



Kings Weston Action Group Newsletter 11

An Autumn Update

A very busy Summer...

There has been a lot of activity at KWAG since our last newsletter in the Spring. We hope everyone has been able to keep up to date with most of our activities through local press, email, or on our regularly updated Facebook Page. But at last we have time to catch our breath and compose this eleventh update. There is plenty that we haven't been able to cover in this update including a successful Doors Open Day at the house in September and anything more than a very brief overview of the practical conservation work of the last few months.

Most of this year has been focused on events as part of our Heritage Lottery Funded 'All our stories' project. This initiative aimed to get people involved in exploring their local history, customs and traditions, and at Kings Weston we chose to do that through engaging people through the park's natural history and wildlife. The BioBlitz in May was just the beginning of things, but has informed the variety of legacy projects that have followed. A series of free nature walks, the Big Bulb Plant, Tree Trail, and Nature Detectives days have all formed part of this and soon a new website will complete our HLF grant.

All Our Stories has brought new visitors to Kings Weston, almost 1000 across the year, with more likely to continue using the Tree Trail and enjoy new bluebell woods into the future.

You may also know that the Council have completed the Draft Conservation Management Plan for the estate, which will shortly become an adopted document. A new steering group including the Council, National Trust, Kings Weston House and KWAG has been set up to explore how to secure the recommendations of that report, to prioritise them, and look for funding. This is likely to be a major focus for 2014.

We are very keen to look towards the City's year as European Green Capital in 2015, and our initial hopes are that we can use this as a target for securing funding that could lead to a full Kings Weston revival. As an essential part of the City's 'Green Infrastructure', the Kings Weston estate needs new focus and KWAG are here waving the flag for it.



Above: Justin Smith of the North Somerset and Bristol Fungus Group holds up a specimen on our tour of Penpole Wood.

Right: Steve England showed us how to enjoy Crow's Garlic as part of the Wildfood walk that started KWAG's season for free nature events.



Walks on the wild side

Building on the success of the Bioblitz, earlier in the year, and our new links with local naturalists, KWAG used more of our Heritage Lottery funding to host a series of free natural history walks throughout the summer. These events have been really popular and have introduced new visitors and KWAG supporters.

Steve England kicked things off with a fascinating, and humorous, beginners guide to wild food. Most of us will never look at a bramble bush in the same way ever again! David Brown from the Avon Bat Group led us through the dark and damp woods, with his entertaining 'batty' facts and anecdotes. Despite a rainy evening we identified Common Pipistrelles (and also one of our resident badgers snuffling in the undergrowth!)

Kings Westons' trees were the stars on Richard Bland's woodland tour. Many fascinating facts were unearthed about the history and biodiversity of the estate. Richard's expertise has also helped us to create a Kings Weston 'Tree Trail'.

On 22nd September the North Somerset and Bristol Fungus Group invited KWAG members along to share in a fungus survey through Penpole Wood that was quite eye-opening.

Autumn is the time when the birds become more active and visible, and our last event had an early start! On Saturday 28th September, local naturalist and broadcaster Ed Drewett led a dawn walk, looking and listening for the birds as they feed on insects and ripening berries and fruits. This event was a great finish to a well-supported summer of walks at Kings Weston that have broadened our understanding of the incredible biodiversity on the estate, widely available

