

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

THORPE HALL

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**THORPE HALL**

Name:	THORPE HALL
District:	City of Peterborough (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.571918 Longitude: -0.27383487 National Grid Reference: TL 17082 98521 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000139 Date first listed: 14-Jan-1988

## Details

A country house, now in a city setting, surrounded by walled gardens and a small park dating from the mid C17, the gardens having Victorian additions.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Thorpe Hall was built between 1650 and 1656 for Oliver St John, at which time the Hall, outbuildings and gardens were all contained within a rectangular enclosure (Thorpe Hall Working Party report). The earliest known plan of these gardens dates from 1760 and shows a series of courtyards surrounding the Hall as well as a pattern of avenues radiating out into the park from the garden walls. Frances St John, the last of the family, died in 1789 and the estate, having reverted to the Dean and Chapter of Peterborough Cathedral, was then sold to the Fitzwilliam family (of neighbouring Milton Park, qv). The 1789 sale catalogue and inventory record show that the formal nature of the gardens had altered little but that the park had become more informal with the removal of some of the avenues. The Hall was occupied by tenants until 1850 when it was purchased by the Rev William Strong. Strong was responsible for the next phase of developments, which are recorded in a series of journals he kept of the work to the gardens, partly carried out within the C17 framework (Northamptonshire RO). He extended the walled garden to the west to create a large kitchen garden. The gardens changed little until 1947 when the Hall became a hospital, although some modifications were undertaken by the Meaker family who purchased the estate in 1927. After 1947 the gardens became neglected but (late C20) have become the subject of a major restoration plan, following the purchase of the Hall by the Sue Ryder Foundation in the late 1980s and the formation of the Thorpe Hall Gardens Working Party. The site remains (1999) in institutional use.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Thorpe Hall lies in the district of Longthorpe on the north-west side of the city of Peterborough, beyond the north-west bank of the River Nene and Thorpe Meadows. The site covers an area of c 26ha bounded to the south-east by the A1179 (Longthorpe Parkway), to the north-east and north-west by Thorpe Road, and to the south-west by housing. The Hall occupies an elevated position with views out to the north, east and south.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** Thorpe Hall is approached via a straight drive off Thorpe Road to the north (lodge no longer survives) which leads to the walled entrance court below the north front. A second, service drive leads from a stone-built lodge c 300m further to the south-west on Thorpe Road, c 150m to the west of the Hall. It provides access to the stables

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**THORPE HALL**

and domestic wing on the west front. A further drive can still be seen leading off the main drive eastwards towards the city, the lodge and entrance to the road which accompanied it having been removed on the construction of Longthorpe Parkway (late C20). The surviving lodge, together with the demolished north and east lodges, were built in the 1850s by the Rev Strong who reused materials from an old barn which he demolished to make way for a new kitchen garden, to construct the west lodge.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Thorpe Hall (listed grade I) is a square, three-storey country house built in the Classical Mannerist style of stone under a hipped tile roof. It was designed by Peter Mills for Chief Justice Oliver St John and constructed between 1653 and 1666. The seven-bay symmetrical entrance front faces north, whilst the garden front looks east and comprises three bays facing onto a raised, stone balustrated terrace.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The Hall stands within a rectangle of gardens, the whole being enclosed by a high stone wall contemporary with the house, its four corners surmounted by large stone urns. The wall was built with two entrance courts, one to the north and the other to the south, only the former of which remains. The wall is broken on all four sides by carriage gateways, those to the north, south and east being of elaborate design, while that to the west is simpler, its piers being finished by stone balls. To either side of the north gateway are pedestrian doorways with C18 iron grilles.

The main garden area lies below the east front. Steps lead down from a balustrated terrace next to the Hall to a parterre of stone-edged beds laid out in the 1850s. Along the walls of the north and south sides of this area are raised walks, that to the north being treated as an informal shrubbery walk, that to the south being a broad gravelled path. In the south-east corner of the garden, set into the east wall, is an C18 stone summerhouse. This marks the eastern end of an axis established in the 1850s which runs east/west across the gardens south of the Hall. An arch saved from the old south wing's central doorway was placed to form the continuation of a line with the gateways in the east and west walls of the then new kitchen garden. The entrance to the west kitchen garden wall is an earlier feature and originally stood to the west of what is now the south entrance to the kitchen garden. When the site was first laid out there was a walled court beneath the south front of the Hall, the lines of which have been picked up in the newly planted (late C20) hornbeam hedges. The garden to the west of this is laid to lawn with specimen trees, but originally contained a simple parterre bounded on its western edge by the stable yard (Thorpe Hall Working Party report). Both the walls of the court and the stables had been demolished by the 1850s.

South-west of the Hall, partly on the site of the stables, is the Victorian Children's Garden, previously a swimming pool, now (1999) a rose garden, laid out around an oval pool. The brick summerhouse in the south-east corner was brought from Stanground Manor in the 1850s.

**PARK** The Hall and walled gardens are set in a small park, level to the north and sloping away to the south and east. Of the C17 avenues which radiated from the centres of the north, south and west garden walls, only traces of the lime avenue to the north survive. In the south-west corner of the park are the Holywell Ponds, a complex of fishponds dug to accompany the medieval manor house (no longer standing) and later incorporated as a feature into the C17 park.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden lies beyond the rose garden c 100m to the west of the Hall. The walls, built in the 1850s, are stone, faced with brick. To the north of the service wing, within the mid C17 walls, is an area of orchard. Originally this was two garden divisions but these had been amalgamated into one for use as a productive ground by the 1820s (Thorpe Hall Working Party report). In the 1850s a secondary wall to the west was put up to separate off the servants' entrance from this enclosure.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 16 (13 August 1904), pp 234-43; 46 (6 September 1919), pp 300-4; (13 September 1919), pp 330-8; 48 (18 December 1920), pp 833-4; no 44 (31 October 1991), pp 70-3 C H Poynton, Oliver St John (1909), (Peterborough Natural History, Scientific and Archaeol Soc leaflet) Gardeners' Chronicle, i (1939), p 379 Report on the development of Thorpe Hall Gardens, (Thorpe Hall Working Party, September 1986) [Copy on EH file]

Maps Outline plan for Sir Robert Bernard, Duke of Manchester of the grounds of Thorpe Hall, 1760 (Huntingdon Record Office) Sale catalogue, 1789 (Duke of Manchester papers), (Huntingdon Record Office) Plan of the gardens dated 1798 (Fitzwilliam Papers), (Northamptonshire Record Office) Enclosure map for Longthorpe, 1809 (Huntingdon Record Office)

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*THORPE HALL*

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1888 2nd edition published 1901 1928 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1902

Archival items Sale catalogue, 1789 (Northamptonshire Record Office) The journals of Rev William Strong, 1850s (Northamptonshire Record Office) Arthur William Hakewell, General plan and external details with picturesque illustration of Thorpe Hall, 1852 (Northamptonshire Record Office)

Description written: March 2000 Amended: December 2000 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: January 2001

## 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.