

INFLUENCES SHAPING THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE OF THE SEVENOAKS AREA SINCE *c.*1600

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The former market town of Sevenoaks with its surrounding villages and hamlets remains a largely rural area of west Kent despite being within 30 miles, and only 35 minutes by rail, from central London. That the area has retained much of its pleasing environment is due in part to its geographical position, to aristocratic influence, and more recently to actions by central government to secure the green belt around London. This essay looks at how the landscape history, or the human landscape – a geographers' term to distinguish the actions of people on the landscape from those of natural processes – of the Sevenoaks area has been shaped and made over the last four hundred years. The father of the study of English landscape history was W.G. Hoskins, a redoubtable foe of twentieth-century developments which he either ignored or vigorously denounced in his several influential books.¹ His colleague, and successor to the Hatton Chair of English Local History at Leicester University, was Sevenoaks-born Alan Everitt. It is to him that we owe many of the most imaginative ideas about the evolution of Kent's early human landscape.² As Everitt said in one of his essays, 'The landscape history of Kent is a vast subject [and] ... I am still baffled by many of its complexities'.³ With that warning in mind this essay is restricted to a short period and a small area of west Kent. Confining the focus to the 'modern' period avoids repeating what has been well explained by earlier scholars and concentrates on recent centuries, especially the twentieth which has been largely ignored by historians of landscape.⁴

The natural landscape

Although many people who live in Sevenoaks may not have recognised it as a hill town it is indeed just that, standing at a height of over 600 feet [190m], a rare occurrence in England. This is evident by the steady climb of one mile from the two railway stations at Tub's Hill and the Bat and Ball to the town centre, from where it is possible to look northwards

down both main roads over the Vale of Holmesdale towards the line of the North Downs on the horizon. Sevenoaks stands on Chartland composed of Lower Greensand, and the pre nineteenth-century parish boundaries ran southwards down the sandstone scarp into the clay Weald. The North Downs, the Vale of Holmesdale, the Chartland, and the Weald constitute *pays* or regions, areas distinct from each other not only in geology and soils but also in pre nineteenth-century patterns of human settlement and economic livelihood.

The North Downs is a region of chalk uplands with a longish dip slope leading up to a south-facing steep scarp slope. The highest point locally is atop Westerham Hill at 825 feet [250m]. The chalk is overlaid with bands of clay and flint so that soils are poor and difficult to plough; flints turned iron ploughs and also tear the tyres of modern tractors. Much of the area was, and still is, heavily wooded, unlike the generally bare South Downs. The dip slope is wooded with dry valleys, while the scarp slope is also wooded and too steep for arable farming. Agricultural practice on the Downs was constrained by poor soils, the elevation, a shorter growing season, and winds, so that it was an area of limited settlement and early enclosure with scattered farms mainly given to sheep and corn. The North Downs also has a distinctive natural vegetation of hawthorn, blackthorn, wild rose, wild clematis ('old man's beard'), and a range of trees such as oak, elm, beech, ash, hazel, and elder.⁵

At the foot of the North Downs scarp is the narrow Vale of Holmesdale formed of Gault Clay. The River Darent, running eastwards from Westerham and then turning north through a gap in the chalk Downs, is fed by small tributaries descending from the Chartland to the south. The narrow belt of Gault Clay overlaid with alluvial and gravel deposits provided fertile soil, the whole Darent valley being 'recognized as one of the earliest cradles of English settlement in Kent'.⁶ Villages were established along the spring line of the Downs at places such as Chevening, Otford, and Kemsing, while the Darent gap through the Downs provided an easier north-south route in early times and also for the first railway to Sevenoaks.

To the south of the Vale of Holmesdale is the Chartland, a belt of Lower Greensand which in the Sevenoaks area is no more than three or four miles wide and steadily rises to a ridge overlooking the Weald; the highest point at Toy's Hill is at 800 feet [245m]. Originally a wooded region of relatively poor soils the place names often indicate its agrarian poverty: Seal Chart, Brasted Chart, 'chart' meaning poor, sterile or infertile soil; Salter's Heath, and Sevenoaks, Goathurst, and Fawke Commons. In the past it was an area of woodland activities: firewood, coppicing, and also pannage for pigs. The Chartland may have been an unpromising site for the town of Sevenoaks, lacking a good water supply, but it was near to adequate building materials in the form of outcrops of hard grey Kentish rag, a limestone embedded in the Greensand.

The Weald, an extensive area of clay and heavily wooded – cf. the German word *wald* (forest) – extended southwards from the foot of the Greensand scarp. Wealden soils were heavy, difficult to plough, and the region became primarily permanent pasture with orchards and hops on the better drained soils. The heavy clay, once described as ‘cement in summer and soup in winter’, made access to and within the Weald relatively difficult until the coming of the railway in the 1840s.

Building materials

Local availability of suitable building materials and the cost of transport largely determined the form and construction of buildings. Before the railways most buildings used locally available materials.⁷ Throughout Sevenoaks parish timber was widely used for the frames of many houses until the nineteenth century. Timber-clad weather boarding, sometimes with an upper storey hung with nailed tiles, was a common feature especially in the Weald. Barns and many farm outhouses were also built of timber. For example, many of the older houses in the upper part of Sevenoaks were originally constructed of timber but have had later additions of brick and tile façades. The Downland provided lime for mortar and plastering, and also for burning for fertiliser; lumps of chalk, locally known as ‘clunch’, were used for in-filling of brick walls. The dramatic white scar on the Downs below Polhill, is the site of a lime works begun in the eighteenth century; smaller quarries can be easily identified at other sites along the Downs.⁸ Chalk was also carried down in to the Wealden area to be burnt in limekilns near the village of Weald and then used on fields. The ubiquitous flint, regularly removed from ploughed fields until the early twentieth century, often by women and children called ‘flint grubbers’, was a heavy and highly durable misshapen stone of varying sizes, which was difficult to knap and square. Since Roman times flints were used for rough walling. They were heavy to transport and rarely used in construction work more than a mile or two from where they were found, although smaller flints were used fairly widely for road making. As a result nearly all buildings with flint walls are to be seen on the Downs and adjacent areas.

Sevenoaks, astride the Greensand, had outcrops of ragstone which were relatively easy to quarry and work. The primary use of dressed stone was for prestigious and costly buildings such as Knole, St Nicholas church, the eighteenth-century almshouses in the upper part of the town, and also other later Anglican and nonconformist churches, as well as walls around gentry estates such as Knole and the surviving wall to Jeffrey Amherst’s eighteenth-century Montreal Park. Larger stones were invariably recycled. The widespread use of rag, for example on many late nineteenth-century houses, indicates that it was readily available. When St Julian’s was built

in 1819-20 ragstone for the house was quarried within the grounds of the estate. There were many similar small quarries; some are obvious and identified by place or street names, for example Stonepitts, east of Seal, and Quarry Hill off Seal Hollow Road, while others are now little more than depressions left in the surface of the land. One of the largest modern ragstone quarries was at Dry Hill, to the west of Bessels Green. It was opened by the district council in 1921 to provide material for road building and worked until 1951, a small railway being used to move the stone. Today it is a picnic site owned and managed by the district council. Smaller pieces of ragstone were used for road making. Within the Greensand are small pieces of brown, hard 'iron stone' which have been used mainly for paths, for example in the Shambles; they are rarely large enough for walls although a few exist, for example in Hartsland.

It is not known when deposits of soft sand within the sandstone area were first exploited for commercial purposes, but these were used to make mortar and later bricks. The large scale Ordnance Survey maps from 1869 onwards indicate the position of working and also worked-out sand pits. Three of the largest pits were located on the northern edge of the Greensand: one on the main road to Maidstone where the Sevenoaks Town Council Office now stands which was being worked in 1869; a second on the west side of Golding Road, developed after 1870, which became the site of a garage and then houses; and a third and more recent pit next to Pontoise Close which was created after the sale of the Bradbourne estate in the late 1920s and is now a small park and playground from which many children return home with their clothes stained with yellow sand. Gravel was also excavated on the northern side of the town within the Vale of Holmesdale, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries mainly for use in road making. Smaller deposits were soon worked out.

The manufacture and use of bricks increased from the sixteenth century onwards. The most substantial building of that period was the palace at Otford, built largely of brick for Archbishop Warham in the early sixteenth century, grand in design but rapid in decay when soon neglected. A common practice was to make bricks from suitable clay found on or near to the site of a proposed building.⁹ The fields named Upper and Lower Brickfields, to the south of the town, indicate that this was a site of local manufacture; a brick works lay behind the *White Hart Inn* until, and perhaps beyond, the Second World War. On the Downs, clay overlaying the chalk provided material for the new brick farm houses and outbuildings constructed in the eighteenth century.¹⁰ In Holmesdale brickearth deposits within the belt of Gault Clay have been exploited since the sixteenth century. Hand-made bricks were produced north of Sevenoaks along the Otford road where there were several brickfields. With the coming of the railway, the South East Railway Company bought

adjoining land in Dunton Green in order to produce bricks for its own use. Local yellow stocks were produced in the late nineteenth century and continue to be in demand. The last brick works, at Greatness, closed in the late twentieth century.

