

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

KNOLE

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

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*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KNOLE**

Name: KNOLE

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Seal

County: Kent

District: Sevenoaks (District Authority)

Parish: Sevenoaks

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.262552  
Longitude: 0.19916669  
National Grid Reference: TQ5353553785  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: I  
List Entry Number: 1000183  
Date first listed: 01-May-1986

## Details

A largely C16 walled garden, with minor early C17 and C19 additions, set in parkland established in the C15 and laid out to its present form by the end of the C17.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The first reference to Knole occurs in the Lambeth Palace papers, in 1281 (Sackville-West 1974). The manor was conveyed to Geoffrey, Lord de Say whose grandson was created Lord Say and Seal in 1447. His son, William Fiennes, sold the manor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Bouchier, in 1456, who built much of the present house and enclosed the park. Knole remained in the ownership of the See of Canterbury until Henry VIII took possession of it by gift from Thomas Cranmer in 1538. In 1561, Knole was given to the Earl of Leicester by Queen Elizabeth but on his abandoning his claim to it in 1566, she gave Knole to her cousin, Sir Thomas Sackville. He finally took possession, after buying out existing leases, in 1603 and between 1605 and 1608 carried out extensive remodelling of the house. In 1945, the fourth Lord Sackville gave the freehold of the house and walled garden and c 10ha of parkland on the west side to the National Trust, the Sackville family occupying the house on a long lease. The majority of the park remains (1997) in private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Knole lies on the immediate outskirts of Sevenoaks, on the east side of the A225. The registered site comprises 10.5ha of walled ornamental gardens, surrounded by a further 378ha of deer park, woodland, and golf course. The park lies on undulating ground which rises generally from the north-west to the crest of an east to west ridge to the south. The southern half of the western boundary is formed by the A225 while the northern half abuts the edge of the centre of Sevenoaks and the buildings of Sevenoaks School. To the north and east, the park is bordered by

well-wooded farmland dotted with hamlets and enjoys extensive views to the North Downs. Part of this north-east boundary is enclosed by a C19 stone park wall (listed grade II). To the south, the lane running along the ridge forms the park boundary beyond which an open landscape of small farms and streams slopes gently southwards to the River Medway.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Knole is approached along Knole Lane, which turns due east off Sevenoaks High Street. The principal entrance to the park is through wrought-iron gates set in a screen which connects two early C19 lodges (listed grade II). The drive, passing through the National Trust-owned area of the park, sweeps northwards then branches eastwards, ascending the north slopes of Echo Mount before linking up with a further drive which enters the park at the north-west corner, by Plymouth Lodge (early C19, listed grade II). The route then follows a straight course southwards for 250m to the gravelled forecourt, which replaced an early C17 railed enclosure (Thomas Badeslade engraving, in Harris 1719) on the north-west front of the house. This front is also approached by a branch of the west drive (part forming the 1990s public exit route) which ascends to the south-west of Echo Mount. Within the immediate vicinity of the house, both drives, and the present tree-lined Duchess' Walk which approaches the house at its north-east corner, reflect the pattern of avenues shown in the view of the South Prospect of Knole by Kip in 1714 (Knyff and Kip 1714-15).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Knole (listed grade I) lies on the north-west slope of the site's central plateau and enjoys views both over the park and to the more distant surrounding landscape of Kent and the North Downs. The approach through the gatehouse tower in the principal, north-west front leads into the Green Court, laid out to lawn. This court was added in the mid C16 by Henry VIII himself (Newman 1969). Beyond the Green Court lies the house built by Thomas Bouchier, incorporating the former manor of Knole, in the mid C15. The house extends south-eastwards and is arranged around two courtyards. Minor additions were made by Bouchier's successors in the late C15 and early C16 but major remodelling by Thomas Sackville from 1605 to 1608 included re-roofing, the addition of the stable block to the north of the Green Court, and the creation of state rooms in the south range. Knole is built of Kentish ragstone although only to ground-floor level on the east front which is otherwise half-timbered and rendered, a C17 feature, possibly following a fire (*ibid*). The Orangery, facing the garden on the south-west corner of the Green Court, was added in 1823.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The ornamental garden, which lies to the south and east of the house, is entirely enclosed within a rectangle of high Kentish ragstone walls (listed grade I), built in the late C16, probably by the Lennards of Chevening who were tenants of Knole until 1603 (Brown 1985). The garden, which slopes gently upwards to both south and east of the house, is laid out in its south-west half as formal enclosures and as an informal Wilderness in the south-east half. The present (1990s) general shape and size of the enclosures, several of the axes, and the Wilderness, survive from their depiction on Thomas Badeslade's West Prospect of Knole published in Harris' History of Kent in 1719.

The garden is entered from the park immediately to the south of the house, through a gateway in the west wall flanked by stone piers (under restoration in 1997). Just inside the gate to the south-west, a small, late C20 herb garden, enclosed within a square of clipped yew hedges, opens off the path. The Orangery and central Colonnade Room open off the south-west front onto lawns, planted as parterres in the early C18 (Badeslade, 1719), and a broad gravelled path. A steep, grassed bank rises from the south-west side of the path onto a rectangular lawn from which a broad, axial grassed walk, flanked by columnar cypresses and herbaceous borders (refurbished 1997), leads to a clairvoie in the south-west wall (railings refurbished 1997). An orchard lies to the west. The axial walk is shown established on Knyff and Kip's view published in 1715 but the bank appears to survive from a number of improvements carried out by Thomas Akres in 1710-11 (Contract for work, 1710-11), in which it replaced a former walled terrace.

