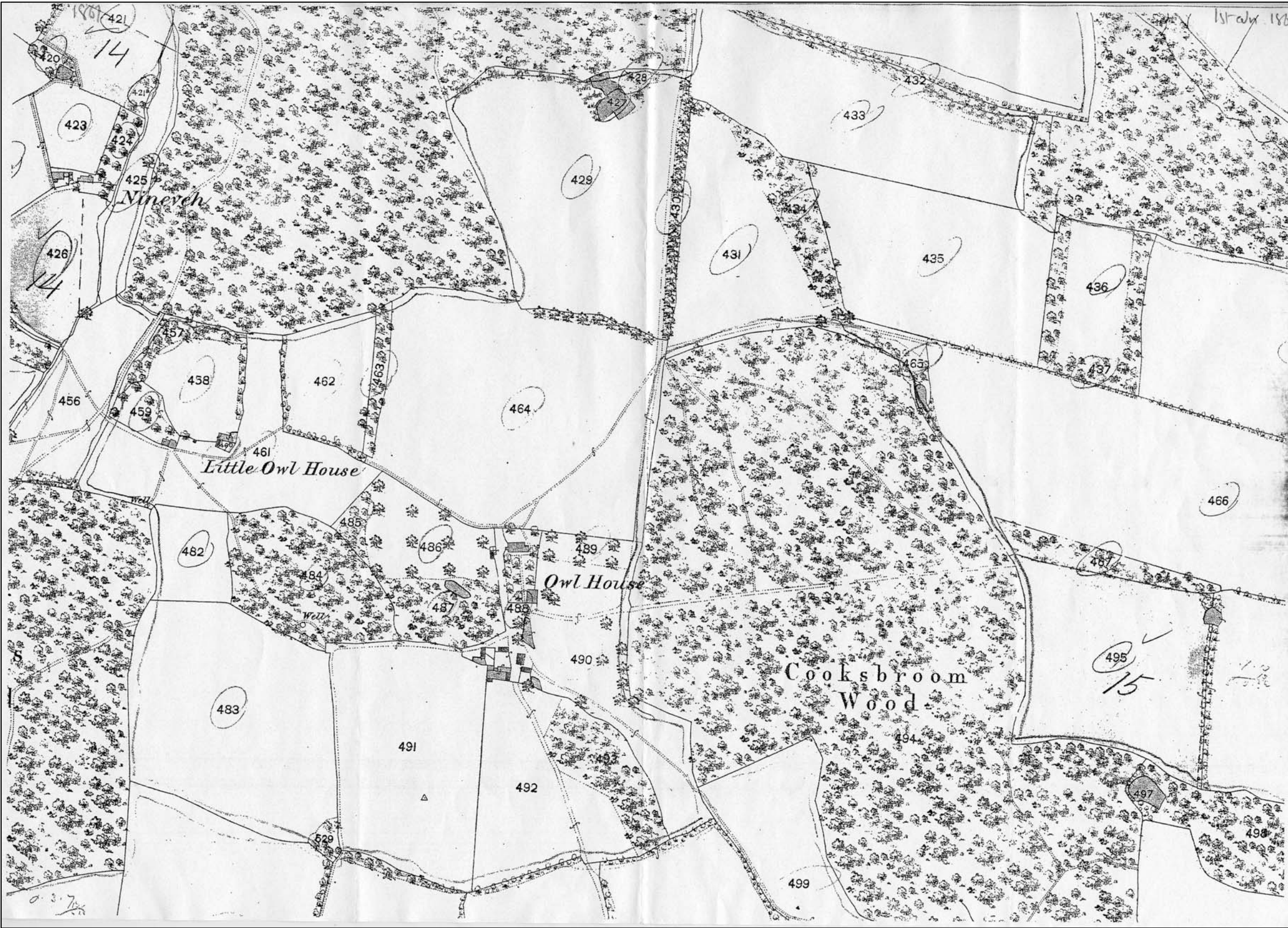