The demand for bricks grew with the rapid growth of building work in the second half of the nineteenth century. Smaller brick works continued to hand-make bricks using local timber for fuel; newer and larger works tended to be mechanised with coal fired ovens. The unit price of bricks and tiles fell as production soared, the brick tax in place from 1784 to 1850 seemingly making little difference to demand. Many of the new buildings in Sevenoaks in the second half of the nineteenth century were built of brick, as were the oast houses (some were built of rag, as at Kettleshill Farm), with clay tiles for roofs and walls. The coming of the railways in the 1860s increased the demand for bricks and also changed the pattern of the market although locally produced bricks and tiles long continued to have a price advantage over the mass produced Flettons of the Midlands. The railway also gave a cost advantage to imported roofing slates, mainly from north Wales, over local clay tiles. Many of the houses built in Sevenoaks after 1870, whether large villas or the close terraces in Hartsland and the centre of the town, had roofs of durable dark grey slate.

Rivers and streams

The northern boundary of the old parish of Sevenoaks abuts the River Darent. The Darent is fed by numerous small streams that flow from the spring line along the foot of the Downs. In medieval times the Darent was navigable by small shallow bottomed boats up to Riverhead. The river was also a formidable obstacle in the rainy season when it was liable to flood surrounding meadows. In low lying areas the Darent could change its course. At Chipstead, Longford, Otford, and Shoreham there were bridges; both Longford and Otford had raised walk ways to enable people to reach the bridge when the river flooded. In pre-industrial times the flow of water was considerably more all the year round than in the twentieth century. Modern domestic and industrial demand for water, and the use to which it has been put, for example, sewage disposal, has resulted in the lowering of the water table and a reduced flow of water into local water courses. In the late 1990s the Darent almost dried-up and was only 'rescued' by the Environment Agency pumping additional water into the river course and changed extraction rights. Nevertheless, the river and its tributaries, some of the latter such as the Brad now culverted, continue to burst their banks. Despite anti-flooding measures being put in place, heavy rainfall led to serious flooding in 1968, in October 2000, and December 2002 and January 2003. The battle against the river is continual and costly.

The Darent takes shape at Westerham, at a height of 330 feet [100m], and in its 30-mile course falls steadily to sea level where it enters the Thames. Both the Darent and its tributaries have been exploited as a source of water power for the last millennium. At the peak of its use in the eighteenth century there was on average a mill every two miles along the length of the river. In the Sevenoaks area, from Sundridge to Otford, the river falls 65 feet [20m] in a distance of only five miles, while on some of the tributary streams mill ponds were created to ensure a regular flow of water. There were mill ponds at Greatness on both sides of the main road to Maidstone, one in existence from the sixteenth century on the Guzzlebrook to the east of Childsbridge Lane, Seal, and a further pond to work the mill in Whitley Forest which may date from Domesday. At Sundridge the site of the former large mill pond close to the northern side of the A25 can be easily identified. Most mills in the Sevenoaks area ground corn, although they could be put to other uses. The stream at Greatness, supplied by a local spring, worked what was probably a fulling mill in the seventeenth century (there was also one on the Brad) but by the late eighteenth century it had become a silk mill owned by the Nouaille family; in 1816 it was employing 80 people, mainly women and children. The mill at Sundridge and those further down river at Shoreham and Eynsford continued to produce paper into the twentieth century.

Early settlement

The earliest known settlements in the Sevenoaks area are at Otford, site of a Bronze Age burial ground and an Iron Age hill fort. Otford, a crossing point on the Darent, a river with an ancient name, is an old settlement as are Shoreham and Eynsford further north along the valley. Romano-British villas were built along the Darent valley, most notably at Lullingstone. Further north, in Holmesdale, there were other permanent settlements by Anglo-Saxon times. The writ of the archbishop's Otford estate extended south into the Chartland, the present site of Sevenoaks which then was wooded land used for rough grazing. The dual pattern of mother churches in Holmesdale with ancillary churches and chapels in the Chartland can be found extensively in Kent is repeated along this geological belt in Kent. The Chartland was also crossed by droveways, some of which may date back to Romano-British times, used by herders for the seasonal movement of their swine from Holmesdale up the Chartland and down in to the Wealden area for pannage – to root among the forest undergrowth. Some of these ancient droveways can still be seen, for example at Kettleswell, a deep track worn through the sandstone ridge and descending to the Weald at Underriver.

According to Knocker, Sevenoaks began as a market place well before the Conquest, at a junction where the road from the south divided with

one branch going north-west to London, the other north to Dartford.¹¹ There are strong indications that Sevenoaks had a pre-Conquest and non-prescriptive weekly market (that is, without a royal grant), although the earliest record is 1281. An early fifteenth-century account places the market on an area known as 'le Vyne', which may be the modern area of The Vine. Within this small cluster of buildings linked by narrow alley-ways was the shambles where animals were slaughtered and meat and fish sold. A church followed the market and then a manor. The earliest reference to a church and priest at Sevenoaks is in the *Textus Roffensis* of 1120, but a place of worship undoubtedly preceded that date. The east end of the building was, and still is, within three metres of the present main road, and this, along with its dedication to St Nicholas the patron saint of travellers, may indicate its origin. Everitt persuasively suggests that St Nicholas began as a shrine standing on one of the several droveways used for the passage of swine and other animals being driven into the Wealden area for seasonal pannage.¹²

The parish probably dates from the post-Conquest period; it was long and narrow, similar to neighbouring parishes, stretching for five miles from Longford on the River Darent up onto the Chartland and down into the Low Weald as far south as Hale Oak. Freeholders cleared sites on the Chartland and by the thirteenth century manors had developed at Knole (1281), Black Charles (1292) and Blackhall (1313), with subsequent sub-manors to the west and the east. In the Low Wealden part of the parish by the tenth century land had been permanently cleared and settled to form a patchwork of small fields interspersed by wooded shaws.¹³ The largest estate to develop in late medieval times was Knole.¹⁴

Sevenoaks parish c.1600 - c.1750s

In the early seventeenth century the parish of Sevenoaks encompassed an area of 6,800 acres, over 10 square miles. The small town clustered round the distinctive 'Y' shaped junction pointing north where the road from Rye on the coast via Tonbridge divided. The Rye road is first shown in Richard Grafton's road book of 1571. One hundred-and-twenty years later Celia Fiennes described her journey across the weald, 'a sad deep clay way after wett', through Sevenoaks and up the scarp slope of the Downs, 'a great hill called Madam Scott [Madamscourt] Hill so steepe as seldome is either rode down or up, and few coaches but gains the top of it by compass round it, which is steep enough'.¹⁵ The road crossed the river Darent at Chipstead and also at Longford, although Lambarde also mentions that there was a bridge at Sundridge. From the top of the Downs the road to London passed through Knockholt and on to Farnborough. The old road from Sevenoaks to Dartford crossed Seal Hollow Road diagonally at the present A25 towards Childsbridge Lane from where it went north up the Downs via Romney Street to Eynsford and Farningham.¹⁶

The majority of the population of the town, numbering perhaps 800 people in the 1660s, were poor.¹⁷ The largest and most solid buildings were the parish church of St Nicholas, in appearance very similar to what it is today, the great house at Knole, and the houses of the lesser gentry. These were constructed of ragstone although brick was widely used. For example, in the upper part of the High Street stood the seventeenth-century brick-built Chantry and The Red House of 1686, while beyond the town boundary was Bradbourne Farm, on the north side of Bradbourne Vale Road, also built of brick. The homes of the more prosperous were increasingly built of more durable materials such as brick and ragstone with clay tiles on walls and roofs; those of the poor were made of timber with thatched roofs. The town's water supply came from springs, wells, and pumps.

The major imposing building was due east of St Nicholas, the recently extended great private house of Knole, its garden surrounded by a newly built ragstone wall, the whole estate forming a fenced deer park exceeding 1,000 acres. The process of extending and consolidating Knole Park had gone on for centuries, and continued into the nineteenth century. Not only did the aristocratic inhabitants of Knole, from 1550 onwards also Lords of the Manor, wield economic and political influence over the town, but their control of an emparked estate to the east served to restrain the way that Sevenoaks developed in the next three hundred years. Another new, but considerably smaller deer park, was the 120 acre estate of Sevenoaks Park, its entrance at the southern end of the High street (the present entrance to Park Grange) where the road to Tonbridge turns abruptly east to skirt the property. Beyond the town but within the parish were other imposing houses and accompanying estates: Kippington, built of brick, to the west, the Lambard's land at Panthurst Park to the south, Bradbourne and Greatnesse to the north.

