

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

KIDBROOKE PARK

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Name:	KIDBROOKE PARK
County:	East Sussex
District:	Wealden (District Authority)
Parish:	Forest Row
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.088900 Longitude: 0.023855495 National Grid Reference: TQ 41836 34124 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.localisation:	[51.0931713760403,0.025492699924397], [51.0931634262297,0.025496734032421], [51.093171716326,0.02550274880879], [51.0931713760403,0.025492699924397]
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000305 Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

Details

An C18 park with extensive surviving early C19 landscaping attributed to Humphry Repton and with additional C20 formal and woodland gardens.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The sixteenth Lord Abergavenny, William Nevill, built the present house at Kidbrooke as his new dwelling in 1733(4), purchasing surrounding farmland to lay out the new grounds and park.

In 1803, the second Earl of Abergavenny sold the 203 acre (82ha) estate to Charles Abbot, later Lord Colchester, Speaker of the House of Commons. He called in Humphry Repton (1752-1818) between 1803 and 1808 to improve the park. Repton's visits and payments concerning the water system, planting and the site's approach are recorded, and a Red Book is referred to in the Colchester papers (Landskip & Prospect 1991), but it is unclear whether such a book was ever produced. Abbot also purchased Hindleap Warren, south of the park's boundary.

The third Lord Colchester sold the estate in 1874 to Henry Ray Freshfield who enlarged and altered the house. It was next sold in 1909 to Mr Lewes Kekewich and again in 1916 to Sir James Horlick. It was purchased in 1921 by Ronald Olaf Hambro who added the western formal gardens. The Alliance Assurance Company bought the estate for office use in 1938, selling it in separate lots in 1945-6. South, North and Kidbrooke Lodges and farmland to the south-west (c 19ha and now run as a stud) were sold first, the remaining 145.5 acres (59ha), including the house, gardens and pleasure grounds, becoming the property of Michael Hall School, a Rudolf Steiner School, who are the present (1997) owners. The school has sold off some perimeter land for development and built school housing and facilities in the grounds.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Kidbrooke Park lies on the south-west edge of the village of Forest Row, 5km south-east of East Grinstead on the main A22 Lewes Road. The c 65ha site is bounded to the north-west by

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Priory Road and by open farmland beyond the road. At the north end of Priory Road a line of houses, built on land sold off by the school soon after purchase, separates the park from the road. Although in the C18 and C19 the estate owned considerable farmland to the north and west, Priory Road marks the original boundary of the C18 park.

To the north and north-east, the boundary is formed by the built-up edge of Forest Row village, 20ha of the housing built on land formerly part of the park until sold by Michael Hall School for development in the mid C20. Prior to this, the park boundary extended to the junction of Gilham's Lane and Lewes Road.

South of the village, the remaining eastern, fenced and wooded boundary of the park follows its C18 line along the A22 Lewes Road, with Ashdown Forest rising to the east beyond. To the south-west, within Kidbrooke Wood, a stone-walled ha-ha (now largely reduced to an earth bank) defines the park's C18 boundary with the Forest.

The park lies within the broad valley of the Kid stream. The stream rises in the Forest and flows northwards through the site towards Forest Row, converging with a more minor stream at the site of the house. The side of the Kid valley rising to a ridge forms the eastern side of the park while to the south-west, a high Forest ridge extends northwards into the park between the two stream valleys.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site's main approach is by a short drive entered from Priory Road just north-west of the house. This route was established as a service entrance from at least the early C19, becoming the principal entrance only when development closed off the entrance from Forest Row in the mid C20. The earliest principal drive to the house in the mid C18 followed a route due west from Lewes Road at Highgate Green (a present footpath follows a similar line). Evidence suggests (Colchester papers) that Humphry Repton replaced this approach with a new one entered at the north end of the park (from Forest Row) which crossed the Kid by a bridge and followed the west bank of Lower Lake to a junction with the present drive c 100m north-west of the house. Between 1899 and 1911 (OS maps), the drive route was altered to run along the east side of the lake. This route survives (1997) as a track.

The present drive serves new school buildings and car parks before ending at the north front of the house in a tarmacadam forecourt which in the late C19 was laid out with flowers and shrubbery. Early C19 views (Forest Row, Historical Aspects and Recollections) show lawns extending up to this front.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING From its position in the Kid valley, Kidbrooke Park (listed grade II*) commands extensive views southwards over the park to the Forest ridges beyond. Ashurstwood village can be seen on a high, skyline ridge north of Forest Row. The architect of the house, which was built in 1733-4, is unknown. It consists of a central block with a north and south wing and a separate stable block with clock tower (listed grade II*) to the north. The house was altered in 1805 by Robert Mylne, who added the colonnade opening onto the west terrace, and again by George Dance in 1815. The south wing was removed or burned down in the mid C19 and in 1874 F P Cockerell added a north-west wing and the present tower and entrance porch on the east front.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the west, south and north-east of the house, the grounds to the south and north-east being focused on the Kid stream.

