

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

KNEBWORTH

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*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KNEBWORTH**

Name: KNEBWORTH

County: Hertfordshire

District: North Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Codicote

County: Hertfordshire

District: North Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Knebworth

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.872284  
Longitude: -0.21789561  
National Grid Reference: TL 22786 20802  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1000255  
Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

## Details

Gardens, including a mid C19 formal scheme, surrounding an early C16 country house altered in the early and mid C19, set within a former mid C17 deer park and woodland, landscaped in the early C19. The garden was remodelled by Edwin Lutyens in 1908, alongside his contemporary work on the interior of the house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

A park has existed at Knebworth since at least the C14 (Preston 1982). In 1490 Sir Robert Lytton (d 1504) bought Knebworth from Sir Thomas Bouchier for £800. Around 1500 Sir Robert built a new, four-sided courtyard house attached to the existing C15 gatehouse. The estate was described in 1700 as 'a large pile of brick with a fair quadrangle in the middle of it, seated upon a dry hill, in a fair large park, stocked with the best deer in the country, excellent timber and well wooded and from thence you may behold a most lovely prospect east' (Chauncy 1700).

The estate remained largely unaltered until the early C19, when in 1810 Mrs Elizabeth Bulwer-Lytton (1773-1843), finding the building 'old-fashioned and too large' demolished three sides of the quadrangle, including the medieval gatehouse, part of which she re-erected as Tower Lodge in the park (guidebook). She gothicised the remaining south-west wing, adding eight towers, battlements and a porch. The House at that time sat in a landscape park, with lawns sweeping up to the south-west and north-west fronts (1819 painting, reproduced in guidebook).

In 1843 Mrs Bulwer-Lytton was succeeded by her son, the novelist Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-73), first Baron Lytton (cr 1866), who added further embellishments to the exterior of the House, as well as elaborate formal gardens with ornate flower beds, fountains, statues and shrubbery walks. The gardens were widely featured in the horticultural press of the mid to late C19. In 1908 Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) carried out work in the House and simplified the garden design for Victor, second

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*KNEBWORTH*

Earl of Lytton, whose sister Lutyens had married shortly before. Lutyens continued to advise on alterations in the House and garden until his death in 1944. A herb garden designed by Gertrude Jekyll in the early C20 for Knebworth but not established at the time was laid out in the late C20. The park and estate remain (1999) in private ownership, the House and gardens being the property of a charitable trust.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Knebworth lies 3km south-west of the centre of Stevenage, on the north-west edge of the village of Old Knebworth. The c 180ha site is bounded to the south-east by Old Knebworth Lane which leads south-west into the village street of Old Knebworth, to the south-west largely by the lane from Old Knebworth to Gaffridge Wood, and on the other sides largely by agricultural land and woodlands. The House and gardens stand on high ground skirted to the north-west and north-east by a valley which runs through the park and holds a stream, a series of lakes and a swallow hole. Woodland and parkland extend north from the valley bottom. The setting is largely rural, with long views north-west and north-east from the House and adjacent parkland. The view north-east is interrupted in the middle distance by Stevenage's late C20 industrial developments.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Several approach drives cross the park. The north-east drive (1886; Lord Cobbold pers comm, March 2000) enters 1.25km north-east of the House at North Lodge, a brick-built gateway in Tudor style flanked by two lodges (C19 or early C20). From here the drive runs south-west along a lime avenue through parkland, with views south-east across the park beyond the House and church to distant countryside beyond. Some 650m north of the House the drive turns south, descending sharply into the valley and crossing the stream 550m from the House. The drive rises up the valley side, leading to the north-west end of a further lime avenue. The lime avenue extends south-east to the main entrance to the forecourt, both aligned on the north-west front of the House.

The rectangular forecourt is enclosed to the north-west and north-east by brick and stucco walls, with a balustrade with a quatrefoil frieze and traceried piers at intervals (c 1845, listed grade II). The drive enters via gate piers surmounted by large heraldic beasts, supporting ornate cast-iron gates. The forecourt is laid largely to gravel, leading up to a porch at the centre of the north-east front. The north-east section of the forecourt is laid to lawn with borders, with a raised bank running along the inner side of the forecourt wall, and a polygonal bastion at the north corner of the forecourt. A further entrance to the forecourt, in the south-east side, is marked by a large gothic gatehouse and curtain wall, terminated by a round tower.