Economic activities were overwhelmingly agrarian, the community to a large extent self-sufficient although the Rye road served as a conduit for trade goods.¹⁸ Kent was an area of old enclosure and by the seventeenth century much of the Sevenoaks area was hedged and fenced. This can be seen from an estate map dated 1630 of Thomas Lambard's Panthurst Park – 424 acres of land enclosed by hedges, most of the fields illustrated by drawings of domestic animals.¹⁹ Gavelkind, the system of partible inheritance prevalent across the county, encouraged the division of land and also its enclosure, but rarely to the extent that economic realities were ignored. An exceptional instance occurred at Chevening in 1603 when three brothers received small plots of land as their inheritance.²⁰ The few remaining areas of unenclosed land, such as common on the Chartland, were steadily encroached upon by adjoining landowners, usually the well-to-do, or squatted on by the landless poor in marginal lands especially on parish borders. The lower parts of Holmesdale along

the Darent formed seasonally flooded water meadows used as pasture for livestock. Higher and drier fertile areas were given over to arable farming. Agriculture on the Chartland was largely confined to rough grazing with a few arable fields including hops. The Chartland also produced timber, for example ash for hop poles, while sweet chestnut was coppiced for use as fencing, a practice that still continues. By 1650 the City of London church St Botolph's without Bishopsgate had bought some 80 acres of land that stretched from Bligh's Meadow with its accompanying farm house, then on the southern limits of Sevenoaks, down the northern slope to where the main railway station now is located. The land was mainly rough grazing with an annual income just sufficient to clothe a few poor men of the London parish.²¹ In the Weald below the sandstone scarp small farms stood among relatively small fields and pieces of woodland, a good example being Polebrook Farm just beyond the parish boundary.²² These farms were largely self-sufficient producing little surplus for an external market, although large timber was in demand for shipbuilding. The great problem was the inaccessibility of the area, especially in the winter months. The mid-seventeenth century was a time of slow population growth with little pressure on land.

c.1750 - c.1840

In 1800 the shape and structure of Sevenoaks was little changed from that of one hundred years earlier. The street plan was similar although the top of the High Street now had a substantial row of almshouses constructed of ragstone opposite St Nicholas church. Hasted in the 1790s described the town as 'remarkable for the many good houses throughout it, inhabited by persons of genteel fashion and fortune'.²³ His view was confined to that of the social elite who increased in number during the eighteenth century. Several aristocratic and lesser gentry estates with substantial houses were remodelled or built beyond the town limits after 1750. The largest were Lord Camden's Palladian Montreal House built after 1760, Kippington rebuilt in the 1780s, and Wilderness and Chevening Park both extended respectively for the Marquess of Camden and for the Earl of Stanhope.²⁴ Among the smaller gentry houses was St Julian's, built for the Herries cousins in 1819-20 on a site below the sandstone ridge in a position commanding a fine view south over the weald.²⁵

The population of the whole parish in 1801 was 2,640 (the town 1,403) a growth of 75 per cent in the past century. Farm land and agricultural practice surrounded and intruded upon the town. Most men, women and also children continued to be employed in work related to agriculture, some often pursuing several jobs at a time on farms and smallholdings, in brewing, milling, and tanning. A growing number were also employed in the various services offered by a small town astride the main road



Fig. 1 Sevenoaks from the map of the Hundred of Codshead in Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (1797).

to the growing spa at Tunbridge Wells and the coast. Enclosure of common and waste land continued, a process made easier by the General Enclosure Act 1801, although loss of customary rights to graze animals and collect firewood pushed many impoverished agricultural labourers deeper into poverty. Under the 1801 Act the Manor Court of Sevenoaks and Knole presided over the further enclosure of parts of Sevenoaks Common, Bowzell Common, Gallows Common between St John's Hill and Bradbourne Road, and areas of waste in Sevenoaks Weald.²⁶ A few areas on the Chartland were enclosed in this period sometimes by squatters, although the advantage invariably lay with landowners who held title deed to adjoining land – for example at Brasted Chart and Toys Hill in 1801. Hasted frequently described the North Downs as having 'poor' and 'barren' 'cledgy soil', an upland landscape that was 'dreary' and 'wild'. He dismissively described Halstead, the parish on the Downs north of Sevenoaks, as having soil of 'either chalk or a stiff clay, much covered with flints ... a lonely unfrequented place, having nothing further worth mentioning in it'. Cobbett writing in 1822, turned his view south recollecting that below the Downland scarp the Vale of Holmesdale was 'a most beautiful and rich valley ... with rich cornfields and fine trees', while Sevenoaks itself was 'a very fine place ... the land appears to be good'.²⁷ In the same period the painter Samuel Palmer romanticised the woods and orchards, hop gardens and moonlit sheaves of corn of the area.

The years from the 1750s to the 1830s were marked by considerable changes to agriculture. Flints were increasingly cleared from Downland fields and used for building;²⁸ estates were extended and consolidated such as that of the Herries in the Weald; new agricultural methods were applied by progressive farmers; labourer's cottages were rebuilt; and arable land was extended as corn prices rose. Timber was grown for ship-building and other purposes, Herries bemoaning the fact in the 1830s that his southerly neighbour Squire Woodgate had marked over 600 fine oaks for felling, some of which probably went to the Royal Navy dockyards at Chatham.

Communications between Sevenoaks and neighbouring towns improved during the eighteenth century and heavy goods could now be moved more easily. This was not only due to new turnpikes but also the construction of locks on the Medway which made the river navigable for barges up to wharves at Tonbridge. The first turnpike, authorised in 1709, created a better surfaced and regularly maintained road from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells to Sevenoaks. Its course closely followed the existing road including the curve on Riverhill as it descended to the Weald, a feature shown on the Panthurst Park map of 1630. The new road improved the flow of traffic to and from the Sussex coast, although the intractable clays of the Weald continued to restrict movement along tributary roads and lanes. A further turnpike from Sevenoaks to Farnborough was agreed

in 1749 which resulted in a regrading and realignment of the steep and difficult climb up the Downs at Morant's Court Road/Star Hill. Until the mid-eighteenth century the east-west route along Holmesdale between Riverhead and the northern end of Seal Hollow Road appears to have been little more than a track for pack animals. As a result wheeled traffic had to make a detour into Sevenoaks and rejoin the east-west route via Seal Hollow Road. This inconvenience was addressed in 1765 when an east-west turnpike was created from Reigate to Wrotham.²⁹ This intersected with a new turnpike built along the valley of the Darent to Farningham and Dartford. Flooding and marshy land on the road at Greatness, led to a higher road being constructed to avoid using the dip of the stream. Similar improvements were made on the Tonbridge-Sevenoaks turnpike, for example a bridge being built just south of Sevenoaks to avoid a low-lying area adjacent to Knole Park, a structure still in use although not obvious to most modern motorists.

Improvement and re-alignment of roads was continually in hand in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was not uncommon for powerful landowners to enclose land and divert roads for their personal advantage. In the first decade of the eighteenth century Thomas Lambard diverted the Tonbridge road to prevent it running immediately in front of his house Park Place (now the site of Park Grange), hence the sharp curve to the present road as it leaves the town. Lord Amherst in 1764 'turned the road further from his house' at Montreal Park, and 20 years later Lord Stanhope succeeded in closing the old Rye road that ran between Chevening Place and the parish church and up the Downs. Economic use of horse drawn traffic required better road surfaces and easier gradients. Between 1834-38 the turnpike road up the Downs was rebuilt to the east at Polhill providing a longer but easier gradient to the top and then a straight road to Badger's Mount, the present A21. The old road through Knockholt continues to bear the name of the London Road.

c.1840s - 1950

For much of the nineteenth century Sevenoaks town centre remained fairly compact, a cluster of houses, inns, and shops at the junction of the two main roads with numerous yards, inter-connecting alleys and footpaths.³⁰ In 1851 the local economy was stagnant and the population of the town numbered *c.*3,000, that of the parish 4,870. Over the next few decades, and especially after the arrival of the railways in the 1860s, the economy revived and the population steadily increased, reaching 8,000 in 1881, nearly 11,000 in 1911, and over 13,000 in 1931. Through the nineteenth-century Sevenoaks remained essentially a rural market town buttressed by agricultural-based industries, but with an increasing number of shops, banks, public houses, and other services for the growing population,

some of whom were commuters to London. The tithe survey of 1841 showed most agricultural land as pasture, with the majority of arable land in the northern part of the parish. There were also orchards and hops, production of the latter declining steeply in the late nineteenth century. Bligh's in the High Street, with its adjoining meadow and brewery, was a working farm until the 1880s. A regular stock market was held in the town although its position was increasingly challenged by larger cattle markets down the railway at Tonbridge and Ashford. Several nurseries stood within the town limits in the 1870s, two surviving until the mid twentieth century. The number of people engaged in agriculture declined with rural depression in the late nineteenth century. This was given added impetus by low wages and growing mechanisation, especially on arable farms. A certain amount of farm land, orchard, and woodland was surrendered to house building, although some also came from the break-up of private estates. During the First and Second World Wars old areas of pasture in the Weald and on the North Downs were ploughed to provide wheat for the domestic market. Little if any historical research has been done on farm size, land use, and rural production in the Sevenoaks district during this period. However, there exists a rich collection of data which would enable this to be done: the tithe surveys of the 1830s-40s, private estate papers, the Land Valuation Survey under Lloyd George's Finance Act of 1909-10, official war time reports, the Land Utilisation Surveys of the 1930s, and the National Farm Survey of 1941-43.

