

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**GOLDNEY HOUSE**

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**GOLDNEY HOUSE**

Name: GOLDNEY HOUSE

District: City of Bristol (Unitary Authority)

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.451976  
Longitude: -2.6144366  
National Grid Reference: ST 57401 72734  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1000444  
Date first listed: 30-Apr-1987

## Details

Mid-C18 merchant's villa garden with subterranean grotto and bastion overlooking the River Avon.

**HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT** In 1694 Thomas Goldney II, son of a successful Quaker grocer, leased a gentleman's house and garden on Clifton Hill. In the late C17, Clifton was a small village of some 200 inhabitants, separate from the city of Bristol, which was beginning to attract city dwellers in search of cleaner surroundings. Goldney purchased the property in 1705 and had the house partly rebuilt and extended between 1722 and 1728. After his death in 1731, the property was inherited by his son Thomas Goldney III who, over the next 22 years, gradually acquired additional parcels of land on which he developed the garden until his death in 1768. The property was inherited by his brother, Gabriel (d 1786), who appears to have made no significant changes to the garden. It passed to his sister Ann, who died in 1794 (Stembridge, 1998). After her death it was inherited by a sequence of cousins but after the death of another Thomas Goldney in 1856, there was a dispute over inheritance, following which outer parts of the grounds were sold off for residential development before the house and the remnant of the estate were acquired in 1864 by Lewis Fry of the Quaker family of chocolate manufacturers.

Fry commissioned Alfred Waterhouse to remodel the house, 1864-65. After Fry's death in 1921 the house was bought by Sir George Wills, who let it, before his daughter Margaret took it over in 1932 with her husband Ellison Eberle. They carried out an extensive programme of repairs to house and garden (Country Life, 1948). In 1956, after his wife's death, Eberle sold the property to the University of Bristol. At first it was converted to an annexe of Clifton Hill House, the university hall of residence for women students. In 1969, the University constructed student accommodation blocks on Hill Close, south-west of the house, and these were redeveloped and extended in 1994.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Goldney House and garden occupy a site of c 1.6ha., located on the brow of Clifton Hill, c 1.5km west of the centre of Bristol. The northern boundary is formed by Clifton Hill, a public highway. To the west the registered site is bounded by a footpath leading to Goldney Lane, and to the east by Clifton Wood Road, public roads which descend steep hills to the south. The southern boundary is formed at the eastern end by the garden wall of Clifton Wood House, and by a Pennant sandstone rubble wall running west to Goldney Lane along the north side of properties on Ambra Vale East. The garden runs from the house, southward to a terrace some 100m south of the house, then steeply south towards the suburb of Clifton Wood and the river. From the terrace there are long views south-west to the Avon valley and the hills of Ashton Court, (qv) beyond. Goldney House and garden are surrounded by the Bristol suburb of Clifton.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The garden is approached through the house, the main entrance door of which is on Lower Clifton Hill. A door on the south front of the house opens directly into the garden. A carriage entrance, 30m east of the house along Lower Clifton Hill, is via a gateway, attached to former stables, with ashlar piers with ball finials (early C18, listed grade II) in a 2m high rubble wall. This wall curves for 20m south-east, and then a curved brick wall runs c 40m to Constitution Hill. A door in the garden wall fronting Clifton Wood Road, 100m east of the house, provides pedestrian access into the former kitchen gardens laid out east of the main garden.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Goldney House (listed grade II) is built of limestone ashlar with a slate hipped roof. Its early Georgian origins are visible despite C19 alterations including a stair tower to the east. It is located close to the north boundary of the registered site. The house dates from the mid 1720s when Thomas Goldney II had an earlier villa residence rebuilt, possibly to designs by George Tully. It was encased, altered and extended by Alfred Waterhouse in a Second Empire style, 1864-65. His tower has four stages, a pyramidal roof and a wrought-iron widow's walk. The south, garden front retains a 7 bay symmetrical Georgian design with a central door, although the sash windows are now of C19 plate glass.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The principal garden extends the width of the south front, c 60m from east to west. Immediately south of the house is a lawn, c100m long. On the west side it is bounded by a 2.5m rubble wall, which separates it from student accommodation blocks (1969 and 1994) on Hill Close. At the southern end of this west walk, c 100m south of the house, stands a pair of Corinthian columns (listed grade II) taken from a 1720s doorway and repositioned here by Waterhouse, 1864-65. The principal planted feature is an axial yew walk that bisects the lawn and runs south from the central door of the house to the entrance of a grotto (1737-c1764, listed grade I). There are seven pairs of yews, 8m apart in the row in a 9m wide avenue. On the west side of the entrance to the grotto is a mount planted with holly and yew, which may be the 'Hawthorn Mount' referred to by Goldney in his Garden Book (Stembridge, 1998, 2016, 2017)

Parallel to, and 10m east of the yew walk, on the east side of the garden, is a stone-lined canal (1758-59, listed grade II\*), 30m long and 4m wide, with a central C19 fountain of tritons supporting a shell. At the canal's northern end is a C20 parterre and an orangery (early 1760s, re-fronted and re-roofed 1933, listed grade II\*). At its southern end is a raised bank behind which is a sunken, serpentine rock-lined footpath, leading for some 20m eastwards from the main lawn to the kitchen garden.

