

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

KINGS WESTON HOUSE

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

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
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**KINGS WESTON HOUSE**

Name: KINGS WESTON HOUSE

District: City of Bristol (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.496270

Longitude: -2.6653207

National Grid Reference: ST 53910 77691, ST 54161 77252

[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

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*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KINGS WESTON HOUSE**

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label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
 Grade: II  
 List Entry Number: 1000335  
 Date first listed: 30-Apr-1987

## Details

A mid to late C18 park, laid out with advice from Lancelot Brown, containing the remains of a formal layout dating from Sir John Vanbrugh's early C18 redevelopment of an earlier site.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Kings Weston was so named as a detached western part of the king's ancient desmesnes of Berkeley Hundred (Neale 1819). It was recorded in Domesday and described by Atkyns (1712) as a 'considerable Manor' in the time of William the Conqueror. Henry VII granted the whole hundred of Berkeley to Robert Fitzhardinge, who subsequently settled the manor

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KINGS WESTON HOUSE**

on his second son, Robert. The estate was inherited by William Berkeley who sold it in 1570 to Sir William Wintour, who probably built the Elizabethan house by 1588 (Kingsley 1989). It was later purchased by Sir Humphry Hook, whose son sold the property to Sir Robert Southwell (Cooke 1957). Southwell was a distinguished diplomat and politician, Secretary of State for Ireland and Clerk of the Privy Council, President of the Royal Society, and friend of John Evelyn (1620-1706), the C17 garden writer and author of the influential *Sylva*. He assisted in the arrangement of the marriage between William Blathwayt and Mary Wynter (1651-91), heiress to nearby Dyrham Park (qv), and his son married Blathwayt's daughter in 1716 (National Trust 1983). An extensive Anglo-Dutch garden was laid out at Dyrham with advice from George London (d 1714) and it is likely that this influenced the laying out of the landscape at Kings Weston (Pearson Assocs 1994).

Although there is no documentary evidence of the layout of the manor grounds during the Berkeley, Wintour, and Hook family tenures, it is probable that formal gardens would have adjoined the Elizabethan house, and that these gardens may have formed the basis of the extensive formal landscape laid out by Sir Robert Southwell during the late C17 and early C18, as recorded in Kip's prospect in Atkyns (1712). Sir Robert died c 1702 and the estate was inherited by his son Edward who, like his father, became Secretary of State for Ireland and Clerk of the Privy Council. In 1710, Edward Southwell, later Lord Clifford, commissioned Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726) to design a new house on the site of the old which was demolished in 1713-14. Despite the rich documentation of the architecture of the house and garden buildings there is little documentary evidence recording the early C18 landscape. It is possible that Vanbrugh contributed to this landscape, although there is no evidence of the involvement of a professional landscaper until Lancelot Brown (1716-83) was consulted in the period 1758-74. The park was considerably enlarged in the mid to late C18 by the addition of the 'new park' south of the current Shirehampton Road, known as Shirehampton Park. In 1763, Edward employed Robert Mylne (1733-1811) to complete the interior of the house and the outbuildings, including new designs for the stables, kitchen gardens, and lodges. The astronomer, architect, and landscape designer, Thomas Wright of Durham visited in 1774 while staying at Stoke Park, Avon (qv). The estate was let in 1822 and sold in 1833 to Philip Miles of Leigh Court, Avon (qv), becoming the residence of W Miles MP by 1844. A further phase of architectural and landscape development took place c 1820-40, including a new lodge at Henbury, the alteration of existing buildings, and the establishment of new plantations containing a large number of conifers. The estate declined in the C20 and in 1918, Shirehampton Park, the southern half of the parkland was given by Dr Napier Miles to the National Trust and let by the Trust for use as a golf course. On his death in 1937, the house was sold to Bristol Municipal Charities and 104 acres (c 43ha) of downland on Kings Weston Hill to Bristol Corporation. Work to develop a school at the house was halted by the Second World War, the site being occupied by troops instead. In 1948 the walled garden, pond, and lodges were bought by Bristol City Council which demolished Penpole Gate in 1952. The proposed demolition of the stables in 1959 was only rescinded following a press campaign. The house was restored with public funds in 1962-3. By 1970 a Police Training School was established at the house and the Brewhouse, Loggia and Laundry, and the Echo, a former banqueting loggia, were abandoned and under threat of demolition. Plans to redevelop Kings Weston as headquarters for the Avon & Somerset Police in the 1980s were halted due to public opposition, but the landscape continued to decline. The Echo was consolidated as roofless ruin c 1988 and the Brewhouse and Loggia were externally restored, the former being converted to provide three private dwellings by Bristol Buildings Preservation Trust in c 1990. Bristol City Council bought the house and grounds from Avon County Council c 1996. Kings Weston House is currently leased as a restaurant, café, and conference centre and the grounds are managed as public open space by the Council (2002).