Local corn milling by water power, or in the windmill near the present Eardley Road (demolished *c.*1890), steadily declined after the 1860s as cheaper foreign wheat entered the country and was mass-processed at new mills on deep river-side locations. Brewing, formerly undertaken in inns and beer houses, by the end of the nineteenth century was largely concentrated in three breweries, two in the centre of the town and a recently opened one in Crampton's Road near the Bat and Ball railway station. Another major industry was brick making, local demand being stimulated by the great increase in house building after the 1860s. A related industry was quarrying of various materials for building and road making. Service industries grew to meet the demands of an expanding population; these included shops, which by 1900 lined the two main roads, and a range of smaller commercial workshops. Many houses facing the main street, for example Suffolk Terrace in the Dartford Road, were converted with shop windows added at street level. When silk crepe production at the Nouaille's Greatness mill ceased in 1828 the only other factory production in the area was in the valley of the Darent at Sundridge and Shoreham where rag-based paper manufacture used water power, later supplemented by steam, and at the brick fields on the Otford Road.

A significant piece of building activity took place in the 1840s-50s before the coming of the railway. Daniel Grover, a local builder, owned 13

acres of land one mile north of the town adjoining St John's Hill and near to the recently opened town gas works in Hitchen Hatch Lane. Between 1841 and 1851 this site was developed as a working class community, with a public house and a small Baptist chapel, for 350 people many of whom were employed in the local brickworks on the Otford Road or within the town itself. People referred to it as the 'village', a title still occasionally used by older residents. On the other side of St John's Hill a row of terraced working class houses was built in Golding Road in mid-century. In the early 1850s the St John's area was bought by the National Freehold Land Society and apportioned as building plots for sale. Roads were laid out, a few villas built plus some terraced housing, but the sale of land was slow and only accelerated after the second railway line reached Tub's Hill. Separate working class areas at a distance from Sevenoaks satisfied the elite who dominated the affairs of the town. Their intent was to reduce the slum properties in the town centre with their noise and smells. As larger houses were gradually sold off for housing development, covenants were imposed to prevent working class housing being built in specific areas, for example on the Vine Court estate in the mid 1870s. The liberal-minded Jacksons, father and son, covertly bought land just to the west of the town centre and built superior working class dwellings in Lime Tree Walk complete with a temperance hotel in the late 1870s. In the next decade and a half other small estates of working class red-brick terraces were built to the east and the west of the town centre.

The first railway to influence Sevenoaks was the line built in 1841-2 across the Weald from Redhill to Tonbridge and on to the east Kent coast.³¹ Landowners and residents in Sevenoaks, 'those who will derive the greatest benefit', were among the first to campaign for an extension of the railways from Sydenham via Otford to Maidstone.³² The first railway line came to Sevenoaks in 1862 built by the London Chatham and Dover Railway Company. This was the easiest and cheapest route, a spur from Swanley (i.e. Sevenoaks Junction) south up the Darent valley to a station at Bat and Ball, one mile from Sevenoaks. As a hill town there was never going to be a station in the centre of the town. A second and more expensive line built by the rival South Eastern Railway Company followed in 1868 which ran directly from Lewisham via Orpington through a tunnel in the North Downs. As it approached Sevenoaks at the Tub's Hill station the line ran alternately in cuttings or atop a 35ft (10m) high embankment, with occasional bridges, which effectively divided old patterns of travel and communication. The line south out of Sevenoaks towards Tonbridge followed a deep valley to the west of the town and then went into a lengthy tunnel through the sandstone ridge, beneath the town (its course marked by brick air shafts) to emerge two-and-a-half miles further on in the Weald.³³ In 1869 the two stations were linked by

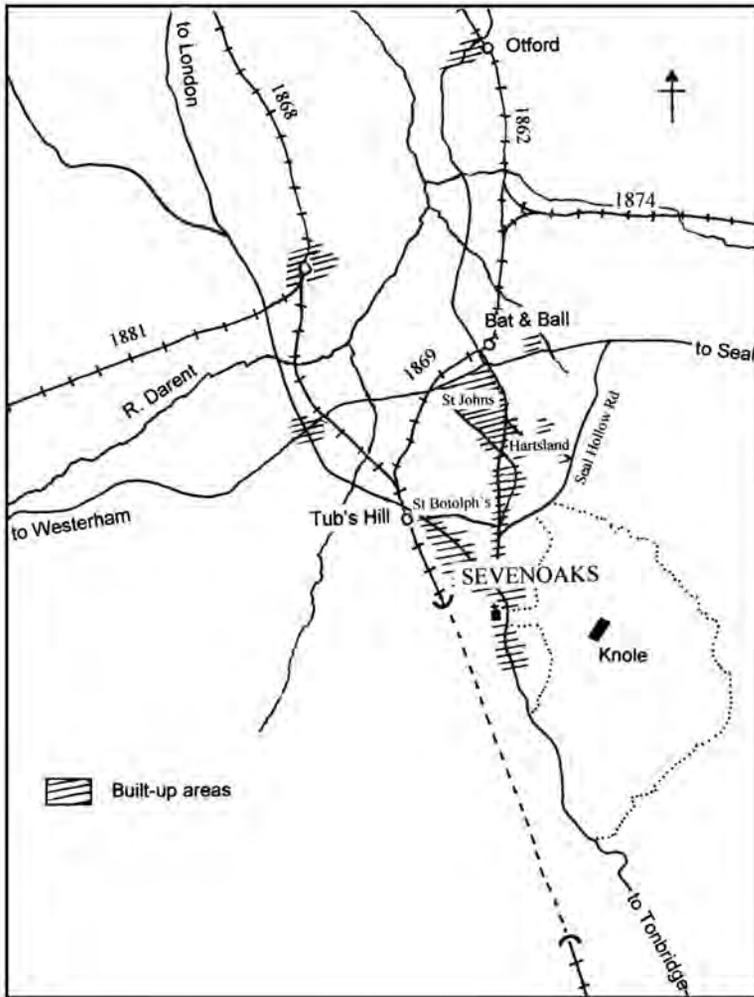


Fig. 2 Sevenoaks c.1890.

a short line that provided, by 1874, a direct line to Maidstone. A further railway was built in 1881 west from Dunton Green along Holmesdale to Westerham. At Shoreham a spur to the railway was added to supply Wilmot's mill with rag brought from London, and also a shorter line to serve the new gas works opened at Cramptons Road in 1869.

The coming of the railway brought radical change to the town and to a certain extent to the Sevenoaks landscape. The new line to Tonbridge

divided the Kippington area. The building process also brought temporary changes as a large camp of railway navvies worked its way south along the line of construction.³⁴ In cutting the tunnel through the sandstone ridge the labourers struck a supply of fresh water which flooded the operations, temporarily halted work, and bankrupted the construction company. This commercial misfortune was of great benefit to the town in that it provided it with a new and regular source of water. Until then local water came from springs, wells, and standpipes in the two main streets. A pumping station was built at the foot of Oak Lane (an area that occasionally flooded and where local people skated in winter) and a reservoir on the Tonbridge Road.

