

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

KIRBY HALL

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

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Name:	KIRBY HALL
District:	North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Bulwick
District:	North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Deene
District:	North Northamptonshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Gretton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.523002 Longitude: -0.63639339 National Grid Reference: SP 92615 92554 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000116 Date first listed: 25-Jun-1984

Details

Remains of formal gardens of late C16 and C17 associated with contemporary, architecturally significant, country house. Gardens investigated and restored in 1930s and again c 1990.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Kirby Hall's construction was begun in 1570 for Sir Humphrey Stafford of Blatherwick. He died in 1575, after which work continued on an enlarged scheme for Sir Christopher Hatton I (already building a prodigious house at Holdenby (qv) 36km to the south-east) who in 1587 became Chancellor to Elizabeth I. Following his death in 1591 Kirby passed by deed first to his nephew Sir William Newport (d s p 1597), who changed his name to Hatton, and then to Sir Christopher's cousin Sir Christopher Hatton II (d 1619). It was probably he who laid out the Great Garden west of the Hall. After Holdenby was sold in 1608 Kirby became the Hattons' main residence and during the time of Sir Christopher Hatton III (cr Baron Hatton 1643), the son of the last-named, its gardens became well known. James I, Anne of Denmark and Charles I all stayed at Kirby. Sir Christopher III died in 1670, and in 1680 his son Christopher IV (cr Viscount Hatton 1683), who like his brother Captain Charles Hatton (d c 1708) and their father, was a keen plantsman, returned to live at Kirby, where in 1685 he began to remodel the Great Garden. From the mid C18 Kirby was neglected, and despite some refurbishment after 1786 by George Finch-Hatton, by the early C19 the gardens had been abandoned and the statuary sold along with the house's furniture. Kirby Hall became ruinous in the mid to late C19. In 1930 Kirby was taken into Guardianship by the Ancient Monuments Branch of HM Office of Works. Excavations were undertaken during the next two years in the Great Garden and the results used to inform the restoration which followed. Further excavations took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as a result of which the fifty-year-old restored garden was removed and replaced by a new and simpler layout. Kirby remained in the Guardianship of English Heritage in 1997.

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DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Kirby Hall stands in a shallow, valley bottom situation, c 5km north-east of Corby and 3km north-east of the A43 from Stamford, via Corby, to Kettering. The village of Gretton lies 3km to the north-west, and Deene 2.5km to the east. The registered area, c 5ha, embraces the Hall's gardens, principally the restored compartment west of the Hall.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Kirby Hall is approached from the south, via a 500m long private track off Kirby Lane. This runs west of the complex before turning east, as a formal, tree-lined approach along the north side of the garden to enter the forecourt via its west Great Gate.

When first built the east side of the Hall lay alongside, and west of, the road from Gretton to Deene, with a forecourt to the south. When the north forecourt was made in the late 1580s the road was moved c 100m east of the Hall, and carried over the Kirby Brook via a causeway. In the C18 this was refronted with stone arcading (restored in 1990s) to give a bridge-like appearance and to hold back a small lake. A westward spur from the Deene road provided the main access to the Hall, via the eastern of an opposed pair of Great Gates (also of the 1580s, and like those at Holdenby) into the forecourt. The north wall has a miniature arcade and a central gateway, the outer face of which is rusticated, the inner having a grotesque of vermicular treatment. The north gateway (part of Nicholas Stone's work of c 1640) and wall were probably moved here from the south side of the Great Garden c 1694.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Kirby Hall (listed grade I) was begun in 1570 for Sir Humphrey Stafford of Blatherwick, probably by the mason Thomas Thorpe. After Sir Christopher Hatton purchased Kirby in 1576 the design was altered to make the house outward, rather than inward, looking, an early example of the concept. Of limestone, and essentially a two-storeyed courtyard house, Pevsner considered Kirby one of the most important and interesting houses of its date in England. It is richly decorated with carved motifs, many of continental origin, taken from contemporary publications on architecture. The main range, with porch, two-storeyed great hall, and kitchen is to the south. Off this is the south-west, or State Apartment, wing, added by Hatton in the years after 1576, which contained the family's private apartments. The main craftsman here was Nicholas Stone (d 1647), the King's master mason. The apartments' most striking external feature is the two full height, semicircular, bow windows on the south front, which overlooked the Privy Garden and Wilderness. Lodgings ranges extend northward from the east and west ends of the main south range to enclose a courtyard, the west wing having a long gallery which overlooked the main garden west of the Hall. The thirteen-bay north range, closing the courtyard, is occupied by a loggia with gallery over and contains the main gateway. To its north is the stone-walled forecourt with arched gateways on its north, east and west sides.

