

MARSTON HOUSE

A STUDY OF ITS HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE

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In 1875, the Somersetshire Archaeological Society held its annual meeting at Frome. On 12 August the Society was entertained by its President, the Earl of Cork and Orrery, at Marston House in the parish of Marston Bigot, two and a half miles south-west of the town. Here members admired the 'choice pictures', and the 'curious and interesting objects' laid out in the billiard room. After partaking of an excellent luncheon, they 'strolled on the terrace in front of the house which commands a splendid view'.¹ The only reference to historical associations was a retelling of Lord Broghill's encounter with the Revd. Mr. Asberry, an episode which has entered local literature and received a fame out of all proportion to its interest or significance.² None of the learned and leisured gentlemen present were inspired to investigate Marston's past and so the matter has rested. The historians of 1875 had a great advantage over those of today. Then the estate and family papers were still intact. The Countess of Cork 'delighted in, and jealously guarded, the manuscript treasures of the family'.³ Now they are scattered, most being in the Houghton Library at Harvard and in the National Library of Ireland.

It is astonishing that a house of this size and quality, seat of the Boyles, amongst the most cultured of noble families, for more than 250 years, and situated in a superb position overlooking the Vale of Witham, should have been so little studied. The meagre accounts which have appeared in print are superficial and ill-informed. Collinson is the first topographical writer to mention the house. He gives a detailed description of the interior, but dismisses it historically as 'of modern construction', finding a builder in 'the grandfather of the present possessor', that is Charles, fourth Earl of Orrery (1674-1731). The Revd. Richard Warner uses the same phrase, but we are a generation on and he substitutes 'Father' for 'Grandfather'.⁴ Neale does not enter into its origins.⁵ The best known account of Marston House is that included in Kelly's *Directory of Somerset*. The meaningless statement therein that Marston House was 'an Italian structure' and its dictum that the mansion was 'almost entirely rebuilt' in 1857 have been all too widely accepted. Cuzner comes up with the familiar information about 'the grandfather of the present owner'.⁶ Amid all these grandparents of different generations, it is obvious that none of these writers had much idea of who built the house. In the absence of evidence, they pointed vaguely at dim ancestral shades. That a great mansion should be judged on the hearsay of directories and guide books is an appalling thought, yet so it has proved.

Credit for the first attempt to differentiate between the separate periods of construction must go to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Provisional List, compiled in 1959. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's account⁷ draws heavily on this survey, but he misquotes Kelly in saying that the *interior* of Marston House was rebuilt in 1857 whereas Kelly refers to the whole house. The aim of the present paper is to investigate the origins of Marston House and to trace its architectural history.

An earlier manor house of Marston was about half a mile from the present mansion at a spot still called Marston Moat. The moat is 20 ft wide and still filled with water. It surrounds an island 120 ft by 108 ft. The site, which is on exceedingly wet clay, has never been excavated. On Bowen's map of Somerset, published in 1760, it is labelled Roman Mount, a circumstance that excited the curiosity of Sir Richard Colt Hoare. He visited the Moat on 27 March, 1808 to comment sadly in an unpublished notebook: 'It is only the relic of a moated mansion house'.⁸

The moated house was probably the home of the Bigots, a branch of the great house of Norfolk, from before 1195 into the reign of Edward II.⁹ The house was probably damp and the site, unhealthy as, apart from lying low on the clay, the nearby River Frome formed

several lakes in the area.¹⁰ By the reign of Edward IV the manor was held by non-resident lords in the persons of the Stourtons, of Stourton, and the house was probably let as a farmhouse. A capital message or farm of Marston Bigot was the subject of legal action in 1581;¹¹ this could have been either the moat-site itself, or a house which succeeded it on a nearby site, perhaps the later Painter's Farm.

The earliest surviving survey of Marston Manor was copied by John, Earl of Orrery, in 1745. He found the original 'among a parcel of old papers in a garrett of lumber' at Marston House and tells us that it was in the handwriting of his great-great-grandfather, the Great Earl of Cork, which he had learnt to distinguish 'by ever finding it more laborious to read than any other hand I have almost ever met with'.¹² But there is internal evidence that the survey is much older than Lord Cork's purchase of Marston Manor which took place in 1641. For instance, there is mention of a fee-farm rent due to the Queen, who can only be Elizabeth I and she died in 1603. Mr. John Doddington, whose will was proved in 1604,¹³ is given as holding several leases in the manor; and there is a marginal comment by 'J. Orange', almost certainly identical with that Mr. Orringe who held land in the neighbouring tithing of West Woodlands in 1605.¹⁴

Unless Lord Orrery was mistaken about his ancestors' handwriting, which seems unlikely, Lord Cork merely copied an earlier valuation for sale. It obviously dated from the very end of the sixteenth century and is interesting in that there is no indication that Marston House was then standing. There is a single reference to 'four acres about the house', but it soon transpires that this is only a farmhouse. Mr. Doddington's coppices lie near Marston Farm and there are other 'demesnes lying near the farm house'. Moreover, East Hill, where the present house stands, is described as '46 acres inclosed at 5s. per acre'.

