

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Dover



Crabble Athletic Ground, Dover



June 2016

Crabble Athletic Ground

Dover, Kent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

SITE DESCRIPTION

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Boundary map

FIGURE 2: Tithe map

FIGURE 3: Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map (1862-1875)

FIGURE 4: Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25" map (1897-1900)

FIGURE 5: Ordnance Survey 3rd edition 25" map (1907-1923)

FIGURE 6: Ordnance Survey 4th edition 25" map (1929-1952)

FIGURE 7: Main western gate off Crabble road (2016)

FIGURE 8: Main entrance, gate house and turnstile to northern side of entrance on Crabble Road (2016)

FIGURE 9: Inside the western entrance looking upslope to football stadium access (2016)

FIGURE 10: Rugby pitches looking eastward with cycle track in foreground (2016)

FIGURE 11: Pavilion, cycle track and terraces from western entrance looking south east (2016)

FIGURE 12: Looking across the Athletic Ground from the top terrace in south-east looking west (2016)

FIGURE 13: Pavilion from the main entrance (2016)

FIGURE 14: South (back) side of pavilion from top of terrace

FIGURE 15: Cycle track and northern border on top of Crabble Avenue embankment looking west (2016)

FIGURE 16: Cyclists on track going clockwise from top of east terrace (2016)

FIGURE 17: The old cricket scorers hut and board (2016)

FIGURE 18: Terracing and cricket score board to west of pavilion (2016)

FIGURE 19: Northern boundary along Crabble Avenue with embankment rising to the Athletic Ground (2016)

FIGURE 20: Looking through the beech grove to the original eastern entrance on Crabble Avenue (hidden behind trees, 2016)

FIGURE 21: Top of eastern terrace looking towards pavilion and along path to the eastern entrance of football stadium (2016)

FIGURE 22: Looking down from the old overgrown upper tennis court to the lower tennis court (2016)

INTRODUCTION

This site description and accompanying dossier have been prepared by the Kent Gardens Trust as part of its wider review of ***The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens***. This part of the review was carried out for Dover District Council (DDC) from 2015-2017 and covers sites within the Dover local authority area. The reports detail the historic nature, content, current state and significance of the sites currently identified in the ***Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens*** for the Dover local authority area along with others identified by DDC.

Dover District Heritage Strategy.

The Dover District Heritage Strategy 2013 (DDHS) seeks to ensure that heritage plays a clear role in shaping any future regeneration, development and management decisions. To achieve this aim the DDHS contains a series of recommendations intended to promote and enhance the protection and enjoyment of the Districts heritage assets. A heritage asset is defined as a “building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)”¹.

The review carried out by the Kent Gardens Trust supports the following DDHS recommendations:

- *Recommendation 9: Systems should be put in place to ensure that historic environment information and advice is readily accessible to local communities to help them shape the places in which they live.*
- *Recommendation 14: a Local List of Heritage Assets should be developed...gardens identified within the Kent Gardens Compendium and any enhancement of the Compendium should be included in the Local List.*
- *Recommendation 23: Opportunities should be sought and support given to local communities, groups and individuals in researching their past, develop projects with them that identify, enhance understanding of the Districts heritage assets and involve them in condition assessment, monitoring, management, promotion and interpretation of the assets:*

How was the review carried out?

The review has been undertaken using Historic England’s criteria for identifying the significance of local heritage assets to provide a consistent approach². A template for the reports was developed by DDC, building on the experience of previous work by the Kent Gardens Trust. The heritage values of the historic

¹ National Planning Policy Framework 2012

² Historic England “Conservation Principles: Policy and Guidance” 2008

park or garden subject to the report are defined within the Statement of Significance.

The extent of the area identified represents the current surviving area of the designed landscape, the boundary line generally reflecting the maximum extent of the historic gardens or parkland (although there are exceptions such as where land has been irreversibly lost to development). The boundary line takes no account of current ownership.

How will the reports be used?

- a) The revised list of sites has the potential to support development of a Local List³ of Heritage Assets in Dover, should the Council progress with the recommendation in the DDHS in the future. The list of sites researched and evaluated in this review would be subject to consultation as part of any Local List development and is therefore not intended to be final.
- b) In response to recommendation 9 of the DDHS, the reports will be made publically available both on the DDC website and to the Historic Environment Record held by Kent County Council.
- c) The reports will help to inform future funding applications for historic spaces by the identification of significance.
- d) The review will help to inform future policy making, conservation and/or any development of sites, and contribute to the understanding, and where possible enjoyment, of these heritage assets by the identification of the significance of key historic character, features and association including that of setting and viewpoints.

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.

Dover District Council
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover
CT16 3PJ
www.dover.gov.uk

Kent County Council
Heritage Conservation
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
ME14 1XX
www.kent.gov.uk

Kent Gardens Trust
www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk

³ Historic England "Local Heritage Listing": Historic England Advice Note 7 2016

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

EVIDENTIAL

The Grounds are very much as they were originally designed although parts are now overgrown, particularly the western end of the terraces and behind the pavilion, the embankment to Crabble Avenue and the eastern boundary around the old disused tennis courts. The cycle track, access roads, paths and rugby pitches are well maintained with permanent floodlights installed over the pitches.

There are a variety of mature trees around the boundaries to the north and west while the stand of beeches around the original eastern entrance is still extant.

