

WHC Nomination Documentation

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SITE NAME ("TITLE") Blenheim Palace

DATE OF INSCRIPTION ("SUBJECT") 11/12/1987

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CRITERIA ("KEY WORDS") C (ii)(iv)

DECISION OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE:
The Committee made no statement

BRIEF DESCRIPTION:

Near Oxford, in a romantic park created by the well-known landscape gardener "Capability" Brown, is Blenheim Palace, given by the English nation to John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, in recognition of his victory in 1704 over French and Bavarian troops. Built between 1705 and 1722, characterised by eclectic inspiration and a return to national roots, it is a perfect example of an 18th-century princely home.

1.b. State, province or region: Oxfordshire, England

1.d Exact location: O.S. Map Ref. SP 3144 1016 Lat. 51°50' N ; Long. 1°20' W

WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

BLENHEIM PALACE

Cultural Properties: U.K.Nomination

23-12-1986

WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION
CULTURAL PROPERTIES: U.K. NOMINATION
BLENHEIM PALACE AND PARK

Prepared by the Historic Buildings
and Monuments Commission for England on behalf
of the Department of the Environment

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SUMMARY

Blenheim, formerly the royal manor of Woodstock, lies some 13km north-west of Oxford. It was a royal resort before the Conquest since there is record of a council held at Woodstock by Aethelred II (979-1016). Domesday Book refers briefly to the King's demesne forest at Woodstock and it was as a royal deer forest that it was chiefly notable during the Middle Ages. Nothing now remains of the medieval manor-house, although the site is marked by a monument.

Blenheim Palace was built (1705-26) as a national monument rather than as a home. The royal manor and funds to build the palace were presented by Queen Anne to John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, as a token of the nation's gratitude for his defeat of the French army at Blenheim on the Danube in 1704. The architect was John Vanbrugh (born 1664), a surprising choice since he had had little experience as an architect having embarked on a career as a soldier and achieved fame in the 1690s as the writer of stage comedies.

Vanbrugh's metamorphosis from soldier/dramatist to architect was rapid, but one essential element of his success was his collaboration with Nicholas Hawksmoor (born 1661), who can fairly be described as one of the first professional architects, who had had a long training in the Office of Works under Wren and who had been involved in the design of the City churches, St Paul's Cathedral and the royal palaces at Hampton Court and Whitehall. In general it can be said that Vanbrugh provided the grand schemes and the dramatic flair, Hawksmoor the practical know-how and the organising ability. A second essential element was the support of a team from the Office of Works itself. Sir Christopher Wren was consulted about the estimates; the work force consisted largely of masons who had worked for Wren on St Pauls and the City churches; the carving was the work of Grinling Gibbons (between 1708 and 1712) with eight assistants; Sir James Thornhill was employed to decorate the ceiling of the Hall. Altogether approximately 1,500 men were employed at the beginning of the work under the direction of Henry Joynes as resident 'Comptroller and Conductor of the Building'.

The palace as originally planned consisted of a central block fronted by a grand court with rectangular courtyards on either side, although only one of the flanking courtyards was ever completed. The style derives in part from Versailles, the model for all princely palaces of Europe, but Italian sources also contributed; however the most important quality of Blenheim was Romanticism. Both Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor looked to medieval buildings for inspiration and as a result Blenheim was a key monument in the history of the Romantic movement. With its four square towers on the one hand and its exuberant skyline on the other Blenheim is an extravagant combination of medieval fortress and Elizabethan mansion. Vanbrugh was also among the first to appreciate the picturesque relationship between building and landscape, so that in this respect, again, he was a pioneer in a new and subsequently fashionable field.

Internally Vanbrugh adopted the conventional palace plan, with a Great Hall leading into a Saloon, with suites of rooms originally comprising ante-chamber, drawing room and bedroom on either side. There were private apartments in the east wing with a library/gallery leading to the chapel occupying the full length of the west front.

The garden and landscape setting of the palace reflected the changing fashions of their day. The original layout by Vanbrugh and Henry Wise was formal, with intersecting avenues and a parterre of geometrical design south of the palace. This was swept away by Capability Brown (c.1762-74) who replanned the park and formed the lake with lawns sweeping right up to the house in his usual manner. In 1908-30 there was a reversion to formality, and Duchêne was employed to

design formal gardens east and west of the house, thus providing a less abrupt transition from the natural curves of the landscape to the formal rigidity of the architecture.

The palace remains the home of the Duke of Marlborough who retains the east wing for his own use. Strictly speaking the estate is still Crown property on permanent lease to the Duke and his successors, subject to the presentation of an embroidered banner to the Sovereign at Windsor each year. For legal purposes the tenants are now the Trustees of the Estate. The Palace itself and a number of the garden features are listed for preservation under the Town and Country Planning Acts and the park and gardens are included in the Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest. There is a continuous programme of maintenance and repair financed by Government grants, a Maintenance Fund and income from the admission of visitors. Palace and park are open to the public daily from March to October and by special arrangement for private functions outside normal visiting hours. There is a well-organised Educational Service and the usual supporting facilities such as restaurants, a gift shop and an adventure play area.

A special feature of the Palace is its association with Sir Winston Churchill who was born there in 1874, became engaged there and is buried at the nearby Bladon parish church. The tour of the palace includes a Churchill exhibition which includes some of his personal possessions and paintings as well as photographs, manuscripts and recordings of extracts from his speeches.

Given the above the Palace is nominated with the park for inclusion in the World Heritage List of Cultural Properties under UNESCO criteria a(i), (ii) and (vi).

1. Specific location

- a. Country England.
- b. State, Province or Region Oxfordshire.
- c. Name of property Blenheim Palace.
- d. Exact location on map and indication of geographical co-ordinates O.S. Map Ref. SP 3144 1016.
Lat. 51°50' N. Long. 1°20' W.

2. Juridical data

- a. Owner Trustees of Blenheim Parliamentary Estate
Blenheim Palace
Woodstock
Oxfordshire OX7 1PS

- b. Legal Status Crown Property on permanent lease to the Trustees.

The Palace and a number of garden/park features are listed under the Town and Country Planning Acts (see 4d below) and included in the Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England.

The public are admitted to the palace and park at advertised times, including the east wing when the Duke of Marlborough and his family are not in residence. The palace is also made available for functions outside normal visiting hours.

Visitor facilities include an Educational Service (winner of a Sandford Award for outstanding contribution to Heritage Education at an Historic House) and a Nature Trail.

- c. Responsible administration The Duke of Marlborough
c/o The Land Agent
Estates Office
Blenheim Palace
Address as above.

3. Identification

- a. Description and inventory

THE PALACE

THE EXTERIOR

Viewed from a distance across the magnificent park, Blenheim has the aura of a romantic castle with a remarkable silhouette of turrets and

pinnacles. Both the medieval fortress and the fantastic skyline of Elizabethan palaces have contributed to this effect, but nowhere is this explicit, and the details are entirely classical.

The grand approach is from the north, and it is on the North Front that the feeling for drama is greatest. The grouping of the house with its subsidiary buildings has been compared to a stage set with a series of wings receding towards the centre. It derives from Palladio and from the Cour d'Honneur at Versailles.

