



# Kings Weston Action Group Newsletter number 9

## Winter 2012: Happy New Year!

### Memorial project

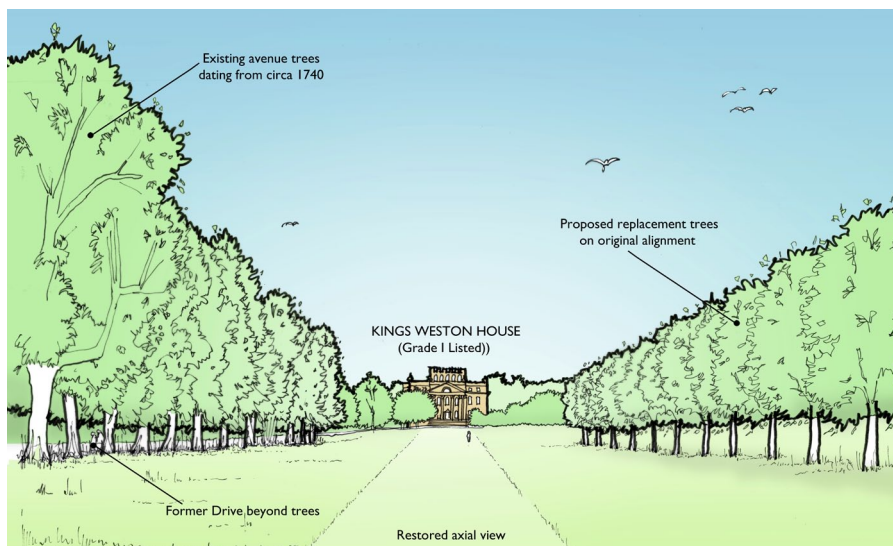
KWAG is hugely grateful to everyone who has taken the time to voice their sympathies following the sudden death of our co-founder Tim Denning in October. Following an invitation from Tim's parents we have been collecting donations towards a memorial project and have already received a number of generous donations from KWAG members and Tim's family and friends. We have been discussing what form the memorial should take and have recently discussed suggestions from our members with officers from Bristol City Council.

The idea that has been settled upon is to replant part of the historic avenue that once led up to the front of Kings Weston House. The lost avenue can be seen in the engraving that we donated to Bristol Record Office, and was illustrated in our last newsletter. The existing trees along the former drive are the only fragments that remain of an avenue that once stretched from the house as far as Park Hill leading into Shirehampton.

Whilst the Conservation Plan for the estate will now not be available for consultation until later this year we are encouraged that the reinstatement of this avenue will be supported by it. The replanting of these trees seems to be a fitting tribute to Tim's memory as well as being a practical and achievable project that KWAG can take on.



**Tim Denning, Co-founder of KWAG  
1965-2012**



**Impressions of KWAG's proposals for a memorial project to replace the lost historic avenue**

It's also something that helps achieve a key restoration objective in returning some of the formal views towards the Grade I Listed house.

As part of our aspiration for the memorial avenue we have produced some illustrations to show how it should look. The proposals would be to replant the same species of Lime tree as are already growing along the adjacent path and we hope to work

with the Council's tree planting officer to develop the project as a community planting event towards the end of this year. Before then there is a great deal to do to gain support for the project and we would like to ask everyone for their comments before we proceed too far. If you have any suggestions or you would like to make a contribution to this project please get in touch through the contact details at the foot of this page.



# Kings Weston Action Group

## Newsletter number 9 (cont.)

### Lottery Grant Success!



Since our last newsletter we have received some fantastic news. In October the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded KWAG a grant of £10,000 as one of the first projects to receive support from their "All Our Stories" grants scheme.

Up till now we have concentrated heavily on the history of the estate but this award will enable us to focus on the estate's natural heritage through a major event to which everyone will be invited. We will be working with the Bristol Natural History Consortium (BNHC) on a 'Bioblitz' which will set out to record everything we can in a 'day in the life of' survey. The grant will enable us to support the event across the park, put it in the context of the historic landscape, and use the information we collect in a variety of ways. We hope these will include local exhibitions, teaching packs for schools and new wildlife nature trails.

