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



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2009 review of Tunbridge Wells Borough Fig.8 Austen, Saxby & Playfoot *Map of Kent* 1796 (detail). CKS ref U200P3.

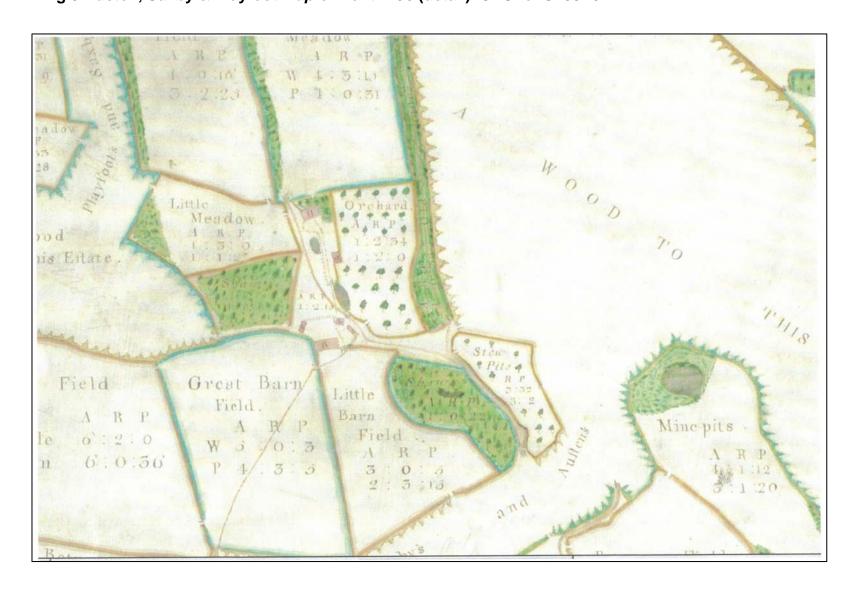


Fig. 9 Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1867). Sheet 69/3.

