

FAWSLEY HALL
HOTEL & SPA
FAWSLEY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Our Heritage



OUR HERITAGE



Before the Knightleys

Fawsley was a Royal Manor as early as the 7th century, it being the headquarters of administrative and ecclesiastical matters for 12 settlements. The area was hunted by royals from the nearby Anglo Saxon palace at Weedon but there was no hunting lodge before the end of the 8th century. A land charter of AD944 records a gift of some land adjoining Fawsley by King Edmund to Bishop Aelfric.

The same charter refers to pagan burials in nearby Badby Woods. These burials date back to the 6th and 7th centuries when Fawsley's parish boundary was established. After England was divided into counties, smaller areas were created to help administrate - these areas were called hundreds. The Fawsley hundred was called Gravesend and the hundred courts were called Mangrave. A constable presided over the Mangrave and charges of assault and debt were heard by a jury and judgement made. They met under a huge beech tree on the highest point of the ridge at the junction of the parishes of Badby, Everdon and Fawsley, opposite Bull's Hill Farm on the Newnham to Preston Capes road.

In 1224 the King granted the holding of a weekly market and the population had grown to its zenith by the 1340s, before the Black Death wiped out between one third and one half of the population. Poll Tax records show that there were only 200 residents left in 1377. The site of the village was in the field around the Church of St Mary.

On the other side of the lake, the ridge and furrow created by the early single plough is particularly well preserved and is best viewed when the sun is low in the sky.

The Knightley Family



The Knightleys came over to England with William the Conqueror and settled in the village of Knightley in Staffordshire, from whence the name comes. In 1416 Richard Knightley became Lord of the Manor of Fawsley. He was a successful Staffordshire lawyer and the family were hard sheep farming landlords. Richard Knightley later became the King's Sergeant and Teller of the Exchequer. They developed the sheep farming at the expense of their peasant tenants, who were all evicted by the turn of the 15th century. Thus the Knightley family wealth was assured for the next 300 years. Richard Knightley's son, also Richard, was twice Sheriff and his grandson, also Richard, who through marriage acquired extensive estates, set about building the earliest part of the house, the South Wing that exists today.

The Tudors

Henry VII knighted Sir Richard Knightley (third generation) in 1494 when Henry's son was created Duke of York. Henry VIII knighted Sir Edmund Knightley (fourth generation) in 1542. Edmund, a sergeant-at law, enhanced the family wealth by being appointed a commissioner for the Suppression of the Monasteries and confiscating monastic lands. Edmund held strong religious convictions, once trying to prevent Henry VIII from taking the son of his deceased brother in law (Sir William Spencer) into wardship. He was thrown into London's Fleet Prison for his impudence. Edmund continued the building work at

Fawsley with his brother Valentine and it was Valentine's son who inherited the house, yet another Richard (died 1615). It was this Richard Knightley who entertained Queen Elizabeth I in 1575 in the South Wing.

There was no major building work in the 17th century, largely because of the extravagances of Richard's son, Valentine. He sold a large part of the family estates and these financial difficulties remained for some time. In an inventory of a family member who died in 1650, there is mention of the 'Queens Chamber'. This is now our 1575 suite. Queen Elizabeth I often visited her courtiers during the summer months while her palaces were being cleaned.

The Puritans and the Civil War

Sir Richard Knightley (died 1615) was imprisoned for allowing the printing of Puritan material and there is little doubt that in the period leading up to the Civil War, the Knightleys were very much opposed to the unlimited power of royalty. The term 'sub rosa' is supposed to have originated here from the flower in the centre of the ceiling of the bay window in the Great Hall, above which is the secret room where meetings were held. On the eve of the Battle of Naseby, Charles I was seen hunting deer in Fawsley Park. This may seem curious seeing as the Knightleys were Parliamentarians but the Knightley family had leased out the house and were living in London at the time. Clearly the tenants were Royalists!

The Georgians, Victorians and Edwardians

Lucy Knightley inherited in 1728 and added the Georgian Wing in classical style. During this time the family continued to represent Northamptonshire in Parliament. In 1798 Sir John Knightley, 22nd lord of the manor, was made the first Baronet. His nephew, Sir Charles Knightley, 2nd Baronet (1781-1864) carried out the Gothic alterations to the Georgian Wing and his son Rainald III Baronet commissioned Anthony Salvin to re-model the North Wing. Rainald was MP for south Northamptonshire for 40 years. The Life Peerage, Baron Knightley of Fawsley, was created by Queen Victoria for Sir Rainald Knightley in 1892.