New estate guides

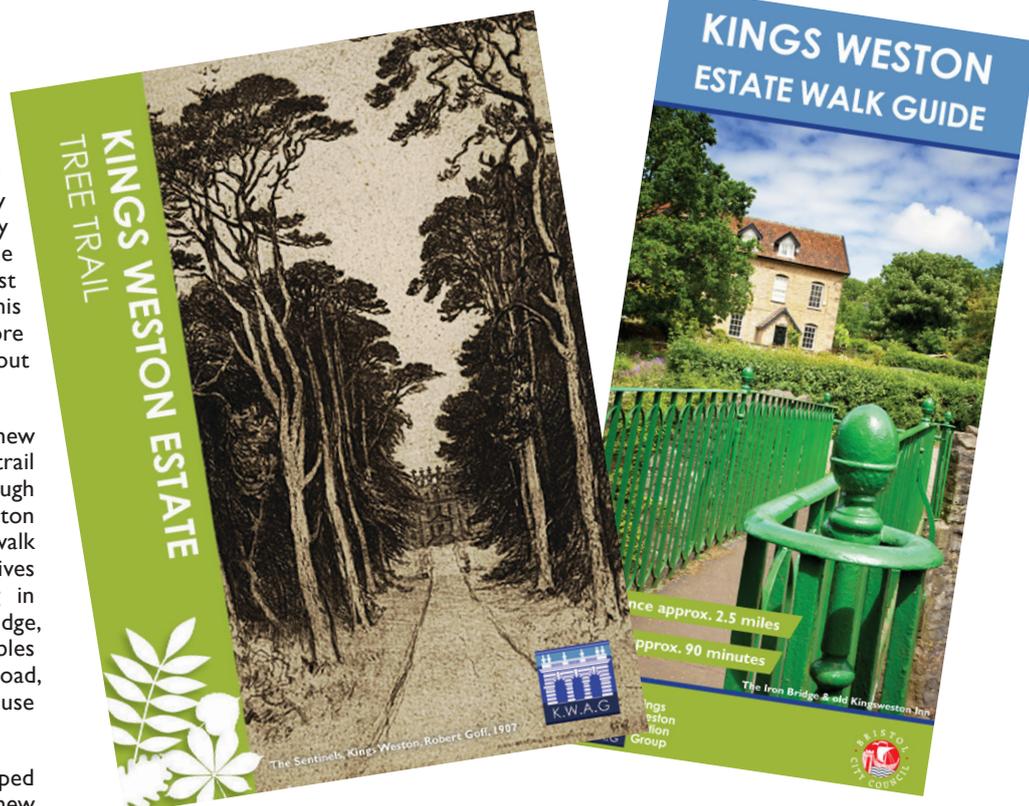
The publication last year of a walking guide for Kings Weston proved instantly popular. Since then we have seen many people using the free leaflets, some traveling to Kings Weston for the first time to enjoy it. Spurred on by this success KWAG has published two more free leaflets to help people get more out of their visit to the estate.

The first off the press was a new walking guide with an alternative trail complementing last years' route through Penpole Wood and Shirehampton Park. The new route is a circular walk showcasing the historic carriage drives around Kingsweston Hill and taking in other highlights such as the Iron Bridge, Henbury Lodge, and the former stables and walled gardens on Napier Miles Road, before returning via Kings Weston House and its coffee shop.

The other of our free leaflets was developed as part of our HLF project and is our new Tree Trail. Produced in conjunction with tree expert Richard Bland this large-format leaflet contains a brief history of planting at Kings Weston and a detailed map showing the locations of the most interesting, unusual, and rare specimens. There were plenty to choose from, but there are some real highlights, and the collection sheds new light on the park's history. Some trees such as the White Oak are unique in the City, whilst the Lime avenue is over three hundred years old. KWAG has identified each of the trees with numbered labels fixed to the trunks.

Both leaflets are available through the city's library network, at Kings Weston House, and other local venues. Our leaflet dispenser in Shirehampton Road car park is also regularly refilled.

Below: One of the new Tree Trail labels identifying the most interesting specimens at Kings Weston.



Above: Look out for our two new free guides; The Kings Weston Tree Trail and a new Walking route.

Big Bulb Plant

Instead of our usual working party event in October there was the less gruelling challenge of our Big Bulb Plant. The event saw over 2500 native bluebell bulbs and some daffodil bulbs planted through the shady area along the Echo Walk between the house and the Echo pavilion.

Another part of our HLF funded programme of events the Big Bulb Plant followed-on from the identification of species from May's BioBlitz. There were several areas along the walk where bluebells had started to grow since we cleared away choking undergrowth last year. This had been out-competing the woodland flowers and, with sunlight now able to reach the woodland floor, we were eager to strengthen those small colonies.