The BNHC hope to use the event at Kings Weston as the flagship launch event of their own "Bristol.99" project; part of the Bristol Festival of Nature in May next year giving us exciting opportunities to help more people discover the estate and develop a better record of the park's natural habitats. This will become increasingly important as conservation plans progress for the protection of habitats and for promoting greater biodiversity. We will be keeping a particular eye out for rare species native only to Bristol and which we know have grown here historically, such as Bristol Rock-cress (pictured) that once thrived on the rocky limestone grassland around Penpole Point.

We will definitely need volunteers to come forward and help us out closer to the time, so if you are interested in lending a hand please let us know and we will keep you abreast of things as they develop.

**Don't forget!** Find us on-line. Search for Kings Weston Action Group on [Facebook](#) or [Flickr](#) and follow us for more regular updates.



**Above: Bristol Rock-cress (*Arabis scabra*) flourished on the slopes around Penpole Point until the 1950s**

### Heritage Schools

English Heritage has received £2.7M funding from the Government to pilot a new Heritage Schools programme with clusters of schools across the country. We are fortunate that Bristol has been selected to pioneer this project which aims to help school children become more aware of the rich local history in their area and get out exploring it. This will be achieved through cross-curricular projects supported by "Heritage Brokers". Two local schools, Avon Primary and Avonmouth Primary, will form part of a cluster within Bristol. KWAG have been invited to get involved and the prospect of using this initiative to bring the fascinating history of the estate closer to the community is an exciting one.

We have begun discussing ideas with our local Broker and the strong scientific, artistic, natural, industrial, and national

historic connections with Kings Weston create a wealth of opportunities. KWAG have begun supporting this project by bringing together an on-line collection of our photos and archive material as part of a teacher support pack. Images have been carefully selected to showcase the key people, places and periods. Our HLF funded 'Bioblitz' event may also be woven into the local school curriculum through the Heritage Schools programme.

### Don't Miss out! Important dates for 2013

Building on our recent success with walking tours of the historic estate would like to invite you to our first guided tour of 2013. This will take place on Sat 23rd February and take in the history of the landscaped parkland and its buildings. Come along and find out where 'Echo' gets its name and discover some of the hidden historic features of Penpole Wood. The event will cost £4 which will go directly towards running KWAG's projects. It will start at 10am from Shirehampton Road Car Park and finish at Kings Weston House at lunch time. Please get in touch to book your place as spaces go quickly.

Working party events are key to KWAG's future success. Following requests we will be running more Saturday events this year as these appear to work better for people than Sundays. As usual we will send out a reminder before each, but just so you can get them in your diary they are as follows:

January	12th	Saturday
February	16th	Saturday
March	17th	Sunday
April	13th	Saturday
May	11th	Saturday
June	16th	Sunday
July	13th	Saturday
August	10th	Saturday
September	15th	Sunday
October	12th	Saturday
November	16th	Saturday
December	15th	Sunday

Working party events are both enjoyable and rewarding. We really need as many volunteers as possible to get hands-on so if you, or someone you know are able and interested in contributing in even the smallest way please let us know. Come along and discover things as we uncover them and make a few new friends along the way.





# Kings Weston Action Group

## Newsletter number 9 (cont.)



The newly revealed panorama and terrace wall (on right) as they now appear as you cross the Iron Bridge.

### A wall with a view

Over the last few months KWAG volunteers have been working hard to uncover the Georgian viewing terrace overlooking Shirehampton Park. Our objectives have been to uncover the forgotten and neglected terrace and return it to prominence as a spectacular location to enjoy views across the Avon Valley.

Since September working parties have focussed on removing ivy and self-seeded saplings from the terrace before they further damage the masonry and also to remove undergrowth that has encroached on the view in the areas below the terrace. We have to express our thanks to the City's new estate's team and Andrew Gordon and his team of rangers in particular for reengaging with the estate and helping in our efforts by removing trees too large for our volunteers to manage safely.

