

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



The Postern, Capel



May 2009

The Postern

Capel, Kent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

SITE DESCRIPTION

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Boundary map.

FIGURE 2: Key views map.

FIGURE 3: Key features map.

FIGURE 4: Aerial photograph

FIGURE 5: Map of listed buildings at The Postern.

FIGURE 6: Listed buildings at The Postern.

FIGURES ONLY ON CD

FIGURE 7: J. Andrews, W. Dury and W. Herbert, *A Topographical Map of the County of Kent ...* 1769.

FIGURE 8: Tithe map 1840.

FIGURE 9: Ordnance Survey 1st edn 25" map (1867). Sheet 50/12

FIGURE 10: Ordnance Survey 2nd edn 25" map (1897) Sheet 50/12.

FIGURE 11: Ordnance Survey 3rd edn 25" map (1908). Sheet 50/12.

FIGURE 12: Ordnance Survey 3rd edn revd 25" map (1913). Sheet 50/12.

FIGURE 13: Ordnance Survey Revd edn 25" map (1936). Sheet 50/12.

FIGURE 14: Photographs of The Postern February 2009.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the owners for allowing me to visit the gardens and commenting on the text, and to their gardener, Lewis, for sharing his memories.

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 POSTERN

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

CAPEL

TQ 6072 4620

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC INTEREST

A formal garden divided into compartments by yew and copper beech hedges laid out in 1954 to a design by the landscape architect Anthony du Gard Pasley (1929-2009) around an C18 house.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Tonbridge Castle was first built as a motte-and-bailey castle in 1070 and by the early C15 the Manor of Tonbridge extended to c.6000ha of which at least half comprised forest and heath (Zell). Postern Park, the Inner Park of the Castle, was one of four paled parks and its keeper was provided with a house in the Park (location unknown), from which the name of the present house probably originates. During the C16 the land was disparked and many of the trees on Castle lands, including within the 2000ha in South Frith, Postern and Cage Parks and North Frith, were felled to supply fuel for the expanding iron industry. A hammer mill and three fineries for iron production were built on Postern land. Operations at the forge had stopped by 1698 when a 'cinderpot on which the forge formerly stood' is mentioned in a bill of sale (personal communication).

During the C17 much of the land of the Manor of Tonbridge changed hands and some 162ha in the former Postern Park was acquired by a Sir Robert Croke who probably built a house (shown on a 1674/5 survey, now lost) to the east of the present one. Margaret Stephens recounts that on the survey 'land to the north of Postern Lane was meadow or pasture, while that to the south was under the plough' (*Georgian Tonbridge*). At some point after the survey date, Croke sold 75ha to a William Eldridge whose descendant, John, built the present, Postern House in 1757 (listed building description). In 1759, his son, also John, following his father's death, extended it. The Eldridge family prospered and through marriage changed its name to Eldridge-West (later to West) and by 1855, the family owned most of the Postern area although all the Postern farms were leased out (Andrews, Dury and Herbert; Tithe Map).

By 1862 Postern House had been further enlarged by the addition of a service wing on its north end and a detached stable block, and gardens had been laid out (1st edn OS map). The 2nd edn OS map shows that by 1897 the house had been renamed The Postern, and also that the subsequent 10 years saw further changes to the layout of the garden with the introduction of a series of formal compartments (3rd edn OS map). The property was offered for sale in 1913 but no further changes to the garden are recorded until 1946, when an aerial photograph shows an extensive kitchen garden to the north-east of the house (RAF).

In 1952, the property was purchased by a John Gore Phillimore, a merchant banker, who described the house as having 'virtually no garden at all other than a little orchard' and the building as in 'rather poor condition' (Hellyer). Phillimore sold off some of the outbuildings, renovated the house and commissioned Anthony du Gard Pasley to redesign the gardens. He also bought commercial orchards to the north of the property. A swimming pool had been added by 1972 (RAF). Mr Phillimore was still in residence in 1981 when the garden was described as 'an astonishingly mature garden, excellent in design and filled with exceptionally interesting plants' (Hellyer). A Mr and Mrs Coaten owned the property from 1983 and largely maintained Pasley's design and planting (1997 aerial photograph). The present owners bought The Postern in 1998 and the property remains in single private ownership.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The Postern is situated on the eastern outskirts of Tonbridge in the Medway Valley and stands on land that slopes steeply to the south and west with views over the surrounding farmland and orchards. The village of Tudeley is approximately 1.5km to its south-east, Paddock Wood 6km to its east and Royal Tunbridge Wells 7.5 km to its south. The c.1.6ha site is bordered to its south by Postern Lane, to its west by an access track to Postern Heath Farm, and to its east by a road to Postern Park. Its northern boundary abuts commercial orchards.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance to The Postern stands on the north side of Postern Lane. A gravelled drive passes between the posts of a 1.5m high five-bar, wooden gate from which point the house can be viewed. The curving drive runs c.60m in a north-easterly direction between 2m high, clipped yew hedges to arrive at a circular, gravelled forecourt on the west, entrance front of the house.