At right angles to the yew walk axis is a terrace walk, c 100m south of the house, which was built up over the grotto shell and finished by 1755 (Stembridge, 1996, 2017). This stretches c120m from an eastern point at the southern end of the canal to terminate at a rotunda (Goldney, first mentioned 1738, listed grade II\*), 110m south-west of the house, at the western end. The rotunda is glazed on two sides commanding views to the south and south-west and was originally surrounded from 1757 by a colonnade, as seen in S.H Grimm's view of 1788, removed in the early C19. West of the rotunda and below the level of the terrace, is a stone bastion, which runs a further 45m west (mid C18, rotunda, bastion and connecting wall group-listed grade II\*). This is a buttressed retaining wall with a grass walk on top which ends in a round-ended viewing point, designed to command views south and west, now obscured by two C19 horse chestnuts and a beech tree on a lawn immediately south-west of the bastion. Although not shown on the 1746 survey of the Manor of Clifton, the bastion, or an early version of it, is referred to by Goldney in 1748 (Stembridge 1998, 2017)

The grotto appears to have been among the first works undertaken by Goldney. He began with a tunnel that now runs southward from the front entrance of the main chamber under the terrace. The tunnel was finished in 1737, in which year work also began on the main grotto chamber. Goldney appears to have started work on the decorating of the grotto from about 1739; the date is set into the shell work and is also the date when Goldney noted that he had 'cover'd and finish'd ye shell of ye Grotto', and continued until 1764. The grotto's principal approach is from the north, via steps at the end of the Yew walk which descend to a Gothic door with flanking trefoil-headed windows to either side and an octofoil window above. Either side of the main façade are tufa-lined arches, to the east giving access to the head of a well, to the west leading into the main chamber by a curved tunnel. The main chamber is a pillared hall, in which every surface is encrusted with shells, quartz and the local rock crystal known as Bristol diamonds (Savage 1989). It has a cave guarded by two stone lions and a pool fed by a sloping cascade, at the higher, eastern end of which is a top-lit figure of a river god, his hand resting on an urn to discharge the cascade to the pool. The tunnel, which runs for some 30m southward under the terrace, is lined with furnace slag and at its southern end has an

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arched entrance set into the terrace wall. The grotto was supplied with water raised by a steam-engine housed in a tower (1764, listed grade II\*) which stands on the terrace, some 20m east of the north entrance to the grotto, and 90m south of the house. The three storey tower is of red sandstone rubble with limestone dressings, with Gothic pinnacles on a parapet and narrow Gothic windows on each storey. On the second storey of the north elevation is a large opening intended for the beam of the engine. Beside the terrace walk and above the grotto, is a statue of Hercules on a plinth (mentioned in situ in 1768, listed grade II\*), 8m south-west of the tower.

South of and below the terrace is a sloping lawn, with a range of multi-phase glasshouses (c1870 and 1935) attached to the eastern end of the terrace's south wall, and an C18 London plane to the east. To the west, the area south of the bastion was occupied in the mid-C18 by a poultry garden, a vineyard at the western end, and a paddock. The lawn slopes downward some 50m to a rubble wall on top of a substantial retaining wall running the width of the garden. Steps descend to a third level via a gateway with brick piers roughly in the centre of the wall. The east wall bounds the garden of Clifton Wood House to the south, which was part of the Goldney estate from 1747, but lies outside the site here registered, and to the west a lawn, separated from housing on Ambra Vale East by a belt of self-sown trees and a 2.5m high rubble wall. The two parts of this lower level are separated by a 1.5m high rubble and brick wall.

KITCHEN GARDEN East of the canal and separated from the main garden by a hedge is the kitchen garden, 50m south-east of the house. It is accessed via the rock-lined serpentine path which runs around the southern end of the canal and enters the garden via an iron gate between two brick piers. In 1744 this was Goldney's new fruit garden (Stembridge, 2017, Appendix A). Tennis courts occupy the northern part, while to the south fruit trees have been planted in recent years (late C20). The kitchen garden is slightly lower than the lawn and canal to the west; the hedge that divides the two stands on a 1m-high retaining wall.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, vol. 104 (1948), pp 278-81; 328-31; N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (1979), pp 446-47; RJG Savage, 'Natural History of the Goldney Garden Grotto, Clifton, Bristol', *Garden History*, 17:1 (1989) pp 1-40; P K Stembridge, *Thomas Goldney: Man of Property*, 1991; P K Stembridge, *Thomas Goldney's Garden*, 1996; P K Stembridge, *The Goldney Family: a Bristol Merchant Dynasty*, Bristol Record Society's Publications XLIX (1998); P K Stembridge, *Thomas Goldney's Garden: an Eighteenth Century Garden Notebook*, *Garden History* vol 44:2 (2016); P K Stembridge, *The Development of Thomas Goldney's Eighteenth Century Garden*, *Garden History* vol 45:2 (2017) pp 117-142;

MAPS OS 6" to 1 mile: 3rd edition, 1936, Gloucestershire sheet LXXI.SE OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition, surveyed 1884, published 1886, Gloucestershire sheet LXXV.4 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition, 1903, Gloucestershire sheet LXXV.4 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition, 1885, Gloucestershire sheet LXXI.16 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition, 1918, Gloucestershire sheet LXXI.16 OS 10" to 1 mile, 1886, Gloucestershire sheet LXXI.16.22. Estate map, c1856 (Bristol Archives) G.C. Ashmead, *Plan of the City of Bristol*, 1828 (Bristol Archives) Clifton parish tithe map, 1844 (Bristol Archives) Survey of the Manor of Clifton, 1746 (Society of Merchant Venturers) GC Ashmead & Sons, map of Bristol, 1855 (Bristol Archives) Ashmead, map of Bristol, c1872 (Bristol Archives)

ILLUSTRATIONS S H Grimm, *Goldney, the rotunda and bastion from the west*, 1788 (British Library)

ARCHIVAL ITEMS Thomas Goldney, 'Garden Book', begun 1736, deeds and family archive, University of Bristol Special Collections; Debois Landscape Survey Group, 'A Survey of the Landscape of Goldney House, Bristol', 1990

Description written: December 2002 Register inspector: DAL

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 09/10/2018

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.