



**Private Palaces: The Mansions of the Marlboroughs**  
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This is the tale of two extraordinary people, a **husband-and-wife** team who brilliantly navigated the huge political changes through the reigns of Charles II, through James II and William and Mary to Queen Anne and George I, remaining in and out of power, amassing a vast personal fortune, and leaving behind what is perhaps the largest private house in Britain. **Blenheim Palace** elicits superlatives however you look at it. At a cost of a quarter of a million pounds it was in today's money perhaps the most expensive house ever built in the British Isles. It covers seven acres and its south front sports a 30-ton statue of Louis XIV who Marlborough spent his life fighting. The **great hall** is 67ft high and **the long gallery** is 183 ft long, quite honestly it is hard to know where to stop!

My lectures this year have been taking a look at four great aristocratic families and their estates. In my first lecture I told the remarkable story of the **Boleyns**, a dynasty that rose in four generations from Norfolk gentry to produce a queen of England. Their rise was founded on money from the city of London but consolidated through a series of spectacular aristocratic marriages that brought huge wealth, and influence.

The case of the **Cecils**, covered in my second lecture was entirely different. Without the blood to marry into great wealth, two brilliant men, father and son, systematically invested the fruits of royal service in land. They bought, built, amassed and consolidated. On the strength of their many offices, reinforced by palpable royal favour, they borrowed to buy still more. Both William and Robert Cecil looked to the future - they were dynasty building, creating houses and estates that have endured for 400 years.

The approach to building was different too. The Boleyns were eager to stress their ancient lineage, their aristocratic descent. Owning property was dynastic affirmation. They wanted their houses to look old, any modernisation was carefully judged to bring modern comforts within a pre-existing structure. The Cecils came from much more humble stock - a fact that their opponents and detractors were keen to point out. The family was out to establish itself, not only through architecture but through the totality of an estate with a capital mansion at its heart. Those mansions made references to the feudal obligations of a landowner but were essentially modern houses built by new men.

My third family, the Scotts, Dukes of **Monmouth** and Buccleuch, owed their fortune to the fact that James, Duke of Monmouth was the adored illegitimate son of King Charles II who married a Scottish heiress. Quite unlike the Boleyns and the Cecils what was important to them was their power base in London, not an estate in the country. The life of the Monmouths was urban and the Duke's engagement in politics made their London residence into a model of a political house central to the mechanics of national power.

Tonight, we move on to the Churchill family. **John Churchill**, who became the first Duke of Marlborough, and commissioned Blenheim Palace, was the son of Sir Winston Churchill a royalist cavalry officer. He was born in 1650, the year after the execution of Charles I and, after a stint in Ireland during the republic, he went to St. Paul's school in London and then entered the household

of Charles II brother, James Duke of York as a page. John was extremely handsome and very charming and in the licentious atmosphere of Charles II court had an affair with Barbara Villiers (after 1670 the Duchess of Cleveland), a mistress of the King's. The details of this are not fully documented but the Duchess gave Churchill some £5,000 which he sensibly invested to give himself an annual income of some £600 a year, thus forming the basis of his later fortune.

Although his lustful antics may have annoyed Charles II, the Duke of York saw in Churchill, not only a charming and intelligent courtier, but the makings of a very capable soldier and diplomat. In the early 1670s he was fighting on the continent at the side of the Duke of Monmouth, who of course, was the subject of my last lecture. Personal bravery and strategic good sense made him stand out amongst his fellow officers.

In 1674 Churchill returned to London and was made a Gentleman of the Duke of York's Bedchamber. This put him in constant and intimate contact with the king's brother, who we must remember was, in the absence of an heir to Charles II, next in line to the throne. **His first house** was on Jermyn Street; it's no longer there, but you will remember from my last lecture that the whole of the St James's square area was occupied by supporters of the Duke, and Churchill's house was thus in an enclave of Tory supporters of the Crown.