The first description of Marston House is contained in a letter from the Great Earl of Cork to his steward, John Whalley, dated 16 August 1641: 'I have . . . purchased from Sir John Epsley, the Mannor of Marston Bigott in Somersetshire, which hath a fair house, with orchards, gardens, and pleasant walks about it, well-wooded and watered, and 500 li lands a year'.¹⁵ The price was £10,350, part of which came from the dowry of Lady Margaret Howard, who married Cork's youngest son, Lord Broghill, on 27 January 1641. The property was for 'my son Broghill and his lady'.¹⁶ Kathleen M. Lynch says the estate consisted of 800 acres,¹⁷ but this estimate must exclude the 800 acres of Selwood Forest which lay within the manor and which Sir John Hippesley promised to secure to Lord Cork by Act of Parliament.¹⁸ The two figures combined come near to the 1615 acres owned by Lord Orrery in 1733, before he started to buy up surrounding property.¹⁹

Lord Cork evidently bought a new house in good order, a fact apparent from his description and from his voluminous diaries which record constant expenditure on Stalbridge Park in Dorset and on his Irish properties, but not a penny on Marston House. He was able to stay there on 8 October 1641 when he 'kept a Courte' in the house before receiving the attornment (acknowledgement as landlord) of his tenants at Frome.²⁰ The proof that this was the present house, or one standing on the same site, is contained in the memoirs of the Revd. Thomas Morrice, chaplain to the first Earl of Orrery, who, in relating the meeting between his master and the Revd Mr Asberry in 1649, tells us that 'the parish church of Marston is very near to the mansion house'.²¹ Until 1786, when Lord Cork obtained an Act of Parliament²² to demolish the church and rebuild it further down the hill, it did indeed stand cheek by jowl with the great house. Morrice was familiar with the position of Marston House and had the story first hand from Lord Orrery.

Despite Palladian trimmings and Victorian additions, this house, which gladdened the eye of the Great Earl as he rode over from Stalbridge, can still be discerned at Marston. It is represented by the central block which is basically a variation of the Elizabethan H-shaped design. Georgian improvements could not quite disguise the old-fashioned character of the plan with its recessed centre and extruded corners which so artlessly tell of its Jacobean origins. The question remains, who built the house and when?

A clue may exist in the kinship between the garden front at Marston and the south front of Ham House, near Petersham in Surrey. A comparison of drawings of Ham in the 17th century and Marston circa 1740 show remarkable similarities. In both cases there exists the twice recessed centre, an identical arrangement of high-pitched roofs with dormer windows and the same terraces with flights of steps leading to the garden. Both houses have three storeys plus a basement and the front doors are on the first floor approached by steps. Ham is larger and more elaborate — it had bay windows in the extruded corners and oculi in the basement — but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that both houses are by the same hand. The original ground plan of Ham, which was built in 1610, survives in the Royal Institute of British Architects. It is by John Smithson, the well-known Jacobean architect.

Ham was built by Sir Thomas Vavasour, Knight Marshal to James I. It is significant that Sir Thomas bought the manor of Frome together with lands in Marston Bigot from the Leversedge family in 1606 and retained it until 1611.²³ It is tempting to see in Vavasour the founder of Marston House. However, it does not appear that the Leversedges, or the Thynne family to whom Vavasour sold Frome and his Marston holdings, ever owned the East Hill on which the house stands. As late as 1804 and 1865 Lord Bath was exchanging parcels of his land in Marston with Lord Cork and it lay mostly in the valley.²⁴ There is a mystery here that we are unlikely to resolve. That Sir Thomas Vavasour provides a link between Ham and Marston seems likely, but we cannot be sure of its nature. He may have recommended his architect to John Syme, who was Lord of the Manor of Marston about this time.²⁵ All we can say with certainty is that whereas no mansion existed in 1600, a fine house, evidently with mature grounds flourished in 1641.