The decline of the family was dramatic. Rainald died childless in 1895 and his wife Louisa, extra lady-in-waiting to HRH Duchess of Albany, died in 1913 (the Duchess of Albany was the widow of Prince Leopold, the youngest son of Queen Victoria). There being insufficient capital for the will to be proved, the contents of the house were auctioned over a three week period in 1914. She was the last Knightley to live in Fawsley Hall. Her diaries are now out in book form called 'The Journals of Lady Knightley'.

Subsequently, when the penultimate baronet, Sir Charles Valentine died in 1932 and his brother, Sir Henry Francis died in 1938, the house passed to the Gage family of Firlie Place, Sussex because of the earlier marriage of Rainald Knightley's sister, Sophia, to Viscount Gage. The Gage family still owns the former Knightley lands. Both Sir Charles and Sir Henry, who lived in the Stewards House, died childless, leaving a vacant baronetcy.



Fawsley Hall

South Wing

The earliest part of the house is the Tudor South Wing, built in the early 16th century. The hotel restaurant now occupies most of the ground floor of the South Wing. The early house is exceptional in that it contains two kitchens, each having a large back fireplace served by a common chimney. Above the kitchen, which has a door opening into the courtyard, is the room in which Elizabeth I slept during her visit in 1575. Following the completion of the South Wing, three further wings were soon added. These were the Great Hall, Brew House and Gate House thereby forming an inner courtyard.

Great Hall

Sir Edmund Knightley commissioned the building of the Great Hall in 1537 in the traditional open hall style of the period. Its fine roof was removed in 1966 but was reconstructed in 1988 using an engraving from 1816 and a few surviving beams. These original beams are of much darker wood than the new beams, which otherwise are an exact copy. As you face the original Tudor fireplace you can see the coat of arms of the Knightleys and those of Richard I and twenty-six knights who accompanied him on his first crusade. The fireplace itself is slightly smaller than it was originally. There was a large window with three lights above the fireplace with the smoke being carried by twin flues either side of the windows. The flues are still there but the three windows were covered over to allow the construction of a central flue.

On high are the copies of the original exquisite stained glass panels, now in the Burrell Collection in Glasgow. The large aperture in the end wall to your right was originally a squint allowing observation by servants. Immediately facing the fireplace is the large bay window with its fine carved ceiling. Above that ceiling, now inaccessible, is a hidden room, commonly thought to be the place where Puritan material

was secretly printed for which Sir Richard Knightley (died 1615) was subsequently imprisoned. It was reached originally by a spiral staircase outside, where the outline of the entrance archway can still be seen. The family crest can also be seen above the window outside. Curiously, the crest and coat of arms hasn't fallen over, for some unknown reason it is displayed on its side. The large shield in the Great Hall on the left by the bay window contains 334 quarterings of heraldry showing all the Knightley marriage alliances up to the 19th century.



Great Hall

The West Wing or Brew House

This was built around the same time as the Great Hall. The bar and lounge are located on the ground floor of this wing. It is constructed of golden Northamptonshire sandstone and contains a very fine oriole window on the upper floor at the north end. Not only was brewing carried out here but also the laundry and possibly a dairy. It was the very first part of the house to be restored in 1976.



Louisa Mary Bowater room

Georgian North Wing

In 1732, Lucy Knightley commissioned the North Wing. The original gatehouse and North Wing were demolished. It is constructed at an angle which is not symmetrical with the rest of the house, possibly due to boundary constraints. It has been attributed to Francis Smith of Warwick, as was the very fine grade I listed red brick contemporary stable block next to it on the north side. The main house addition is three storeys and was topped with a balustraded parapet. In 1815 Sir Charles Knightley, 2nd Baronet (died 1864), commissioned Thomas Cundy to remodel it in gothic style, which included demolishing part of the eastern end and replacing it with a three storey construction and a single storey porch for the new main entrance. Corner turrets were added at the top with battlements replacing the parapet. Not to be outdone, his son Rainald III Baronet commissioned Anthony Salvin for a further remodelling of the wing in 1868. He removed the battlement, turrets and porch and replaced them with another porch, large enough for coaches to pass through.

