

# 3 Historical Development

## 3.1 Key historical periods

The origins of the C19 and early C20 gardens, which form the two public parks known today as Kearsney Abbey Grounds and Russell Gardens, have their origins in the medieval manor of Kearsney. The parks are located in the valley of the River Dour, which runs through the steep sided Alkham valley, an area that contains evidence of a long history of human activity.

The history of the area now comprising the parks, and the development of the parks themselves, is described below in relation to six key phases:

- Pre-history and early history;
- The medieval manor of Kearsney;
- Industrial exploitation – the mills of the River Dour;
- The private estate of Kearsney Abbey;
- The private house and gardens of Kearsney Court;
- The public parks – Russell Gardens and Kearsney Abbey.

## 3.2 Pre-history and early history

The valley of the River Dour contains important evidence of early post-glacial environmental history; scientific investigations a little downstream from Kearsney parks, at the Crabble Paper Mill site, revealed significant deposits of river sediments from the end of the last ice-age. The valley bottom at the confluence of the Dour and the Drellingore (below the ground level of the present day park) has potentially preserved deposits of peat and river sediments that may provide a record of the early post-ice Age history of the Dour valley, and may also indicate how the earliest people in the area interacted with their environment.

The Dover district is archaeologically rich, and extensive evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation is confirmed by a series of significant finds in the area. These include local scatters of pre-historic

flint-work at numerous locations on the valley slopes around Dover. A number of flint flakes, typical of lithic material from other finds in the Dover area, were collected on the slopes of Coxhill Mount during the course of this study; such hill-slope prehistoric flint material is likely to be derived from the top of the ridge line, which would be consistent with other finds in relation to Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation sites in the region.

Three Bronze Age round barrows survive on the valley sides at Lousyberry Wood, Temple Ewell, about 400m north of Kearsney Abbey, with another on the ridge top at Ewell Minnis, some 2km to the west. A possible new round barrow site on the summit of Coxhill Mount was examined as part of this study. A low, rather ill defined, mound on the summit of the hill, it is as yet unproven, but the positioning, at the eastern end of this high, sharply defined chalk ridge is typical of the region, with parallels provided by examples at Little Watersend, Lousyberry Wood, and on Whinless Down.

Further downstream, around Crabble Paper Mill, a number of pits filled with charcoal and burnt flint have been dated to the late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age period<sup>1</sup>, providing evidence for pre-historic activity and occupation of the lower valley slopes as well as the ridge.

Possible strip lynchets of Iron Age date have also been noted on the hillside of Lousyberry Wood, suggesting that this area of the valley was cultivated in the later pre-historic period.

Across the East Kent chalk downlands, naturally occurring fresh running water is a rare commodity and the River Dour therefore represents what must always have been a very important local resource, reflected in the very ancient name of the river itself: Dour, probably from the Celtic word 'Dubras' meaning 'waters' or 'stream'.<sup>2</sup>

There is little evidence of Roman occupation in the Kearsney area, although the modern London Road, running through Crabble and Temple Ewell is believed to represent the general line of the Roman road that connected Dover with Canterbury and London. It is possible

<sup>1</sup> Parfitt 2006: Kent HER TR.34 SW 1072

<sup>2</sup> Rivet and Smith 1979, 341-2

that the present-day road along the Alkham valley represents the line of the lost Roman road from Dover to Lympne. Finds of Roman pottery in the area are limited and appear to be derived from a settlement up-slope from Beresford Road in River.

From the surviving evidence, it seems more likely that the Dour valley provided a focus for Anglo-Saxon settlement, which is supported by the discovery of four separate Anglo-Saxon cemetery sites all within 2km of Kearsney parks.

The fast-flowing River Dour has been used to power mills over a long historical period. The earliest definitive record of a mill, located at the mouth of the river, is from the Norman period, but it is suspected that earlier mills existed along the river during the preceding Anglo-Saxon and / or Roman periods. As yet there is no clear evidence for this but there remains potential for such discoveries anywhere along the course of the Dour.

## 3.3 Kearsney Manor

By the medieval period, the land that forms Kearsney parks today comprised part of an extensive single manorial holding. Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of 1769 is the earliest plan that survives of the area, and shows 'Cas-ney Court' as a group of at least two and possibly three or four buildings to the east of a pond on the River Dour, with a further building, presumably the mill, immediately south of the pond (**Figure 3.1**).

The C18 historian Edward Hasted explains the Manor's complex history and changes of ownership in some detail; he records that it was known as 'Castney Court', which on his map is given as 'Casney Court'<sup>3</sup>, (**Figure 3.2**), while also noting that it was properly called 'Kersoney', and lay partly in the parishes of River, Ewell and Whitfield.