On the north side of the forecourt, a 2m high, curved, brick wall extends a few metres from the house across part of the forecourt, separating it from the stable block.

On maps from 1862 (1st edn OS map) the drive from the south to the west entrance front is shown. However, as the date of 1757 and the initials of John Eldrige are inscribed on the south front of the house, it has been suggested that this was the entrance front of the house in the C18 (Edwards).

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The Postern (listed grade II*), built in 1757 with some C19 and C20 alterations, is a three-storey, red-brick house, five window bays wide, with sandstone ashlar footings, brick chimney stacks and a peg-tile roof (listed building description). The house is built into the hillside on its east side, resulting in the ground floor on this side being below ground level. It has been extended on two fronts, on the north by a C19, single-storey service block and on the west by a single-storey conservatory built by the present owners c.2000.

Ten metres to the north of the house is a C19 single-storey, red-brick stable block under a tiled roof, converted in 1957 to garages and storage. A few metres to its south-west is a two-storey, C19 coach house in a similar architectural style, converted at the same time to accommodation (inscribed 1957, with the initials J. G. P.) and but recently (2008) refurbished.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

To the immediate west and south-west of the forecourt is an informal lawn studded with trees, most of which have been planted in the last fifty years (personal communication). About 40m from the house, a stream flows through the lawn, crossed by a hump-backed, Japanese-style, wooden bridge and with its banks planted with moisture-loving plants. The lawn is sheltered and visually enclosed on its east by the yew hedge along the drive and on its west side by a 2m high beech hedge enclosing it from the track to Postern Heath Farm. A late C20 heather garden occupies the north-east corner. The stream in the garden, identified on the Tithe Map as Hammer Dyke, is a tributary of the Medway and by 1862 the land around it was shown planted with mature trees, many of which (sweet chestnuts, beech, horse chestnuts and Scotch fir) were felled from 1950 (personal communication). A footbridge across the stream is first shown on the 1908 OS map, but the present bridge was designed by Pasley in 1952.

The south front of the house opens onto a York-stone paved terrace (c.25m x 20m) that runs along its full width and from which there are fine views south across the lawn to surrounding fields. In similar fashion to the lawn on the west front, this is bounded on its west side by the yew hedge along the drive and by mature beeches on its south side. From the east side of the lawn, the land rises steeply as a grass bank and marks the boundary of a small arboretum some 40m south-east of the house. A flight of steps, decorated with statuary imported from Italy by Anthony Pasley, ascends from the east side of the terrace to the east, garden front.

The main ornamental gardens are laid out on the higher land on the east front of the house, some half a storey above the level of the west, entrance front. They are divided into a number of compartments and decorated with further pieces of imported Italian statuary. The east front opens onto a narrow, random-paved, stone terrace that runs along its length. There are views east up a wide, steep, grass slope to a garden pavilion 70m east of the house. The single-storey, timber garden pavilion was designed in a classical style with a pediment to the designs of Mr Phillimore's architect cousin (Claude Phillimore, a passionate Palladian) in the 1950s (Hellyer). Its open, west-facing front is decorated with trellis 'columns', while its east-facing front is closed with a door and windows overlooking a tennis court.

As the slope levels out it is flanked by 2m high, yew-hedged compartments (c.80m x 40m) with mixed borders below. Each compartment contains two garden rooms. That on the grass path's north side comprises a sunken parterre garden and a sunken rose garden, both partly enclosed by wisteria-covered pergolas. The hedged compartment on the path's south side contains a second parterre garden and a camellia garden. The camellia garden was laid out in 1952 as a children's garden and retains its 1950s wooden summerhouse and

white wrought iron seat and gates, made in the local area (personal communication).

