

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

BUCKHURST PARK

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**BUCKHURST PARK**

Name:	BUCKHURST PARK
County:	East Sussex
District:	Wealden (District Authority)
Parish:	Withyham
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.093799 Longitude: 0.13765065 National Grid Reference: TQ4978934894 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000230 Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

## Details

An C18 landscape park, enlarged in the early C19 and improved at that time by both Humphry Repton and Lewis Kennedy, with significant formal gardens laid out in the early C20 by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The present house and estate of Buckhurst Park took its name only in the early C19. The Sackville family owned both the separate but neighbouring parks of Buckhurst and Stoneland (the former from the C11) in the medieval period. Until the early C17, the family lived at Buckhurst Place in Buckhurst Park but moved from the house in 1609 to their estate at Knole. The outer court buildings of Buckhurst Place became the house now known as Old Buckhurst. Although it lacked a family house until the end of the C17, the Sackvilles retained and continued to enlarge the estate formed by the two separate parks. By the mid 1720s, Lionel Sackville, 1st Duke of Dorset and grandson of the 5th Earl, is recorded as living at Stoneland Park and planting the park landscape. His son, Lord George Sackville, was court-martialled after the Battle of Minden (1759) but was eventually raised to the peerage in 1782 as Viscount Sackville. Stoneland was his principal home (although never owned by him) until his death in 1785. The Sackville estates passed to his nephew, the 3rd Duke of Dorset whose son's widow married Charles, Lord Whitworth. Humphry Repton was engaged by Lord Whitworth in 1805 to advise on improving both the landscape and the house, producing a Red Book for Buckhurst in February 1806. Lady Whitworth also amalgamated the two parks and renamed the house Buckhurst Park. She later invited Lewis Kennedy to design new walks, a Swiss bridge and woodland improvements (plans dated 1819 at Buckhurst Park). Lady Whitworth died in 1826 and the estate was inherited by her daughter, Lady Elizabeth Sackville, Countess De La Warr. In the early C20, Buckhurst Park was leased from the De La Warr family by Mr and Mrs Robert Benson, for whom Sir Edwin Lutyens designed additions to the house and a new formal garden. Gertrude Jekyll provided planting plans. In 1952, it was again occupied by the Sackville family and the estate remains in private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Buckhurst Park lies on the south side of the B2110, just to the south-east of Withyham village. The registered site of c.215 ha comprises 1ha of formal gardens, c.23 ha of pleasure grounds and 190ha of parkland, farmland and woodland. St Michael's Church (which contains the Sackville chapel) and a 200m wide

band of village houses and garden land separate most of the northern boundary of the site from the B2110, although the wood known as The Warren abuts the road for 400m in the north-east corner. To the east, the wooded edge of the site meets open farmland while to the south-east, with the exception of several roadside houses in Lye Green, the site is bounded by the B2188. In the south-west corner, the site boundary runs 600m due northwards along the course of a stream and then due west along a track. The western boundary is bordered by a narrow strip of arable land and the unclassified road running due south from Withyham to Fishersgate.

The general slope of the site is northwestwards towards the Medway valley, c.1km to the north. The south-eastern third of the park lies on a high ridge which falls away westwards and north-eastwards to two stream valleys. The western valley stream flows almost due north from the southern site boundary and feeds the main lake before meeting with the stream valley on the north-east side of the ridge, c.200m north of the house. The site is surrounded to the west, north and east by farmed ridges and valleys and while to the south and south-west, thickly wooded slopes rise to the highest point of Ashdown Forest c.5km distant.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The present entrance to Buckhurst Park is from the B2110, immediately west of the Dorset Arms Inn. The drive enters through timber gates and climbs in a south-easterly direction passing the cricket field on its north-east side. It then follows the lightly wooded course of a stream valley, passing the the Mill House (listed grade II), Saunders (listed grade II) and the wellhouse covering the chalybeate spring (listed grade II), before turning south and then climbing steeply westwards to the south-east entrance front of the house.

The survey of the estate in 1597, attributed to Thomas Marshall, shows the Lodge, which occupied the site of the present house, approached directly from Buckhurst Place (now Old Buckhurst), 1km to the west. The survey also shows a secondary approach from the north, along the public road from Withyham, the first 300m of which is followed by the present entrance drive. This public road continued south-eastwards across the park to Lye Green, separating the parks of Stoneland and Buckhurst. It was diverted to its present course along the eastern boundary of Buckhurst Park in 1806, on the advice of Humphry Repton (Red Book, 1806), whose proposal Lord Whitworth also adopted to create a new approach from the south-east, running through Coppice Wood. A woodman's cottage was built at the entrance and both this and Repton's drive survive in the 1990s, the latter as a track and public footpath. During the mid and late C19, the principal entrance and drive to Buckhurst Park was altered to the route from Beechings on the north-eastern boundary (Woudstra, 1991) but reverted to the present route in the C20.