The terrace is now clear again for the first time in a generation and the spectacular view can take its place as one of the estate's highlights. It has also benefitted in opening up views to and from the old Kingsweston

Inn and the Iron Bridge restoring the connections between Shirehampton Park and these historic features.

During the work we made a few new discoveries about the terrace. Looking closely at the construction of the wall it shows that it was built in two phases with the parapet wall being added some time after the original terrace retaining wall and it was once gently ramped at the western end. We also found that part of the wall was topped in 'Bristol Black' slag blocks created as a by-product of the City's Eighteenth Century copper smelting industry. One of the more curious discoveries seems to be a small Nineteenth Century rockery.

Next year we hope to continue work in partnership with the Council on projects. The prospect of clearing the slope overlooking Avonmouth close to the house looks much more achievable with their support and we hope to start work there soon.

**Below: Looking up at the revealed viewing terrace wall and showing the restored views to the old inn.**

### Awards nomination.

On Wednesday 5th December some of KWAG's regular volunteer workers and supporters attended Bristol Green Volunteers awards ceremony in Central Bristol. The awards are made annually to a wide range of environmental projects across the City and recognise the dedication and involvement of the huge number of volunteers who drive them.

This year KWAG was delighted to have been nominated and shortlisted as Project of the Year. There were so many nominations in this category that we are immensely proud that we were in the final three. Competition was very tough and in the end the award went to the Golden Hill Community Garden which is an incredibly successful project to turn a boggy patch of Horfield into a thriving and productive community garden and their award was richly deserved.

We hope that next year we can make a return to the awards, and with your help we can build on our progress and maybe win!