The course of the central section of the north-east drive was altered in the mid to late C20, being moved eastwards to its present course over the stream from its C19 course which crossed the water at the east end of the lake above a now derelict (1999) flight of formal steps, and passing Lake Lodge 75m to the north (OS 1881; 1899).

A service drive enters off the village street, 20m south-east of the House, giving access to the stable yard and kitchen garden south of the House, and the south-east side of the forecourt via the gatehouse.

The early C19 west drive formerly entered 1.15km west of the House at Tower Lodges (C15, re-erected 1816, converted to domestic accommodation 1990s, listed grade II), a single-storey brick gatehouse with stone crenellations and a narrow, three-storey tower attached. This entrance is now (1999) disused. From here the drive extends east through the park at the edge of the south-east plateau, arriving at the north-west entrance to the forecourt.

The south drive, established in Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee year (1897; Lord Cobbold pers comm, April 2000), enters 400m south of the House, set back off the main village street and flanked by two single-storey, late C19, timber-framed lodges (listed grade II). The entrance is flanked by low, curving brick walls leading to brick gate piers which support wooden carriage gates. From here the drive leads north-west through the park, flanked by an oak avenue, curving north and east to arrive at the north-west entrance to the forecourt.

A further entrance drive, created in 1971, leads south directly from junction 7 of the A1(M) and Stevenage, north of the park (outside the area here registered). Following the course of a disused lane, it extends south alongside the park boundary, passing North Lodge, entering the site 1km north-east of the House. From here it runs south-west through the park, flanked for c 550m by a sweet chestnut avenue, skirting the church, and extending beyond this to the north entrance to the forecourt.

The earliest entrance to the park may have been from the southern corner at Park Gate House, off Slip Lane. Two sweet chestnut trees remain from the entrance avenue which is marked on C18 and C19 maps (1731; OS 1884).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Knebworth House (C16, J B Rebecca 1815-20, H E Kendall 1840s, Edwin Lutyens 1907-8, P Tilden 1950, listed grade II\*) stands close to the centre of the south-east boundary of the park, enclosed by the mid C19 courtyard to the north-west and north-east, to the south-west by the gardens, and to the south-east by the stable yard and other service yards. The two-storey, brick-built house is the remaining wing of the C16 courtyard house, gothicised in the early C19 by Mrs Bulwer-Lytton and extensively embellished in Gothic style by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton in the 1840s. The early C19, Tudor-style stable block (listed grade II) stands at the south-west side of the adjacent stable yard.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens lie to the south-west and south of the House, divided into formal and wilderness sections respectively. The north-west arm of the forecourt turns south-east, to continue as a gravel terrace along the south-west, garden front of the House, leading to a raised paved garden at the south-east end of the terrace. The terrace is separated by a brick and stucco balustrade from a sunken lawn extending south-west, flanked by gravelled lime walks, at the centre of which lies a formal pool surrounded by pollarded lime trees. Steps lead up from the walks to a gravel cross walk, beyond which lies a formally laid out rose garden set in lawns, flanking a central broad gravel path. At the centre of each flanking lawn lies a formal stone pool. The path leads to a clipped yew hedge (known as the Iron Curtain), curved at the centre, through which a gap leads to a small lawn enclosed by a further yew hedge. The lawn is encircled by a stone path and flanked by narrow borders with (1999) a green and white colour theme. Two gaps at the south-west end lead out to the Gold Garden (formerly the site of Lutyens' Rose Garden) with a central circular pool enclosed by a border and clipped dwarf box hedges, this set in a ring of lawn, itself in turn encircled by box-edge borders. From here a grass path leads south-west to Lutyens' small, rectangular Brick Garden, laid to lawn enclosed by brick paths and flanked by a geometric pattern of brick-edged borders with (1999) a blue and grey theme. A raised bank runs along the south-west side of this area, supporting a pergola (early C20, rebuilt late C20), separated from the parkland beyond by the remains of a ha-ha. The view across the park, towards a monument to Mrs Bulwer-Lytton, is flanked by a horse chestnut avenue leading into a lime avenue. A path leads south-east from the pergola to the maze (1840s, replanted 1990s), stone-paved and planted with clipped yews and box.

