

**THE ALBERT MEMORIAL WELL,  
FRANT ROAD, FRANT, EAST SUSSEX**

(NGR 558803 135570)

**HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT**



**Commissioned by  
Frant Parish Council**

**Project No. 230397  
Report No. 2023292**


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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 In November 2023 Archaeology South-East (a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, UCL) carried out a historic building assessment of the Albert Memorial Well, Frant Road, Frant, East Sussex (NGR: 558803 135570; Fig. 1). The work was carried out in order to assess the building's origins, historic development and significance, to inform proposals for repairing the building.

## **2.0 SCOPE & METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1 The intended purpose of this report is to give an overview of the date and sequence of construction of the building, and an assessment of its significance. As such, it should not be regarded as a detailed archaeological record, nor should it be taken as definitive. Further research, particularly that undertaken during future building works, may refine and extend the understanding of the building and potentially necessitate re-assessment of its significance.
- 2.2 Unless noted to the contrary, the assessment involves a visual inspection of the building's fabric, both internally and externally, including any accessible roof voids and basement areas. At the time of the survey, the building was shored-up with timber bracing, Acro props and Heras fencing.
- 2.3 No drawings of the building are currently available. For illustration, a selection of photographs has been reproduced as plates within the report.
- 2.4 The site was visited by Katya Harrow on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 in order to carry out the survey. Background research was carried out at East Sussex Record Office at The Keep, Falmer.

## **3.0 SITE LOCATION**

- 3.1 The Albert Memorial Well is located on Frant Road (A267), a principal route from Tunbridge Wells which runs roughly north – south on the western side of the village (Fig. 1). The building stands on the western side of Frant Road, just south of its junction with Church Lane. It is a small structure aligned east-north-east – west-south-west (hereafter referred to as east – west). To its east the building opens onto a grass verge and to the west the land drops sharply away, with extensive views across the wooded landscape of the High Weald and Eridge Park.

## **4.0 RELEVANT DESIGNATIONS**

### *Listed buildings*

- 4.1 The Albert Memorial Well was listed at Grade II on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1982, its list entry number being 1286653. It is described as a late 19<sup>th</sup> century covering to a former well (Historic England, National Heritage List for England; Appendix 1). The legislative cover not only relates to both the interior and exterior of the building, but also extends to any building within the curtilage which predates the 1st July 1948.

- 4.2 The building lies within the Frant Conservation Area, which was first designated in 1976 and reappraised in 2003 (Wealden District Council, 2020). Frant village falls within the boundary of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 4.3 Eridge Park, the eastern boundary of which lies approximately 185m west of the site, is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (Historic England, National Heritage List for England).

## **5.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND MAP EVIDENCE**

- 5.1 Following the death of Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria, many public monuments were erected all over the country and across the British Empire. Parish Council records show that a proposal for a well was first made by Henry Thompson, Rector of Frant, in a public notice dated February 25<sup>th</sup> 1862. At a parish meeting held in Frant on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1862, *'the proposal to sink a public well on Frant Green, in memory of the late lamented Prince Consort'* was approved, and subscriptions were gathered from local residents between 1862 and 1864 (ESRO ref. P344/4/2).
- 5.2 The original proposal to construct a well on the Green commenced, but was abandoned following serious objections by a Mr P. Ashburnham that a well in this location could potentially cause damage his property nearby; Mr Ashburnham threatened legal proceedings. Lord Abergavenny [latterly the Marquess of Abergavenny] of Eridge Park, subsequently offered a site. A public notice stated *'A most convenient spot has been granted, contiguous to the turnpike road, and a Well has been sunk which furnishes an abundant supply of soft spring water. The Well has been by a temporary apparatus rendered accessible to the public...The expenses of the whole undertaking, including the sinking of the well, engine pump, raising the adjacent ground to a level with the turnpike road, and enclosing it with a stone wall, amount (exclusive of any memorial) to the estimated value of £130'* (ESRO ref. P344/4/2).
- 5.3 In 1887, a vestry meeting discussing the upkeep of the Albert Memorial Well *'decided to put it in a perfect state of repair'* (Kent & Sussex Courier, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1887). In the 1890s, the reopening of the abandoned well on the village green was proposed, with a letter of support from local residents to the Parish Council noting the *'inconvenience caused by our distance from the Jubilee Well and the deficient supply from that well in times of drought'* (ESRO ref. P344/19/1) [it is presumed the Albert Memorial Well was also known locally as the Jubilee Well, given the date of its construction around the time of Queen Victoria's silver jubilee in 1862]. The building subsequently erected on the Green was designed by the architect Granville Streatfeild and is known as the Victoria Well (ESRO ref. P344/19/1).
- 5.4 In November 1901, the Parish Council obtained agreement from the Marquess of Abergavenny to assume charge of the Albert Memorial Well and its care on behalf of parishioners. A letter from the Parish Council to the Marquess records that the superstructure was at that time *'far from sound...the uprights have much perished on the south-west side and a heavy gale might bring the roof down'*. The Marquess provided old oak for the repairs, which were carried out by a Mr Luck (ESRO ref. ABE/1610).
- 5.5 In 1907, the well was described as requiring repair, with a subsequent article noting that it *'had now been thoroughly repaired and a new stop placed on it, at a cost of £3'* (Kent & Sussex Courier, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1907, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1907). During the 1920s,