The Earl of Cork left Marston to Lord Broghill, created first Earl of Orrery in 1660. His great-grandson, the fifth earl, tells us that Broghill lived at Marston House 'whenever leisure and absence from Ireland would permit him'.²⁶ He withdrew here after the execution of Charles I and 'lived very close for some time'.²⁷ From this year also dates Marston's association with Broghill's brother, Robert Boyle, the philosopher and scientist. A letter exists from him, dated at Marston on 26 March 1649, in which he asks an unknown lady to help him secure from the French Ambassador a pass to enable Broghill to 'travel into France'.²⁸ Lord Orrery died at Castlemartyr in Ireland in 1679 and Marston underwent a period of neglect as a dower house, being held first by Orrery's widow 'a lady of great piety, prudence and reserve' given to such dicta as 'I would rather, Sir, you should bury my boys beyond the seas virtuous, than bring them home vicious: vice is a serpent that must be crushed in the egg, or it will soon become an unconquerable monster'.²⁹ She died in 1689. Marston then became successively the jointure of Mary, widow of Roger, second Earl of Orrery, and after her death in 1711, of Mary, widow of Lionel, the third earl.³⁰ She died in 1713 and the Marston estate returned to the head of the family in the person of Charles, fourth Earl of Orrery. As diplomat, man of letters, soldier, and dilettante scientist, he deserved the *Gentleman's Magazine's* description of him as 'a great virtuoso'. It was in his honour that George Graham named the Orrery, an astronomical instrument for measuring the movement of the planets.

Until this period, Marston had been only a minor rural seat of the earls of Orrery. But in 1690 their magnificent house in Ireland at Charleville was burnt down by the forces of James II and thenceforward the ties which bound the Boyles to Ireland slackened. On the conclusion of his embassy to the Low Countries, Orrery was created an English baron with a seat in the House of Lords. He now had to be frequently in London. Orrery took the title of Baron Boyle of Marston, and a remote Somerset parish became a *caput baroniae*. In 1713 he was Lord Lieutenant of Somerset. It must have been about this time, soon after he inherited the property and while he occupied a great position in the county, that he began the restoration of Marston House. When his son, John, Lord Boyle, first saw it 'the house was then rather in a state of ruin than otherwise'. Nevertheless, it was a case of love at first sight. He afterwards called Marston 'the place I love best in the world'. Lord Orrery's work was

completed by 1726 when Lord Boyle wrote to William Cecil: 'My father had added a wing to complete the fabric and by that means has enlarged the house within and rendered the building uniform and regular without.'³¹ Orrery appears to have employed Stephen Switzer, a Hampshire man, believed to be of Swiss extraction, to improve the grounds. Switzer is hardly a household name today, but G. W. Johnson believed him to be one of the 'Classic Authors of Gardening' and 'a sound practical Horticulturist.'³² He was certainly working for Orrery in 1724³³ and in the introduction to a book written in 1729 tells us that it was largely composed 'out of the library of my very worthy, learned, and noble friend and master the Earl of Orrery.'³⁴ Switzer was an expert in what were then called hydrostatics and was proud of the cascades he laid out at Marston.³⁵

A print by R. Parr (Pl. I) throws considerable light on the architectural history of Marston House. It is undated, but dedicated to John, Earl of Orrery, so it must have been drawn between John's accession to the earldom in 1731 and his succession to the Earldom of Cork in 1753. It thus portrays Marston after the fourth earl's restoration, but before the fifth earl remodelled it. The print shows the central block with its twice recessed centre much as it is today and instantly recognisable as the same house. There are no wings as such and the roofs are high-pitched instead of mansard. The balustrade is missing, and a basement storey is shown. The main entrance was on the south front on the first floor, a *piano nobile*, approached by a flight of steps. Despite the fourth earl's work, Marston looks old-fashioned. The print does not indicate the exact window style, but they appear to have transoms. One of the basement windows which still survives has a transom.³⁶

The house is surrounded by elaborate gardens. The square, formal composition laid out with parterres and curving walks, all very regular and geometrical, strikes us as entirely Jacobean and seems to conflict with Switzer's view that 'a gradual transition from finished art to wild nature is pleasing and soothing.'³⁷ But Switzer conceded that 'a little regularity is allowed near the main building.' Overall, the garden reflects his basic conservatism and his preference for turf and forest trees over shrubs and flowers. The two ornamental pools in front of the house no doubt contained those jets d'eau of which he thought so highly. The number of walls is surprising as Switzer thought they imprisoned the eye. Lord Orrery believed them necessary in the exposed position of Marston House. He wrote to Tom Southerne on 7 November, 1733: 'We are hard at work both within and without doors, but in the gardens are out-doing Hannibal, and working thro' rocks more obdurate than the Alps.'³⁸ A month later, he adds: 'My trees are all planted, and my walls built, so I need not much dread either wind or weather.'³⁹