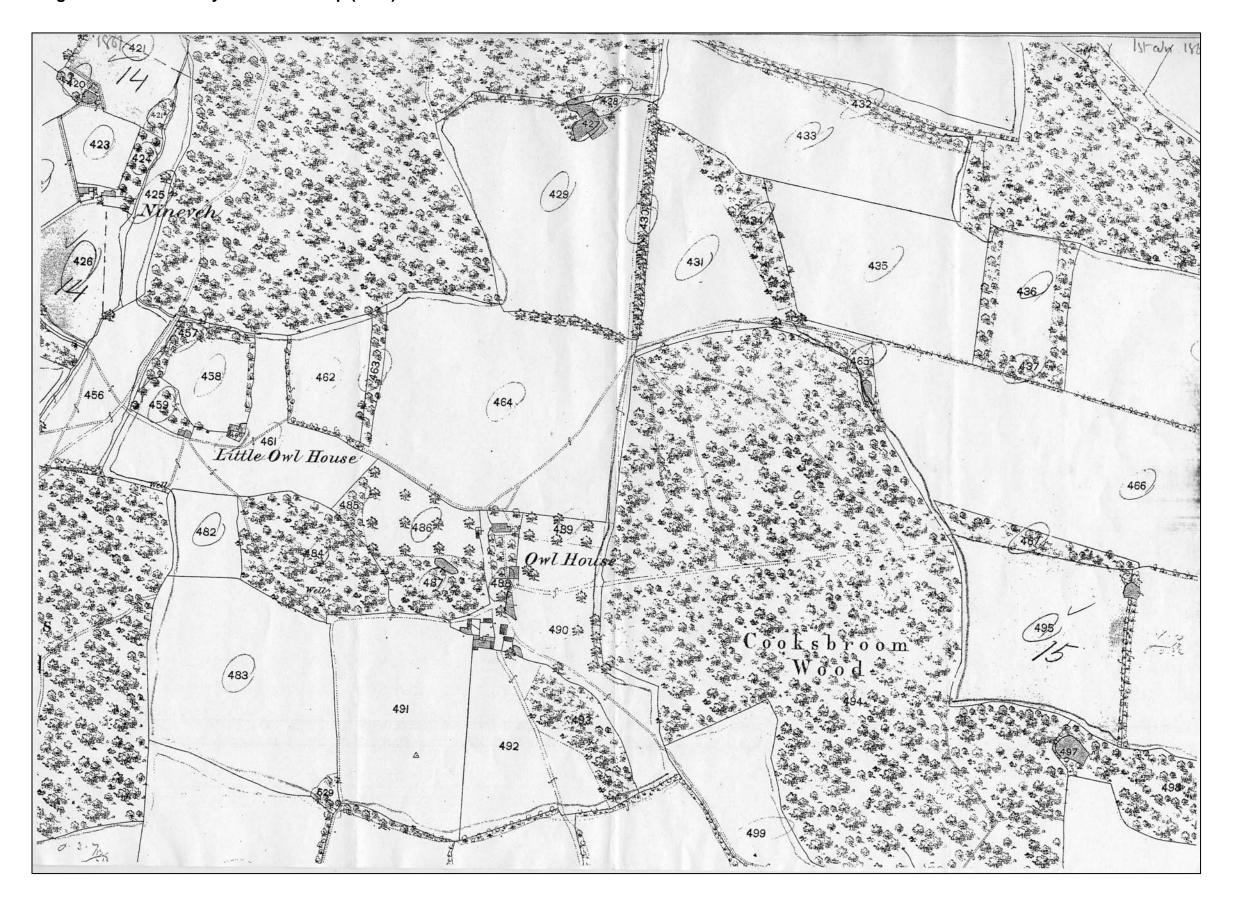


Fig. 10 Ordnance Survey 2nd edn 25" map (1898). Sheet 69/3.