A 45m long gravel path lined by pleached limes runs along the rear of the garden pavilion. It was designed to screen a wire-enclosed tennis court some 75m further east of the house (Pasley). Adjoining the south side of the tennis court, and separated from it by a beech hedge, is a swimming pool and wooden pool house enclosed by a wooden fence, at the foot of which roses are planted. In an area of rough grass on the pool's south side some fruit trees survive from a C19 orchard that formerly occupied the site of the present ornamental gardens (1st edn OS map). A 65m long path lined by a beech hedge runs westwards from the pool to the arboretum which contains mature conifer and beech trees.

KITCHEN GARDEN

The kitchen garden (c.100m x 20m) lies some ten metres north-east of the house and forms a further compartment along the whole length of the north side of the ornamental gardens. It is enclosed by brick walls on its north and east sides and by hedges on its south and west sides and is laid out with perimeter gravel paths and cross paths to form three sections. The two easternmost sections are laid to grass and are separated by one gravel cross path, lined with climbing roses and apple trees, that forms a continuation northwards of the pleached lime walk screening the tennis court. The path terminates at a wrought iron gate in the north wall of the garden from where there are views north over the orchards outside the site boundary. The gate replaced a former *claire-voie* in the fence in the 1950s when Mr Phillimore purchased the commercial orchards. The westernmost section of the kitchen garden, nearest the house, is still maintained as a productive garden; a C21-century greenhouse has been erected on the site of a former, now demolished C19 glasshouse, the foundations and tiling of which still survive.

There is little evidence of a kitchen garden at The Postern before the mid-C20, although maps show that much of the present ornamental gardens were used as orchards from the mid-C19 (1st edn OS map). A 1946 aerial photograph shows the site of the present kitchen garden laid out in its current form, although enclosed by a fence at that date. The present walls and hedging were introduced in the 1950s (personal communication) and all three sections were in use as a productive kitchen garden until 1997 (aerial photograph).

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Books and articles

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Arthur Hellyer, 'Fine Design with Good Plants', *Country Life* vol. CLXIX (14 May 1981), p. 1306-08.

C. W. Chalklin (ed), *Georgian Tonbridge* (Tonbridge Historical Society, 1994).
Anthony du Gard Pasley, 'Set and Matched', *Country Life* (24 April 1997), pp. 58-60.

Michael Zell (ed), *Early Modern Kent 1540-1640* (Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 87-88.

James Edwards, *Capel Explored* (Capel History Society, 2007).

Maps

J. Andrews, W. Dury and W. Herbert, *A Topographical Map of the County of Kent ...* 1769.

Tithe map and apportionment 1842-44

OS maps 1st edn 6" OS map 1862
 2nd edn 6" OS map 1897
 3rd edn 6" OS map 1907
 4th edn 6" OS map 1929

OS maps 1st edn 25" OS map 1867 Sheet 50/9 & 50/12
 2nd edn 25" OS map 1897 Sheet 50/9 & 50/12
 3rd edn 25" OS map 1908 Sheets 50/9 & 50/12
 Revd edn 25" OS map 1936 Sheets 50/9 & 50/12

Plan from 1913 Sales Particulars (private collection).

Modern Mastermap 1:10,000. 2007.

Map showing listed buildings within The Postern boundaries.

Illustrations

Aerial photographs 1947, 1972. RAF

2 colour photographs (a) pleached trees, rose borders and ornamental urn (b) rear of house with trees and shrubs. July 1982

Photograph of the house in Edwards, p. 73.

Colour photos of pergola and tennis court in Pasley (1997).

Aerial photographs 1997, 2003.

Archival items

English Heritage listed building entries: undated.

Kent Compendium entry with map 1996.

