



THE HISTORY OF HAMSTEAD MARSHALL PARK

Introduction

Hamstead Park lies within the Kennet Valley near Newbury, Berkshire. The Park has been recognised by Historic England as a landscape of national significance and it is Grade II registered. A number of features within the Park are also Scheduled or Listed.

This former mediaeval deer park has a fascinating history with royal connections and, for many years, was part of the Lord Craven estate. The Berkshire Gardens Trust '*Hamstead Park Revealed*' walk leads you on a journey of discovery through the Park; along the way you will discover castle mottes, the mediaeval deer park 'pale' and old manorial fishponds, a grand Lodge and veteran park trees. Then, rising surreally in the open parkland and apparently leading nowhere, pairs of enigmatic gateposts come into view to give a clue to the existence of a grand mansion long since vanished. There are some fine views from the Park and this provides an opportunity to see the park in its immediate context of the Kennet Valley.

The history of Hamstead Park outlined here is intended to provide additional context to the '*Hamstead Park Revealed*' walk.



PHOTO 1: HAMSTEAD PARK



PHOTO 2: GATE PIERS

Mediaeval Deer Park

The recorded history of Hamstead Park started in the 13th Century when it was a deer park and owned by William, the Earl Marshal of England (c.1146 – 1219). There was a mediaeval village, three motte and bailey castles, fishponds and a park 'pale' that was a hedged mound and trench to keep the deer in. The deer park functioned until 1574. While deer parks were once common throughout southern England, it is rare to find a surviving park which has escaped being used for agriculture and has surviving elements of the mediaeval landscape. At Hamstead Park, the motte and bailey castle mounds, the fishponds and nine surviving portions of the park pale can be seen today.

Two of the motte castle mounds stand in the grounds of North Lodge (a former keeper's cottage, extended in the 1950's for the dowager countess). Occupied during the 12th to 14th Centuries, one is thought to be 'Newbury' castle which was held for the Empress Matilda by John Marshal. Henry III visited in 1218 and Edward III stayed at the castle several times in the 1350s. The third motte castle mound sited on the ridge overlooking the fishponds is thought to be a Royalist siege-castle dating from 1153 during the reign of King Stephen.

The estate was obtained by the crown in 1302 and continued to be associated with royalty for the next 300 years.



PHOTO 3: MOTTE CASTLE MOUND



PHOTO 4: FISHPONDS



PHOTO 5: PARK PALE



PHOTO 6: NORTH LODGE CASTLE MOTTE MOUND

The Craven Seat

In 1620, the manor was purchased by Elizabeth Craven, a wealthy widow, and it stayed in the Craven family until 1984. Her son, William Craven (1606 - 1697), pursued a military career and spent much of it campaigning on behalf of Elizabeth of Bohemia and sister of Charles I. William, who became the Baron of Craven in 1627, built a grand mansion for Elizabeth at Hamstead on the site of an existing manor house.

The mansion was set within a series of walled ornamental and productive gardens. It is thought that the garden was created at the same time as the house was built. The result is captured in an engraving by Kyp dated around 1709 which shows a great formal garden surrounding the house with avenues of trees leading into Hamstead Park.

The mansion was destroyed by fire in 1718. Most history books suggest that it was not rebuilt and the hunting lodge at the centre of the Park was expanded to become the main Craven residence in Hamstead. During the 19thC the Lodge was completely remodelled in the Regency style and later enlarge. The gardens surrounding the Lodge were also laid out. A report of the Great Western Railway Fete held at Hamstead Lodge in 1858 refers to 'magnificent avenues of chestnut and beech trees leading in various directions'.