The manor and lands of 'Kersoney' were granted to the landowner Jeffrey de Say after the Norman Conquest in exchange for men from his estates to help maintain the garrison at Dover. For several hundred

<sup>3</sup> Hasted, 1778

years, the manor land continued to be held on knight's service, a feudal form of land tenure under which a knight held an estate on condition of him performing military service for his overlord.

From the end of Edward I's reign (1272 – 1307) until 1319, Kearsney manor estate was owned by the Paganel, or Painall, family. Land at 'La Kersony' passed by marriage of Maud Paganel to Elias de Bockton. Ownership later passed to the Norwood family, but by the end of the C15 the manor was in the ownership of the Roper family of St Dunstan's. It remained in the ownership of the descendants of the Roper family until the end of the C16, when it was sold to the Best family of Canterbury.

Hasted provides a full record of conveyance by inheritance through the C17 and most of the C18, finally recording that in 1788, the manor holding was inherited by Thomas Biggs, esquire, of Dover.

Hasted's plan, which dates from 1778 (**Figure 3.2**), shows the settlement of Ewell, located on the main road out of Dover, the River Dour south of the road, and a church south of the river.

Although the original manorial estate is described by Hasted, there is no specific mention of any associated manorial buildings, although there can be little doubt that such existed from early times. Hasted's map of 1778 (**Figure 3.2**) confirms the earlier 1769 plan, indicating the presence of at least two buildings at 'Casney Court', adjacent to the road running south-westwards from Ewell towards Alkham, and showing a building on the river to the south of a pond, which must be the mill identified on later maps as 'Great Kesney Court Mill'.

The earliest Ordnance Survey map, dated 1797 and shown in **Figure 3.3**, shows the alignment of the Alkham Road on the north side of the Drellingore at Bushy Rough. The paper mill at Bushy Rough is marked, as is 'Casney Court', and there appears to be a building very close to the confluence of the Drellingore and Dour, in the location of what is shown on the later 1805 Alkham Road diversion plan as 'Little Kesney Court House' (see **Figure 3.5**).

**Figure 3.4** shows a slightly later plan, by Mudge<sup>v</sup>, of the Kearsney area, and although 'Casney Court' is not specifically identified, a group of buildings is shown in the location of the manor complex, near the confluence of the Dour and its western arm tributary, the Drellingore, (the chalk stream that runs, seasonally, within the Alkham Valley). Mudge's plan also identifies a mill on the Drellingore arm of the Dour. It also confirms that the road along the Alkham valley towards Chilton and

Wolverton was on the north side of the water bodies at Bushy Rough, possibly taking advantage of the valley side as a convenient course in comparison with the wet valley bottom and the adjacent clay-capped and wooded higher ground. It is also interesting to see that many of the tracks shown on the plan align with the present day network of roads, footpaths and bridleways.

The medieval manorial complex of 'Casney' or 'Kersoney' Court became known as 'Kesney Court' and later 'Kearsney Court' or 'Kearsney Court Farm'.

Peter Fector (1723-1814), the owner of the Minet and Fector Bank in Dover (which later became the NatWest Bank), purchased 11,000 acres (4,500 ha) of the Kearsney estate from the Lord of the Manor, presumed to be Thomas Biggs in 1790<sup>w</sup>. However, there is a discrepancy in the historical record about the date of purchase, and an alternative source states that the Fectors purchased the paper mill at Bushy Rough and Kearsney Court c. 1810, and the manor estate as late as 1818<sup>x</sup>.

The 1805 Alkham Road diversion plan (**Figure 3.5**) provides evidence for an earlier sale date for at least some of the land, since it identifies John Minet Fector as the owner of the Long Field (an area that later becomes Russell Gardens), of Coppins Meadow at the confluence of the Dour and Drellingore, which includes the group of buildings named 'Little Kesney Court House', and of a strip of land at the confluence of the Dour and the Drellingore. Thomas Biggs is, however, identified on this plan as still being the owner of the land east of the Dour and south of 'Great Kesney Court Mill'.

The 1805 plan shows a bend in the road, passing very close to the site of 'Little Kesney Court House', which was to be straightened, seemingly in order to consolidate and free up land around the older house for the building of a new house, which would be known as Kearsney Abbey.

The 1814 proposed footpath diversion plan (**Figure 3.6**) shows that the Fector's land holding had increased by this date, as it identifies John Minet Fector as being the landowner of land up to, and to the north of, the Dover to Canterbury turnpike road, including the area of 'Great Kersney Court'. The plan shows the re-routing of various footpaths from the Fector's land onto adjacent roads and bridle paths, indicating further privatisation of the estate in preparation for the new house and its associated landscape.

The Fector family were in residence on the site from the late C18; it

seems likely that the buildings they occupied were then of considerable antiquity. Whatever the actual sequence and dates of land transfer, it is evident that a process of purchase and consolidation took place over a number of years at the end of the C18 and beginning of the C19; a later date of purchase of Kearsney Court would perhaps explain the subsequent building of Kearsney Abbey mansion, which started in 1820, although the expansion of the Fector's land holdings may equally well have been disrupted by the death of Peter Fector in 1814.

