

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

NEVILL HOLT

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Name:	NEVILL HOLT
County:	Leicestershire
District:	Harborough (District Authority)
Parish:	Medbourne
County:	Leicestershire
District:	Harborough (District Authority)
Parish:	Nevill Holt
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.534010 Longitude: -0.79673767 National Grid Reference: SP 81716 93585 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001433 Date first listed: 25-Aug-1999

Details

Remains of an early or mid C17 garden surrounding the medieval hall of Nevill Holt, which was partly improved in the early C19 following proposals given by the architect J B Papworth, and subsequently in the late C19 under the ownership of Sir Bache Cunard.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The name Nevill Holt originated in the late C16 or C17 and is derived from the Nevill family which owned the estate from c 1474 until 1876. The village was formerly called Holt or Holt-on-the-Hill, and was probably created by the clearing of woodland in this area during the C12 and C13. Documentary sources and dendrochronology dates indicate that construction of the Hall was almost certainly started in 1288, and there is a reference to a manor house at Holt in 1302 (VCH 1964; Archaeol J 1999); the church of St Mary also dates from this period.

In the mid C15, Holt was bought by Thomas Palmer (d 1474), who added a porch and oriel window to the existing great hall and obtained a licence to impark 300 acres (c 121ha) at Holt in 1448 (ibid). Field enclosure probably took place in the late C15 or early C16 (Archaeol J 1999). In the mid C16, ownership passed by marriage from the Palmers to the Nevill family, which became one of Leicestershire's leading Roman Catholic families. Many additions and alterations to the Hall and grounds were carried out by Sir Thomas Nevill in the mid C16, including the addition of the south range lodgings block and the crenellated tower at the west end of the Hall. An entailment of 1564 describes the site of the 'manor of Holt' as having a garden and orchard (ibid). After Sir Thomas Nevill's death in 1571, the inheritance of the estate was in dispute since there was no male heir. Eventually Sir Thomas Smyth of Essex, son of Sir Thomas' daughter Mary, became the new owner in 1591, followed by his son Henry Nevill. The latter, when he became Deputy Lieutenant of Leicestershire in 1661, commissioned a detailed plan

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of Nevill Holt with its gardens from John Andrews, drawn to a scale of 11 yards to the inch. The 'cloysters' shown on the 1661 plan were built in 1640 (date stone) and the gardens were possibly laid out at that time. The current stable block, not shown on the 1661 plan, was built in the late C18.

Henry Nevill's great granddaughter, Mary (d 1742), married Count Cosmas Migliorucci but their son took the name Nevill. The west avenue may have been planted in the C18 (OS 1824; Medbourne Enclosure map, 1845), under the ownership of Cosmas Nevill, who had an interest in the garden: a letter of 1759 (LRO) addressed to him, which lists twenty-four plants recently sent to Nevill Holt, states 'your Collection will be a very good one considering the Coldness of the Scituation'.

In 1829-32, the then owner, Charles Nevill (d 1848), employed the architect J B Papworth (1775-1847). Papworth's proposals included alterations to both the Hall and the grounds, but because of financial constraints his plans were never fully completed. None of his tree-planting proposals for the parkland to the south were carried out, but in 1873, the industrialist Grieveson, who was a tenant at the time, 'planted 400 forest trees along the drives and elsewhere' (Archaeol J 1999; Sale plan, 1876).