The North Front

The house has four square towers and is flanked to the east and west by the kitchen and stable wing set forward from the main block. They are connected to the towers by a straight Doric arcade, and between the towers and the main front are concave quadrant arcades. This build-up to the centre culminates in a series of interlocking pediments above the entrance. To the fore is the pediment of the portico, and set back above it a colossal cleft pediment. Behind this is the clerestory of the hall, also pedimented, which rises above the centre as high as the corner towers. The main facade, of nine bays, is articulated by a giant order of Corinthian pilasters, the usual Baroque treatment for a palace front. The portico is treated with some subtlety, with two round columns in the centre flanked by a square column and angle pilaster placed close together. In the pediment are the arms of the Duke of Marlborough. The treatment of the towers is appropriately simple, with banded rustication and arched windows, a combination frequently used in France by Le Vau but unusual in England. It is probably no coincidence that the huge carved brackets of their cornices suggest a medieval corbel-table. The gateways to the kitchen and stable courtyards have banded rustication and ringed Doric columns. They are surmounted by carvings of the Lion of England savaging the Cock of France, and victory is proclaimed from all sides by military trophies and other patriotic emblems. Above the main entrance is the figure of Britannia, chained slaves on the pediment, and centurions on the parapet, all by Grinling Gibbons and his school. On the corner towers are round arcaded temples with small flying buttresses set diagonally. They are surmounted by pinnacles composed of piled-up cannon balls, reversed fleurs-de-lys, and ducal coronets. There are

smaller satellite turrets and a forest of other strange shapes, a sculptural kaleidoscope, shifting from every angle. The clock towers over the kitchen and stable wings are even more complex, a series of interlocking pediments and arches. A double colonnade was intended to enclose the north side of the courtyard. It is shown in Vitruvius Britannicus but was never built.

The South, East and West Fronts

The South Front is quiet by comparison with the North, but is skilfully composed with a square tower at either end and a gradual break forward in the centre towards the portico. The sculptural treatment of the orders with the progression from pilasters to half-columns and free-standing columns in the centre owes much to Wren's late work. The columns of the portico repeat the arrangement of the main entrance, but it has a straight entablature. This was intended to support an equestrian statue of Marlborough crushing his enemies, but after the sack of Tournai in 1709 Marlborough obtained a colossal bust of Louis XIV from the city gate and set it above the south front of Blenheim instead. The east and west fronts both have a curved centre bay. On the West Front it is larger, the full height of the building, with caryatids between the windows of the attic storey, a detail indebted to Borromini. The curve of the wall is however timid by comparison with Roman Baroque and little more than a large bay-window. The arcaded basement was intended as a grotto but not completed. Against the south wall of the kitchen court is an Orangery with arched windows and a Doric porch. The Kitchen Court is Romanesque rather than Gothic Revival. Two sides of the courtyard are arcaded and have a castellated parapet. The arches, of two orders without mouldings, are interrupted by heavy Doric porches with open pediments. The massive East Gateway is also the water tower, with garlands and statues in niches added by Sir William Chambers, 1766-75.

THE INTERIOR

The arrangement of the interior is typical of palace planning of the period, with a Great Hall leading to a Saloon, from either side of which opens a suite of three rooms. Each suite consisted of ante-chamber, drawing room and bedroom, and with the Saloon they occupy the whole of the south front. The east wing contained the private apartments, and on the

west was a picture gallery (now the long library) leading at the north-west corner to the chapel. The staircases were to be concealed behind arcades on either side of the hall; only one staircase was in fact built, although the plan published in Vitruvius Britannicus shows two.

The Great Hall is on a majestic scale with two tiers of stone arches on either side. They recall the arcades of the Colosseum, but are quite plain and without superimposed orders. The only decoration is a giant fluted Corinthian column in each corner and the deeply cut mouldings of the cornice by Grinling Gibbons. This austerity is typical of Vanbrugh. Nowhere at Blenheim was Gibbons given a free hand to work in his characteristic manner.

Opposite the entrance a proscenium arch frames the doorway to the Saloon, over which the first-floor corridor is continued as a gallery with a simple ironwork balustrade. The ceiling was painted by Sir James Thornhill in 1716 with an allegory of Marlborough presenting a plan of the Battle of Blenheim to Britannia. Vanbrugh had intended Thornhill to decorate the Saloon and the gallery, but the Duchess, who found his charge of 25 shillings a yard expensive, dismissed him after Vanbrugh's departure in 1716.

The vaulted stone corridors linking the hall with the east and west wings are characteristic of Vanbrugh. They have saucer domes, miniature versions of the aisles of St Paul's.

The Saloon was decorated in 1719-20 by Louis Laguerre. The grandiose scheme is based on the Escalier des Ambassadeurs at Versailles. The walls are treated as a giant colonnade open to the sky, from behind which figures representing the four continents look down into the room. Caricatures include a self-portrait of Laguerre, and one of Dean Jones, Marlborough's chaplain. The attic is also treated architecturally, with round openings divided by herms and festooned with trophies. On the ceiling, in an oval frame, is the Apotheosis of the Duke of Marlborough. The decoration does not have the richness of work at Versailles, where details such as the roundels over the doorways, here painted in grisaille, would have been carved in relief. The doorways of speckled white marble were designed by Hawksmoor. They have arched heads surmounted by shells and lintels resting on triglyphs, a detail Hawksmoor frequently

used. The Imperial double-headed eagle in the tympanum alludes to the creation of John Churchill as a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire.

The State Rooms east and west of the Saloon are hung with tapestries woven in Brussels by Judocus de Vos illustrating Marlborough's victories. The decoration was altered by William Chambers in 1766-75 (assisted by Hakewill and Yenn) and again in the late 19th century. The suite west of the Saloon retains two of the original fireplaces carved by Grinling Gibbons, large, bulbous forms in purple marble. The ceilings are Victorian Rococo. In the east suite the marble fireplaces are all of the 1770s, but the three ceilings were designed by Hawksmoor, probably in 1724, and have thick bands of ornamental plasterwork. The scrolls and eagles in the coving are of c.1890.

In the east wing are the Private Apartments, in the centre of which the Bow Window Room has an arch to the bow-window with four Corinthian columns carved in wood by Gibbons. The marble fireplace is also by Gibbons. The fireplace in the Duchess's Drawing Room was designed by Chambers in 1773 and carved by Wilton.

The Long Library (55m) runs the full length of the west front. It was planned as a picture gallery. Vanbrugh intended that Thornhill should paint the ceiling, but the decoration did not begin until 1722 under Hawksmoor's direction. The sumptuous plasterwork is by Isaac Mansfield and the marble doorcases were carved by William Townesend and Bartholomew Peisley. Hawksmoor avoided monotony by dividing it into five sections, of different widths and heights, but unified by the treatment of the walls with a giant order of fluted Doric pilasters and triglyph frieze. At each end is a proscenium arch to a galleried bay with a clerestory and a coffered dome. The balustrades of the galleries are carved with pierced scrolls and supported on massive carved brackets. In the main part of the library, Hawksmoor's two scroll-headed doorways in Doric tabernacles are close in spirit to Roman Baroque. Contrasting with these, the chimneypieces of black and white marble are in the more classical manner of William Kent. The pedimented overmantels frame paintings of a storm and coast scene attributed to Wootton (after Gaspar Poussin) and are surmounted by busts of Charles Spencer as Earl of Sunderland by Rysbrack and as Duke of Marlborough by an unknown sculptor.

The large organ of 1871 fills the north bay. The bookcases are modern.

Sculpture Statue of Queen Anne by Rysbrack, commissioned in 1736 by Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. Bust of John, Duke of Marlborough, by Rysbrack, on a pedestal by Chambers.

THE CHAPEL

In 1716 little more was built than the foundations. The chapel was completed in 1726-31 under Hawksmoor's supervision. It is plain externally, with arched windows, but the interior has fluted giant pilasters and plasterwork in the manner of the library. It is dominated by the Monument erected in 1733 to John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, designed by William Kent and executed by Rysbrack in heroic Baroque style.

The chapel interior was remodelled by Teulon c.1850 and completed c.1870 by David Brandon. It was altered again c.1890 by Sir Thomas Jackson, who also designed the organ case and probably the reredos, pulpit and benches.

THE GARDENS

The East Formal Garden is a parterre designed by Achille Duchêne in 1908 in an attempt to reconstruct Sarah Churchill's flower garden which stood on this site. It had been altered in the 1770s by Chambers and probably again in the C19. The centrepiece is a large fountain by Waldo Story, c.1900-10, with bronze mermaids and dolphins.

The Water Terrace Gardens were formed in 1925-30, also by Duchêne. Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor had suggested a water garden here but it was never made. The present gardens are two great terraces connected by a wall with small cascades and caryatids. In the lower garden is a fountain with an obelisk, at the base of which are four river gods and seahorses on a rock. It was presented to the first Duke of Marlborough in 1710 by the Spanish ambassador to the Papal court and is a small copy of Bernini's fountain in the Piazza Navona in Rome.