#### **PRINCIPAL BUILDING**

Buckhurst Park (listed grade II) sits on a knoll extending north-westwards from the lower slopes of the parkland ridge to the south-east of the park. The house is approached on its south-east front by an axial gravelled drive flanked by lawns. This layout, which replaced a C19 formal garden, was established in 1991. Built in 1690 on the site of the former Stoneland Lodge (Penn, 1984), the house was extended and altered in the mid C18 by the first Duke of Dorset. The entrance front was moved to the north-east side on Repton's advice in 1806. His proposals for Gothic detailing also appear to have been carried out. The fifth Earl added to the house, largely on the north-east side, the plan for which is held in a private collection. In 1903, Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) rebuilt the western wing of the house although most of Lutyens' work and the early C19 additions were demolished by the tenth Earl in the mid 1950s and the entrance re-established on the south-east front.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The formal terraced gardens lie below and parallel to the south-west front of the house and were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1903. Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) produced planting plans although the present planting dates from the 1990s. French windows open onto a paved terrace which steps down to a narrow grass walk terminated at either end by a low raised wall and a seat. A flight of steps at each end of the grass walk descends to a further broad grass terrace containing a rectangular walled sunken garden. Semi-circular stone steps on three sides of the garden lead down to an oblong lily pool with a central fountain (restored in 1992 from use as a swimming pool), surrounded by paving, narrow grass walks and with mixed borders at the foot of the rose-covered retaining walls.

South-westwards below the sunken garden terrace, the slope is retained by two massive, parallel, high-buttressed walls, the lower supporting a grass walk. Mixed planting fills the niches between the buttresses. At both the north-west and south-east ends of the buttressed walls, a complex flight of straight and semi-circular steps with intervening landings links the various terrace levels to the principal lawn (formerly a tennis court) below. A stone pergola extends south-westwards from the foot of each

flight to frame the lawn. The terrace containing the sunken garden extends north-westwards in a series of hedged compartments to the north-east boundary of the kitchen garden where it terminates in a bastion of yew hedge enclosing a sundial.

From the north-west end of this terrace a broad grass path, contained between parallel beech hedges, slopes south-westwards towards the lake. It curves gradually westwards towards the south-east end of the dam, passing through a landscape of open glades of rhododendron clumps and mature oaks which borders an area of carr, known as the Mill Lands, below the dam to the north-east. Lewis Kennedy's (1789 - c.1840) shrubbery walk, designed in 1819 for Lady Whitworth, followed a route westwards through this area and along the south-east bank of Mill Lands; the latter part appears to have survived. Close to the south-eastern shore of the lake are several small rocky islands with remnants of Japanese-style planting. These gardens are probably of late C19 origin and laid out by the Sackville family. The grass walk continues across the dam to the north-west corner of the lake, where the water descends to the stream in a dramatic rocky cascade crossed by a timber bridge, the latter replaced in 1980 to a previous Victorian design. The cascade, designed and built by James Pulham, and the original unwrought timber bridge formed part of Kennedy's extended pleasure ground walk (Woudstra). The lake extends some 250m to the trees enclosing its southern end and was created some time in the C18 from the Stoneland furnace pond. William Figg's map, although dated 1799, records an additional note of the dam being raised in 1800 and shows the lake similar in size and form to its appearance on the O. S. 1st edition, surveyed in 1874. Walks continue along the densely-planted western slopes of the valley above the lake and Mill Lands. The present extent of the planting, restored in 1992 following storm damage, dates from the late C19 or early C20 although the lake shores were first planted in c.1800 (Figg's map, 1799).

**THE PARK** The land laid out as parkland lies to the south-east and south-west of the house on the slopes of the ridge. Tree cover is sparse, consisting largely of a scatter of individuals with a few clumps immediately south-west of the formal terraces. The remainder of the park is managed as large-scale arable land or woodland. Figg's map of 1799 shows a similar pattern of land use. Although the main body of the late C18 Stoneland Park lay on The Plain and is now arable land and outside the registered site boundary, the eastern part of the ridge which lay within Stoneland Park contained a considerable scatter of individual trees, clumps and five formal rectangular clumps or platoons. These were all part of the extensive new planting carried out in the early C18 (Sackville estate papers). Two of the platoons, remaining only as stumps, retained their form until the mid C20 (aerial photographs c.1960s) and it is intended that these will be restored in the 1990s. The western slopes of the ridge, down to the mill pond stream, are managed as arable. The slopes were part of Buckhurst Park, which had largely been disparked by C18 (Figg's map, 1799 and Tithe map, 1841).

In the park there are two major blocks of woodland, Warren Wood in the north-east and Coppice Wood in the south-east. Although their boundaries have altered, both seem to have been woodland continuously since 1597 (Thomas Marshall's map, 1597). A string of fish ponds occurs along the stream valley between Coppice Wood and the cricket field which, although fewer in number and smaller by the late C20, are shown established on Marshall's map. A further lake lies in the extreme north-west corner of the park, laid out by the Sackville family in the C19 to be viewed from St Michael's Rectory and Monks House (both listed grade II).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden lies at the north-west end of the formal garden terraces from which it is concealed by hedges. It is triangular in shape, slopes down steeply to the south-west and is contained by brick walls along the north-east and north-west sides. The garden, now laid out to cut flowers, open grass and occasional use as grazing, is shown as established on Figg's map of 1799, its north-west side following the alignment of the former public road.

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W. Figg *Plans and Surveys of the Estates in the County of Sussex belonging to the most noble John Frederick Duke of Dorset 1799* (ESRO AMS 5786) Tithe map for Withyham parish 1841(ESRO) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874 2nd edition,

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published 1899 3rd edition, published 1911 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874 3rd edition, published 1910 & 1911 (2 sheets) Revised edition, published 1931 (1 sheet only)

Description written March 1997 revised July 1998 Register Inspector VCH

## 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.