Orrery was still employing Switzer in 1739 when he jestingly tells Dr. King that: 'Switzer talked of planting thistles and crab-trees.'⁴⁰ On 2 June 1745 he notes that Abdel Coppice has been renamed Orrery Coppice and 'divided into walks and ridings for pleasure by me. It is a place for the reservation of my game . . . it may be made useful, profitable and delightful.'⁴¹ Returning to Marston in 1749 after a three and a half year absence, he hoped to find 'my hamadryads there in perfect health . . . Trees are the best monuments that a man can erect to his own memory. They speak his praises without flattery, and they are blessings to children yet unborn.'⁴² Before leaving the Parr print, it is worth pointing out that it shows the exact appearance and position of the original St. Leonard's Church 'nearly opposite and within 100 feet of the mansion house'.⁴³

Having 'amused himself in laying out gardens and plantations'⁴⁴ and having dotted his grounds with memorials to his dog, Hector, and his horse, Rex Nobby, Lord Orrery turned his attention to the house itself. In his *Remarks on Swift*, he tells us of his pleasure 'in viewing a plain, regular building, composed by a masterly hand in all the beauty of symmetry and order'.⁴⁵ At Marston he turned an old-fashioned house into a Palladian mansion which meets this description admirably. The quality of the masons' work is exquisite and the taste faultless. Orrery was, of course, a cousin of Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington and Cork, who had popularised the Palladian style in England, patronised William



Plate II

Marston House in 1922, a drawing from Neale's *Views of Seats*. The outward appearance of the mansion has changed little since. Its architectural history can be clearly followed from this print: the high central block of about 1610 with Palladian embellishments of 1751 and portico of 1820. The two low wings date from 1776. The print is in possession of the author.

Kent, and designed Chiswick House. A taste for architecture ran in the family. The library at Marston was full of books on the subject, including two sets of Palladio's *I Quattro Libri dell' Architettura*, numerous designs by Inigo Jones, Gibbs' *Book of Architecture* and Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*.⁴⁶ Burlington may have advised on the restoration of Marston House, but Lady Orrery records that 'the plans were approved of or designed by Lord Dungarvan whose genius is very much inclined towards architecture'.⁴⁴ Be this as it may, the work was so skilfully done that it has deceived many over the generations, beginning, as we have seen, with Collinson.

A comparison of the present house with Parr's print gives us a good idea of the improvements. We are fortunate in having confirmation from Lady Orrery. She writes that Marston 'had been much neglected by his (Lord Orrery's) ancestors, (was) much out of repair, without offices or stables, little more than the shell of a large old house'. She continues: 'The fine situation of Marston House attached my Lord's inclinations thereto and the condition in which he found this place made it necessary to lay out a good deal of money in building stables, coach houses, in fitting up and furnishing various appartments'. The face-lift began in 1749 and was still continuing in 1752, although the rainwater heads are dated 1751. 'My Lord to gratify both his own and Lord Dungarvan's desire of ornamenting this place, had taken off the roof of the house, very much adorned the outside, put in new windows and window cases, built (a) new staircase and made great alterations on the inside, brought water, which, although only for use, was a very expensive article as the springs are far from the house and conveyed hither in leaden pipes. He enlarged and beautified the gardens.'⁴⁷ The interior was 'extremely well furnished (with) many good pictures, some statues, busts, bronzes, china, and, above all, an elegant collection of books . . . the house is very well filled with all kinds of useful and ornamental furniture.' Basically, the work consisted of replacing the high-pitched roofs with mansards and altering the transomed windows to sashes surrounded by stone mouldings and voussoir blocks. The elegant balustrade and dentilled cornice round the top of the building were almost certainly added at the same time, although it is first mentioned by Neale more than 70 years later.⁴⁸

Orrery was not granted much time to enjoy his creation. He bought the Manors of Frome and Vallis in 1751 and that of Monksham in 1753. Frome 'had great power and advantages attached to the lordship which made them both (sic) desirable purchases to the possessor of Marston.'⁴⁴ But, alas, 'a succession of trouble and confusion in my affairs came upon me the next year.'⁴⁹ As a result, he saw little of Marston over the next decade, finally returning there on 8 April 1761 'with a resolution of applying myself to the care of my estate and the payment of my debts'.⁴⁹ An hereditary gout killed him on 16 November 1762,⁵⁰ and 'this dear and delightful place' knew him no more. He left instructions to be 'buried at Frome as soon as possible after my decease and as private (sic) and that immediately after my interment the vault be made up and never again be opened'.⁵¹ This last request was ignored by his family. The vault in St. John's continued to be used until 1856.