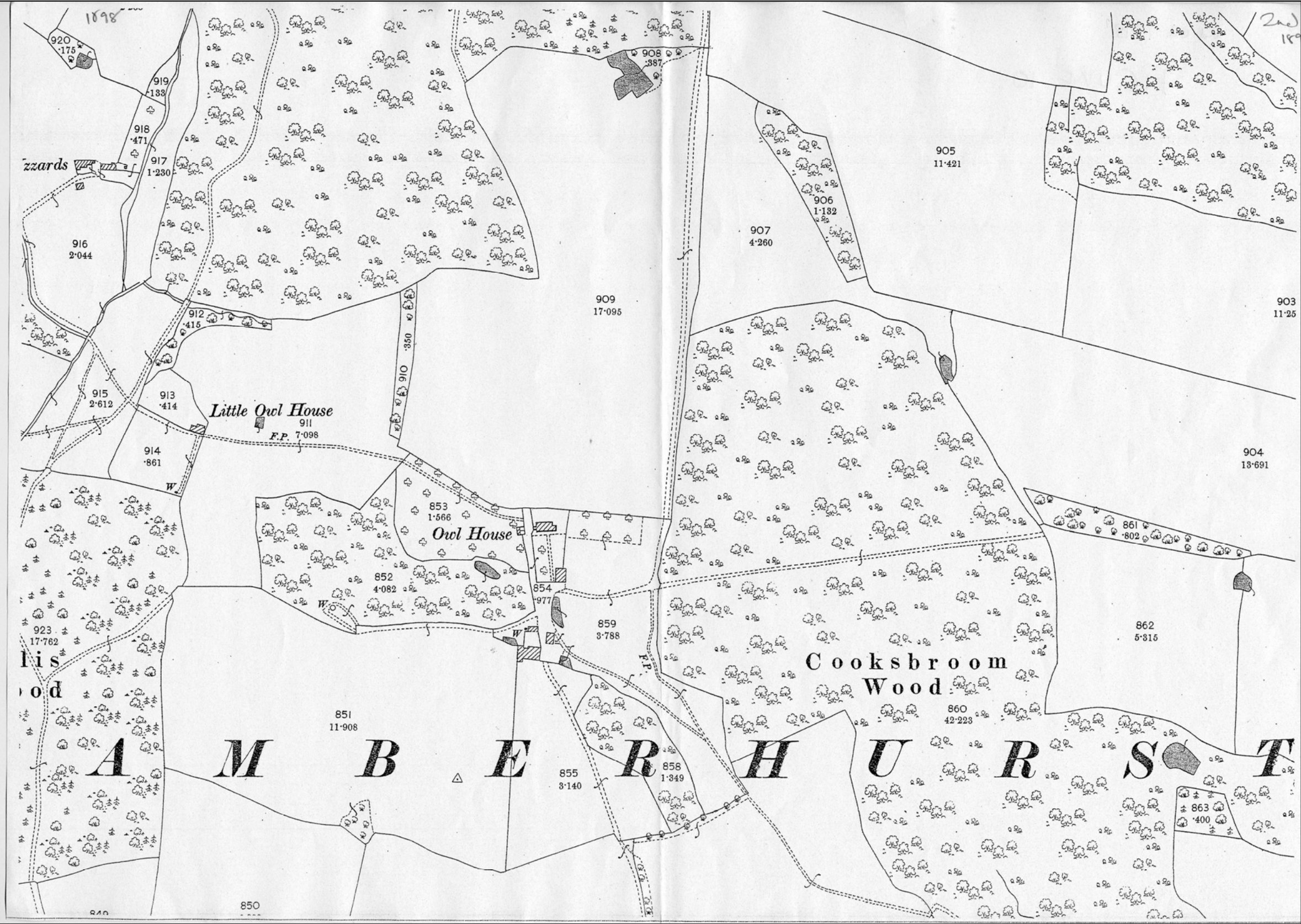


