

heritage open days



MARLOW PLACE

THE HISTORY

Over the years a great deal has been written about Marlow Place. Since many of the original eighteenth century documents have been lost, and others require very careful interpretation, much of this early writing is speculative leading to some misunderstandings. This pamphlet is therefore based on the latest research contained in a longer and more detailed article on the Marlow History section of the Marlow Society website. This incorporates the most recent understanding of the history as well as including a list of detailed references.

It seems likely that the house was built for Alicia, sometimes known as Alice, Borlase, later Lady Wallop, the mother of John Wallop 1st Viscount Lymington (1720 – 1743) and 1st Earl of Portsmouth (1743 – 1762). When her uncle died in 1681 she and her sisters became the heiresses of their branch of the Borlase family. As both her sisters were married, it seems probable that Alice inherited the family home in Great Marlow including the land on which Marlow Place now stands. Married in 1683, she was widowed in 1694, and could have built Marlow Place at any point after that. She was, however, first documented as living in

Great Marlow in 1721, and was still here twenty years later.

In 1731 she made a will leaving her "Capital Mansion" in Great Marlow to her son, John, although the mechanism for doing so would seem strange to modern eyes. Alicia died in 1744 at the age of eighty-six. What happened to the ownership of Marlow Place at this point is unclear. It may have been sold or it may have been retained by the family.

In 1720 Alicia's son, John, employed Thomas Archer to rebuild Hurstbourne Park in Hampshire as a grand Palladian mansion. Based on this connection, and architectural details, it appears likely that Archer also designed this High Baroque house in Great Marlow for Lady Wallop. One of the ground floor bricks has the date 1731 inscribed by a mason, but this may be a repair date. The house bears some resemblance to Chettle House in Dorset, designed by Archer in 1710, so may have been built before Hurstbourne Park.

Rumours have persisted that George II, while Prince of Wales, and his son Frederick, Prince of Wales, were in the habit of visiting the house. There are intriguing links between the Wallops and the Hanoverian royal family. Alicia's daughter, Mary, was for many years lady-in-waiting to Princess Anne, a daughter of George II. Her son, John, was a prominent Whig politician, therefore of the Prince of Wales's party, and only a few years younger than the Prince.

By 1772 the house was being offered for rent and the London contact was Robert Taylor, the architect who had designed Harleyford for William Clayton. This might suggest that the Claytons owned it but there is no evidence of that in the Clayton deeds. In the early 1790s much property in the town was sold to Thomas Williams, 'The Copper King', of Temple House. Either then or soon after, the Williams family probably acquired Marlow Place since his son, Owen Williams, and his family were living in the house in 1795 when his son, Thomas Peers Williams, was born and in 1796 when he was first elected as a Member of Parliament.

The junior branch of the Royal Military College was established at 'Remnantz' in West Street in 1802. For the next ten years, Marlow Place was used as a boarding house for the junior cadets, who are said to have sent semaphore signals from its roof to fellow cadets in Remnantz. Uniform buttons marked "R. Mil. Coll. Junior Dept." have been found in the garden. In 1811, when the college moved to Sandhurst, the house was re-let.

Throughout the 19th century the house had many tenants, some of them titled families who wanted an out-of-town residence for the Season, several who used the building as a school. Notable among these was Mr Matthews of the Prospect House Academy, a school for boys said to be over 100 years old, which had prospered at the eastern end of Chapel Street. Unfortunately, its removal to larger premises proved its undoing. In the 1890s the brother-in-law of Owen Williams lived there for several years until his early death.