Research by Janet Mayfield

Description written by Barbara Simms

Edited by Virginia Hinze

May 2009

Fig. 1 Boundary map

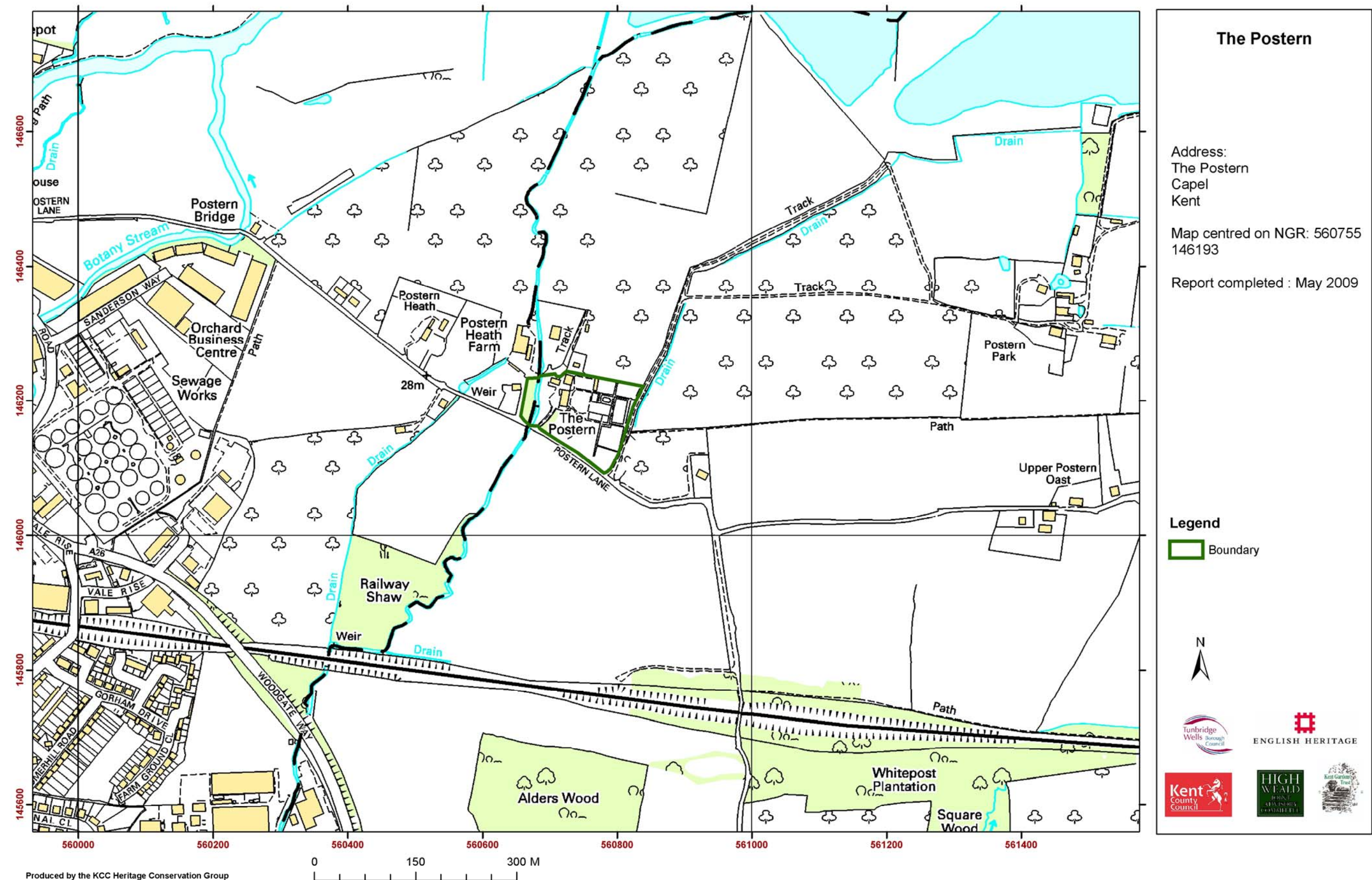


Fig. 2 Key views map

