

Haddon Hall

England's Loveliest Long Gallery?

The Long Gallery at Haddon Hall, in Derbyshire, is not the longest, nor the most opulent, to survive from the Elizabethan and early Jacobean period, but with its wooden panelling, dappled light and air of serenity, it can lay claim to being the loveliest. **Deborah Roil** explores Haddon Hall's remarkably unaltered Long Gallery.

Set on a rocky outcrop above the River Wye, Haddon Hall is a medieval, fortified manor house that has changed very little in the centuries since it was built. Fortuitously, after escaping damage during the Wars of the Roses and destruction in the Civil War, it avoided the drastic alterations inflicted on so many country houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to be restored in the early twentieth century. Consequently, Haddon is described by architectural historian, Anthony Emery, as ranking “among leading late Plantagenet survivals in England”, and by Simon Jenkins, who gives it a five-star rating, as “the most perfect English House to survive from the Middle Ages”.

Haddon Hall was the home of the Vernon family from c. 1170, when Richard Vernon received the earliest-

recorded licence to crenellate, until 1565 when marriage brought it into the hands of the Manners family of Belvoir Castle, Dukes of Rutland since 1703. The Vernons were an important Derbyshire gentry family, holding various positions as MPs, High Sheriffs and Chief Justices. Sir Henry Vernon (c.1445 – 1515) rose to become Governor and Treasurer to Arthur, Prince of Wales.

Today, the hall consists of a fourteenth-century core, with substantial fifteenth-century extensions and some sixteenth-century additions. The Great Hall, kitchen, family apartments and chapel are wonderfully preserved and many original fittings – screens, ceilings, doors, wall and ceiling paintings – and some early furnishings, survive.



© Suzanne Howard



© Haddon Hall

Elizabethan Renaissance style

The Long Gallery is in the Upper Courtyard, on the first floor of the south range. It is thought that there were already existing first floor rooms here, which were used as the basis for a Long Gallery created by Sir George Vernon (c.1508 – 1565), the self-styled ‘King of the Peaks’, before his death in 1565. The original ceiling is of a sixteenth-century construction with moulded spars, rafters and purlins. After the marriage of Sir George’s daughter, Dorothy Vernon (1544 – 1584),

Above: Readers might recognise the Long Gallery from its appearance as Thornfield Hall in the BBC series of *Jane Eyre*, the 2018 *Mary Queen of Scots* film, featuring Saoirse Ronan and Margot Robbie, or, most recently, *Firebrand*, featuring Jude Law and Alicia Vikander, based on Elizabeth Fremantle’s novel, *The Queen’s Gambit*, about Katherine Parr, the last wife of Henry VIII.

Left: The Porch in the Lower Courtyard marks the entrance into the Great Hall and beyond to the Upper Courtyard, where the Long Gallery is located, along with the family’s private apartments.

to Sir John Manners, the couple changed the original smaller Long Gallery to a longer, lighter and more fashionable room, in the style of the new Elizabethan Renaissance.

It appears that the couple added panelling to the room and erected the current plaster ceiling. They extended the Gallery; a slight kink in the left-hand wall, which marks the creation of the new Gallery, is still visible. There is a stained-glass roundel in one of the windows with a date of 1589 which may commemorate the finishing of the first part of the Gallery. It seems to have taken more than thirty-five years to build, and it may have been extended and redecorated between 1570 and 1611, prior to Sir John Manners’ death.

The important, and indeed unique, aspect of Haddon’s Long Gallery is that it remained exactly as it was from the mid-eighteenth century until the 1920s.

The family left Haddon and moved to Belvoir Castle after the Earl of Rutland was made a duke in 1703. Belvoir Castle was considered more comfortable and more in keeping with being a ducal seat. No changes were made to Haddon's architecture or grounds for two hundred years, because the family did not live there. As a result, Haddon remained exactly as it had been until the meticulous restoration of the 9th Duke of Rutland in the early-twentieth century.

It is believed that the Long Gallery was designed by Robert Smythson who moved to the East Midlands in 1580 at the invitation of Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton Hall, a personal friend of Sir John Manners. There are records in the 1582 Haddon accounts for a Mr Smithstone's charges and the mention of his making 'modulls' and sending them to London. There are a number of marked similarities with the other better known Smythson-designed buildings, such as the presence chamber at Hardwick Hall and the fish-scale, carved patterns at Longleat, where Smythson previously worked.

Below: The Long Gallery has seven large windows, with very rare, curved windows, reputedly made to a Venetian design.

The garden and its balustrade were built at the same time as the Gallery and were probably designed by John Smythson, Robert's son, as a unity. The Long Gallery was built in line with what is known as the Upper Garden, its two canted bays and central square designed to give views across the garden. John Smythson's spiral staircase at Wolfreton Manor is very similar to the balustrade at Haddon. Both father and son were the master builders of the period.

Beautiful panelling and rare windows

The beautifully carved panelling is of oak from the estate and was most likely lime-washed before being painted in a foxy-red colour. This was probably done to give the appearance of cedar wood, which was in fashion at the time, coming from the newly-discovered Americas. There are classical pilasters with painted inlays, and square panels depicting parterres and garden designs, presumably to mirror what was to be seen in the gardens outside. The upper frieze shows the boar's head of the Vernon family and the peacock of the Manners family. The floor of the Gallery is said to have been cut from one gigantic oak from the park.



© Haddon Hall



© Haddon Hall

The floorboards vary in width from twelve to twenty-two inches. There are seven large windows with very rare, curved windows, reputedly made to a Venetian design. No two windows face each other. The diamond panes are all set at different angles, which provides a most dramatic effect, ensuring maximum daylight and dramatic reflections in candlelight at night.

The Long Gallery was predominantly used for exercise purposes. Bad weather would have prevented anyone from walking in the garden so they would have walked inside whilst enjoying garden views. It may also have been used for dancing, games and music. Clearly designed to welcome visitors and to show off the wealth of the newly united Vernon and Manners families, its social function is reflected in its fine decoration and dramatic use of light and space.

Whilst no original furniture remains in the Gallery, contemporary records indicate that the early furniture that was there attempted to reflect the garden which the Gallery looked out on. The 1623 inventory notes that the Gallery was furnished in green velvet, and green buckram, silk and damask. In the 1640 steward accounts there is a record of a payment for 'painting the gallery', which probably refers to the panelling and ceiling. ■

Above: The carved oak panelling displays emblems of the Vernon (boar's head) and Manners (peacock) families, with the rose and thistle emblems of King James VI and I.

Visiting

Haddon Hall

Bakewell, Derbyshire DE45 1LA

www.haddonhall.co.uk

In Issue 4, our article *A Tudor Weekend in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire* provides an itinerary for a series of places with Tudor connections that you could combine with a visit to Haddon Hall, to make an enjoyable two- or three-day weekend break.

Further Reading

Coope, R 'The 'Long Gallery': Its Origins, Development, Use and Decoration', *Architectural History*, Vol 29, pp 43 – 84 (1986)

Emery, A *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300 – 1500: Volume II* (2000)

Faulkner, P.A 'Haddon Hall and Bolsover Castle', *Archaeological Journal*, 118:1, pp188 – 205 (1961)



Deborah Roil is the founder and editor of *Tudor Places* magazine.