

Remnantz, a brief history - forerunner of Sandhurst and family home



Stephen Remnant

The house that we now know as Remnantz takes its name from a former owner, Stephen Remnant, an iron founder from Woolwich. He came into the property through his wife's family in 1747 and held it until his death in 1801.

The exact date of the buildings is not known although historical and architectural evidence points to c 1720. There is a two-part plan which may have been drawn in 1804 and which shows

A: how the property was laid out at that time, the "mansion house" with its west wing being still intact, and

B: how the various plots of land were assembled before the house was built, evidently on the site of an old malthouse.

The College years

By 1799, Remnant was trying to let the house, having retired to Kent. So it was fortuitous that at that time the War Office needed accommodation for the junior branch of its newly formed Royal Military College, a senior branch having already been established in Wycombe. A rent of £129 a year was agreed, and after various repairs and alterations had been made, the first batch of sixteen cadets moved in on 17th May 1802.

The College was the brainchild of a remarkable officer, Colonel (later Major-General) John Le Marchant. Its numbers eventually grew to over 400 and several other properties in Marlow were needed to house it. (Cromwell House, High Street; Marlow Place, Station Road and Albion House, West Street.)

The college had:

100 places for sons of officers killed in action

80 places (£40p.a.) for sons of serving officers

60 places (£90p.a.) for Royal Artillery Cadets

60 places (£90p.a.) for boys of the East India Company.

There exists a coloured engraving showing the cadets drawn up for inspection, probably by the Army's commander-in-chief, Frederick Duke of York, who is known to have visited the College in 1808. There are also two small watercolours

showing ways in which the boys spent their few leisure hours e.g. fishing.

Not hinted at in these bucolic scenes was a rowdier side of cadet behaviour. There were reports of stone-throwing at professors, insulting women in the town, debts to shopkeepers, and drunkenness. In 1804, an attempted mutiny was thwarted by vigilant guards; the culprits, we are told, suffered expulsion after having their swords broken over their heads.

College life was fairly rigorous, each day starting with a parade and inspection at 6am. At 6.30am there were prayers, followed by two hours of study. Not until 9am did the cadets get their breakfast, after which they studied again from 10am to noon. Then came “fencing, riding, swimming and the sabre”. Dinner was at 2pm; then it was study until 5.30pm when there was an hour of military exercises. At 8.30pm they had supper, followed by prayers and “the retreat” at 9pm.

There must have been mixed feeling among the people of Marlow when, in 1812/13, the College moved its permanent quarters to Sandhurst. If cadet discipline had been a problem, then the presence in the town of the officers and professors did a great deal for its social life. One young lady in particular lost her heart to a distinguished academic and eventually married him. He was the Rev Godfrey Faussett who was to become Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford; she was Sarah Wethered, eldest daughter of Thomas Wethered the brewer. Before leaving Marlow, the cadets presented Thomas

with a handsome silver salver, but the reason for the gift is not known.

The Wethered Years

By his will, Stephen Remnant directed that the house be sold and it was put on the market, along with the Albion House Boarding School (almost directly opposite Remnantz and now known as the Shelley Cottages) and other properties, in May 1803. In the event it went to members of Remnant's own family, and it was from his great-grandson, John Richard Groves, that Thomas Wethered bought it in 1825. With its stables, kitchen garden and six-acre field, it cost him £2,000.

Thomas immediately set about remodelling it, taking down the west wing and greatly reducing the size of the second floor.

He introduced bay windows on the street and garden sides, and to accommodate his new drawing room, built a 16-foot extension to the west. (The bricks saved from these alterations are said to have been used to enlarge his brewhouse.) An amusing result of the family's move to Remnantz was that Thomas was no longer listed as "brewer" in the local directories but as "gentleman". By then his brewery had become Marlow's main industry and source of employment, as it was to remain well into the 20th century.

The remodelling improved the appearance of the house, giving it an elegance lacking in the rather fortress-like building seen in a painting of earlier date. Internally, it

produced a mixture of styles; the front hall and stairwell being 18th Century rococo and the Regency drawing room reflecting the taste of Thomas's day.

Mouldings above the stairwell show musical instruments alternating with flags and weapons representing "the arts of peace and war".

The much loved eldest son of Thomas and Sarah Wethered – another Thomas - had died from "the locked jaw" or tetanus in 1815, so it was their second son, Owen, who became his father's heir. (His son, Thomas Owen Wethered, was to become Marlow's last M.P.) Owen, with his younger brother Lawrence William, carried on the brewing business after their father's death in 1849.

Outwardly, Remnantz has changed little since Thomas's time although the east wing was extended in the early 1900s, a loggia overlooking the lawn was added in the 1950s, the stables were converted to apartments in the 1980s, and the six-acre field was developed in the 1990s. Six generations of Wethereds lived in the house from 1825 to 2007, when it was sold after the death of Anthony Wethered.

The drawing of the south elevation of the house is by John Beadle.

This leaflet, originally written by Anthony Wethered, and with later additions by Hazel Malpass, was produced by the Local History Group of The Marlow Society. Feb 2009.