It was in this period that Churchill met one of the Duchess of York's ladies in waiting, the fifteen-year-old **Sarah Jennings**. The path for Churchill to marry her was opened up by Sarah's brother's death and her inheritance of family lands worth £1,500 a year. The couple married in 1677. Sarah and John Churchill were financially secure because in addition to annuities from his investments and his army pay John had a salary as master of the Duke's wardrobe. Sarah had a pension of £300 a year as a former maid of honour to the duchess and the income from her estates at Sandridge, at St Albans, Hertfordshire, and at Agney in Kent. They kept seven servants and a coach and horses in their house in Jermyn Street and, no doubt cut a dash around the west end.

In my last lecture I explained the deep political crisis occasioned by the Duke of York's conversion to Catholicism and the split in parliament between those who wanted to exclude him from the throne (Whigs) and those who wanted to maintain the hereditary principle at all costs (Tories). The exclusion crisis reached a peak with the banishment of the Duke of York from London, first to the Low Countries and then to Scotland. Between November 1679 and March 1682 James and his duchess Mary Beatrice lived in Edinburgh at **Holyrood** with a short break in England in 1680. During this time Churchill was the Duke's closest advisor and companion, at his right hand at Holyrood and shuttling back and forth to London. At first Sarah was not with him, but in due course she joined him in a large apartment at Holyrood.

During the republic, Cromwell had built a barrack block over the entrance front of the Holyroodhouse signalling its new use as the Edinburgh headquarters of the army. In 1661 Scottish Privy Council smartened the palace up, and in 1663, there was some thought that it might be remodelled, but nothing happened until, in 1670, it was decided to almost completely rebuild it.

What was built between 1671 and 1679 was no normal palace. At the time it seemed very unlikely that Charles II would ever visit Edinburgh let alone live there but Holyroodhouse was a visible symbol of the restored Stuart dynasty and an expression of the status of Edinburgh as a national capital. Its rebuilding was therefore symbolically important as well as being necessary to serve the practical needs of the King's Commissioner to Parliament, various government officials and the Scottish Privy Council.

The prime mover was John Maitland, earl, and later Duke of Lauderdale, the brutal, boisterous, red-haired Scot who Charles appointed Secretary of State for Scotland in 1660. Lauderdale must have

been responsible for suggesting to the king that Sir William Bruce be the architect. Bruce was another royalist who had spent some of the 1650s touring Europe studying architecture.

The new palace, like the old, was arranged round a courtyard. **Its entrance front**, a brilliantly conceived blend of old and new. The north tower had contained the lodgings of Mary Queen of Scots and weighed heavy with national symbolism. Bruce retained this and built a matching wing to the south, between the two was a lower screen wall containing a swaggering entrance portal framed by coupled Doric columns and crowned by a cupola and vast coat of arms. This front, that still greets visitors at the bottom of the Royal Mile, is both venerable and modern, militaristic and gracious, fashionable and romantic – designed to present the modern face of an ancient dynasty.

The Duke's arrival at Holyrood coincided with the fall of Lauderdale and, for three years after 1679 Holyroodhouse became a fully working palace where power and display, architecture and etiquette melded together in perhaps the way the Privy Council had originally intended. James and his household of more than 100 made a big impact on Edinburgh and James did everything to seem calm, reasonable and gracious. He held drawing rooms at the palace, attended the Privy Council, played golf and encouraged plays. Importantly during the eight months that 21-year-old Sarah Churchill spent at Holyrood she renewed her acquaintance with the duke's sixteen-year-old daughter, Princess Anne, a relationship that became fundamental to her life.

In 1682 James Duke of York obtained permission to return to England and he and the Churchills joined Charles II court at Windsor. **The castle** had been spectacularly rebuilt to designs by High May and decorated with a great mural cycle by Antonio Verrio. Here the next important event in the lives of the Churchills took place. Sarah was made one of the bedchamber women to Princess Anne and her husband was created Lord Churchill. In their respective positions they were closely involved in the princess's marriage to Prince George of Denmark and when Anne's household was established Sarah was given the key post of groom of the stool with a salary of £400 a year. John now had balanced his close support of the Catholic Duke of York with the key role in the household of the Protestant Princess.

