

## Dutch Style Garden: Which Bishop Commissioned This?

This has been long accredited to Bishop Ken (1685 – 1691), but without any primary supporting evidence it is recommended that we should be more circumspect about attribution. We should also be careful of dating the creation of the Dutch Style Garden.

Examining first the evidence for Bishop Ken, Professor Mark Horton<sup>1</sup>, in a conversation with him in 2019, expressed strong reservations about Ken being the instigator. His key concerns were: Ken was too busy on other matters during his relatively brief tenureship of the see; his personality.

The basis for the accreditation to Bishop Ken is his exposure to Dutch style gardens when he was chaplain to Mary (wife of the future William III) in the Hague, and his tour of Italy when he would have seen Italian formal gardens. He was also resident at Longleat during the time that the great formal gardens were being laid out there (1682 and 1694). However, there are good reasons for concluding that he is a less likely person to have commissioned this garden. These are:

1. Ken's tenure at the Bishop's Palace was short – consecrated Jan 1685, suspended 1 August 1689 (for refusing to sign the oath of allegiance to William of Orange), formerly deprived of the bishopric in 1691. Would he have wanted to spend money on enhancing the garden post his suspension, not knowing if this was permanent or temporary; suspect this is unlikely?
2. If he did spend money on a new garden it is more likely therefore to have been prior to his suspension – ie between Feb 1685 and 1 August 1689. Did he have time to think about improvements at the Palace? Although bishop of Bath and Wells, Ken didn't spend his time exclusively here. Following his consecration in early 1685, he is known to have spent much of his time in London, attending the King in his last days and subsequent death (6 February 1685), and did not go to Wells until mid July, following the failure of the Monmouth uprising (June 1685). Once there his focus was on tending to the prisoners and trying to save as many of them from death as he could. The Bloody Assizes were held in Wells in September that year.
3. It is also known that Ken was assiduous in fulfilling his parliamentary duties and is known to have attended the House of Lords which would have sent him to London – more time spent away from Wells.
4. Ken was also increasingly concerned, as others, with the growing 'tide of Romanism' which was gathering pace following the accession to the throne of the Roman Catholic, James II. He fought this tide during the years 1687/8 spending time in London delivering sermons, preaching against it. When James II issued his declaration of indulgence (which suspended religious and civil restrictions against Roman Catholics and Protestant dissenters), Ken was one of seven bishops who drew up a petition refusing to support this (1688). Consequently, Ken and the other bishops were sent to the Tower but quickly acquitted at a trial in June. The writing was on the wall for James and the political tide was turning against him. Ken appears to have spent some time in London across the late summer and early autumn after the acquittal playing a role in advising the King but left for Wells in October after a final meeting with James. William landed in England in early November and by December, James II was in France: he had been deposed. (NB a careful analysis of Ken's official Register would allow us to work out exactly how much time he spent in Wells – this is held at SWHT but is in Latin).

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Mark Horton, Royal Agricultural University, (formerly Emeritus Professor at the University of Bristol) has been involved in archaeology at the Palace including work done in 2004 on the South Lawn (Bishops Palace, Wells (2004-6). Investigation of the medieval palace using geophysics and excavations (project director and board member).

5. Was it also in his character to spend money on creating a garden; could he even afford it?

Ken was not a wealthy man, unlike other men who became bishops. It is stated that he was loaned money on his elevation to the See of Bath and Wells as he needed to equip himself with the necessary accoutrements of being a bishop. Agnes Strickland<sup>2</sup> wrote "*KEN was now a bishop designate; but so indigent was he at the time of his nomination to the see of Bath and Wells, that he was wholly destitute of the means requisite to meet the expenses attendant on entering on the episcopate and providing an equipage suitable to the dignified position he was unexpectedly appointed to fill. The means of doing this were generously supplied by Francis Morley, the nephew of his early patron and friend, George Morley, the late Bishop of Winchester. Aware of the state of Dr. Ken's finances, Francis Morley voluntarily offered to assist him with a loan of the sum necessary for his present exigencies. This was the only debt Ken ever incurred, and he faithfully repaid it, obliging himself to the most rigorous course of self-denial till it was done, even abstaining from the exercise of his accustomed offices of charity; telling his chaplain 'that it behoved him to be just before he could enjoy the happiness of ministering to the necessities of others, for while he was in debt he had nothing of his own, and must himself be reckoned among the poor.'*" How long did it take him to pay off this debt?

