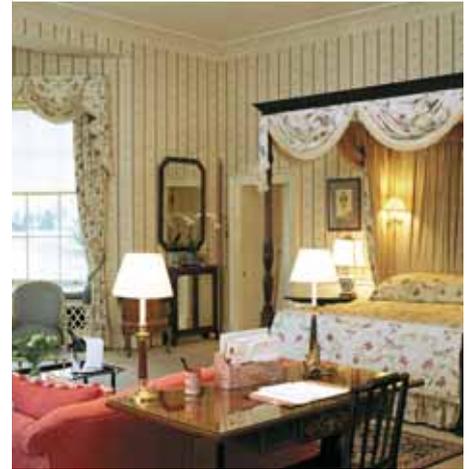
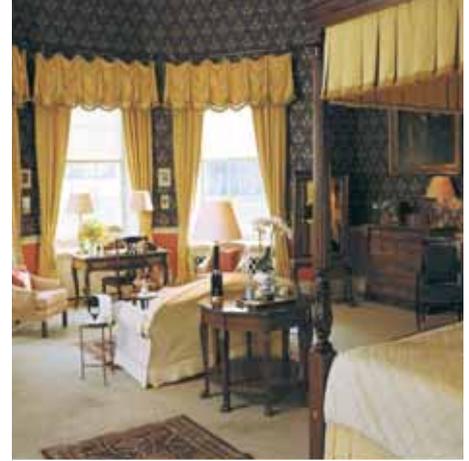




# FIT FOR A KING

Hartwell House's previous occupants include  
the exiled King of France, Louis XVIII



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The extensive grounds around the mansion were landscaped in the mid 18th century, in the style of 'Capability' Brown by one of his contemporaries and admirers, Richard Woods. **ABOVE LEFT:** Resplendent in its 18th century grandeur, the Morning Room is of great proportions, and features ornate plaster cornices. **TOP RIGHT:** The King's Room features an elegant Georgian-style four-poster bed, richly hung with gold drapes. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Queen's Bedroom has been decorated in a typical 18th-century style, but as with every room in this luxurious hotel, offers 21st century comfort.

The estate at Hartwell has a history that stretches back almost a thousand years to the reign of Edward the Confessor. Mentioned in the Domesday Book as belonging to William Peveral, son of William the Conqueror, it later passed to John, Earl of Mortaigne, who succeeded his brother, Richard the Lion Heart, as King of England in 1199.

Built in the 17th century, the existing mansion was commissioned by the Hampden and Lee families, ancestors of the Confederate General Robert E Lee. It was in this building, during his exile from France between 1809 and 1814, that Louis XVIII held his court at Hartwell. He also signed the constitutional document, confirming his accession to the throne, in the library. Portraits of King Louis and his Queen, Marie Josephine de Savoie, still hang on the walls of the main staircase.

Sir Thomas Lee married a wealthy heiress, Elizabeth Sandys, in 1720 and set about the transformation of the Hartwell gardens. They were laid out in a formal style with allées, a temple, an obelisk, statuary, canals and a yew tree exedra. It is thought that it was created by James Gibbs, who certainly designed the garden buildings, several of which remain today, namely the gothic tower and the pavilion. It is said that when Louis XVIII returned to reclaim the French throne, he laid out an English Garden at Versailles, modelled

on that of Hartwell. However, by the middle of the 18th century the formal gardens at Hartwell had been altered, and the grounds landscaped in the manner of 'Capability' Brown, by one of his admirers, Richard Woods.

#### COLOURFUL HISTORY

The 19th century saw Hartwell inherited by a particularly eccentric character, Dr John Lee. During his ownership, the property resembled an amalgamation of a museum and an astronomical observatory. A philanthropist, Victorian liberal and member of many different learned societies, Dr Lee travelled widely and amassed huge collections of middle eastern artefacts. He even built a then-futuristic observatory projecting from the south-west corner of the house. In 1850, the forerunner of today's Royal Meteorological Society was formed in the library at Hartwell.

The house remained in the possession of the original families until 1938, when it was bought by Ernest Cook, the grandson of Thomas Cook, founder of the travel agency. During the Second World War the property served as an Army billet for British and American troops, then in 1956 it was let to The House of Citizenship, a finishing school. In 1983 the School moved out, and the lease was taken by Historic House Hotels. A programme of restoration began, carried out to exacting standards.

Today, many of the rooms in the hotel retain their opulent 18th century style of décor. The various public areas, such as the gothic Great Hall, the Morning Room, Drawing Room and Library all feature elaborate decorative plasterwork on the ceiling, elegant marble chimneypieces and decorative panelling. The principal Dining Room was decorated in 1988 in the manner of the eminent Georgian architect and designer Sir John Soane.

From the Great Hall, a Jacobean staircase, decorated with carved figures, leads to the 30 bedrooms and suites contained within the house. All guest rooms are individually decorated, and some are named after members of the court of Louis XVIII. An additional 10 suites and six bedrooms are to be found in the adjacent Hartwell Court, which is an imaginative conversion of an 18th century indoor riding school.

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

Accredited with four red AA stars, Hartwell House is an award-winning country house hotel situated two miles from Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The hotel's restaurant has 3 AA rosettes, while the spa offers the opportunity to unwind in luxurious surroundings. Prices start from £270 per room per night for a double sleeping two people, including breakfast. For further details call 01296 747 444 or visit the website at [www.hartwell-house.com](http://www.hartwell-house.com).