The original pavilion is still extant although there has been a modern extension added to the front which is not in keeping with the rest of the building. The gate houses on Crabble Road which are in keeping with the original pavilion, are boarded up.

HISTORICAL

Although the Athletic Ground only came into being in 1898 it has been well used in the past and was one of Kent Cricket Club's County Grounds between 1906 and 1976. It was also used for national celebrations and parades

AESTHETIC

The ambition of the businessmen of Dover to carve an athletic ground out of the side of a hill was far-sighted and the spot they purchased gave incredible views across the Dour Valley from the terraces. Unfortunately for them it did not prove to be a financial success and they planned to sell the land for building. However Dover Corporation, the predecessor to Dover District Council stepped in and purchased the Grounds to maintain it as a recreational space for the public of Dover, which they have to this day.

The Ground is unusual in that it has been carved out of hillside to produce a flat area for sports whereas most sports grounds are situated in relatively flat areas which do not require much engineering work to make them suitable. The position of the Ground also gave spectacular views across the Dour Valley, which were commented on at the time.

COMMUNAL

Crabble Athletic Grounds are open to the public and the pitches and pavilion are utilised by the Dover Rugby Club. The cycle track is used by runners and dog walkers as well as the odd cyclist. The Grounds also act as the only entrances to the Football Stadium which is home to Dover Athletic Football Team which are currently (2016) playing in the National League.

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

Approximately 14 acres in extent of which an eight-acre area was carved out of the hillside, to create a cricket ground in what had been known as Crabble Meadows. This created an amphitheatre with a beech grove, two gate houses flanking the west road entrance and Victorian Sports Pavilion, built 1896 to 1901, of flint and brick with wooden veranda, dormers and weather vane turret. The current football pitch was dug out of the hillside above, behind and to the South of the existing Pavilion in 1930 to 1931 by Dover Corporation using Government grants to give work to the unemployed during the Depression and the first stand built in 1932. Further development followed around the football stadium and to the pitch through to the 1990's, however the Football Stadium is out-with the original Crabble Athletic Ground and is not a part of the Compendium entry and is therefore not considered in this report.

Sports facilities, created, through substantial levelling works, as a commercial venture by local businessmen to encourage the growing popular interest in sports towards the end of the 19th century. When the commercial venture proved to be financially unsuccessful, the local authority purchased the Ground to maintain it as a public amenity in which use it remains.

In the early to mid-20th century, Crabble Athletic Ground was used as one of the Kent County Cricket Grounds and was also host to several major civic celebrations.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The site on the northern slope of Coombe Down was originally taken from four fields situated in an area known locally as Crabble meadows between the Parishes of River and Buckland. The Tithe map of 1840-1850, indicates that the owners of the fields were the Reverend Henry Rice and John and Edward Pilcher Coleman. By 1896, according to the Indenture of that date held by Dover District

Council, the Rev Rice's parcel appears to have passed to Sir Edward Bridges Rice of Dane Court, Dover, a retired Royal Naval Admiral, while the other parcel, a part of Crabble farm, was still owned by E.P. Coleman.

On the 6th January 1896, a syndicate named Dover Athletic Ground Ltd was set up by Frederick Finnis (timber merchant), Henry Hayward (surveyor), Alfred Charles Leney (brewer) and James Stilwell (solicitor), all business men of Dover, with the intention of creating a cricket ground and cycling track. The syndicate purchased land at Crabble for £2,500 from Sir Edward Rice and £8,600 from E.P. Coleman. The area acquired stretched from Bunkers Hill in the east to Crabble Bridge under the railway in the west and to the south of railway and on the north side of Coombe Down, a total of some 42 acres and an area within the north-west part of this parcel, extending to 14 acres, was designated as the athletic field.

Crabble Athletic Ground was opened on Whit Monday 1897 by the local M.P. George Wyndham with a "grand race meeting" under the management of the Dover Cycling Club, which was attended by 6,000 spectators. The chart attached to an Indenture of 24 November 1898 between the syndicate and Dover Athletic Ground Ltd, transferring the title to the latter, shows the layout of the 14 acres used for the Athletic Ground with its terracing, embankment, cycle track and entrance from Crabble Avenue.

The venture, however, was not a financial success and an agreement was made, after an extraordinary meeting on 7th March 1902 of the Company at the Grand Hotel, Dover, for the Company to be wound up. Initially the idea was to sell the land for building development, but Dover Corporation stepped in and purchased the Ground for £5,500 to ensure it remained as a recreational space.

Improvements were made by the Corporation including a winding road at the eastern end of the site. Of further benefit, the River extension of the electric tram was built in 1905 linking Dover via Crabble Hill to Minnis Lane, River and this ran along the north-western boundary of the Athletic Ground. The tramline is shown on the 3rd edition 25" OS map (1907-1923), the line leading under the railway bridge past Crabble Paper Mill (now, 2016, apartments) following Crabble Road over the River Dour before continuing south-westwards through the fields which lay between Crabble Farm and the Athletic Ground. By the 4th edition of the 25" OS map (1929-1952), the tram line had been replaced by an extension to Crabble Road which thus now formed the western boundary of the Athletic Ground.