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The Kings Weston estate covers c 98ha and is located largely in the parish of Henbury, c 10km west of the centre of Bristol. It occupies a steep limestone spur which includes Kings Weston Hill and Penpole Point, commanding views over the Bristol Channel to the west and the Avon Gorge to the south and south-east. To the north-east the Kings Weston and Blaise Castle registered sites are contiguous and both are under the management of Bristol City Council. The historic boundary between the two shows that Evergreens Wood, Limekiln Wood, and Kings Weston Down to the north-east belonged to Kings Weston as well as land north to Henbury Lodge and east to Southside Wood as far as the rear of residences in the housing development to the east. The northern boundary is formed by fence lines and tracks.

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KINGS WESTON HOUSE**

The eastern boundary is formed by the south side of Shirehampton Road and the rear of houses on the residential roads of the Sea Mills housing estate. The southern boundary is the edge of the Avon Gorge at the southern end of Shirehampton Park. The south-west boundary runs to the rear of buildings on Park Road and Park Hill, along a path between a public cricket ground and the playing fields of Shirehampton School, and extends westwards along Penpole Lane, on the edge of the wooded ridge to Penpole Point. The north-west boundary is defined by the rear of houses on Mancroft Avenue as far as Kings Weston Lane, the rear of the former stables in Napier Miles Road, and the rear of the properties in Lawrence Weston. Apart from the part-wooded and part-open country of Kings Weston Down to the north-east and the deeply incised Avon Gorge to the south the estate is on a relatively level plateau which falls away steeply to C20 housing developments to the north and west. To the east the land falls gently to the extensive C20 housing estates of Combe Dingle, Sea Mills, and Westbury-on-Trym.

Physically separated from the main estate but included in the land here registered is the Tump, a c 3ha open grassy island of high ground c 300m north-west of the House. The Tump is bounded to the north-west by a fence to school grounds and on the other three sides by the gardens of houses on Barrowhead Drive and Badenhams Grove.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The entrance to Kings Weston House is via a 50m former service drive from Kings Weston Lane to the north-east, which enters a car park north-east of the rear elevation of the House. On the east side of this entrance is Home Lodge (Mylne late C18, listed grade II). The car park is enclosed 30m to the north and north-east by a range of garden and service buildings including The Loggia and remains of the Laundry (Vanbrugh c 1718, listed grade I), and the Brewhouse (Vanbrugh c 1715, listed grade I). A solitary gatepost (c 1760, listed grade II) stands 15m south of the Brewhouse and marks a former entrance to the House. Opposite and north-east of the Home Lodge entrance is Napier Miles Road which leads north-east past the Icehouse (C18, listed grade II) in a wooded bank 80m north of the House and the former Stable Block (1763, listed grade II\*) c 180m to the north-east. On the opposite, south-east side of Napier Miles Road are the lodges, pond, and garden walls of the former kitchen garden (1763, listed grade II\*) c 150m north-east of the House, now belonging to The House in the Garden. The road leads c 600m north-east to Henbury Lodge (c 1820-40), which marks the junction with the Blaise Castle estate (qv).

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Kings Weston House (1710-25, listed grade I), designed by Vanbrugh, is located on the western edge of a south-west to north-east ridge and commands wide views over the Bristol Channel and the Welsh Hills. Foreground views have changed dramatically in the C20 with the development of the industrial complex at Avonmouth and the housing estate of Lawrence Weston. Work on the building started in 1714 following the demolition of the Elizabethan house and took more than a decade to complete. Vanbrugh was working on Castle Howard, Yorkshire (qv) and Blenheim, Oxfordshire (qv) at the same time as Kings Weston which was not finished by the time of his death in 1726. The severe Baroque style of the House and garden buildings may have been regarded as old-fashioned by the time it was completed as fashion had changed significantly in favour of the purely Palladian (Georgian Group Ann Rep 1985). Significant internal alterations were carried out by Robert Mylne (1764-75).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** Some 30m north of the House, The Loggia terminates a terrace (late C19, replacing 1720s terrace, removed c 1770s) which runs c 100m south-west along the length of the north-west front of the House and continues for 300m through an informal double avenue of lime trees to meet a track running east/west from the Echo to Penpole Point. The terrace was formerly balustraded for most of its length, and some dressed stone remains in evidence on the ground. Lancelot Brown was paid £84 by Edward Southwell III for 'Alterations about the House and Terraces' (Pearson Asocs 1994), work probably completed in the early 1770s and commented upon by Thomas Wright in 1776. North-west and west, extending c 70m below the House terrace, is an area of woodland, formerly further terraces and gardens or orchards.

Some 300m further to the north-west is The Tump, an open grassy island of high ground with young trees on the summit and now separated from Kings Weston Park by housing, which is included within the area here registered. The Tump is a survivor of the pre-1771 landscape and was an important eyecatcher, aligned on an axial vista from the House and terrace.