It was time to move house. The townhouse in Jermyn Street was given up and the couple moved into an apartment in St. James's Palace and then soon after to a much larger and more prestigious apartment close to Princess Anne's in Whitehall Palace itself. There, on 28 February 1684, Sarah gave birth to a daughter, Anne, named in honour of the princess, who was the child's godmother. Later that year they acquired their first country house. Sarah bought out her sister's share in the Jenyns estate at Sandridge and Holywell for £11,000, the estate included Holywell House, a Tudor mansion on the south of St Albans at the bottom of the hill below the Abbey.

It was not ideal. It was modest sized; it was unmodernised, and it faced a busy public highway. Yet it was in an excellent location close to London and set in fine grounds. The **Churchill's first** step was to have the road re-aligned, and a comparison between maps before and after show that the highway in front of the house was **diverted in a large** arc round its front. A measure of privacy guaranteed, the Churchills appointed their architect. **They chose** a then completely unknown architectural talent, John Talman. Later to snatch the job of completing Hampton Court from under the nose of his then boss Sir Christopher Wren, Talman became the leading country house architect of the 1680s and 90s especially for the Whig landowners. But in 1686 he had yet to secure a major job or a major patron.

Remodelling Holywell House had a contract sum of £1,675 for which a new north facing block of rooms would be built and the Tudor wing behind renovated. **The earliest** illustrations of the new block are after it had been altered by later owners. **The house** you see here has been rendered, sash windows inserted, a porch added and in all likelihood the dormers changed. Yet what we see is a typically fashionable house of the 1670s – astylar – that is to say without columns on the front,

restrained and modest, not unlike the facades of the house built for the **Duke of Monmouth** which I spoke about last time, or the restrained houses of many of Charles II's courtiers. The one flourish is in the pediment and here we start perhaps to see some of the taste of Lord Churchill, for carved, probably by one of the king's masons, was a large and elaborate achievement of arms referencing his military accomplishments and appointments.

This house was the principal private residence of the Churchills through the 1690s when, after the Glorious Revolution, and under King William III, they were out of favour at court. More work was commissioned, but from a local builder and not a named architect. This included the construction of a 'new great room'. The eight years Sarah and John spent living at Holywell were dominated by what were described as 'continual alterations' and intensive work on designing the gardens. Writing to the Lord Treasurer John said of Holywell 'you could not avoid taking delight in the work of your own hands, for this garden is really a charming thing'.

But let me return briefly to the politics because they are complicated and important. Although Churchill was one of James Duke of York's closest advisors, a member of his household, and one of the leading military commanders, his loyalty to him as king was compromised by the fact that he was a Catholic. Although the fiercely Anglican Churchill brutally put down the Duke of Monmouth rebellion, defeating his former commander in chief and his ramshackle army, when it came to the crisis of 1687-8, he could not align himself with James II Catholic aspirations. Increasingly concerned about his family's future he put his St Albans estates into Trust to protect it from potential seizure by the king. In the end he was one of the key commanders who defected to join William III and his invading troops bringing an end to his long-time master's reign.

At First Churchill's relationship with the new joint monarchs, William and Mary, was good. He was put in charge of the army and was created earl of Marlborough and Wiltshire as well as being appointed to the Privy Council. But there were deep tensions, the Marlboroughs, as they now were, had Dutch rivals at court for both favour and military appointments. Tensions between Queen Mary and Princess Anne grew, and the countess of Marlborough inflamed them. But it was the earl's extremely unwise flirtations with his old friend James II that was the real problem. Exposed as corresponding with the exiled king Marlborough was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London and then excluded from court and side-lined in politics and the army. It was in this period that Marlborough, at Holywell, acquired his taste for building and gardening which we shall see came to dominate his later life.