The central formal garden axis is flanked by informal lawns planted with mature specimen trees of many species. A pets' cemetery lies to the west of the north half of the Iron Curtain yew hedge. South of the rose garden lies a grass viewing mound (1840s), separated from a second mound to the east by a path edged with stone retaining walls. A path leads from the mounds south to a pond. From here the path leads to the Wilderness, an area of mature woodland with many ornamental trees and shrubs underplanted with wild flowers and bulbs.

The estate plan of 1731 details the garden, which then consisted of a kitchen garden to the south-east of the House, an orchard to the south-west, a bowling green to the north-west, and the forecourt as depicted by Chauncy in 1700. These gardens seem to have been removed by Mrs Bulwer-Lytton in the early C19 and incorporated within the park, to be replaced by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in the late 1840s with an Italianate garden along the south-west axis of the House. This incorporated various smaller, secluded features enclosed by clipped evergreens. The garden came to be described as a 'horticultural fairyland' (Gardeners' Chronicle 1891), and was extensively reported in the C19 horticultural press and literature. In 1874, Robert, later Viceroy of India and first Earl of Lytton, took over the estate, creating the Wilderness to the south of the House. In the late C19 a walk led from south of the kitchen garden through the belt to the east bounding the village street (OS 1884; 1899), this walk having since been lost (1999). Edwin Lutyens considerably simplified the mid C19 garden layout c 1908.

**PARK** The park is laid to pasture and planted with scattered mature park trees. It is divided into two unequal halves by the valley through which the stream runs from south-west to north-east. The stream has been dammed 500m north of the House to form a 250m long lake with a central island. On the north bank stands a C19 boathouse and Fishing Cottage (C17, listed grade II), a timber-framed thatched cottage remodelled as a cottage orné in the early C19. Two statues stand on the serpentine island, moved in the mid C20 from the flight of steps and dam below the east end of the lake (Lord Cobbold pers comm, April 2000). The lake lies at the west end of a series of cascades and smaller lakes leading through the park at the bottom of the valley to

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
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**KNEBWORTH**

a swallow hole. The north-west half of the park is bounded by a broad band of woodland, Wintergreen Wood and Cowley's Corner Wood, which frames views of the park to the north and north-west from the House.

The south-east half of the park is largely laid to open pasture. Knebworth parish church (1150 and later, listed grade I) stands 150m north-east of the House, within a churchyard set in the park. The churchyard contains several notable tombstones, including two by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1933 and 1938, listed grade II), together with mature trees. A horse-chestnut avenue extends north-east from the east corner of the churchyard, aligned on the House to the south-west and formerly on countryside to the north-east, the view now (1999) dominated by a large white factory. Some 300m north-east of the House stands the Lytton Mausoleum (J B Papworth 1817, listed grade II), a small, rectangular stone chapel surrounded by early C19 railings and largely screened from the park by trees and shrubs.

The present park appears to occupy a different site to the medieval park and seems to have been created in the mid C17 as a deer park. Chauncy (1700) shows deer in the park surrounding the House, together with an old pollarded tree. The 1731 estate plan shows avenues radiating from the principal fronts of the House, together with three formal ponds in the valley where the lake now lies (1999). By the mid C18 (Dury and Andrews), a formal rectangular pond lay in the valley, with an avenue linking it directly to the north-west front of the House. By the late C19 broad avenues were aligned on each of the fronts of the House except that to the south-east, with several other avenues in other parts of the grounds. In the 1890s an extension to the park to the north-east was created incorporating former farmland, this being part of the works during the formation of the north-east drive and North Lodge.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The rectangular kitchen garden lies 50m south of the House, bounded on the north-west side by the stable block and service buildings, and on the other sides by brick walls (early C19, listed grade II). A lean-to greenhouse stands against the north-west wall. The garden remains in use as a nursery. A field to the south-east, surrounded by a belt of trees and now laid to pasture, was used partly as a kitchen garden in the late C19 (OS 1884; 1899), with the southern half laid out as an orchard.

#### REFERENCES

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Maps *Plan of the Manor of Knebworth, 1731* (original in Knebworth House Collection, copy at Hertfordshire Record Office)

Dury and Andrews, *A topographical Map of Hartford-shire, 1766*

OS Surveyor's Drawing, 1810 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1924

Description written: June 1999 Amended: April 2000 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 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.