



Children love a garden

By Tim Saunders,
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From our home in Hampshire we travel two-and-half hours to Tiverton in Devon to visit Knightshayes, a magnificent National Trust property with extensive gardens.

Covid has forced the closure of the house at the time of writing but the grounds are so large it really doesn't matter to us. We arrive at just after 1pm and have eaten in the car. The traffic could have been better and a long queue to one Hampshire visitor attraction causes long delays as we head towards Salisbury to eventually pick up the A303.

When we arrive at Knightshayes we drive through the entrance that takes us through the estate to the car parks at the rear. It is an exceedingly grand stately home designed by William Burges for the Heathcoat-Amory family, notable in business and politics. Nikolaus Pevsner describes it as 'an eloquent expression of High Victorian ideals in a country house of moderate size'. Certainly this grand Gothic revival architecture is a statement of wealth. It would cost a fortune to live in such a place and to maintain it. And like every

property that the Trust has been given, it looks after it for the nation. We make our way round the grounds with the help of a map and our first port of call is the Kitchen Garden, full of wonderful flowers and a good deal of rhubarb. The Douglas Fir Walk sees little Henry (4) and sister Heidi (7) tearing ahead of us down the path and hollering because there is a little echo and they love it. The trees are enormous. Then we spot what looks to be like a little castle roof and they both worry that it might be a witch's house. No bad thing because Henry is starting to flag and we need him to continue walking. Of course tired time is fast approaching and so it is not long before we come to a standstill. 'I'm not walking anymore,' he protests. 'But you've been sat in the car for two-and-a-half hours,' we plead. It's no good, I have to go back to the car to collect the pushchair. On my return Caroline and the children have struck up a conversation with a fellow

visitor, Jonathan, who has enjoyed quizzing Henry about how many fingers and thumbs he has. Of course at this time of day the answer to Jonathan's question of: 'How many fingers have you got, Henry?' is '89'. For a brief time our cheeky little comic sits in his carriage but as we make our way round the formal gardens of the main house, he becomes bored and as we turn a corner and the grounds seem to be endless. Henry leaps up to accompany his sisters as they run down the steps past the ornamental pond. Heidi stretches her arms out as if to fly. I remember doing that when I was her age. It doesn't matter that it's raining. This is what childhood is all about. For more information visit: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knightshayes>

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