In 1906, an annual cricket festival was inaugurated with the intention of attracting County Cricket. Kent Cricket Club was so impressed with the ground that the following year they used Crabble for the Kent v Gloucestershire match played

between the 11th and 13th July. The Ground was also used for Association Football with the main pitch on the east (Dover) side of the cricket outfield. The football season, however, started to impinge on the cricket season and in 1924, the possibility of a separate football ground began to be explored. A successful application was made to the Unemployment Grants Committee (part of the Ministry of Labour employing the unemployed through special work schemes) and, in 1930, work was completed on a new football ground further to the south-west, above and behind the Athletic Ground (outside the site boundary as here defined).

During the Second World War, Crabble Athletic Ground was used by the Royal Corps of Signals as the headquarters of one of its units. A pillbox (Type 24) was built, but no visible remains of this survive.

After the war, first class Cricket resumed at Crabble, but, from the 1952/53 season onwards, the cricketers had to share the ground with Dover Rugby Club. A deteriorating wicket and outfield led to the ground being declared unfit for this level of Cricket in 1976. Dover Cricket Club continued to play at Crabble until it folded in the 1990's, at which time Dover Rugby Club became the main user of the Ground. The Rugby Club continues in this role (2016) although Dover Football Club, which uses the football stadium above Crabble Athletic Ground (outside the site boundary), has two access routes through the site, one from the north-west, the other from the south-east. The Football Club also uses the asphalt cycle track within the Athletic Ground as a car park on match days.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Crabble Athletics Ground straddles the two parishes of River and Buckland in the town of Dover. The 5.6 ha (14 acre) site is rectangular in shape with its main (long) axis lying in a north-west/south-east direction.

Much of the north-western boundary is defined by a wire mesh fence running along the east side of Crabble Road. Behind, to the south-east, this rises an embankment, part of the original 1896 levelling works. Along its top stand mature trees. These appear to have been planted as a line along the length of the embankment, but no longer form a continuous feature.

Crabble Road had been extended southwards by 1929 (4th edition OS), replacing the earlier tramway extension, laid out in 1905, as shown on the 3rd edition OS (1907-1923), across the fields from Crabble Hill to the Minnis Lane terminus in River and lies along the western boundary of the Athletic Ground.

In 1993, a plot at the northern tip of the site at the junction of Crabble Road and Crabble Avenue, was sold off to build a private house. The site boundary skirts south round this plot, then follows Crabble Avenue in a south-easterly direction forming the northern boundary of the Athletic Ground. Here it is delineated by a continuation of the wire fence along the road, the embankment rising steeply behind this to a height of around 20 feet with the broken line of mature trees continuing along its summit. The slope is now (2016) overgrown with scrub and trees.

The boundary continues to the south-east behind a row of early C20 houses on the south side of Crabble Avenue before tending in a south-westerly direction. At this point there is no definitive edge to the site as it merges into the woodland covering Coombe Down, the boundary line continuing around in a curve to the west until it reaches the boundary with the Football Stadium forming the east and south boundaries. The Stadium is fenced off with high solid panels and barbed wire fencing that follows the top edge of the Athletic Ground terracing.

The north-western boundary from the Stadium to the Athletic Ground entrance on Crabble Road abuts housing built along Lewisham Road.

The views from the pavilion and terraces across the cricket pitch to the north-east over the Dour valley to Old Park Hill were considered amongst the prettiest in England when the site was originally built. Old Park Hill has now had a housing estate built on the side of it with an industrial estate on the summit. There is still a green area of scrub between the two where it is too steep to build. The view up the Dour Valley towards River over the farms and fields has also been built on and is now (2016) completely built up. Trees planted around the northern boundary have also grown to maturity and now hide some of the built-up areas quite effectively. The views up Coombe Down to the south are now tree covered or obstructed by the high fencing around the Football Stadium.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance to Crabble Athletic Ground stands at the junction of Crabble Road and Lewisham Road, opposite the north-west apex of the Ground's cycle track.

Two gatehouses stand one to each side of the main roadway into the Ground, being of square single-story construction, of brick and flint with tiled roofs and with a turnstile and window on each side. The turnstiles are in disrepair and the windows boarded up, as are the doors at the back (2016). The gatehouses were probably built in the 1920s around the time that Crabble Road was extended along the line of the earlier tramway (4th edition OS).

As originally laid out (1896), this part of the ground was bounded by Crabble Farm and there appears to have been no public access point (2nd Edition 25" OS map of 1898). There is no indication either, on the 3rd ed OS (date), that the early C20 tramway provided an access to the Athletic Ground on this side, but it seems likely that there would have been a stop somewhere in the vicinity of what, by the 1920s (4th edition OS), with the arrival of Crabble Road, had become the main entrance.

At the east end of the site is a second entrance providing access from Crabble Avenue. This was the original entrance to the Athletic Ground (Indenture Plan, 1898) at which date the path led directly to the south-eastern apex of the cycle track where the terracing meets with the embankment (2nd edition OS). The original gates, if any, are gone and there is a modern (late C20/early C21) pedestrian access and a locked wire gate arrangement for vehicular access.

The pedestrian gate is open to the public and used during league football games for away fans to disembark from their coaches in Crabble Avenue and walk through Crabble Athletic Ground to the Football Stadium.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Built into the terracing on the south side of the cycle track, and overlooking the centre of the levelled oval which has the cycle track as its boundary, stands the Sports Pavilion. Erected in the late 1890s as part of the original late C19 scheme, it is of brick and flint construction with a tiled roof incorporating a bell tower with weather vane on top. To its west side is a small wing built along the second terrace and there is a balcony stretching around the front of the building at this level, connecting the eastern and western arms of the second terrace. There are three gabled windows set in the roof at the third floor.