Fig. 10 Ordnance Survey 2nd edn 25" map (1898). Sheet 69/3.



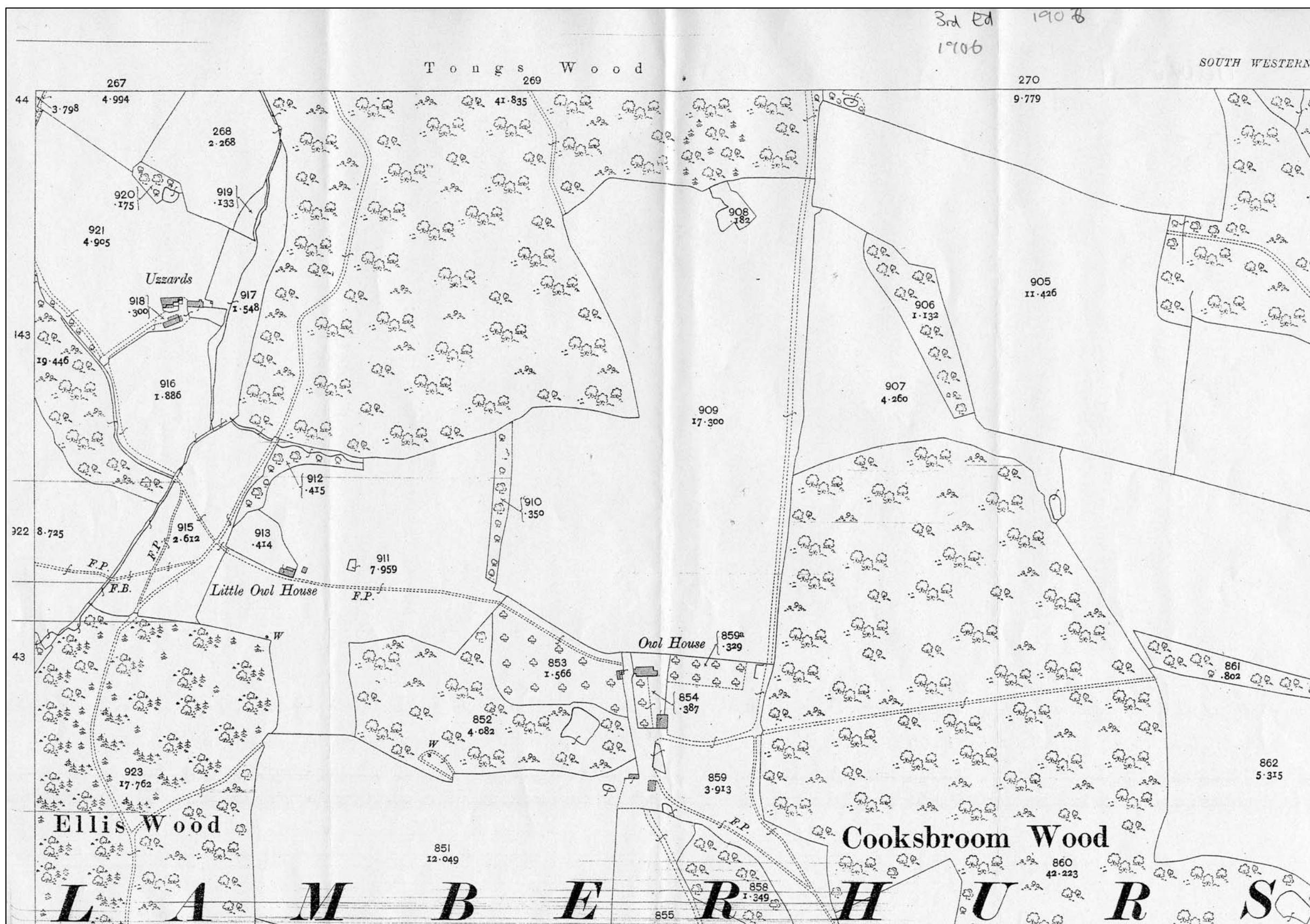