#### A note on names

During the course of the C19, the great manorial estate was split up into separate smaller units, each retaining 'Kearsney' as part of its name – 'Kearsney Abbey', 'Kearsney Court' and 'Kearsney Manor'.

The 25<sup>th</sup> OS (1872) shows 'Kearsney Court Farm' in the location that in earlier times had been known as 'Casney' or 'Kersoney Court', (or 'Great Kesney Court') and this may well have been the original site of the manor buildings, although by this date, this complex of buildings was subordinate to Kearsney Abbey mansion, opposite.

After the new 'Kearsney Court' was built to the west in c.1900, 'Kearsney Court Farm' was eventually changed to 'Kearsney Manor'. Kearsney Manor, as a name, remains in use today for the earlier Kearsney Court / Kearsney Court Farm, and comprises private grounds lying to the north of Kearsney Abbey park; the current house on this site, replacing earlier buildings, serves as a nursing home.

### 3.4 C18 and C19 Industrial Heritage

Over the centuries, the fast-flowing Dour stream was extensively used to power watermills and much of its course was modified. By the late C18, thirteen mills were spaced along the river, more than half of which have now disappeared without trace.

These included both corn mills and paper mills, the clean waters of the Dour being particularly suited to the production of paper. The Fector family had interests in eight local mills between the late C18 and the mid-C19, largely either financing their operation, or acquiring them outright<sup>vi</sup>. These included Temple Ewell Corn Mill; Bushy Ruff Paper Mill; Kearsney Court Mill; Kearsney Abbey Corn Mill; River Paper Mill; Crabble Corn Mill; Charlton Paper Mill; and Town Mill.

Of these various mills, two – Kearsney Abbey Mill and River Paper Mill –

<sup>w</sup> Frost, M., 2004. *Industries of the River Dour* (unpublished notes and maps prepared for Dover Museum).

<sup>x</sup> Welby, 1977

<sup>v</sup> Frost, 2004

<sup>v</sup> Mudge, An Entirely New and Accurate Survey of the County of Kent, 1801

fall within the present day area of Kearsney Parks; and two more – Bushy Ruff Paper Mill and Kearsney Court Corn Mill – lie immediately outside the parks' boundaries.

Kearsney Court corn mill was a Domesday manorial mill. The early corn / paper mill at River has a documented history going back to the C17 and the mill at Bushy Rough appears on maps in 1801, but both of these sites may well have been in use from earlier times. Kearsney Abbey Mill seems to have been a smaller site, and one with an uncertain and complex history that includes incorporation of the former C16 Town Mill during the 1820s-1830s, and modifications to pump a water supply to Kearsney Abbey house.

The Fector family had a short-term interest in River paper mill, which stood at the extreme eastern end of the mill pond, east of the lake on the Kearsney Abbey site. William Phipps purchased this mill in 1777 but went bankrupt in 1782 and the Fectors bought the mill. Phipps recovered financially and leased the mill back from them. In 1800 he paid £21,000 to the Fectors to purchase the mill<sup>vii</sup>. When Phipps died in 1819 it was taken over by his son Christopher Phipps who died in 1867 (his ownership is recorded on the 1838 Tithe map **Figure 3.7**). The mill appears on Ordnance Survey plans until 1952; it was a working mill until 1918 when it was closed and gradually dismantled although some structural remains survive.

The Fector family also purchased the old Dover Town Mill, (dating from the late C16) which was replaced in 1811 / 1812, and in 1821 rebuilt it at Kearsney as an ornamented working mill to pump water to the house. (The surviving structure has a dated stone in the wall marked 1611). This mill was still operating in 1924 but now survives only as an outer wall and pit.<sup>ix</sup>

By the end of the C18, Kearsney Pond was enlarged and extended south to the Alkham Road, apparently to serve the Kearsney Court mill; the 1805 road diversion plan (**Figure 3.5**) shows the Dour channelled into twin leats extending south of the mill.<sup>x</sup> By this date, the Alkham

<sup>vii</sup> Jon Iveson

<sup>viii</sup> Frost, M., 2004. *Industries of the River Dour* (unpublished notes and maps prepared for Dover Museum).

<sup>ix</sup> Frost, M., 2004. *Industries of the River Dour* (unpublished notes and maps prepared for Dover Museum). Kearsney Court mill was leased to the Plichers by 1786. In c. 1810 the Fector family purchased mill and court and the mill was leased again to the Plichers, who rebuilt it in 1811 with four storeys and five pairs of stoves. The manor and estate were purchased by Fector in 1818. Plichers went bankrupt in 1837 (although in the Tithe award of 1838 the owner is given as Fector and Plicher is still given as the occupier). John Minet Fector was still given as owner in 1843. It closed in 1902 and was left derelict, and demolished 1953. The foundations, wheel pit and

Road followed the route that it still follows (with minor straightening), on the south side of the mill pond at Bushy Rough.

