

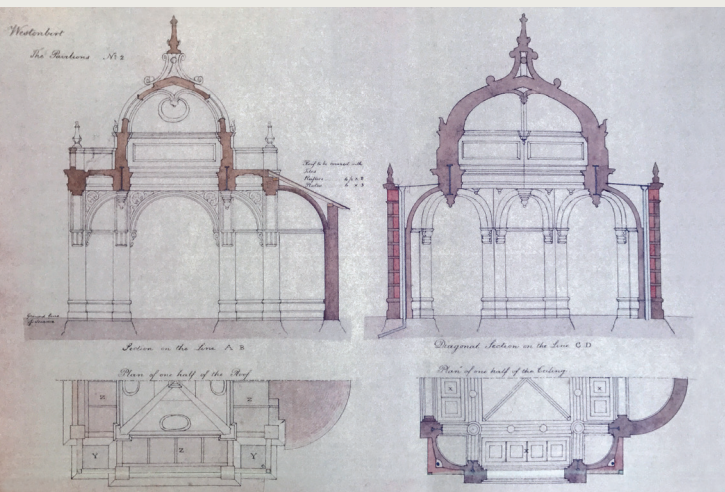
The design of the gardens



The design of the gardens at Westonbirt was largely the work of Robert Holford.

He received professional horticultural advice and assistance from William Broderick Thomas (1811-1898) and James Pulham (1820-1898). The laying out of the gardens was overseen by his estate manager Edmund Rich. Most of the built elements were designed by Holford's architect Lewis Vulliamy (1791-1871).

The gardens also reflect the influence of the landscape designer William Sawrey Gilpin (1762-1843), especially the combination of the formal terraces and lawns immediately surrounding the house gradually giving way to informal areas featuring carefully placed specimen trees.



Designs for the Italian Garden pavilions, 1843

Further Information



The Lake

Reading

Angela Potter	<i>Weston Birt House and the Holfords</i>
Michael Symes	<i>Westonbirt Gardens: A Victorian Elysium, Journal of Garden History Vol 18, No 2, Autumn 1990</i>
Margaret Freeman	<i>Weston Birt, A short account of the Manor and the School</i>
Sylvia Barkley	<i>Trees of Westonbirt School</i>

Credits

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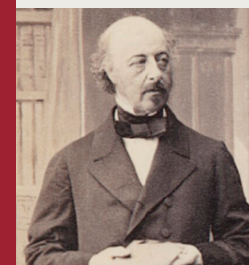
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WESTONBIRT — GARDENS —

Garden Trail



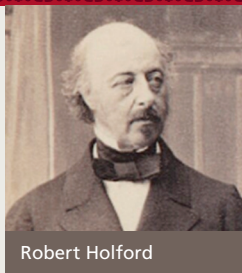
THE HOLFORDS OF
WESTONBIRT TRUST

Welcome to WESTONBIRT GARDENS

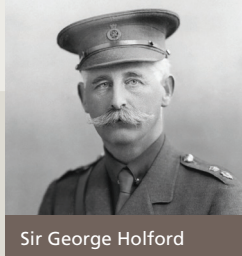
Westonbirt Gardens are an outstanding example of high Victorian landscape design which incorporate both formal and picturesque styles.

The gardens were laid out between 1840 and 1885 by their wealthy owner, Robert Holford (1808-1892). He also built the spectacular Westonbirt House and was responsible for planting Westonbirt (now the National) Arboretum.

Robert's son George (1860-1926) inherited the estate in 1892. Like his father he had a passion for trees and continued to develop the arboretum. He was also a keen gardener and an expert in the cultivation of orchids.



Robert Holford



Sir George Holford



School lesson in the Italian Garden c1930s

After Sir George's death in 1926 the Westonbirt estate was broken up and the ownership dispersed. In 1927 the house and its grounds became a school and in 1956 the arboretum was acquired by the Forestry Commission (now Forestry England).

Today the gardens are managed and cared for by the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust. The main aim of the trust is to enable the long-term conservation of both the house and gardens and to make them more accessible to a wider range of people.

Map of WESTONBIRT GARDENS

- 1 St Catherine's Church
- 2 Church Terrace
- 3 Westonbirt House
- 4 Garden Room (Visitor information & Toilets)
- 5 Italian Garden
- 6 Camellia House
- 7 Mercury Pond and Bishop's Seat
- 8 Long Terrace
- 9 Fountain Pond and Seat
- 10 Site of Tudor Manor House
- 11 Iron Footbridge
- 12 Lake
- 13 Rockery & Grotto
- 14 Robert Holford Memorial Stone



Please note that Westonbirt is a working school. Visitors to the gardens are asked to keep to the marked trail in order to comply with the school's safeguarding policies.

1 St Catherine's Church

Now used as Westonbirt School Chapel, St Catherine's was originally the parish church for Westonbirt village. Constructed in the 12th century, it was substantially rebuilt in the 17th century and underwent further alterations in the 1800s and in 1955. The church contains fine memorials to Robert Holford and his father and uncle (George and Robert snr).