In 1876 Edward Cunard bought the estate, and subsequently it was owned by his brother, Sir Bache Cunard, who improved both the Hall and the garden; built two new entrances, flanked by lodges; and probably imparked the surrounding land in the 1880s (OS). During the First World War the Hall and stable block stood empty until they were bought in 1919 for conversion into a private preparatory school. In the early C20 the majority of the late C19 parkland laid out by Sir Bache Cunard was sold and has since been farmed. The south-west corner of the park became the Nevill Holt Quarry (now, 2004, disused). The school closed in the late 1990s and the whole property was sold for use as a private country house. Since then a major programme of repairs and renovation has been undertaken to both the Hall and grounds. Work on the Hall is now (2004) largely complete and is continuing on the stables and in the gardens and the wider estate. The grounds are now used for annual operatic events.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Nevill Holt, a site of c 56ha, is situated on Nevill Holt Hill, the summit of which is crowned by the Hall and the hamlet of Nevill Holt. It lies to the south-east of the B664 road between Market Harborough and Uppingham. It is situated in a rural area and is mainly surrounded by arable land with the exception of the land to the south-east of the site which is pasture.

There are extensive views from the terrace on the south front of the Hall towards the Welland Valley to the south-east, Rockingham Castle (qv) on the far side of the valley being an important eyecatcher.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The western approach, called The Avenue, leads off the east end of Manor Road c 400m west-south-west of the Hall. This was probably planted in the C18 and takes the form of wide grass verges flanked to north and south by over-mature trees; an inner avenue of saplings has recently been planted. At the west end the drive is flanked by gate piers and Buffalo Lodge (1880, listed grade II), a Tudor-style building of one and a half storeys built by Sir Bache Cunard. The main road through the estate, which runs approximately north to south, is also tree-lined. This avenue dates from the late C19 improvements as it does not appear on the sale plan of 1876.

The court on the south front of the Hall is approached from an entrance situated on Drayton Road c 30m south-south-west of the Hall. This entrance has decorative cast-iron gates (listed grade II) which were installed as a memorial to those pupils who died in the Second World War. From the entrance gate the drive runs east-north-east for c 50m before turning northwards into the forecourt, which is largely grassed over. To the south the forecourt is bounded by two sections of balustrade of c 1880 (listed grade II), built for the then owner Sir Bache Cunard. Two decorative stone garden seats stand on either side of the entrance porch of the Hall and are probably C17 in date. As indicated on the 1661 plan by John Andrews, the Hall and village of Nevill Holt were accessed via 'The lane leading into the Towne street', which ran along the south front of the Hall. This lane was closed off before 1876 (Sale particulars), and access to the Hall and village were separated by the creation of Paddock Lane to the north of the Hall.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The Hall, church, and stable block at Nevill Holt form a coherent group of buildings and are situated in the centre of the site. The buildings are mostly medieval in origin with subsequent work of a range of dates. The Hall (listed grade I) has an elongated irregular ground plan and is largely unchanged from the outline shown on the 1661 plan, except for the subsequently demolished west wing. The south front of the Hall is characterised by the C15 porch; windows from this

side of the Hall overlook the forecourt and land beyond. The north side of the Hall is characterised by the loggia (Cloysters), clearly shown on the 1661 plan, and overlooks the remains of the C17 garden. The mostly two-storey building is built of ashlar and rendered brick and stone with stone dressings and a roof of Collyweston slates. The central portion is gothic, with later additions and alterations in Gothic style. The Hall has recently (early C21) undergone a major programme of works to convert it back to a private residence.

The church (C13-C15, listed grade I) lies to the east of the Hall, connected to it by what is described on the 1661 plan as a 'Gallery'. To the south-east of the Hall is the late C18 stable block (listed grade II*). This new stable block is located to the east of the site of the earlier one, approximately on the site of a large 'Hospital' shown on the 1661 plan. The building is currently (early C21) undergoing a major programme of repairs and refurbishment.

