

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

GREYS COURT

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

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**GREYS COURT**

Name: GREYS COURT

County: Oxfordshire

District: South Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Bix and Assendon

County: Oxfordshire

District: South Oxfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Rotherfield Greys

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.546056  
Longitude: -0.95626979  
National Grid Reference: SU 72473 83534  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001096  
Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

## Details

A country house surrounded by an C18 landscape park, with C20 gardens within earlier, walled enclosures.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Sir John de Grey, one of the original Knights of the Garter, was granted a license to crenellate his dwelling at Rotherfield in 1346, and at this time considerably enlarged the group of buildings within the courtyard surrounding it. The estate passed to the Crown in 1485, being granted to Robert Knollys in 1514 and remaining in his family until 1642, during which time the current house and its associated buildings were constructed within the earlier outer walls of the courtyard. Sir William Paul bought the estate in 1686, it passing by marriage to Sir William Stapleton in 1724 and remaining in that family's ownership until the early C20. The Stapletons altered and embellished the house during the C18, probably laying out the park and constructing the ha-has at this time. Sir Felix Brunner bought Greys Court in 1937, he and his wife restoring the house and developing gardens within the old walled spaces east of the courtyard. The estate was given to the National Trust in 1968, in whose ownership it remains (1997).

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Greys Court lies 4km north-west of Henley-on-Thames, 1km north of the village of Rotherfield Greys, towards the southern end of the Chiltern Hills. The 75ha estate is bounded largely by agricultural land and woodland, with the west boundary defined by Rocky Lane connecting Rotherfield Greys with Highmoor, and the north boundary defined by the remains of Grim's Ditch. The land rises gently across the north park from the flatter plateau on which the house and gardens stand, falling sharply on the south side to the lane connecting Rotherfield Greys with Bix, which bisects the south park in the bottom of the valley. The land rises up the south side of the valley, with a small spur

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valley running south at the south-west corner. The estate is set deep within the hills, largely surrounded by woodland, with views south through the valley at the south-west corner towards further hills beyond.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance lies 350m east of the house, off the Rotherfield Greys to Bix lane, marked by a rendered, two-storey lodge. Having passed through a wooden gateway close to the lane, the east drive curves west, rising up to overlook the north and south parks, passing close to the south wall of the kitchen garden and its adjacent ditch, arriving at the entrance to the main courtyard, 100m south-east of the house. Two square, stone gate piers mark the courtyard entrance, flanked by mature yews and Scots pines and overlooked by the Dower House (formerly known as the Batchelors' Hall, listed grade I) lying adjacent to the north-east. This comprises a C14 octagonal tower (probably constructed at the south-east corner of the medieval courtyard, CL 1944), with a C16 house attached. The ditch adjacent to the walled gardens extends along the south boundary of the Dower House garden, almost to the courtyard entrance, continuing beyond, to the west, as a flint and brick ha-ha forming the curved south boundary of the courtyard. Inside the courtyard the drive encircles the perimeter, enclosing an irregular oval panel of lawn, leading to the house at the north-west corner.

The courtyard is bounded to the west by the house and attached southern wall (C17 with C19 alterations, listed grade II), which also forms the east wall of the adjacent service court. A flint, C19 blind gateway, with four piers, is inserted towards the north end of the wall, adjacent to the south front of the house. A gap at the south end gives access to the service court. To the east the courtyard is bounded by a range of medieval buildings. These include the C14 Great Tower, its attached ruined tower to the north (probably constructed at the north-east corner of the medieval courtyard, CL 1944) and connecting curtain walling (all listed grade I), together with the red-brick Cromwellian Stables (C17, listed grade II\*) to the south, and courtyard wall beyond this. The southern walls to west and east are largely obscured by adjacent mature yew and pine trees. The ha-ha forming the south boundary 75m south of the house is mirrored by a further, similar ha-ha 100m north of the house, above the sloping north lawn planted with specimen trees and shrubs. The courtyard enjoys views south across the park and beyond.