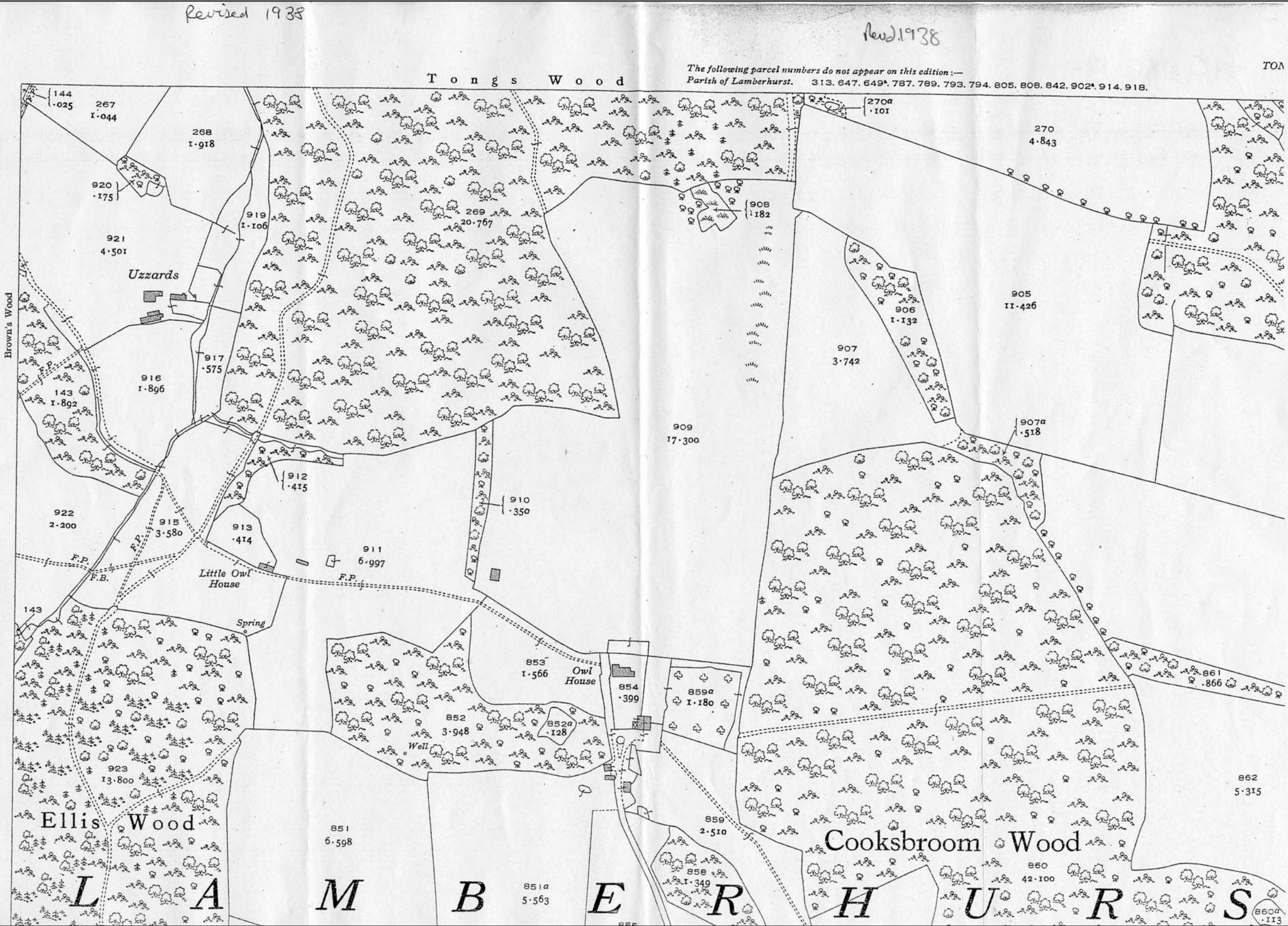
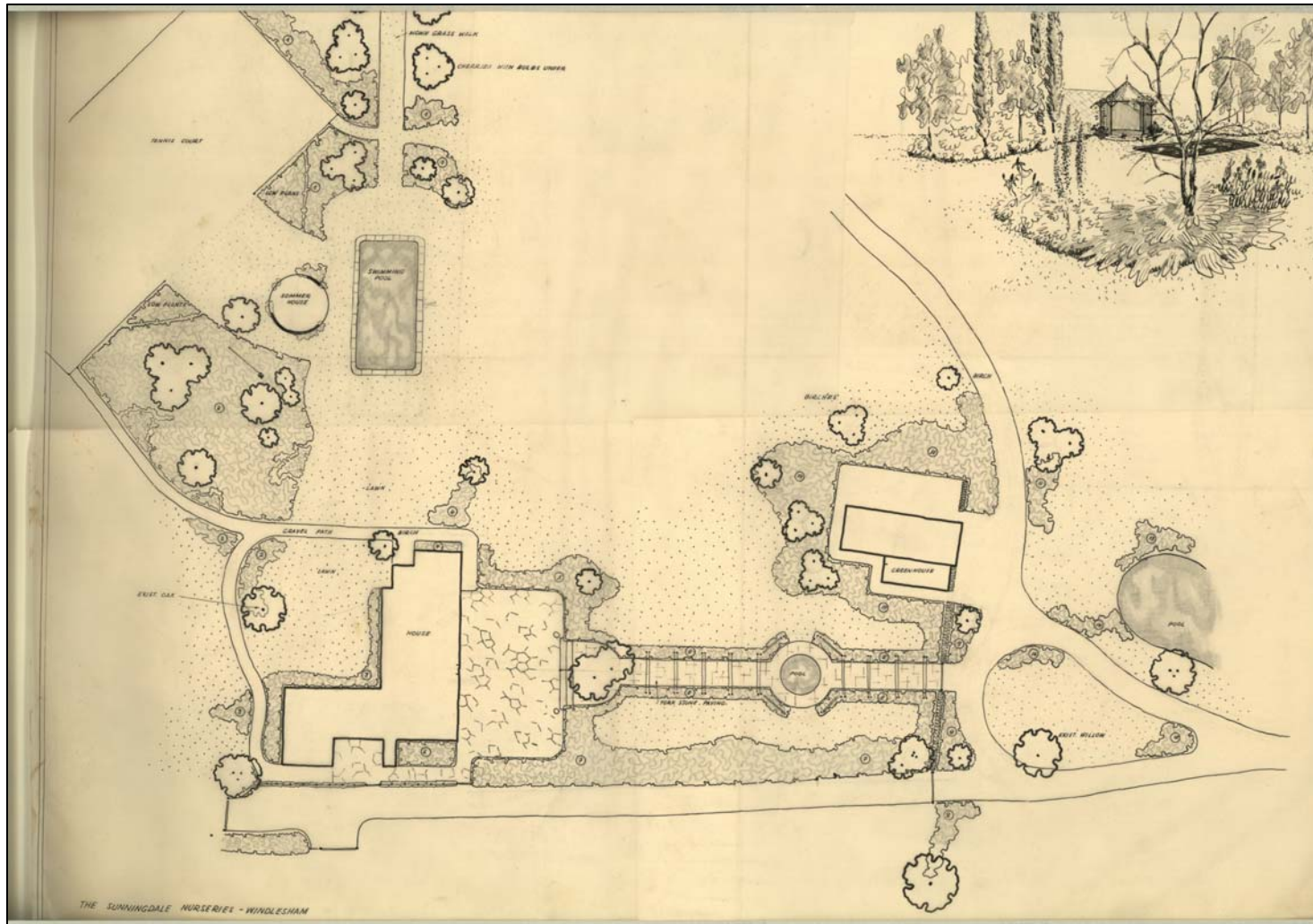