To the north-east of the Hall lies the village of Nevill Holt which consists of various cottages (some listed grade II), and Nevill Holt Farm (listed grade II).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The garden lies to the north-west side of the Hall and is bounded to the north and west principally by a brick wall with a stone base (listed grade II). To the east the ornamental garden is bounded by the walls of the three kitchen gardens (listed grade II). The garden has a grass lawn, divided by a raised avenue (restored early C21) running to the north from the back of the Hall, with a belt of mature trees and shrubs along its western boundary. At the north end of the garden, c 120m from the Hall, is a raised bank with central stone steps and a stone buttressed retaining wall along its north end, creating a platform from which there are fine views of the parkland to the north. This feature is depicted on the 1661 plan and is called the 'Stand'; it may have been used for hawking (a 'Hawkes Mew' is shown in the walled garden to the east of the Stand), or perhaps to view deer coursing. A stone sundial of 1728-42, now located on top of the Stand, carries the coat of arms of Migliorucci impaling Nevill. The 1661 plan shows the garden in use as a formally arranged orchard and a grove with walnut and cherry trees. The orchard and grove were separated by the 'Mount', a long raised bank running west to east with three sets of steps on either side. This was on the same axis as The Avenue and its remains, in the form of slight earthworks, may still be traced in the lawn. The 1661 plan shows a 'Pheasant Garden' and a 'Courtyard' on the south front of the Hall, but these were lost during later landscaping works.

PARK Today (2004), only the land to the east and south-east of the Hall and village is parkland; this retains scattered mature trees and clumps. This area of the park dates principally from the C18 and is described as 'New Ground' on the Tithe map of 1850. To the east it is bounded by a thick belt of trees. The parkland immediately south of the terrace in front of the Hall contains various archaeological remains, possibly of a medieval settlement or further gardens (LCC 1999). From the Hall and village the parkland slopes down in a south-easterly direction towards Fishpond Spinney which contains a square-shaped pond. At the far north-east corner of the park lies Holt Wood (outside the area here registered), which contains the remains of the fountainhead erected by the Countess Migliorucci c 1730 over the site of a chalybeate spring discovered in 1728 (VCH 1964). This became known as Holt Spa (OS 1912).

The northern park was bisected by Holt Road but this area was converted to arable cultivation in the mid C20 and is outside the area here registered. The land to the north of the Stand is partly in arable use and consists of two large walled enclosures (early C19), called the Top and Bottom Paddock on the Tithe Award plan of 1850. The Bottom Paddock contains various earthworks of archaeological interest (LCC 1999).

The field to the south of The Avenue, which has been used as a school playing field, contains scattered mature trees. This area, outside the site here registered, still retains the name 'The Warren' which is first recorded in the C16 (Archaeol J 1999).

KITCHEN GARDEN The three walled kitchen gardens date from the C17 (first shown on the plan of 1661) and were altered and added to in the C18 and C19. They form an L-shaped ground plan and are situated to the north-east of the Hall. To the north they are bounded by Paddock Lane. They are enclosed by brick walls with a stone base and are linked by several doorways.

Since the late C20, the north-west enclosure has been occupied by a private dwelling. It can be entered from both Paddock Lane and from the Hall garden. Its entrance is flanked by brick gate piers with stone urns and cast-iron railings. The enclosure situated to its east is in use as a vegetable garden, the beds surrounded by late C19 box and clay tile edging. Attached to the south wall is a range of C19 service buildings, and an early C20 lean-to glasshouse attached to the east wall has now (2004)

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been replaced in aluminium. Two large late C19 glasshouses that were attached to the north wall have also been replaced in aluminium. The third enclosure is used as a flower garden and has a square lawn. It has a two column wooden temple of c 1905 (listed grade II) attached to the north wall.

REFERENCES

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Archival items Nevill Holt Charters (MF6, 41533-41626), (Leicestershire Record Office) Sale catalogue with litho view of S front of Nevill Holt Hall, 1868 (British Library Maps 137, a 8/7) Sale particulars of the Nevill Holt Estate, 1919 (Leicestershire Record Office) Aerial photograph, c 1920-30 (private collection) Composite aerial photograph of Nevill Holt, c 1:10,000, 1991 (RCHME) [copy on EH file]

Description written: January 2000 Revised: December 2004 (CAA) Register Inspector: FDM Edited: December 2004

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.