A big change to the family fortunes came with the premature death from smallpox of Queen Mary. William now saw that his sister-in-law, Anne, would succeed him and that Anne's son, the five-year-old William, Duke of Gloucester, would be England's future king. In October 1695 William offered Anne **St. James's Palace** as her principal residence where she would live as 'if she were a crowned head'. William of Gloucester was given the Order of the Garter, his own household and a private residence. Sarah, Anne's closest friend, was now in a position to rehabilitate her husband. William was shrewd enough to realise that, whether he liked it or not, the Marlboroughs would be dominant at court in the next reign, and they thus moved into St. James's Palace - this time into the largest and most prodigious of all the courtier lodgings.

Over the following two years Marlborough gradually won back the trust of the King and in June 1698, William restored Marlborough to favour appointing him to the privy council, making him a cabinet minister, master of the horse, and, most significantly, governor of Princess Anne's young son, the now eight-year-old duke of Gloucester. The following month, when William left for Holland, he appointed Marlborough one of the regents in his absence.

In 1701 came the first of two events that would shape the remainder of the Marlboroughs' lives. After the death of the childless Hapsburg king, Charles II of Spain, and competition as to who would inherit



the vast estates of the Hapsburg Empire, England went to war against France and Spain to prevent them uniting under the French crown. This was vital to prevent Louis XIV from reversing the revolution of 1688, reinstating James II, and imposing Catholicism on Britain. The War of the Spanish Succession, which lasted between 1701 and 1714, dominated Europe and was to become the making of Marlborough.

The following year came the second event to change the lives of the earl and countess for, in 1702, William III died, and Anne became queen. A torrent of honours fell upon the Marlboroughs. The posts Sarah had while Anne was Princess, were now made sovereign appointments and so she became mistress of the robes and groom of the stole. She also became keeper of the privy purse meaning that the three most powerful court posts were in her hands. Sarah was also appointed Ranger of Windsor Park. Her total salary from these posts was over £6,000 a year.

Meanwhile Anne made Marlborough a knight of the Garter and 'Captain-General of her majesty's land forces and commander-in-chief of forces to be employed in Holland in conjunction with troops of the allies'. A few days later he was made master-general of the ordnance. The post of commander in chief alone attracted a salary of £10,000 a year, and that was without the many perks that accompanied the post. After his first season of campaigning in the Spanish War of Succession Marlborough had won some modest victories and on returning to London in December 1702 the Queen promoted him to the Dukedom of Marlborough and awarded him a pension of £5,000 a year for her lifetime. In short, in the first year of the new reign, the Duke and Duchess as they now were, cleaned up.

Now let's return to the architecture because Sarah's appointment as Ranger at Windsor requires some explanation. As Princess, Anne had spent much time at Windsor Castle living at first in the castle and then later in a succession of large houses in the **castle's shadow**. The great attraction of Windsor was the hunting and the fact that her son, the Duke of Gloucester, was schooled at Eton nearby. Even after the death of her son aged only 11, and after ascending the throne, Anne liked to stay in what was known as the garden house to the south of the castle walls. Sarah therefore required somewhere to stay near the Castle and the post of Ranger came with a large lodge in the great park. Now called **Cumberland Lodge**, it had been built in the 1650s and improved in both the reigns of Charles II and William III. What the Marlboroughs found there did not please them. Immediately they commissioned extensive remodelling which was to cost over £2,500 and was executed by the royal Office of Works under Sir Christopher Wren – but probably actually undertaken by Nicholas Hawksmoor and supervised personally by Sarah, her husband fighting the French abroad.

A view of the house in the early 1750s shows a typical house of the late 1650s with a flat roof with a ballustraded viewing platform. Was the central section of seven bays the original house and did Sarah add the three-bay side wings? Or was Sarah's addition the pavilions that **are shown** on a plan of c.1712. Frustratingly we don't know. But we do know about her taste in architecture:

She believed in utility, much later condemning Vanbrugh's great bridge at Blenheim as 'ridiculous' and writing to her niece that she had never been fond of 'magnificent things'. She was to advise her grandson's tutor 'As to architecture I think it will be no use to Charles or John no more than music; which are all things proper for people that have time upon their hands and like passing it in idleness rather than in what will be profitable'. 'Poets, painters and builders', she wrote, 'have very high flights, but they must be kept down'. She was to instruct the architect Roger Morris, at her house at Wimbledon, which I will mention later, to have things 'plain and clean from a piece of wainscot to a lady's face'. Her tastes were for simplicity and utility. **A plan of Windsor** lodge from 1748 shows a that the house was indeed relatively modest and that there she had what she described as 'everything convenient and without trouble'.

