

KINGS WESTON PARK

Before Kings Weston house was completed Edward Southwell and Vanbrugh began turning their attention to the landscape surrounding it. In 1718 plans for the Loggia were drawn up converting the old banqueting house into a billiard room with a new ornamental facade. A vast terrace was thrust out from the side of the hill linking it with Penpole Wood. Eye-catching buildings were added to the park ornamenting the horizon at Penpole Lodge and, to the south east, the Echo. At the same time Edward Southwell extended the park boundaries to meet the Avon in the south, and northwards towards the River Severn below.

Edward's son, Edward II, made further changes to the park, but it was with the Edward Southwell III, later Lord de Clifford, that a new phase began. Returning from a Grand Tour of the continent in 1762 he immediately set about redesigning the park. He drew up designs with the landscape designer and famous mathematician Thomas Wright, and employed the newly fashionable architect Robert Mylne to build grand stables and kitchen gardens. At this time many of the old-fashioned formal features, like the Great Court and terrace, were removed and the park made to look more natural.

It was during the late eighteenth century that Kings Weston became famous. Visitors came from far and wide to admire the spectacular views, the gardens, and enjoy the famous collection of paintings in the house - much in the way people enjoy National Trust properties today! The inn on Kingsweston Hill served these visitors with refreshments, and a boat trip down the Avon to reach the estate from Bristol was a recommended excursion. It's now owned by Bristol City Council and the National Trust.



Edward Southwell and his wife Elizabeth.
Taken from paintings in Kings Weston House

Kings Weston House as first completed in 1719 and before the bay window was added in the 1760s

Avenues of Lime trees planted in about 1710 and leading to the main front of the house

Woodland gardens at the boundary of Penpole Wood

Penpole Lodge: Designed by Sir John Vanbrugh as an eye-catching tower on the horizon

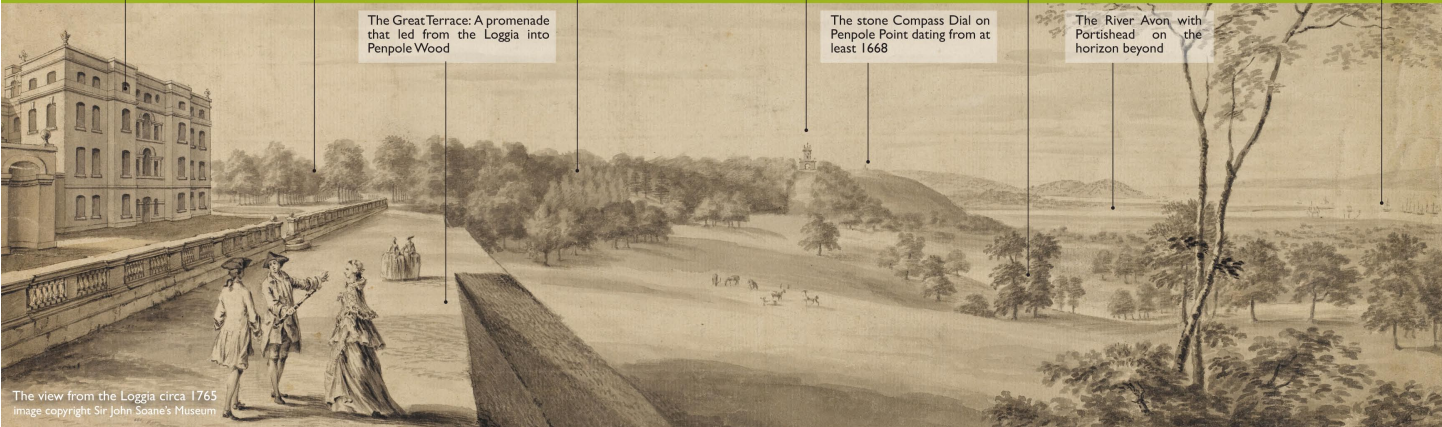
The landscaped parkland of the Home Park stretching towards the River Severn

Ships waiting in the King Road to enter the Avon and sail into Bristol

The Great Terrace: A promenade that led from the Loggia into Penpole Wood

The stone Compass Dial on Penpole Point dating from at least 1668

The River Avon, with Portishead on the horizon beyond



The view from the Loggia circa 1765
image copyright Sir John Soane's Museum

Kings Weston Action Group



KWAG formed to protect the Kings Weston estate, fight for its future, and protect its past. Although overlooked by many people Kings Weston House is a nationally important building and remains at the heart of the historic estate. Today 300 acres of grounds around the house are public park owned by Bristol City Council and the National Trust, but parts have become forgotten and overgrown, and some features lost. KWAG is volunteer organisation formed of local people, users of the park, and anyone interested in supporting the conservation and enhancement of this unique place.