Fig. 12 Ordnance Survey Revd edn 25" map (1938). Sheet 69/3.



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Fig. 13 James Russell plans for lawn area 1954. *Plans and correspondence relating to the garden at the Owl House, Lamberhurst, Kent 1954-1968.* Borthwick Institute Ref JR 1/126.



THE OWL HOUSE - LAMBERHURST

THE MARCHIONESS OF DUFFERIN & AVA

SCALE 1"=16'

OCTOBER 26TH 1884

AM/SC

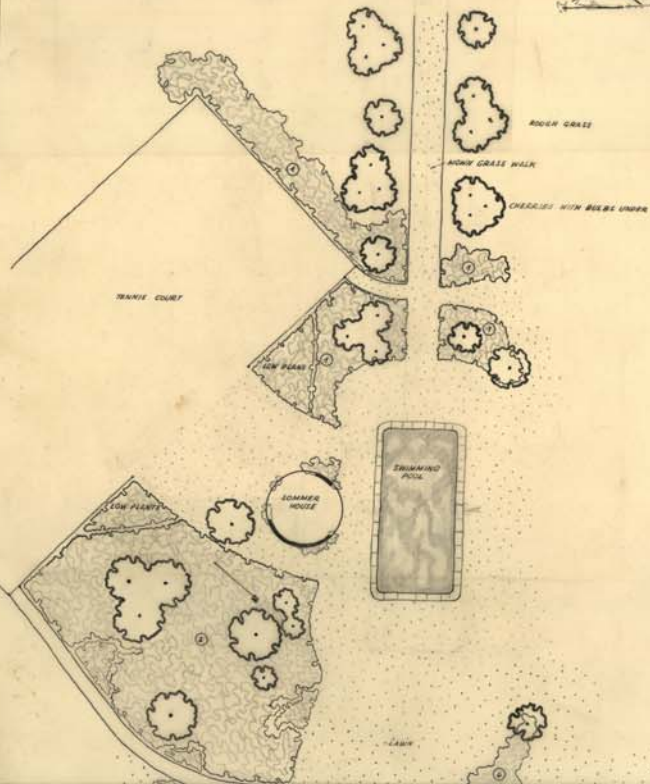
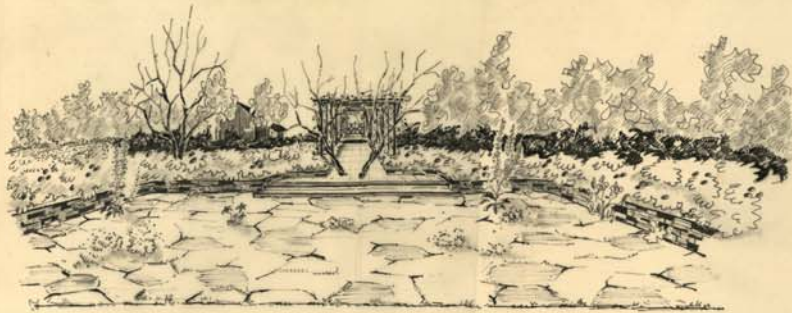


