

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR ~ *Dendrology in Dover*

Having read Owen Johnson's interesting article on *Dendrology*, published in your last issue, I am at a loss to find any trees of great age or with any exceptional character in the Dover area. However, what we do have, in our three parks in Kearsney, is, in my opinion, one of the finest collections of deciduous trees in Kent. This is because each of the parks originally formed the grounds of a private house and, in the last century, people who built large country houses used to lay out the grounds in a splendid fashion and incorporate a large number of native trees.

Kearsney Abbey was never an abbey but a large private house. The name "Abbey" sounded more pretentious than "House" and there was already a Kearsney Manor in the area. The grounds were laid out in 1822. After the second World War the house and grounds were bought by the then Dover Corporation and the house was demolished because it was riddled with wood worm and dry rot. The grounds then became a public park.

Russell Gardens were originally the ornamental gardens of Kearsney Court, a large house built at the turn of the century. Its spacious grounds were laid out by Thomas Mawson of Liverpool University, who was one of the foremost landscape gardeners of the time. The house was built on the hillside overlooking the Alkham Valley, but formal gardens were laid out at the foot of the hill. They contain an artificial lake with water running under pergolas at each end. After World War Two the house was empty and the whole estate was bought by a private developer. He then sold these formal gardens to the Dover Rural District Council and they were named after a prominent local councillor, Alderman H.E. Russell.

Bushy Ruff was built about 1825. The grounds of about 24 acres contain a lake and woods reaching to the top of the hill. The Dover District Council bought the house and land in 1974. The house is now a private nursing home and the grounds a public park.

Howard Cleaves





THE GATE LODGES OF KEARSNEY COURT c. 1905. The road to the left is now called Alkham Road and passes the entrance to Bushy Ruff. Behind the high wall to the left are the grounds of Kearsney Abbey.



KEARSNEY COURT AND GROUNDS from the air, including what is now Russell Gardens. The ornamental lake and its pergola bridges, loved by countless children, can be seen in the bottom right-hand corner segment of the photograph.

*From "River in the County of Kent" by John Roy. Published by River Village Hall Trust.*