The south-east end of the lawn is enclosed by a high wall with a brick and timber pergola, replacing one of curved ironwork (photographs dated 1865, in Colvin and Moggridge 1991), built against it. The wall forms the north-west side of the enclosed rose garden, which is entered on its north-east side up a flight of stone steps from the continuation of the path along the south-west front of the house. Both the axial path running south-westwards from the steps, now (1997) flanked by Irish yews planted in the early C20 (photograph 1947) and the garden's walls, are illustrated on Badeslade's engraving of 1719 (Harris 1719). South-west of the rose garden, there is an informal garden enclosure of trees and shrubs planted as groups in grass, shown established in character on the OS 1st edition, surveyed 1868-9.

The south-east front of the house opens onto a broad lawn, terminated 48m from the house by a pair of stone pillars shown forming a gateway in an enclosing wall in Badeslade's view of 1719 (Harris 1719). On the south side of the lawn is a box parterre infilled with roses, and laid out to its present design in the late C20, while on the north side, grass banks descend to a rectangular sunken garden laid out as a canal by Thomas Akres in 1710-11 on the site of former stew ponds. The garden now (1990s) contains a swimming pool enclosed within clipped yew hedges and overlooked by a gazebo at the north-west end. The pool, laid out in the late C20, replaced the former Mirror Pond, surrounded by formal herbaceous beds, which had been established by the 1870s (Brown 1985; OS 1870).

The Wilderness, the mature tree canopy of which was probably established by the beginning of the C19 (Colvin and Moggridge 1991) and then largely destroyed in the storm of 1987, lies south-east of the formal compartments and is approached by two axial paths. From the south-east corner of the rose garden, a broad, straight grassed path, lined with clipped yew, ascends towards the south-east garden wall. Some 70m along its length further grass paths, interplanted informally with trees and shrubs, radiate from a node towards the clairvoies in the south-east and south-west walls. This layout of 1990 was based on a reconstruction of Badeslade's view of 1719 although it is uncertain whether this was ever carried out; the greatly informalised path system shown on the OS 1st edition of 1870 may however have derived from Badeslade's goose-foot arrangement (D Jacques, MS Notes 1991). The north-east section of the Wilderness, under restoration in 1996-7 to its C19 layout as shown on the OS 1st edition, is centred on the Causeway avenue, which forms an axis (shown on Badeslade's view) from the south-east front of the house to a clairvoie 300m distant in the garden wall. To the south of the avenue is an informal C20 azalea garden while to the north, a circular pond, 95m from the house and restored in the 1990s from the fountain basin shown on OS editions up to 1896, forms a central focus, with a second pond and a mound (possibly a C19 rockery or fernery) as additional features within the replanted woodland and shrubbery.

**PARK** The park surrounds the house and gardens on all sides. Its complex, undulating landform is cut by two major forked valley systems, one on the west side of the park, the other running from north-west to south-east on the other side. Its general character is of open parkland dotted with clumps and individual trees, interspersed with woodland. The park has been in continuous use as a deer park from its first enclosure in 1465 up to the present day (1997), gradually extending to double its original size by 1695 and reaching its present form by 1826 (Colvin and Moggridge 1991). The present Park Keeper's House (listed grade II), 200m south-east of the kitchen garden, incorporates a C17 structure.

Major tracts of woodland lie in the south and south-east part of the park. Most of these, largely replanted after their destruction by the storm of 1987, originate from a major planting programme begun in the early C18 by the first Duke of Dorset and are illustrated in Badeslade's view of 1719. Further woodland was planted in the 1760s (Colvin and Moggridge 1991), its extent by then being indicated on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of Kent of 1769. Two new plantations were added in the south-west corner in the early 1960s.

Of the two major avenues originating at the extreme southern entrance to the park, the Chestnut Walk, which runs parallel to the south-east boundary, contains trees of mixed ages, including 1990s replanting, and is shown on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of 1769. Field and archival evidence suggests that the northern end was first planted in 1735-6 and the southern end c 1760. The Broad Walk, which runs due north-east and is focused on the Bird House of 1761 (listed, with the ruins, grade II), also contains trees of mixed ages. Its northern half was probably first planted in the early C18. Formal lines of trees run parallel to the north-east and south-west walls of the garden. These, and the tree-lined Duchess' Walk which runs for c 400m due north-east of the house, although having been much replanted, appear to have an earliest planting date of c 1710 and are shown on Badeslade's view (*ibid*). To the north-east of the tree-crowned Echo Mount and running south to beyond the kitchen garden, the golf course, laid out in 1923, occupies a major swathe of the park.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden lies 250m south-east of the walled garden on an east-facing slope. Its rectangular form is enclosed by brick walls (listed grade II) with further fenced enclosures, planted with trees, adjacent to the east and south walls. A gardener's cottage (listed grade II) and various outbuildings and glasshouses lie outside the west wall. The garden is first recorded on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of Kent of 1769.

#### REFERENCES

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868-9, published 1871 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1910 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1870 2nd edition published 1896 3rd edition published 1909

Illustrations J Kip, *South prospect of Knole*, c 1714 (in Knyff and Kip 1714-15) T Badeslade, *West prospect of Knole*, c 1719 (in Harris 1719)

Archival items Garden records including Thomas Akres contract in 1710-11 (U269 E21/2/3), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) Photographs of gardens on the east front, 1899-1901 (Local Studies Library, Maidstone) D Jacques, MS Notes, 1991 (EH file)

Description written: June 1997 Amended: June 1999 Register Inspector: VCH 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.