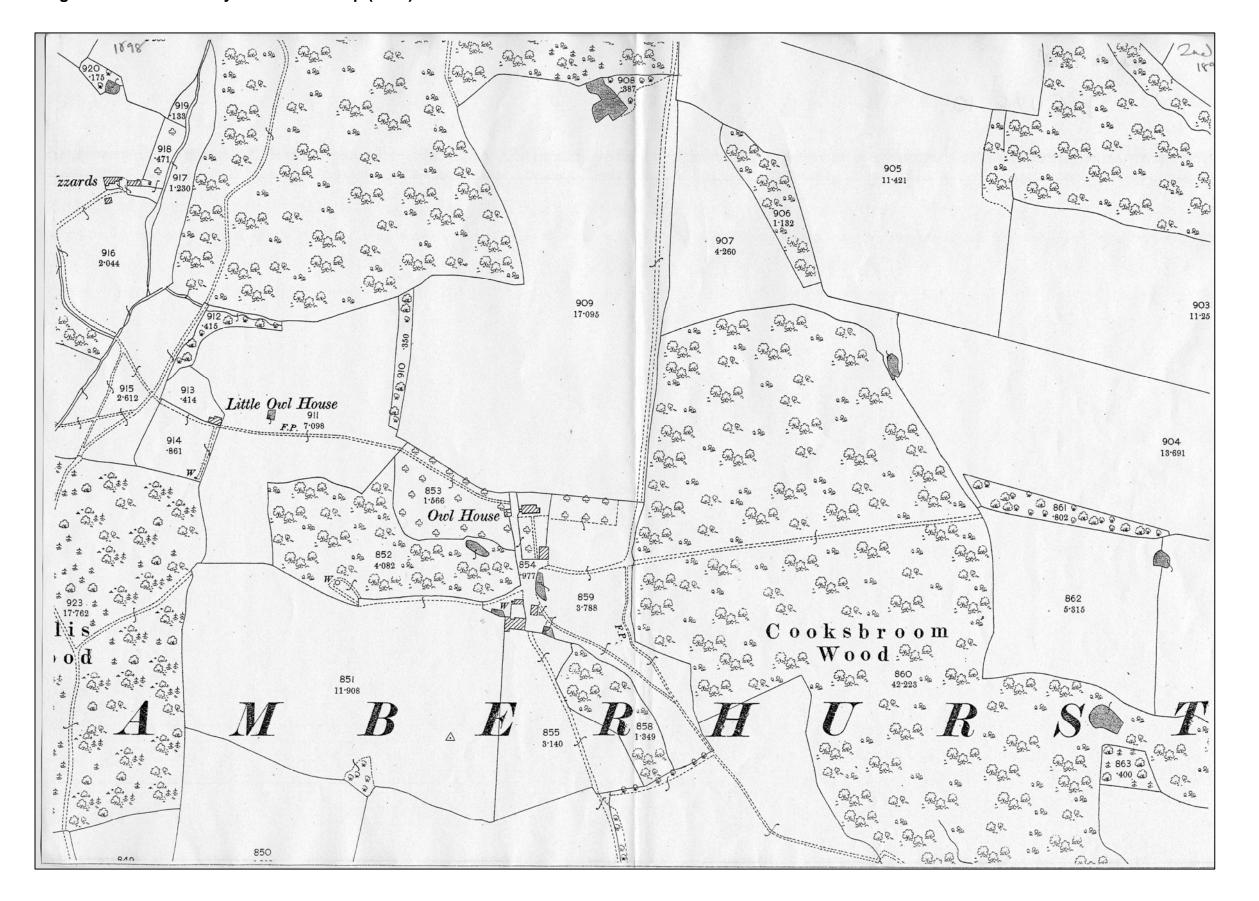


Fig. 11 Ordnance Survey 3rd edn 25" map (1906). Sheet 69/3