Fig. 14 James Russell garden design 1956. Borthwick Institute Ref JR 1/126





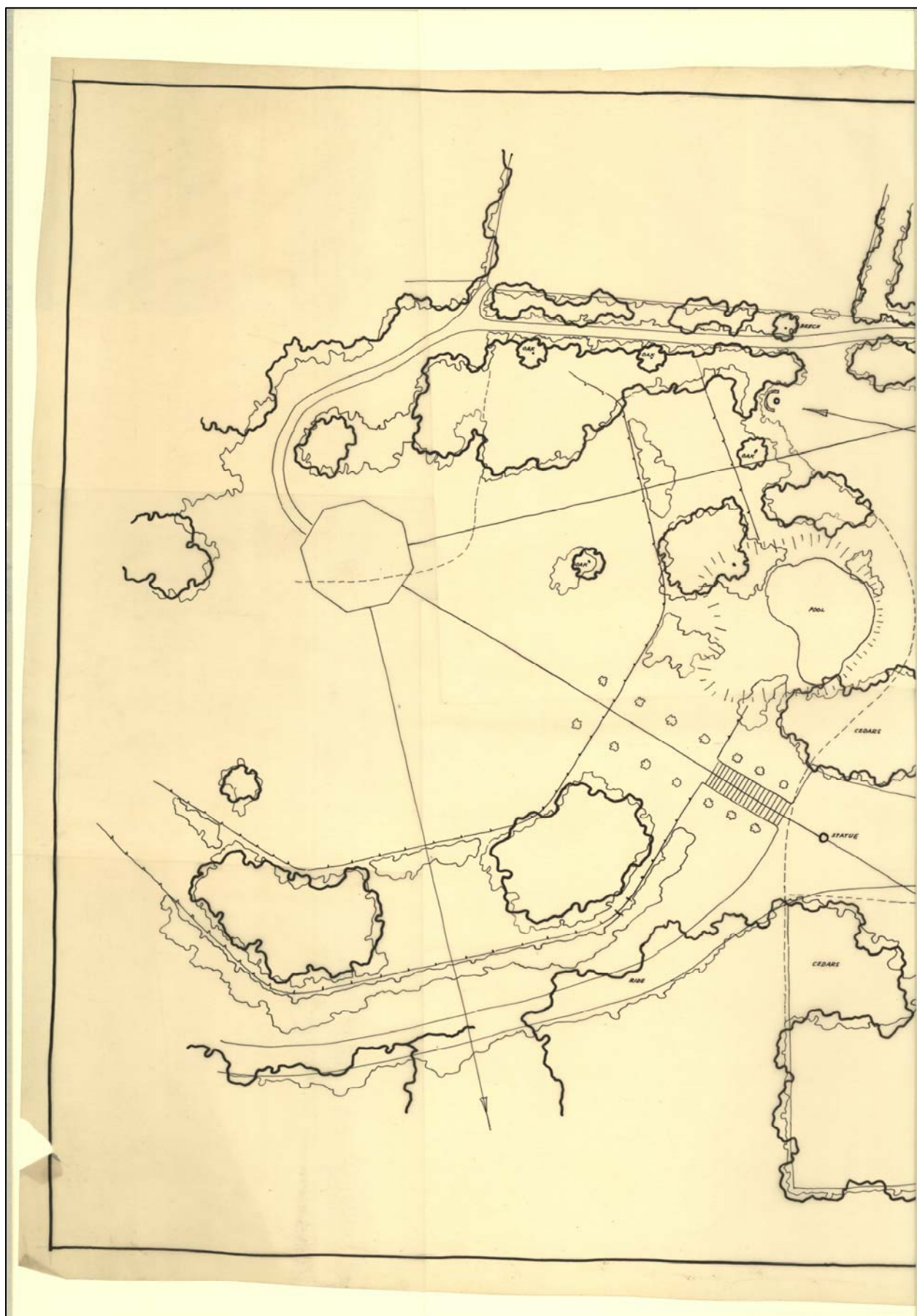


Fig. 15 Photograph of the Owl House 1907 reproduced in Owl House Brochure (private collection)



Fig. 16 Tom Wright, *The Gardens of Britain. Kent, East and West Sussex and Surrey*

The Owl House

TQ 665 374 (Sheet 188). Mid Kent. 1 mile from Lamberhurst SW off A21 on a narrow road in the village. 8 miles SE Tunbridge Wells. 2 miles from Scotney Castle. Owner: Maureen, Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava. Open: Gardens only open all year on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, also some summer weekends 11–7. See H.H.C.G.