The east/west track, a former carriage drive c 250m south of the House, provides an almost straight route of c 500m between narrow blocks of woodland and describes the southern edge of the pleasure grounds. To the west the track leads 1km through an informal avenue of European limes (c 1700s) to Penpole Point which has views of the Bristol Channel. A viewing tower

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
**KINGS WESTON HOUSE**

and breakfast lodge, after designs by Colen Campbell (1723) and Vanbrugh, at Penpole Gate, c 1km west of the House, was demolished by Bristol Corporation in 1952. Penpole Woods contain other rows and a circle of limes (c 1700s), mature and over-mature beech trees (c 1760s), and indigenous and exotic planting, notably cedars, from c 1870-90. In an easterly direction the track passes through woodland at the southern edge of Home Park Lawn and bends northwards for 100m to the Echo (Vanbrugh c 1715, listed grade I), a former banqueting loggia 300m south-east of the House, now roofless but stabilised, which faces north-west and is aligned to the south-east front of the House. A straight gravelled path of 300m, Echo Walk, runs uphill and south-east from the House to the Echo through woodland containing some prominent C19 trees and C20 self-sown trees and scrub. The area south-east of, and adjacent to the House has a lawn with marks of former planting beds either side of the Walk for c 50m. The unmanaged woodland contains the bases and some walls of the uncompleted school buildings. This area was laid out in the early C18 as elaborate parterres within walled garden enclosures, of which nothing visible remains. The roughly triangular area contained within the tracks south of the House, Home Park Lawn, is used as playing fields and maintained as amenity grassland (2002).

**PARK** Most of the open parkland of Kings Weston Park lies south of Shirehampton Road, c 350m south of the House, and is now known as Shirehampton Park, the largest part of which is let by the National Trust to Shirehampton Golf Club. This contains extensive areas of young trees and scrub and earth-moving has been carried out to create the golf course. Shirehampton Park is separated from the Kings Weston estate by Shirehampton Road and a loose avenue of trees on the north side of the road. Memoranda show that Edward Southwell was involved in the deformatalisation of the estate between 1750 and his death in 1755, principally through the felling and planting of trees in spots partly advised by Norborne Berkeley of Stoke Park, Avon (qv) (Pearson Assocs 1994). Robert Mylne continued to be employed at Kings Weston from 1763 until at least 1772, probably designing the classical Shirehampton Lodge 450m south-east of the House at the former entrance, now a public highway, to the then newly enlarged park. Isaac Taylor's estate plan of 1772 shows an extensive informal landscape. Kings Weston Hill, c 500m to the north-east of the House, has a path running over the top of open, but scrubbing-up, downland to the Blaise Castle estate between the ornamental plantations of Evergreens Wood, Southside Wood, and Limekiln Wood on the slopes. Meandering paths are laid out in Evergreens Wood and provide framed views to Kings Weston House and Blaise Castle. These woods were planted and the drives and walks developed under the ownership of the Miles family (c 1820-40s).

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The former productive gardens, now part of a school named The House in the Garden, are located on the south-east side of Napier Miles Road, c 150m north-east of the House, opposite the former stables. Built in 1763 to designs by Robert Mylne, the garden is of symmetrical plan around a central square pond, surrounded by rubble and ashlar walls c 4m high. There are two matching classical lodges, or gardeners' houses, in the north and west corners of the walled garden. There are further walled enclosures on the same axis to the south-west and north-east, the latter containing glasshouses against the south-west-facing wall. The school, school grounds, and residences south-east of the walled garden are excluded from the site here registered.

#### REFERENCES

R Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire* (1712) J P Neale, *Views of the Seats... II*, (1819) *Country Life*, 6 (11 November 1899), pp 592-7; 61 (30 April 1927), pp 680-7; 113 (23 January 1953), pp 212-15 R Cooke, *West Country Houses* (1957) N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (1958, reprinted 1979), pp 469-70 *Architectural History* 10, (1967) *Georgian Group Annual Report* (1985) *Avon Gardens Trust Newsletter* 3, (1988) N Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume One, 1500-1660* (1989), pp 115-17 *Kings Weston: Historic Landscape Survey & Management Plan*, (Nicholas Pearson Associates 1994) S Harding and D Lambert, *Parks and Gardens of Avon* (1994), pp 20-2, 41-2, 64

Maps Kings Weston Estate map, 1720 (British Library) [reproduced in Pearson Assocs 1994] Isaac Taylor, Kings Weston Estate map, 1772 [reproduced in Pearson Assocs 1994] Isaac Taylor, Map of Gloucestershire, 1800 [reproduced in Pearson Assocs 1994] Tithe map for Henbury parish, 1841 (Bristol Records Office) [reproduced in Pearson Assocs 1994]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 1921 edition

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*  
*Inventory of Great Britain*  
*KINGS WESTON HOUSE*

Illustrations J Kip, Kings Weston, the seat of Edward Southwell Esq (in Atkyns 1712) Sir John Vanbrugh, Kings Weston House, 1713, in Kings Weston Book of Drawings (see Architect Hist 1967) James Stewart, The front view of Edward Southwell Esq's Seat at Kings Weston, 1746 (Bodleian Library, Oxford Ms Gough Somerset 8, folio 36) S H Grimm, Kings Weston Drawings, 1788 (Kaye Collection, British Library)

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Description written: November 2002 Register Inspector: SH Edited: September 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.