Now we come to an important point - The Duke and Duchess lived in the largest apartment in St. James's palace immediately adjacent to the queen, they had a modest house and estates in St. Albans and the use of the great lodge at Windsor. All these residences were Sarah's, owned or occupied either through inheritance or through posts she held, in the case of the Rangership, for life. The Duke was absolutely occupied by the war and apart from his period of exile from court in the early 1690s when he had loved to garden hardly saw his wife and was disengaged from her building projects. There was no great country house to visit and no rolling acres to manage.

In my previous lectures we saw how royal favour was critical in boosting the architectural fortunes of the Boleyns, Cecils and the Monmouths, the route to architectural greatness for John Churchill was, despite appearances slightly different. The emergence of the political parties of Whigs and Tories during the exclusion crisis, and the settlement at the Glorious Revolution of 1688, decisively moved the focus of power away from court to Parliament. The queen was important because she appointed ministers, but those ministers had to have the support of Parliament without which they would be impotent.

Marlborough was a courtier, diplomat and soldier not a politician, and his political powerbase was his intimate friendship with the taciturn financial genius **Sidney Godolphin**, a veteran of the Treasury, and master of the national finances. Like John Churchill, Godolphin, who had risen to power and influence in the reign of James II, entered the orbit of Princess Anne and, at her accession, the 57-year-old politician became Lord High Treasurer and the most powerful politician in England. Marlborough and Godolphin were effectively the heads of a ministry that favoured war with France and a strategy of surrounding the French army on all fronts, dividing it, and crushing Louis XIV. To stay in power, they needed to navigate the extremely complex politics of the house of commons dominated by the warring Whigs and Tories. The politics were extremely complex and I'm not going into them tonight but, to continue to fund the cripplingly expensive war, that was to cost some £40m during the eight years of their ministry, Marlborough and Godolphin needed to present the war as a heroic national struggle against the most powerful army in the world, a struggle led by a national hero, the scourge of Louis XIV – The Duke of Marlborough.

After his very first season in the **field a medal** was struck commemorating Marlborough's modest successes. A large number were produced and circulated. These medals contained an iconographical conundrum. Previous monarchs, Charles II, James II and William III had been commanders in chief of the armies and medals celebrated the monarch. Anne, a woman was not and depicting Marlborough in any way as equal or greater than the monarch was impossible. The problem became much more complicated when in **August 1704 Marlborough** led the Grand Alliance to victory at Blenheim, a military triumph which was so shattering that Louis XIV banned any mention of it. This led to, led to a series of other spectacular wins – at Ramillies, Lille, Malpaquet and Bouchain – in fact Marlborough was never beaten at a major battle in the field. Every victory became an excuse for a celebration...

But the first and greatest Victory was Blenheim and before the echoes of the church bells ringing in celebration had died out discussions were underway about how to commemorate it. One was for a new London square to be laid out and named after the Duke with an elaborate fountain in the middle bearing figures of him and the queen; but it was impossible to erect a monument that seemingly put subject and monarch on the same level. **The next idea** was a huge obelisk celebrating the battle and ascribing the victory to the queen. A drawing in the hand of Nicholas Hawksmoor shows the idea with inscriptions to the queen's glory.

Neither came to pass and in the end, what was done was a grant to the Duke of one of the oldest and most prestigious royal estates in England, the **ancient palace** and park of Woodstock. A favourite of the Tudors and used by the early Stuarts it had fallen out of use as a royal residence after the Restoration, but the large medieval house still stood within a stunning walled landscape.