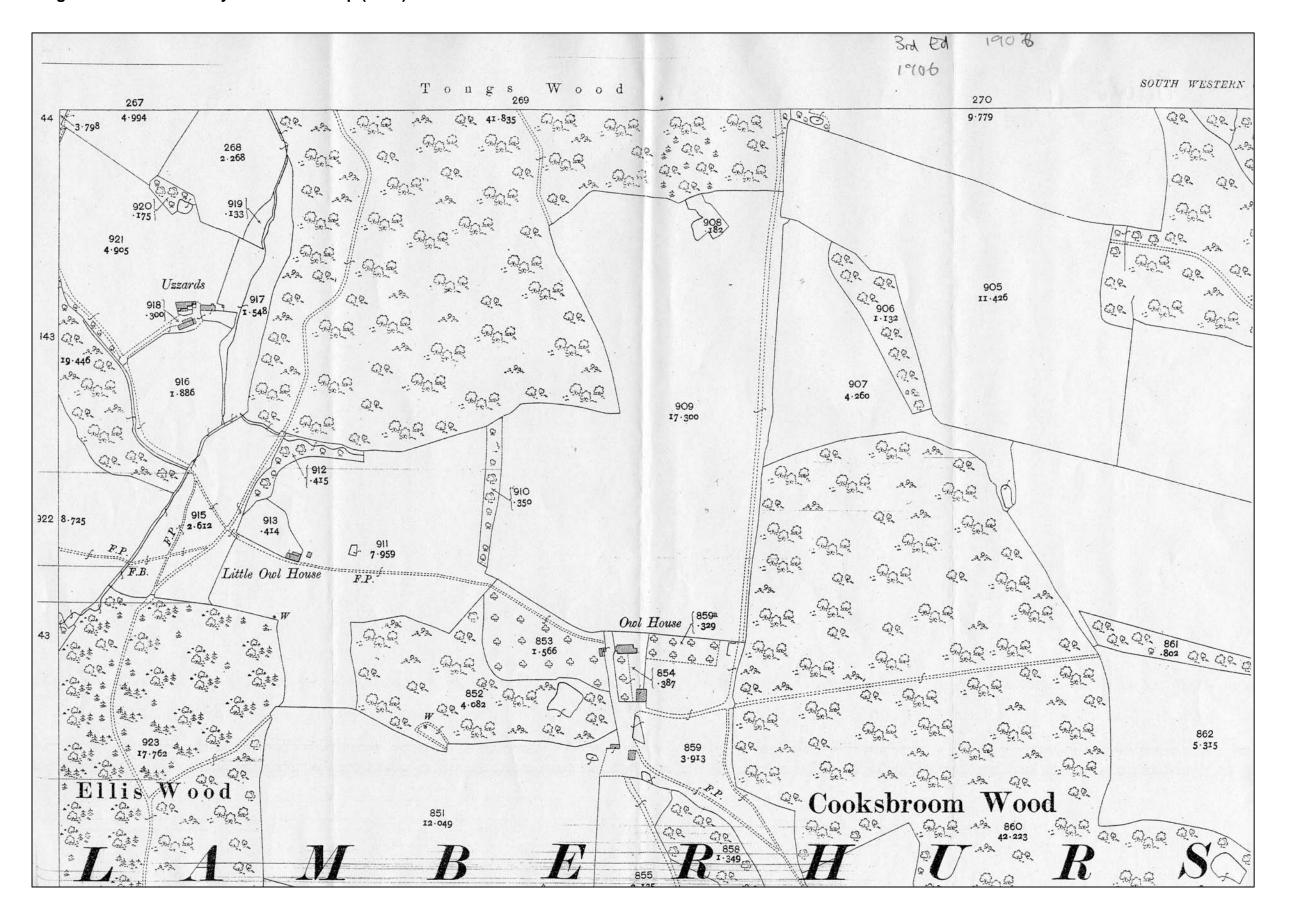


Fig. 12 Ordnance Survey Revd edn 25" map (1938). Sheet 69/3.