His son, Hamilton, Lord Dungarvan, succeeded to the double earldom, his father having inherited the title of Cork from a cousin in 1753. He died two years later at the age of 35. The funeral cost the Frome churchwardens 6s. paid to four men for keeping off the mob. Edmund, his brother, was the next possessor of Marston and evidently found that despite his father's improvements, the house was too small. He added two long, low wings in the Adam style which, although they lack the quality of the central facade, are handsome, nicely balanced compositions. Their construction gave the facade the imposing length of 365 ft. The rainwater heads are dated 1776. In the west wing is the library which still retains fine fitted book cases whose fluted pilasters and cornice are mentioned by Collinson. Earl Edmund also removed the church from its position in front of the house to the side, no doubt to improve his view and add to his privacy. However, there is no hint of such ulterior motive in the Earl of Cork and Orrery's petition to the House of Commons in 1784 praying

leave to bring in a bill for taking down the church. It states that Marston Church was 'in a ruinous condition' and beyond repair. 'No service can be performed in the old church, and, if erecting a new one is deferred another year, the inhabitants of the said parish . . . will have no place of public worship.'⁵² Permission was granted and a private Act of Parliament passed in 1786. The new church, built on a ground called Coward's Mead, was a simple structure in the Gothick style with three pointed windows on each side and a freestone battlemented parapet. It corresponds to the nave of the present church. The original design still exists, marked boldly: 'This plan belongs to me, Cork'.⁵³ The church was first opened for service in September 1787.⁵⁴

During his last years, the seventh Earl of Cork and Orrery, who was colonel of the Somerset Regiment of militia, spent most of his time in London and Bath, leading a voluptuous life. Hardly had his son, another Edmund, succeeded him in 1798 when he put in hand what the Revd. Richard Warner called 'judicious alterations'. These were designed not only to 'improve the mansion in appearance without, but render it much more comfortable within. By these, the whole range of rooms on every floor, instead of leading into each other, will be connected by well-disposed passages; and the laundry and numerous offices, be rendered distinct from the dwelling apartments. The drawing-room which is now too small will be enlarged by including another . . . the lowness of its ceiling being relieved by a well-contrived recess; and the house altogether be made more secluded, quiet and retired, by turning the public road, which at present runs along the front.'⁵⁵ As Warner came from Longleat, he was entranced by the sight of the house which 'assumes in the perspective a magnificent appearance'. He added sagely: 'The front, indeed, is extensive, and deceives with the semblance of majesty, but (the building being low in proportion to its length) . . . it appears greater than it really is, and dwindles as we approach.'⁵⁶ His final comment was on the interior which impressed him favourably 'since it conveys the ideas of comfort and utility, with which the glitter of gold, and the rustling of damask, are ever at variance'. Six years later Marston House and its contents were insured for £8,800 with the London Assurance Corporation, an interesting example of contemporary property values.

Warner does not specify the exact nature of the improvements to the outside of Marston House. Judging by what he does say, supplemented by the evidence of the 1839 Tithe Map, he probably added the two ranges of offices, one behind the east wing and another contiguous to it. The closure of the road allowed for further improvements, the most elaborate of which was the removal of the *piano nobile* and the lowering of the front door to ground level. The basement was buried to make way for a stately terrace which occupied the whole length of the south front. The extruded corners were connected by a charming single-storey loggia whose Ionic columns reflect the taste of the Greek revival. Although no direct evidence survives, this fine feature may be the work of Sir Jeffrey Wyattville. He was employed by Lord Bath at Longleat between 1801-1811 and may have been introduced to the Earl of Cork at this time. A portrait of Wyattville, by Henry Wyatt, painted about 1820, includes a book case. A note on the back tells us that 'the names on the books are a part of J. Wyatt's employers or for whom he had made designs'.⁵⁷ Among them is the Earl of Cork. It is likely that he built the loggia about 1817 when he wrote of 'going to Lord Cork's'. In 1819, Lord Cork called on Wyattville in London.⁵⁸ In 1799, Wyattville, who was equally fluent in Gothick or Grecian, carried out a commission at Woolley Park in Berkshire which may well have been the blue print for his later work at Marston. A 'plain brick house' was turned into an elegant stuccoed villa by 'raising the ground level to cover the partly exposed basement'.⁵⁹ A colonnaded loggia was erected on the south-east front connecting two wings which is markedly similar to that at Marston except that the order is Doric instead of Ionic. Lord Cork's partiality to the Greek style is also reflected in the monuments to his children at Marston Bigot and St. John's, Frome, which he commissioned from Westmacott. The loggia was complete by 1822 when Neale drew Marston for his *Views of Seats* (Pl. II).

