

Aston Hall A Jacobean House

Background Information

Aston Hall was built for Sir Thomas Holte between 1618 and 1635. Sir Thomas was a local landowner and dignitary. He had received, at first a knighthood, and then a baronetcy from James I and had the house built as a statement of his wealth and importance. It was put up on the largest of his manors at Aston, overlooking the church and small village.

The Hall was approached through an avenue of trees leading from the main Birmingham to Lichfield road: the visitor would have looked up towards an imposing brick creation with tall turrets, glittering windows and broken skyline. A short stretch of chestnuts have been planted in recent times to give some idea of the effect. Two lodges were built in front of a large courtyard: one housed the gardeners and the other the porters.

Important guests would have been greeted in the Entrance Hall and taken to a guest suite of rooms on the first floor - Great Chamber (Great Dining Room), Best Lodging Chamber (King Charles' Room), Withdrawing Room (Green Drawing Room) and Long Gallery. These rooms still retain much original Jacobean work in plaster, wood and stone. A beautiful, geometrically designed garden would have been laid out on the south side to be viewed from the windows or strolled in on fine days.

Located on the north side were kitchens, larders, pastry, buttery, stillroom and sculleries. The stable block still remains

but a range of buildings running at right angles to the stables, and parallel with the house, has been demolished. These buildings would have been made up of a bake-house, brew-house, wash-house, milk-house, cheese house and wool-house.

Kennels for hunting dogs and mews for falcons were further essentials for the wealthy Stuart gentleman and would have been found on the north side too.

Sir Thomas Holte lived in the house with his second wife and any remaining alive and unmarried children (he had 16 children but only 6 lived to adulthood).

In October 1642 (two months after Charles I declared war on his parliament and their supporters) Sir Thomas was honoured with a visit by King Charles I as he made his way south from Shrewsbury where he had been raising troops to serve the Royalist cause. Shortly after leaving Aston Hall the king's army was engaged in one of the first big battles at Edgehill. Aston Hall itself was attacked in December 1643 by a Parliamentarian force from Coventry. Royalist soldiers had been sent from the garrison at Dudley Castle to help defend the house and earthworks were hastily thrown up in the park. Following a 3 day bombardment Sir Thomas surrendered. A cannonball hole in the staircase provides a lasting reminder of the attack.

Aston Hall was lived in as a home for nearly 250 years. It was opened as a museum in 1858.