The weather started poorly which may have put some people off, but we had a good turnout. So good in fact that the bulbs disappeared into the ground much quicker than we anticipated! Although the event was publicised to last until 4pm we had exhausted supplies by lunchtime and had to pack up. We are sorry if you came along in the afternoon and didn't find us there. We hope it will be another worthwhile project that we can run again next year with KWAG's own funds and hope you will be able to join us then.

The fruits of our labours should start to show in spring next year and hopefully multiply for many years to come.

Below: Volunteers plant native bluebell bulbs along Echo Walk (Photos courtesy of Bob Pitchford)



Working party progress

This summer's working party events have been pretty well supported apart from a couple which coincided with some of the hottest weekends in the year! This put us a month behind our original programme, and the addition of the Big Bulb Plant in October also interspersed our activities.

That having been said we have achieved a considerable amount in areas, though rather more scattered around the park than last year. Immediately after our last newsletter we undertook the clearance of a large area close to the old Quarry Garden with the intention of joining it up to the circle of lime trees at the 'Scout's Chapel', the former viewing mound in Penpole Wood. Although the weather and the density of undergrowth conspired against us this area now has the feel of an attractive woodland glen and complements the clearance within the quarry we'd begun in February.

In August we began work on the perimeter of the Circle, the area at the end of Shirehampton Road car park. We were grateful for the assistance of Charlotte Leslie MP who came along and lent a hand to open up the prospect from the road, across the recently cleared tennis court, and into the park itself. Following this we returned to the area around the Echo, spending two months working to remove laurel bushes on the south side of the path and improving views of the Grade I Listed garden building, before jumping back to clearance behind the building and on



Above: Before and after views from the Circle, looking out across the ha-ha and tennis courts we cleared earlier in the year, towards the avenue along Shirehampton Road.

the slopes below the Eighteenth Century viewing Terrace.

Clearing areas of undergrowth also improves safety in the park. Better visibility and fewer dark corners to hide in increase the sense of security for everyone and reduce antisocial behaviour. In light of recent local attacks we have approached Police community support officers for the area and we hope to work with them to try and reduce the risk of attacks happening in the future. We are also looking at ways KWAG members and the community could help us through a volunteer warden scheme, but we will keep you informed on how this develops.

One of the problems with such a large park with so much needing doing is that it is always difficult to know where to start next. A considerable impact has been made in all these areas, but we are keen to try consolidating our working party events in the future to try and focus on bigger challenges.

We always need more volunteers to lend a hand and we hope that you will think of coming along to help out if you are able.

Left: Little things make a big difference. The bay tree beside the Echo that was overstretching paths on all sides and has now been thinned.



Working Parties for 2014

We are already planning next year's working party locations. We plan to start in January next year with a big new project planned as several months' worth of events. Following a lot of recent correspondence in Shire newspaper and a number of direct approaches to us we plan to start the major clearance of undergrowth on Penpole Point. Many people remember the views from here from years ago and it is our intention to try and reinstate these. This work will need to be staged over several years as the scale of the project is considerable.

The first three months of next year will be focussed on removing the brambles and self-seeded saplings from the ruins of Penpole Lodge towards the stone dial on Penpole Point. This will open up the area and enable us to get a better impression of how much else needs to be done. There remains many larger trees in the area that we won't be able to tackle and we will work closely with the Council to have these carefully thinned selectively.

Other locations for working in the first half of 2014 will include further work on the Great Avenue, and reinstating the back path to the Echo from the house.

Nature Detectives

The last of our HLF funded public projects was held on the 23rd and 24th of October with local schools pupils becoming Nature Detectives. The two-day event was held at Kings Weston House courtesy of Norman Routledge and his team and was led by expert naturalist Steve England. Schools across Bristol were invited, but we were delighted that it was those closest to the park that booked all the places first! Shirehampton, Avonmouth, Blaise Castle, Henbury, and Kingsweston Schools all brought eager groups of pupils keen to explore the nature at Kings Weston and take part in creative activities.

