

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**KEMP TOWN ENCLOSURES**

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KEMP TOWN ENCLOSURES**

Name: KEMP TOWN ENCLOSURES

District: The City of Brighton and Hove (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.815630  
Longitude: -0.11381660  
National Grid Reference: TQ 32972 03482  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001313  
Date first listed: 07-Jun-1995

## Details

### SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

Private town gardens laid out in the 1820s for the residents of the Kemp Town Estate by Henry Phillips, landscape gardener and Henry Kendall, surveyor as part of the wider Regency town planning of Brighton.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Early in C19, Thomas Read Kemp, MP (1781-1844), developed his property, Black Rock Farm and adjacent land, into a fashionable high quality residential estate which he called Kemp Town. Despite early financial difficulties and some alterations to the original plan, the land was laid out in 1823, by the architects Amon Wilds and Charles Busby to a unified plan. As architects they were responsible for the layout of many of the new Regency suburbs of Brighton. Areas of this urban scheme were also developed by Thomas Cubitt for Kemp, working together with Henry Kendall, a surveyor and pupil of John Nash. Cubitt and Kendall also collaborated together over the development of Belgrave Square, London (qv). Kemp's ventures in town planning and speculative development eventually led to a loss of £500,000 and he died in comparative poverty in Paris, in 1844. The gardens set centrally as the focus of the new housing development, were at first enclosed by railings at Kemp's own expense in 1821. In 1828 Henry Phillips (1779-1840), a botanist, landscape gardener and the author of *Sylva Florifera* (published 1823), drew up the plan for the gardens which was presented to the first meeting of the Kemp Town Enclosures Committee. At this meeting, Thomas Cubitt, who built 37 of the 106 houses, and himself lived at 13 Lewes Crescent, was appointed 'to superintend the general works and improvements'. Phillips' planned scheme for which he was paid £371.10s.8d included shrubberies with untrimmed shrubs giving an informal appearance, mounded to provide privacy and protection for the plants. This followed the style of shrubbery planting as outlined in his book *Sylva Florifera*. 20,000 plants were subsequently ordered and planted under Phillips' supervision, including semi-mature trees, shrubs and flowering plants, and gravel walks were put down.

An aquatint of c.1826 depicts the gardens merely as architect's infill, giving a vague impression of gardens, whereas maps of 1828 show the implementation of Phillips' plan as presented. However, this design required almost immediate adaptation when the decision was made, later in 1828, to close the road round the crescent making two instead of three garden enclosures.

The first meeting of the Kemp Town Enclosures Committee also agreed to the development of formal walks at the south end of the crescent. These were reached through a subterranean passage under Marine Parade which led out onto the Esplanade with formal terraces and grassy slopes along the sea front and the seashore itself. This effectively provided the residents of Kemp

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KEMP TOWN ENCLOSURES**

Town's 106 houses with their own private sea side walks extending over a 1 km along the beach. This part of the scheme was built from 1830-35 by Henry Kendall.

The development of the sea-terraces has been attributed to Sir Joseph Paxton (1803-1865). In 1828, William George Spencer Cavendish, sixth Earl of Devonshire, bought the two houses at the corner of Lewes Crescent and Chichester Terrace, overlooking the sea and gardens, and for many years he resided in Kemp Town. Paxton is known to have made several visits to the Duke's house and was interested in Phillips' plans for a great conservatory at Brighton, to which the Duke had contributed plants. Paxton's other works for the Duke include his great scheme at Chatsworth (qv) and a smaller scheme at Buxton Pavilion Gardens (qv). At Kemp Town the long hill from the beach, some 30m below, is known as the Duke's Mound.

The gardens were maintained by subscriptions, each proprietor contributing an equal proportion per house he possessed, to works, improvements and maintenance. The gardens remain private for the housing estate and many of the many of the houses have now been converted into flats.

#### SITE DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Kemp Town gardens form 6ha of enclosed gardens in the Kemp Town Estate which is situated on the east side of Brighton, now directly adjacent on the west side of the Brighton Marina and the Undercliffe Walk. The site slopes steeply southwards from the northern end of the gardens to the sea front, the top of Sussex Square which forms the northern, highest part of the gardens, being nearly 40m above sea level and 400m from the mean high water level.

The gardens form the focus of the Regency layout: Sussex Square (houses nos 1-50, 1825-28 listed grade I) to the north opening out onto Lewes Crescent at the southern end. The gardens thus comprise a semi-circle facing the sea with an adjoining rectangular plot to its north. Flanking either side of Lewes Crescent (houses nos 1-28, 1823-28 listed grade I) and also facing the sea to the west and to the east are Chichester Terrace and Arundel Terrace, both fronted by a grass lawn between the Estate road and Marine Parade, now the A259, with the Esplanade beyond.

Kemp Town gardens, lying central to the housing scheme are separated from the surrounding terraced houses by public roads, Lewes Crescent and Sussex Square to the west and east, with a further road, Eastern Road, formerly York Terrace, dividing off the northern end of Sussex Square. Eastern Road thus forms the southern boundary of the northern square and thereafter to the south lie the main gardens. These are railed as is the northern square.

**GARDENS** The northern square has a perimeter walk set inside a ring of shrubbery and sycamores. Part of the ground has been levelled presumably to form a games lawn. The main gardens are entered from gateways central to the west, north and east sides. These all lead onto paths which meet at a central circular shrubbery. From this central feature, a path leads south to the area enclosed by the crescent. Here the path divides to provide a perimeter walk (the southern line of which is now lost, late C20). Central to the axis of the gardens a path leads down to the tunnel, which provides the link between the gardens and Esplanade below. This subterranean passage runs under the A259, formerly the Marine Parade, to the sea front.

The southern end of the tunnel emerges between two 'cottages' set into the high brick retaining wall along the front (originally one was for the gardener, the other for a constable). From here, walks to either side lead down the planted Slopes, as the steeply falling ground to the beach is called, joining in front of the Reading Room, built in 1835, which stands directly below the tunnel entrance. A 12m high retaining wall shelters the walks from northerly winds, and originally there were arches in the retaining walls of the upper and lower marine terraces providing shelters and summer-houses.

#### REFERENCES:

Printed material Mavis Batey, Site report, 1994 *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 October 1908 (reprinted as *The King & Brighton. A History of Sussex Square*) J Lawrence-Hamilton, *The Budget & Private Enclosed Gardens*, 1909 Kemp Town Closures Committee, Minute Book of the Committee of Management

Maps Plan by Henry Phillips, 1828

Illustrations John Bruce, *Kemptown Brighton, Erecting on the East Cliff on the Estate of T R Kemp Esq., MP*, aquatint by John Bruce from his own sketch, c.1826

Description written : 30 July 1996 Register Inspector : Dr H Jordan Revised : K Campbell, January 2000

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*KEMP TOWN ENCLOSURES*

## 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.