A flat roofed, single story extension, constructed in 1982 and out of keeping with the original building, projects from the ground floor of the Pavilion out to the edge of the cycle track, encroaching onto the level area between the cycle track and the bottom of the terracing. Dover Rugby Club holds a 25-year lease for the Pavilion (2008-2033).

OTHER LAND

The focus of Crabble Athletic Ground is an oval, grassed, levelled playing field some 3.2ha (8 acres) in extent, its perimeter defined by an oval cycling track. The levelling was carried out in 1896 by Messrs W & T Denne of Walmer. The work appears to have taken place very rapidly since it was complete by April 1896 (Dover Express; 2nd edition OS; see also chart attached to Indenture of 24 November 1898 between the syndicate and Dover Athletic Ground Ltd

transferring the title to the latter). An estimated 38,000 cubic yards of chalk (approximately 72,500 tonnes) was dug out from the high (southern) side of the slope and moved to the lower (northern) slope to create the level area, with the embankment along Crabble Avenue at the north-eastern boundary rising to a height of approximately 6 metres. (Dover Express).

The asphalt cycling track is, as originally laid out, 20 yards wide (18.3 metres) and 640 yards (585.2 metres) per lap. It was regarded as being of international standard (Dover Express) and remains in good condition (2016). A row of wooden posts has been installed (early C21) around the inner edge to prevent vehicles driving onto the grassed centre area. The cycle track is used for car parking for football or rugby matches.

The levelled grassed area within the track is currently (2016) marked out with several rugby pitches with goal posts erected. Flood lighting has also been installed around the pitches on high level metal posts. Originally, in the late 1890s, the land was laid out for cricket, football, lawn tennis, and hockey with the main centre pitch being prepared to first class standard cricket. The initial work on the cricket ground was carried out under the supervision of George G Hearne an old Kent professional cricketer.

Cut into the hillside to the south of the cycle track, from which they are separated by a 2m wide level grassed strip, are two terrace levels with a third level, above the terraces, along the top of the area, marking the natural slope of Coombe Down. A metal fence runs along the top of the terracing. These terraces were created as part of the original 1986 ground moving works. At their centre stands the Sports Pavilion, rising to three floors such as to provide access to each level. On the east side there are external steps leading up to the terraces and giving access to the building.

To the west of the Pavilion, the terracing has brick buttresses to support the tiers and one set of wide concrete steps from the ground to the top of the third level. There are several other sets of concrete steps connecting the first and second tiers to the levelled ground. This arrangement is repeated on the terracing east of the Pavilion, with the addition of a modern, white rendered outbuilding on the same level, a few metres east of the Pavilion.

Part way along the western terraces, 30m from the Pavilion on the second tier, is the original late C19 cricket score board and green painted corrugated iron hut. The structure is somewhat dilapidated and overgrown (2016).

At the main, Crabble Road entrance to the Athletic Ground, the road branches just to the east of the gatehouses, one arm leading directly eastwards onto the cycle track through a modern gate, the other, as laid out by 1929 (4th edition OS), leading south up the slope to the main, west, entrance to the Football

Stadium. Between the site boundary and the roadway to the Stadium, is a grove of mature Scots Pine trees. The ground to the east of the roadway gives access to the two terrace levels associated with the Pavilion although this area is now overgrown and covered with trees (2016).

From the eastern entrance on Crabble Avenue, a tarmacked path leads in a sinuous curve through a beech grove, up the sloping ground to a modern (late C20/early C21) wooden farm gate at the eastern apex of the cycle track. This arrangement is shown on the 3rd edition OS (1907-23) replacing the original straight approach. Branching southwards off the roadway is a tarmacadam path leading further up the slope and passing the overgrown remains of two hard surfaced tennis courts cut into the slope at this eastern end of the site. These were put in as part of the improvements made by the Corporation after its acquisition of the site, along with the planting of flower beds and shrubberies, and appear on the 3rd edition OS (1907-23).

Beyond the site of the courts, the path crosses a grassy area, being the original slope of Coombe Down, overlooking the cycle track and rugby pitches to the north. On the north side of the path the grassy area used to be a pitch and put course according to local people but all that remains are a few flat areas where the greens were. The southern side of this area merges with woodland. The path terminates at the gate of the east entrance to the Football Stadium.

REFERENCES

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Www.parksandgardens.org Record ID: 957 extracted 06 Dec 2015

Www.talesftre.com/doverfootballclub extracted 20 Jan 2016

Newspapers

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Maps

Ordnance Survey 25"to 1mile: 1st edition (1862-1875)

Ordnance Survey 25"to 1mile: 2nd edition (1897-1900)

Ordnance Survey 25"to 1mile: 3rd edition (1907-1923)

Ordnance Survey 25"to 1mile: 4th edition (1929-1952)