Steve England led the groups out on bug hunts and the finds were carefully brought back to the house for closer inspection under magnifying glasses. There were tables for making clay models of your discoveries, 'stained glass and leaf rubbing using fallen leaves, and on the 23rd there were even live owls in attendance!

This was the first schools event KWAG has put on under its own banner and thanks must go to our volunteer 'education officer' Penny Stedman for making it all happen. The event was a real success and following a lot of positive feedback we hope to run them again in the future.

Below: Pupils from Avonmouth Primary School gather in Kings Weston House and prepare to follow naturalist Steve England out into the park on KWAG's Nature Detectives day.



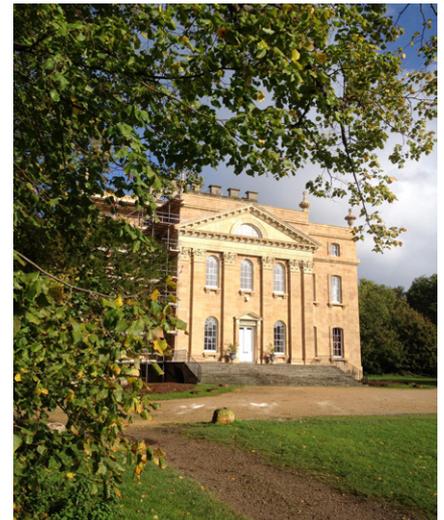
Dog poo bins

As regular dog walkers at Kings Weston will know all too well there is presently only one dog waste bin and a single litter bin for the whole 300 acres of the historic landscape. This has contributed to a serious issue of dog mess in the park. We are extremely grateful to the local Neighbourhood Partnership for having supported our ambition to get better dog walking facilities, and their funding of a new bin. This will be for use for both litter and dog waste and hopefully go a long way to easing the issue.

As part of KWAG's commitment to the project we will be working with the Neighbourhood Partnership to highlight the present problem, promote the location of the new, and encourage responsible dog owners to help keep the park clean. Since a recent change in waste classification ANY bin can now be used for litter AND dog waste.

The proposed new location is close to the Echo and will ensure that there are regularly located bins around the main dog-walking circuit as well as the longer route leading towards Blaise across Kingsweston Hill. If you are a dog walker who uses the park regularly we would really appreciate your comments and assistance as this project develops. Get in touch if you think you can help out.

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



Restoration progress

If you've visited Kings Weston recently you can't fail to have noticed that the house has undergone a bit of a change! The biggest progress has been made in the removal of the yew trees that have been overshadowing the front of the house for many years and whose roots were damaging the foundation of the front steps. The removal of these with Conservation Area consent has dramatically opened the façade up to be fully appreciated again.

Norman Routledge and his team have continued with the restoration of the building inside and out. The garden front and main façade have been cleaned, the principle rooms now redecorated, and the oil paintings have returned to their place in the Saloon. A Listed Building application has recently been submitted for the reopening of the blocked first floor windows of the main façade and return it to its original design.

We are delighted to announce that the Eighteenth Century marble fireplace we reported on earlier this year has been reassembled, restored, and returned to its original location in the former Eating Parlour (now the bar).

Avenue update

Last year we collected donations to help reinstate part of the great avenue in front of Kings Weston House. This was planned as a fitting memorial to co-founder of KWAG Tim Denning who died in October 2012. We still have the donations which now total about £1000 and although things are taking longer than we hoped we are still making progress on the project. Following our application to the Council last year for support through the Neighbourhood Partnership there were a few hiccups in the process, but things are now back on track. We hope to be able to report more news soon.



Kings Weston Action Group Research update

Architectural Historians visit Kings Weston

In August KWAG were honoured to have been asked to lead a study day for the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain. Norman Routledge kindly hosted the event at the house and KWAG took the opportunity of reporting the many new discoveries we've made over the last few years. This was the first time much of our research has been presented in front of professional historians and academics and our presentation sparked a good deal of positive interest and discussion.

