

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CHEVENING

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name: CHEVENING

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Chevening

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Knockholt

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Sundridge with Ide Hill

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.302294
Longitude: 0.11812954
National Grid Reference: TQ4775458038
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II*
List Entry Number: 1000258
Date first listed: 26-Aug-1988

Details

Gardens, pleasure grounds, and a park surrounding a C17 country house, first remodelled in the early C18, then reworked in the 1770s and added to during the first half of the C19.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The present Chevening House was built, reputedly to designs by Inigo Jones (1573-1652), in c 1620 for Richard Lennard, thirteenth Lord Dacre, on the site of an earlier building. Following the death of Thomas, fifteenth Lord Dacre and Earl of Sussex in 1717, the estate was sold to General James Stanhope (1673-1721), who was created Earl Stanhope in 1718. Stanhope added wings and two pavilions to the house and remodelled the gardens. An engraving by Badeslade, published in 1719 (Harris), shows a complex set of formal gardens south of the house. Nicholas Dubois, Thomas Archer, and Thomas Fort are all known to have worked on the house and each could have been involved in the gardens. Philip, second Earl Stanhope (1714-86) inherited the estate while still a minor. From 1763 to 1773 he lived in Switzerland and during this period Chevening was let to his cousin, William Pitt, first Earl Chatham. A letter exists from Lord Chatham to Lady Stanhope stating that he had contacted Lancelot Brown (1716-83), as she had instructed, but there is no evidence that Brown actually became involved. The second

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Earl's wife and his son, Charles, third Earl (1753-1816), as well as making alterations to the house, were responsible from the 1770s onwards for extensive changes in the grounds, softening the formal layout in a more fashionable form. A map of 1775 by Woodward shows the first stages of these alterations. The fourth Earl, Philip (1781-1855), succeeded in 1816 by which time the park had become neglected. A keen gardener and forester, he spent thirty-seven years planting at Chevening and was responsible for the basic layout of the present gardens and surrounding park. A codicil to his will requested that the garden, pleasure ground, park, woods, and plantations be left unchanged, and his wish was largely respected. Some renovation was carried out in the 1930s and in 1970 Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-96) became involved in the work. An extensive restoration plan was begun in 1980. On the death of the seventh Earl in 1967, Chevening passed to a trust and it is now (2001) used as an official residence, the occupant being nominated by the Prime Minister.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Chevening is situated c 4km to the north-west of Sevenoaks, in a rural location on the west side of the estate village of Chevening. The c 176ha park is bounded to the south and west by Ovenden Road, to the east by a minor country road through Chevening village, and to the north by farmland. The House stands close to the centre of the eastern boundary, overlooking the Darent valley, on the south face of the North Downs.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Chevening is approached either from the small estate village of Chevening to the east. Prior to 1980, access could also be gained from the drive from West Lodge on Ovenden Road to the west, or along the scenic drive from the north, Lord Chatham's Ride, laid out in the 1770s. The Ride leads from Knockholt Lodge on the north-east corner of the site, across the north park and south through the winding combe which was, in the C17, the site of 'The Warren'. It then enters through gates in the C18 wrought-iron screen (listed grade II) of the forecourt on the north side of the House. There are several other lodges: Ovenden Lodge and Sundridge Lodge on the south boundary, Sundridge Hill Lodge on the west boundary between West Lodge and Knockholt Lodge, and another in the north-east corner of the site.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Chevening House (listed grade I) is a large, three-storey country house built in red brick with blue headers and rusticated stone quoins under a tile roof. The central section is dominated on the north-west, entrance front by four giant Ionic pilasters while from the garden front a flight of stone steps leads south-east to a central terrace. There are service and stable wings set back from the central main section of the house which was built in c 1620 on the site of an earlier building. Later additions, an attic storey and facing mathematical tiles, were removed in the 1970s.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS To the south-west of the house are Italianate parterres, centred on a Coade stone urn (listed grade II) introduced here by the fourth Earl in 1820. He also planted the maze below the west front, since replanted to the original design.

Beyond the gardens are lawns and pleasure grounds, the lawn to the south being bordered by a double row of yews. A ha-ha runs round the south and west sides of the area, separating the ornamental plantings from the south park. A high brick wall (listed grade II), part of the alterations of the 1770s, screens the pleasure grounds from the road on the east side. The dominant feature in the pleasure grounds south of the house is an informally shaped lake. This was an adaptation, carried out in 1776, of the existing formal canal which formed the central axis of the formal garden.

In the pleasure grounds are the remains of early C18 lime avenues and, to the east of the lake, some yews of the same date. On the west bank, near its south end, is the Chatham Vase (listed grade II). Made in 1780 by John Bacon and originally at Stowe, it was placed in the gardens in 1934 by Hester, Lady Chatham in memory of her husband. On the south-west bank of the lake is a feature formed from a collection of Roman tombstones, erected in 1851. A boathouse stands at the north-east tip of the water. The pleasure grounds extend into formal rides cut through Home Wood to the south-west of the lake. The Wood, planted on an area of Glebe Land purchased by Lord Stanhope in 1718, formed an extension to Stanhope's wilderness.

PARK The parkland extends to the west of the House and to the south over rolling farmland. To the north it stretches past Park House, and is surrounded by hanging beech woods planted on the steep scarp in the early C19. A network of drives runs through the woods. Directly aligned on the House is a narrow cut through the trees, referred to as The Keyhole, which formed the extension of an avenue which ran across the land north from the public road. It is not shown as a feature in the 1775 survey

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by Woodward, so presumably was a later development. Two depressions mark the site of a pair of formal ponds which, in the C18, stood on the north side of the House.

The road to London originally passed down the east side of the park, close to the House, and the Pilgrim's Way ran west to east across the site a little to the north of the building. It was either Philip, second Earl or Charles, third Earl, who altered this layout in the late C18, constructing new roads past Sundridge and Chevening crossroads, and up Star Hill to increase the privacy of the estate. The land to the north of the old Pilgrim's Way was then imparked and in the 1770s Lord Chatham's Ride was laid out, running in a curved circuit from Chevening House north and then west, before turning east towards Knockholt Lodge. The land to the south was imparked in the 1820s.

KITCHEN GARDEN The c 4.5ha hexagonal walled kitchen garden (listed grade II*) stands c 250m to the north-west of the House, with a path linking it to the pleasure grounds. At its centre is a c 1775 well-head (listed grade II) and also within the walls is a bee-house (listed grade II*), originally dating from c 1850 but extensively restored. The walled garden was built in c 1775 under the supervision of Grizel, wife of the second Earl Stanhope, and is unusual in that the northern four sides have a second, outer wall. The several associated garden buildings include the red-brick and tile head gardener's cottage (c 1775, listed grade II) and the late C19 apple store (listed grade II).

REFERENCES

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Description rewritten: March 2001 Amended: May 2001; February 2004 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: November 2003

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.