Illustrations

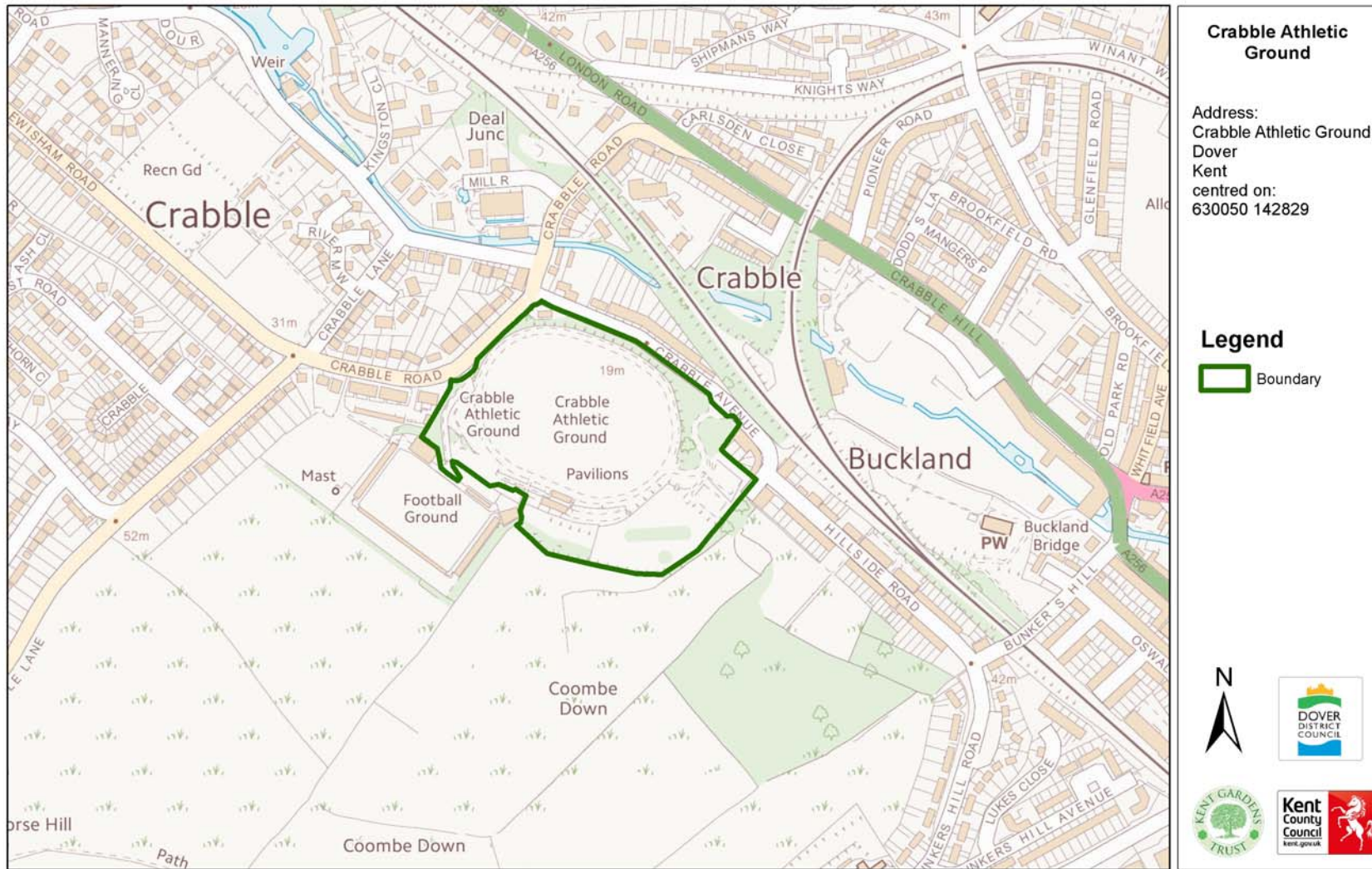
Dover Museum (various photographs)

