

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

**KING'S NYMPTON PARK**

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Name: KING'S NYMPTON PARK

County: Devon

District: North Devon (District Authority)

Parish: Chittlehamholt

County: Devon

District: North Devon (District Authority)

Parish: Chulmleigh

County: Devon

District: North Devon (District Authority)

Parish: King's Nympton

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.957962  
Longitude: -3.9059644  
National Grid Reference: SS 66236 19345, SS 66884 19192, SS 67419 19101, SS 67500 19240  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001661  
Date first listed: 25-Nov-2002

## Details

A mid C18 landscape developed from a C15 park with the advice of Allen, first Earl Bathurst.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late C15, Sir Lewis Pollard, one of Henry VII's justices of the King's Bench, purchased 'a considerable estate' at King's Nympton and 'built a good house on it, and inclosed a large park adjoining to the mansion' (Polwhele 1793). Saxton's Map of Devon (1575) shows a deer park at King's Nympton corresponding to that enclosed by Sir Lewis Pollard in the late C15. In the mid C16 Sir Lewis' grandson, also Sir Lewis, was described as enjoying 'a fair demesne, with a park and manor; and was conspicuous for his sumptuous hospitality' (Polwhele 1793). By the late C16 the estate had been sold to Sir Arthur Northcote of Upton Pyne, near Exeter, in whose family it remained until September 1740, when it was sold to James Buller for £4773 1s 9d (CRO: DD/BU120a).

James Buller of Morval, Cornwall had acquired property in Devon on his marriage in 1739 to Elizabeth Gould of Downes, Crediton in addition to his already extensive estates in Cornwall. This marriage produced one son, James, but in 1742 Elizabeth Buller died, and two years later, in 1744, James Buller married as his second wife Jane Bathurst, daughter of Allen, Lord

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Bathurst (1694-1775, created first Earl Bathurst, 1772). Under their marriage settlement, the property at King's Nympton was to be held in trust for Jane Buller, while she brought to the marriage a jointure of £5000 (CRO: DD/BU298). While Downes at Crediton remained Buller's principal residence in Devon, in March 1746 he commissioned the Dorset architect and builder Francis Cartwright (c 1695-1758) 'to Build a House at New place in ye County of Devon, according to ye plans given in & agreed on by Mr Buller' (CRO: DD/BU134). The design of Cartwright's Palladian villa was inspired by Roger Morris' Marble Hill House (qv) at Twickenham, Middlesex, which had been built c 1728. Significantly, Jane Buller's father, Lord Bathurst, had advised Henrietta Howard on the design of the gardens at Marble Hill in the early C18; he had also laid out his own grounds at Richings Park, Buckinghamshire and Cirencester Park (qv), Gloucestershire, where he was himself advised by Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Correspondence shows that he also advised his son-in-law, James Buller, on the formation of the landscape at King's Nympton, and even supplied trees for the new plantations from his own woods at Cirencester (private collection). The main features of Buller's scheme appear to have been a 'Great Terras' walk commanding dramatic views of the River Mole, a 'lower Terras' corresponding to the surviving south-west drive, and various plantations in and around the park which serve to frame significant views. Further correspondence from the estate steward indicates that work continued on the park into the early 1760s (CRO: DD/BU130, 131), with areas being broken and planted with turnips to increase the quality of the grass for the deer, which were only with difficulty confined within the park.