Our initial presentation was followed by a tour of the house in the morning. The afternoon began with a presentation by the architect Quentin Alder outlining the building's restoration and finally a jaunt through the park visiting the more important historic buildings including the stables, walled garden, Echo and former Kingsweston Inn.

We are grateful for the donation from the SAHGB in recognition of our support for the event and the many contacts we made during the day. We hope to be able to present a full research paper to the society for publication in their Journal in the near future.

Plenty of paintings

As with the rest of KWAG's activities our research has progressed a great deal in the last few months. One of the highlights has been to see the return of the collection of oil paintings to the House after their removal last year for safety,

Other paintings have also been re-located, namely the collection of paintings belonging to the Southwell Family that hung on-loan at Kings Weston until last year. Still within the ownership of a family trust the collection of paintings contains many that were recorded hanging at Kings Weston house before the last of the direct line, Edward Southwell IV, 21st Baron de Clifford died in 1832.

The collection formerly held two paintings of Venice by Canaletto that were the first to be collected in England in 1727. These were sold to finance the restoration of the rest of the collection which remains a superb cross section of work by the most important portraitists of the early C18th.

The real showstopper of the collection has to be the painting of the wealthy Irish



Above: The glorious painting of Lady Elizabeth Cromwell from Kings Weston House and now in the ownership of a family trust. Painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller prior to 1709 and in a Chinoiserie Chippendale-style frame of the 1750s.

heiress, Lady Elizabeth Cromwell. She was wife to Edward Southwell, owner of Kings Weston, who had the old mansion demolished and rebuilt as we know it today.

The artist, Sir Godfrey Kneller painted numerous portraits of Lady Elizabeth and was rumoured to have been infatuated by her. She retains a striking presence through his paintings of her. Another painting of her hanging in the Saloon at Kings Weston,

but the version owned by the trust possesses an incredible Rococo frame in the Chippendale style, bedecked with hoho birds and strange beasts. From historic inventories of the house we know that this once hung in the 'Eating Parlour', now the bar or Canaletto room.

The paintings, all part of the Hilda Inge Trust, are presently on long-term loan to another country house in Somerset.

The goats with the most

A collection of buttons found in the garden of a property on Kingsweston Lane have provided an intriguing detail to the Kings Weston story. The four buttons were dug up from the garden by a previous owner of the property, but it was only when we started researching them that we discovered their significance.

The buttons, shown here, are decorated with the armorial goat of the Southwell family and a baron's crown, symbolic of the grant of de Clifford baronetcy to the family in 1776. The goat matches those surmounting the Southwell coat of arms on monuments in Henbury Church. These brass buttons, some of which still retain some of their original gilding, must date to between that time and 1832 when the last of the direct line of the Southwell Family died.



The buttons are likely to have come from the livery uniform of a footman, coachman or another member of the estate's extensive staff who would have lived close to the house in the estate's tied cottages. It was in the garden of one of these in which they were found, but sadly we don't have a record of who the occupants were at this time. That all four were discovered in a similar location suggests that they were disposed of at the same time, perhaps shortly after the estate was bought by the Miles family in 1834.

British Museum finds

The British Museum and British Library have been targets for us for quite some time. Both institutions were known to have contained records relating to Kings Weston and finally in October we made first contact. Whilst there is a lot of new documentary evidence from the Library, the more attractive material came from the British Museum.

Within their prints and drawings collection is a sketchbook kept by the artist Samuel Ireland on his visit to Bristol and Bath in 1792. Two pencil sketches showed Kings Weston; one of the main front of the house and the one shown here. The view here is taken from the Somerset side of the River Avon. It shows Kings Weston House in the distance with Penpole Lodge and the point dominating the horizon behind the masts of ships heading for Bristol Dock on the incoming tide.



Top: Detail of the buttons showing the Assyrian Goat, an heraldic device used on the Southwell coat of arms since at least the Seventeenth Century.

Left: The same goat on the tomb of Sir Robert Southwell of Kings Weston in Henbury Parish Church carved by Grindling Gibbons.

Below: View of Kings Weston from the mouth of the Avon, Samuel Ireland, 1792. (British Museum)

