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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HOLDENBY HOUSE

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Name:	HOLDENBY HOUSE
District:	West Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Holdenby
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.299535 Longitude: -0.98629578 National Grid Reference: SP 69224 67307 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1001035 Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

Details

Extensive earthwork remains of a formal terraced garden associated with one of the greatest late C16 country houses.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Hattons were established at Holdenby by the late C15, and gradually increased their holding in the parish until William Hatton (d 1546) owned all four manors. His son Christopher, who was born there in 1540, moved into royal circles at the age of twenty-one, and through the favour of the Queen rose quickly. In 1564 he became one of the Queen's Gentleman Pensioners, and in 1578, by which time the reconstruction of Holdenby was well advanced, was made Vice Chamberlain and knighted. From 1587, by which time the House was completed and its gardens and deer park laid out, he was Lord Chancellor. By the time of his death in 1591 he owed £40,000, his extravagances including the purchase of Kirby Hall (qv) while work was still in progress at Holdenby. His estates passed to his nephew Sir William Newport (d 1597) who took the name Hatton, and then to Sir Christopher Hatton II, his namesake's cousin. In 1607 the last-named sold Holdenby to James I as a country seat for Prince Charles, and during the early C17 it was visited many times by royalty. Charles I spent over three months as a prisoner here in 1647. In 1650 Holdenby was bought by Capt Adam Baynes, a Roundhead soldier, MP for Leeds and speculator, who felled Holdenby's woods and demolished most of the house and sold the materials. After the Restoration Holdenby returned to the Crown and was then sold. Holdenby remains (1997) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Holdenby lies c 3km east of East Haddon, on the road to Northampton c 10km to the south-east. That road forms the northern boundary of the registered area. The eastern boundary runs around the west side of Holdenby village before turning south-east, to include the line of the main C16 approach to Holdenby House, up to the sewage works north of Coneybury Hill. The southern boundary of the registered area is formed in part by the stream which runs c 400m south of All Saints' church. The area here registered is c 65ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Holdenby House is approached from the north, via a straight, lime-lined drive off the East Haddon to Northampton road. At the end of the drive is a gateway of 1920 closely modelled on those of 1583 in the Base Court and that which stands at the south end of the drive, in the centre of the wall closing the House's forecourt. The forecourt archway, close in design to those of 1583, carries the date 1659. Girouard (1979, 1401) suggests Capt Baynes added this date to a pre-existing arch to mark the completion of his new house.

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In 1580 Holdenby House was approached from the east along a road which entered The Green, which appears to have served as a large forecourt on the east side of the House. By 1587 that approach had been made more impressive with the construction on the east side of the House of the Base Court, entered from The Green via a large gatehouse (not extant) at the centre of its east side. As the Court was entered the visitor would have seen fully revealed Holdenby's symmetrical, towered east front.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Holdenby House (listed grade II*) was rebuilt between 1873-5 to a design by R H Carpenter and W Slater, incorporating parts of Capt Baynes's mid C17 house and its late C16 predecessor. It was enlarged in 1887-8 by W E Mills. To the west side of the House is a quadrangular stone stables range (listed grade II) of the later C19. On the north-west edge of Holdenby's grounds is a tall, circular, C19 ironstone water tower.

Until a few years before 1580, by which time it had been demolished, the Hattons' manor house lay immediately south of the church. In 1571 Sir Christopher Hatton began to build a prodigious new house on high ground 125m north of the church. Arranged around two courts, it was the largest private house built in England in the C16, with symmetrical fronts, mullioned windows, bay windows and two-storeyed open arcading on the garden front. Dedicated by Hatton to the Queen in an unrealised expectation of a royal visit, Holdenby was sufficiently finished for Lord Burgley (on whose own house of Theobalds it was modelled) to walk through it in August 1579. The main house was largely demolished (although some fragments remained upstanding as late as the 1730s) after Capt Baynes bought Holdenby in 1650; in its stead Baynes contrived a small hall from part of the service buildings in the north range.

Holdenby church (listed grade II*), largely C14, saw extensive restoration, including the rebuilding of the chancel, in the mid C19.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The present House occupies the site of the north-west part of Sir Christopher Hatton's house. The gardens around it were largely created at the time it was restored, in the 1870s. Running from east to west across the south, garden front of the House is a gravelled terrace walk, at the west end of which is a 3m high, ironstone exedra. The walk runs across the top of the main south lawn, which slopes gently downhill to a low, C19 ha-ha, down which steps lead to the main grassed-over remains of the earlier gardens.