In the vicinity of Kearsney Abbey, the natural course of the river has been extensively altered to accommodate mills to the north of the grounds (Kearsney Court corn mill), to the east (River Paper Mill) and to the west (Kearsney Abbey Mill and Bushy Rough Mill). The course and character of the natural streams is now difficult to visualise, as the natural flow was artificially dammed, diverted, split and re-aligned, forming a series of interconnected leats, sluices and mill ponds, intimately connected with the river's long use for powering watermills

Surviving remains include a complex of mill ponds, leats and sluices. The C18 water-courses were further altered, streams culverted and additional dams and sluices installed to create the ornamental pools and lakes which are key features of the pleasure gardens, at Kearsney Abbey, today.

### 3.5 Kearsney Abbey

#### Creation of the Abbey grounds

In 1820, Peter Fector's son John Minet Fector (1754-1822) began a new house in the gothic style and called it Kearsney Abbey, although it had no religious connections. This replaced the older buildings in this location, (Little Kesney Court House), and presumably also superseded other older manorial dwellings on the north side of the Alkham Road.

The new house incorporated much stonework taken from medieval buildings then being demolished in Dover. Quantities of material, perhaps including stone from the medieval town wall and gates, seem to have been transported to create the new mansion.

It seems likely that grounds also began to be developed in the informal Picturesque style at this time, establishing the landscape much as it remains today.

After his death in 1822, his son, also John Minet Fector (1812-1868), (John Minet Fector II, for the purposes of this report), who was to become MP for Dover, inherited the property.

By the late 1830s the landscape seems to have been more or less completed. The 1838 River Parish Tithe Map (**Figure 3.7**) shows it in outline, with the house, lodge, lake, kitchen garden and adjacent mill ponds and fields, although it does not give detail of the internal layout of the various areas. The Tithe award indicates that the Fector family

---

mill race are visible in the gardens of Kearsney Manor nursing home.

owned some seventy four acres in twenty nine parcels by the late 1830s, within the River parish.<sup>xi</sup>

The new mansion took advantage of the consolidation of the old house site achieved by the road realignment, and was placed at the north boundary. It turned its back on the Alkham Road, with its garden fronts overlooking pleasure grounds to the east and south. Service yards were to the west and additional stables and coach house immediately to the north, on the opposite side of the Alkham road. A lodge was also built at the entrance opposite Kearsney Court; the Tithe plan records the presence of corn mill, farmhouse, cottages, barns, barn stables and gardens at the old Kearsney Court site – very much a working farm and mill- and thus confirms the shift in focus to the new Kearsney Abbey mansion.

The new house stood in extensive pleasure grounds, of nearly eight acres. Lawns swept down to a new lake, created by damming the Rivers Dour and Drellingore, which meet at this point. The lake was embellished with an ornate bridge, crossing it centrally, and islands on either side. Shrubberies lined the south bank of the lake and ornamented the largest island.

A castellated red brick bridge was built as an 'eye-catcher', spanning the weir and waterfall at the east end of the lake, of which only the foundations remain today.

South-east of the lake, and south of the mill pond which served River paper mill, there was a walled kitchen garden, with a central yard with hothouses, and a gardener's cottage. The substantial north and west garden walls form part of today's park boundary.

The creation of this layout required some major remodelling of the site.

The lake itself required major earthworks, to broaden and shape valley bottom, build the dam and weir, and form a number of islands. The River Dour previously flowed south from Kearsney pond in a double leat arrangement, one of which seems to have been filled in. A single outflow from Kearsney Pond was culverted, to flow beneath an ice-house and leaving only part of the leat exposed as it flowed to the outfall at the dam, into the mill pond.

The Drellingore was harnessed to feed the lake. Water flowing from the paper mill at Bushy Ruff in a leat, which fed into the Dour to the south of the Mansion site, was culverted to the south of the lake. From Bushy Ruff mill, an overflow or bypass channel, running to the north

---

<sup>xi</sup> The original manor holding spanned 3 parishes at least, and other Tithe records for the full extent of the estate at this date have not been investigated for the purposes of this report.

of the leat, seems to have been dammed to create a mill pond for Kearsney Abbey Mill, and the flow from this mill and pump house fed into the new lake (see **Figures 3.5 and 3.7**).

The 1838 River Parish Tithe map (**Figure 3.7**) indicates that the Fectors also leased some twenty-eight acres of land within the parish, comprising six parcels of wood and pasture to the south of the lake, namely Upper and Lower Coxhill Field, Coxhill Shaw and Coxhill Mount, and Frandham Wood; these were owned by John Every.<sup>xv</sup> By the early 1870s, this area was united and laid out as parkland, shown on the 1872 Ordnance Survey (**Figure 3.8**). It is not clear whether the Fector family converted the area from pasture to parkland in the early 1840s, which were the last few years of John Minet Fector II's ownership; or whether one of his successors was responsible, either Jones (c. 1846-62) or Churchward, in the later 1860s.

