

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

BOSCOBEL HOUSE

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

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**BOSCOBEL HOUSE**

Name:	BOSCOBEL HOUSE
District:	Shropshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Boscobel
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.670038 Longitude: -2.2418725 National Grid Reference: SJ 83741 08064, SJ 83771 08253 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001115 Date first listed: 01-Dec-1986

## Details

Reconstructed formal garden attached to a largely C17 house and nearby oak tree; long celebrated as hiding places of Charles II after Battle of Worcester.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the early C17 the White Ladies estate was owned by Edward Giffard, who was descended from the Giffards of Chillington (qv) in Staffordshire. He was succeeded by his son John, whose daughter, Frances, married John Cotton. By 1651 she had been widowed, but remained the owner of White Ladies. She did not however live here, and the house was occupied by William Penderel, her caretaker and servant, and his wife.

In 1651, following his defeat at the Battle of Worcester, Charles II was brought to White Ladies. Here he separated from the body of horse he had travelled with and was taken 1.5km to the north-east to a house at Boscobel which the Cottons used as a hunting lodge. During the day which followed (4 September) the now disguised Charles walked in Spring Coppice, 1km to the south, contemplating how best to make his escape from the country. The next day, accompanied by Richard Penderel, a member of an extended family some of whom were the Cottons' servants, Charles attempted to cross the Severn at Madeley, 15km to the south-west. The crossing however was guarded and the pair were forced to return to Boscobel. Here they found Major William Careless, one of Charles' officers. It was he who proposed the form of concealment adopted on Saturday 6 September, which was to spend the daylight hours hidden in an old oak pollard, lopped three or four years previously, which stood in a clearing c 150m south of the house. During the course of the day Charles and Careless observed Parliamentary troops searching the woods (Royal Oak Wood, Old Coppice and Spring Coppice) to the south. Charles slept that night 'in a secret place' in the house, rising the next morning to walk and pray in a 'gallery' at the top of the house. Part of the rest of the day was spent in a 'pretty Arbor in Boscobel garden, which grew upon a mount and wherein there was a stone table and seats about it'. An engraving by Hollar published to accompany Thomas Blount's 1660 account of the escape (from which the quotation is taken) suggests the possibility of conflation here, as it shows, quite separately from the mound and arbour, an octagonal stone table with a stool-like seat on the edge of the woodland a short distance south of the garden. That evening Charles left Boscobel, eventually to sail for France on 15 October.

Soon after 1651 ownership of White Ladies and Boscobel passed to Basil Fitzherbert, who in 1648 had married Frances' only daughter, Jane. The properties remained in that family's ownership, occupied by a series of tenants including descendants of the

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Pevelers, until 1812 when Boscobel and much of the White Ladies estate was purchased by Walter Evans of Darley (Derbys). He, a mill owner, was attracted by the house's historic and romantic associations (Boscobel and the Royal Oak became well known soon after Charles' return to England in 1660), and embarked on a restoration of the house and garden to make them 'what it was when Charles was there' (guidebook 1996, 31). In 1918 the estate was bought by the Earl of Bradford, who in 1954 placed the house and the tree in Guardianship. The house passed into the care of English Heritage in 1984.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Boscobel House stands 14km north-west of Wolverhampton, on an unclassified road between the A5 and A41. South and especially west of the House the ground falls away, and from its upper floors and the prospect mound in its garden there are views south to the Royal Oak and the woods beyond and west towards Telford. The boundaries of the area here registered, c 2ha, follow the fences and hedges which define the garden, the close to its east and the farmyard north of the House. Also registered is the Royal Oak 200m to the south.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** There is a car park on the north side of Boscobel's farmyard. From here there is access to the English Heritage shop and entry point via which visitors are admitted to the site.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Boscobel House (listed grade II\*), a C16 timber-framed farmhouse (the present North Range), was remodelled and extended c 1630 as a hunting lodge by John Giffard, the eldest son of Edward Giffard of White Ladies. It was apparently during a party to celebrate the completion of this extension, which forms the greater part of the present building, that the name of Boscobel was bestowed. It was conceived by one of the guests, Sir Basil Brook of Madeley (where, incidentally, he had created a fine garden) from the Italian Bosco Bello, because it stood in the midst of fair woods. In the early C19 a new block was added on to the north side of the North Range. Considerable restoration works took place after 1954 when the House was placed in Guardianship.