Abutting the east side of the north forecourt is a 70m square compartment surrounded with tall brick and stone walls, now (1998) housing a falconry but earlier a fruit garden. This has a central stone basin on its main, axial, yew-hedged north/south path. At the south end of the path a wrought-iron gate leads through to the House's lawns, and to a 60m square, yew-hedged compartment with a central circular lily pool. There is a break in the centre of each side of the square. That to the south leads through to a slight, southward-looking knoll with some mature coniferous specimen trees, while that to the east leads via iron gates (listed grade II) to a narrow, yew-hedged compartment, on the far side of which and through further gates (also listed grade II) there is access to the Base Court.

Between the west side of the House and the kitchen garden is a small, yew-hedged knot garden with central sundial designed by Rosemary Verey. To its south, beyond the main terrace walk, a fragrant garden was being planted in 1998.

The terraced earthworks of Holdenby's late C16 and early C17 gardens lie to the south and east of Holdenby House and its modern gardens, on the top and down a gentle, south-west-facing slope.

The west court of Hatton's house lay immediately to the south of the modern house, divided by a central north/south range from the east court. The remains of Hatton's gardens are laid out on an axial line which continues that of the lost central range. Placed centrally to the south is a level terrace 95m east/west by 70m north/south. In the 1580s this was occupied by a quartered flower garden, and traces of this survive including a circular mound at the centre 30m in diameter and 0.20m high. Along the east and west sides of the terrace are low, raised walks; to the north is the C19 ha-ha. Along the lower, south side of the terrace the ground drops down a 5m scarp; the modern westward approach to the church runs along its bottom.

Flanking the central terrace to east and west are the most pronounced features of the garden, flights of terraces (in 1580 called The Rosaries), each 100m wide from east to west. To the west, and overlooked from the walk down the west side of the central terrace which stands 10m above it, are seven terraces, each c 1m high. The top one is probably C19; the next has a C19 wall inserted into it but is probably the uppermost of the late C16 terraces. At their west ends the terraces meet a 1.5m high north/south walk which bounds the garden; a bulbous projection on the inner, east side midway down the walk may mark the site of

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the documented arbour. At the bottom of the west terraces is a rectangular fishpond (dug 1580 x 1587); the north/south walk turns east to run along the pond's south side, scarping steeply away to the south. To the east of the central terrace, and again at a lower level, there are seven narrow steps or terraces, each 0.5m (0.75m high). Below the lowest terrace is a long, narrow area, in 1587 called the Bowling Alley, bounded on the south by a 1m high raised walk. This was the route from the garden to the Banqueting House.

To the west of the site of the late C16 house (and thus south-west of the present one) and south of the modern kitchen garden is a gently sloping lawn with shrubbery. In 1580 there were nine square flower beds here, which when Holdenby was mapped anew in 1587 had been replaced by rows of trees. Both maps show a Cistern House on the north/south raised walk which continues up the west side of this compartment. The ditch which supplied the Cistern House can be traced cutting across ridge and furrow in the park to the west.

Placed roughly centrally at the head of the east terraces is the more southerly of the two monumental limestone ashlar carriage arches (both listed grade I) which lay at either end of the Base Court. Both are dated 1583. The Base Court itself, 60m north/south by 70m east/west, adjoined the east side of Hatton's house. Between 1580 and 1587 it was remodelled and a large gatehouse, of which no trace survives, was built on the centre of its east side. This gave access to a compartment called 'The Green', 300m wide from east to west and 250m from north to south, crossed axially from the east by the main approach drive. Also built in the 1580s was a double-pile banqueting house or lodge (not extant), in the early C17 known as the Dairy House, close to the south-west corner of The Green.

South of the main terraced garden and east of All Saints' church is a further distinct set of garden earthworks. These lie within a compartment which in the 1580s was an orchard and in which between 1580 and 1587 the number of fishponds increased from one to six. A 4.5m high prospect mount stands at the south-east corner of the compartment; from its top there are panoramic views, north-west across the gardens to the site of the C16 house, and across the lower ground of the former deer park to the south. To its west, and again overlooked, are eight low terraces forming a zig-zag path down the slope to the fishponds dug in the 1580s. On the north side of the terraces is a roughly rectangular area cut back into the hillside, with internal scarps presumably representing flower beds. This apparently represents alterations after 1587, and possibly improvements made at Holdenby in the early C17 when it was owned by the Crown.