The arrival of the two railway lines in the 1860s gradually transformed the physical shape and the economy of Sevenoaks. Two new public houses were built at both the Bat and Ball and at the foot of Tub's Hill. Near Tub's Hill station the course of the London road was raised, banked, and graded to meet the bridge over the railway. Within a short time railway sidings were put in and coal merchants with their yards leased sites. Piles of coal and other fuels remained a common sight at Tub's Hill station until the 1980s by which time changes in demand and supply brought about their demise.³⁵ In response to the opening of the two railway lines new building land became available. Around the Bat and Ball station building plots with planned roads west of St John's Hill came on the market in the late 1860s. Further building development also took place east of St John's Hill in the Hollybush area where the Freehold Property Investment Association had bought 22 acres of land which was 'plotted out' in 1876-7.³⁶ On the northern side of the Seal road, the present A25, several roads of terraced houses were constructed in the 1880s on part of the old Greatness estate. During the partial sale of that estate in the mid 1860s, Thomas Crampton, the railway contractor, secured 81 acres which became a small industrial area with brick fields, an extended gas works, brewery, and working class housing.

The expectation of some contemporaries that the railway would result in a new demand for building land was not always realised and the development of new housing was often a relatively slow process. A good number of substantial brick villas were built after the 1870s on new roads to the south of Tubs Hill station, on Tubs Hill itself, Granville Road and South Park, where there were 'good residences ... principally inhabited by the families of London merchants'³⁷ and the adjoining streets. At the same time the trustees of the St Botolph's estate failed to sell leased building plots along the wide road they had had constructed running from the station up to The Vine. For 30 years the road was a financial burden to the trustees; leases could not be sold and few houses were built.³⁸ After 1860 the owners of the Bradbourne estate began selling off parcels of land. Sixty-four acres between the railway and Hitchen Hatch Lane went

to two local landowners who built new roads – Bradbourne Park Road, Mount Harry Road, and Woodside Road – and sold off plots where house building began in the 1870s.³⁹ Many of these houses were substantial family homes, when families were larger, and often with three floors to provide accommodation for live-in servants. At the end of the century near the Tubs Hill station two co-operative housing estates were built as the Sevenoaks Tenants estates. The first, adjacent to St Botolph's, was built on land with an unrestricted freehold made available by the Thompsons of Kippington. The second, Holyoake Terrace, named after 'the Owenite 'father' of co-partnership', was to the west of the railway line, and met with some resentment from the well-heeled owners of large houses in Kippington.⁴⁰

The next stage of concerted house-building occurred in the late 1920s and 1930s, a time of large scale suburban growth around London. Land was relatively cheap and large estates, either encumbered with death duties or a divided inheritance, were sold off: Chipstead, Wilderness, and Bradbourne. Commuting to London by rail became speedier once the railway was electrified in 1935. In a period of few building restrictions new houses went up rapidly: chalet bungalow style houses on generous plots of land on the Bradbourne estate south of the A25; on the Wickenden estate to the east of St John's Hill; another development close to the Otford Road; and fairly extensive development at the foot of the Downs in Otford and Kemsing in an area soon be designated as Green Belt. Few people then owned cars but 'filling stations', which first appeared in Britain in 1920, and garages to maintain motor vehicles were increasingly established in the town and along main roads. Parking restrictions were rare and invariably opposed by most shopkeepers.

The housing stock built in Sevenoaks after the 1870s was largely intended for rent or sale to specific social classes. Although new terraced houses did not always have front gardens they invariably had a back garden or yard. However, most new houses had gardens to the front and rear of the house, legal possession marked by hedges, walls and fences. Earlier the homes of the wealthy were fenced; now it became a standard practice as people with ordinary incomes bought or rented a house on a plot of land. The larger houses built in Kippington and Wilderness had gardens that often extended to several acres. Cheaper houses in less prosperous streets had smaller gardens, but even some of these were substantial. Gardens and gardening became a major leisure activity for all social classes in the twentieth century. The cultivation of gardens, both public areas provided by the local authority and those tended by house owners, gave the town a greater degree of seasonal colour and also preserved trees and open spaces, the green lungs that made the place so attractive to potential residents. Organisations founded in the mid nineteenth century actively pursued the preservation of open spaces and

footpaths giving access to the countryside. Such lobbying was further institutionalised with the founding of the National Trust in 1895 which three years later was given its first property at Toys Hill on the sandstone ridge. Fifty years later Knole house, but not the park, was given to the National Trust.

In 1870 Sevenoaks was shaped, wrote Dunlop, like an hour glass: a developed old town centre that stretched north to The Vine cricket field; then a narrow neck of green open country leading to a northern bulge of houses, most for working class people, within half-a-mile of the Bat and Ball station.⁴¹ By the end of the century that narrow neck had been developed. Also by the beginning of the twentieth century, the town had undergone a sanitary revolution with a new main drainage system installed, in the face of considerable opposition from many ratepayers. The removal of the cattle market to Tubs Hill in the early twentieth century contributed to a more pleasant and clean environment in the town centre. The major inns and hotels in the town centre had attractive landscaped garden that were advertised as overlooking pleasant open countryside.⁴² By then the system of parish administration had been drastically amended. Chapels of ease had been built at Weald (1820), Riverhead (1831), and St John's (1858), and Kippington became a separate parish with a new expensive church in 1877. With London less than an hour away by railway, Sevenoaks was increasingly attractive to 'day trippers'. And the accessibility of Knole Park, open to the public permanently after the mid 1880s, drew new residents to the town. By 1900 a trickle of commuters was going daily to London. If the railway brought these changes, it also spelt the end of certain local industries such as corn milling, paper making and, eventually brewing, industries which were subject to take-over and amalgamation and relocation to deep water ports to take advantage of imported supplies.

A modern town meant modern utilities of gas, water and, by the early twentieth century, the telephone and an electricity supply. For over a hundred years town waste was dumped in disused brick earth pits situated on the Otford Road. By the 1920s the distinctive double poles and wires of the telephone trunk route ran from Tonbridge to London along the main road. Smaller but similar systems of wires strung on poles alongside railway lines and many roads were a common sight, and remained so until the latter end of the twentieth century.⁴³ Modernity also required a police station and magistrates court, built in 1864 near The Vine. The creation of Sevenoaks as an urban district council in 1894 resulted in new offices and a fire station, in Eardley Road, along with the necessary stables for horses. Since the 1840s paupers in the area had been housed in the Union workhouse built on Chartland to the south of Sundridge, a remote place where the inmates were distant from family and friends. During the 1870s two new hospitals were opened, a cottage hospital at the bottom of St John's Hill, and Emily Jackson's voluntarily supported hip hospital; 30

years later a hospital for infectious diseases was established in Oak Lane. The first council houses were built in Greatness in 1914. A further public amenity, that also preserved open space, was the municipal cemetery opened on the Seal road at Greatness in 1909.

Along with health, poverty, and death, public leisure had also begun to put its mark on the landscape. Knole was the pre-eminent open space for the townspeople which they enjoyed by perceived customary right.⁴⁴ The Vine had long served not only as a cricket ground but also a place of entertainment and, before the secret ballot in 1872, for the local hustings; the southern end was bought by the local government board in 1893 and turned into the 'Vine Pleasure Garden', complete with band stand, open to the public at specified times. It stood adjacent to the Constitutional Hall which, with seating for 500 people, was the major venue for local concerts and drama. In the twentieth century publicly owned parks were extended, often as a result of bequests given by wealthy benefactors. In 1914 land at Hollybush, jointly purchased by the UDC and local ratepayers, became a public recreation ground. Knole Paddock came into the hands of the local council in the early 1930s. A few years earlier the 122 acre Bradbourne estate was sold off for housing, but the landscaped gardens and lakes were bought by the District Council as a public park. Over the course of the years other pieces of land had been given to the town or bought for public use. In the early 1890s Lord Hillingdon gave to the local authorities an elevated piece of land at Quaker's Hall for use as allotments. This provided garden plots for the working classes, a statutory requirement for local authorities under the recent Allotments Act.⁴⁵ Private charity from Andrew Carnegie in 1905 provided the first free library on land given by a local benefactor, and another wealthy resident gave the town its first indoor public baths in Eardley Road in 1913. Summertime swimmers could use the open air lidos and pools along the Darent at Brasted, Chipstead, Longford Mill, and Greatness, while the younger and more adventurous had recourse to mill ponds. Commercial interests were primarily behind the creation of golf courses, privately subscribed and exclusive clubs which owned and maintained extensive areas of open land; the first in Sevenoaks was the Wildernesse, founded in 1890, the second the Knole Park course opened in 1924. Another commercial undertaking, but classless in its popular appeal, was the cinema. The first opened in Sevenoaks in 1911, and others followed; at the height of cinema-going in the late 1940s there were four in the town, including the Odeon on the site of the former Royal Crown Hotel, and the Granada in the High Street, opened in 1935, complete with organ, restaurant, and uniformed commissioner.

