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# Hart and soul

It's been the home of an exiled king, but today **Hartwell House & Spa** has the relaxing vibe of a lovingly preserved country house that's the ideal weekend getaway

Words: **Helen Milbank**

**R**ARELY DOES A hotel wow you with its past, but Hartwell House & Spa is a real cut above in the history stakes. First mentioned in the Domesday Book as belonging to William the Conqueror's son William Peverel, that alone would be impressive enough. But that was just the start of its

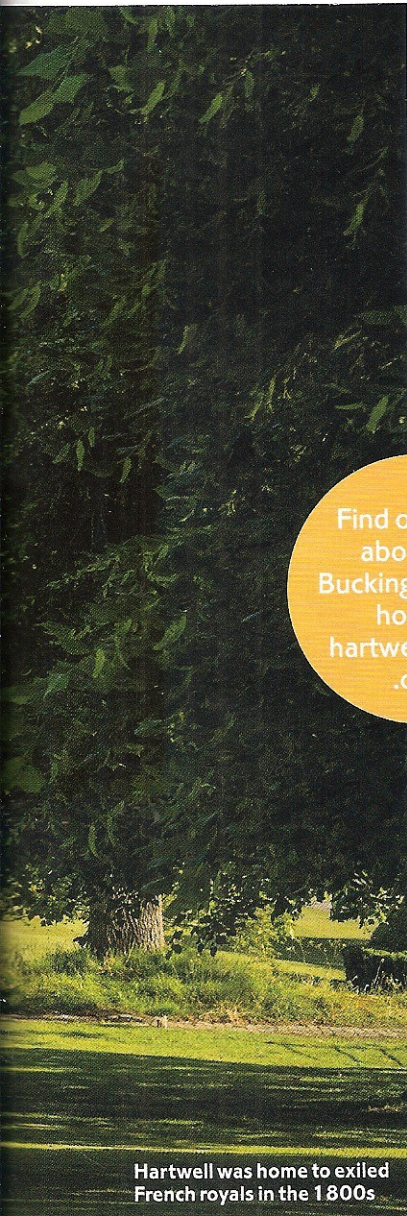
centuries-long association with the world's movers and shakers. Louis XVIII, exiled King of France, lived here for five years from 1809, and more recently the house was owned by the Cook family of Thomas Cook fame.

Now expertly preserved, and in such fantastic shape even Louis XVIII would

be proud, the house is part of the luxury Historic House Hotels group (see below for more on their pioneering work), and retains many of its Jacobean features, with the later addition of Georgian facades and garden buildings by eminent architects of the time.

Staying a night is an experience in itself, as the gates to the estate open and you're transported back to another era, a statue of Frederick Prince of Wales – rescued from an overgrown part of the garden and now restored – proudly sitting on a plinth to greet you.

Nothing's too much trouble for the hotel's hugely knowledgeable team of staff, who'll happily take you on a brief tour to reveal the building's quirkiest side. (We learned the ornate carvings on the staircase are thought to be caricatures of past staff and residents; the hotel was used by American soldiers as a base in the Second World War,

