

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**GREAT HARROWDEN HALL**

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

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**GREAT HARROWDEN HALL**

Name: GREAT HARROWDEN HALL

County: Northamptonshire

District: Wellingborough (District Authority)

Parish: Great Harrowden

County: Northamptonshire

District: Wellingborough (District Authority)

Parish: Little Harrowden

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.331196  
Longitude: -0.70273337  
National Grid Reference: SP 88497 71137  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1000392  
Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

## Details

Early C18 compartmentalised formal gardens, little altered, and former deer park associated with an early C18 country house.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the C15 the manors of Great and Little Harrowden were acquired by William Vaux (d 1471). Sir Nicholas Vaux, who entertained Henry VIII at Harrowden in 1511, was created Baron Vaux a month before his death in 1523. Like their kinsmen the Treshams, the Vauxs were later well known for their adherence to the Old Faith. In 1647 Harrowden was one of the houses visited by Charles I to play bowls while under arrest at Holdenby (qv). On the death of the fifth Lord Vaux in 1662 the title fell into abeyance and the estates were inherited by Nicholas Knollys, styled Earl of Banbury, the son of the fourth Baron's wife but of doubtful legitimacy.

In 1693 Knollys sold Harrowden to Thomas Watson (d 1723), third son of the second Lord Rockingham, who created the house and garden as they are today. Although he inherited the vast Strafford estate in Yorkshire in 1695, work may not have begun at Harrowden for almost twenty years, perhaps c 1716 when he handed over Wentworth Woodhouse, his main Yorkshire house, to his eldest son at the time of his marriage. After Harrowden was completed c 1723 it was mainly used as a dower house, although apartments were reserved for the owner. In 1782 Harrowden was inherited by William, second Earl Fitzwilliam, of Milton, and it remained in that family until sold in 1895 to the seventh Lord Vaux, the then representative of its owners in the C16 and C17. In 1974 the property was purchased by Wellingborough Golf Club; the Hall became the clubhouse, while an 18-hole course was laid out in the park. It remains (1998) in this ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

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**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The village of Great Harrowden lies on the A509 Kettering to Wellingborough road, c 3km north of the latter. That road forms the western boundary of the registered park. Otherwise its boundaries are defined to the south by a minor road to Finedon (diverted slightly southward and straightened when the park was created), to the north by a stream and to the east by field boundaries. The area here registered is c 70ha.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The Hall is approached from the west, via The Slips, a broad, 100m long approach from the crossroads which form the centre of Great Harrowden. Mature beech trees run down the north side of the approach, while to the south is the parish churchyard. The Slips leads to the more southerly of the two iron gates at the west end of Harrowden's forecourt. This grand approach, and the movement of the main Wellingborough road well clear of the Hall, was contrived after 1754. At that date The Slips still carried the main Wellingborough road.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The new house begun c 1716 replaced a perhaps C16 building, the undercroft of which survives beneath it. Harrowden Hall (listed grade I), of limestone ashlar with a flat copper roof, has lead downpipes dated 1719 and was substantially complete by 1723. Since then alterations have been few and minor. The west-facing front has a plain, five-bay centre of two-and-a-half storeys with three-bay, two-storey wings to either side. The garden front is very similar. Abutting the north side of the Hall are stables and domestic buildings (listed grade II) of the late C17 and early C18 converted in the C20 into houses, shop and changing rooms. To their west is a service court, now a car park. A further 100m to the north are post-medieval farm buildings used as a maintenance compound. A curving, stone-lined pond (a horse pond) to the south-west of the compound was already present in 1725.

In 1905 Lord Vaux built a Catholic chapel (listed grade II) 50m south of the Hall. It is a copy of Archbishop Chichele's school at Higham Ferrers (Northants). A south chapel was added in 1924.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens around the Hall are of c 1720 and in the Dutch manner, separated by brick walls and iron screens into a number of rectangular compartments. To the west of the Hall is a forecourt, with at its west end two sets of iron gates bearing the arms of Watson and Proby. These are hung on limestone ashlar piers, the two gates being linked by railings on low stone walls (all listed grade II\*). To the north and south the forecourt is bounded by early C18 brick walls, the former rebuilt c 1900, perhaps when the Vaux chapel was built. A grass oval occupies the greater part of the forecourt, the south side of which is taken up with a long grassy mound with some trees and shrubs.

East of the Hall is the main East Parterre garden, a compartment 95m x 95m bounded to north, south and to either side of the Hall by a c 3m tall brick wall of the early C18 and to the east by gates and railings. Running across the garden front of the Hall is a slightly terraced gravel walk. Iron gates in screens give access through the north and south walls around the main garden to continuations of the terrace walk across the flanking northern and southern compartments. Further iron gates and screens form the final terminations of the terrace walk. From that to the north there is a view over the formal pond beyond and across the park. The view through the gate at the south end of the terrace walk has been deliberately obscured by planting. Most of this ironwork is attributed to Thomas Warren (d 1749), who had his forge at Castle Ashby (qv) where he is buried.