The west drive enters 300m south-west of the house, off Rocky Lane, rising up to the north-east through flanking woodland, passing Greys Court Farm to the north (converted to office use) standing 200m south-west of the house. A spur north off the drive 100m south-west of the house enters the service court between square, stone gate piers. The drive continues east below the main courtyard's south ha-ha, overlooking the south park, to join the east drive close to the east entrance to the main courtyard. A further short spur, now disused, ran north from the west drive, close to the service drive, curving north-east through a group of mature yews and other trees to give direct access to the main courtyard (OS 1900).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Greys Court (listed grade I) lies towards the centre of the estate, on level land on a south-facing hillside. Built of flint with brick banding, it is of late C16 construction, with C18 interiors, and C19 and C20 alterations. The medieval dwelling may be incorporated into the C16 structure. The entrance front with its three prominent gables faces east across the main courtyard, overlooking the Great Tower and its associated buildings. A central studded door surrounded by a plain stone arch is reached by a short flight of stone steps. The north front, with its prominent C18, stone, crenellated bow window, overlooks the north lawn and beyond this the park.

Various outbuildings attached to the south-west of the house form the north side of the enclosed service court (listed grade II). The west side is bounded by The Keep (listed grade I), a C14, flint and stone octagonal tower in similar style to the Dower House tower (probably constructed at the south-west corner of the medieval courtyard, CL 1944), and its range of C16 buildings attached to the north. The courtyard is bounded to the south by an earth bank with retaining wall, and to the east by the west wall of the entrance court. The centre is dominated by the large, C16 brick Well House (listed grade I), which retains its well and donkey wheel.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens lie east of the main courtyard, situated between the medieval building range, which forms their west boundary, and the walled kitchen garden 100m east of the house. Laid largely to lawn, with perimeter borders and stone paths, the five small, irregular compartments are enclosed by C19 flint and brick walls (listed grade II), probably on the site of earlier structures, and are dominated by the Great Tower on the west boundary. The enclosures are entered from the main courtyard through three gateways in the walls, and are interconnected by doorways in the garden walls, with access to the adjacent kitchen garden. A small private garden (C20), enclosed by clipped evergreen hedges, lies adjacent

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to the west front of the house, laid largely to lawn with a small central pond. East of the kitchen garden a turf maze with brick paths has been constructed (Adrian Fisher 1980) overlooking the park to the east.

The gardens were laid out by the Brunners following the Second World War, with the help of Humphrey Waterfield and the rose expert Hilda Murrell, with later additions by the National Trust.

**PARK** The park surrounds the house and gardens, divided by the drives into north and south sections and largely bounded by woodland. The north park remains pasture with some single trees and views south down the southern valley; it contains the circular, thatched C19 icehouse (restored late C20). A structure called the Spire or Obelisk (now (1997) gone) which stood 700m north of the house, at the south edge of the northern finger of woodland called The Standings, was visible from the north front of the house across the park (Davies, 1797; OS 1883, 1900). The south park, divided by the Rotherfield Greys to Bix lane, contains many single trees including exotics, set in pasture across the valley sides.

The park in the late C18 occupied the area north of the Rotherfield Greys lane only, and is shown surrounded by a park pale fence, with the Obelisk depicted on the northern boundary, and the area south of the lane shown as enclosed fields (Davies, 1797).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden, lying between the ornamental walled gardens and the maze, 200m east of the house, is surrounded by a C17 and later flint and brick wall (listed grade II), incorporating two sides of a former tithe barn. The garden, in full production until the 1950s, is largely laid to lawn with fruit trees and straight gravel paths, with a potager at the north corner.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 95 (23 June 1944), pp 1080-3; (30 June 1944), pp 1124-7; no 25 (22 June 1989), pp 198-201 N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), pp 735-7 Greys Court, guidebook, (National Trust 1995) S Lacey, *Gardens of the National Trust* (1996), pp 123-5

Maps R Davis, *A New Map of the County of Oxford ...*, 1797 A Bryant, *Map of the County of Oxford ...*, surveyed 1823 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1926 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1880

Description written: October 1997 Amended: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: January 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.