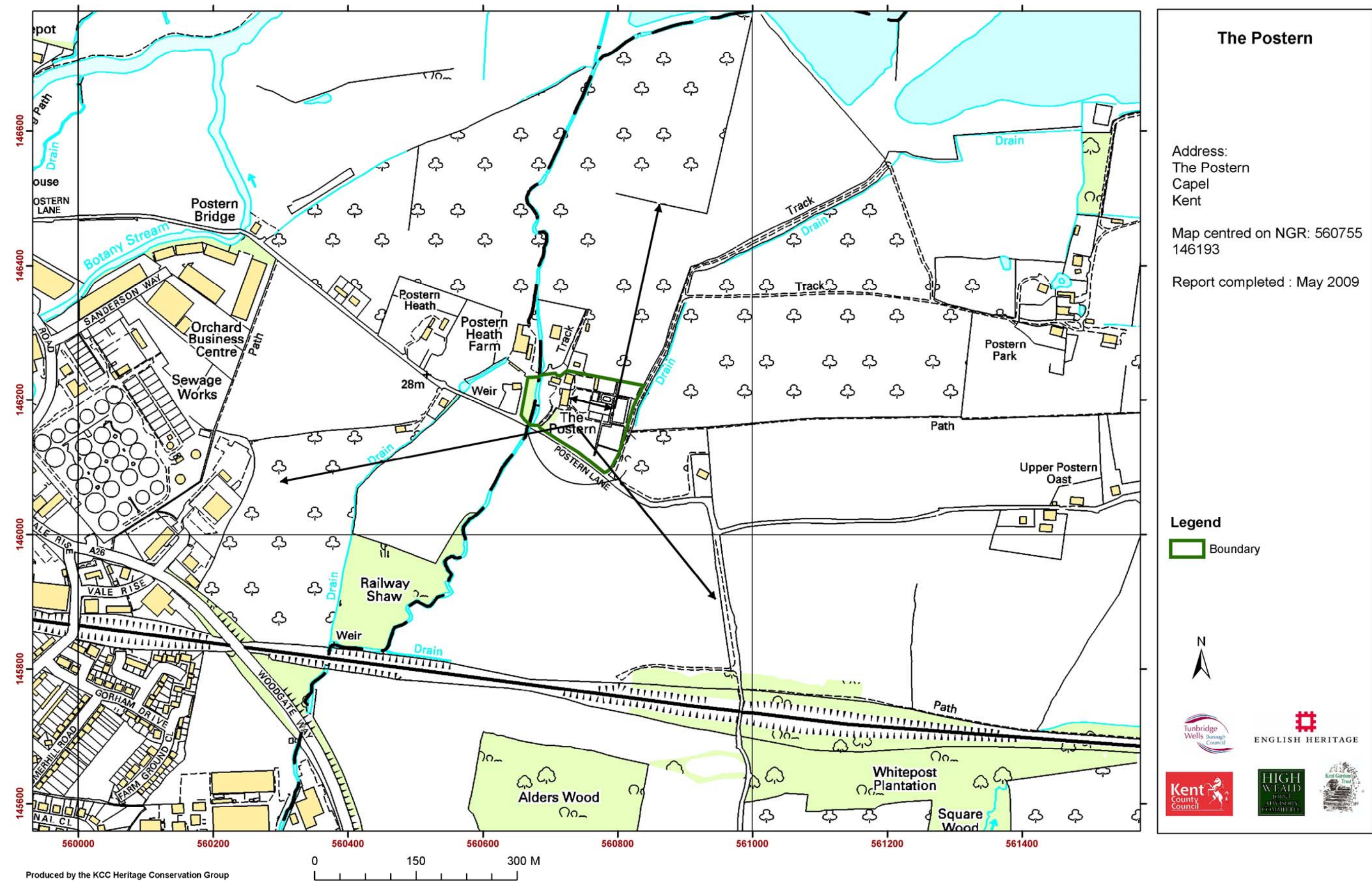
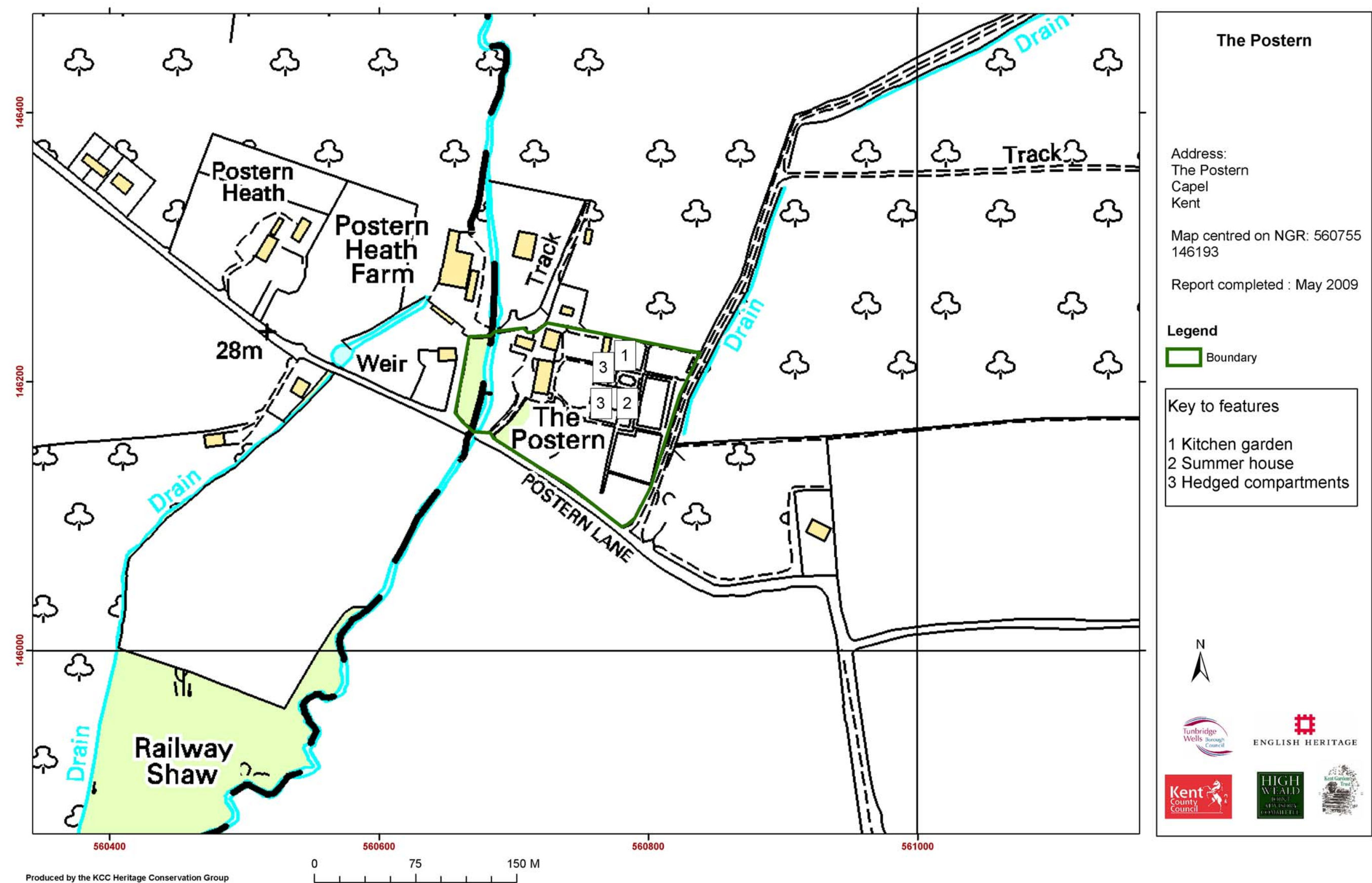