Research and written by Martin Meare

Edited by Harriet Jordan

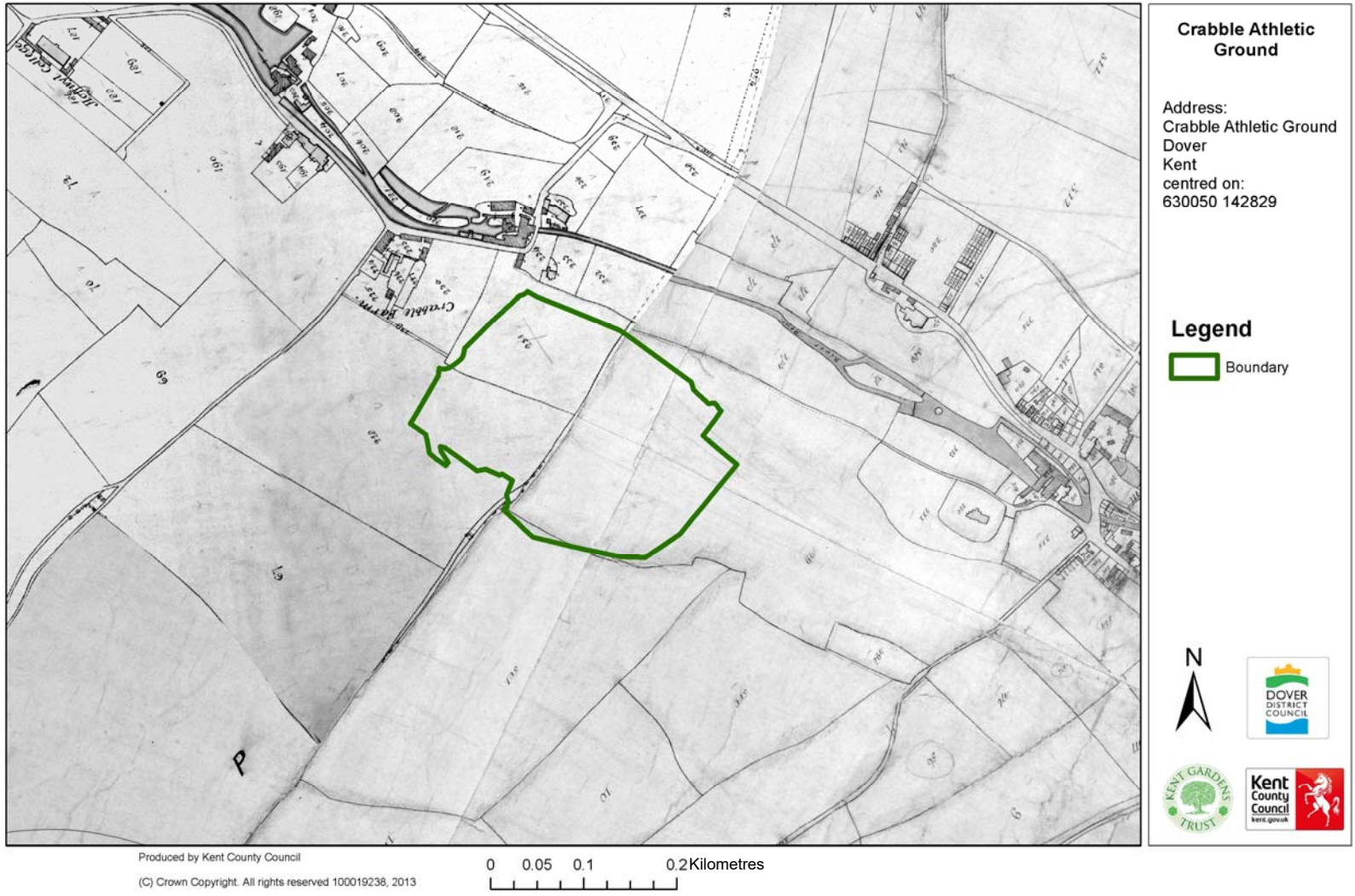
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Fig. 1 Boundary map



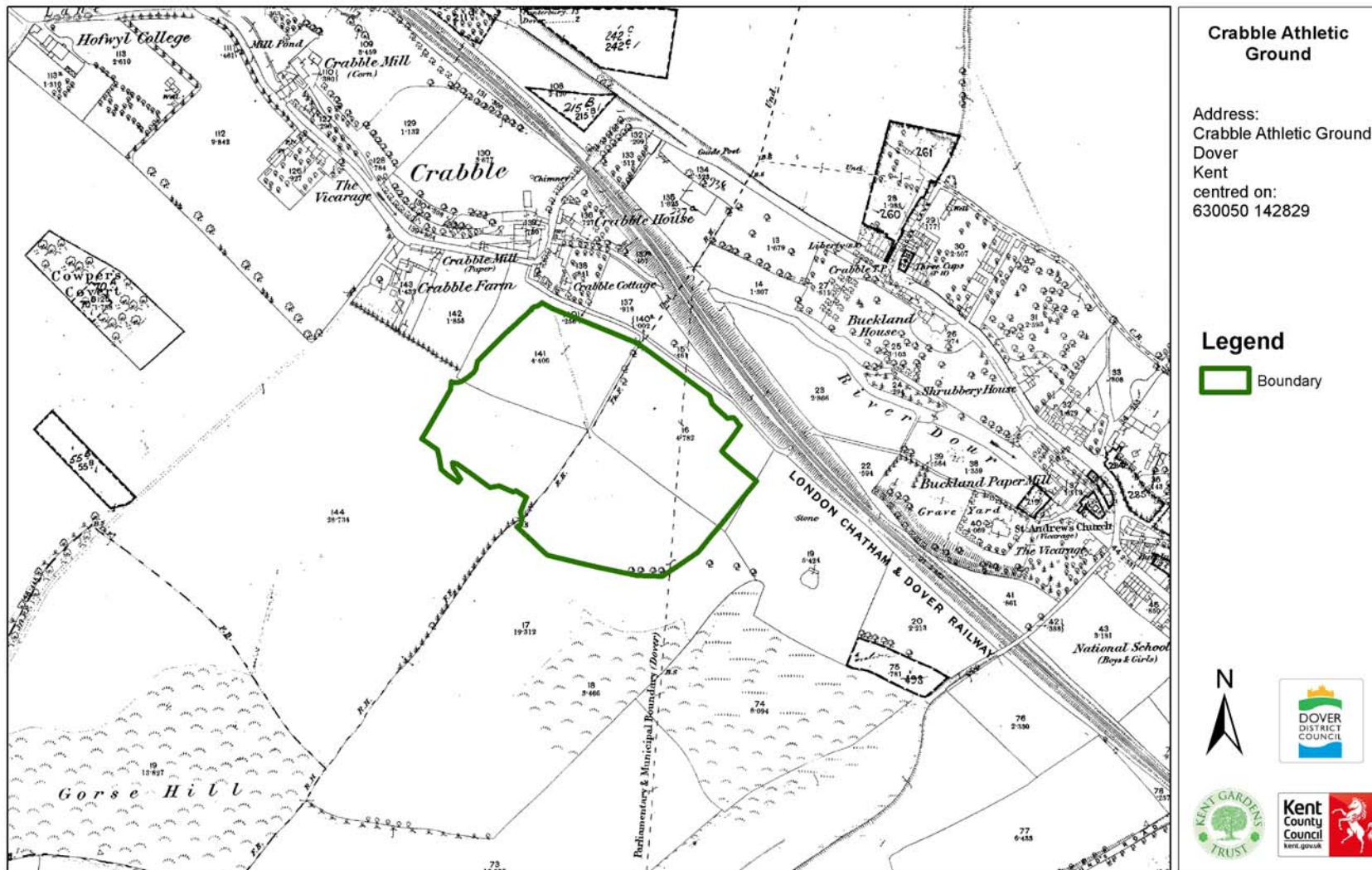
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Fig. 2 Tithe map