Schools were another feature of the modern townscape. The Queen Elizabeth Grammar School provided public education for charitably supported boys throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁶

The new red brick building of Walthamstow Hall school, initially for the children of missionaries, was opened in Hollybush in 1882. After 1870 the characteristic local board and church schools, with enclosed playgrounds, were built to provide elementary education for children at Cobden Road, St Johns, Riverhead, and in Weald village. In the late nineteenth century large converted houses became private schools to train 'young gentlemen and ladies', being superseded by preparatory schools. Modern educational provision resulted in a townscape increasingly marked by dedicated buildings and green open spaces.

Fear of foreign military invasion led to a line of defences being built on the North Downs to protect London in 1889, Fort Halstead above Sevenoaks being part of that system.⁴⁷ Its subsequent use in the twentieth century as a military research establishment provided local employment at the same time helping to preserve Downland flora and fauna. The Great War brought memorials to every town and village; in Sevenoaks following much argument on a site facing The Vine, in the nearby village of Shoreham by a cross carved in the chalk on the Downs and a more conventional memorial by the Darent.

The years before 1920 were largely the age of the horse. Horses were used for most haulage and for ploughing, with oxen used for heavier loads and on poorer roads and soils. Rearing, feeding, and maintaining horses was a major occupation requiring the production of fodder and the services of farriers and blacksmiths. In the late seventeenth century Sevenoaks had public stabling for 136 horses, and many landowners, wealthy people, and farmers provided their own mounts and draught animals. The development of railways eventually ended the role of horse-drawn mail coaches while increasing the demand for local horse-drawn carrier services to serve villages away from the line of rail. The railway also reduced the commercial value and income of turnpikes; tolls fell and road surfaces deteriorated. Although roads ceased to be the responsibility of the parish and passed to a local highways board in 1862, surfaces often continued to be poorly maintained, dusty in dry weather and broken by water-filled ruts in wet weather.⁴⁸ The advent of the motor vehicle in the early twentieth century increased the problem of dust, although improved surfaces were being laid.⁴⁹ Tar Macadam was increasingly used on roads after 1913, the system of all-weather roads, including urban streets and minor country lanes, being a twentieth-century development in response to the increased use of motor vehicles for commercial and leisure use, along with the bicycle. Roads were improved, straightened, and better maintained, and most urban streets had pavements for pedestrians.⁵⁰ Motor buses connected nearby towns and neighbouring villages with Sevenoaks; a bus garage was built at Dunton Green and Bligh's Meadow bought by the council as a car park and bus terminus.⁵¹ The horse as a traction animal along with the related stables, smithies, and other services

steadily declined in the early years of the twentieth century, although given a temporary reprieve by the Second World War.

Since 1950

Twenty-five years ago Oliver Rackham stated that the greatest changes to the English countryside had occurred since 1945.⁵² This certainly applies to the Sevenoaks area, although had commercial developers and some planners had their way the changes would have been even greater. Much has been protected, preserved, or rescued. The Green Belt Act, 1938, and particularly the Town and Country Planning Acts since 1947, have placed a green girdle between Sevenoaks and the creeping sprawl of London which has extended beyond Orpington. Several central and local government plans for large-scale development in the area since 1945 were successfully thwarted: the Nash plan for a satellite town to the west of Sevenoaks in 1946; a Kent County Council proposal to build 400 council houses on Blackhall Farm; and a scheme to turn Whitley Forest into a military training camp in 1951. Knole Park formed an eastern barrier to urban development, wooded country to the west was largely preserved, and the designation of the sandstone ridge to the south and the Downs to the north as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), have effectively girt the town around with a protective barrier. The well-to-do inhabitants of areas of high-priced property, for example the private gated roads in Kippington to the west and Wilderness to the north east, have ensured that their spaciousness and privilege were guarded by carefully worded covenants to preserve both estates from all but carefully controlled development.

In the years 1951-61 the town's population grew by nearly 20 per cent to 17,600 people. This was accompanied by substantial development of new private housing in Wildernesse, on the Montreal Park site, and Solefields to the south of the town. Council housing was also extended in Greatness, Bat and Ball, and the Hillingdon areas, with smaller concentrations on other pieces of land. Further private housing was built at Riverhead in the 1980s and on the old Marley Tile Company site at Dunton Green in the 1990s. Rapid inflation in the last three decades of the twentieth century led to steep rises in the price of land and houses in the area. An aging population and changes in marital patterns and behaviour with later marriage and an increase in divorce resulted in more people living alone, and hence the demand for smaller houses and flats. These factors, along with inflation in the price of land, led to the building of more compact housing on smaller plots of land, for example, 'town houses' and apartments. Also many older and larger houses were either divided into flats or demolished to make way for cul-de-sacs of new brick dwellings. Central government plans for population growth in the south-east placed

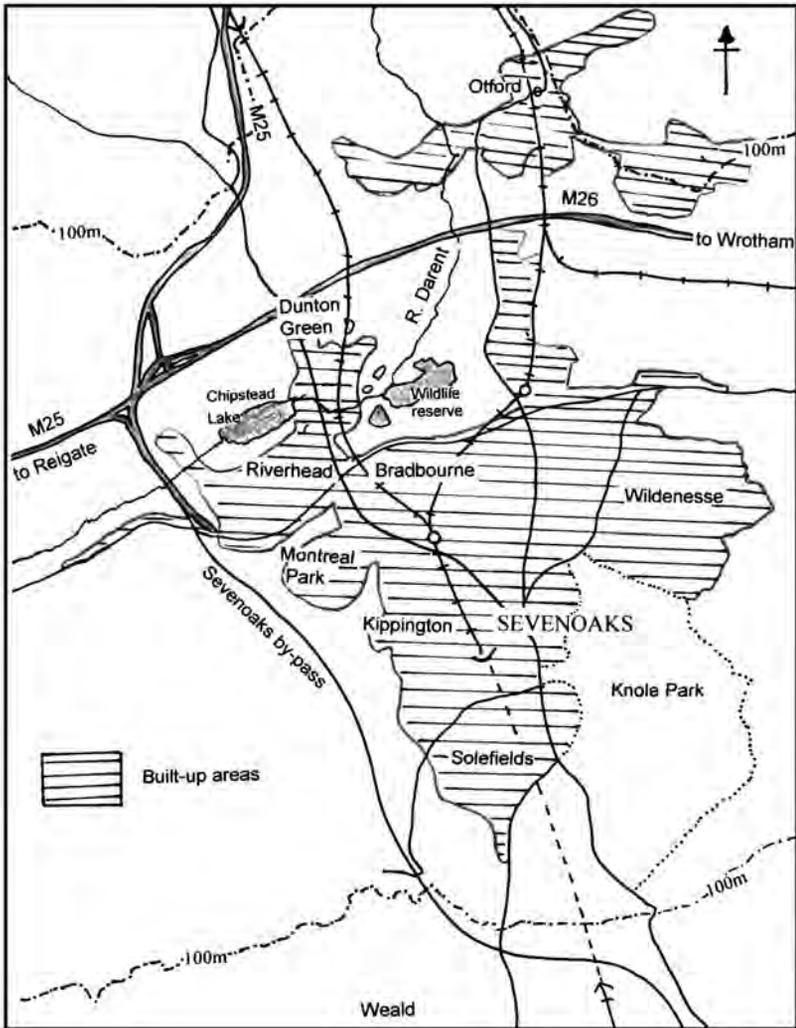


Fig. 3 Sevenoaks c.1990.

further demands on land for housing, which has now partly been met by on-going developments on the Cold Storage site at Dunton Green and at Fort Halstead. Provision of private and public sheltered accommodation for the elderly increased, the major development since the 1960s being Rockdale in the town centre, along with the construction of many other smaller dedicated homes and complexes.

As the town's population increased from 14,500 in 1951 to approximately 18,600 in 2001, so did educational provision. Following the Education Act 1944 two new secondary schools were built in the town, one for boys at Wilderness in 1951, and another for girls which was then relocated to a new site north of Bradbourne Vale Road in the mid 1970s. Two new primary schools were built on more spacious sites, at Riverhead and on Knole Paddock. On the campus of the boys' secondary school further buildings were opened for public leisure activities. Wildernesse House and gardens, latterly the home of the Hillingdons, became a school for visually-impaired children in 1955. Schools, not just private ones, also had to provide road access and parking as the journey to school changed dramatically in the latter part of the twentieth century.