It was probably Wyatville who swept away the formal gardens shown in Parr's print. The building of the wings in 1776, the destruction of the church ten years later, and the offices created by the eighth earl around 1800, must in any case have played havoc with them. There can have been little left by the time of Warner's visit for all he can find to say is that the grounds were 'small, but well disposed'. Neale's print shows a more natural environment of turf and larches merging imperceptibly with the park. On the Tithe Map, the garden is situated some way from the house, round the present Home Farm, then the gardener's cottage. Some garden ornaments still exist there, including the edifice known as Lady Cork's Bath. The Boyles were indefatigable builders. In 1809 Lord Cork added a tower to the church.⁶⁰ In 1845 his son, the Hon. and Revd. R. C. T. Boyle, Rector of Marston, gave it a chancel. At the same time the nave and tower were carefully normanised, the thoroughness extending down to the last beak head. Boyle was also responsible for erecting the attractive Gothick schoolhouse in Lower Marston. Even after his death, Lord Cork continued to influence events, leaving £1,200 for the provision of a new chapel at Gare Hill in Marston parish which is still a striking feature of the local landscape.⁶¹

The eighth Earl of Cork and Orrery, who had been a General and A.D.C. to the King, died in his 89th year in 1856. His funeral at St. John's was the last occasion on which the right of the Lord of the Manor to have the nave cleared of pews was invoked. He was succeeded by his grandson, Richard Edmund St. Lawrence, under whom Marston House reached the height of its splendour and its demesne became a model estate. The ninth earl was twenty-seven when he inherited, and had married, in 1853, Emily Charlotte, daughter of the immensely wealthy Marquess of Clanricarde. She brought with her a large dowry which made possible immediate improvements and alterations to the house. This was just as well for it was 'in a deplorable state of repair'.⁶²

Almost at once work started on what became Marston's most grandiose feature, a new entrance hall on the north front. It is dated 1858. Samuel Cuzner in 1867 found it 'a commanding and handsome stone structure, of the classic order of architecture. Its exterior embellishments, in stone carving, as well as the massive doorway, are imposing and elegant. The interior of the hall is grand and striking in effect, not only from its lofty and spacious dimensions, but also from the lantern light at the top . . .'⁶³ Mr. Bryan Little has described it as 'of much dignity and with fine Renaissance detail'.⁶⁴ At the same time a grand staircase of stone with cast-iron standards and oak handrail was erected. This led up to an additional suite of bedrooms. Although now sadly mutilated, the entrance hall with its arches springing from stone columns, elaborate entablature and monograms of the Cork family, still reflects its former grandeur. It is undoubtedly one of the finest features of the house. The architect was Major C. E. Davis, of Bath,⁶⁵ who had such a profound influence on the mansions of North Somerset.

The construction of the Entrance Hall not only dignified the building itself, but allowed the whole approach to be tidied up. The house was now turned back to front, the entry being on the north side looking into East Hill. A new coach road was made to connect it with the turnpike road from Frome to Shepton Mallet and Bruton and planted with trees in 1864. This obviated the need for coming to the house past the jumbled buildings of Orrery Farm, Lower Lodge and the church.⁶⁶ The lawn and pleasure grounds on the south side could now be improved and the terrace formalised by the erection of a retaining wall. Between 1858 and 1864 the offices and stables were 'totally rebuilt'.⁶⁷ In 1868, Lord Cork reconstructed the west wing, retaining the 1776 facade, but creating behind it a new billiard room and ballroom. A palatial new laundry and washing house went up on the west side of Chizzle in 1869 and its place at the end of the west wing of Marston House was taken by a magnificent conservatory, now in the last stages of decrepitude.

The ballroom, at present used as an artist's studio, is a noble apartment, 44 ft. x 32 ft. and 24 ft. high with three 15 ft. tall windows. It saw many elegant functions during Lord Cork's 40 years as Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset. The carved ceiling is of rich design and the

plaster swags exquisite. There is a tradition that the plaster work was carried out by the same Italian craftsmen who were employed by Lord Bath at Longleat about this time. The ballroom contains a superb marble chimneypiece, damaged and discoloured, which may well be that 'of white marble, bordered with green and black, enriched with easy sculpture in strong relieve' mentioned as being the Drawing Room in 1791.⁶⁸ The ballroom is now much decayed.