the well was closed and *'certain repairs and alterations to the brickwork and covering of the Albert Memorial Well, which had recently been polluted, were suggested'* in a report by the Water Committee, which the Parish Council decided to withhold until associated County Council drainage works had been completed (Kent & Sussex Courier, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1922).

- 5.6 These issues must have been resolved as the Albert Memorial Well was still in use as a water source for the village up until at least the 1930s: newspaper articles in 1933 and 1934 describe concerns about the water supply and also noted that tenders would be invited for the repair of the woodwork of the well (Kent & Sussex Courier, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1933 & 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1934). Later in 1934, the well machinery was reported as having broken down, with repairs to be commenced at once (Kent & Sussex Courier, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1934).
- 5.7 By the early 1950s, newspaper articles describe the Albert Memorial building as containing a pump and well, and record how consideration was given to converting the building to a bus shelter, although it appears this was eventually vetoed. By this time, it seems to have become a secondary water source: it was noted that the well had been and could be used in an emergency, such as during droughts. The Albert and Victoria wells were recorded as costing the village an average of £15 to £25 a year in repairs and it was noted that *'damage was largely through vandalism by village boys'* (Kent & Sussex Courier, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1951, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1952, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1953, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1953).

#### *Map Evidence*

- 5.8 The Frant Tithe map of 1846 shows Frant Road, with a linear plot (598) running alongside it (Fig. 2; ESCC Tithe maps online). Plot 598 is recorded in the accompanying apportionment as 'Sawpit Mead' a pasture field in the ownership of Lord Abergavenny and occupied by Charles Thwaites. The site of the well presumably fell within this field; no building was present at this time.
- 5.9 The first edition Ordnance Survey map, produced in 1874 (Fig. 3) depicts a small, square structure, set within a curved enclosure which punctuates the field boundary. It is labelled 'Albert Memorial (Pump)'. A benchmark is identified to the north-east corner of the enclosure. The map of 1898 (Fig. 4), presents the same picture; however, it refers to the building as 'Albert Memorial Well'. By this date, the Victoria Well had been built on the village green. No changes can be identified on the subsequent Ordnance Survey maps (Edina Digimap; not reproduced).

#### *Historic Images*

- 5.10 An early 20<sup>th</sup> century photograph of the well shows the building as an open-sided, timber-framed structure with pyramidal roof, set within a stone-walled enclosure, opening onto the road (Fig. 5). The roof at this time was covered with bull-nosed tiles, with decorative crested tiles to the hips and to the ridge of a small projecting gable on the building's east side. This is also clearly depicted on an early 20<sup>th</sup> century painting by landscape artist Alfred Robert Quinton for the Sevenoaks-based publishing and printing company J. Salmon, which was reproduced as a postcard (Fig. 5).