James Buller died in 1765, leaving King's Nympton Park to his eldest son by his second marriage, John Buller, who came of age in 1766; other properties were left to his younger son, Francis, who subsequently purchased Lupton Park (qv), Devon. A plan of the King's Nympton estate was drawn c 1766 (private collection), recording many features which survive today, and which formed part of James Buller's landscape setting for the new villa. John Buller continued to develop the landscape, constructing in 1769 a picturesque thatched barn, known as Snydles Barn, to be seen as an eyecatcher from the Great Terrace (CRO: DD/BU135). In 1776 John Buller was appointed Commissioner of Excise in London, and New Place or King's Nympton Barton was let; the terms of the lease reserved to Buller the 'great House, the Walled Gardens, the Whole [Home] Close, the park, the little new stable, the Coach House stable, the House & Garden at Jewells & Jewells Marsh', together with rights to the timber on the estate. The lease was renewed in 1795, and by 1818 the farm was let to Robert Tanner, whose son, James, purchased the estate from John Buller in October 1843. The disposition of the park and grounds in the early C19 is recorded on the OS Surveyor's Drawing (1804-5) and the 1" OS map (1809), showing that the park remained enclosed by paling; by 1843, however, the Tithe map records its disparking and conversion to agricultural use.

James Tanner (d c 1860) made various improvements to the estate, including constructing a new bridge, Head Bridge, adjacent to the south entrance; in 1857 he was said to have 'greatly improved both the mansion and grounds within the last few years' (Billing 1857). At James Tanner's death the estate was left equally to his sons John Vowler Tanner and James Tanner, who was agent to the Earl of Portsmouth's Eggesford estate. This arrangement led to disputes, and the estate was let until it was inherited by Charles Peile Tanner in 1903. Charles Tanner made few changes to the estate before his death in 1964, when it passed to his niece, Miss J M Stoddart. Miss Stoddart continued her late uncle's management regime into the late C20, and in 1974 made over part of the estate to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. Today (2002), the site remains in divided ownership.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** King's Nympton Park is situated c 1km west of the village of King's Nympton, to the north-east of the B3226 road. The c 115ha site is adjoined to the north and north-west by agricultural land from which it is separated by hedges, while to the west and south-west the boundary is formed by the west bank of the River Mole. To the south the site is bounded by the B3226 road and Head Bridge, while to the east and north-east further hedges separate the site from agricultural land. Some 400m south-west of the house, the boundary hedges incorporate the remains of the pales of the late medieval deer park. Three outlying areas are included in the registered site: to the west of the River Mole, the late C18 Snydles Barn serves as an eyecatcher from the Great Terrace, while on high ground to the south-east of the house two small plantations known as West Toptrees fulfil a similar function. The site comprises a varied topography with a deep, steep-sided valley extending south-south-west from the house towards the southern boundary giving extensive southerly views towards Dartmoor. A ridge of high ground on the western side of this valley falls steeply west to the River Mole, allowing

westerly and north-westerly views across and up the valley. A further, shallow valley extends east from the house giving a view of the spire of King's Nympton church which serves as an eyecatcher. To the north of the house the ground rises gently towards the northern boundary of the site, affording further southerly views. Beyond the boundaries of the registered site clumps of mature pines and other trees are placed on high ground, while extensive areas of woodland such as Head Wood to the south of Head Bridge frame the more distant views.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** King's Nympton Park is approached from the B3226 road to the south, at a point immediately east of Head Bridge (listed grade II). The entrance comprises a single, early C19 wrought-iron gate supported by a pair of stone piers under pyramid caps, and leads to a tarmac drive which sweeps c 200m north-west and north through an area of park, with views west to the River Mole and Head Wood. Crossing a small stream known as Catham Lake on an C18 or early C19 single-arched stone bridge, the drive turns sharply west to pass to the north of Jewell's Lodge (listed grade II), a symmetrical two-storey picturesque lodge of mid C18 construction, which was externally remodelled in the early C19 and extended in the late C20. Until floods in 1982, Jewell's Lodge was flanked by walls which formed part of the deer park boundary (Dr J Kear pers comm, 2002). To the west of the lodge a walled garden extends parallel to the river. Immediately north-east of the lodge a service drive leads north and east to reach the C18 New Barn (outside the area here registered). To the west of the lodge a track extends parallel to the walled garden to reach Head Weir on the River Mole, an C18 or earlier weir (reconstructed late C20). Beyond Jewell's Lodge, the principal drive ascends steadily north-north-east for c 400m along the west side of a wooded valley, before reaching a late C20 metal gate which marks the entrance to the park. Within the park, the drive follows a more level course, sweeping north-north-east and north-east for c 400m, continuing along the west side of the valley and enjoying views east and south-east across the valley to the West Toptrees Plantations. To the west of the drive the ground rises steeply to the summit of the ridge of high ground which extends south-west from the house. The drive passes through a further early C19 wrought-iron gate supported by C20 timber posts, to enter the pleasure grounds c 300m south-west of the house. The drive is artificially embanked and passes along the east side of the Rookery, a mid C18 plantation; below, to the east of the drive, the ground falls steeply into the valley, revealing further views to the south-east. The drive sweeps north-east, passing a spur leading north-west to the stables and Home Farm, and the site, to the south-east, of the C18 'little stable' (demolished during the C19), to reach a gravel carriage turn below the west facade of the house. The carriage turn comprises a circular gravel drive surrounding a central lawn (restored, late C20). To the north this area is enclosed by the mid C18 laundry (listed grade II\*), while to the west predominantly evergreen shrubbery and mature beeches planted on rising ground serve to screen the stables and Home Farm. The south-west drive corresponds to James Buller's mid C18 'lower Terras leading to Jewells' (CRO: DD/BU131), and forms part of the landscape laid out to complement his Palladian villa.