North of the House is a farmyard. Although it incorporates a large, C17, timber-framed barn (listed grade II), most of the buildings are 'improved' ones of the early C19 (these listed grade II).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The garden lies along the west and south sides of the House, and is 60m long from north-west to south-east and 40m wide. It is entered via a door in a 2.5m tall brick wall which defines the garden to the north-west. To the south-west the garden is bounded by a tall holly hedge; a gap gives access to the path across the field to the Royal Oak. At the south corner of the garden the holly hedge turns to form the first part of the south-east boundary, up to a gap leading to the hornbeam walk. The hedge continues in box, up to the end of the 45m long, 3.5m high, brick fruit wall (listed grade II) which bounds the garden to the south-east. Along the last is a flower border. The main paths in the garden are of red quarry tiles edged with pebbles.

In the south-west quarter of the garden is a four-sided prospect mound. On top of the mound, and reached by worn sandstone steps, is a timber-framed, plank-walled, north-west-facing arbour; the present structure (1998) was built c 1950. The mid C17 structure was probably less substantial and covered with climbing plants, as described by a late C18 visitor (guidebook 1996, 25). North-west of the mound is a small lawn, on the west side of which, against the hedge, is an oak tree grown from a Boscobel Oak acorn and planted in 1897. North-west of the lawn are four small beds comprised of intricately patterned low box hedging. A similar group of four beds also lies against the south-east gable of the House. South-east of these, to the north-east of the mound, is a rectangular compartment defined by a 1m high box hedge containing fruit trees arranged in two rows of five.

The hornbeam walk runs 60m south-east from the gap in the garden hedge. To its east is a 20m wide paddock, once a kitchen garden. Along the east side of the House and gardens is a former orchard, now a grass paddock with a few skeletal fruit trees. A map of 1753 shows the paddock, then called the Park.

Hollar's view of Boscobel, published in 1660, was presumably the basis for the C19 recreation of the garden which was present in 1651. This shows a palisaded garden west and south of the House, with a mound and arbour, approached by steps, in the south-west corner. Behind (south of) the mound is a door in the palisading, through which Charles was taken to be concealed in Spring Coppice. The garden north and east of the mound is set with parterre-like beds, apparently box edged. The palisading, mound and arbour are also glimpsed in a painting almost certainly commissioned by Charles II in 1670 from Robert Streater of Boscobel

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and White Ladies. By the later C18 the C17 garden features (with the possible exception of the mound) had disappeared, and a visitor noted 'a pretty little kitchen-garden planted with nut-hedges, currants and gooseberry bushes' (guidebook 1996, 31).

**OTHER LAND** The Royal Oak, a successor of the original pollard, stands as an isolated tree in an arable field c 200m south of the House and 100m north of Boscobel Wood. It is protected by 2.5m high iron railings (listed grade II); three successive copper plaques (included in listing) recording the royal association are mounted on a post on the south side of the tree. As soon as the story of the King's concealment at Boscobel became known the tree became a target for souvenir hunters. By 1680 the Fitzherberts had been forced to crop part of the tree and to build a tall brick wall around it. An inscription on stone was placed over a door in the wall. Remarks by Evelyn and Stukeley in the early C18 indicate that by this time the original tree was almost dead, but that a new tree was growing close by. Later in the C18 even the roots of the old tree were removed to supply souvenirs. The brick wall was rebuilt in 1787 and the smallest and earliest of the three plaques installed. This wall was replaced by the present iron railings in 1817, the two other plaques being added in 1875.

A map of 1753 shows that at that time Boscobel Wood extended c 100m further north than it does in the late C20; the Royal Oak, in its square-walled enclosure, is shown close to its north boundary.

#### REFERENCES

T Blount, *Boscobel, or the History of His Sacred Majesty's Most Miraculous Preservation* (edns of 1660 and 1680) *Boscobel House and White Ladies Priory*, guidebook (English Heritage 2nd edn 1996)

Maps Plan of Boscobel ..., 1753 (D641/5/M/1/1), (Staffordshire Record Office) [copy in Shropshire Records and Research Centre: 4128/1]

OS 6" to 1 mile: 2nd edition surveyed 1901, published 1903 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1881, published 1882 2nd edition surveyed 1901, published 1902

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: February 2000

## 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.