The Victorian and South East Wing

In preparation for the wedding of Sir Rainald (later) Baron Knightley to Louisa Mary Bowater, Anthony Salvin was commissioned in 1869. His brief was to demolish the south-east corner of the house and build a two storey block including apartments above and two very large rooms on the ground floor. These are now the hotel's main function rooms. Anecdote: Louisa, who had no children, befriended John Merrick, 'the Elephant Man' and provided him with a cottage on the estate.

Courtyard

This was covered over in the 19th century and divided into rooms with inter-connecting passages which were lit by sky lights. Traces of this construction can still be seen on the surrounding walls in the courtyard.

The 20th Century

After the auction of its contents in 1914, the house was requisitioned by the army during the First World War and afterwards only skeleton staff lived there. The Gage family who inherited the house in 1932 already had a family seat in Sussex and had no need for another seat. The future of Fawsley was uncertain. It was again requisitioned in the Second World War, and in the 1950s and 60s a timber company leased the building as a workshop. Further deterioration occurred following the departure of the timber company. Its sorry state was highlighted when Fawsley Hall was featured in an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum entitled 'The Decline of the English Country House'. In 1975 it was purchased by successful entrepreneurs and antiques dealers, Mr and Mrs E A Saunders. The monumental task of restoring the house continued until the recession of the late 1980s. Work restarted again in 1996 when a consortium, including the Saunders, reinvested in the building and created the wonderful hotel that it is today.

The Parkland

In the 1760s and 70s Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the landscape gardener, was engaged and transformed the park by creating sweeping vistas, planting trees and laying lawns. Many of the trees planted can still be seen today.

Great Hall Paintings



Queen Mary I (1516 – 1558)

Daughter of King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, born 1516 and ruled 1553 – 1558. Her executions of Protestants caused her opponents to give her the sobriquet “Bloody Mary”.

As the fourth crowned monarch of the Tudor dynasty, Mary is remembered for her restoration of Roman Catholicism after the short-lived Protestant reign of her half-brother. During her five-year reign, she had over 280 religious dissenters burned at the stake in the Marian persecutions. Her re-establishment of Roman Catholicism was reversed after her death in 1558 by her younger half-sister and successor Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn.

Copy of Original Portrait by Antonis Mor, 1554



Anne of Cleves (1515 – 1557)

Queen of England from 1540 - 1540 as the fourth wife of King Henry VIII.

The marriage was declared never consummated, and, as a result, she was not crowned queen consort. Following the annulment of their marriage, Anne was given a generous settlement by the King, and thereafter referred to as the King's Beloved Sister

She lived to see the coronation of Queen Mary I, outliving the rest of Henry's wives

Copy of portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger, c.1539



Catherine Howard (c1521 – 1542)

Queen of England from 1540 until 1541, as the fifth wife of Henry VIII who referred to her as his “rose without a thorn”.

Catherine married Henry VIII on 28 July 1540, almost immediately after the annulment of his marriage to Anne of Cleves was arranged.

Catherine was beheaded after less than two years of marriage to Henry on the grounds of treason for committing adultery while married to the King.

Copy of portrait - Unknown Artist



Jane Seymour (c1508 – 1537)

Queen of England from 1536 -1537 as the third wife of King Henry VIII. She succeeded Anne Boleyn as queen consort following the latter's execution for high treason, incest and adultery in May 1536.

She died of postnatal complications less than two weeks after the birth of her only child, a son who reigned as Edward VI. She was the only one of Henry's wives to receive a queen's funeral, and his only consort to be buried beside him in St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.

She was the only wife of Henry VIII whose son survived infancy.

Copy of portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger, c.1539



Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603)

Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 until her death.

Sometimes called The Virgin Queen, Gloriana or Good Queen Bess, the childless Elizabeth was the fifth and last monarch of the Tudor dynasty

Copy of The "Darnley Portrait" of Elizabeth I (c 1575)



Prince Edward Stuart, Bonnie Prince Charlie (1720 – 1788)

Charles Stuart, commonly known in Britain during his lifetime as The Young Pretender and often referred to in retrospective accounts as Bonnie Prince Charlie, was the second Jacobite pretender to the thrones of England, Scotland, and Ireland (as Charles III of England, Scotland and Ireland) from the death of his father in 1766

Copy of portrait by William Mosman



Mary Queen of Scots (1542 – 1587)

Also known as Mary Stuart or Mary I of Scotland, Queen of Scotland from 1542 - 1567 and Queen consort of France from 1559 - 1560. Mary, the only surviving legitimate child of King James V of Scotland, was six days old when her father died and she acceded to the throne