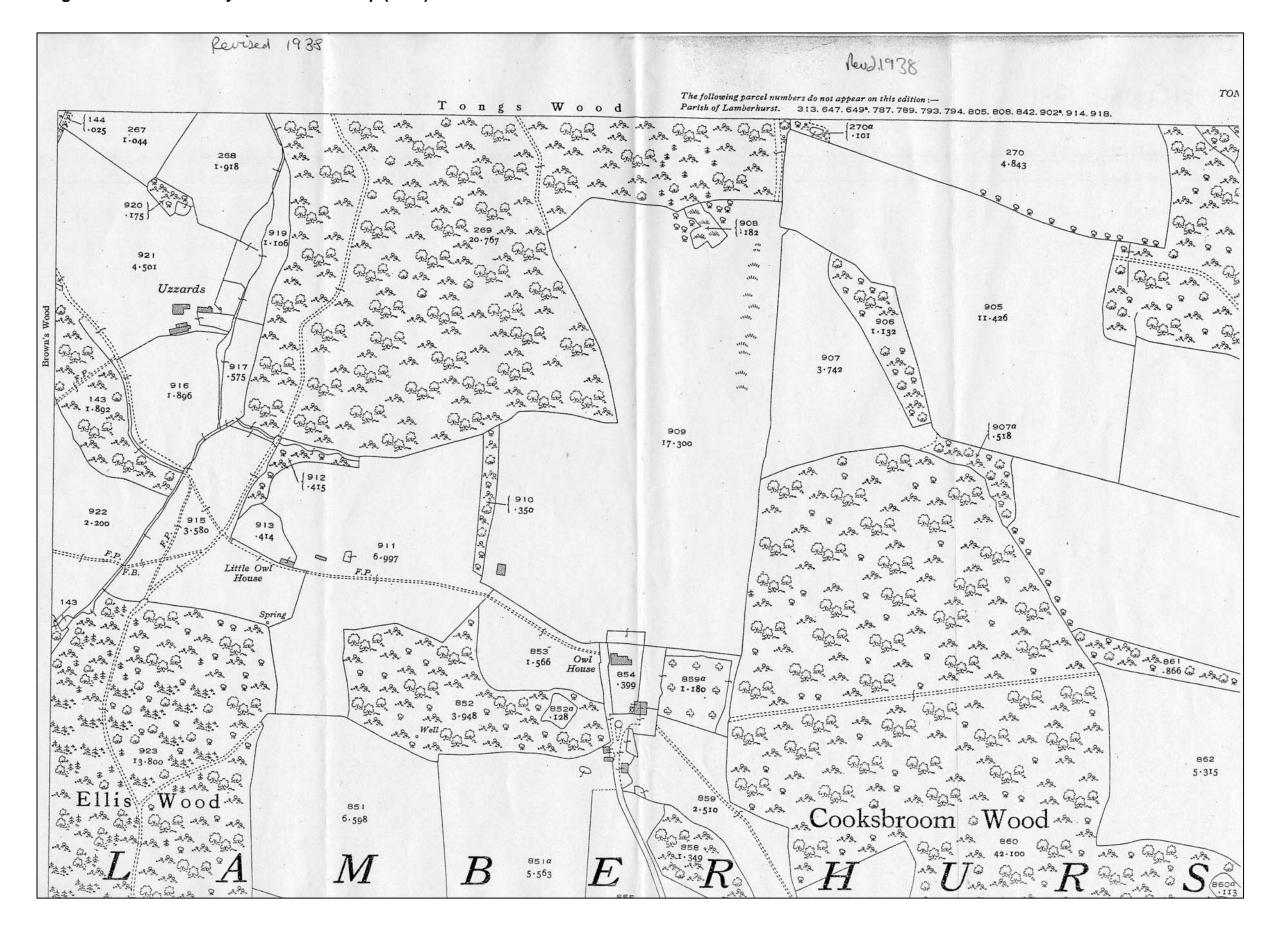
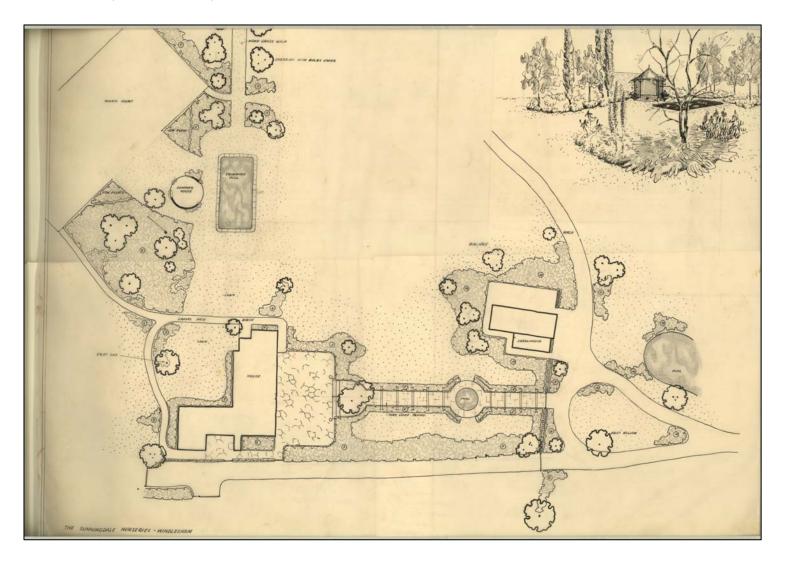


Fig. 13 James Russell plans for lawn area 1954. *Plans and correspondence relating to the garden at the Owl House, Lamberhurst, Kent 1954-1968.* Borthwick Institute Ref JR 1/126.