Leading east from the Hall's central door is the main east/west axial path across the East Parterre garden. This leads to iron gates set on stone piers in the centre of the east wall around the garden, that wall dropping in height, via demi-lunes to either side of the gate piers, to c 0.5m to allow a view from the garden across the park. Originally the lawn was quartered, and in the centre of three of those divisions a lead group (all listed grade II\*) by John Van Nost (d 1729) stands on a stone plinth. In each case the subject is a life-size pair of men wrestling or fighting. The fourth group is said to have been melted to mend the roof in the C19; its plinth however survives (listed grade II). A perimeter path runs around the outside of the lawn, around the edge of which are some irregularly arranged specimen trees. A rectangular lily pond lies in the middle of each half of the lawn, surrounded by low hedges. Ponds and hedges have been introduced since 1908.

To north and south of the East Parterre are flanking compartments c 30m deep, connected with it by the main north/south terrace walk across the east front of the Hall. That to the north, in the C18 the kitchen garden (see below), contains several glasshouses, mostly in use in 1997. It also contains an early C18 summerhouse (listed with the walls grade II) near the west end of the south wall, against the clairvoie screen from the East Parterre. This building may be the bath house mentioned in a mid C18 inventory

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
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*GREAT HARROWDEN HALL*

(Heward and Taylor 1996). The compartment on the south side of the East Parterre, in the C18 an orchard, still contains a few old fruit trees. At its west end a small swimming pool and changing rooms, all late C20, are screened behind hedges.

The outer, 3m tall, brick walls of the north and south compartments continue east of the main gardens as the perimeter of an outer garden, 230m east/west by 170m north/south. The original name for this compartment is unknown; in 1918 Jekyll called it the Wilderness. Traces of its internal layout, as shown on a plan of c 1725, are still discernable. The line of the main east/west axial path through the East Parterre continues across the outer garden as a broad grass walk lined with an avenue of various mature specimen trees. At its east end is a further pair of tall, early C18, stone gate piers supporting gates and screen (listed grade II) in the centre of the line of the outer garden's east wall. The wall itself has largely been removed, leaving only short stubs at the outer garden's north-east and south-east corners. On the north side of the avenue, c 30m east of the gate from the East Parterre, is a rectangular pond (shown on the plan of c 1725) 75m east/west by 25m wide. In the south-east part of the outer garden, c 230m south-east of the Hall, is an early C18 gazebo (listed grade II), a single-storey, octagonal brick building with a domed, lead-sheeted roof. In the early C18 this lay at the centre of the Grove, a square compartment divided by both quartering and diagonal paths. A map of 1754 shows a second building in the Wilderness, north-east of the rectangular pond. New gardens, extending out via avenues into the park/landscape beyond, were laid out to complement the new Hall of c 1720, and in 1721 John Bridges noted that Thomas Wentworth had purchased the manor and 'built ye Mannor ho & made large gardens, seated high' (Brown and Foard 1994, 97). No designer has been identified. Large sums were probably spent: Van Nost supplied leadwork including the four main groups on the East Parterre and at least two pairs of figures which earlier in the C20 still stood atop gate piers, while no less than eight wrought-iron gate screens separate the garden compartments. The family's non-residence at Harrowden after 1743 meant few alterations were made to the early C18 gardens.

**PARK** The Hall and its gardens lie in the south-west corner of a roughly square, 40ha park, laid out in 1718. The southern half of the park is fairly level, whereas its northern half falls away quite markedly into a valley. The whole park is now laid out as a golf course; there are some mature oaks, but most of the planting is relatively recent. The park's southern boundary is straight, and is a continuation of the early C18 south wall of the gardens. This wall then turns to run north-east for c 450m, to the ruinous Blowhill Barn. The west side of the park is walled in stone. The northern boundary is formed by the valley-bottom stream. The park is almost wholly surrounded by a shelter belt plantation. This expanded at the north-east corner of the park as Duke's Covert, by 1997 reduced to a patch of scrub. A bank and ditch to the south of the latter mark the position of a wood marked on maps of 1754 and 1781. The perimeter shelter belt continues as ornamental woodland (not yet present 1725) along the outside of the north wall of the gardens, within which mature oak and yew are the dominant species. At the west end of that woodland is the linear pond overlooked from the north end of the terrace walk. The pond is very close in dimensions to that in the outer garden, and is aligned north/south with its west edge continuing the line of the west end of the gardens.

In the C18 the main axial alignment through the gardens was continued eastwards across the park as an avenue or ride, which was crossed at right-angles by another towards the east side of the park.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** In the C18 the kitchen garden occupied the compartment along the north side of the East Parterre, and it still contains a lean-to vinery and a forcing house of the mid C19, sheds (in part converted to stables), and two free-standing glasshouses of c 1900. The east end of the compartment is fenced, its line a continuation of that across the east side of the East Parterre. In the early C18 however the kitchen garden was twice as long, and had a 50m long formal pool in its eastern half.

#### REFERENCES

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Maps Northamptonshire Record Office holds estate maps of c 1725, 1754 and 1781.

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887(9 1927 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900

Description written: 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: January 2000

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## 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.