Although Marston House was kept in perfect repair during Lord Cork's lifetime, the west wing was the last major work undertaken. He died in 1904. 'During the 50 years he had the estate, he took the very greatest personal interest in it, and spent large sums in improving it, entirely rebuilding several of the farms and putting into a thoroughly good state of repair the buildings of all, and at his death very few estates were in better repair, also the gates; and all the hedges by the road he had cut himself so that they should be well done, others were certainly some of the best in the county. He also made many exchanges of land, and bought lifeholds, leaseholds, and reversions to make the property more compact so that at his death it might be almost termed in a ring fence.'⁶⁹

The ninth Earl's son, Lord Dungarvan, 'did not care for Marston and at once reduced the staff and took steps to sell the property'.⁷⁰ He may have been in financial difficulties, *The Times* recording that 'he was obliged to sell his Somersetshire property'.⁷¹ The estate was split up and sold by auction in 1905, realising £160,000. The contents of the house were also disposed of; neither the family portraits, nor the library which included many works by Lord Cork's ancestors, autograph letters and manuscripts, were spared. Marston House itself went to Mr. Hamilton Fletcher, a colonial magnate, who in September 1905 re-sold it to Major Bonham-Christie, of Birling House, West Malling in Kent, whose family still own it.

Between the wars Marston House was neglected and often empty. The estate was allowed to deteriorate. In the Second World War, the house was requisitioned by the Army and the interior severely damaged. The Bonham-Christie family received only nominal compensation.⁷² The house was then divided into ten flats. A few of these are still occupied.

Marston House faces an uncertain future. The late owner, Mr. J. R. Bonham-Christie, wished to demolish the building and redevelop the site. Until recently it had no statutory protection having, inexplicably, only been classed as Grade III in 1959. As a result of representations made by the Frome Society for Local Study in 1972, Marston House was spot-listed by the Department of the Environment and is now a Grade II building. In June 1973 Somerset County Council refused listed building consent for demolition. It is to be hoped that a solution will be found which will save this important part of our Somerset heritage.

1. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 21, i, 65.

2. The story can be found in J. Collinson, *History . . . of Somerset*, ii, 215 and *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, 21, i, 65-6.

3. *The Times*, 2 Oct., 1912: obituary of the dowager Lady Cork.

4. R. Warner, *Excursions from Bath*, 83.

5. J. P. Neale, *Views of Seats . . .* series I, iii, no. 71.

6. S. Cuzner, *Handbook to Froome-Selwood* (1867), 81.

7. N. Pevsner, *Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol*.

8. Wiltshire R(ecord) O(ffice), 383/932.

9. *Pipe Roll 7 Richard I*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Pipe Roll Soc.), 40.

10. Two meares are mentioned in the boundaries of Marston and West Woodlands in 1605/6: W.R.O., 845, box 30.

11. Public Record Office, E 134/22 Eliz. I, Trin. 5; 23 Eliz. I, Trin. 1; 24 Eliz. I, Hilary 6.

12. Note by Lord Orrery in 'A Survey of Marston Manor' by Francis Jesse, 1733, *penes* the author.

13. F. Brown (comp.), *Somerset Wills*, ed. F. A. Crisp, ii, 108.

14. W.R.O., 845, box 30: perambulation, 1605/6.

15. *The Lismore Papers*, ed. A. B. Grosart, second series, iv, 210.

16. *Ibid.*, first series, v, 182.