The Kitchen Garden, $\frac{1}{2}$ m (0.8km) south-east. Completed by c.1712. Rectangular, of 3ha, enclosed by 4.5m high brick walls and watered by two round stone ponds. The walls sweep out in an elliptical curve twice on either side and the gateways are flanked by bastions and stone niches, details which seem characteristic of Vanbrugh. At the west end is a pedimented Tuscan Gateway, built in 1766-75 from designs by Chambers, based on Palladio's gateway at the Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza.

Garden ornaments worth a mention include three sundials designed by Hawksmoor (originally four) with dials by John Rowley, one at the east end of the south front, with a pedestal with swags, a similar one outside The Bothies near the kitchen garden, and the third, with a ribbed pedestal, in the fruit manager's garden, south-west of the kitchen garden.

Marble Terms made for the arcades of the hall, probably in 1772 by Richard Hayward, were moved by the tenth Duke to the Exedra, south-east of the palace.

THE PARK

The park with its picturesque valley, lakes and bridge is a worthy setting for the palace. The original layout by Vanbrugh and Henry Wise was in formal style with intersecting avenues and a great parterre of geometrical design south of the house, and beyond it bastion walls enclosing woods. Almost all of this was swept away c.1764-74 by Capability Brown, who replanted the park and formed the lake. The present landscape is one of his masterpieces. This transformation was in some respects too drastic, with lawns sweeping right up to the house in Brown's usual manner. In 1908-30 the ninth Duke employed Duchêne to make the formal gardens east and west of the house, which provide a less abrupt transition between Brown's curvaceous landscape and the formality of the architecture.

The state approach was from the north, across a steep valley in which ran the river Glyme, no more than a shallow stream. To cross it Vanbrugh built the Grand Bridge, approached on either side by a causeway which involved massive earth-moving operations. Its immense size was out of all proportion to the stream which it crossed, and it was not originally a bridge in the usual sense, but a viaduct. The masons were William Townesend and Bartholomew Peisley. The design is inspired by Palladio's bridges and was to have been surmounted by towers and arcading. It was incomplete when work on the palace stopped in 1712. When it resumed in 1716 it was under the direction of the Duchess, who considered the proposed additions too extravagant and therefore did no more than make it usable. Brown provided an inspired setting for it when he dammed the river to form two long lakes joined at the bridge. In so doing he raised the water level about 4.6m up to the imposts of the arches. East of the bridge on the north side of the lake is the site of the old manor, marked by a small

monument. West of the bridge on the same side is Rosamund's Well, a square pond fed by a spring. Leading north from the bridge to the Ditchley Gate two miles away was an avenue of elm trees which survived Brown's alterations. It was replanted in 1902 when the ellipse half-way along it was changed to a square and has recently been replanted as the result of damage inflicted by Dutch elm disease. At its south end is the Column of Victory, the erection of which was 'conducted' by Lord Herbert, later ninth Earl of Pembroke, in 1727-30. A fluted Doric column surmounted by a statue of the Duke and Roman eagles, it is a simplified version of designs submitted by Hawksmoor. The masons were Townesend and Peisley, and the lead statue of the Duke is attributed to Sir Henry Cheere. Much trouble was taken over the inscription, which was written by Lord Bolingbroke.

The grand approach from the north was found inconvenient, and the usual route taken by visitors is through the town to the Woodstock Gate, designed in the form of a triumphal arch by Hawksmoor in 1723. It consists of one opening flanked by Corinthian columns and an attic narrower than the width of the whole, a design for which there is no classical prototype. The small arched doorways flanking it were made before 1710 for the wall of the flower garden east of the palace and moved here c.1773. The route from the Woodstock Gate to the palace intersects an avenue leading east to the Hensington Gate. The frosted columns and ingenious superstructure have been attributed to Hawksmoor. They are crowned by baskets of flowers carved by Gibbons. Originally situated opposite to the bow-window east of the palace, they were moved here in the 1770s. Hawksmoor's designs for the Ditchley Gate were not executed, and the present gate-piers of 1781 are attributed to John Yenn.

High Lodge, 1.6km east of the palace, is the house of the ranger of Woodstock Park which was rebuilt in Gothic style probably by Capability Brown c.1768. It has an embattled central tower with a bay-window. Prints of its predecessor show a square house with a hipped roof.

Park Farm, 3km north-east, was built by Brown c.1768 also in Gothic style, but was remodelled c.1858. New Bridge, 0.8km south towards Bladon, is of 1773 by William Chambers. It has three arches with a balustraded parapet. Near it is the Temple of Diana, also by Chambers, 1772-3, an Ionic tetrastyle temple. The Temple of Health, in the trees south-east of the Water Gardens, was

built in 1789 by John Yenn, to celebrate the recovery of George III from an illness.

CONTENTS OF THE PALACE

The State Rooms contain an outstanding collection of furniture, tapestries, paintings and miscellanea. The following lists include only those items which are particularly associated with John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, or Sir Winston Churchill.

Section 1 - John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough

TAPESTRIES

The Duke of Marlborough made sure these were accurate in military detail.

The Storming of the Schellenberg	1704 1st State Room
The Battle of Blenheim	1704 Green Writing Room
The Crossing of the Brabant Lines	1705 1st State Room
The Battle of Oudenarde	1708 3rd State Room
The Action at Wynendael	1708 Green Writing Room
The Surrender of Lille	1708 1st State Room
The Battle of Malplaquet	1709 1st State Room
The Siege of Bouchain (3 tapestries)	1711 2nd & 3rd State Room

There is no tapestry of the Battle of Ramillies 1706.

ITEMS RELATING TO CAMPAIGNS

Replicas of Captured Standards	Great Hall, State Rooms
Silver centrepiece of Marlborough writing his famous despatch to his Duchess after the victory at Blenheim	Saloon
The famous despatch	1st State Room
His baton	2nd State Room
Quit Rent Standard presented to the Sovereign on every anniversary of the Battle of Blenheim	1st State Room
Plan of Battle of Blenheim	Long Library
Bust of Louis XIV captured by Marlborough at Tournai	South Front

PAINTINGS

Queen Anne by Edward Lilly	Great Hall
Duke and his family by Closterman	Great Hall
Duchess by Kneller	Green Drawing Room
Duke aged 25 by Kneller	Green Writing Room
Louis XIV by Mignard	2nd State Room
Duke and his Chief Engineer, Col Armstrong, studying plans for Seige of Bouchain by Seeman	3rd State Room
King William III by Kneller	Long Library
Queen Anne by Kneller	Long Library
Duke by Kneller	Long Library

STATUES

Queen Anne by Rysbrack	Long Library
Bust of Duke by Rysbrack	Long Library
Monument to Duke and Duchess with their two sons	Chapel
Column of Victory by Lord Herbert and Roger Morris with inscription by Lord Bolingbroke (Henry St John)	The Park

Section 2 - Sir Winston Churchill

The tour of the Palace includes the room in which Sir Winston was born, and an exhibition which illustrates many aspects of his life and work.

HIS LIFE

Photographs from early childhood onwards.
Personal letters written by him in the early part of his life.

PRIME MINISTER AND ORATOR

Selections from his war-time speeches recorded on tape.
His despatch box.

AUTHOR

The manuscripts of his books.

ARTIST

His paintings.

SOLDIER

Letters written by him at Sandhurst.
The uniform which he wore at the Battle of Omdurman.

INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION

The document conferring on him the Honorary Citizenship of the U.S.A.
Commemorative stamps.

PERSONALITIES AND EVENTS OF HIS TIME

Photographs showing the personalities and events of his life from 1874 to 1965.