The stables (demolished in C19, when a 1590 datestone was noted) lay c 75m north-east of the entrance to the forecourt. Detached service buildings, also of c 1600, stood east of the east range. Slight traces of these survive with low walling, south of the modern works compound.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The remains of Kirby Hall's gardens occupy a long, narrow strip of ground some 100m wide and 570m long running south from the west side of the Hall, down into the shallow valley of the Kirby Brook and then up the hillside beyond. The northernmost compartment, or Great Garden, was laid out anew in the 1990s following excavation and documentary research, and comprises a 120m long quartered lawn with gravel paths in a style typical of late C17 cutwork derived from a design for Longleat. Across its north end is a raised terrace of c 1605(19, 20m wide, 3m high and 90m long, with a stone wall on its outer side and a brick wall on the inner. In the centre is a stone gateway. This was probably built c 1610-20 at the west end of the main cross-walk across the garden (the position now occupied by the statue fragment: see below), was reworked by Nicholas Stone c 1640, and moved to its present position and blocked in 1694. The north raised terrace returns south as a 237m long and 12m wide terraced or ramped walk down the west side of the garden and to the Kirby Brook beyond. A broken statue stands on a plinth at the base of the walk at the end of the main east/west cross-walk across the garden. Another brick plinth lies to its south. In the centre of the south side of the Great Garden a shallow flight of steps leads down to the grass south terrace. At the west end of the terrace is a denuded raised mound, raised over the site of Kirby's church. The mound, originally rectangular, may have been constructed in the early C17, at the same time as the Great Garden.

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Of the further compartments to the south, including the Wilderness, well documented by contemporary maps and other sources, little visible evidence survives. Beyond the brook (straightened where it passes through the garden, with the water level controlled in the C17 by a dam and sluice) the ground is permanent grass farmland. Here (outside the registered area) slight traces of the east and west boundaries of the garden can be seen along with earthworks of the southern part of Kirby village. Before the south front of the Hall, the site of Kirby's Privy Garden, is a lawn. Archaeological explorations c 1990 located the perimeter paths, presumably of the Privy Garden. Along the west side of the lawn is the buttressed terrace wall of the west garden, rebuilt in the 1930s on old foundations.

To the east of the Hall is a lawn on which stands the modern works compound and to its north the modern (mid C20) custodian's house. The compound is partly screened by modern planting, while a few older trees lie to its south.

When construction of the Hall began in 1570 the area later absorbed into its gardens was still part of the village of Kirby; in the 1580s a garden and orchard lay west of the Hall while to the south was Kirby's parish church and at least some of its village houses. Inclosure and depopulation of the village, perhaps anyway in decline from the C14, was complete by 1608, although the church may have stood until the later C17. In the later 1580s a new stable block was built north-east of the Hall's forecourt which was then made a grand outer court by the addition of great gateways on its east and west sides. The Great Garden west of the Hall was probably laid out c 1605-19, the impetus perhaps the visits made by James I between 1612 and 1619.

After Kirby was inherited in 1619 by Sir Christopher Hatton III the gardens became well known, and in 1654 they were commended by John Evelyn (*Archaeol J* 1995, 293). The family's horticultural interests seem to have become more pronounced from the 1660s. By 1666 the gardens may have been extended south of Kirby Brook and an orchard, while in 1689(92 the creation of the Wilderness up the valley slope to the south of the orchard almost doubled the length of the gardens. A century later Bridges (1791, 314) saw in the Wilderness 'almost the whole variety of English trees and ranged in an elegant order'. Meanwhile, in 1685(6, the Great Garden was remodelled, with the walks being heightened, intricate new beds laid out, and much garden statuary introduced. In 1693(4 the Great Garden was turned through a right-angle to lie north/south from its original position, possibly to the advice of George London (d 1714) who was at Kirby in 1693. Together with the removal of the wall along the south side of the Great Garden this produced a vista south to the Wilderness beyond.

PARK According to Dix et al (*Archaeol J* 1995) the west gateway from the forecourt led to a park.

OTHER LAND As seen from the Wilderness, in the 1690s the alignment of the Great Garden was continued northwards by an avenue of horse chestnuts, alongside another (making four parallel rows of trees in all) running north from the Hall. No trace of these survives, and there has been extensive quarrying for ironstone in the area. Another avenue ran east from the north forecourt. Depressions either side of the modern tree-lined drive to the custodian's house mark the position of trees at the west end of the avenue.

An avenue was seen at Kirby in 1654 by John Evelyn; he thought the 'avenue ungraceful and the seat naked' (cited in *Northants Past & Present* 5, (1977), 400).

REFERENCES

J Bridges, *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire* 2, (1791) *Country Life*, 20 (20 October 1906), pp 558-65
Northamptonshire Past & Present 5, (1977), pp 400(1 *Roy Comm Hist Mons Engl Inventories: Northamptonshire* 2, (1979), pp 59-61 *J Garden History* 4.2, (1984), pp 139(56 Kirby Hall, guidebook, (English Heritage 1986) A E Brown (ed), *Garden Archaeology* (1991), pp 60-72 *Archaeol J* 152, (1995), pp 291(380 J Heward and R Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, (RCHM(E) 1996), pp 245-56

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1901 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886

Archival items The Finch-Hatton Collection, which includes the garden accounts, is held at the Northamptonshire Record Office (FH 272).

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

Legal

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