Do you use the estate? Do you live close by? Or would you like to support us? Whether you are keen to lend a hand or just interested in keeping up to date with our progress please get in touch. Membership is free!

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Find out more by visiting us at:
www.kwag.org.uk

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Miss Irene Bridgeman as part of the celebrations of the 350th anniversary of the birth of Sir John Vanbrugh



KINGS WESTON

Park and house: A guide



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THE OLD MANOR

Kings Weston began as a medieval manor owned by the Crown, from where it gained its name. It was granted to the Berkeley family shortly after the Norman Conquest. After many fairly uneventful centuries the estate was sold in 1570 to Sir William Wynter, the son of a Bristol merchant and sea captain. Sir William was appointed Vice Admiral of England by Queen Elizabeth and served during the Spanish Armada. He amassed estates on both sides of the River Severn and at Kings Weston he built himself a fine new mansion with viewing towers to take advantage of the spectacular location overlooking the river.

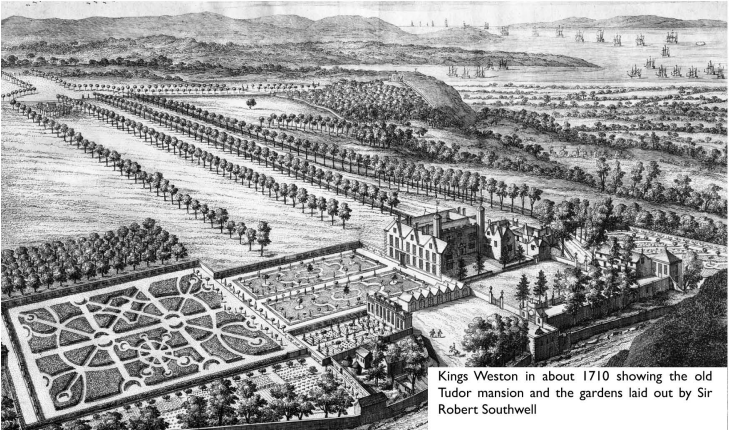
In 1679 the mansion and estate was sold again, and this time it was purchased by Robert Southwell. Robert was born in Kinsale, on the south coast of Ireland. In 1659 he suffered a serious illness while studying in Oxford and went to France to recover. Instead of resting he embarked on an adventurous trip across Europe. After meeting many famous and influential people on his travels he returned to the English Court where he was appointed to significant official roles by Charles II. He was knighted in 1665.

Robert bought Kings Weston as a convenient home midway between London and his Irish estates. He retired here from court life with his son Edward and spent many years collecting plants, creating formal gardens around the house, and planting long avenues through the park.

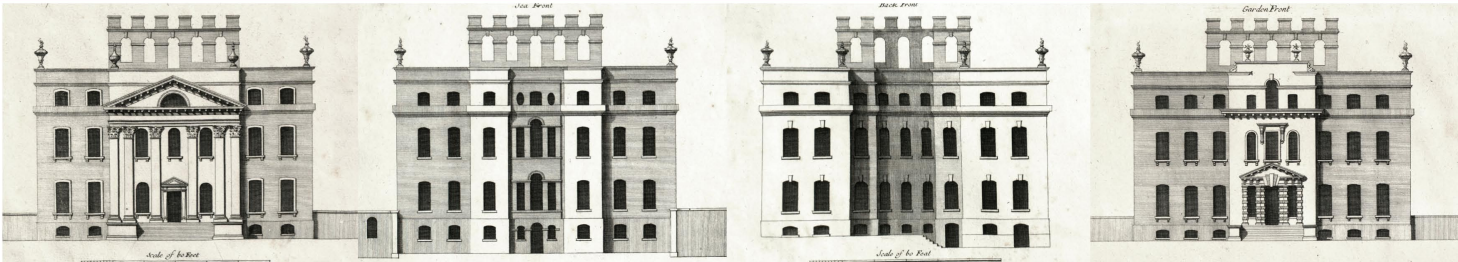
Elected President of the Royal Society in 1690 he called on his scientific friends to help develop Kings Weston including the plantsman and diarist John Evelyn, and the physicist Robert Hooke. Hooke helped design sea walls along the Severn to protect the farmland from flooding and proposed works to install a fountain near the mansion.



Sir Robert Southwell 1635-1702.
(from a painting hanging in Kings Weston House).
Clerk of the Privy Council, Secretary to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, ambassador and emissary for King Charles II. Secretary of State for the Kingdom of Ireland under King William III. President of the Royal Society 1690-1695.