In the gardens is the Temple in which Winston proposed marriage to Miss Clementine Hozier.

b. Maps and/or plans

1. Location map (1:4000 000).
2. Map of Woodstock area (1:50 000).
3. Map of Blenheim Park (1:20 000).
4. Plan of house (ground floor) (1:500).
5. 18th century plan of house (1:1250).
6. Vanbrugh's scheme for Grand Bridge (1:500)

c. Photographic and/or cinematographic documentation

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Palace and park before the outbreak of elm disease.
2. Palace and gardens today.
3. Grand Court.
4. North front.
5. Main entrance.
6. South front.
7. West front and terrace garden.
8. Great Hall.
9. The Saloon.
10. The Second State Room.
11. The Long Library.
12. The Chapel.
13. Churchill's painting of the Great Hall.
14. Churchill's Birthroom.
15. The Terrace garden.
16. The Italian Garden.
17. Palace, Lake and Grand Bridge.
18. The Victory Column.

Photograph 1 by Aerofilms Ltd, of Gate Studios, Station Road, Boreham Wood, Herts WD6 1EJ. The remainder by Jeremy Whittaker of Land of Nod, Headley Down, Bordon, Hants.

COLOUR SLIDES

Air Photographs

1. Palace and Park from the north-west.
2. The north front.
3. The east front.

The Approaches

4. Flagstaff Lodge.

Interior

5. The Great Hall.
6. The Saloon.
7. The First State Room.
8. The Green Drawing Room.
9. The Green Writing Room.
10. The Blenheim Tapestry.
11. The Long Library.
12. The Chapel.
13. Sir Winston Churchill's Birthroom.

Park and Gardens

14. The French Water Gardens.
15. The Italian Garden.
16. The Lower Water Terrace.
17. Palace and Grand Bridge from the air.
18. Grand Bridge and Lake.
19. Lake and Palace.

Slides by Jarrold & Sons Ltd of Norwich.

d. History

The history of Blenheim Palace dates back to August 13th 1704, when John, first Duke of Marlborough, having led the allied armies across Europe, defeated the French and Bavarians in and near a village called Blindheim (to be anglicised as 'Blenheim') beside the river Danube.

As a result of that victory Queen Anne, on the nation's behalf, gave the royal estate at Woodstock, known as the Hundred of Wootton, to Marlborough and his heirs forever, the one condition being that, as nominal rent, a replica of a captured French Standard should, on every successive anniversary of the victory, be presented at Windsor Castle to the reigning monarch. The practice continues to this day.

WOODSTOCK MANOR

The origins of Blenheim Park are unrecorded, but that Woodstock was a place of royal resort before the Norman Conquest is shown by the record of a

Council held by Aethelred II (979-1016) 'at Woodstok in the land of the Mercians'. Domesday Book refers to the King's demesne forest at Woodstock and it is clear that the estate was a favourite hunting place for the kings of England throughout the Middle Ages. It was Henry I (1100-1135) who enclosed the park within a wall 27km long, although the existing wall, which encloses an area of some 970ha, only dates from 1727. In the neighbourhood of what is now Park Farm he kept a menagerie of animals imported from abroad.

New Woodstock (now simply called Woodstock) was founded by Henry II (1154-1189) to accommodate some of the royal household while he and his friends stayed at the Manor. Among the latter was Rosamund Clifford for whom, at Rosamund's Well (north-west of the Grand Bridge) the King built an elaborate retreat.

Recent research has shown that the place, called Everswell, was a house with water running through it; and that the plan for it almost certainly came from Sicily. In Rosamund's time there were three square pools, a cloister and delightful gardens. Certainly nothing in the whole park is older than the spring still running at Rosamund's Well, and as for the water, the ninth Duke of Marlborough, who became Duke in 1892, believed so strongly in its curative properties that he had it piped the length of the lake and then pumped to his Water Terraces and to the kitchens.

As king succeeded king, Woodstock Manor began itself to become a Palace with courts, chapels, formal gardens and even a Real Tennis court. In 1554 Queen Elizabeth I was imprisoned for nearly two years in the gatehouse which had been added by Henry VIII. Indeed, for over five hundred years, almost every King and Queen of England stayed there. In 1646 Cromwell's soldiers bombarded it, but the small garrison held out for twenty days before surrendering. In 1687 James II stayed there for deer hunting. In 1713, while the first Duke and Duchess of Marlborough were abroad, Blenheim's architect John Vanbrugh lodged there, declaring it 'very pleasant, although in the middle of rubbish'.

Nothing is left of Woodstock Manor today, but its site is marked by a large, square, white stone on the Woodstock side of Vanbrugh's Grand Bridge. Queen Elizabeth's Island once formed part of a causeway raised above the marsh which preceded the lake to serve as a bridle-path between New Woodstock and Woodstock Manor.

THE PALACE

An inscription on the facade of Flatstaff Lodge records the construction of the Palace as follows:-

'Under the auspices of a munificent sovereign this house was built for John Duke of Marlborough and his Duchess Sarah by Sir J Vanbrugh between the years 1705 and 1722 and this royal manor of Woodstock, together with a grant of £24,000 towards the building of Blenheim was given by her Majesty Queen Anne and confirmed by Act of Parliament (3 and 4 Anne C 4) to the said John Duke of Marlborough and to all his issue male and female lineally descending.'

The building of the Palace (a complex covering, with its courts, a total of c.3ha) was slow and complicated, and although the foundation stone was laid in the summer of 1705, it was not habitable until 1719 and even then there was still much to be done. Part of the trouble was lack of money, which came in more and more slowly from the Treasury; but as time went on, serious differences, often political, arose between Queen Anne and Sarah, First Duchess of Marlborough (1660-1744), who was her Groom of the Stole and Mistress of the Robes.

The Duchess fell out also with the architect, Sir John Vanbrugh, whom she accused of extravagance. All she ever wanted, she said, was a clean, sweet house and garden, though ever so small. But that was not at all the kind of thing Vanbrugh visualised for Marlborough. On the contrary, Blenheim was to be not only a mansion fit for heroes to live in, but a lasting monument to the Queen's glory. In any case, it would never have done in those days for a Duke who was internationally famous and a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire to receive his guests, including possibly the Queen, in anything smaller than a palace or at least a castle, as in fact Blenheim was called while it was being built.

There had, to begin with, to be noble rooms of parade - a huge reception hall leading to a state dining-room called the Saloon - and there had to be state bedrooms and drawing-rooms. At Blenheim the Saloon is flanked by two suites of state rooms, each consisting of an ante-room, a drawing-room and a bedroom, which take up the whole of the south front; while the west front (55m long) is devoted to one apartment alone - the Gallery, now called the Long Library.

Vanbrugh built from east to west so that the eastern range, which housed and still houses the private apartments, could be lived in while the rest of the castle or palace was being finished. There had too, of course, to be what was called an attic storey and a vast basement or undercroft for the servants. Even then, huge as that was, it was not big enough to include the main kitchen, dairy, laundry and so on, which needed to be housed in the Kitchen Court on the east. There was to have been a Stables Court to the west, but this was never completed.

ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of Blenheim is in the style known as English Baroque. It was unorthodox, romantic and short-lived. The Palace - the north front especially - shows it at its zenith. This north front reminds us that, before becoming an architect, Vanbrugh was a soldier and a dramatist. We need to remember, too, that he had Nicholas Hawksmoor to help him. Just as Marlborough had found an ideal partner in Prince Eugene, so Vanbrugh had found Hawksmoor to make some of his wildest schemes practicable in terms of exciting architecture.

The builders' problems and difficulties - and the architects' second thoughts - were all on the Blenheim scale. When the stone quarried in Blenheim Park proved unsatisfactory, a score of other quarries had to be used, with teams of horses to draw waggonloads of monoliths from the Cotswolds: from Taynton, from Barrington, from Cornbury in the middle of Wychwood Forest. After two years of building the south front in the Doric order, Vanbrugh changed his mind and switched to the Corinthian order, so that all had to be done again; while the Plymouth Moor stone ordered for the steps of the main entrance still had not arrived when Vanbrugh retired from Blenheim in 1716.