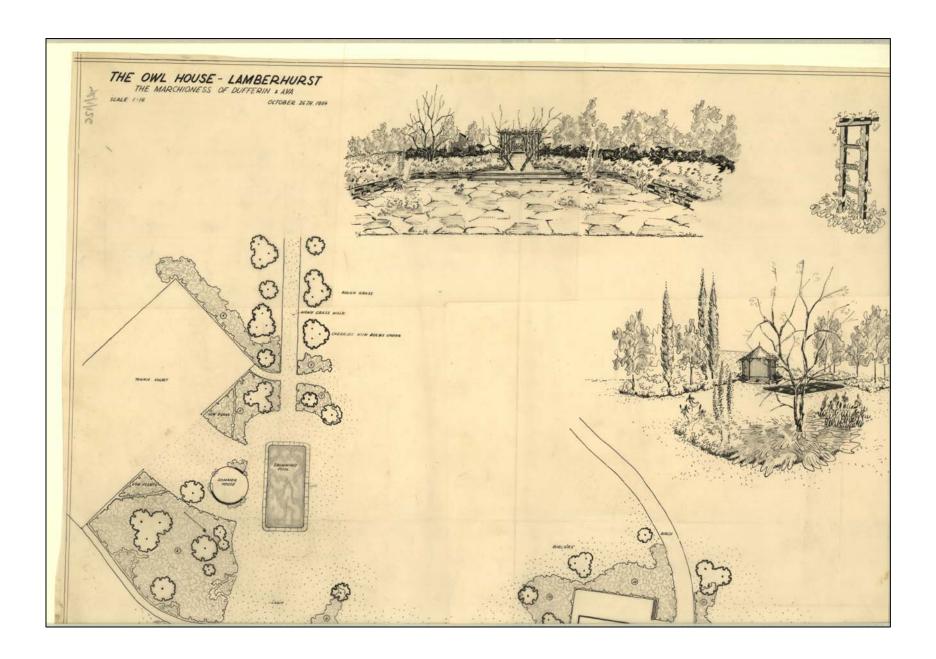
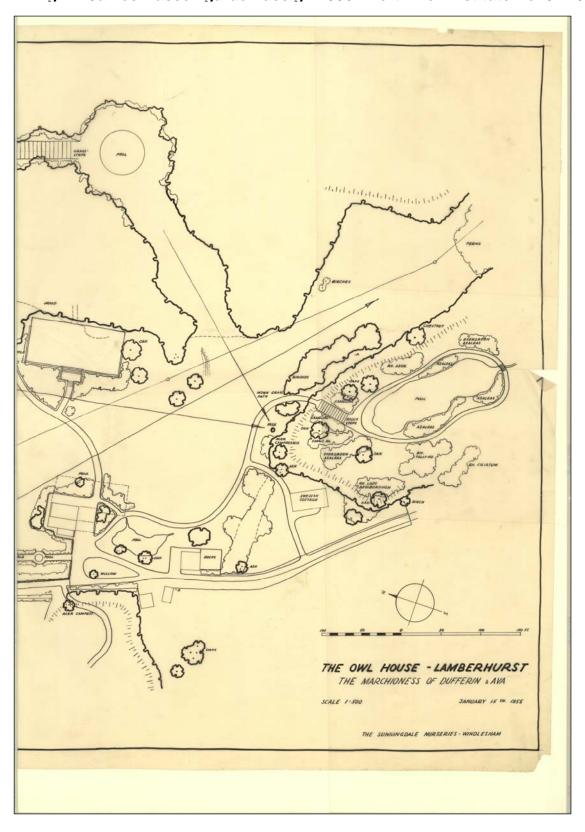
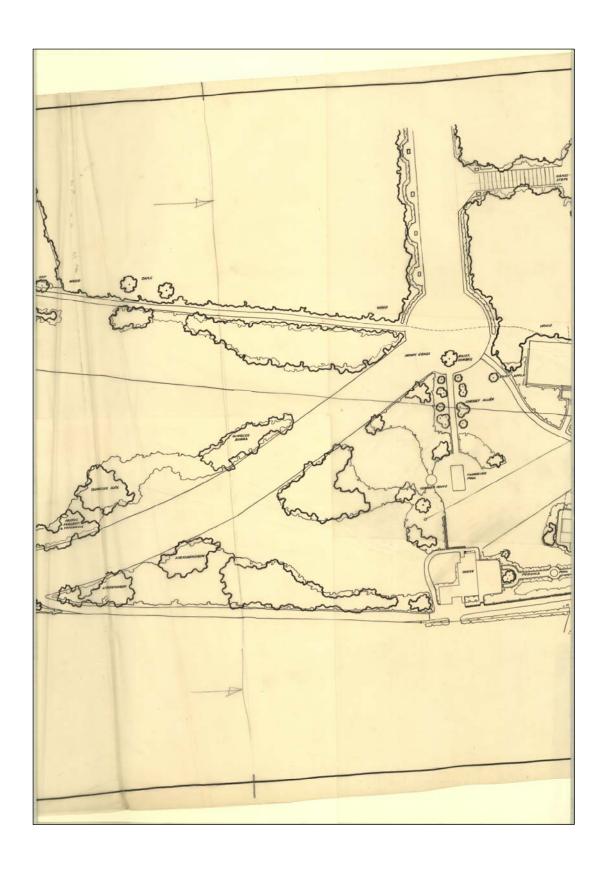