In 1950 Sevenoaks' main industries were brick and tile making, various forms of light industry, and services. Some of the greatest changes to the landscape have occurred to the north of Sevenoaks along the valley of the Darent as a result of industrial activities. Since 1934 the Marley Tile Company had expanded its excavation of sand with the result that two branches of the Darent were gradually incorporated into a large lake, now Chipstead Lake.⁵³ Further along the Darent valley, to the east of the main line railway to London, mid-twentieth century large-scale industrial gravel extraction created a number of pits which gradually flooded to create five large lakes. Excavation ended in the 1970s and the efforts of the Harrison family converted a 140-acre site, half land and half water, into the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, an area recognised as a SSSI.⁵⁴ A further lake, a reservoir at Bough Beech south of Sevenoaks in the Weald, was created in 1969 by the water supply industry, now also a sailing centre and bird sanctuary. When Marley ceased work at Dunton Green in the 1990s the site was developed with a supermarket and private housing, certain homes overlooking the Chipstead Lake which for years had been a sailing centre. Since the 1960s three new industrial sites have been permitted on 'brown sites' within the Green Belt: the North Downs Business Park in the Polhill quarry; the Chaucer Industrial Park, Kemsing; and at Fort Halstead. Another 'brown field' development was on the site of the old mill at Sundridge, while an extensive cold storage plant was built at Dunton Green. Within Sevenoaks in the 1960s many older houses were demolished and new offices constructed, the most intrusive and insensitive being the tower block and neighbouring shops on Tubs Hill, one of the few buildings in Sevenoaks that can be clearly seen from the North Downs.⁵⁵ There was also plant for the short-lived local publishing activities of Hodder & Stoughton at Dunton Green. At the start of the new century a large BT office, with a basement car park, was built in Hitchen Hatch Lane on the site of the animal and general market, closed in 1999.⁵⁶

One of the greatest influences on the shaping of the landscape of modern Sevenoaks has been the internal combustion engine. Although roads were built, widened, and straightened, bridges strengthened, and parking places made available to accommodate motor vehicles and their users, often at public expense, it was not until the late 1950s that the power of motorists' demands was truly felt. New houses built in the 1930s, for example in the Bradbourne area, had spaces for garages, while most built-to-sell houses after 1960 came with a garage or a space to park a car. Roads in the 1960s that had older residents without cars, by the early twenty-first century were increasingly overwhelmed by parked vehicles. This problem increased nearer to the main railway station as commuters to London (approximately 22 per cent of the town's working population in 2008) sought to avoid paying to use the extensive railway-owned car parks. People also used cars for shorter journeys, for example parents taking children to school and increasingly for shopping.⁵⁷ New out-of-town supermarkets and stores, designed primarily for customers with cars, were opened in the late 1990s by Tesco on the old Marley site at Dunton Green and by Sainsbury's on the eastern side of the Otford Road.

In the 1940s and 1950s there were few road signs in Sevenoaks: the occasional directional notice, a pair of Belisha beacons, and few restrictions on parking in the town centre. By the end of the century directions and restrictions were vividly conveyed by a profusion of street notices, traffic lights, double yellow lines, parking meters, nearly every street was lit at night, and there were large tarmac-covered public parking spaces in the centre of the town. The devolved shape and layout of towns and villages were inconvenient in an age of growing car use. Demands for a Sevenoaks by-pass road were first raised in 1922. In the 1930s complaints were increasingly heard about the flow of traffic through the town. By the 1960s the increasing commercial and leisure traffic through Sevenoaks led to action being taken. A by-pass was eventually opened in 1968, delayed for two years because the contractors encountered locally foreseen geological difficulties. The four-lane highway extension to the A21 built to the west of the town cut the course of the Westerham Valley railway line, closed in 1961, and passed through fields and woodlands; it was well landscaped but consumed acres of land and required several new road lay-outs and bridges. The new road was eventually extended to join up with the Tonbridge by-pass. At roughly the same time various abortive proposals were put forward to widen the High Street and for an inner relief road either to the east or to the west of the town centre.⁵⁸ The largest, and perhaps most intrusive road development, was the building of the M26 and the M25 motorways. First built was the M26 which ran along Holmesdale from Maidstone, subsequently being joined to the M25 London orbital road in the 1980s.⁵⁹ Besides the large inter-sections, new bridges and new road lay-outs, the open land covered by tarmac and

INFLUENCES SHAPING HUMAN LANDSCAPE OF SEVENOAKS AREA SINCE 1600



Fig. 4 Sevenoaks 2009: vehicle parking, public and private, marked in black.

concrete which greatly altered the landscape of the area, there was the added noise and pollution of traffic which increased in volume year by year.⁶⁰ These major highways took the burden of traffic off communities, at least to some extent, and paradoxically helped to protect flora and fauna by creating areas closed to pedestrians.

Mass ownership and increasing reliance on the motor car corresponded with democratic demands for wider and faster roads, cheaper food and fuel, and greater provision for leisure. As in many other towns, Sevenoaks

was faced with demands to improve access to shops in the town centre. In the 1980s open land to the east of the town centre, an area which for long had been used by travelling circuses and for communal November the fifth bonfires, was developed with a new road leading to a library, leisure centre and swimming pool, commercial offices, and extensive car parks. In the next decade Bligh's Meadow, long a contended space on the other side of the High Street, was developed as a town square with shops and parking spaces. In the meantime roads adjoining the High Street had suffered from creeping commercialisation as houses were converted into or replaced by offices. However, green areas within the town survive: Knole Park is inviolate, as is The Vine where cricket has been played for at least 250 years, and many public and private sports' fields provide open spaces. Although there have been frequent attempts to nibble at the Green Belt, the surrounding countryside is protected by government and active pressure groups, the National Trust, and even golf courses which help preserve flora and fauna.⁶¹

In the last few decades of the twentieth century the landscape of the rural area surrounding Sevenoaks has been altered, sometimes radically, by nature and human activity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Dutch elm disease killed off virtually all hedgerow standards, and the great storm of October 1987 felled thousands of large hardwood trees, Knole Park losing seventy per cent of its large oaks and beeches, thus greatly altering the landscape. The use of larger farm machinery led to hedges and some areas of low woodland being 'grubbed-up' to make bigger, more convenient and profitable fields. The advent of the Common Agricultural Policy in 1976 encouraged the production of crops regarded as new, such as rape; two decades later rural overproduction led to arable and pasture land being 'set-aside'. While these changes were happening 'new' money went into buying property in the surrounding rural areas, pushing up prices and leading to a slow retreat of the indigenous rural inhabitants. Old farm houses, disused oast houses, and converted barns became gentrified homes for prosperous commuters and the rich retired who were intent on preserving a perceived rural environment. The result was an increase in neatly trimmed grounds and fenced paddocks with ponies alongside working farms. Horses made a come-back, but for leisure purposes.

Final thoughts

Continuity and change, both essential concerns of the historian, have marked Sevenoaks' recent history. The upper part of the town, St Nicholas church, the entrance to Knole and the fork in the main road would surely be recognisable to an eighteenth century inhabitant. However, most of the changes to the urban scene would make the town totally unrecognisable. But, in contrast, parts of the surrounding countryside, the view of field

patterns from Down and Chartland ridge would have been familiar, so also would be some of the narrow hollow tracks that descend into the Weald. Noises and smells, the aural and olfactory history of the past about which little is written, would have been very different; traffic noise and diesel fumes in place of the sounds and smells of horses and cattle. Rather than once being a ‘pleasant town’, Sevenoaks was a noxious triangle of buildings, unlit at night in contrast to today’s urban environment. The most radical changes to Sevenoaks have come in the last 50 to 60 years with the increasing domination of motor vehicles which have determined road patterns, the distribution of resources, influencing housing, patterns of shopping, and the physical layout of the town centre. Today most people would find it difficult to live without the car. Perhaps the policies, actions and changes to deal with the consequences of car use over the next thirty years will be the most crucial ever made in the history of the Sevenoaks’ landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to his friend Ian Walker who read an earlier draft of this paper and rescued him from a number of errors and omissions.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hoskins died in 1992. His seminal work was *The Making of the English Landscape* (London 1955), for which see the 3rd edn, edited and annotated by one of his former students Christopher Taylor (London, 1988). See also the ideas in Taylor’s, ‘People and places: local history and landscape history’, *The Local Historian* 32, 4 (2002), pp. 234-49.

² Alan Everitt (1926-2008), held the chair of local history at Leicester from 1968-82, and edited the new edition of Edward Hasted’s *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (1797-1801; Wakefield, 1972). See Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: the evolution of Kentish settlement* (Leicester, 1986), and the essays in *Landscape and Community in England* (London, 1985), which includes ‘The making of the agrarian landscape of Kent’, first published in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xcii (1977), 263-77.

³ Everitt, ‘The making of the agrarian landscape of Kent’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xcii (1977), 263.

⁴ As a counter to Hoskins’ myopia, see Trevor Rowley, *The English Landscape in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2006).