James Legard 's research has recently demonstrated that this was no spontaneous gift from the queen, it was in fact a carefully orchestrated transfer of land masterminded by Marlborough and his political allies and expertly executed by Godolphin.

After all the man was a Duke, the most powerful person in the kingdom basking in royal, political and popular adulation - and he had no estate. His wife's houses were nice to have but a man of his status needed lands and a house suitable to his stature. This was not a new concept. Henry VIII wanted Cardinal Wolsey to have a magnificent house at Hampton Court because it reflected on the greatness of his servant and reflected the power of the nation to foreign ambassadors. Queen Elizabeth was more than happy for Cecil to build and own Theobalds for precisely the same reason. Marlborough needed to be able to hold his head up high amongst the powerbrokers of Europe and Woodstock would allow him to do this.

The grant of Woodstock in April 1705 was both Marlborough capitalising on the swell of adulation flowing from the victory at Blenheim to provide for himself an estate but also the perpetuation of the heroic myth that was being spun round him to emphasise the merits of the war and its chief protagonist. Crucially this could not be a personal gift, that would have alienated the very support in parliament that was vital for continuing the war, but it was what Marlborough described as a 'royal and national monument'.

At this stage all that was public was the gift of the estate, but it seems that even before this was made Marlborough was in conversation with **Sir John Vanbrugh**, Wren's deputy at the royal office of works. We don't have time to cover Vanbrugh's career tonight, but his name is sufficiently well known to state that he moved from being a merchant and a soldier to a playwright, a herald and then an architect. His lucky break came with the commission to design for **Lord Carlisle** Castle Howard in Yorkshire in 1699, surely the most spectacular architectural debut in English history. It was perhaps through his membership of the exclusive Kit kat Club, where he and Carlisle were members, that Vanbrugh got the commission to design Blenheim Palace from Marlborough who was another member.

As this was to be a public building it was first assumed that it would be built by the royal office of works and Sir Christopher Wren was sent to Woodstock and estimated that a new house there would cost £100,000. But Wren was not to be the architect; Vanbrugh had been chosen, almost certainly on the strength of his designs for Castle Howard and Godolphin told him that Wren's £100,000 would be the budget. A model was made and shown to the queen; approved, it was set up at Kensington Palace where refinements were made to it as the design developed. Soon a delegation of Marlborough's friends, led by Lord Carlisle **were visiting** the newly dug foundations. A few days later Godolphin inspected the works with the duchess as his guide.

Not long after it had started, as the cost started to mount up, Godolphin was writing to the duchess who was increasingly concerned about the megalomaniac nature of the project stating that Marlborough thought the magnificence of the house was 'not only proper but necessary and that it should be of a suitable scale appropriate to 'a memorial set up for the public upon so remarkable occasion'. It was Marlborough who justified the house as a public monument rather than a private vanity project, but his victory at the battle of Ramillies in 1706, which triggered the collapse of the French war effort in the former Spanish Netherlands, led to a formal recognition in the Commons that not only the estate, but a vast mansion built in it were to be gift of the queen. Secure now in the knowledge that parliamentary cash was behind the project Vanbrugh was ordered to **improve** the design. If we look at the first design for the south front, and that which was actually built, we can see a building vastly grander – **a change** in design dated by James Legard to the summer of 1707 – the very moment when Parliament voted cash for the house.

The grant of cash after the battle of Ramillies began a pattern of victory and reward that took place during his successful campaigns. After each success he was able to claim more money for Blenheim peaking at a sum over £40,000 after his last great victory at Malplaquet. His victories were great achievements and the payments great rewards. Each success was celebrated in London and Marlborough became a popular hero celebrated in everything from print to pottery. With rock solid royal support and popular adulation, the Duke and his project were both on secure foundations.