The bow on the south elevation of the house opens onto a narrow terrace and a square of sunken lawn enclosed to the west and east by parallel yew hedges and approached down two flights of stone steps. A central flight, now gone, still existed in c 1900. This formal arrangement, which replaced C18 open lawns with tree clumps, was laid out by the Freshfields in the late C19 (Forest Row, Historical Aspects and Recollections). The lawns contained a central fountain and flower beds (now gone) and a framing semicircle of six columnar cypresses, two of which survive. Some 80m further south, yew hedges enclose the lawn but leave a central gap for an axial view southwards to a further large oval of grass beyond, framed by wooded shrubbery (largely rhododendrons) and known as the Valley Field. From the far south end of the Valley Field, the Kid stream contains a series of designed features. It follows a course east of its original one which ran down the centre of the Valley Field. Evidence suggests that Repton was responsible for this new water system. The floor of the stream is lined with dressed stone blocks and ornamented with stepping stones and a rocky cascade. The stream runs on northwards through a tunnel, emerging at the north end through a circular swallow-hole in the stream floor. Northwards from this point the stream is canalised, retained by

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a dressed stone wall on its west side (this is now reduced largely to two courses). The stream passes the east front of the house in a further tunnel and emerges to form the Lower Lake north-east of the house.

At the south end of the Valley Field, the framing belts of wooded shrubbery meet but allow an axial vista from the house to the rising slopes and parkland clumps beyond. This vista (revealed by vegetation clearance in the 1990s), together with a second one focused on the Fairy Mount beside Lewes Road and a third on tree clumps on the ridge of parkland to the south-west (both currently obscured or lost) probably also formed part of Repton's landscape work.

Further south still and now set within woodland and rhododendron, the Kid's upper course is ornamented with a series of pools and islands, known as the Silt Lakes, also part of Repton's water system. The water course is shown in an open setting on the OS 1st edition of 1874 and a sale plan of the same year. The present woodland encroachment appears to be mid C20. The weir below the largest pool (Top Lake) was built by the Hambros between 1921 and 1938. Close to the park's southern boundary ha-ha is a chalybeate spring emerging into a small stone basin, and the site of a former obelisk (gone by the early C20).

West of the house, the colonnaded front opens onto a large paved terrace with flower beds, low walls and urns, with steps connecting its various levels to a temple-like circular pergola supported on stone columns. The pergola links the terrace with the walled kitchen garden through a door in the south-east corner of its wall. These formal gardens were designed for Olaf Hambro by Walter Hines Godfrey (1881-1961) in 1924. A grass terrace, previously with a path and a herbaceous border (now gone) runs along the south side of the kitchen garden wall linking a vista from the pergola with a small pedimented garden temple at the far west end. The temple and terrace design was also carried out by the Hambros.

South-west of these formal terrace gardens is a further stone-faced ha-ha (of C18 or early C19 origin), a swimming pool and a tennis court (abandoned in the 1990s). Further south-west and stretching up the minor stream valley is a bog garden with a pool and stonework weirs and the remnants of waterside planting and Japanese maples. These are all features built by the Hambros between 1921 and 1938, replacing open grass and vistas to the south-west beyond the ha-ha.

The pleasure grounds extend north-eastwards along the Kid valley from the house to the end of the park. The stream flows over two ruined weirs and then expands into the long, sinuous form of Lower Lake. The lake is fringed with trees and terminated by a balustraded bridge by Samuel Wyatt (1737-1807), also in a ruinous state. The stream cascades into a stone bowl beneath the bridge and into a pool on the far side. Repton's early C19 drive west of the lake is now a footpath and the boathouse shown on the 1874 sale plan has gone.

PARK The parkland lies on the valley sides and ridges which rise above the pleasure grounds to the south-west and south-east of the house. It is laid to rough grass or grazing. The eastern slopes of the Kid valley have a sparse scatter of clumps and individual parkland trees. The school's kindergarten is built on the lower slope of the valley side, c 150m south-east of the house. A narrow belt of woodland along the eastern boundary screens the park from the main A22 road. The parkland south-west of the house on the central ridge between the two streams has virtually no tree cover except for one storm-damaged central clump. The detailed pattern of planting shown on the OS 1st edition (surveyed 1873-5) is shown established in principle on the surveyor's drawing for the OS Old Series (1808). This pattern is largely still in existence on the OS edition published in 1938. While the eastern slopes of the Kid valley were well furnished with tree clumps, the central ridge seems never to have had much more than its one central clump. By the mid C20 the vista south-west from the house to the park had been closed by trees and the open parkland character of the upper Kid stream had also been replaced by tree cover. Many trees were lost in the park in the storm of 1987 although some new planting took place under the 'More Trees Please' scheme in the early 1980s. An area of parkland south-east of the Lower Lake was lost to development in the mid C20.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen garden lies on rising ground to the north-west of the house. It was established by the mid C18 and is illustrated in a view by George Lambert in c 1740 (Harris 1979). It is surrounded by brick walls with a main entrance through wrought-iron gates in the centre of the south wall and is now laid out to vegetables, fruit and poly-tunnel cultivation. School housing projects into the garden through much of its north wall, behind which a late Victorian glasshouse survives. In the south-east corner is a paved garden in the shape of a fan (possibly part of Godfrey's 1924 scheme), undergoing restoration in 1997. An icehouse is sited immediately north-east outside the kitchen garden wall.

REFERENCES

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Maps W Gardner and T Gream, *A topographical map of the County of Sussex...*, 1" to 1 mile, surveyed 1795 Map accompanying sale particulars, 1:2500, published 1874 (East Sussex Record Office)

OS surveyor's drawing, 1808 (British Library maps) [copy in East Sussex Record Office] OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874 2nd edition published 1911 3rd edition published 1938

Archival items Drawings and photographs relating to the design work by Walter Hines Godfrey in 1924 are held in a private collection.

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 2000

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.