A further drive enters the site from a minor road to the east-north-east, at a point c 400m north-west of King's Nympton church. The drive extends c 500m west before entering Kennel Wood, a mid C18 plantation, and passing to the north of the remains of Laurel Cottage, a cob and stone structure which may have served as an inner lodge before its demolition in the mid C20 (Mr Kenyon pers comm, 2002). The drive turns sharply south-west to enter the pleasure grounds, and leads c 250m south-west through an area of lawns, shrubbery, and mature specimen trees to reach the north-east corner of the house. It continues round the north side of the building to join the carriage turn to the west of the house. The north-east and south-west drives are shown on the 1766 estate plan, which also shows the house encircled by a drive, the mid C18 entrance being situated on the east facade, rather than on the west. The carriage turn to the west of the house is not shown until 1891 (OS).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** King's Nympton Park (listed grade I) stands on an artificially levelled terrace, from which the ground drops away steeply into a valley extending to the south-south-west. The building is almost square on plan, comprises two storeys with an attic and basement, and is constructed in brick and stone rubble under a pyramidal hipped roof with a central leaded finial and weathervane at its apex. The original entrance facade to the east is constructed in brick above a rusticated stone basement, with giant Ionic engaged columns rising through the first and second floors to support a pediment bearing a carved relief of the Buller arms. The north and south facades are constructed in rubble stone with an ashlar string course between the first and second floors, while the west facade is of similar construction with a mid C19 ground-floor Tuscan portico which shelters a central doorway with a Gibb's surround; since the C19 this has served as the principal entrance to the house.

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The house was built 1746-50 by Francis Cartwright of Blandford Forum, Dorset for James Buller. The plan and form of the house is closely based on that of Marble Hill House (qv), Twickenham. With the exception of the addition of the west facade as the principal entrance in the mid C19 and the construction of the associated portico, the house remains substantially unaltered since its construction in the mid C18.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The pleasure grounds are situated principally to the south, east, and north of the house. A grass terrace corresponding to the site of the mid C18 drive extends below the south facade of the house, affording wide southerly views towards Dartmoor. The ground drops steeply below this terrace to a stone ha-ha which extends in a gently curving line east from the south-west drive to a stream which flows south through the valley below the house. The lawns return below the east facade of the house, while to the north-east, beyond the north-east drive, further south-facing sloping lawns planted with mature specimen trees ascend to a belt of mixed shrubbery. Some 20m east of the house a C19 metal estate fence follows a curving course north from the ha-ha to the north-east drive, separating the lawn from an east-facing sloping meadow which descends into the valley to the east of the house. In the valley the stream is dammed to form two ponds. Approximately rectangular in outline, the ponds are separated by a substantial dam which carries a carriage drive providing access to the park to the east of the stream; this dam is placed on an axis with the east facade of the house. The ponds are surrounded by mature specimen trees and evergreen shrubbery which extends north to the north-east drive and the site of Laurel Cottage. Immediately north-west of the larger, upper pond, stands a single-storey brick and stone structure (derelict, 2002). Of uncertain purpose, this building retains traces of internal plasterwork, and may have been intended as a fishing lodge or bath house, although it appears to have been altered in the late C19 or early C20. The ponds are of unknown origin, but are mentioned in the Steward's correspondence for March 1765 when James Buller ordered the ponds to be drawn (CRO: DD/BU131).