Water gardens, reliant on the River Dour, were an important feature of all the mansions in the area; this point, however, rather belies the fact that these great houses were established within an established industrial landscape, already occupied by a series of watermills with their associated mill ponds. Maintaining water flow to power the various mills, including those further down the valley, was vital, and any additional ornamental features had to take this power source fully into account, not least because the mansion owners themselves often had significant financial interests in these mills.

John Minet Fector II lived at Kearsney Abbey<sup>xvi</sup> until he sold it in c. 1844-1846<sup>xvii</sup> to E.C. Jones for £57,000.<sup>xviii</sup>

By 1862, the estate had been sold again, to Joseph George Churchward, a journalist who came to Dover when he won the contract to convey mail between Dover and Calais in 1853.<sup>xix</sup> He was one of the town's largest employers and his interests included politics and running local newspapers. Churchward allowed the grounds "to be used for *festes, rifle reviews and picnics on application*". Churchward was elected Mayor in 1867 and his family lived at Kearsney Abbey until he sold it to the Marquess of Ely in c. 1878.

By the early 1870s, the development of the grounds was complete: the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey, 1872, shown in **Figure 3.8**, is important as it shows the detail of the fully formed Picturesque landscape layout for the first time. After this date, there was very little

further change.

Access to the house was via a lodge to the east, along the drive that lay close to the north boundary of the gardens; the drive led to a forecourt at the north front of the house. The house occupied an elevated position on the site.

The informal pleasure ground between the house and the lake was divided into two halves, to the east and west of the leat that channelled the Dour from Kearsney Court Mill.

The western half was laid to open lawns between the house and lake, and dominated by the south and east fronts of the house. A freestanding aviary stood at the west corner of the lawns and there was a glasshouse to the west of the service yard, at the top of the slope close to the boundary; this was presumably the orange-house referred to later in the 1907 Sales particulars.

The eastern half of the pleasure grounds were enclosed by boundary plantations of deciduous and coniferous trees, with a mixed plantation or shrubbery and a line of deciduous trees along the north side of the lake, and a path circuit looping from the lodge, down the west side of the canal or leat, along the lake edge towards the mill pond, and back around the boundary. There was a gateway in the north-east corner (now bricked up), which must have had steps up into the grounds to accommodate the change in level between the road and the gardens.

The lawns to the east were planted in the gardenesque style, with specimen deciduous trees, conifers and shrubs, perhaps as an arboretum or pinetum. A subsidiary loop crossed the 'eye-catcher', the dam / weir at the east end of the Abbey Lake, to give access to the kitchen garden, returning along the south side of the Lake to cross via the ornate central bridge back to the lawns and house. A diagonal path across the eastern lawn led directly from the lodge to the path across the dam and to the walled garden.

A fountain lay between the two main islands, with a further fountain on the east island; the islands could be reached by footbridges. Various parcels of meadow and woodland had been amalgamated, and two triple avenues were laid out, aligned on the foundation in the centre of the lake, and running south from the lake up the slopes to Coxhill Mount.

Images of the late C19 and early C20, **Plates 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4**, show that the house was built in an undistinguished gothic style, with a formal terrace with stone balustrading on the south and east side, below which was a gravel path with numerous rustic-style iron seats. A circular seasonal bedding display ornamented the south front.

In about 1899, Kearsney Abbey was sold again, to Charles Curtis Esq. JP, who made his money through gunpowder manufacture<sup>xvi</sup>. By this time, the extent of the Kearsney Abbey estate was reduced to 90 acres (36 ha). Little change had occurred in the grounds since the 1870s, evidenced by the Second Edition of the Ordnance Survey dated 1896, (see **Figure 3.9**) which shows only minor changes. The addition of a boat house at the south-western end of the lake; the enclosure of land south of the lake, presumably to facilitate parkland grazing, and a triangular enclosure with a group of conifers to the west of Coxhill Mount, are the most notable additions. The avenues seem to have been clarified into two double avenues (although this second edition of the Ordnance Survey is known to be less accurate in plotting trees than the first, so the extent of trees shown must be viewed circumspectly); and the circular path route around the eastern lawns, and the diagonal path between the walled garden and the lodge, also seems to have been discontinued.

A 1901 plan (**Figure 3.10**) showing a proposal for new roads to the west of Kearsney Abbey (Abbey Road and Chilton Avenue), is based on the 1896 Ordnance Survey plan and shows no change apart from the diversion of the footpath west of the pleasure grounds, which previously ran directly across land from St Peter's Church to Bushy Rough.