Fig. 3 Key features map



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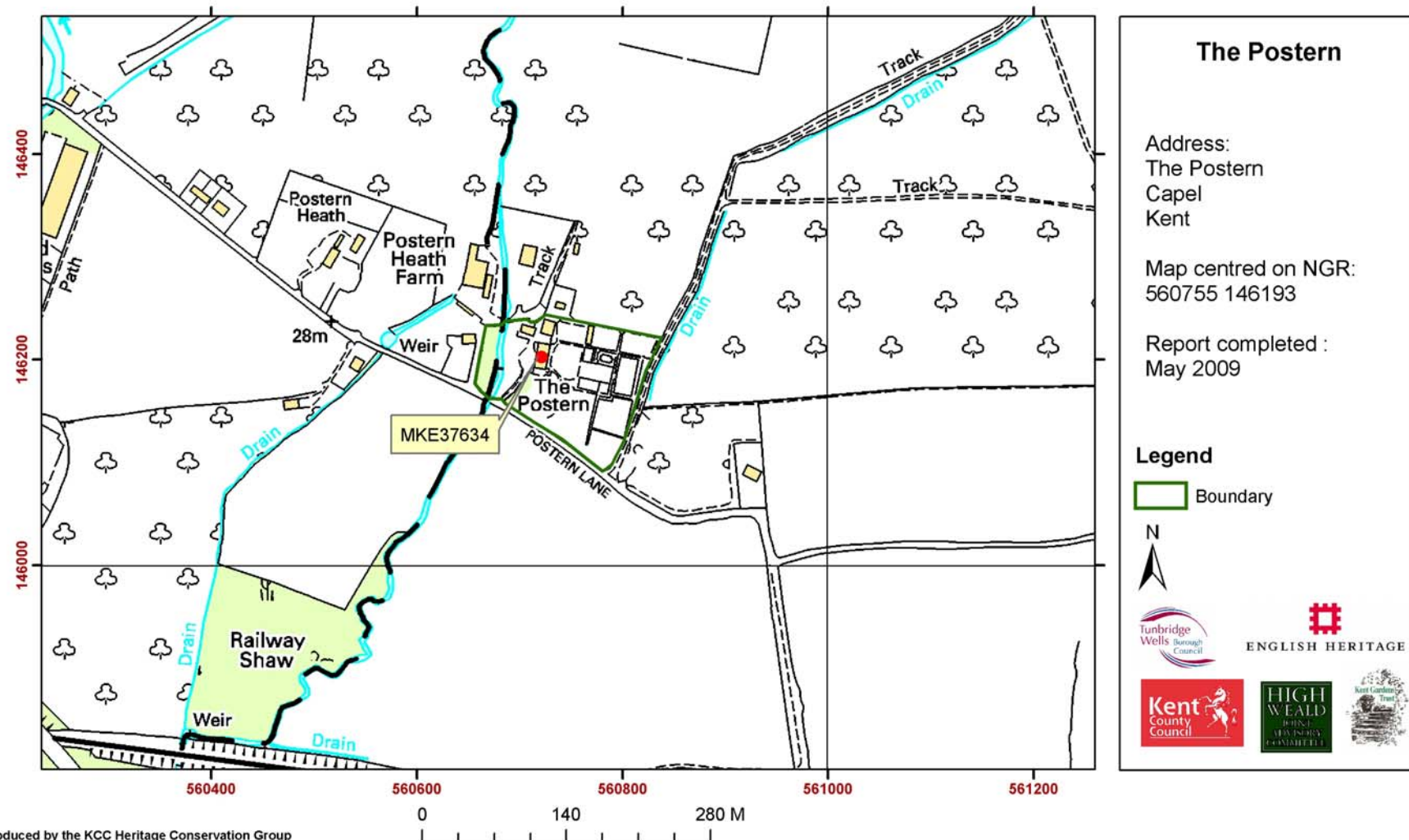
Fig. 4 Aerial photograph



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Fig. 5 Map of listed buildings at The Postern



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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Fig. 6 Listed buildings at the Postern

Kent Historic Environment Record reference: MKE37634

The following text is from the original listed building designation:

TQ 64 NW CAPEL POSTERN LANE, TUDELEY

1/272 The Postern 20.10.54 II*

Large house. Dated 1757 with some C19 and C20 modernisation. Flemish bond red brick on coursed sandstone ashlar footings; brick stacks and chimneyshafts; peg-tile roof.

Plan: House faces south onto the garden with its entrance front on the left (west) side. The house is terraced into the hillside so that the ground floor level is buried on the right side. Double depth plan house, 2 main rooms wide and 2 main rooms deep. Central entrance hall from the west side with the stairs rising to rear. Most rooms are heated by lateral stacks although there is one axial stack. Principal rooms on the south (garden) side with service rooms behind. 3 storeys with secondary single storey service blocks to rear.

Exterior: Principal front to the garden (south) has a symmetrical 5-window front. Ground and first floor have 12-pane sashes and second floor 9-pane sashes. Central doorway contains a C20 part-glazed door with a contemporary Georgian-style doorcase with a segmental pediment. Flat brick bands across the front at first and second floor levels, moulded brick eaves cornice and plain parapet. Roof is hipped both ends. In the centre, above the first floor window there, a brick is inscribed with the date 1757 and the initials J.E..

Entrance front has a 4-window front; it would have been symmetrical with a 5th window right of centre. Similar windows but no flat bands or eaves cornice. Central doorway is wide with an almost round-headed segmental arch containing a 6-panel door with sidelights (with internal shutters for security) and a fanlight with an elegant pattern of glazing bars. Opposite (east) side has casement windows with glazing bars, all with low segmental brick arches. Doorway off the staircase half landing contains a probably C20 part-glazed panelled door with a stone panel above carved with Adams-style decoration.

Interior: Has been somewhat modernised in the C20. For instance the principal ground floor rooms are lined with imported fielded panelling in 2 heights and principal parlour has good but introduced timber chimneypiece. Nevertheless original joinery remains. Roof not inspected.