Fig. 14 James Russell garden design 1956. Borthwick Institute Ref JR 1/126





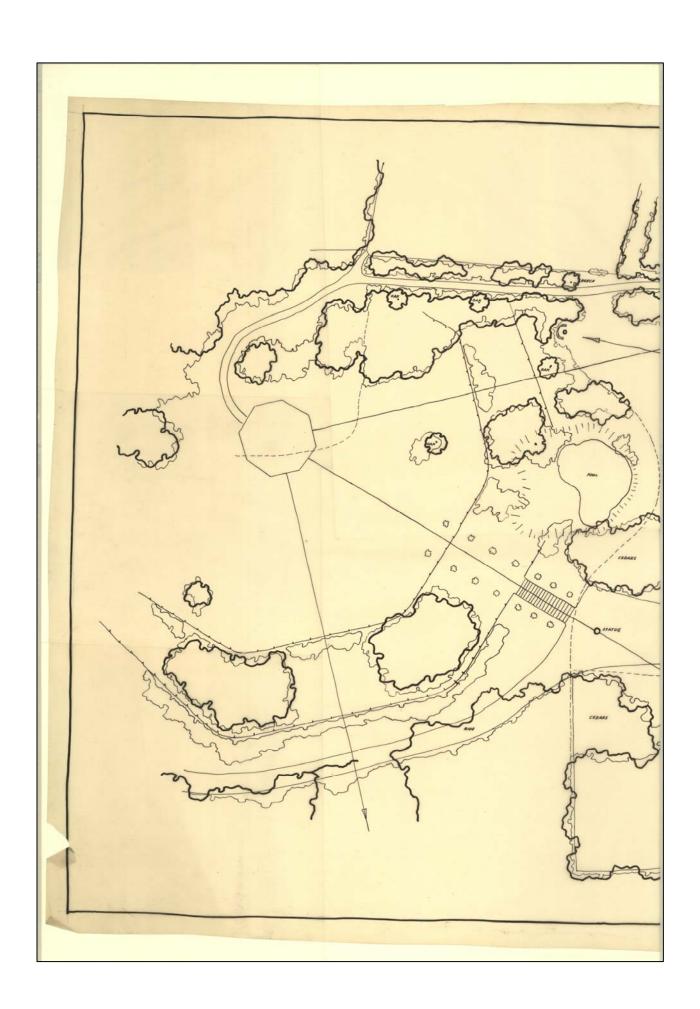


Fig. 15 Photograph of the Owl House 1907 reproduced in Owl House Brochure (private collection)



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 few bluebells but plenty of 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 Wyiliard 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".