An extensive informal woodland-style garden with attractive ponds and planted glades and a contrasting formal well-planted garden around the sixteenth-century house.

The origins of the house may go back to the pre-Dissolution days and links with nearby Bayham Abbey. The present sixteenth-century tile-hung half-timbered house was used by smugglers from the coast known as 'owlers', from which the house derives its name. It was acquired by the Marchioness of Dufferin in 1952 and the gardens have largely been developed since then. The setting is in the fruit and hop growing area of the Weald, very like that of Crittenden House and Ladham House which lie not far away to the north-east. Soils are acidic Wealden Tunbridge Wells sandy loams, as at Scotney Castle. The gardens lie on a south-west facing ridge over 320 ft above sea level. From the house there are fine views across the wooded Weald to the west and south-west.

There are two distinct styles and areas to this garden. Around the house are flagged paths, terraces and richly planted borders as a setting to the attractive old house. A pergola leading to a pool is clad with roses and clematis and there is an attractively planted terrace. The owl motif occurs frequently here and one can see, for example, stone owls on the pillars of the main entrance gates. The house itself is clothed with scented climbers – clematis, honeysuckles, and old roses.

Away from the house to the north-east and east across a great expanse of lawn one can find the 15 acres of woodland and wilderness garden, the acidic heathland soils being ideal for the collections of rhododendrons and azaleas and other rare shrubs that have been planted in the glades and walks. The woods are of oak and birch and vistas have been created to great effect. Daffodils are naturalized in vast numbers here and one can also explore a series of former hammer ponds now developed into romantic planted lakes. Good associations of waterside perennials and such trees as Japanese Maples add atmosphere, with well-placed seats and access paths.

Two to three gardeners are employed to maintain these gardens, which include a private swimming-pool area and enclosed garden south-west of the car park.

Fig. 17 Michael Young, 'Garden to visit. Smugglers' blossom', *The Times* (12 May 1984).

Garden to visit

Smugglers' blossom

For those who have not invested in spring bedding there is now a full in the garden. However, fruit blossom does carry us forward and the dusting of green as leaves appear on trees is as fresh and vibrant now as it will be all summer.

The Owl House in Kent is full of blossom. Leased to Thomas Wyllard in 1522 for the annual rent of one cockerel, it later became the headquarters of a gang of wool smugglers whose use of the owl's cry gave them the name of "the owlers" and their house that of "The Owlers' House".

The parts of the garden which are close to the house are in the cottage-garden tradition, with box edging and roses and curved beds set among the neatly cut lawns. Away from the house the garden becomes more innovative where the acres of deciduous woodland meet meadow and lawns which are tinged blue by clouds of common speedwell. Most of the daffodils are over but on the wood's fringe flowering cherries now provide a mass of pink and white blossom. Roses scramble up rustic pyramids and banks of rhododendrons and azalea crowd into the woods.

Through the centre of the wood a broad path has been cut and this leads the eye to a distant gazebo weighed down by wisteria and Clematis. There are few bluebells but plenty of violets and primroses and at one point a great drift of deep blue muscari. In these woods one has the feeling that the garden is Victorian and it is something of a shock to discover that in fact it was created as recently as 1952 by the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava.

Lost among the trees is a water garden sheltered in a quiet dell. Although the water level is low, *Lysichiton americanus* (commonly known as the skunk cabbage) spreads its curious aroma and there is a mass of marsh marigolds. Those with sharp eyes will also find the Early Purple Orchid, which is quite common in the south, and the charming pink Lady's Smock. *Cardamine pratensis*, the bottom leaves of which really are seen at their best in a woodland setting, drop their reflections into the still pools. Colour from pieris and azalea fills this tiny valley and also edges the ancient stone steps which lead back up to the formal garden. On this side the garden is dominated by two huge chestnuts, their candles preparing for the riot of colour which is due in a week or two.