## **6.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

- 6.1 The building is a diminutive structure of rectangular footprint. It is aligned roughly east – west with its entrance on the eastern side, facing Frant Road. The building's walls are of timber-framed construction resting on a plinth of coursed sandstone, the top course of which is chamfered (Plates 2 & 3). The framing of the walls comprises plain posts, which extend between a timber soleplate and wallplate. Horizontal rails are jointed into the posts at approximately one third of their height. Below the rails, each panel created by the framing has decorative cross-bracing (Plate 4); the rail and cross-bracing to the central panel on the west elevation have been removed, although the redundant mortices for the original bracing can be identified. The corner posts have upward braces to the wallplate; these have been removed from the end (east and west) walls, although their redundant mortices remain. The framing is properly jointed together with mortices and tenons, and many of the joints are pegged. The soleplate and wallplate have simple chamfers, which to the latter respect the position of the posts with angular chamfer-stops (Plate 5). Iron ties are fixed to the soleplate at the corners of the building, to provide additional strength to the frame. There is some limited evidence for graffiti to the walls of the building, both modern and historic, although these could feasibly be associated with repairs (Plate 6).
- 6.2 The roof is of steep, pyramidal form, with a projecting gable above the doorway to the east. It is constructed of softwood and comprises slender common rafters nailed to slender hip rafters, which meet at the apex at an octagonal boss (Plates 7 & 8). Four substantial diagonal dragon ties span the building in lieu of a tiebeam, and are jointed-in and bolted to the wallplates. The eaves of the roof are carried on decorative carved timber brackets fixed to the posts (Plate 9). Externally, the roof is clad with traditional clay tiles, incorporating decorative bands of bullnosed tiles. These lie over slender timber sarking boards, which have seen some repair: the original boards are bead-moulded, and characteristic of a late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century date while the later replacements, within the upper part of the roof, are plain. The roof terminates in a lead-covered finial at its apex. The small gable to the east has decorative clay ridge tiles, a timber bargeboard and is faced with timber cladding laid diagonally.
- 6.3 The floor is laid with two stone slabs, and running centrally east – west between the stone slabs is a narrow section of concrete with scars for fixings; this may relate to the former location of a pump (Plate 10). Adjacent to the entrance is an area of slim red brick pavements, consistent with an early 20<sup>th</sup> century date (Plate 11).
- 6.4 The building is enclosed to the north, south and west by a curved perimeter wall of coursed sandstone, with a rounded stone coping (Plates 12 & 13). This accords with the curved enclosure shown on the map of 1874 (Fig. 3), but appears to have been truncated at its eastern ends, compared with the wall as seen on an early 20<sup>th</sup> century photograph (Fig. 5), presumably as a result of the creation of the existing grass road verge. Set into the internal face of the wall, adjacent to the western end of the building, is a stone plaque of red/pink granite, inscribed with 'Prince Albert's Well, 1864' (Plate 14). Looking west from the building from the memorial plaque, there are extensive views across Eridge Park and the High Weald (Plate 15).
- 6.5 Aside from the alterations to the roof and floor, there is limited obvious evidence of repair, although the wall-framing is quite crisply-detailed. It is known that repairs were carried out in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and probably again in the 1930s; the description of the condition of the building in 1901 suggests that significant repairs

were required at that time, particularly to the south-west (see section 5). This suggests that the building, in particular its wall-framing, has probably seen fairly extensive reworking over the years, albeit repairs have been carried out in a traditional manner. In general, the building has an Arts and Crafts character, which is perhaps more indicative of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century date: while it is feasible that the repairs replicated the original structure, it is also possible that the present appearance of the building owes much to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century phase of works.

- 6.6 The early 20<sup>th</sup> century images of the building indicate that the present roof covering is not the original, nor does it replicate it. The earlier covering was fully of bull-nosed tiles, with crested ridge and hip tiles (Fig. 5). The roof was probably recovered at the same time as repairs were carried out with the replacement of sarking close to the apex.

## 7.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 7.1 The *National Planning Policy Framework* (Section 16: 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment') requires that the significance and setting of a historic building should be considered as part of the planning process:

*189. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.<sup>1</sup>*

- 7.2 The foregoing discussion of the building's significance and setting is based on the understanding of its development related above, using Historic England guidance and terminology (English Heritage 2008; Historic England 2017; Historic England 2019). Within each of the categories of heritage value explored below, the following degrees of significance are adopted here:

- **Exceptional**: elements of the place that are of key national or international significance, being among the best or only surviving examples of an important type of monument, or being outstanding representatives of important social or cultural phenomena.
- **High**: elements that constitute good and representative examples of an important class of monument (or the only example locally), or that have a particular significance through association (although surviving examples may be relatively common on a national scale) or that make major contributions to the overall significance of the monument.
- **Moderate**: elements that contribute to the character and understanding of the place, or that provide a historical or cultural context for features of individually greater significance.
- **Low**: elements that are of low value in general terms, or have little or no significance in promoting understanding or appreciation of the place, without being actually intrusive.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment>