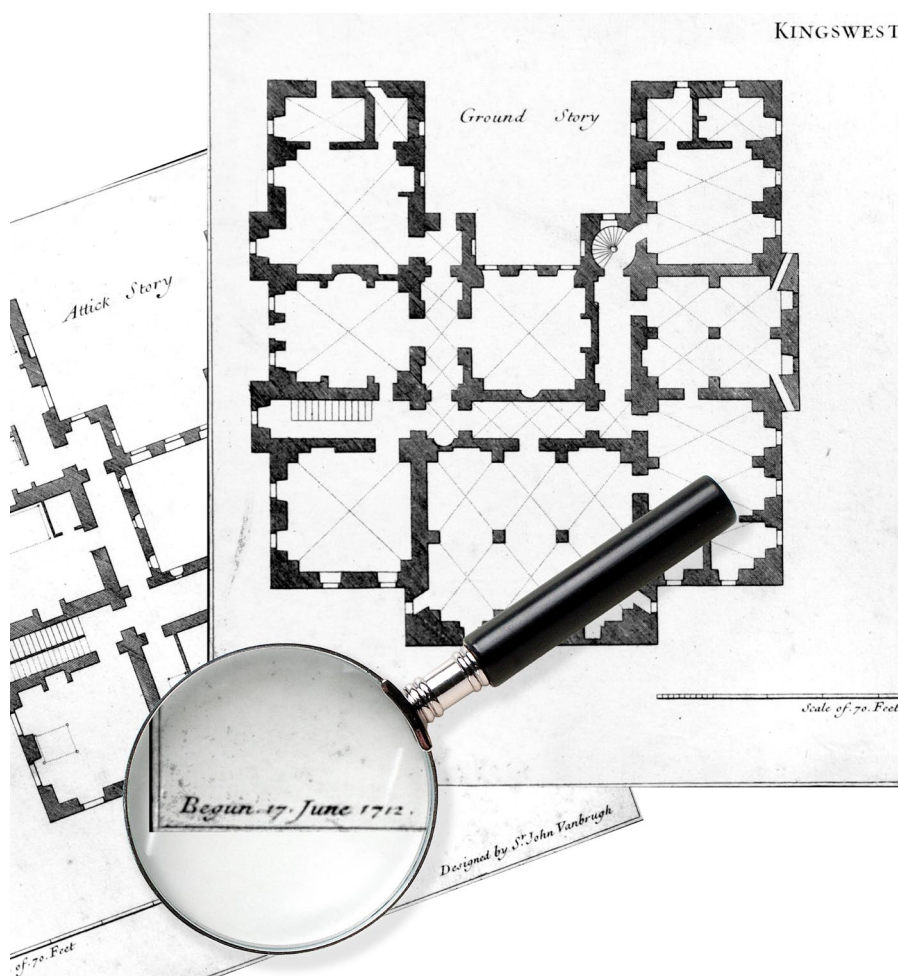
### New theories on Kings Weston house

Last year we generated a lot of interest in our announcement that 2012 was the tercentenary of the commencement of Kings Weston House and we have been asked to provide more detail to support our claim. This research update hopes to outline some of the evidence that we have collected and suggest startling new theories on how the house developed.

Although we know that Kings Weston House was designed by the architect Sir John Vanbrugh and replaced an older mansion there has always been uncertainty about when it was begun. Most authors have suggested a date of 'about' 1710 and this has become widely accepted, but there is no firm foundation of evidence that supports this. Last year we discovered some engravings in the Bristol Record Office that shed more light on the matter and in conjunction with other evidence we can propose a more certain date. These engravings are a full record of all of the house's elevations and floor plans and were produced by the eminent architectural engraver 'Mariette' and published in 1724. Each of the four sheets states 'Begun 1712', but one goes further and suggests that the building was begun on the specific date of 17th Jun 1712.

Whilst the engravings were produced more than a decade later it appears that the author visited Kings Weston and recorded the actual detail of the building rather than relying on Vanbrugh's original drawings to base his engravings on. If he did visit did he get such a precise date directly from the Southwell family?

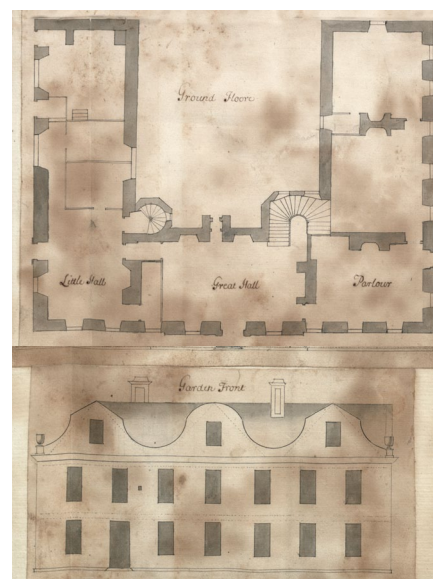
We know from a letter written in April 1711 that the house was furnished and its gallery of paintings was still in place. The author, Sir Emanuel Moore also states that the house as "Crazy"; a term used to describe a dilapidated or 'crazed' state. We do not know whether this referred to the poor condition of the old building or whether it might imply that some demolition work had begun in advance of Vanbrugh's reconstruction. Either way we know that the roof was being finished in October 1713 when Vanbrugh wrote to Southwell expressing that he was "much pleased that the house being quite covered in so good season" though the elaborate chimneys were not yet begun.



Above: Details of engravings by Mariette published in 1724. (BRO 41965/1)

Another issue perplexing historians has been the long construction period of the new house which we know ended with finishing touches in about 1719. Why did it take so long if the roof was going on in 1713? It is unlikely to have been financial issues as Edward Southwell had received the then-huge sum of £35,000 from the estate of his first wife Elizabeth Cromwell. Other comparable houses with well-documented construction histories, such as Dyrham House in Gloucestershire owned by the Southwell's close friends the Blathwayt's, went up very quickly. Each of the two principle wings of Dyrham house, built in different phases flanking the old Great Hall, were complete and furnished within two years and either of these projects compares well with the scale of Kings Weston.

