

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

KNEPP CASTLE

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

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Name:	KNEPP CASTLE
County:	West Sussex
District:	Horsham (District Authority)
Parish:	Shipley
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.983103 Longitude: -0.35338212 National Grid Reference: TQ 15681 21701 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000519 Date first listed: 20-Dec-1988

Details

Pleasure grounds and a park laid out on a new site to complement a picturesque, castellated mansion of 1806-13 by the architect John Nash, but incorporating elements of an earlier landscape including some industrial features, notably a substantial hammer-pond associated with the post-medieval Wealden iron industry.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Knepp Castle was a seat of the de Braose family, who had received the lands from William the Conqueror. The castle was built in the C11 and fortified in 1214. King William is known to have visited Knepp several times for hunting and it is referred to variously as a Park and a Forest. In the C16 the land was used for iron working and the Duke of Norfolk constructed a large hammer-pond. The castle was demolished in 1726.

The present Knepp Castle is an early C19 house designed by John Nash (1752-1835) for Sir Charles Merrick Burrell. It is set at the centre of a picturesque park which appears to have been laid out at the same time the house was built, although unfortunately there is little surviving documentation for Nash's involvement in the landscape. As a principal exponent of the Regency Picturesque style, Nash considered that the house should itself be the major picturesque building in the landscape, as at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton (qv), rather than picturesque garden follies. This is broadly the effect achieved at Knepp Park. The house and park remain (2000) in private ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Knepp Castle, lying within its gently rolling park of 144ha, is situated due east of the hamlet of Shipley, 9km east of Billingshurst. The western boundary of the park abuts Shipley Road, which runs northwards to meet the A272 Billingshurst to Haywards Heath road, situated 0.7km north of Knepp Park. The parkland stretches eastwards to meet the Horsham to Worthing road (A24) which forms the park boundary for 500m. To the south the park boundary lies along Castle Lane which joins the Shipley Road to the A24, while the northern boundary of the park is enclosed by small copses and a regular pattern of enclosure fields, apart from a salient strip bordering a long, straight, formal approach running southwards for 800m from North Lodge to the Castle. This is paralleled by another strip running northwards to enclose an area, now marshland, which was originally open water, being the upper extent of Kneppmill Pond (OS 1879).

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Inventory of Great Britain
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The main view lies south-east across the lake towards the ruins of the old Knepp Castle.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The Castle is approached by several drives. Castle Lane, a turning off the A24, runs along the southern edge of the site, leads between Floodgate Farm and the remains of the old castle, and passes down the side of the Ladies Walk and over the dam of the lake. From here a drive branches off from the lane to lead northwards through The Rookery and across the south park. Castle Lane continues north-west to New Lodge (late C19), from where a second drive leads north-eastwards to meet the turning circle at the south front of the house.

From West Lodge (late C19) on the Shipley Road, which marks the west boundary of the site, a drive leads south-east across parkland towards the Castle, and is backed on its north side by Spring Wood and Brickyard Wood. Another lodge, North Lodge, stands directly on the A272, or the 'New Road' (OS 1898) to the north of the Castle. From here a drive leads south, through a long belt of planting, to join with the west drive. As with the other approaches this also leads to the turning circle below the south front of the Castle.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Knepp Castle (listed grade II*) was built in 1806-13 by John Nash. The house and offices form a castellated Gothic-style composition that is prominent in the landscape

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS There is no formal garden as such, and there is no evidence that there has ever been one (Inspector's Report 1988). From the north front a terraced walk extends northwards, divided from the park to the east by a ha-ha, and sheltered by the wall of the kitchen garden to the west. This was originally the limit of the early C19 pleasure grounds. In the late C19 the pleasure grounds were extended northwards, running down to the lake, incorporating the early C19 plantings of clumps of oak and sweet chestnut, the new area being planted up as an arboretum by Ethelredia Burrell (née Loder). The late C19 plantings include exotics such as Wellingtonias, and the area was separated from the park by ornamental iron railings, which survive in part.

PARK The landscape park was developed out of existing agricultural land at the same time as the Castle was built. Nash may have been involved with its design.

To the east of Knepp Castle, the land falls to Kneppmill Pond, a 24ha expanse of water, originally a C16 hammer-pond. The long, slightly serpentine lake runs north/south across the centre of the site in a shallow valley. The dam is situated across its southern end and is crossed by Castle Lane, which forms the southern boundary of the park. An icehouse has been built into the west end of the embankment, while Kneppmill House on the south side of the lane (outside the area here registered) marks the termination of the east end of the embankment. At its southern end the lake branches off to form an area of water which extends eastwards to Floodgate Farm where there is another substantial dam. In 1835 the lake was described as 'the most extended piece of water south of the River Thames, and which derives additional beauty from its serpentine form, adorned as its banks are, by fine timber and plantations' (Horsfield 1835).

To the east of Kneppmill Pond is Hillhouse Lawn, a rectangular expanse of open parkland laid out on gently rising land which meets the A24 at its boundary, screened by a tree belt. The term 'lawn' in this Nash-like setting refers to forest lawn as advocated by William Gilpin in his *Remarks on Forest Scenery* (1791).

To the south-west of the Castle the park is limited in extent to some 0.5ha with occasional oaks set in small groups, until it meets the park belt along Castle Lane. To the west the park extends to the Shipley Road, the majority of this area being out of sight of the Castle.

The remains of the old castle (scheduled ancient monument, outside the boundary of the registered area), lying 800m south of the Ladies Walk, consist of an square stone tower atop a motte, surrounded by marshy land with a causeway approach on the west side. By 1775 it was in ruins so that 'its original form could not be conjectured' (Horsfield 1835). It seems to have been deliberately planted with trees as an eyecatcher, to be seen from Knepp Park as part of the early C19 landscape scheme.

KITCHEN GARDEN The brick-walled kitchen garden, contemporary with the Nash house, lies beyond the offices to the north of the Castle and forms an integral part of the building complex.

REFERENCES

J Dallaway, *History of Western Division of Sussex 2*, (1830), p 298 T W Horsfield, *History of Sussex 2*, (1835), p 247 W S Ellis, *The Parks and Forests of Sussex* (1885) *The Field*, 266 (23 February 1985), pp 56-8

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
KNEPP CASTLE

Maps Pre C19 estate map, (private collection)

OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, surveyed 1801-6 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1875, published 1879 2nd edition published 1898

Description written: June 2000 Register Inspector: KC Edited: September 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.