are close to the house are in the is quite common in the south, cottage-garden tradition, with and the charming pink Lady's box edging and roses and curved Smock. Cardamine pratensis, beds set among the neatly cut the bottom leaves of which lawns. Away from the house the really are seen at their best in a garden becomes more innova- woodland setting, drop their tory where the acres of decidu- reflections into the still pools. ous woodland meet meadow and Colour from pieris and azalea lawns which are tinged blue by fills this tiny valley and also clouds of common speedwell, edges the ancient stone steps Most of the daffodils are over which lead back up to the but on the wood's fringe formal garden. On this side the flowering cherries now provide a garden is dominated by two mass of pink and white blossom. huge chestnuts, their candles Roses scramble up rustic pyra- preparing for the riot of colour mids and banks of rhododen- which is due in a week or two. drons and arales crowd into the woods.

Through the centre of the wood a broad path has been cut and this leads the eye to a distant gazeho weighed down by except Tues and Thurs, 11am-6pm. wisteria and dematis. There are Adults £1, children 50p.

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 parts of the garden which the Early Purple Orchid, which

Michael Young

The Ow House Lamberhurst, Kent, is off the A21 north of Lamberhurst. Open daily all year,



Colourful tradition: The Owl House all set for summer

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

The Marchieness of Dafferin and Ava

2nd Hovember 1954.

To consider the approaches to the garden first.

I would like to see the entrance drive slightly formalised using a circle of small pyramidal trees round the central ring of grass. As there will be the pool beside the drive, the pool at the foot of the wood and the s swimming pool, I feel it would be best to do away with the small pool at the gentre here and keep the whole thing to grass with a few rather architectural plants such as the Viburnum and Junipers as suggested.

I would like to remove the existing hedge round the garden and replace it with a mixed hedge of resa rubrifolia with its bronze and silver foliage and resa alba celests with its bluish foliage and extremely pretty soft pink flowers.

The path to the house would be moved to the line of the front door and I think a slightly gore important gate should lead through the hedge. The path itself would consist of York paving stone flanked by square trellis-work pillars. The trollis would extend in a broken circle round the small pool which would need to be enlarged considerably.

The path would be edged with sweet-scented pinks and aromatic herbs to-gether with a number of good foliage plants. I have suggested a variety of sorts of climbing roses to-gether with the purple-leaves claret vine for the pergola itself.

At the foot of the walk the path divides round the old fruit tree and two small flights of stops descend into the paved area in front of the house.

In all the planting suggested I have concentrated on two kinds of plants which do particularly well in Kent; all sorts of cherries for early spring and all sorts of roses for summer.

The border to the left of the gate contains every sort of strong-growing rose from the old-fashioned striped varieties to the most modern type of polyantha and hybrid musk and I have also included some groups of pasonles.

To the right, I have suggested masking the greenhouse entirely by a bold group of shrubs consisting of many sorts of rose and sweet-scented plants such as Syringa and lilac. A service path leads round the greenhouse and into the yyard at the back and I have put in one or two clumps of trees which will form part of the actual landscape for which I will send a plan later on.

Round the house I have suggested a few groups of flowering plants against the walls and weeping cherries and a magnelia at the corner.

The aviuming pool with occupy the position of the present rese-garden and from here a cherry walk under-planted with daffedile, will lead down to

I have suggested a large group of trees round the pylon and to mask scourt. This appears on the plan at a rather awkward angle but it the tennis court. should run north and south as shown.

small summerhouse would face both ways and function as a shelter for the swimming pool and also as a tennis pavilion.

The planting in this area consists of cherries underplanted with all sorts of evergreen analess in rather deeper shades of colour than the charries and a number of the very sweetly-scented Viburnums.

Many sorts of roes and other shrubs will give solour in the surror and the hydrangess, hypericums and caryopteris will take over in the autumn. Manysof the trees suggested solour brilliantly in the autumn.

J.F.C. Ruscoll.

Fig.19 Photographs of The Owl House February 2009.







Above left: View ot the house through the formal garden

Above right: Temple avenue

Left: Pool house with 19th century oast