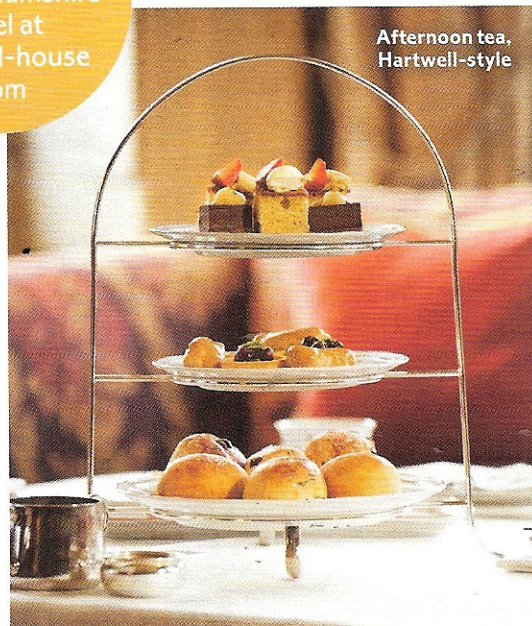


Hartwell was home to exiled French royals in the 1800s

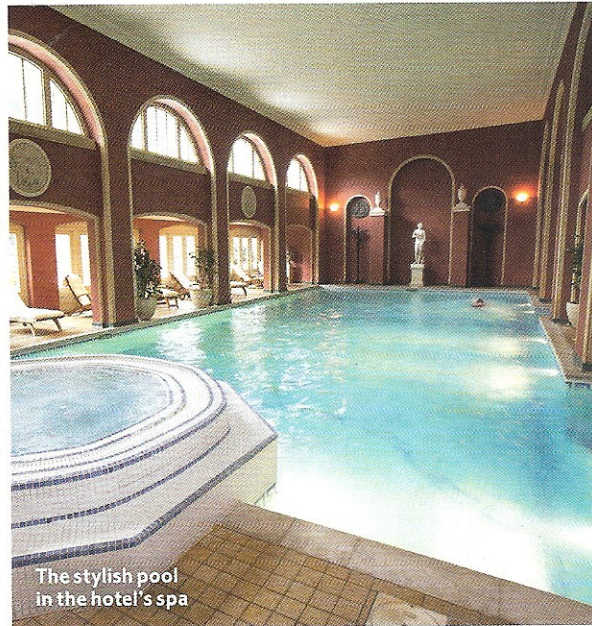


Stay in a sumptuous royal suite

Find out more about this Buckinghamshire hotel at [hartwell-house.com](http://hartwell-house.com)



Afternoon tea, Hartwell-style



The stylish pool in the hotel's spa

and the eyes of the portrait in the drawing room follow you wherever you go...).

The hotel has 30 rooms and suites in the main house, all decorated in a style that reflects the property's impressive history, with a further 16 rooms in Hartwell Court, a former coach house.

Dine on site and head chef Daniel Richardson and his staff are on hand to create

world-class dishes in the hotel's restaurant, which has been awarded three rosettes by the AA. Its selection of wines have also been recognised by the AA in its Notable Wine List.

You can then burn off all that fantastic fare at the hotel's spa, with its swimming pool, steam room, sauna, gym and treatment rooms. There's also a café and bar, all-weather tennis courts and a croquet lawn.

I can vouch for the fantastic treatments on offer too. I tried an Icelandic BIOEFFECT facial (£85 for super-smooth skin and the most relaxing hour you'll ever get to indulge in).

### AND ANOTHER THING...

Guests enter by the Great Hall, which was redesigned by James Gibbs in the mid-1700s, beyond which is an oak-panelled room that served as a chapel during Louis XVIII's stay. It was here, while he was at prayer, that word reached him of his reinstatement as King of France

## Keeping history alive

Hartwell House & Spa is one of three spectacular properties, which are all part of the upmarket group of Historic House Hotels. The other two are Middlethorpe Hall & Spa in York (see [www.middlethorpe.com](http://www.middlethorpe.com)) and Bodysgallen Hall & Spa in Llandudno (see [www.bodysgallen.com](http://www.bodysgallen.com)).

Historic House Hotels are pioneers in

the conservation of neglected country houses, turning them into high class hotels, while preserving their history and country house ambience. Hartwell was restored in the late 1980s and early '90s, and, in September 2008, the company donated all its interests in its three wonderful properties to the National Trust, with all profits benefiting the houses and the charity.

■ Hartwell House & Spa is two miles outside Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, 40 miles north west of London. Overnight stays start from £150, and there are special offers and events throughout the year. Find out more at [hartwell-house.com](http://hartwell-house.com) or call 01296 747444. **GTW**