On the other hand, no building ever had a better team of craftsmen: masons, carvers, cabinetmakers - all were first class. Most of them had worked, or were still working for Wren on St Paul's Cathedral, the best known of them all being Grinling Gibbons, who had carved the Choir of St Paul's in oak and limewood before moving with his team to Blenheim, where most of their carving - urns, trophies, coats of arms - were in stone or, for the Saloon, in marble. Inside the Great Hall, again enriched by Gibbons, Vanbrugh hid his staircases behind arcaded walls with row above row of roundheaded arches. Outside, the astonishing

roofscape is equally typical, with chimneys hidden in towers and, to crown the north portico, a pediment with the Marlborough arms; above it a huge broken pediment and above that a third pediment bearing a golden ball and two chained captives.

As for Vanbrugh's Grand Bridge, if he had had his way that too would have carried an arcade of roundhead arches, but that was stopped by the Duchess, who saw it in terms of an extravagant folly. And so, after his last quarrel with her in 1716, Vanbrugh left, and although Hawksmoor returned later to finish the Long Library and to raise the Triumphal Arch at Woodstock, that was not until after the first Duke's death in 1722.

BLLENHEIM AND ITS OWNERS

From the point of view of the history of Blenheim the most important dukes have been the first, the fourth and the ninth. The first Duke (1650-1722) is said to have chosen Vanbrugh as his architect after seeing a model of Castle Howard. While still on the continent Marlborough bought pictures and ordered tapestries for the state rooms. In the event he was to enjoy only two summers at Blenheim. He died at Windsor Lodge. His widow, Sarah, was left to finish the palace and to raise monuments to Marlborough's glory. These included the Triumphal Arch at the Woodstock entrance designed by Hawksmoor (1723), the Column of Victory built by Lord Herbert and Roger Morris (1730) and Rysbrack's monument in the Chapel (1733). She commissioned Rysbrack, too, for the marble statue of Queen Anne which stands in the Long Library, while in the Park she directed Colonel Armstrong to canalise the Glyme and to make a cascade beneath the main arch of the Grand Bridge.

The fourth Duke (1758-1817) employed Sir William Chambers and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Chambers' alterations to the East Gate were not revolutionary, but in the Park Brown's were, for it was he who made the lakes by releasing the Glyme and letting it engulf the base of the Grand Bridge. It meant drowning Sarah's cascade, but at the extremity of the second lake he made another, and beyond it, near Bladon, Chambers spanned the Glyme with a graceful bridge.

It was a pity that Brown destroyed the state or military garden designed by Vanbrugh and Wise for the south front, for with its terraces and fountains, its bastions and curtain-walls, it must have been the wonder of the gardening world. But,

after Vanbrugh's death in 1726, fashions changed not only in architecture but in garden design. The setting of a great house had no longer to be formal, but seemingly natural and pastoral; at Blenheim even the Great Court in front of the main entrance had to be grassed over.

By the time the ninth Duke had acceded to the dukedom in 1892 the wheel of fashion had turned again, so that in 1900 he began to restore the Great Court to its original form. Within the Palace he re-decorated, in the Versailles idiom, the three state rooms west of the Saloon. In the grounds he planted thousands of trees, re-planted the elm avenue north of the Grand Bridge and then, with the help of his French architect, Achille Duchêne, made the formal gardens on the east front of the Palace and, much later (1930) on the west. He died in 1934, leaving Blenheim far better enriched than he had found it.

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

On November 30th, 1874, Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, son of the eighth Duke of Marlborough's brother, Lord Randolph, was born at Blenheim Palace, where his mother, Jennie, happened to be staying. In 1908 he proposed to and was accepted by Miss Clementine Hozier in the Temple of Diana. He died in 1965 and is buried in the village churchyard at Bladon. Baroness Churchill died in 1977 and her ashes are interred in her husband's grave.

THE GARDENS

The Gardens to be seen at Blenheim Palace today bear little resemblance to those originally created, in the early 18th century, by Henry Wise. Indeed the only remaining feature from that time is the Walled Garden. Much of the rest of the gardens, and also the Park, was laid out by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the 1760's. He was the most acclaimed landscape architect of his day, but his ideas were very different from those of Henry Wise and so he destroyed much of what Wise had created, sparing only the Walled Garden and the great avenues of elm to the north and east of the Palace.

The greatest loss was that of the State or Military Garden, which lay to the south of the Palace and covered an area of more than 30ha. It was a formal garden consisting of a 'parterre' on the site of the present south lawn, and, beyond, a wilderness garden, the whole surrounded by curtain walls with eight large

bastions. This was a highly ordered garden with the borders and paths combining to form well defined patterns. By contrast, Brown's ideas centred on the provision of an 'Arcadian' landscape set down in the English countryside, where although everything was arranged no less exactly than in Wise's designs, the overall effect was to be that of a natural landscape. To this end Brown removed the State Garden totally, and replaced it with a broad sweep of grass, which still today bears traces of Wise's foundations for his walls and bastions.

Brown's scheme for the Park was founded on the damming of the River Glyme and this he accomplished by building the Grand Cascade, which lies at the south-west end of the gardens. Beyond the Cascade the fifth Duke and Duchess created in the 1820's a large rock garden, together with other gardens below the falls. This area has now reverted to its natural state, but for over one hundred years it was the horticultural highlight of Blenheim.

It was not until the beginning of this century that any further major alterations were made to the gardens. The ninth Duke engaged a French landscape architect, Achille Duchêne, to recreate a garden which would give the Palace its proper formal setting. This garden was to be on the site of the Duchess's garden to the east of the Palace. Duchêne removed the existing shrubberies and planted the Italian Garden we see today, a pattern of scrolls and arabesques in dwarf box interspersed with plantings of summer flowers, the whole framed on two levels by golden yew. The Italian Garden recalls the 'parterre' which used to lie close by to the south, and it is heavily influenced by the 18th century gardens of France and Italy; thus it provides a contemporary setting for the Palace.

In 1925 Duchêne was again commissioned to work at Blenheim, this time on the west front, where he removed the shrubberies which ran from the Palace down to the lake. In their place he made terraces on two levels, with water the main feature of the whole enterprise. The Water Terraces are said to resemble the 'parterre d'eau' at Versailles and thereby they complete the contemporary setting of the Palace. Duchêne wished to include fountains and running water, but the ninth Duke was adamant that the tranquillity of the limpid pools was not to be disturbed; however the fountains were installed at a later date, thus completing Duchêne's plans. Away from the formal gardens adjacent to the Palace, the plantings are more

natural. To the south-west, beyond the Rose Garden, there are many mature specimen trees which, together with more recent plantings, comprise the Arboretum. This area continues to the Grand Cascade and the western end of the lake.

To the south-east the Gardens extend beyond the Duke's Garden, constructed by the tenth Duke in the 1950's, towards the Walled Garden. It is in this area that one can gain an impression of the styles of previous years, with plantings of laurel and the 19th century Roundabout, or Exedra, recalling the carefully planned patterns and sightlines of the 18th century.

Henry Wise's Walled Garden remains as it has stood for more than two centuries. It encloses an area of 3.2ha and as such is one of the largest enclosed gardens in Britain. The walls are 4.27m high and topped with 'Taynton Stone' dressings. There are four large bastions in the walls which originally complimented those of the State Garden.

The purpose of the Walled Garden was to so modify the environment that a wider range of plants could be grown than was possible in the open. To this end the walls served two purposes, firstly providing shelter from the wind and secondly vertical surfaces on which to grow plants. The whole garden was orientated east-west so the maximum amount of wall was south facing. This enabled the plants growing on that wall to absorb the maximum amount of energy from the sun; and furthermore the walls themselves would absorb energy during the day, releasing it as heat at night.

Whilst the Walled Garden was mainly used to provide fruit and vegetables of all descriptions to the Palace kitchens, its purpose was not wholly functional. The whole area would have been laid out with neat borders and paths, edged with low hedges of box and lavender. Also there were flower borders to provide decorative material for the Palace. Nowadays only a small part of the garden is cropped exclusively for the Palace and, in addition to the open ground and walls, there are glasshouses which are used to grow grapes, melons and peaches, as well as the more usual glasshouse crops.