Kings Weston in about 1710 showing the old Tudor mansion and the gardens laid out by Sir Robert Southwell



THE HOUSE REBUILT

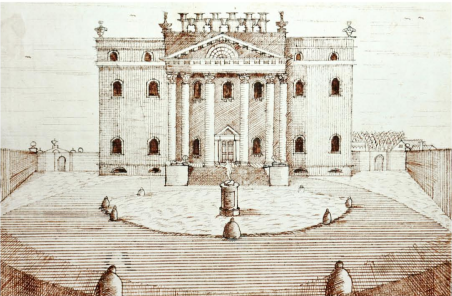
Sir Robert Southwell's son Edward shared his father's education and interest in science and culture. He inherited the Kings Weston Estate in 1702 along with the position of Secretary of State to Ireland. He married his first wife, the wealthy Irish heiress Lady Elizabeth Cromwell, the following year. He quickly began updating the parkland with the addition of a fashionable brick-built orangery and a banqueting house overlooking the Severn. After his wife died in 1709 Edward acquired a great fortune and extensive estates in Downpatrick, Ireland.

Edward commissioned the most famous architect of his day to rebuild the old Elizabethan mansion. He chose Sir John Vanbrugh, who was then Comptroller of the Royal Works to Queen Anne, and was still working on Castle Howard and Blenheim Palace.

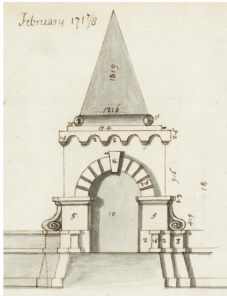
Above: the facades of Kings Weston House as Vanbrugh completed them and before later alterations. From left to right, the 'Main Front', the 'Sea Front', the 'Back Front', the 'Garden Front' facing the Echo.

his two largest and most spectacular works. For Kings Weston he designed a smaller, but equally theatrical house with the "castle air" he hoped to bestow on many of his buildings.

Work began early in 1712 with "upwards of 60 men preparing stones and digging the foundation of the new house" and construction commenced on 16th June 1712. The house went up quickly and by 1713 parts were already at roof level. Vanbrugh was especially keen to see the effect of the arcaded chimneys "rightly hit off" when viewed from a distance. Even today the castellated arcade rises from the centre of the house like the romantic castle Vanbrugh intended.



The Great Court designed by Sir John Vanbrugh for the front of Kings Weston House seen here in 1746. In the centre is a statue of Hercules. (Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford)



Vanbrugh's proposed gate for the entrance to the Great Court (unbuilt) (Courtesy of Bristol Record Office)

In front of the main entrance the Great Court was laid out surrounded by high walls, giving a more imposing approach than today. A fortified gateway Vanbrugh had designed to access this from the avenue was never built. The new building was completed in 1719.

Although still spectacular the interiors of the house have changed from the original designs. The impressive Saloon, was redesigned in 1767. Edward Southwell III had acquired a large collection of paintings and these were integrated into the design by the architect Robert Mylne. Many of the other rooms were also redecorated. Vanbrugh's great stair hall survived until it was redesigned in the 1840s, losing some of the dramatic effect it once had.

Today Kings Weston House is arguably Bristol's most important Georgian building and is Grade I listed.

Sir John Vanbrugh 1666-1726.

Born in London Vanbrugh became a notable playwright before turning his talent to architecture. In 1699 his first commission was to design the vast house at Castle Howard. In 1702 Queen Anne appointed him Comptroller of the Royal Works and in 1705 he started work on Blenheim Palace. Kings Weston was begun in 1712 shortly before Vanbrugh fell from Royal favour. After Queen Anne's death he returned from exile and he was knighted by King George I in 1726. Kings Weston has one of the largest collections of his buildings in the UK.



The Saloon, or Great Hall redesigned in 1767 for Edward Southwell III by Robert Mylne (Courtesy of Bob Pitchford)



Trompe l'oeil painting of a gilded urn in the stair hall dating from about 1719.