Things are confused further by a letter written in August of the same year by the Irish Bishop William King who states that



Plans of the earlier mansion that Edward Southwell sought to replace. Now in Bristol Records Office. (BRO 33746)

# Kings Weston Action Group

## Research update (cont.)

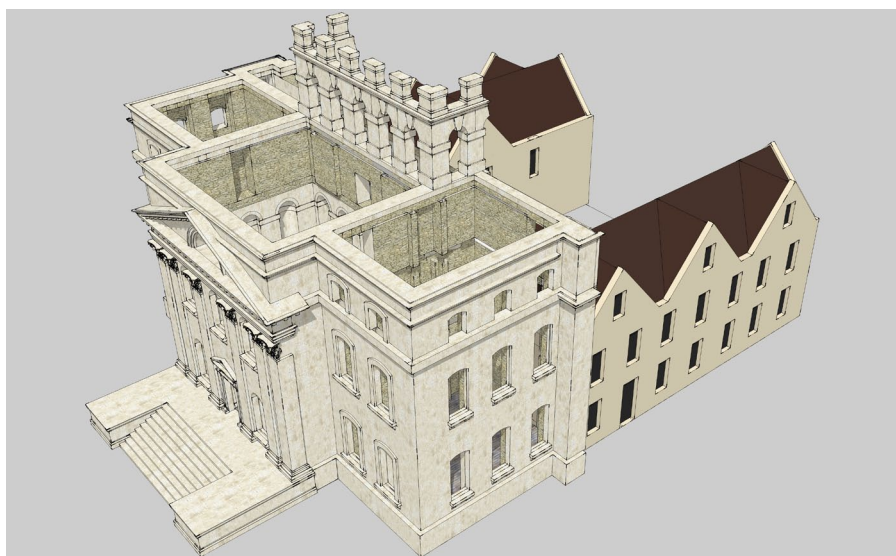
he is staying at Kings Weston for several days. The Bishop was a close friend of the Southwell's and stayed frequently on his journeys between London and Ireland via Bristol docks. Sadly he failed to mention anything about the building site that must have surrounded him but it does suggest that there was somewhere at least to sleep! So what was going on?

What appears to have happened is that the old mansion was kept in use by the family whilst Vanbrugh's new building was progressively built around it in phases; the same approach that had been employed at Dyrham House. From a comparison of Vanbrugh's original plans for Kings Weston with those of the older house it is possible to see where the joins between phases could have been made and it is most likely that work began on the main entrance wing which could have been grafted on to the south west front of the old mansion with relative ease. Compared to the rate of erection of Dyrham it would be easy for construction to have begun at Kings Weston on 17th June 1712 and be up to roof height in September the following year. The old house would have remained in use during this period and only have been demolished progressively as apartments in the new structure were completed to replace them. The staircase and first floor corridor included in the design of the entrance wing would have provided access to all of the other building phases as they were finished.

**Right and below: Scale 3D illustrations showing how the old house may have co-existed with Vanbrugh's new building for a period as it was gradually replaced.**

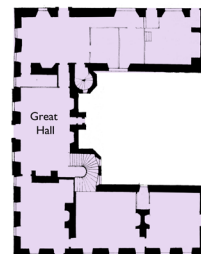
The Garden Front and the 'Sea' Front overlooking Avonmouth probably represent the next two phases of development, each perhaps taking another couple of years to complete. The last standing part of the old mansion, the Great Hall, would have eventually been demolished and replaced by the magnificent stair hall on almost exactly the same footprint; something that would have appealed very much to Vanbrugh's romantic notions of the past. In 1719 the great staircase was receiving its patterned veneered treads, probably marking the end of work before Vanbrugh and Southwell began focussing on developing the grounds.

The historian James Russell has noted previously that the new house lay eccentric to the axis of the earlier formal garden, something that can be explained by this theory. However there remain some things which still need answering, such as a timber, reputedly built into the structure somewhere, that carries the crudely carved date of 1711. Until new evidence comes to light we hope that this article forms the basis of plausible new chronology for the development of Vanbrugh's House.



**Below: diagram showing how the construction may have been phased.**

Original mansion - c.1711



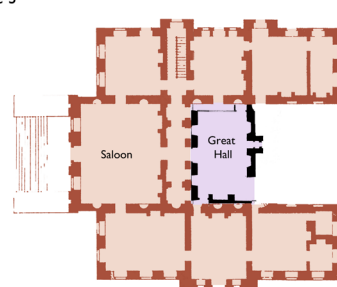
Phase I



Phase 2



Phase 3



Phase 4 - completion c.1719