North of the Walled Garden, on the site of the old glasshouses, there is a small area (0.1ha) of more modern glasshouses which are equipped to produce a range of pot plants, utilising as much of the modern technology as possible, thereby eliminating many of the repetitive tasks involved in plant production. This area is utilised very

intensively and as many as five crops per year are taken from a given space.

Adjacent to the glasshouses is the Blenheim butterfly and plant centre. The Butterfly House offers the facility to view many species of sub-tropical butterflies flying freely in their own specially heated glasshouse. The Plant Centre stocks a wide range of plants for the garden and the home, together with a selection of garden sundries.

Close to this area there is also a Cafeteria and an Adventure Playground, both recent developments which will add to the enjoyment of a visit to Blenheim.

THE WOODLANDS

Many of the Woodlands date from the 18th century when the Estate was laid out by Capability Brown. Of this planting only approximately 100ha remain; the rest was planted either in the early 1900's or from 1956 onwards.

Blenheim Estate in general has a wide variety of woodland which is semi-commercial, but as an added bonus provides a superb habitat for wildlife. Many of the ancient oaks are sadly decayed, but are retained on the advice of the Countryside Commission.

e. Bibliography

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11, HMSO, London, 1963.

Blenheim Palace

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 Life, London, 1951.

Blenheim Palace, Official
 Guide, Oxford, 1986 edn.

Blenheim Park and Gardens,
 Official Guide, Oxford, 1984.

Sherwood, J & Oxfordshire, 1974.
Pevsner, N

See also Country Life, June 3 and 10, 1899, May 29
and June 5, 1909, February 3, 1940 and May 20 and
27, 1949.

Note: For an extended bibliography see Green, D,
Blenheim Palace, Country Life, 1951.

4. State of preservation/
conservation

- a. Diagnosis The property is in reasonable condition overall.
- b. Agent responsible Estate Agent
for preservation/
conservation Address as above.
- c. History of
preservation/
conservation Continuous maintenance, with ongoing programme of
maintenance and repair.
- d. Means for
preservation The Palace is listed Grade 1 under the Town and
Country Planning Acts. The following garden/park
features are also listed:-

Bernini Fountain
Bladon Bridge
Column of Victory
Grand Bridge
High Lodge
Triumphal Arch

Blenheim is also included in the Register of Parks
and Gardens of special historic interest in
England.

The property is financed by visitor income
supplemented by funds from a newly established
Blenheim Foundation set up by the current Duke
with Charity Commissioners approval to raise money
for restoration work. Grants for specific
projects are also received from the Historic
Buildings and Monuments Commission and the
Countryside Commission.

- e. Management plans Nothing known.

5. Justification for
inclusion in the World
Heritage List

- a. Cultural property Blenheim Palace as it stands today

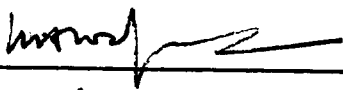
represents a unique architectural
achievement.

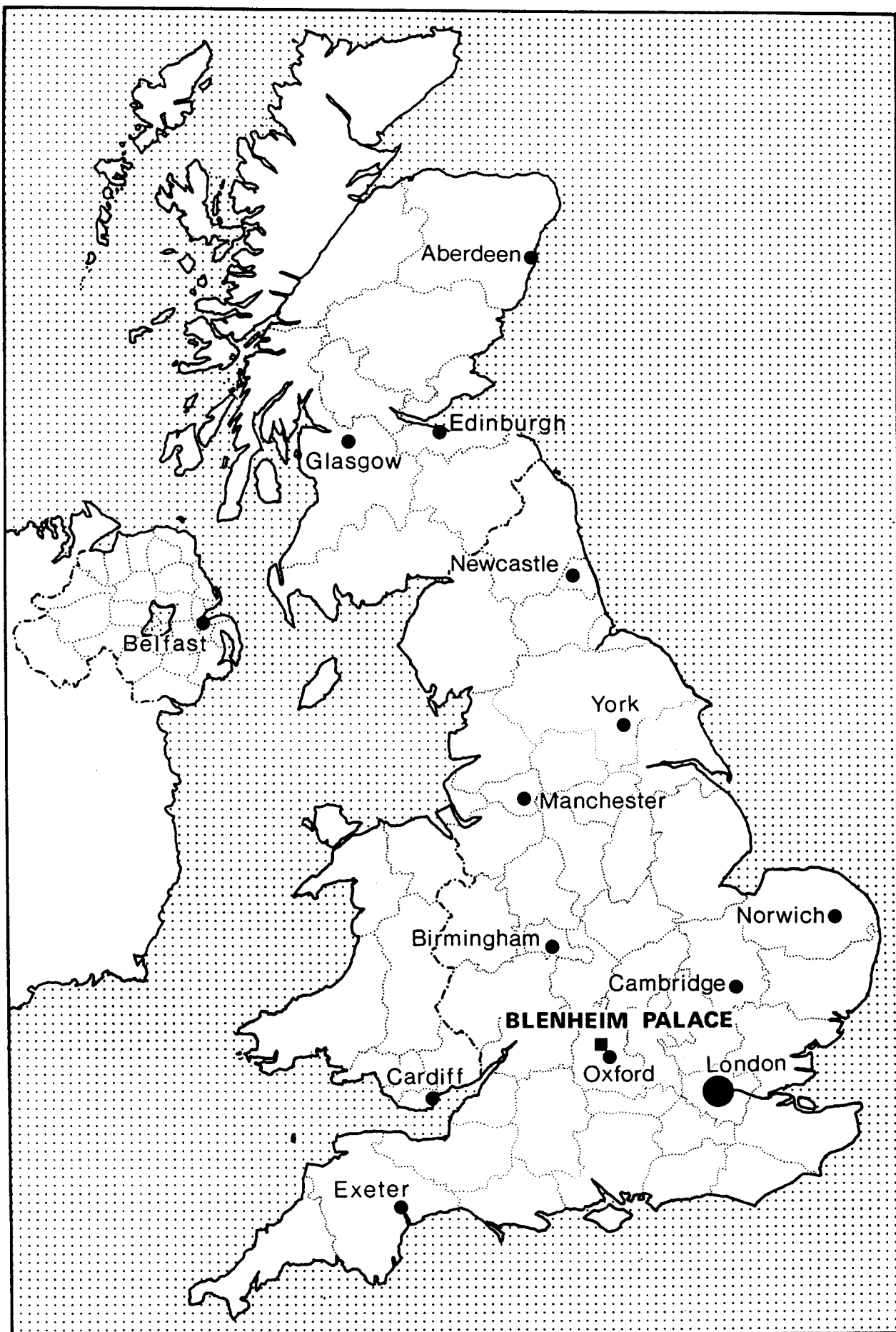
is an outstanding example of the work of two
of England's most notable architects.

is a building which, with its associated
landscape, has exerted considerable influence
on subsequent developments in architecture
and landscape design.

is associated with two of England's great national heroes, the first Duke of Marlborough and Sir Winston Churchill.