Holdenby's gardens, shown pictorially on estate plans of 1580 and 1587, were claimed by Hatton to have been modelled on those at Lord Burghley's great house at Theobalds (Herts). In 1597 their design was attributed to Hugh Hall, a Catholic priest. The gardens were described c 1600 by John Norden: they 'hath been raised, levelled, and formed out of a most craggie and unfitable ground now framed a most pleasante, sweete, and princely Place with divers walks, manie ascendings and descendings replenished also with manie delightfull trees of Fruits, artificially composed Arbors, and a Destilling House on the west end of the same garden, over which is a Ponde of water brought by conduite pypes, out of the Feylde adjoyninge on the west 1/4 of a mile from the same House.' Further additions may have been made to the gardens in the first half of the C17 when Holdenby was owned by the Crown, and in 1651 they were described as 'a pleasant spacious and fair garden adorned with several long walks, mounts, arbours and seats, with curious delightful knots and planted with fruit trees.' Among the garden walks was the Long Walk (later known as the King's Walk) along the top of the terraces where Charles I exercised in 1647. Also mentioned in 1651 were orchards, fishponds, bowling alleys, spinneys planted with ash and 'delightful walks' (descriptions cited in RCHM(E) 1981, 106). The gardens were effectively abandoned in the 1650s at the time the main house was demolished.

PARK West of Holdenby, along the south side of the East Haddon to Northampton road, there is a small park, of permanent pasture underlain with ridge and furrow, with occasional mature parkland trees. There is a narrow shelter belt along the side of the road while denser woodland lies either side of the main north drive and down the west side of the House's gardens. At the extreme north-east corner of the park is a mid C19 estate building, described as 'lodge' although there was never a drive from this point. This park was apparently created in the later C19, about the time the House was enlarged.

Also included within the registered area is the north-west corner of the 606-acre (c 250ha) deer park created by Sir Christopher Hatton between 1580 and 1587 on the rolling clayland south and south-east of Holdenby House. Now permanent pasture, in the 1580s this section of the park was wooded and known as 'The Grove.' Norden saw fallow deer in the park c 1600. At least

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in part the park occupied the site of Holdenby's open fields, inclosed 1584 x 1587; any village houses around the church had already been removed by 1580. County maps of the C17 to early C19 show no park at Holdenby, and it would seem likely that the late C16 park was inclosed c 1651 about the time the House was demolished. Its pale is followed by hedge lines. Most of the park (outside the registered area) is divided into enclosure-period fields and under arable cultivation.

KITCHEN GARDEN A rectangular, brick- and stone-walled kitchen garden lies close to the west side of the House, south of the stables. It is probably largely of later C19 date. A greenhouse along the north wall was reconstructed in the later C20.

OTHER LAND The villagers removed from around the church c 1580, and others who lived north-east of the House were rehoused in a new, planned, village laid out around a rectangular green. This green adjoined the north side of, and shared the axial alignment of, the Base Court on the east side of the House. Also on the Green was an inn, built by Hatton to offer overflow accommodation when large parties visited Holdenby. This, the modern village of Holdenby, largely comprising estate cottages, lies immediately beyond and north-east of the registered area.

REFERENCES

Country Life, 32 (19 October 1912), pp 528-38; 166 (18 October 1979), pp 1286-9; (25 October 1979), pp 1398-1401 J Summerson (ed), *The Book of Architecture of John Thorpe in Sir John Soane's Museum*, Walpole Soc 40, (1966), pp 8, 26, 30, 38, 93(4, pl 85 N Pevsner and B Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire* (1973), pp 260-3 Northamptonshire Past & Present 5, (1977), pp 392-5 Roy Comm Hist Mons Engl Inventories: Northamptonshire 3, (1981), pp 103-9, pls 16-18 C Taylor, *The Archaeology of Gardens* (1983) M Girouard, *Town and Country* (1992), pp 197-210, 268-9 B A Bailey (ed), *Northamptonshire in the Early Eighteenth Century: The Drawings of Peter Tillemans and Others*, Northants Record Soc 39, (1996), pp 97-8 J Heward and R Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, (RCHM(E) 1996), pp 235-8 and pls Maps Maps of 1580 and 1587 which are held in the Northamptonshire Record Office are reproduced in RCHM(E) 1981, pls 16(18).

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886/1891 2nd edition published 1900-1 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1900
Description written: 1998 Register Inspector: PAS 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.