Marlborough, being in the field, was of course not able to supervise **the house** but wrote from his tent to the duchess that it should be advanced as quickly as possible as he wanted to live in it before he died. Sarah therefore took over the management of the project. She was a brilliant businesswoman who had managed the queen's privy purse with discipline: project management came naturally to her and she ruled the workmen and the architect with rods of steel. A stream of letters posted almost every day kept the great general in touch with developments on site. Added to his wife's reports came missives, plans and budgets from Vanbrugh and dispassionate progress reports from Godolphin. In 1706 Marlborough wrote from his camp 'For myself I could have agreed with you in wishing the house had been lesser, so that it might have been sooner finished; but as it will be a monument of the queen's favour, and approbation of my services to posterity, I can't disapprove of the model'.

Just how much did the house represent the Duke's taste? We know that it was not the Duchess's taste for she said so often and firmly. If we turn back to his time in Scotland John would have known well the triumphal **entrance to Holyrood** designed by Bruce, one of the first manifestations in the British Isles of the triumphalist style that Vanbrugh was to adopt. The style was also used by Hugh May at Windsor Castle in the spectacular suite of rooms designed for Charles II. At Holywell a modest but **prominent military** achievement was carved into the tympanum of his house showing that before Vanbrugh began to design the military trophies at Blenheim the Duke's taste was for just **such things**.

Just as the Marlboroughs rose to the highest favour through the relationship between Anne and Sarah, so they fell. Sarah, witty, intelligent, vivacious and ambitious started to tire of the queen's cloying affection and, as Sarah turned against her mistress, so the queen realised that she could do without her. From 1708 the relationship began to crumble and one of the last signs of favour, perhaps even an attempt at revitalising the relationship Anne gave Sarah a townhouse.

**Str. James's** palace had become the headquarters of the monarchy after Whitehall had burnt down towards the end of William III's reign. Under Queen Anne the palace became framed by two extremely large mansions representing the political partnership between the monarch and her ministers. To the west of the palace was Godolphin House built on a slither of St. James's Park on the west side of the stable yard. Here the Lord Treasurer built a substantial brick pile of eleven bays and three stories with an extensive garden that fronted the park. It is not known who designed this although Godolphin had sought the help of Robert Hooke for his lodgings at Whitehall. In this handsome mansion Godolphin often presided over meetings of the Treasury.

[watercolour of 1825 of Godolphin House, St. James's. By 1748 two large bay windows had been added to its southern elevation. In 1825 the house was demolished and replaced by York House, subsequently renamed Stafford House and now Lancaster House].

On the east side of the palace was land granted to The Duchess of Marlborough. The site had been given by the queen to Sarah Churchill on a fifty-year lease in the summer of 1708 together with a loan of over 20,000 to build a house on it. The Duke was sceptical that the four and a half acres of the old palace friary would be large enough but, in 1609, after obtaining an additional two acres of former royal garden, Sarah commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to design a house, seemingly with the assistance of his son, Christopher the younger. The Duke chipped in £7,000 of his own. The old



friary buildings were demolished and the building that survives as **Marlborough House** was begun. Since then, it has been extensively altered, but the relatively plain, brick, two-story mansion shown on **early prints** was completed in 1711 forming a pendant to Godolphin's house on the other side.

The duchess and Wren were careful to exploit its position close to St. James's, in particular to ensure that it had views across the royal gardens. But Marlborough House was no Blenheim, it reflected the simpler tastes of the Duchess. The employment of Wren was deliberately to exclude Vanbrugh with whom she had fallen out, and perhaps reflected the new position of the Marlboroughs on the fringes of power. But nevertheless Marlborough House, like Blenheim, was a shrine to the achievements of the great general. Conceived as a venue to host the Whigs and Tories to nurture their support for **Marlborough** the great stair up which visitors ascended was decorated by Louis Laguerre with vivid depictions of the battles of Blenheim, Ramillies and Malplaquet complete with grisly scenes of death and destruction. Marlborough was not depicted as a god like hero, but as a soldier amidst the carnage of war.

In January 1711, **Sarah was** stripped of all her offices and ordered to move out of her lodgings at St. James's into her new house which she did with considerable bad grace. By the end of the year the political tables had swung against Marlborough and the whole war effort was being painted as an exercise in lining the pockets of its political champions. It was revealed that Marlborough had been taking a 2.5% rake-off from the army bread contractor yielding him some £62,000 between 1702 and 1710. In December the queen sacked him as head of the army and when the commons reassembled in the new year the Tories voted his behaviour unwarranted and illegal. Sarah and John decided to go into exile.