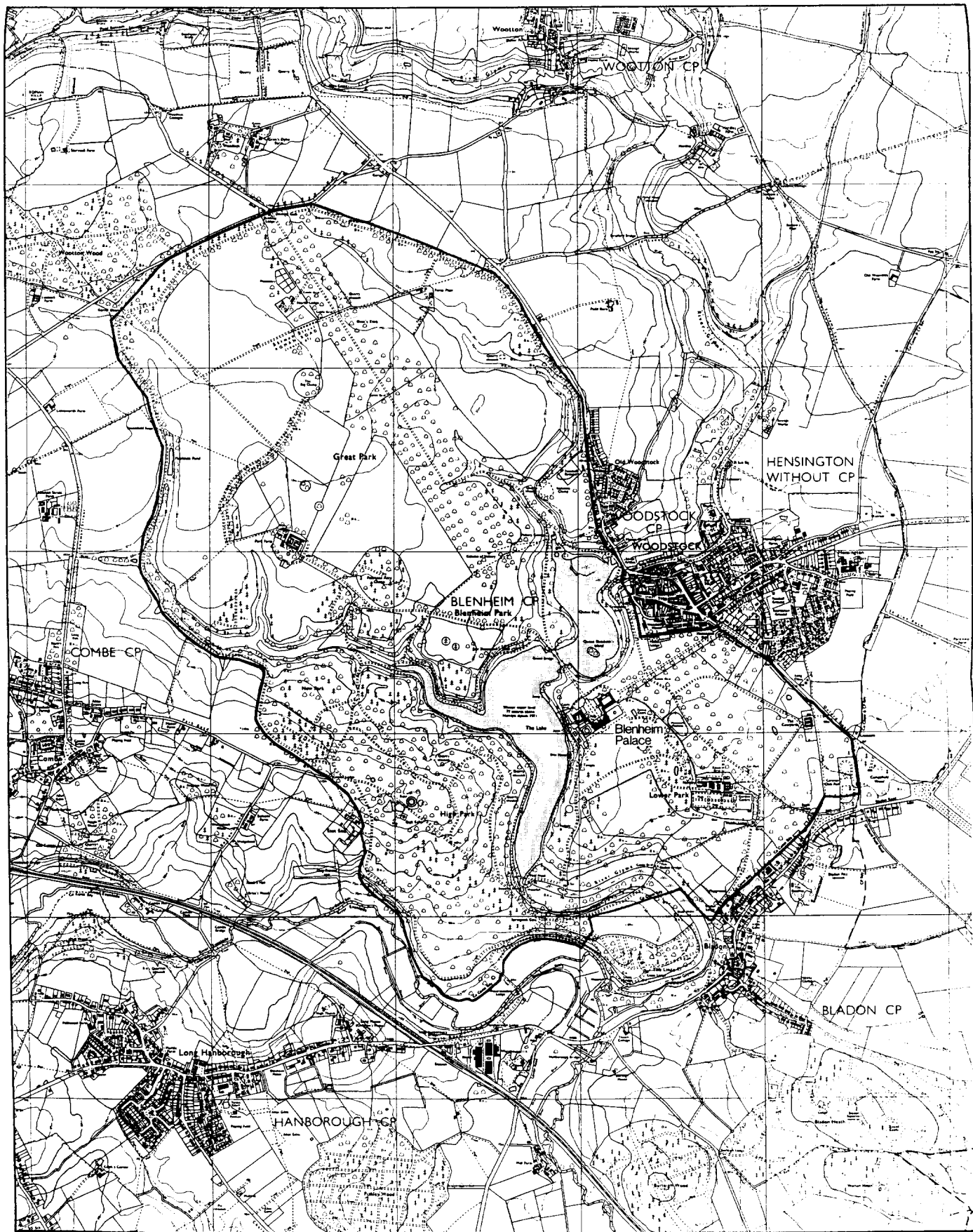
As such it is nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List under UNESCO Criteria a(i), (ii) and (vi).

Signed (on behalf of State party) 
Full name The Hon William Waldegrave MP
Title Minister of State for the Environment
Countryside and Planning
Date _____



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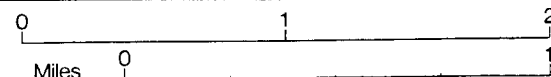
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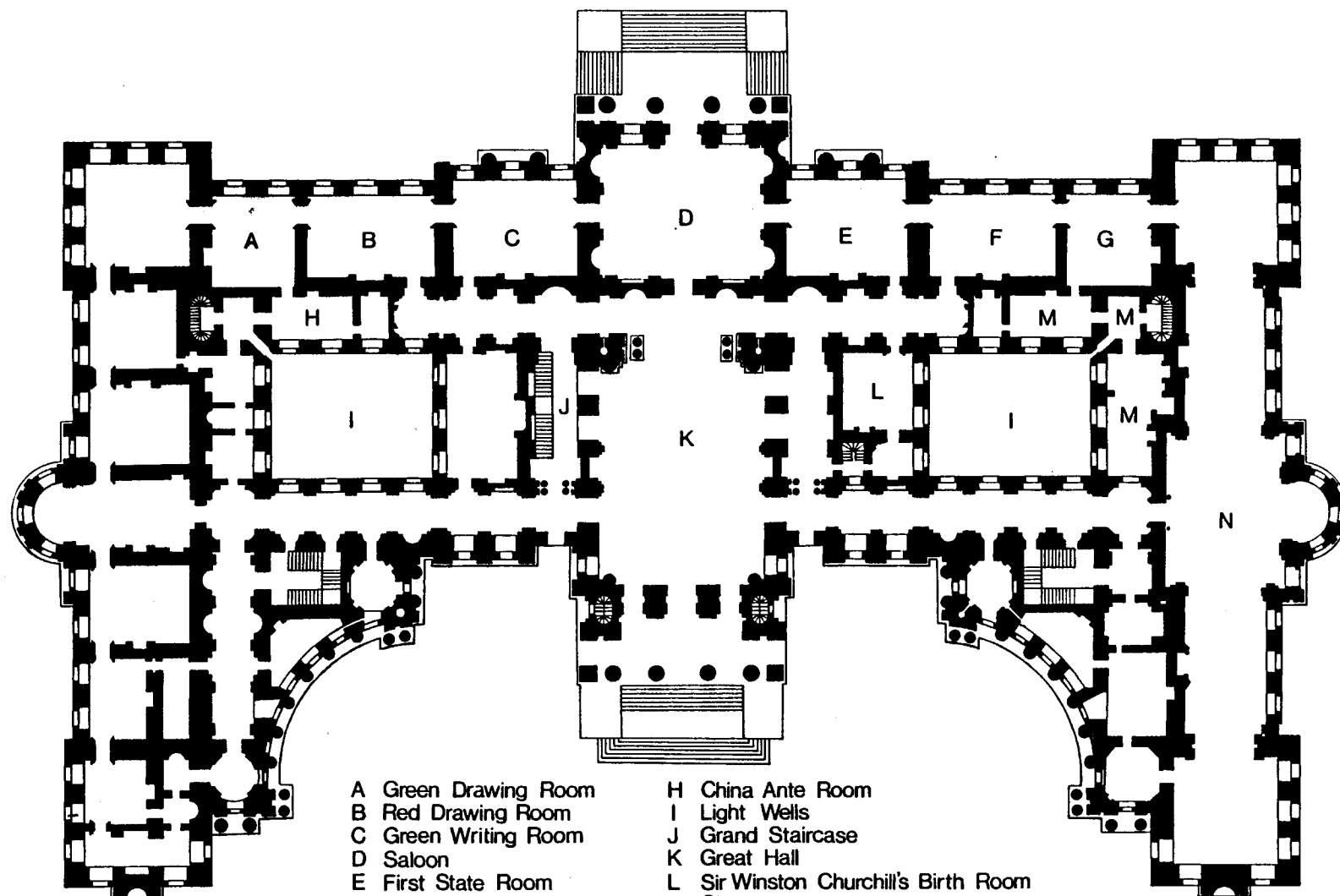
Blenheim Park

Nominated Area

Kilometres

Miles

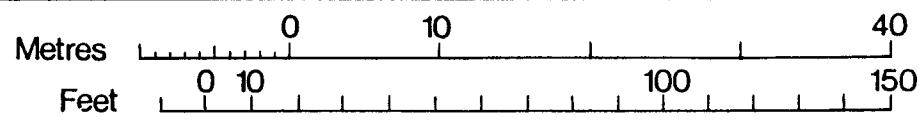




- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| A Green Drawing Room | H China Ante Room |
| B Red Drawing Room | I Light Wells |
| C Green Writing Room | J Grand Staircase |
| D Saloon | K Great Hall |
| E First State Room | L Sir Winston Churchill's Birth Room |
| F Second State Room | M Sir Winston Churchill Exhibition Rooms |
| G Third State Room | N Long Library |

