

Haddon Hall

Haddon Hall stands on a bluff overlooking the River Wye, two miles southeast of Bakewell. The situation and the embattled outline give an impression of strength from a distance, but as a castle Haddon is something of a mystery. Its complex building history suggests a manor house, which developed defenses but has been effectively de-fortified since.

The story goes back to Richard de Vernon, who obtained a peculiar license in 1195. It allowed him to enclose his house within a wall, but the wall was not to exceed twelve feet in height and was not to be crenellated. Some of the wall and part of the chapel survive from that time.

What stands today is a rectangular enclosure of the fourteenth century with ranges of buildings on each side. The outer wall is certainly thick enough to qualify as a curtain except on the north side, where the range is a late medieval rebuilding. On the west the curtain remains defensive with a square bastion projecting from the middle. The terrain is strongest here but the insertion of Elizabethan bay windows elsewhere has transformed the appearance of the mansion. The only other towers are the tall gate towers at each end. An unaccountable weakness is the chapel that projects from the southwest corner of the enclosure.

The hall lies across the middle of the enclosure, dividing it into two courtyards. This arrangement allowed the hall to be lit by large windows on either side without weakening the curtain. A fine porch leads from the lower courtyard into the old screens passage. The original wooden screen still exists, though the hall roof is a modern reconstruction. To the north are the kitchen and a row of domestic offices. To the south is a first-floor solar, the former parlor beneath it preserving a painted ceiling from about 1500.