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Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25” map (1862-1875)



Crabble Athletic Ground

Address:
Crabble Athletic Ground
Dover
Kent
centred on:
630050 142829

Legend

 Boundary







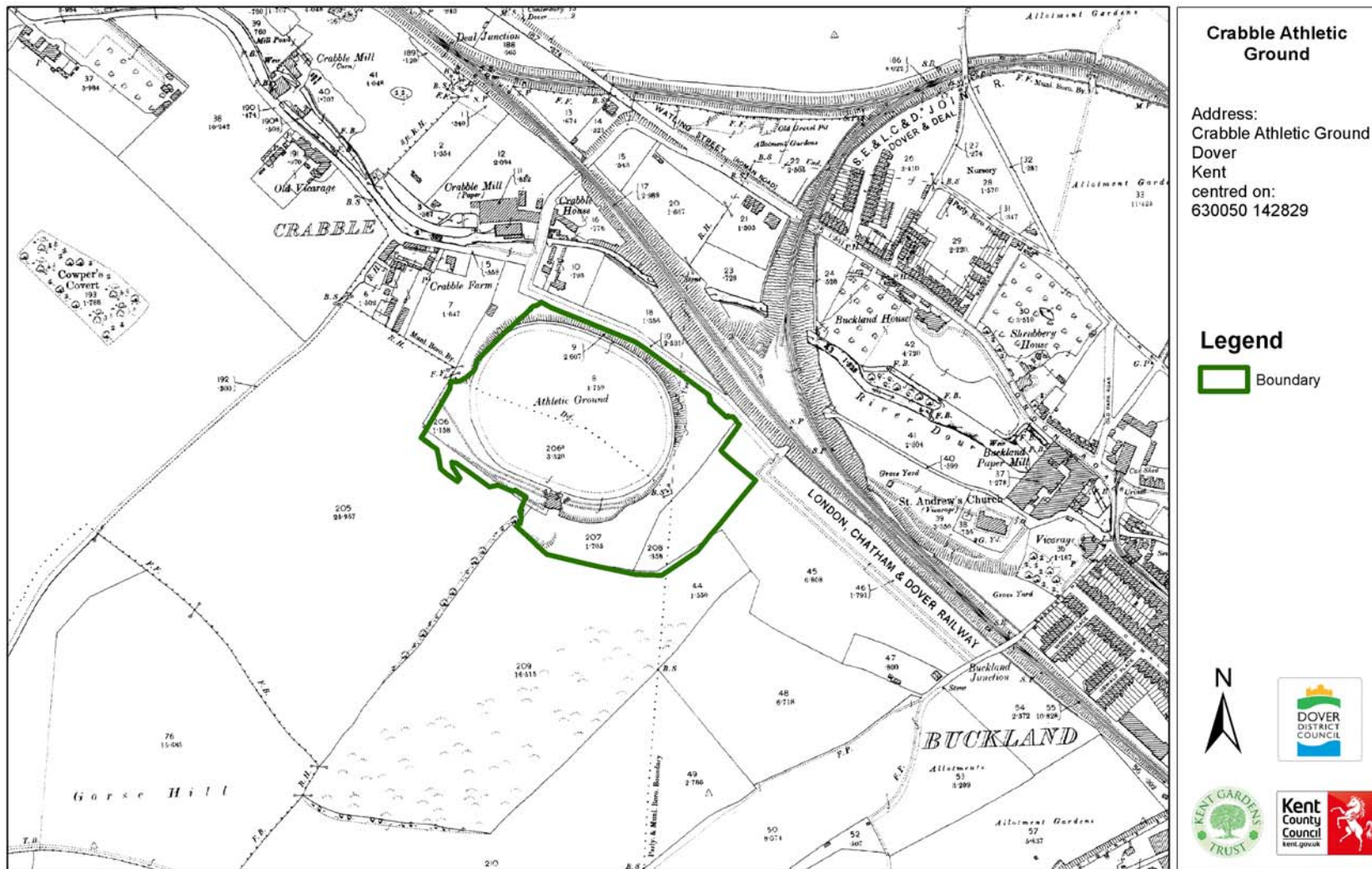


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0 0.05 0.1 0.2 Kilometres

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Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25” map (1897-1900)