The words "*that it behoved him to be just before he could enjoy the happiness of ministering to the necessities of others,...*" are telling. We know that Ken spent money and time on good causes and supporting the poor. For example, he declined funding the traditional banquet to celebrate his consecration as bishop preferring to send the money he would have spent to the re-building of St Pauls. We know also that, on being deprived, Ken was left with very little money to sustain himself, apart from an annual annuity from Lord Weymouth who also gave him living accommodation at Longleat House. However, he remained acutely conscious of the poverty of others and he said of himself "*I have been often offered money for myself, but always refused it, and never take any but for to distribute....*"<sup>3</sup> Even when he had money he could ill spare, he gave it to others in need. If this was the pattern in later life, in all probability it would also have been the pattern during his tenure as Bishop of Bath and Wells. Would he therefore have considered the creation of a garden, for his personal enjoyment, an appropriate expenditure? It would be reasonable to conclude, probably not.

So who could have commissioned the garden and funded it, if not Ken?

The Dutch style garden emerged in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands and with peace on the continent, travellers would have seen these and brought home ideas to the UK. Bishops from both the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries therefore form possible candidates. One likely candidate is Hooper (1704-1727) who also spent time in the Hague as Almoner to Mary, wife of William of Orange, so would have seen the Dutch garden style. Timothy Mowl and Marion Mako state in their book, *The Historic Gardens of Somerset*, that Mark Horton, has suggested that it is more likely that Bishop Hooper created the Dutch style gardens "*citing his longer episcopate and the contemporary currency of this style in the early 18th century.*"<sup>4</sup> They also make the interesting point that in their view "*the palace*

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<sup>2</sup> Strickland, Agnes, *Thomas Ken, 'The Lives of the Seven Bishops Committed to the Tower in 1688*, Chapter 2, p1, 1866 <https://anglicanhistory.org/nonjurors/strickland/index.html>. Accessed 15/01/25

<sup>3</sup> Strickland, Agnes, *Thomas Ken, 'The Lives of the Seven Bishops Committed to the Tower in 1688'* 1866 Chapter 3. <https://anglicanhistory.org/nonjurors/strickland/index.html>. Accessed 15/01/25

<sup>4</sup> T Mowl, M Mak, *The Historic Gardens of Somerset*, Radcliffe Press, 2010 pp 47,48)

*gardens set an important precedent for other formal gardens in the county.*" No other information has yet come to light which would indicate any other bishop as a likely contender, but much hinges on the actual date of the construction of the gardens and canal. What evidence is there for dating the creation of the garden and the canal?

There are a number of images of the gardens: the Buck engraving (1733) which shows a water course exiting the South Lawn under the rampart and formally laid out gardens behind the Jocelin range; the stylised Simes map (1735) showing formal gardens behind the Palace buildings but no canal; the Carter Plan (1790) showing an L-shaped water course; Ordnance Survey Town Plan map of 1816 showing the remnant of a water course and culvert mirroring the Buck engraving.

A geophysical survey undertaken in July 1998 proved the existence of the L-shaped water feature. The report states *"to the south of the Hall lies a canal feature, c. 4m wide, shown by Carter in 1790. The feature is mostly low resistance but the patches of high resistance indicate the canal is filled with rubble. This is probably demolition rubble from the Hall. Buckle writes that demolition occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and, if so, this would date the canal from after 1735 to the 1790s. {...} Other features visible in the southern lawn include parterres and garden features perhaps mostly of late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century date."*<sup>5</sup>

The summary report of an archaeological dig done in 2003 reported the following: *"The line of the canal was located and confirmed as the geophysical anomaly. It was back filled with building rubble, which presumably originated from the demolition of the south wall of the Great Hall. It was found to be 1.8m wide, and constructed from mortared limestone. Its base was not found due to the high water table. The canal was placed within a wider ditch or water feature, that might have been constructed to contain it, or more likely to be an earlier ditch or drain running southwards from the Great Hall. Finds in the back filling of this ditch, including datable clay pipe bowls, placed the construction of the canal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century."*<sup>6</sup>

So we have one archaeological survey stating that the canal was likely to have been created in the 1700s and another saying in the 1600s. The 1998 survey also notes other features *"perhaps mostly of late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century date."* The best conclusion therefore from the pictorial and archaeological evidence is that there was a Dutch style garden including an L-shaped water course in existence in the 1700s and possible formal garden layouts in the late 1600s.

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<sup>5</sup> Dr C. Gerrard, A Pooley & A. Turner (Department of Archaeology, King Alfred's College, Winchester), *Preliminary Report on Geophysical Survey at the Bishop's Palace, Wells*, July 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Archaeology, University of Bristol, *Summary Report on the Investigations at the Bishop's Place, Wells*, June 2003.