The medieval village of Westonbirt was originally located just to the west of the church. However, in the early 1850s Robert had the village rebuilt half a mile further away so that he could extend the gardens.

2 Church Terrace

The Church Terrace is the oldest architectural feature in the gardens. It was laid out by Robert and his father George and appears on the 1840 tithe map. The stone seat next the churchyard wall originally had a Gothic canopy but this had been taken down by the 1950s.

The yew just to the north of the terrace is believed to be the oldest tree in the garden. It was marked on a plan of the Tudor house and grounds commissioned by George Holford Senior in 1810 and is at least 300 years old.



The Church Terrace in 1911

3 Westonbirt House

The present Westonbirt House was constructed between 1863 and 1872 and replaced an earlier (much smaller) Regency house built by George Holford Senior in 1823.

The spectacular Neo-Elizabethan building, based on Wollaton Hall in Nottinghamshire, was designed by the architect Lewis Vulliamy (1791-1871) with much active input from Robert Holford.

The Holfords moved into the new house in 1872. However, parts of the interior remained unfinished at the time of Robert's death in 1892, and were not fully completed by his son George until as late as 1921.



The Regency house

4 Garden Room



Originally a garden bothy and potting shed, this small building was for many years used as the school tuck shop.

Nowadays it houses visitor information and toilets and also provides an indoor space for the Holford Trust's garden volunteers.



5 Italian Garden



The Italian Garden was created by Robert Holford soon after he inherited the Westonbirt estate in 1838. Its formal architectural design contrasts with the much more informal picturesque landscape of the western part of the gardens.

The two pavilions were designed by Henry Hamlen, a pupil of the architect Lewis Vulliamy, in 1843. Vulliamy's practice was also responsible for the other built elements of the garden including the 'Picture Frame' seat, the Jacobean Revival gateways and the Dolphin Fountain.

In its heyday the stone-edged beds were planted with colourful displays of annuals. The present planting scheme reflects the 'high Victoriana' style of the Holfords, and includes a traditional exotic border, a rose border, and a fernery, as well as more modern herbaceous borders.

6 Camellia House

The Camellia House and the adjoining Palm House (now used by the school as a music room) are all that is left of the extensive range of ornamental glasshouses which housed the Holfords' famous collections of orchids and amaryllis.

The pair of elaborately carved stone columns either side of the entrance to the Camellia House originally functioned as chimneys for the heated garden wall!



7 Mercury Pond and Bishop's Seat



The Sunken Garden, Mercury Pond and the Bishop's Seat all date from the 1840s. The name of the latter is something of a mystery given its exotic eastern design!

8 Long Terrace



The Long Terrace was laid out in 1846 and planted with individual specimen trees either side of the pathway.

The strangely shaped tree to the south of the path is a weeping purple beech. Behind it, a clump of trees is dominated by a tall maple. This is the *Acer Cappadocicum* that Robert Holford planted on his 80th birthday in 1888.

Midway along the terrace is a huge cedar of Lebanon which has long since reached maturity. This was originally known as 'Ball's Cedar' as it was planted in this location by a gardener named Ball back in the 1840s.

The decorative stone seat at the western end of the terrace features distinctive tiles by Minton of Staffordshire.



9 Fountain Pond

The Fountain Pond dates from 1846 and was originally situated on the Long Terrace nearer to the Regency house. After 1882 Robert extended the gardens southwards which enabled the creation of a new lower terrace and the repositioning of the Fountain Pond in its present location.



10 Site of Tudor House

The original Tudor manor house stood alongside the present steep flight of steps.

The house was demolished by George Holford senior (Robert's father) in 1818. It was replaced by a new Regency Gothic building on the site of the present house in 1823.



11 Iron footbridge

After relocating Westonbirt village in the 1850s Robert Holford had a sunken pathway created to allow the villagers to continue to access the parish church without disturbing his privacy.

The iron footbridge allowed Holford to create an uninterrupted circuit walk linking the different parts of his gardens.



12 Lake

The lake was laid out in the 1870s by the famous Victorian landscape gardening company of James Pulham & Son. It still boasts its original concrete lining (signed and dated 1875) and natural and artificial rockwork.

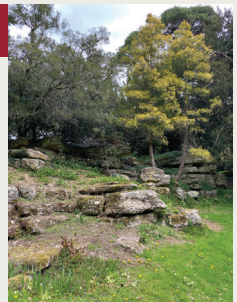


The latter is known as Pulhamite (after its inventor) and is a feature of many of the famous 19th century gardens in the country including Sandringham and Buckingham Palace.

The area around the lake was the original location of the medieval village of Westonbirt although no trace of this survives today.

13 Rockery and Grotto

James Pulham & Son were also responsible for the nearby rockery and grotto. The rockery comprises substantial outcrops of limestone rocks enhanced with artificial cement stratifications. At the centre of the rockery is a grotto which originally featured a small stream.



14 Memorial to Robert Holford



The stone in memory of Robert Holford was erected by the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust in 2008. It was cut by Richard Kindersley. The inscription 'Si Monumentum Requirit Circumspice' means 'If you seek his memorial, look around me.' The large cedar trees nearby are amongst the first garden plantings, dating back to the 1830s.