As relations between the queen and her favourites deteriorated Marlborough had even greater reason to develop the narrative that Blenheim was a monument to national greatness and to the queen herself rather than merely a personal gift. **A painting**, never completed, by Sir Godfrey Kneller, of about 1710, appears to show the queen presenting a plan of Blenheim to the Duke, but in fact the Duke had asked that this painting, intended for the long gallery at the palace, should be entirely allegorical and that the queen's presentation should be to figures representing war and peace.

In an immensely revealing letter in the same period Vanbrugh lobbied the Treasury for more money for the building project. He wrote:

*“How well giving Blenheim that turn of a Public Monument had worked even with those who were likely to make the greatest exception to it: I resolved to spare no pains in cultivating that notion in general, and have found so good success in it, that I do not remember to have talked to any one body about it [...] that has not owned the Queen was right in what she had directed, and that her honour was at stake to see it completed.”*

So cynically both the Duke and his architect continued to play the national monument card at the point when it seemed as if Marlborough's favour was fading.

In August 1719, rehabilitated by George I and once again in a position of influence, the Duke and Duchess moved into Blenheim. It was still not finished, but it was inhabitable. John only enjoyed his palace for three years, dying at Windsor in 1722. There was a vast state funeral and Sarah was left Marlborough House, Blenheim and £20,000 a year. In addition, she still had Holywell and Windsor. In 1723 she bought the old royal manor at Wimbledon and **got the** architect Roger Morris to design her a plain and restrained retirement home. Many other properties were bought as an investment and when she died she left twenty-seven landed estates in twelve counties with a capital value of £4 million, an annual rent roll of £17,000, £250,000 in capital, and £12,500 in annuities.

She was determined to complete Blenheim as a memorial to her husband and had Hawksmoor design the triumphal arch at the entrance to the grounds in order to commemorate her determination to complete the palace. She also erected a 134-foot-high column of victory built between 1728 and 1731 - the first of its kind in Britain. It was crowned by Robert Pitt's lead statue of Marlborough. In 1733 on the completion of the chapel, a tomb designed by William Kent, and executed by Michael Rysbrack was erected. A black marble sarcophagus is flanked by figures of History and Fame, crushing Envy. Below are 7ft high statues of Marlborough and Sarah and their two sons and, of course, a relief showing Marshal Tallard surrendering to Marlborough in 1704.

Sarah died at Marlborough House as an old lady in 1744.

It is now time to conclude my series of lectures and, of course, there are many things I could say to draw together the loose ends. But tonight, I want to stop at what is perhaps a slightly surprising ending. I made the point in my first lecture that it was to women that the Boleyns owed their wealth. Their characters are anonymous today but we should not doubt their formidable influence in the family. The Cecils were also blessed with remarkable women, one heiress, but crucially Mildred, William Cecil's second wife, who was one of the most brilliant women of her age and who played a crucial role in partnership with William and in the education of Robert. Once again, in the story of the Monmouths, although the marriage with the Duke was not a success in conventional terms, Anne's income and taste was crucial to their lives. With the Duke away from home undertaking his military and other duties Anne supervised much of the building work at Monmouth House and Moor Park. Her subsequent activities at Dalkeith certainly show her in control of the design and furnishing of the house. And tonight these amazing women are joined by Sarah Churchill who was without doubt the agency through which her husband gained and maintained power, despite his own considerable talents.

**When we ask who** the real builders were of these vast estates and their palatial residences the answer has to be the women. Their husbands were away, fighting, working, plotting and sometimes playing. The domestic economy of these huge enterprises and their building and maintenance was organised by their wives. And, of course, crucially it was their money that paid for so much of what was achieved. So, this may be a strange conclusion to my series tonight, but it is an important one and one which I hope will help us look at these families, their estates, and their houses in a different way.

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