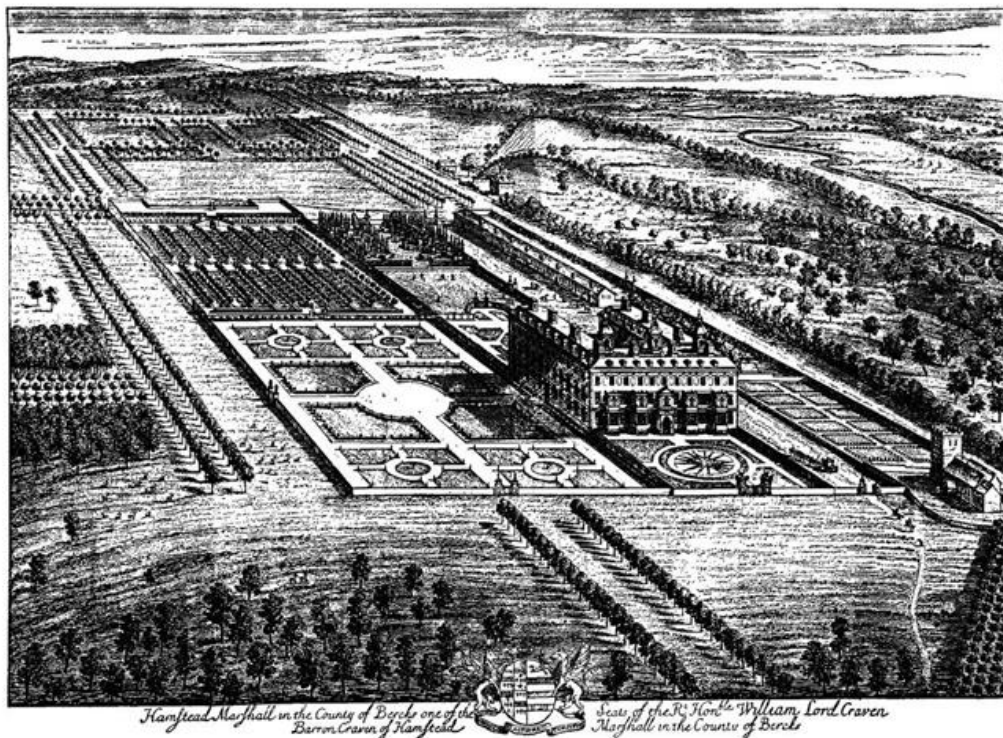
PHOTO 7: AVENUE LEADING TO HAMSTEAD LODGE



It is remarkable that there are surviving remnants of the formal gardens to the mansion that can be identified, thanks to the Kyp engraving. A few trees in the avenues that extended into the Park still exist. Writing for the Shell Guides (1949), Betjeman and Piper refer to an 'immense avenue across grass and bracken slopes' leading to the Lodge from the site of the former mansion'.

The majority of the 17th Century gate piers are extant and show the boundary of the formal gardens. Because the engraving is so accurate, these can be identified using the church as a reference point. The walls around the Fruit Garden still remain as does the raised terrace. And in dry summers, there are parch marks that show the location of some of the paths and flower beds.

Plate XXVII.



KYP'S ENGRAVING OF HAMSTEAD MANSION, C. 1709¹

¹Reproduced from <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924020603282#page/n109/mode/2up>



PHOTO 8: MANSION GATE PIERS



PHOTO 9: MANSION GATE PIERS & ST. MARY'S CHURCH



PHOTO 10: SITE OF HAMSTEAD PARK MANSION – REMNANT WALLING & GATE PIERS



PHOTO 11: GATE PIER AT BENHAM PARK ON THE A4

Once the mansion was gone, there were very few planned changes in the landscape. The Craven family also owned Benham Park at this time, and another Elizabeth Craven (1751 – 1828) who lived there, moved one set of the mansion's gate piers to Benham Park (these can be seen from the A4). She may have made some minor changes to Hamstead Park when she employed Capability Brown to remodel the grounds at Benham, but this is conjecture.

During the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, a combination of lack of interest and then lack of money meant that Hamstead Park was left alone and the formal gardens slowly disappeared. The estate was finally sold in 1984.

Although the Park remains in private ownership, a number of public rights of way pass through the Park enabling us to view and enjoy the remnants of the historic landscape.

Further Information

The entries of the Historic England website provide more information about Hamstead Park and the surviving features within it and why they are so interesting:

- [HAMSTEAD MARSHALL PARK](#) – List Entry 1000525



- [PARK PALE IN HAMSTEAD MARSHALL PARK](#) – List Entry 10105935
- [HAMSTEAD PARK – VARIOUS FEATURES](#) – various entries, including gate piers, motte castles, Hamstead Lodge and garden features, St. Mary's church, and Benham Park

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