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*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

CHIDDINGSTONE CASTLE

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**CHIDDINGSTONE CASTLE**

Name:	CHIDDINGSTONE CASTLE
County:	Kent
District:	Sevenoaks (District Authority)
Parish:	Chiddingstone
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.185334 Longitude: 0.14301387 National Grid Reference: TQ 49868 45083 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000399 Date first listed: 20-Dec-1988

## Details

A country house, built in the late C17 and remodelled in 1803-08 by William Atkinson, surrounded by an early C19 park, also probably by Atkinson, which replaced an early C18 formal layout.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Streatfield family came to High Street House (as Chiddingstone Castle was called until the mid C19) in the C16. In 1670 the house was rebuilt in brick in the Carolean style and was surrounded by a formal landscape which had been extensively remodelled by the mid C18 (Badeslade engraving). Although the house was partly modified c 1760 it was not until 1803 that Sir Henry Streatfield commissioned the architect William Atkinson to completely remodel the house in the Gothic style. At the same time the remains of the formal landscape were removed and replaced, probably also by Atkinson, with a landscape park including a lake, cascade, and grotto. The Chiddingstone estate remained in the hands of the Streatfield family until 1938, although it was let from c 1900 onwards. When Sir Henry Streatfield died in 1938 it was sold to Lord Astor. He divided up the estate and sold the Castle with its grounds to Longdene School. The Castle was requisitioned by the forces during the Second World War and in 1955 the school sold the property, which was divided into lots. The Castle and its grounds were purchased by the Hon Denys Eyre Bower, while the walled garden with the gardener's cottage, and the barn to the west of the house were sold as private dwellings. When he died in 1977, Denys Bower left Chiddingstone Castle to the nation, since when it has been run as a charitable trust. The site remains (2001) in divided ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Chiddingstone Castle lies in a rural setting in the valley of the River Eden c 10km west of Tonbridge, on the western edge of the village of Chiddingstone. The c 14ha site is bounded to the north-east and north by a minor country road, to the west by Hill Hoath Road, and to the south by farmland. The ground falls very gently from south to north, and also to the east from the Castle, which sits in the centre of the site on the highest ground, towards the lake on the eastern boundary. The fall to the north allows extensive views out of the site across the surrounding countryside.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main approach to Chiddingstone Castle enters the site c 100m to the north-west of the Castle, via a drive which branches off Hill Hoath Road, passing through a pair of stone pillars and wrought-iron gates

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placed there by Denys Bower and running south-east to arrive at the north front. The gates came from Benskin's Brewery and the pillars were moved from the entrance to the coach yard. A second entrance lies c 200m to the south-east of the Castle. The beginning of this drive (now a track, 2001), which was created by Henry Streatfield in c 1800 as the main entrance, was marked by a lodge (demolished in the 1950s) on Peshurst Road. It crosses farmland before entering the park on the eastern boundary and running north-west to arrive at the north front. In Chiddingstone village, a further gateway (listed grade II) stands c 200m east of the Castle, marking a footpath entrance also laid out by Henry Streatfield in c 1800. The wrought-iron gates which hang here may have come from the earlier formal garden scheme. The path runs west, crossing the lake via a footbridge before joining the south-east drive at the north-east corner of the Castle. The footpath from the village and the north-west drive mark the line of the main road which ran right past the Castle until it was diverted by Henry Steatfield when the landscape park was laid out at the beginning of the C19 (Eldridge 1990).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Chiddingstone Castle (listed grade II\*) is a large country house built of coursed freestone with corbelled battlements. The main, north front is of three storeys with octagonal towers flanking the central bay and a square tower to the east. It was erected in the C17 for the Streatfield family, at which time it was called High Street House, the main street from Chiddingstone village running past the north front. The house was altered during the C18 and was extensively rebuilt in the Gothic style between 1803 and 1808 by the architect William Atkinson for Sir Henry Streatfield, at which time the south front contained the main entrance. Further gothic details were added by Henry Kendall, architect, in the 1830s, whose extensive alterations for the house were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1838 but were not carried out. Sometime in the mid C19 High Street House became known as Chiddingstone Castle and in c 1890 the South Hall was converted into a Billiard Room.

A wall of brick and coursed freestone leads from the north-west angle of the Castle to the stable wing, built of red brick with blue header diapers under a hipped tiled roof. The stables (listed grade II) were added during the C18 alterations to the house.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** A gravel terrace surrounds the Castle to the north, east, and south beside a strip of lawn enclosed by a brick ha-ha. From the south-west corner of the Castle a high garden wall of coursed ashlar sandstone (c 1797, listed grade II\*) runs south-west for c 80m and then turns west for c 30m, enclosing the walled kitchen garden. At the north-east corner of the wall is an octagonal sandstone pump-house; at the south-east angle stands a gothic gazebo and at the south-west corner stands the remains of the former orangery, to the west of which stands a yew hedge of C17 origin. The three garden buildings (all listed grade II\*) were added by William Atkinson at the beginning of the C19. The area beyond the ha-ha below the south front is laid to grass and in the C19 was used as a hay meadow which was mown after the hay was cleared to make a cricket pitch. Later in the C19 it became a grass tennis court. It is bounded to the south by a second ha-ha, beyond which lies the park.

**PARK** The park at Chiddingstone Castle is currently (2001) a mix of grassland to the north and arable land to the south, with a few mature parkland trees. The land beyond the ha-ha on the east side of the Castle leads down to the c 1.5ha lake which is located c 75m east of the Castle and runs along part of the eastern boundary. It was formed in the early C19 by the damming of a small stream. A grass track, following the line of the early C19 main drive, leads from the Castle to the southern end of the lake where the head is marked by a cascade, fed from a small pool c 200m further to the south in the park. Some 100m to the north of the cascade is the footbridge over the lake which leads to the village gates out of the park (as described above). On the eastern bank of the lake is a series of stone caves and grottoes cut into the natural rock when the lake was dug. Until the late C20 the entrance to the caves was marked by the roots of an ancient oak, fashioned into a gothic archway. An ornamental plantation between the east bank and the eastern boundary of the park, originally planted in the early C19 to screen the Castle from the village, suffered severe storm damage in the late C20. The northern end of the lake is terminated at the boundary of the park by an early C19 sham stone bridge which masks the dam embanking the foot of the lake.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The walled kitchen garden (listed grade II\*) lies immediately to the south-west of the Castle, linked to it by the garden wall containing the pump-house, gazebo, and orangery. It is now (2001) the garden to the Gardener's Cottage which is in separate private ownership.

**REFERENCES**

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Illustrations T Badeslade, engraving of the C17 house and gardens, early C18 (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) R Cornish, watercolour of the east and north front, 1810 (private collection)

Description rewritten: March 2001 Amended: March 2001 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.