

The Stables at Belton

The Stables are contemporaneous with the house and of are of great historic significance. Built for Young Sir John Brownlow , they are grade 1 listed and one of only 21 grade 1 listed stables in the country. The ability to trace the developments in stabling and see how the building changed across the centuries has meant that the stables at Belton is of exceptional significance.



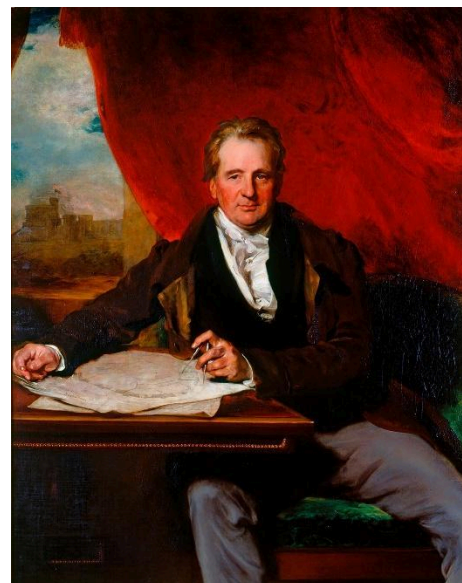
They were designed and built by the master mason William Stanton who, in 1686, became master-mason at Belton House. Stone from Ketton and Heydour was used.

Sir John Brownlow ('Young Sir John') (1659-1697), British (English) School

The stable yard elevation is of a classical design with slightly poor proportions (as some rather mean-spirited critics have said). The other side of the building (the driveway elevation) is of a Jacobean style, thus emphasising Young Sir John's twin need to appear both cultured and English!

Three types of horses were fundamental to an estate such as Belton: they were used for transport, hunting and as workhorses on the estate. The Stables, therefore, were of paramount importance to the family.

The Stables worked with the other buildings in this yard, the Carriage House and Brewhouse to the southern end – designed by Jeffry Wyatt in 1820, the carriage house opposite the stables is also Wyatt in 1820. The Ride was added in 1858 by the "horse mad" 3rd Earl as a place to exercise and school horses. It does not take much imagination to hear the horses' hooves and the jingling of the harness in days gone by – not to mention the smells that must have been noticeable!



Jeffry Wyatt (later Sir Jeffry Wyattville) by Sir Thomas Lawrence

Once inside our first stop was to the important 17th Century stalls currently used as the overspill for the restaurant. These stalls are original to the building and are very rare. The main features are the wooden turned posts and wooden mangers. On one of the post there are oblong notches that would seem to suggest that planks could be put across to partition off part of the stalls; perhaps to allow the coachmen to harness some the horses without interruption from the rest.

Sir John Brownlow, for whom these stables were built had two command stables, a hunting stable, a coach house stable as well as a coach house. The inventory after his death mentions "One old coach and one sumpter cart for a packhorse" All rather disappointing but perhaps his best coaches were at another property. He did, however, have 59 horses!

Viscount Tyrconnel had four coaches at Belton and the exercise chair currently on display in the house was made for him when he could no longer ride.

Conservation work in 2018, meant that these stalls were restored back to good condition. The new colour schemes included the original dark brown. None of the features with any historical significance were changed or lost.

The 1st Earl introduced additional stalls in 1811. These were designed by Jeffry Wyatt .Wyatt used cast iron a great deal in the construction of buildings – quite a new idea at the time. Hence the cast iron in the Orangery which he also designed. That is why these stalls have cast iron mangers and hay ricks. Some of the Saddle Rests are still in situ in what was the Tack Room. Again, these historical features were conserved during the restoration.



John Cust (1779 – 1853), 1st Earl Brownlow by Martin Archer Shee

The floor in these stalls is not the original but was put in place at the time of the 3rd Earl. The yellow cobbled floor of the walkway is believed to be original as it carries through from the central passageway.

The rest of the ground floor is taken up with the 3rd Earl's looseboxes. The 3rd



Earl was a keen rider and owned racehorses.

This area of the stables was remodelled in the 1860s and again in the 1870s to accommodate the most important horses. As was typical, the 3rd Earl commissioned the best. Nothing was too good for the likes of Queen Bess, his favourite horse (a bronze of the Earl and Bess can be seen in the house).

Adelbert Wellington Cust, 3rd Earl Brownlow (1844-1921) and Queen Bess by Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm, RA

St Pancras Ironworks prepared designs for stabling in 1869. They published a catalogue from which the client could select different items, rather like choosing a kitchen nowadays! The name of the company can be seen on the heel posts. The Earl chose the best and most expensive features - enamelled tiles, and a type of en suite in the form of the unusual 3 in 1 manger, hayrack and trough! Belton's loose boxes were installed in 1871, only two years later. In 1874 it supplied The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh and in 1891 Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace; the Earl got there first! In the influential publication of the time, 'The Horse, in the Stable and the Field', the author is impressed with this very design. His only objection was on the score of expense! Nostell Priory has the same loose boxes but none of the adornments.



These loose boxes have been restored; they are now a lovely open space and act as seating for the café.

The first floor was, originally, for the accommodation of single men. In 1698 three chambers are mentioned in an inventory: one for the Coachman, one for the Bailie (Steward) and one other. We do not know the exact location of these except that they were on this floor. Later head grooms, grooms, ostlers and even some single male guests are mentioned. By the mid-19th Century the census shows whole families housed on this floor. In 1891, the Coachman Edward Viner lived in these rooms with his wife and daughter and believe it or not the accommodation remained in use right up to the 1970's!

A visitor to the Stables brought a photo along with her showing a relative of hers (Lord Brownlow's chauffeur) sitting by the fireplace on the first floor of the stables. She was delighted to see the very fireplace and we were equally delighted to hear about her relative.

The first floor was in a semi-derelict state in 2018 and a huge amount of work had to be done to make it into office space and storage. Visitors will not be able to see this floor.

A communication from Gwlenys Cragg Reid, who now lives in America, evokes a wonderful atmosphere of the Stables in the 1950's so I will finish with her words:

The year 1953 seems like yesterday, but it was 64 years ago when I was a thirteen-year-old girl spending my summer holidays helping Gordon Thompsett with the horses at Belton House stables. Mr. Thompsett was in charge of the stables, where he looked after Lord Brownlow's horses. He and his kind wife lived

over the stables in a sunny flat overlooking the back-entrance drive. Down the hall from his flat were a number of empty small white bedrooms where grooms used to sleep.

Just being at the stables with the smell and soft noises of the horses and handling the smooth brown leather was heaven to a horse loving girl. I did odd jobs round the stables, wandered into immaculate stalls with curving metal hay racks, and took horses to graze on the grass verge of the drive behind the 17th century stable block. Even now, in 2017, the sound of horses' hooves reminds me of Lord Brownlow's horses clickety clacking on the cobbles when we led them into the big stable yard through the wide stable door.