In 1900, the Curtis family gave a strip of land east of the kitchen garden to St Peters Church to enlarge the churchyard; the alteration to the churchyard boundary can be picked out by comparing the 1896 Ordnance Survey plan (**Figure 3.9**) with the 1906 plan (**Figure 3.11**).

The sale of Kearsney Abbey to Curtis separated the ownership of the new Kearnsey Abbey from the old manor house at Kearsney Court Farm for the first time. Curtis lived at Kearsney Abbey until his death. In about 1898, Churchwood also sold Kearsney Court Farm and land on the north side of Alkham Road, to Alfred Leney (1837-1900), a member of the Dover brewing family, and subsequently moved to London where he died in 1900.

Leney modernised the Manor but also had plans drawn up to build a new house on land to the west of Kearsney Abbey on the north side of the Alkham Road. Leney also died in 1900 and the unfinished building, and site of what was to become Kearsney Court, was subsequently sold to Edward Barlow, the owner of Wiggins Teape, paper manufacturers (see next section, below).

After the death of Charles Curtis in 1905, Kearsney Abbey estate was

<sup>xv</sup> *Dover Express* May 5<sup>th</sup> 1906

### 3.6 Kearsney Court

The history of the early ownership of the site follows that of Kearsney Abbey.

By the early 1870s (**Figure 3.8**) the area that would become Kearsney Court comprised an open rectangular paddock surrounded by a row of trees, on a steep slope overlooking Kearsney Abbey to the south-east. Referred to on the 1805 Road Diversion Plan as Long Field (**Figure 3.5**) and in the River Parish Tithes award of 1838 (**Figure 3.7**) as Long Meadow, it had previously been united from several smaller paddocks and unenclosed ground (**Figure 3.3**); it contained scattered trees and would have formed a parkland backdrop for the Picturesque grounds of Kearsney Abbey.

This arm of the River Dour (the Drellingore tributary) wound through the valley bottom at the south of the slope, through the swampy woodland on the valley floor in the area around Bushy Rough, and to the south of Long Meadow, was flanked by two rows of mature trees, one alongside the Alkham Road. Palmtree Hill Plantation to the north provided shelter.

The site was contiguous with Bushy Rough House, a villa with grounds to the west; Kearsney Court Farm to the east; and Kearsney Abbey mansion and its grounds to the south.

Alfred Leney began to plan the new Kearsney Court in 1899 following his purchase of the land from Churchward the previous year. A Gothic house was planned, to designs by the Dover architect Worfold and Hayward; design drawings are dated 17 November 1899<sup>xvi</sup>.

Following the death of Leney in 1900, the project was quickly sold on to the wealthy Edward Percy Barlow, the owner of Wiggins Teape, a paper manufacturer. The house was completed, largely based on the 1899 layout but modified to the increasingly fashionable Arts and Crafts style. In December 1901 Worfold and Hayward provided designs for lodges<sup>xvii</sup>. An early photograph from 1903<sup>xviii</sup>, **Plate 3.10**, show that the circular turret on the east corner of the house was a key feature in the view along the main approach to the forecourt on the north side.

In October 1901, Thomas Mawson provided a design drawing for the garden for Mr Barlow (**Figure 3.14**)<sup>xix</sup>. He specified a complex design with expensive features including much terracing and an imposing, formal, water body, some 160m long, canalizing the river. Colonnaded pavilions at either end of the canal, reminiscent of the mid-C19

again sold, in 1907, to Mrs Randolph Steadman<sup>xvii</sup>. The Sale Particulars<sup>xx</sup> describe an extensive house with twenty-one bedrooms, six reception rooms and a billiard room. It was reached via a "well-wooded carriage drive with entrance lodge".

Lot 1, illustrated in the 1907 Sale Plan shown in **Figure 3.12**, included the pleasure grounds on the south side of the Abbey and the northern half of the parkland, south of the lake, with the kitchen garden, but not the mill pond to the east. The pleasure grounds had wide sweeping lawns, an orange house and a boat house; the lake islands were embellished with miniature gardens, and rustic footbridges and stepping stones to provide access. Land south of the lake is described in the sales particulars as parkland and is shown as having two avenues of well grown trees converging towards the lake. A 2.5 acre (1 ha) walled fruit and kitchen garden is described as having a pretty gabled and half-timbered head gardener's cottage. The Sales Plan shows a third fountain, on the largest, western, lake island.

The south half of the park was offered as a separate lot, centred on Coxhill Mount, with a third lot adjacent still further south, including Frandham Wood.

After 1918, Kearsney Abbey was sold again to Mark Purcell Mayo Collier (1857-1931) by which time the estate was further reduced to only 23 acres (9 ha). A marble stone commemorates the last member of the family, Richard Collier 1866-2011, beside one of the open culverts by the lake. Collier and his wife were childless, and Collier put the property up for sale in 1930. The grounds remained much as they were in 1907, as illustrated by the 1930s Sale Plan, **Figure 3.13**<sup>xxi</sup>.