To the west of the house, an area of evergreen shrubbery and mature beech trees extends south-west to merge with the Rookery, a plantation which was in existence by 1763 (CRO: DD/BU131). The OS map of 1891 indicates a walk leading west from the stables, through the Rookery, to join a walk which followed the north-west boundary of the park, before turning south-west to enter Park Wood. This walk forms the northern end of the mid C18 Great Terrace, a gently sloping walk or ride which extends c 500m south-west through Park Wood at the summit of the north-west-facing wooded escarpment above the River Mole. This artificially levelled and contoured walk is bounded to the south-east by a bank planted with mature trees and shrubs, and to the north-west by further low banks planted with mature beech trees. The walk affords picturesque views west across the Mole valley, and north up the river. Some 950m west-south-west of the house, Snydles Barn (listed grade II), a late C18 stone, cob and thatched barn affords a picturesque eyecatcher on the west bank of the river. The south-east facade of this structure facing towards the Great Terrace incorporates an arcade of seven horseshoe-shaped arches. The slope below the Great Terrace is laid out with a series of inter-connecting contoured walks, with a further walk descending to the river bank c 1km south-west of the house. A boathouse marked in this location on the late C19 OS map (1891) adjacent to Brush Weir does not survive. The Great Terrace turns south and south-east to follow the southern boundary of Park Wood, before joining the south-west drive or Lower Terrace c 350m north-north-east of Jewell's Lodge. The Great Terrace and the Lower Terrace thus form a circuit ride or walk from the house, affording the greatest variety of views across and beyond the site.

The Great Terrace was constructed by James Buller c 1746-7 to take advantage of the dramatic views of the Mole valley, and perhaps following the advice of his father-in-law, Lord Bathurst, who in October 1747 praised the aesthetic potential of the 'irregularities of ground, & a fine river' to be found at King's Nympton (private collection). Snydles Barn was built by John Buller in 1769 (CRO: DD/BU135). The disposition of walks and rides in Park Wood remains substantially unchanged from that shown on the late C19 OS (OS 1891).

**PARK** The park is situated to the south-west of the house, with further areas lying to the south-east and east. The south-west park occupies a ridge of high ground which extends south-west from the Rookery. This area remains pasture, with picturesque groups of mature, windswept pines planted on the highest ground, together with small groups of young deciduous trees. The park is bounded to the north and west by the Great Terrace and Park Wood, while the woodland also extends round the southern boundary of the park. To the east the park falls steeply into the wooded valley which extends south-south-west from the house. The stream which flows through this valley is dammed to form several early C20 duck flighting ponds. The south-west park

forms part of the park enclosed by Sir Lewis Pollard in the late C15, and was developed in its present form in the mid C18 by James Buller.