The Stair Hall. The stair and alcoves remain from Vanbrugh's design, but it was heavily altered in the 1840s

Use this map to discover more at Kings Weston

- Kings Weston House** – Before it was removed in 1762 the Great Court acted as a formal introduction to the main front of the house and was approached down double avenues of lime trees.
- The Loggia and Banqueting House** – Now a private house. Designed by Sir John Vanbrugh in 1718. Built to overlook the landscaped park and the Severn Estuary. It fronted the earlier brick Banqueting House of 1707.
- The Brewhouse** – Now a private house. Another building by Vanbrugh the Brewhouse included a bakehouse and was separated from the main house to prevent the risk of fires spreading.
- Ruins of QEH school** – In 1938 plans were drawn up to move QEH School from the centre of the city. After WWII started the plans were abandoned leaving only part-built walls.
- The Ice House** – Hidden behind the stables this was used to provide the kitchens with ice. Ice was collected from the pond opposite in winter months.
- Home Farm** – Georgian farm buildings belonging to the estate that once included a menagerie.
- The old stables** – Designed by the important architect Robert Mylne and built in the neoclassical style in 1763. It served as a police station from 1960.



Painting drawing of QEH school in Kings Weston, Bristol (Record Office)

- Walled gardens and lily pond** – A series of geometrical brick walled kitchen gardens surrounds the square pond and gardeners lodges of 1763.
- The Echo** – Designed by Vanbrugh as the Grand Alcove in about 1722. This pavilion provided an elevated position to enjoy an echo that reverberated towards the house "eight or ten times".
- Iron Bridge** – Built in 1821 by the famous engineer John McAdam when he cut the new road in a cutting through the rock to avoid the steep gradients over Kingsweston Hill.
- Old Kingsweston Inn** – Originally built in about 1724, probably to designs by Vanbrugh, it offered refreshments for visitors to the park though was much altered in the Victorian era.



- Old Quarry Garden** – In the 1760s the garden designer Thomas Wright worked with Edward Southwell III in laying out new walks and reusing an existing quarry as a garden. The planting is lost, but some of the exposed rustic rockwork and boundary of lime trees remains.
- The viewing mound** – Also known as the Scouts Chapel this Georgian viewing mound once looked over the Quarry Garden. It was used by the Scouts as a camp chapel between 1937 and 1952.
- The lower Penpole Walk** – A picturesque pathway was added through the woodland in the 1760s. A stone seat, rocky outcrops, and a woodland arbour, since lost, were features visitors once enjoyed.
- Kings Weston Roman Villa** – Now surrounded by housing the Roman Villa was once within the Kingsweston parkland. The villa is now a Bristol City Council museum.
- Ruins of Penpole Lodge** – Designed by Vanbrugh c.1723 to catch the eye across the park at its boundary with the Common on Penpole Point. After years of dereliction it was pulled down in 1952.
- Estate Wall** – The stone estate wall can still be found standing eight feet or more within the woods.

- The stone compass dial & Penpole Point** – This ancient pillar already existed in 1668 when the Merchant Venturers paid £5 for its repair. It was probably built as a landmark for ships entering the Avon below. There were once famous views looking out towards Wales from here.

- Wood Lodge** – This Georgian Lodge gave access to the park from Penpole Point.



The former Quarry Garden

- Blacksmith's house** – Possibly a design by Vanbrugh this cottage and others on Kingsweston Lane provided homes for estate workers.
- Kingsweston Hill** – This ridge is an important archaeological site possessing a great number of burial mounds. Views from here across the Severn were once famous.
- Carriage rides** – Laid out in 1831 most of the circuit of recreational carriage rides around Kingsweston Hill can still be followed. They are lined with many fine trees.
- Georgian viewing terrace** – An elevated promenade was added some time before 1772 to take advantage of the views out across the Shirehampton Park, and Somerset beyond.
- WWII ruins** – During the Second World War much of the park was covered with barrack huts that formed two separate army camps. You can still find the brick and concrete bases hidden between trees.
- Park Lodge** – One of the lodges controlling access to the private parkland it was described as an "elegant modern little cottage" in 1819.
- The Circle** – For three hundred years this was the focus of the landscaped park. Avenues radiated out from a wide circle of trees and the main drive wound through it on its way to the house.
- Great Avenue** – The oldest remaining avenue in Bristol. Planted before 1710. With a matching row of trees that once grew just to the south they framed the main front of the house.

- War Memorial** – Erected in 1921 on land donated by Philip Napier Miles, of Kings Weston House.
- Shirehampton Lodge** – A neoclassical design by the architect Robert Mylne in the 1760s.
- Horseshoe Bend** – Long a favourite spot for Bristolians, though no longer with the river traffic there once was. It is still a beautiful panorama across Horseshoe Bend and across to Somerset.
- Crabtree Slip** – Ornamental paths once reached as far as the river banks here, but the railway and Portway have since blocked them. Today it is an important natural habitat.
- Longcombe** – Hidden in the middle of Shirehampton Park is this deep secluded glen. There was once a Georgian viewing mound overlooking it and horticultural fairs were held here in the 1800s.