17. Kathleen M. Lynch, *Roger Boyle, First Earl of Orrery* (University of Tennessee Press, 1965), 32.
18. *Lismore Papers*, first series, v. 185.
19. Somerset Record Office, DD/BO 4/1: survey of Marston manor 1733.
20. *Lismore Papers*, first series, v. 198.
21. T. Morrice, 'The Life of the Earl of Orrery', in *Collection of the State Papers of Roger Boyle, the First Earl of Orrery* (1743), 96-8.
22. Statute 26 George III, c. 54.
23. *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, v. 249-51.
24. W.R.O., 845, box 30.
25. *Somerset Parishes*, ed. A. L. Humphreys
26. *The Orrery Papers*, ed. Countess of Cork and Orrery (1903), i. 66.
27. *Biographica Britannia* (1748), ii. 897.
28. R. E. W. Maddison. *Life of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, 74. See also T. Birch, *Life of the Rt. Hon. Robert Boyle* (1744), 89.
29. Morrice, 'Earl of Orrery', 103-4.
30. Note by Lord Orrery in Jesse's 'Survey of Marston Manor', 12.
31. *Orrery Papers*, i. 66.
32. G. W. Johnson, *History of English Gardening* (1829), 159.
33. S. Switzer, *Practical Fruit Gardener* (1724), Dedication.
34. S. Switzer, *Introduction to a General System of Hydrostaticks*. The library in question was probably that at Britwell (Bucks.), a seat the 4th earl preferred to Marston.
35. L. Whistler, *Vanburgh*, 153.
36. Somerset Record Office, DD/X/BT.
37. *Ichthyographia Rustica* (1718), iii, chapter 1, section 1.
38. *Orrery Papers*, i. 121.
39. *Ibid.* 124.
40. *Ibid.* 264.
41. Note by Lord Orrery in Jesse's 'Survey of Marston Manor', 5. Orrery Wood is changed by the Ordnance Survey into the rootless Horley Wood.
42. *Orrery Papers*, ii. 56.
43. Note by J. A. Wickham, Lord Cork's steward, in a survey of the manor in 1810, *penes* the author.
44. W.R.O., 383/909: 'Narrative of Margaret, Countess of Cork and Orrery'. This apologia for family debts throws considerable light on life at Marston. In 1733 'the best garden' consisted of 5 a. and there were also 3 a. of kitchen gardens: Somerset Record Office, DD/BO 4/1 (Williams's survey).
45. John, Earl of Orrery, *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Jonathan Swift* (2nd ed. 1752), 52.
46. *Catalogue of the . . . Library . . . removed from Marston*, Christie, Manson and Woods (1905), 27, 32, 52, 63.
47. W.R.O., 383/909; punctuation added.
48. Neale, *Views of Seats*.
49. Note by Lord Orrery, 25 March 1762, in preface to 'A Survey of the Mannor of Monksham', *penes* the author.
50. John, Earl of Cork and Orrery, *Letters from Italy in the years 1754 and 1755* (2nd ed. 1774), preface by Orrery's chaplain John Duncombe, xxxii.
51. Public Record Office, Prob. 11/882 C7279: will of John, Earl of Cork and Orrery.
52. *Votes of the House of Commons, 24 February 1784*: pamphlet in Marston church.
53. In Marston church. The plan also has designs for other buildings, one of them perhaps that 'neat little building' fitted up by the 7th earl to commemorate the Asberry episode. See Warner, *Excursions from Bath*, 85.
54. 'Robert Elliott, born 1815, son of Reuben Elliot, baptised September 10, 1787, says that Reuben his father was baptised in the church when the present new church was first opened for service, i.e. September 1787, as above': note by rector (1884) in register of baptisms 1784-1804.
55. Warner, *Excursions from Bath* 83-4. Collinson gives the size of the drawing room as 20 ft by 19 ft, modest indeed for a stately home.
56. Warner, *Excursions*, 84.
57. D. Linstrum, *Sir Jeffry Wyatville: Architect to the King*, 227.
58. *Ibid.* 236. Referring to the screen in front of St. John's Church, Frome, Mr. Linstrum assumes it to be 'the work for Lord Cork which caused Wyatt to include him in the list of patrons'. In fact Wyatt carried out this task for the Marquess of Bath, patron of the living and lord of the manor of West Woodlands. See W. J. E. Bennett, *History of the Old Church of St John of Froome* (1866), 46.
59. Linstrum, *Wyatville*, 75.
60. Not in 1789 as Pevsner, *North Somerset and Bristol*, 224. The inscription on the tenor bell in Marston tower reads: 'This tower built and five new bells hung by the Right Honourable Edmon (sic) Earl of

- Cork . . . Anno Domini 1809'. The rebuilding is dated 1845, Pevsner's date of 1844 presumably coming from H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Architects, 1660-1840*, 169.
61. Public Record Office, Prob. 11/2235 C7279; will of 8th Earl of Cork and Orrery.
 62. Marston Estate Reference Book, 1858-1908, 100: general remarks by Robert Porteous, appointed steward in 1858. *Penes* the author.
 63. *Handbook to Froome-Selwood*, 85.
 64. *Somerset Standard*, 3 September 1972.
 65. *The Beacon*, December 1901, 191-2. Davis was probably the son of Edward Davis, of Bath, who had rebuilt Marston Church twenty years before.
 66. Visitors from London would normally approach from this direction; Lord Orrery in 1737 mentions his 'dreadful distempers' which 'would vanish at the sight of Marston. Orrery-Farm would drive them into your continent of Scandanavia': *Orrery Papers*, i. 189.
 67. Marston Estate Reference Book.
 68. Collinson, *History . . . of Somerset*, ii. 214 note.
 69. Marston Estate Reference Book: note by William Cooper, steward 1877-1908.
 70. *Ibid.*
 71. Obituary of the tenth earl, 26 March 1925. My italics.
 72. *Somerset Standard*, 15 June 1973: letter by Mr. J. R. Bonham-Christie.