On 24 July 1567, she was forced to abdicate in favour of James, her one-year-old son by Darnley. After an unsuccessful attempt to regain the throne, she fled southwards seeking the protection of her first cousin once removed, Queen Elizabeth I of England. Mary had previously claimed Elizabeth's throne as her own and was considered the legitimate sovereign of England by many English Catholics. Perceiving her as a threat, Elizabeth had her confined in various castles and manor houses in the interior of England. After eighteen and a half years in custody, Mary was found guilty of plotting to assassinate Elizabeth, and was subsequently executed.

Copy of Mary in Captivity by Nicholas Hilliard c1578



Anne Boleyn (c1501 – 1536)

Queen of England from 1533 to 1536 as the second wife of King Henry VIII.

Henry had Anne investigated for high treason in April 1536. On 2 May she was arrested and sent to the Tower of London, where she was tried before a jury of peers – which included Henry Percy, her former betrothed, and her own uncle, Thomas Howard – and found guilty on 15 May. She was beheaded four days later.

Copy of late Elizabethan portrait of Anne Boleyn, possibly derived from a lost original of 1533–36



Catherine Parr (1512 – 1548)

Queen of England from 1543 - 1547, as the last of the six wives of King Henry VIII. She married him in 1543, and outlived him.

She was also the most-married English queen, with four husbands, and the first English queen to be titled “Queen of Ireland”.

Copy of portrait - Unknown Artist



William Shakespeare

The Cobbe portrait is an early Jacobean panel painting of a gentleman which has been argued to be a life portrait of William Shakespeare. It is displayed at Hatchlands Park in Surrey, a National Trust property, and the portrait is so-called because of its ownership by Charles Cobbe, Church of Ireland (Anglican) Archbishop of Dublin (1686–1765). There are numerous early copies of the painting, most of which were once identified as Shakespeare.



Catherine of Aragon (1485 – 1536)

Queen of England from 1509 - 1533 as the first wife of King Henry VIII; she was previously Princess of Wales as the wife of Prince Arthur.

By 1525, Henry VIII was infatuated with Anne Boleyn and dissatisfied that his marriage to Catherine had produced no surviving sons, leaving their daughter, the future Mary I of England, as heiress presumptive at a time when there was no established precedent for a woman on the throne. He sought to have their marriage annulled, setting in motion a chain of events that led to England’s schism with the Catholic Church

When Pope Clement VII refused to annul the marriage, Henry defied him by assuming supremacy over religious matters. In 1533 their marriage was consequently declared

invalid and Henry married Anne on the judgment of clergy in England, without reference to the Pope. Catherine refused to accept Henry as Supreme Head of the Church of England and considered herself the King's rightful wife and queen, attracting much popular sympathy. Despite this, she was acknowledged only as Dowager Princess of Wales by Henry.

After being banished from court, she lived out the remainder of her life at Kimbolton Castle, and died there on 7 January 1536.

Copy of portrait by Lucas Hornebolte



James I (1566 – 1625)

King of Scotland as James VI from 24 July 1567 and King of England and Ireland as James I from the union of the Scottish and English crowns on 24 March 1603 until his death

Copy of Portrait by Paul van Somer, c. 1620.



Queen Anne (1665 – 1714)

Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland on 8 March 1702. On 1 May 1707, under the Acts of Union, two of her realms, the kingdoms of England and Scotland, united as a single sovereign state known as Great Britain. She continued to reign as Queen of Great Britain and Ireland until her death.

Copy of Anne, circa 1684, painted by Willem Wissing and Jan van der Vaardt



George III (1738 – 1820)

King of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 until the union of the two countries on 1 January 1801, after which he was King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland until his death.

He was the third British monarch of the House of Hanover, but unlike his two predecessors he was born in Britain, spoke English as his first language, and never visited Hanover

Copy of Coronation portrait by Allan Ramsay, 1762



Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (1744 – 1818)

The wife of King George III. She was Queen of Great Britain and Ireland from their marriage in 1761 until the union of the two kingdoms in 1801, after which she was Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland until her death in 1818.

Queen Charlotte was a patroness of the arts and an amateur botanist, who helped expand Kew Gardens. George III and Charlotte had 15 children, 13 of whom survived to adulthood.

Copy of portrait by Thomas Gainsborough



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