Welcome to Sissinghurst

Get in touch…

Sissinghurst Castle
Biddenden Road,
near Cranbrook
Kent, TN17 2AB

01580 710701
sissinghurst@nationaltrust.org.uk

… and stay in touch

Sissinghurst Castle - National Trust
@SissinghurstNT
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sissinghurst

For alternative formats, please call us on 01580 710700 or email sissinghurst@nationaltrust.org.uk

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A quick introduction

Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson moved to Sissinghurst Castle in 1932 and started creating the now world-famous garden at the heart of the estate. However, Sissinghurst actually began life as a Saxon pig farm and within a few years had become a small moated manor house, lived in by a family who shared their name with the place; the de Saxingherstes. Nothing remains today of the original house except for part of the moat.

By the late 16th century the site had been transformed by the affluent Baker family who built a magnificent Renaissance courtyard house, complete with vaulted gallery, 37 fireplaces and tower at its centre. Leased to the government during the Seven Years War (1756–1763), Sissinghurst was used as a prison camp for 3000 captured French sailors who largely destroyed the house. It is from this period that Sissinghurst became known as Chateau de Sissingherst or Sissinghurst Castle.

In 1796 the Parish of Cranbrook took out a lease on Sissinghurst Castle Farm, creating a poor house where up to 100 men were offered housing, employment and food.

By the 1800's Sissinghurst was home to the Mann Cornwallis family who repaired the remaining buildings, leaving their legacy on the tower weather vanes marked 'MC 1839'. Today Sissinghurst is also a working farm with cattle, sheep and pigs and home to rare species of wild flowers, insects and birds.

For conservation reasons, pushchairs, picnicking and dogs are not permitted in the garden. We are a working farm, please keep dogs on leads whilst walking around our estate.

Garden History

First created in the 1930's by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson. The garden is now looked after by a team of gardeners and many volunteers. There are several 'rooms' each very different in their planting scheme, colours and scent. Look out for regular updates on the blackboard at the garden entrance.

Known to Vita and Harold as the 'Big Room' the library was converted by them from the farm stables. It is presented as they would have used it. Take the weight off your feet and perch on the sofa soaking up the atmosphere.

With 78 steps to the top; the tower is worth the climb for the views alone. Built in the 1560's it was then the centre of the Sissinghurst estate, it now houses an exhibition space. On the way up be sure to look into Vita's personal study.

Within the garden are several buildings dating from the original Tudor period. South cottage and the South side of the house are still occupied by the Nicolson family. The Priest house to the North of the garden is available to hire through National Trust cottages.

See overleaf for a longer 3 mile walk.
Some of Sissinghurst’s best bits

If you don’t have time to see absolutely everything today, then here’s a few suggestions we think might interest you:

… if you’ve only got an hour

Learn about Vita and Harold’s life in our exhibitions.
Don’t miss Vita’s writing room in the tower.
Perch on the sofa in the library and immerse yourself in literary history.
Join one of our daily talks to learn about aspects of Sissinghurst.

… if you have three hours

Learn about the good life whilst strolling around our working vegetable garden.
Pop in to the restaurant to taste our home-grown food.
Take a relaxing stroll through our working farm to see what animals you can see.
Borrow exploring packs from visitor reception.
Re-charge your batteries with our family menus.
Sit awhile in the vegetable garden and enjoy the view, it’s a great place for picnics too.

… if you have all day

Follow the path down and around the lakes.
Grab your binoculars and head down to our bird hide.
Seek out stunning views at the edges of our estate.

… for more ideas of what to see throughout the year, come and talk to us in the Visitor Reception