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- Negative: elements that are actively detrimental to the significance of the place, or which detract from its character, setting or comprehension. Recommendations may be made on their removal or on other methods of mitigation.
- 7.3 The Albert Memorial Well holds historical value as an example of a building funded by the residents of Frant, both as a functional building to provide a water source for the village, and as a memorial to the late Prince Albert. The survival of the memorial stone within the perimeter wall is important with regards to the latter, and the building survives as an example of a wider trend for the construction of memorials following the death of the Prince. However, the eventual loss of the pump and covering over of the well has diminished the building's illustrative value, as this aspect of its original function is not readily interpreted, although there is high potential for additional evidence for the well to survive below the present floor covering. The historical value of the building is enhanced by documentary sources which record the background to its construction and suggest various phases of repair.
- 7.4 As the well was constructed as a memorial, albeit not within living memory, it is likely to still have some communal value to the village, and symbolises the values of the community in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 7.5 The building also holds clear aesthetic value, as a diminutive structure built in high quality, traditional materials in the Arts and Crafts style. Although it seems likely that the building has undergone several phases of repair, these have been carried out in a traditional manner, and do not appear to have had a significant visual impact on the building's aesthetic value overall. The building fortuitously makes use of attractive views westwards across the High Weald and Eridge Park, which are considered to contribute to its value in this regard. The building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Frant Conservation Area.
- 7.6 Overall, it is considered that the Albert Memorial Well is of overall *moderate* heritage significance.

**8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 8.1 Archaeology South-East would like to thank Frant Parish Council for commissioning this historic building assessment, and the staff of East Sussex Record Office at The Keep, Falmer, for their assistance.

## 9.0 REFERENCES

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Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Mary Evans Picture Library  
<https://www.prints-online.com/new-images-july-2023/crowborough-beacon-frant-near-tunbridge-wells-32312064.html>  
Accessed: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Tooveys Antique & Fine Art Auctioneers & Valuers, *Lot 3176, An album of approximately 140 postcards*  
<https://www.tooveys.com/lots/271546/an-album-of-approximately-140-postcards/>  
Accessed: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Wealden District Council, 2023. *Draft Conservation Area Character Appraisal: Frant*.

### **Sources consulted at East Sussex Records Office at The Keep, Falmer:**

ABE/1610  
Land at Frant, sold to Frant Parish Council on 18 Nov 1901 for use as site of the Albert Memorial Well, 1884-1901

P/344/4/2  
Reopening of the well on Frant Green, 1862-1901

P/344/19/1  
Minutes of the committee concerning the re-opening of the old well on Frant Green, 1895-1897

PLATES



Plate 1: The Albert Memorial Well, looking north-west from Frant Road.



Plate 2: The interior of the building, looking south-west.

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Plate 3: The interior of the building, looking north-east.



Plate 4: Detail of the framing at the north-west corner.

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Plate 5: Detail of chamfer-stops to wallplate (highlighted).



Plate 6: Historic (left) and more modern (right) examples of graffiti.

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Plate 7: The roof structure, looking west. Note the dragon ties.



Plate 8: The apex of the roof.

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Plate 9: Detail of carved eaves brackets.



Plate 10: The stone floor, with area of concrete infill to its centre.

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Plate 11: Red brick pavements adjoining the entrance.



Plate 12: Looking south-west, showing the well building set within the perimeter wall.

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Plate 13: Detail of the perimeter wall.



Plate 14: The memorial plaque on the interior face of the perimeter wall.

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Plate 15: View looking west from the building.