Crabble Athletic Ground

Address:
Crabble Athletic Ground
Dover
Kent
centred on:
630050 142829

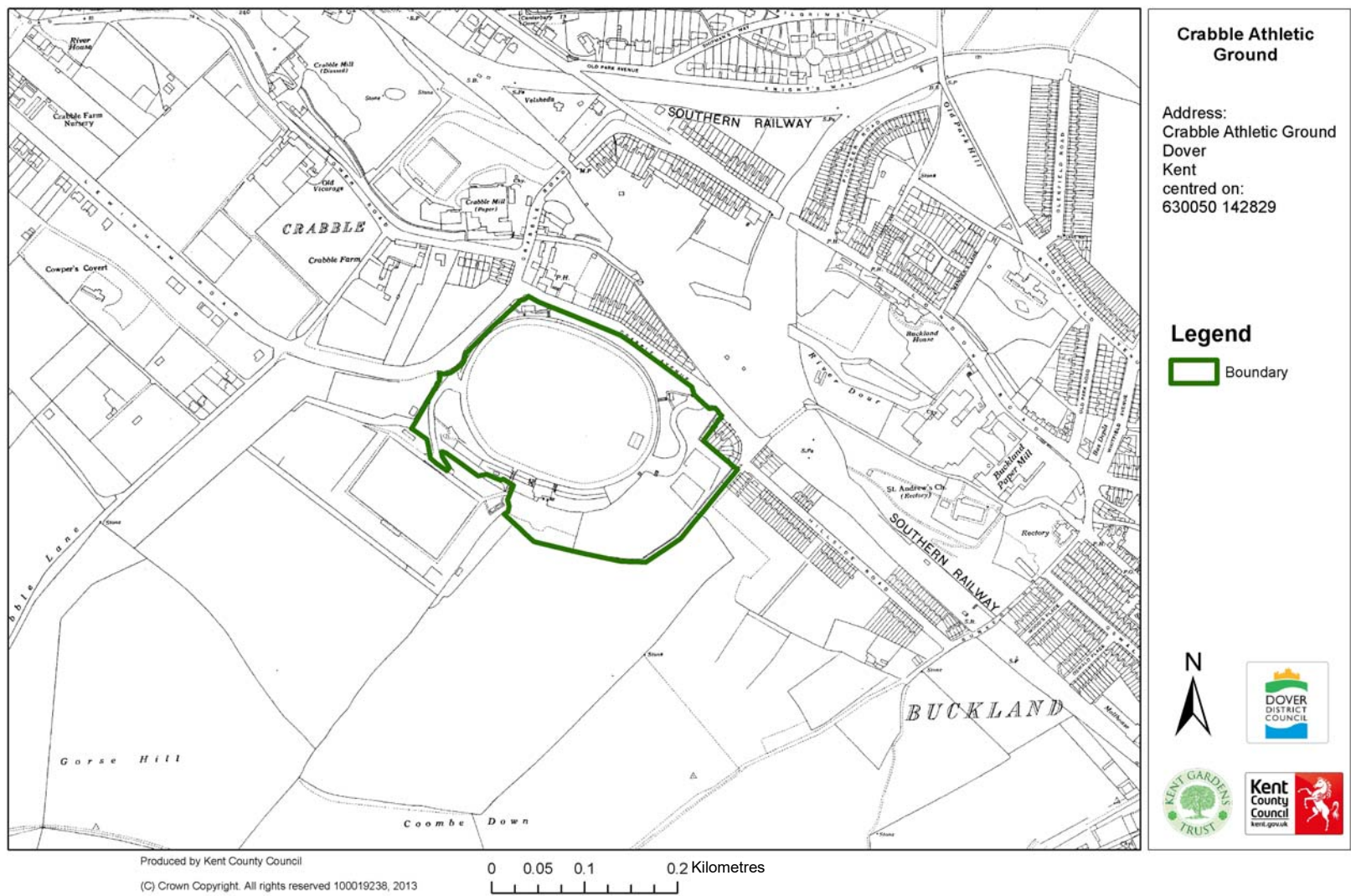
Legend

 Boundary



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 6 Ordnance Survey 4th edition 25” map (1929-1952)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 7 Main western gate off Crabble road (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 8 Main entrance, gate house and turnstile to northern side of entrance on Crabble Road (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 9 Inside the western entrance looking upslope to football stadium access (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 10 Rugby pitches looking eastward with cycle track in foreground (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 11 Pavilion, cycle track and terraces from western entrance looking south east (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 12 Looking across the Athletic Ground from the top terrace in south-east looking west (2016)



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Fig. 13 Pavilion from the main entrance (2016)



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Fig. 14 South (back) side of pavilion from top of terrace



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Fig. 15 Cycle track and northern border on top of Crabble Avenue embankment looking west (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 16 Cyclists on track going clockwise from top of east terrace (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 17 The old cricket scorers hut and board (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 18 Terracing and cricket score board to west of pavilion (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 19 Northern boundary along Crabble Avenue with embankment rising to the Athletic Ground (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

**Fig. 20 Looking through the beech grove to the original eastern entrance on Crabble Avenue
(hidden behind trees, 2016)**



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 21 Top of eastern terrace looking towards pavilion and along path to the eastern entrance of football stadium (2016)



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens – 2015-2017 review of Dover District

Fig. 22 Looking down from the old overgrown upper tennis court to the lower tennis court (2016)