Although the 1930s sale offered the Abbey and its grounds divided into five lots, the Ordnance Survey editions between the 1930s **Figure 3.15** and 1952, show very little change to the gardens so it is probable that the Abbey and its gardens remained in single ownership; it is possible that the sale was not completed and it stood unsold and empty for a decade. By 1938, Kearsney Abbey is described as "unoccupied"<sup>xxii</sup>.

During World War II, the house and land were requisitioned by the war department and used as the headquarters of Number 2 Searchlight Regiment.

Kearsney Abbey was purchased by Dover Corporation in 1945 and the grounds have been managed since then as a public park.

Birkenhead Park boathouse and C18 Palladian bridges at Audley End and Scampston closed the vistas along the canal.

The design is comparable with Wood, Devon, which Mawson had recently designed, although Kearsney is a little less complex. The canal pavilions were under construction by 1902.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) was perhaps the leading, and certainly the most prolific, landscape designer of his day. Several set-piece photographs of Kearsney were included in Mawson's main account of his life's work, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*, in the last two of its five editions, which appeared between 1900 and 1926. In the final edition of this seminal work, Mawson clearly still viewed this commission as a success, as he included a number of plates of the site. He explained that it was designed to provide an appropriate setting for the house, exploiting the dramatic sloping site with a series of formal terraces and a canal, the whole with associated park-like grounds, a kitchen garden, and subsidiary stables and lodges appropriate for a manufacturer's new residence in the countryside.

A family photograph of the grounds, taken almost as soon as they were completed in c. 1902-03<sup>xxvii</sup> **Plate 3.9**, show immature planting in the garden, sheltered by mature trees of the plantation at the top of the slope to the north and a tree belt alongside the Alkham Road to the south.

By 1906, Mawson's complex garden design was largely executed, (see 1906 Ordnance Survey map, **Figure 3.11**) except for minor details and variations, and it was never subsequently substantially altered. Family photographs of the garden<sup>xxviii</sup> show young yew trees planted around lawns towards the bottom of the slope. Wall climbers were starting to soften the brick terraces. The bastion garden was laid out in an intricate pattern of semi-circles. A strong belt of mature trees alongside the road screened the garden from the landscape beyond.

Following Barlow's death in June 1912, the property was immediately put up for sale. Sales particulars from September 1912 include a description and photographs **Plates 3.12, 3.13, 3.14**, depicting the garden following rapid maturing of the planting, at its zenith, in all 24.5 acres (10 ha). Mature yew hedges now enclosed the lawns flanking the tennis courts. Young fruit trees grew on the slope above. It occupied "a lovely and bracing position on a southern slope, some 200 ft above sea level. Commanding panoramic views of vast extent and beauty". Sales particulars go on to say that the gardens by the eminent landscape

<sup>xvi</sup> private collection

<sup>xvii</sup> Dover Library

<sup>xviii</sup> private collection

<sup>xix</sup> private collection

<sup>xx</sup> private collection

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Builders Form and Architectural Record* 1902, 371

<sup>xxvii</sup> private collection

<sup>xxviii</sup> private collection

gardener, Mr Mawson, were arranged most effectively in a series of terraces and flights of steps leading to the semi-circular formal garden. Lawns were provided for croquet and three sets of tennis courts. The rose garden was hedged with yew. It boasted a lily pool, and a large ornamental lake and stream with cascades and pergola, bridges, and lovely beech woods of nearly eight acres.

The “*pretty carriage drive*” was 300 yards long, its ornamental gates and massive red brick gate piers with terracotta caps, flanked by a pair of Picturesque lodges. A stately porte cochere sheltered the entrance to the house, which had a loggia on the south front; a conservatory, detached stables, and a coach / motor house. A further lodge served the stables. The walled vegetable and fruit garden and extensive ranges of glasshouses, were kept to a high standard.

The property was bought by Mr. Johnstone, a London newspaper man.

The *Gardeners’ Chronicle* reported on the garden in 1913, including a striking photo looking up the hillside to the house, similar to **Plate 3.15**. It was clearly noteworthy for its design and horticultural displays. The planting described included terraces enclosing lawns with borders of hardy herbaceous flowers; walls planted with pear trees, grafted on the quince stock; and a ‘*pretty bastion garden surrounded by a hedge of golden yew, in which are flower beds and borders*’. The gardener, Mr W G Sherlock, noted 8,000 bedding plants had been raised for the gardens, including 3,000 pelargoniums. Croquet and tennis grounds were approached by a path bordered on one side by a lavender hedge and on the other by sweet-briars (wild roses). A rose garden was enclosed by yew hedge. The kitchen garden was laid out in four rectangles, where seventy varieties of apples were grown and a central pool was spanned by a rose pergola. It contained pineries, peach houses, a plant stove, several greenhouses, heated pits and frames.