⁵ See further Peter Brandon, *The North Downs* (Chichester, 2005), and Dan Tuson, *The Kent Downs* (Stroud, 2007).

⁶ Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization*, p. 78.

⁷ Alec Clifton-Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building* (London, 1962), remains a standard work.

⁸ Lime Kiln Lane, an indication of former use, leads to what is now a small industrial site at Polhill.

⁹ This was done at Eynsford in the early 1860s to build the railway viaduct over the Darent.

¹⁰ It is debateable whether the Brick Tax of 1784-1850 hindered the use of brick given the high level of competition among brickmakers and the consequent fall in the price of bricks.

¹¹ Herbert W. Knocker, 'Sevenoaks: the manor, church, and market', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xxxviii (1926), 51-68.

¹² Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization*, pp. 187 and 268-70.

¹³ See the chapter by A.R.H. Baker on early Kent fields in Baker and R.H. Butlin, eds, *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 377-419.

¹⁴ F.R.H. Du Boulay, 'The assembling of an estate: Knole in Sevenoaks, c.1275 to c.1525', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, lxxxix (1974), 1-10.

¹⁵ Christopher Morris, ed., *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes* (London, 1957), p. 139; now called Star Hill.

¹⁶ E.G. Box, 'Notes on some West Kent roads in early maps and road books', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xliii (1931), 85-98.

¹⁷ C.W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth-century Kent* (London, 1965), p. 32; and p. 36 for the estimate by the demographer Gregory King in 'a modern computation' of 1695 that there were 1,572 people living in the Sevenoaks parish, i.e. the boroughs of Sevenoaks Town, Riverhead, and Weald. The Hearth Tax returns 1664 suggest a town population of 786, Sevenoaks Weald 360, and Riverhead 240; see Duncan Harrington, ed., *Kent Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1664* (London, 2000), p. 463.

¹⁸ On the idea of the self-sufficient parish community see W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant. Economic and Social history of a Leicestershire village* (London, 1957), pp. 190-2.

¹⁹ Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone [CKS]. U442. P120, and a contemporary note book describing each field and its use, U442 E42.

²⁰ Baker and Butlin, *Studies of Field Systems*, p. 392.

²¹ David Killingray, 'A London city church estate in Kent: St Botolph's, Sevenoaks, 1646-2002', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxiv (2004), 291-307.

²² Peter Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald* (Chichester, 2003), p. 90.

²³ Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey*, 1972 edn, Vol. III, p. 61.

²⁴ See further Christopher Rayner, *Sevenoaks Past with the Villages of Holmesdale* (Chichester, 1997), ch. V, which also deals with the other large houses: Chipstead Place, Greatness House, Riverhill House, Bradbourne Hall, Combe Bank, and Brasted Place. On the surviving houses see John Newman, *The Buildings of England. West Kent and the Weald* (London, 2nd edn 1976), p. 517.

²⁵ Margaret Bates and David Killingray, 'The Herries family and the building of *St Julians*, Underriver, 1819-1837', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxiii (2003), 273-90.

²⁶ CKS. U 269. P52-63. Enclosures of Manorial Waste 1793-1902. See the useful chapter by Marion Mills in Katharine Draper *et al.*, *A History of the Parish of Chevening* (Sevenoaks, 1999), ch. 8.

²⁷ William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (1830; new edition, London, 1853), p. 57.

²⁸ A good example is Little Betson's Farm above Westerham.

²⁹ F.C. Elliston-Erwood, 'Miscellaneous notes on some Kent roads', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, lxx (1957), 204.

³⁰ Ron Terry, *Old Corners of Sevenoaks. The yards, courts and passages of historic Sevenoaks* (Sevenoaks, 2000).

³¹ *The Sevenoaks Advertiser*, 1 December 1843, p. 1, 'LONDON AND DOVER (South-Eastern) RAILWAY. WELL-REGULATED RAILWAY COACHES, from Riverhead and Sevenoaks to London [Bridge station] in 2½ hours, will leave [Riverhead three times daily] ... and arrive at the TUNBRIDGE STATION in time to meet the *Up-trains* ... to London'. The single second class fare was six shillings.

INFLUENCES SHAPING HUMAN LANDSCAPE OF SEVENOAKS AREA SINCE 1600

³² Sevenoaks Public Library. D 327 General. Also 'London and West Kent Railway, 27 November 1853'. *Daily News*, 6 October 1853.

³³ Tessa Leeds, 'The construction of the Sevenoaks railway tunnel 1863-68', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxx (2000), 187-204.

³⁴ Marx in *Capital* (1867) commented on the poor conditions in which railway labourers lived at Dunton Green; see Penguin edn. Vol. 1 (1976), pp. 818-20.

³⁵ Sevenoaks which once had several coal merchants with regular household deliveries now has only one, in the village of Weald.

³⁶ Lambeth Palace Library. Tait 231ff 201. James German to Tait, 18 April 1877. See also Hollybush Residents Association, *Hollybush on the Map* (Sevenoaks, 1999).

³⁷ *Guide to Sevenoaks and its Neighbourhood* (Sevenoaks, 1873 edn), pp. 11-12.

³⁸ David Killingray, 'A London City church estate in Kent: St Botolph's, Sevenoaks, 1646-2002', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxiv (2004), pp. 291-307.

³⁹ Dunlop, *Sevenoaks*, p. 171.

⁴⁰ Aileen Reid, 'Survival of the smallest: the Sevenoaks Tenants estate', *Architectural History*, 44 (2001), pp. 401-10.

⁴¹ Dunlop, *Sevenoaks*, p. 173.

⁴² For example, *Guide to Sevenoaks*, pp. 12-13.

⁴³ The occasional modern mobile phone mast, some poorly disguised as trees, may be a reasonable exchange for the former telephone wires.

⁴⁴ This 'right' was fought for in the early 1880s: see David Killingray, 'Rights, "riot" and ritual: the Knole Park access dispute, Sevenoaks, Kent, 1883-5', *Rural History* 5, 1 (1994), 63-79.

⁴⁵ Allotments of land for the 'deserving labouring classes' had been advocated since the late eighteenth century. The Allotments Act 1887 and The Small Holdings Act 1894 were attempts, in part, to appease rural discontent and stem rural depopulation.

⁴⁶ Sevenoaks Schools was known as the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School until the early decades of the twentieth century; it is now a private secondary school for boys and girls.

⁴⁷ Draper, *Sundridge*, pp. 202-5.

⁴⁸ The un-metalled roads in Sevenoaks and neighbouring villages in the late nineteenth century can be seen in the excellent photographs collected by Gordon Anckhorn, *A Sevenoaks Camera* (Sevenoaks, 1979).

⁴⁹ 'The best modern roads', wrote the contributor on 'Roads' to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1911, 'are of hand-broken stones dressed slightly on the surface with stone chips, while the mass of the road-metal is kept free from any kind of binding'; 11th edition (New York, 1911), vol. XXIII, p. 389.

⁵⁰ Modern use of the noun 'pedestrian' is from the age of the motor car.

⁵¹ One bus route terminated at Paygate on the road to Seal, a name left over from the turnpike, now only an oral memory of the elderly.

⁵² Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London, 1986), p. 26: 'Except for town expansion, almost every hedge, wood, wath, fen, etc., on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1870 is still there on the air photographs of 1940. The seventy eventful years between, and even World War II itself, were less destructive [of the countryside] than any five years since. Much of England in 1945 would have been instantly recognizable by Sir Thomas More, and some areas would have been recognized by the Emperor Claudius.'

⁵³ Draper, *Sundridge*, pp. 109-18.

⁵⁴ Now a Kent Wildlife Trust reserve.

⁵⁵ The heavy, dull brick post office block in the centre of Sevenoaks, built in the late 1960s, is one among several other local public and commercial buildings of that period in want of architectural merit.

DAVID KILLINGRAY

⁵⁶ Monty Parkin, *The Story of Sevenoaks Market* (Kemsing, 2010).

⁵⁷ According to *The Sevenoaks District Strategy for Transport 2009-2026* (Kent County Council, 2009), nearly half of all households in the Sevenoaks District own two or more cars.

⁵⁸ The Buchanan Plan of 1968 proposed an eastern relief road through Kippington; the Bennett Plan in 1971 proposed an 'eastern way' which would have sliced through Knole Park.

⁵⁹ A local conservationist group, DANDAG, opposed plans to bring the M25 down the Darent Valley.

⁶⁰ In 2009 the M25 was carrying 200,000 vehicles every day.

⁶¹ B.H. Green and I.C. Marshall, 'An assessment of the role of golf courses in Kent, England, in protecting wildlife and landscapes', *Landscape and Urban Planning* 14 (1987), 143-54.

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