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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WESTBURY COURT

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Name:	WESTBURY COURT
County:	Gloucestershire
District:	Forest of Dean (District Authority)
Parish:	Westbury-on-Severn
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.822673 Longitude: -2.4100462 National Grid Reference: SO 71835 13863 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1000786 Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Formal water garden in the Dutch style of late C17 and early C18 date, extensively restored since 1967.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Westbury Court was purchased in 1641 by Richard Colchester (d 1643), a lawyer. His son, Duncomb, was knighted after the Restoration for his loyalty to Charles I. At the time of his death in 1694, however, he had done little to the early C16 house. It was his son and heir Maynard Colchester, who married an heiress, who between 1696 and 1705 laid out its gardens in the Dutch style. A major influence may have been his near neighbour Catherine Boverly (or Boevey) of Flaxley Abbey, with whom he founded the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. She was the daughter of an Amsterdam merchant and a Dutch garden was under construction at Flaxley in the early 1690s. After Colchester's death in 1715 Westbury passed to his nephew Maynard (II) (d 1756), who undertook further major works in the garden and rebuilt the house in the Palladian style. This was demolished in 1805, and the family only returned to Westbury to live in 1895. In 1960 Mrs Colchester-Wemyss sold the property to a speculator who demolished the house. In 1964, by when the gardens were in poor condition, Westbury Court was bought by the County and Rural District councils. A home for the elderly was constructed parallel with the Long Canal, on the west part of the site, while (in 1967) the gardens were passed to the National Trust, in whose ownership they remain (1999).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Westbury Court's gardens lie 100m east of St Mary's church at the south-east end of the village of Westbury-on-Severn, on meadowland on the west bank of the River Severn. Westbury stands on the A48, c 15km south-west of Gloucester. The area here registered, c 2ha, is bounded to the north-east by the A48, to the north-west by Westbury Court old people's home, and to the south and south-east by Westbury Brook.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The modern entrance to the site is from a car park on the site of the house demolished in 1961. Baroque urns there were previously at Ebworth Park (Gloucestershire).

The gateway (listed grade II) to the Colchesters' house survives as the entrance to the old people's home, opening onto the A48. It was probably constructed by Maynard (II) when he rebuilt Westbury Court 1742-5. The heraldic lions on top of its piers were carved by a Bristol mason called Biswick.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING The early C16 house at Westbury, against the west side of the north end of the Long Canal, was replaced 1742-5 by one designed by Michael Sidnell, a Bristol statuary mason. This was dismantled in 1805 and its materials used in a house at Tidenham for Sir George Bolton. Its successor, built in 1895 adjoining the Tall Pavilion, was demolished in 1961.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens occupy a rectangular compartment c 150m long from south-west to north-east and 100m wide. Running around the outside of the north, east, and south-east sides of the garden is the Westbury Brook, probably carried to this new line as the first phase of the garden making in 1696. Across the head (north) of the garden is a brick wall (listed grade II), probably of 1698, pierced with clairvoies at the end of both canals. This wall is abutted by a brick wall of c 1970 (its predecessor was demolished c 1960) which runs down the west edge of the garden. It is pierced with three clairvoies and has cordoned fruit growing against it. Running parallel with this wall is the feature which formed the spine of Maynard Colchester's garden, the Long Canal, 137m long and 6.7m wide. This is flanked with yew hedges, rising through and above which are alternate yew pyramids and holly balls. At the south end of the Long Canal is the Tall Pavilion, built 1702-3 and completely reconstructed after 1968 under the supervision of Robert Paterson. It comprises a columned loggia supporting a pedimented brick second storey surmounted with a wooden lantern with golden ball finial. Three tall windows on its north facade give views along the Canal and across the garden. The original arms on the pediment, Colchester impaling Clark, were carved by Mr Randle, the Gloucester statuary. A new gardener's house was built onto the rear of the Pavilion c 1967. At the north end of the Canal, beyond a small round basin, is a clairvoie between rusticated ashlar piers topped with large pineapple finials (of 1704, the carver was a Mr Smart). Originally an avenue carried the eye northward across the fields beyond.

Parallel with, and c 20m east of, the Long Canal is the T-Plan Canal. It is of the same length as the Long Canal, is lined with 2m high clipped yew hedges, and has a 50m long arm across its north end. Standing on a stone plinth in the centre of this arm is a statue of Neptune astride a dolphin, probably mid C17. He looks north, to the second clairvoie in the garden's north wall. It has rusticated piers topped with elaborate stone urns and ironwork from the Forest of Dean. The clairvoie and canal are both of 1715 or a little later. On the lawn between the two canals are two rows of box spires with, placed centrally at the south end, an elaborate canopied wooden seat commemorating Hugo Colchester Wemyss (d 1974). Kip's view (Atkyns 1712) suggests that c 1707 there were vegetable beds here.

East of the south half of the T-Plan Canal, an area occupied in the early C18 by an orchard, is a modern (late C20) parterre based on that shown on Kip's view south of the house (see below) with standard Portuguese laurels to the north.

In the north-east corner of the garden, against the main north wall, is a small walled garden, c 20m long from north to south and c 12m wide. At the north-west corner of the garden is a single-storey brick summerhouse (listed grade II) with high-quality stone detailing: rusticated quoins, window surrounds and, on its west side, a door surround with fluted Corinthian pilasters. The interior of the garden contains formal, box-edged herb beds. The walled garden and summerhouse were constructed in the years after 1715.

A yew alley runs either side of a gravel path on a straight line east from beneath the loggia of the Tall Pavilion. Gaps in the hedge give access north to the end of the T-Plan Canal and south into an informal lawn bounded to the south by the Westbury Brook. Two large trees stand on the lawn, a veteran evergreen oak, and a Tulip tree. Beyond the garden, east of the Westbury Brook, the line of the path is continued by a recently planted (1990s) avenue.

An account book (GRO) allows many of the garden features to be dated precisely. The digging of the Long Canal began in 1696, the garden walls were built in 1698, the hedges and topiary flanking the Canal were planted in 1699, the ironwork for the clairvoie at the end of the Canal was paid for in 1702, and the Tall Pavilion was built and furnished in 1702-3. Work seems to have come to an end in 1705. Westbury Court was recorded soon after in a view - probably somewhat speculative or forward-looking (J Garden History 1988) - of c 1707 by Kip (Atkyns 1712). This shows that a major garden compartment, now lost, with parterre beds (made in 1700 by Thomas Hall), topiary, a canal, and pergola, then lay south of the house, parallel with the Long Canal. The T-Plan Canal was added a little later, probably after Maynard Colchester (II) inherited Westbury in 1715. Certainly it was he who made the second clairvoie at the end of the T-Plan Canal and erected the square summerhouse and the adjoining walled enclosure. The accounts in the years preceding 1705 give much detail about the plants bought for the

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gardens, with as well as the structural trees and hedging plants, large numbers of fruit trees and bushes, shrubs, bulbs, and vegetables such as asparagus.

The gardens required extensive restoration after 1967. Plants in use before 1700 have been favoured.

REFERENCES

R Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire* (1712), p 799 *Victoria History of the County of Gloucestershire X*, (1972), pp 87-8 and pl J Sales, *West Country Gardens* (1981), pp 114-16 *J Garden History* 8, nos 2 & 3 (1988) N Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume One, 1500-1660* (1989), pp 194-6 M Batey and D Lambert, *The English Garden Tour* (1990), pp 95-9 *Westbury Court, guidebook*, (National Trust 1995)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1878-9, published 1883

Archival items Account book, 1696-1708 (D.36 A4), (Gloucestershire Record Office)

Description written: January 1999 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: April 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.