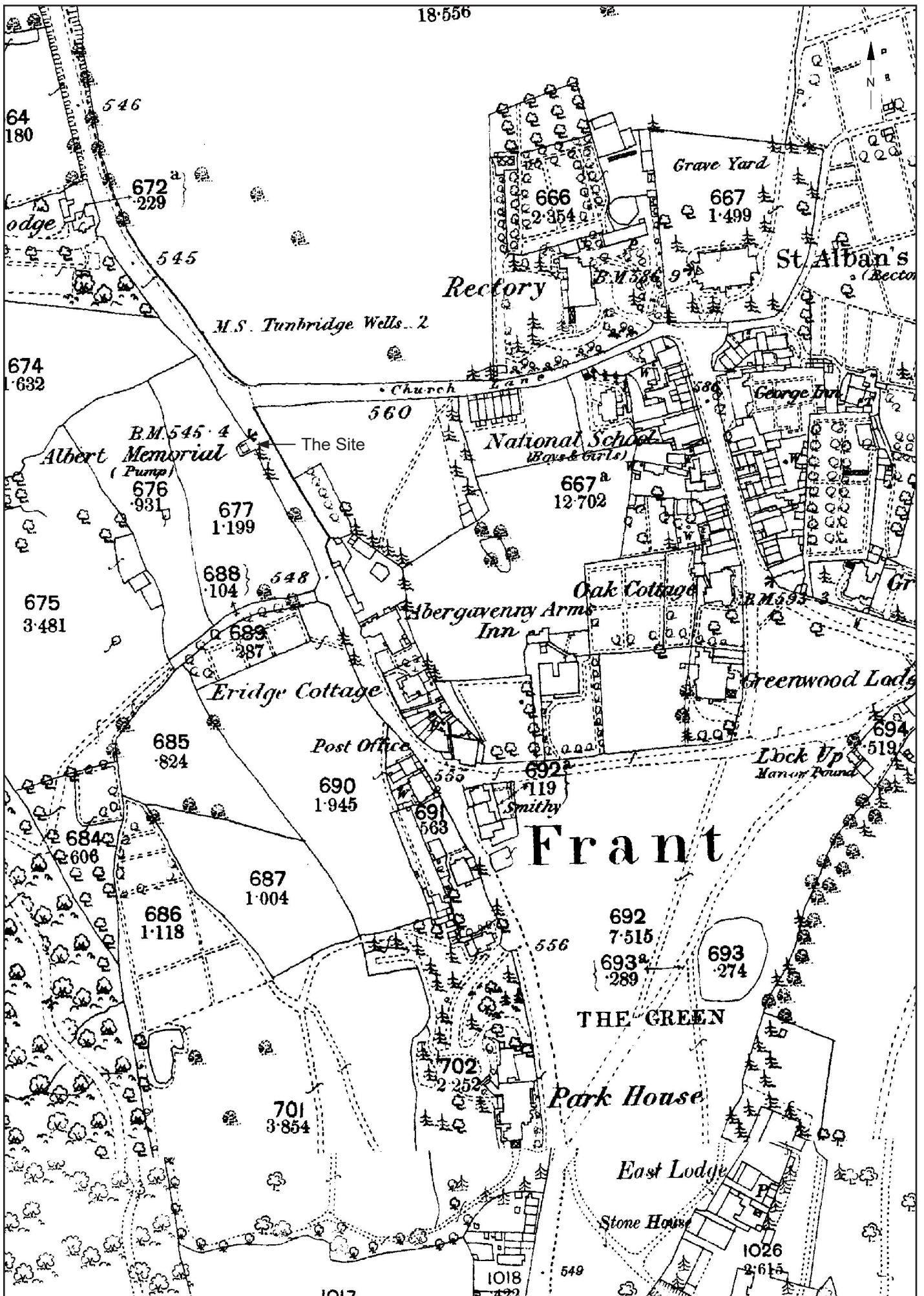
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© Archaeology South-East		The Albert Memorial Well, Frant	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 230397	Nov 2023	Site Location	
Report Ref: 230292	Drawn by: KRH		