Michael Young

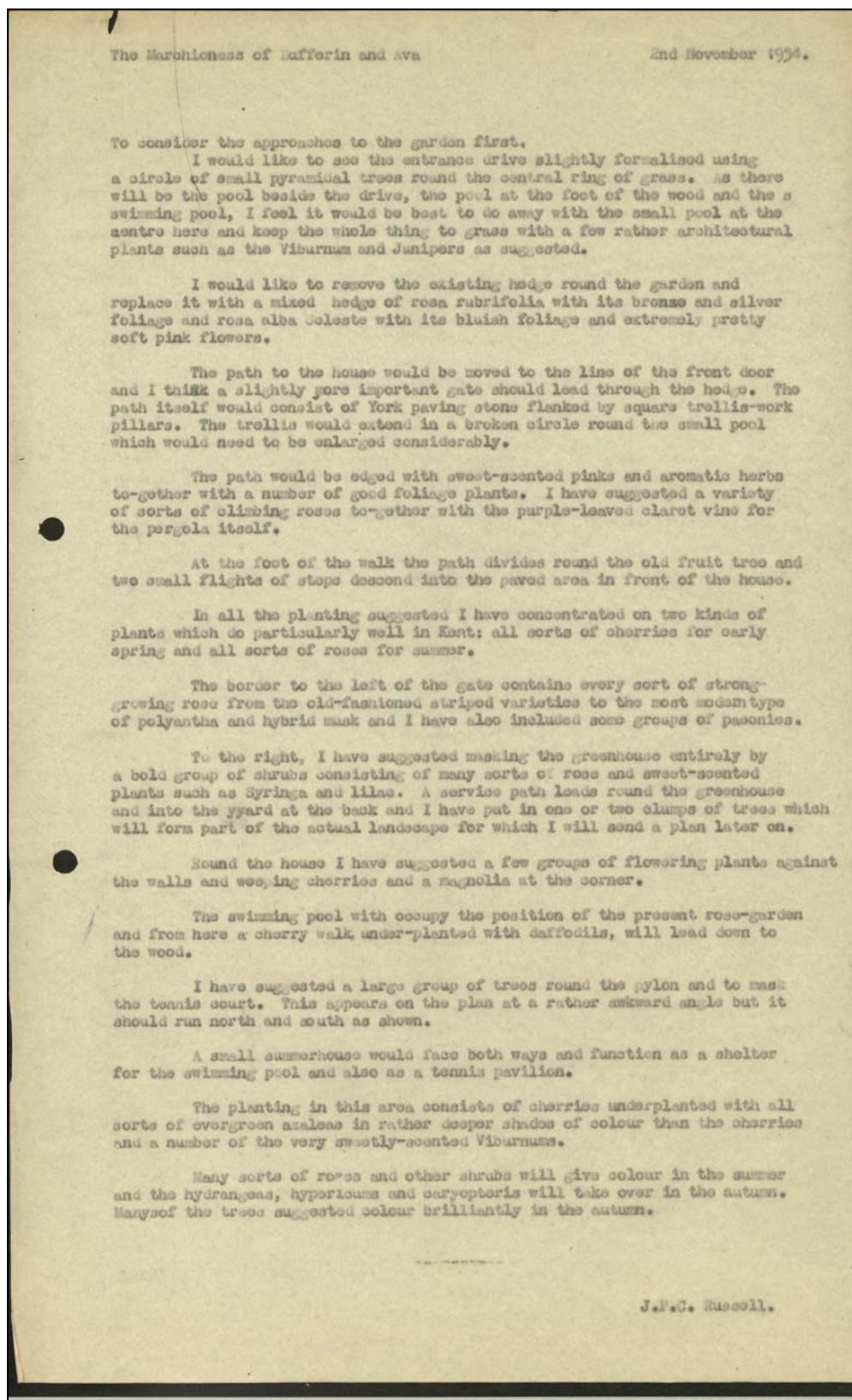
The Owl House, Lamberhurst
Kent, is off the A21 north of Lamberhurst. Open daily all year, except Tues and Thurs, 11am-6pm. Adults £1, children 50p.



Colourful tradition: The Owl House all set for summer

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Fig. 18 Letter from James Russell to Lady Dufferin 2 November 1954. Borthwick Institute Ref JR 1/126



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Fig.19 Photographs of The Owl House February 2009.



Above left: View of the house through the formal garden

Above right: Temple avenue



Left: Pool house with 19th century oast