


Proposed content of Westbury House History panel

	
<p><i>Westbury House today, north elevation</i></p>	<p><i>Westbury from the park side</i></p>

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

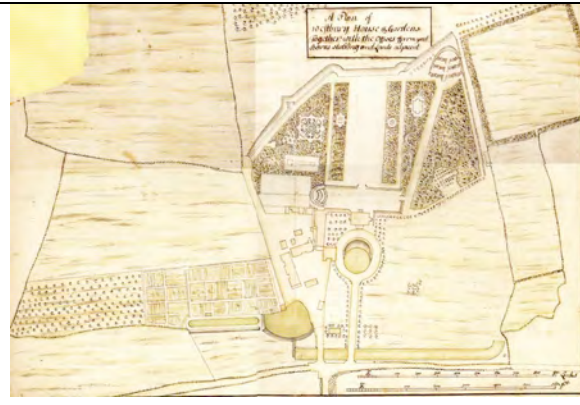
The Ulnod of Edward the Confessor is recorded as an early owner of Westbury (also known in mediaeval times as Wesberie, Westburia and Westbyrie). It was assessed at 3 hides then, and in the Domesday survey.

Westbury had a colourful history, with a succession of owners rising and falling in the favour of different kings. Robert le Ewer, the yeoman of King Edward II, was given permission to fortify the house; he held Odiham Castle 'during the king's pleasure', fell out with the king, and was subsequently restored to favour.

	
<p>During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Westbury was owned by the Fawconer family.</p>	<p>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.</p>



The Palladian house at Westbury built by Sir Peter Warren



Grounds designed in 1761 by Charles Bridmean.

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 designed by the celebrated early 18th century landscape gardener Charles Bridmean.

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 one of Warren's grand-daughters, Susanna, who married her first cousin, Viscount Gage (another Irishman, whose peerage was from County Mayo). The Gage family was based in Firle, West Sussex, and Westbury became a secondary property.

May Sartoris



This stunning portrait of May Sartoris was painted at Westbury in the early 1860s. The Sartoris family rented the house from the 4th Viscount Gage (pictured).



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 May's portrait.

The great fire

The fourth Viscount Gage sold the manor to Mr. John Delawar Lewis, from whom it descended to Colonel Le Roy-Lewis. In 1904, the Times of London reported Col Lewis' gallantry in saving the lives of some of his domestic staff from a devastating fire which destroyed the Palladian mansion:

'The escape of the occupants was most exciting. 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, who immediately did what he could to rouse the family. Rushing out of his bedroom he found the staircase burning and the corridors filled with smoke, and all means of escape cut off. His first impulse was to save his five children, and he ran through the flames to the children's wing and found that that part of the house was safe. 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. He rushed to the stables, and with some difficulty roused the stablemen, and with the aid of three of them tried to raise a heavy ladder to the French governess' window, but it fell and broke.'

‘Owing to the efforts of Colonel Le Roy-Lewis himself, no lives were lost by fire, but the housekeeper, an elderly woman named Jane Henley, who had been in the service of the family for many years, died on the roof from shock and fright before she could be rescued.’

‘The mansion itself is an old one, standing in a well-wooded park of 500 acres, and is in the Queen Anne style. It 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.’



The gallant Colonel lost no time in rebuilding the mansion, regardless of cost. Ground-floor rooms included a ‘saloon or lounge’ (45ft by 27ft), with oak-panelled walls and housing a ‘three-manual organ, electrically blown’, an elegant drawing room (72ft by 21ft), fitted with mahogany glazed bookcases of Chippendale design, a dining room (32ft by 21ft), 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 well-known and successful preparatory school, a use that continued for many years, until the 1980s when it was converted into a nursing home.