To the south and east of the house, the eastern side of the valley extending south-south-west from the house is today (2002) in agricultural use. The south-east boundary of this area is formed by an earthwork park pale, which presumably relates to the late C15 park enclosed by the Pollards. This embankment continues as the southern boundary of Homeclose Copse to the east-south-east of the house. The carriage drive which crosses the dam between the fishponds in the pleasure grounds east of the house continues south through this area of former park, crossing the stream which flows from east to west through Homeclose Copse on a single-arched stone bridge. This stream appears to have been dammed to form a chain of pools within Homeclose Copse, but the dams have at some time been breached. The land to the north of Homeclose Copse and to the south of the north-east drive, the C18 Home Close, formed part of the principal eastern vista from the house towards King's Nympton church.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The kitchen garden is situated c 150m north-east of the house. Approximately rectangular on plan, the garden is enclosed by cob and stone walls c 3m high under corrugated iron coping which probably replaces the original thatch (listed grade II). The garden slopes from north to south, and is divided into two unequal sections by a north/south transverse wall c 30m east of the western boundary wall. The western section of the garden is subdivided by further walls, with a small, square, ornamental garden laid out with lawns and geometrical flower beds, a lean-to vinery, and a range of potting sheds at the south-west corner. A gardener's cottage stands in a further section at the north-west corner of the garden. The larger, or eastern section of the garden is today laid to grass, and is subdivided into three further sections by C19 metal estate fencing. The garden retains several standard apple and other fruit trees, together with cob nuts. At the south-east corner of the garden there is a further metal-fenced enclosure containing an approximately circular pool surrounded by bamboo. The garden is entered through a door at the south-west corner; another door (now blocked) formerly gave access to the garden near its south-east corner. Outside the garden, a raised terrace retained by a finely constructed rubble-stone wall extends parallel to the southern wall; this terrace returns along the east wall, where it is retained above a canalised stream by a further stone wall. From the southern terrace there would formerly have been a view south across the pleasure grounds to Dartmoor; this is now obscured by a mid C20 coniferous plantation. From the eastern terrace there are views across the stream to Kennel Wood, a plantation which was being developed in 1765 (CRO: DD/BU131). To the north and north-east of the kitchen garden are areas of orchard which retain some standard fruit trees.

The kitchen garden was constructed for James Buller in 1744, and is shown on a plan of that date (CRO: DD/BU689); it is also shown on the estate plan of c 1766. A letter of c 1763 from the agent to James Buller refers to orange and lemon trees being grown at King's Nympton (CRO: DD/BU131).

**OTHER LAND** In a meadow enclosure known as the Drying Ground immediately south-east of the Home Farm (listed grade II), c 180m north-west of the house, stands a single-storey octagonal structure built in red brick with ashlar detailed arched windows. The building appears to be of mid C18 construction, but is of uncertain purpose. It is possible that this building corresponds to the pavilion known to have been constructed by James Buller (Estate plan, c 1766), and it would, before the intervening shrubbery and trees grew up, have afforded a fine easterly view to the house and King's Nympton church.

The two plantations known as West Toptrees on the summit of the north-west-facing slope c 400m south-east of the house are included in the site here registered. The plantations are approximately elliptical-shaped on plan, and are enclosed from the surrounding pasture by C19 metal fences and earlier banks. The northern plantation includes several mature specimen pines, while the southern, and slightly higher, plantation comprises beech and sycamore surrounding a central, marshy depression. Accounts indicate that in the mid C18 this was a fishpond within the plantation (CRO: DD/BU131). The plantations are indicated in their present form on the estate plan of c 1766.

#### REFERENCES

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OS Surveyor's Drawing, 2" to 1 mile, surveyed 1804-5 (British Library) OS Old Series 1" to 1 mile, published 1809 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1886-7, published 1891 2nd edition revised 1903, published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1888, published 1891 2nd edition revised 1903, published 1905

Archival items Buller Family Collection (2065), (Devon Record Office) Buller Family Collection (DD/BU), (Cornwall Record Office) Will of James Buller, 1764 (d 1765) (2065M/F/2/9), (Devon Record Office) Correspondence from Lord Bathurst to James Buller, mid C18 (transcribed by Nicholas Thompson from private collection) Copeland, photographs showing the house and 'pavilion', C20 (1733Z/II/78/1-2; 1733Z/VIII/31), (Devon Record Office)

Personal communication from Mr and Mrs H Kenyon

Description written: October 2002 Amended: July 2003 Register Inspector: JML Edited: July 2003

## 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.