William Niven F.S.A, J.P., the grandfather of the actor David Niven, was the tenant from 1901, and was responsible for its appearance in the *Architectural Review* and *Country Life*. In 1921, the year before his death, he purchased the house from the Williams family, and his widow lived there until 1923, when the property was purchased by J H Watts J.P. After the death of his widow in 1934 the house stood empty. In 1937 permission was given to demolish it in favour of a new cinema but eventually, only the stable block, which was much older than the house, was knocked down, and the house survived with the cinema next door to the west. During WWII, it was a 'shadow' factory. In the 1950s it was purchased by the Jackson family, who owned Jackson's Millboard Company of Bourne End, and they received a grant of £5,000 from the Ministry of Works to restore the building. It then became a girls 'finishing' school in the 1950s and 60s before being for sale again in 1967. At present it has yet another use, as a suite of offices.

THE HOUSE



Marlow Place is a Grade one listed building. It was probably designed by the architect Thomas Archer (1668 – 1743), son of a wealthy family, who had studied in Rome, and was much favoured by the Whig aristocracy. It appears that Marlow Place was designed as an 18th century dowry house – a residence for one person, her guests and a retinue of servants. The rooms on the main floor are very grand, eminently suitable for entertaining, whereas those on the other floors are much smaller.



The house has five storeys: a brick-floored deep basement which originally housed the coal store, wine cellar and food storage; ground floor kitchen and service quarters, with an entrance to a wood panelled hall; the main reception rooms on the *piano nobile*, a bedroom floor, and a huge cruciform attic whose only original windows are the four semi-circular lights in the centre of each pediment. It is seven bays wide and six bays deep. Each side has four large pilasters supporting an architrave which runs right

round the house, the brickwork of these being particularly fine. The central pairs of pilasters are surmounted by a cornice and pediment in stone. These pilasters originally had large stone urns above them.

The third floor contains a suite of lofty rooms, originally reached by flights of steps to two imposing entrances. On the north front a flight of tapering stone steps leads to a large reception room between the two main bedrooms. On the south front a pair of stairways led to a balcony entrance to the main saloon. A set of double doors links these two rooms. The saloon contains a marble floor and elegant plasterwork on both walls and ceiling. To the east of it is the dining-room, and to the west a parlour. The main rooms, except for the saloon, are wood-panelled from chair rail to cornice with Baltic pine. All the windows have shutters and window seats. Several rooms, notably the ground-floor hallway and the room at the south-west corner of the fourth floor known as the nursery, contain oak panelling reused, possibly from the previous house on the site.

It is not possible now to say which was the principal entrance, although at one time the driveway to the house ran from the High Street, approximately where Institute Road is now. A Victorian photograph shows the drive coming in from the north, but dividing and running round both sides of the house. It looks suspiciously as though the ground-floor entrance on the south, with its panelled walls, chequerboard floor and Greek columns was the

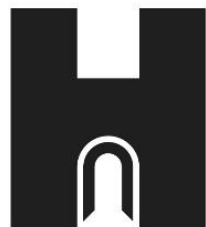


everyday entrance. Between the house and the High Street, was the stable block, with its own cobbled entrance, still visible from the High Street.

The eight fourth-storey rooms are both smaller and lower. In one is a pair of full-length glass-fronted armoires with original plasterwork pediments, which were originally in the saloon. Its fireplace contains tiles showing pictures of children's games from the early part of the 19th century, so it was known as the nursery. There were two winding staircases, referred to, for obvious reasons, as 'snail stairs', going from basement to roof, on either side of the reception room. An attic storey with steeply sloping ceilings and exposed rafters is squeezed in under the roof,



Many alterations have been made to the house over the years. The south front balcony was covered by a Victorian conservatory, later removed. The flights of steps on the south side, much worn, were removed in about 1970. Chimney pieces were added to the main rooms in about 1770, with a particularly elegant one in the saloon. The stone vases which capped the pilasters have vanished. The site was originally completely surrounded on the south by a 10-foot-high brick wall with, for many years, only an inset wooden door. During the 20th century, part of this wall was lowered and the door replaced with the splendid wrought iron gates (Grade II listed) which are still in place. The stables on the west side, which were not in the same style as the house, were removed in 1937. Large parts of the garden, which had included a tennis court in Victorian times, were sold for housing, and the remainder has been converted to a car park.



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