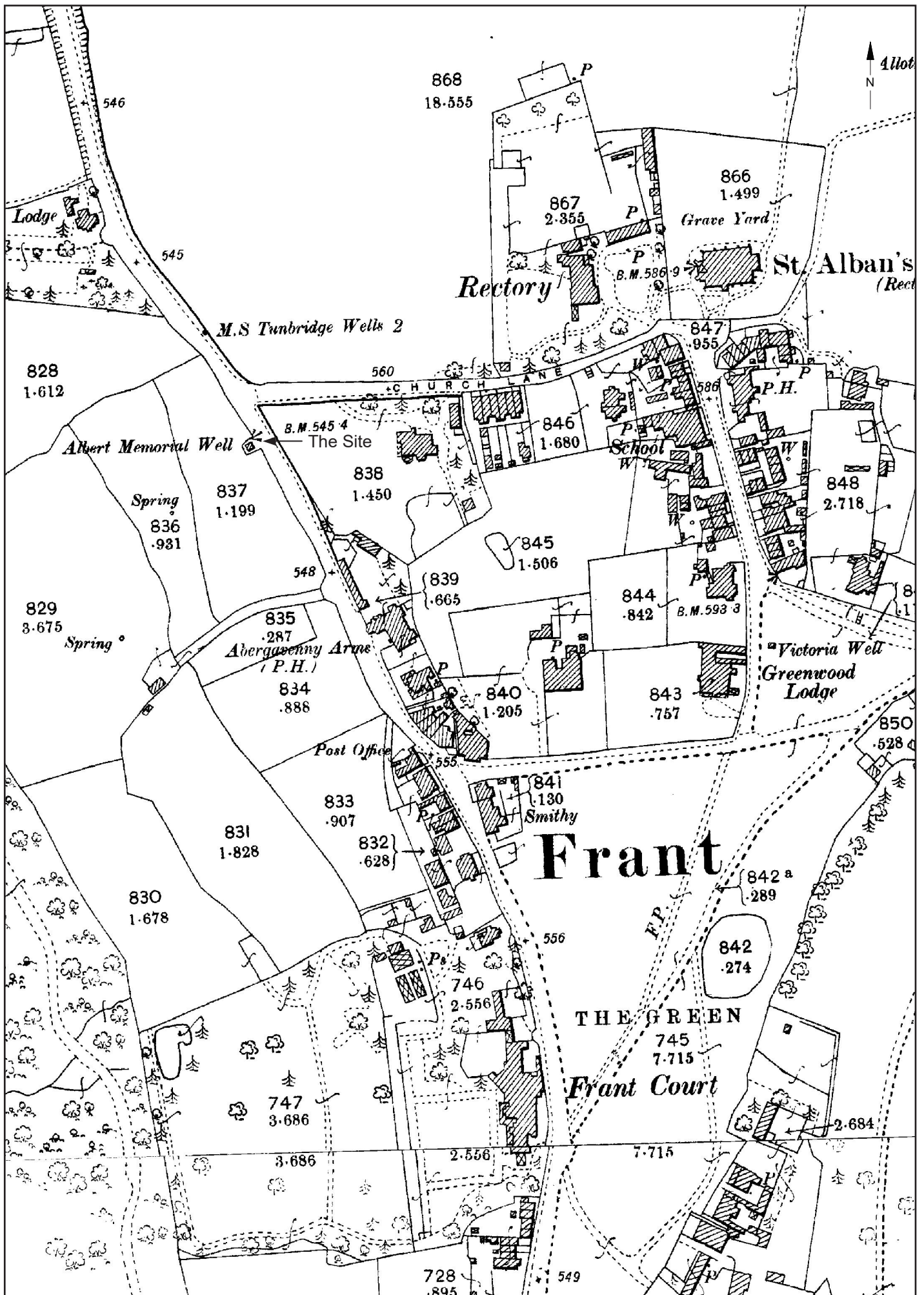


© Archaeology South-East		The Albert Memorial Well, Frant	Fig. 2
Project Ref: 230397	Nov 2023	Frant Tithe map, 1846 (ESRO ref. PAR 344/21/1/1)	
Report Ref: 2023292	Drawn by: KRH		



© Archaeology South-East		The Albert Memorial Well, Frant		Fig. 3
Project Ref: 230397	Nov 2023	Ordnance Survey, 1874		
Report Ref: 2023292	Drawn by: KRH			





© Archaeology South-East		The Albert Memorial Well, Frant		Fig. 4
Project Ref: 230397	Nov 2023	Ordnance Survey, 1898		
Report Ref: 2023292	Drawn by: KRH			



Postcard of the Albert Memorial Well, early 20th century (Tooveys)



Crowborough Beacon, from Frant, near Tunbridge Wells,  
by Alfred Robert Quinton, early 20th century (Mary Evans Picture Library)

© Archaeology South-East		The Albert Memorial Well, Frant	Fig. 5
Project Ref: 230397	Nov 2023	Historical Images	
Report Ref: 2023292	Drawn by: KRH		

## **APPENDIX 1: BUILDING LIST DESCRIPTION**

Official list entry

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1286653

Date first listed: 31-Dec-1982

List Entry Name: THE ALBERT MEMORIAL WELL

Statutory Address 1: THE ALBERT MEMORIAL WELL, THE GREEN

The scope of legal protection for listed buildings

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

Location

Statutory Address: THE ALBERT MEMORIAL WELL, THE GREEN

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: East Sussex

District: Wealden (District Authority)

Parish: Frant

National Grid Reference: TQ 58804 35570

Details

FRANT THE GREEN 1. 5208 (west side) The Albert Memorial Well TQ 5835 35/310 II 2. Late C19 covering to a former well. Rectangular enclosure of a stone base surmounted by a wooden railing with uprights supporting a steeply-pitched pyramidal tiled roof with a small gable on its east side. The well itself has been covered in by a fixed flagstone.

Listing NGR: TQ5880435570

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: 296210

Legacy System: LBS

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