

Proposed content of Westbury House History panel



Westbury House today, from the park side

Westbury House is located at the extreme west of the Parish of East Meon.

Edward the Confessor is recorded as an early owner of Westbury. Then, and in the Domesday survey, it was assessed at 3 hides, xxxx in today's terms.

A succession of owners rose and fell in the favour of different kings. Robert le Ewer, the yeoman of King Edward II, was first given permission to fortify the house; then fell out with the king, but was subsequently restored to favour.

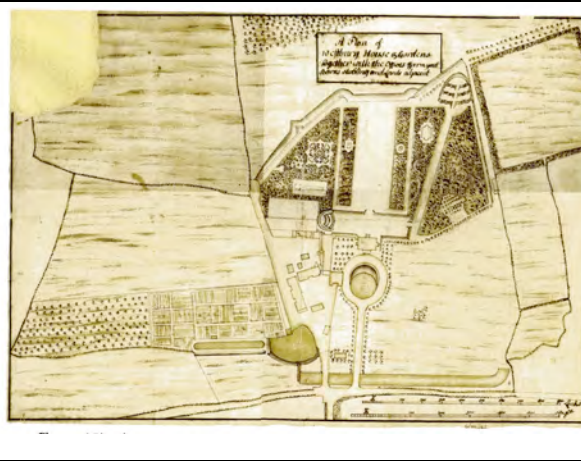
During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Westbury was owned by the Fawconer family.

The Irish connection

In 1722, Westbury was purchased by an Irishman, Sir Peter Warren, who in 1745 captured Louisburg on behalf of the New England colonies and was promoted to rear admiral of the blue. He captured three French ships worth £1,000,000 – a fortune.



In 1747 he won a great naval victory off Cape Finestere and was made a Knight of the Bath. He married a fabulously rich American lady, Susanna daughter of Stephen de Lancey. He rebuilt Westbury House in the Palladian style, and in 1761 commissioned the designer Charles Bridgeman to design the garden and estate.



The approach to the house was along a tree-lined drive off the road between the villages of East Meon and West Meon. The drive looped into an oval on the north side of the house, and on the south side were pleasure grounds. Surrounding the house and gardens was a working estate with a farmyard, barns and stables, fields and timber plantations.

In the early 19th century, Westbury passed to Warren's grand-daughter, Suzannah Maria, who had married her first cousin, Viscount Gage (whose peerage was from County Mayo). The Gage family was based in Firle, West Sussex, and the couple divided their time between there and Westbury.

The 1851 census lists Westbury House as occupied by the fourth Viscount, Thomas William Gage, (below) and the Tithes Apportionments show that most of the parish land to the west of the main village was owned, and much of it farmed, by him, including Riplington, Drayton, Peake, Coombe and parts of Hyden.



May Sartoris



The 1861 census shows that the house is occupied by tenants, the Sartoris family.

This portrait of May Sartoris was painted at Westbury in the early 1860s. Some artistic license is employed in showing Marland mill above her, and the old West Meon Church beside her.

May's mother was Adelaide Kemble, one of the most famous opera singers of the period, and a member of a great theatrical family. She was a renowned hostess and friend of the great literary and musical figures of the day, including Robert Browning and Frederick Leighton, who painted this portrait.

The great fire

Westbury was bought in 1866 by John Delaware Lewis. In 1904, the Times of London reported the gallantry of his son, Colonel Le Roy-Lewis, in saving the lives of some of his domestic staff from a devastating fire which destroyed the Palladian mansion:

'The French governess, who occupied a bedroom at the rear of the main part of the house, raised the alarm at about 3am. Her cries were heard by Colonel Le Roy-Lewis.... Getting out of a window, he scrambled along a narrow ledge to a stack pipe, down which he slid to the ground, a distance of about 40 ft.'

'The mansion contained many fine pictures and some rich carving by Gibbons. Most of the rooms were wainscotted in oak, and there was a fine library. All these have been destroyed, only a few articles of furniture being saved. The family lost all their personal belongings.'





Davis, G.Hale, G.Poise, R.Tulley, R.W.Read, R.J.Treble, F.Sedgwick, G.Longhurst, Gregory, A.Bedington, W.G.Treble, M.S.Ale, R.Lewis, Col. La Roy Lewis, Miss La Roy Lewis, W.Tulley, H.Peter
Westbury Cricket Club. WEST MEON. 1909

The gallant Colonel lost no time in rebuilding the mansion, regardless of cost. Ground-floor rooms included a 'saloon or lounge' with oak-panelled walls and housing a 'three-manual organ, electrically blown', an elegant drawing room fitted with mahogany glazed bookcases of Chippendale design, a dining room with painted panel walls; plus a study, boudoir and billiards room.... and so it went on, three floors of Edwardian comfort, including a passenger lift and central heating.



The estate was broken up in 1924, when Westbury House became a successful preparatory school, until the 1980s when it was converted into a nursing home.