By the 1920s photographs<sup>xxx</sup> **Plate 3.13** show the bastion (or fan) garden layout had been simplified with the loss of the flower-beds in the semicircle, but it still retained its formal ornamental character. One of the gardeners later recalled his memories of this time. Seven gardeners were employed, and (unsurprisingly) much hedge cutting was needed, including golden and green yew and privet. An arboretum by the Tea House replaced the earlier maze. In woods to the west of house a tomb was put up to Coco, a dog belonging to Mrs Johnstone.

It is not clear when the Johnstone’s ownership ended: the house was later a nursing home and, in the Second World War, a military hospital.

**Figure 3.15**, the 1937 Ordnance Survey, confirms that the layout of the

gardens remained largely as Mawson’s design.

After WWII, a development company bought the whole site around 1950, which tried, unsuccessfully, to develop the whole area for housing. The main house was split into seven residential freeholds including the immediate environs of the building. Each house was given its own garden, which was fenced, on the terrace surrounding the house to the west, south and east. Subsequently, sixteen additional houses were built alongside the drive. Some structures apparently survived in the kitchen garden until at least 1960. Due to continuing pressure for development by the owner, the residents of the seven dwellings in the original main house bought additional areas of the garden, including the bastion and part of the middle terrace to its west.

The majority of the grounds of Kearsney Court (including the lowest terrace of the formal gardens, the canal and the pavilions) were acquired in 1945 by the Dover Corporation.

### 3.7 Public Parks – Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens

#### Russell Gardens

Following the acquisition of Kearsney Court, in 1947 the local authority renamed it Russell Gardens, after the councillor who was instrumental in bringing the site into public ownership.

Very few changes have been made to the layout, mainly to accommodate public use. Additional access from the Alkham Road was been created, providing a link with Kearsney Abbey grounds. Some minor changes to the path layout within the gardens also seem to have occurred, notably the creation of an access ramp and handrail to the north of the eastern pavilion. New paths have also been created to connect Russell Gardens with Bushy Rough which is also now open to public access.

To the north-east of the tennis courts, a small kiosk was installed to serve as a pay-point, while to the north-west, public WCs were installed. These are now closed.

The most significant change, in terms of the gardens as a whole, has been inevitable change to the planting design, including the loss of the original flower beds and the grassing over of the terraces in the 1950s; changes to the layout of the enclosing yew hedges; loss of shrubberies, particularly around the boundaries, and loss of ornamental planting on the terraces.

The white-painted timber summerhouse or tea house on the lower

slopes was burnt down in the 1980s and replaced with a modern brick pergola, constructed by the Men of the Trees. A record of the building was made by Dover District Council when proposed improvements were contemplated prior to its loss. figureXXXX

A children’s play area has also been installed, on the site of the lower croquet lawn.

#### Kearsney Abbey

An aerial photograph of Kearsney Abbey house in the early - mid-1950s<sup>xxx</sup> shows the house set in its immediate grounds, the orangery to the west a ruin, and the high wall along the roadside boundary.

In 1959, Kearsney Abbey house was demolished due to dry-rot, leaving only the west wing, formerly the billiard room, standing; this is now the park café.

Like Russell Gardens, very few changes have occurred since the grounds came into public ownership, and such as there are, have primarily been to accommodate public use. The old house site has been laid out to accommodate car parking, a WC block, and a small maintenance yard. A practical path was installed to provide a direct connection between the café, the bridge over the lake and the entrance at Coxhill Gardens.

An open air theatre was constructed to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951, with a production of ‘*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, **Plate 3.5**. This survives as a horseshoe shaped mound to the south of the lake, but the enclosing hedges have been removed

Footbridges to the lake islands were shown on the OS plans until 2010; these have now gone. The culvert to the south of the lake has suffered progressive collapse since the middle of the C19; there are now five open sections which have been embellished over the years with garden seats and ornamental trees and shrubs, **Plate 3.6**.

The kitchen garden has been developed for residential use, including a nursing home, but its high brick walls survive at least in part and form a section of the present day park boundary; the gateway between the old kitchen garden (in the north-west corner), and the park grounds, can still be used by residents of the adjacent nursing home.

The mill pond to the east of the Abbey lake, has silted up; where the water once came right to the northern boundary, is an unmade path, very boggy in parts. This area is now managed for wildlife. At its eastern end are the ruins of brickwork and footings, which is all that

<sup>xxx</sup> private collection

<sup>xxx</sup> See Fotoflitter images, copyright protected.

remains of River Paper Mill.

A children's play area, suitable for younger children, was installed towards the north-east corner of the park, which, although quite new is already showing signs of intensive wear.

Since coming into public ownership, both parks have received a generous number of memorial trees, a practice which has broadened the species range and also altered the original spatial layout and design.