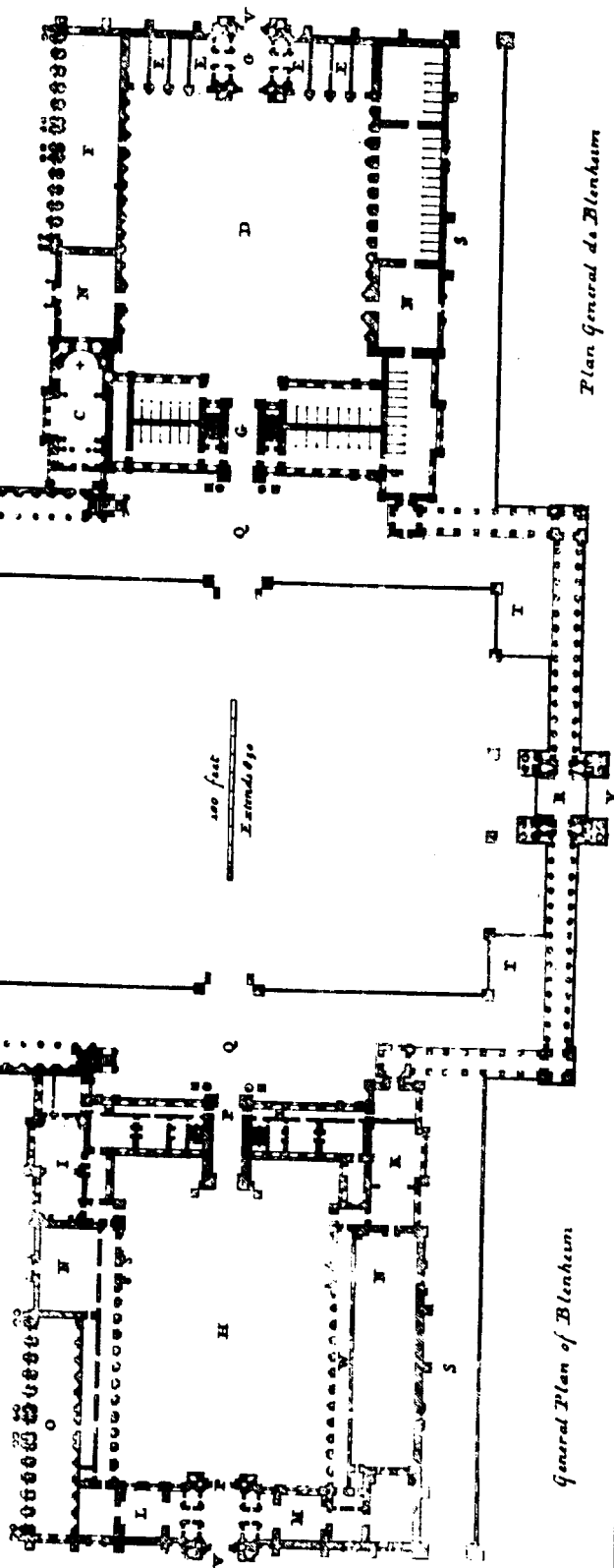
1:500

Blenheim Palace (Ground Floor)



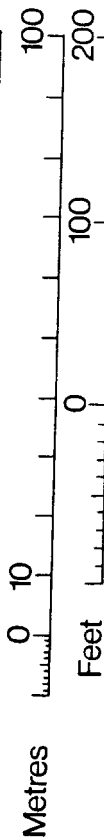
- A The Body of the house
- B Great Court
- C The Chapel
- D The Stable Court
- E Coach house
- F Greenhouse
- G The gates
- H The Kitchen
- I The Common Hall
- L The Balcony
- M The Landry

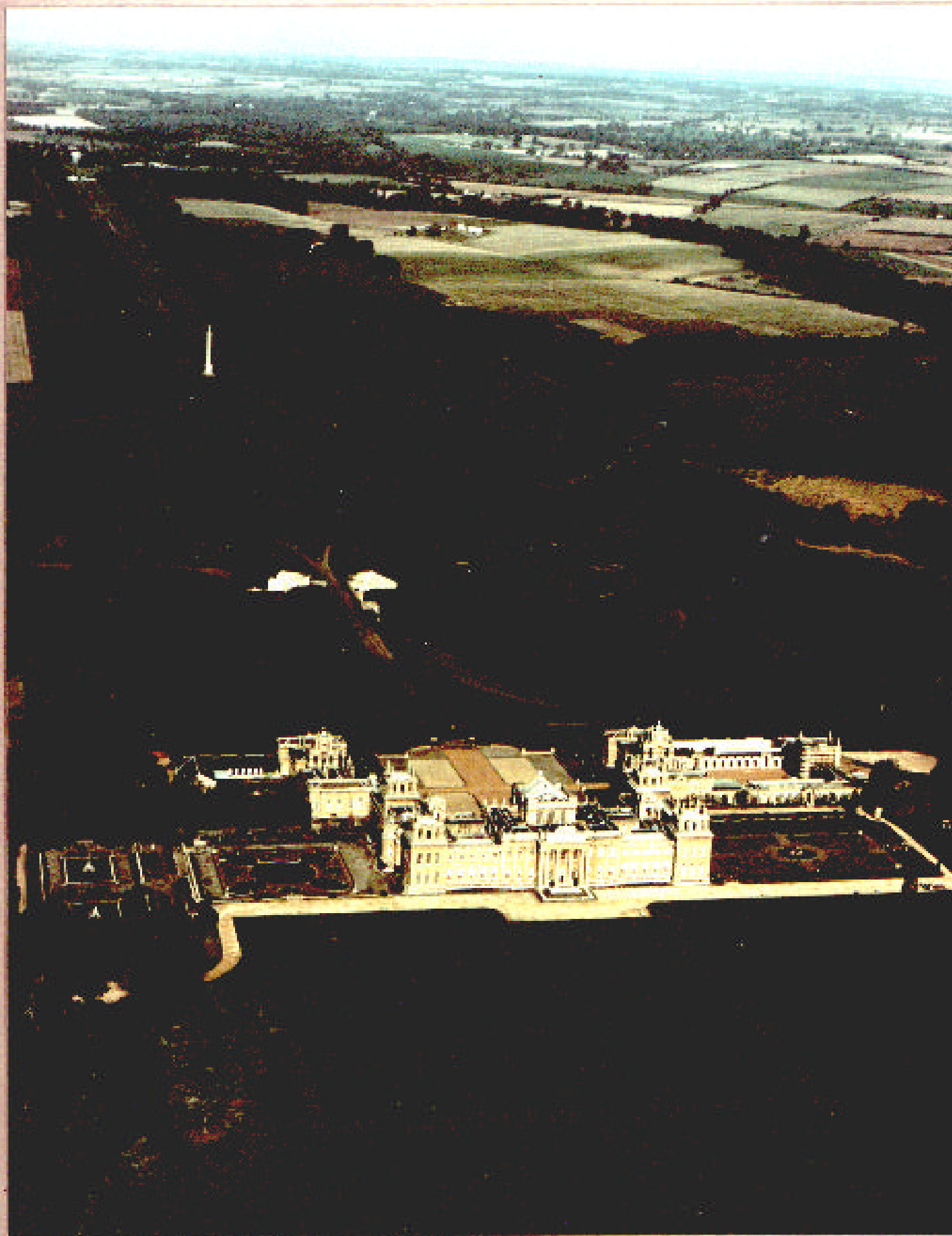
- N Back Courts
- O A Greenhouse
- P The gates
- Q Stables
- R The great Gate
- S Terraces
- T The Colonnade upon a great terrace
- V Water Works
- W Land Portico
- X Pavilions
- Y The Principal Approach & way by the great bridge



General Plan of Blenheim

Plan General de Blenheim





1. Palace And Park Before The Outbreak Of Elm Disease



2. Palace And Gardens Today.

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 425

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Blenheim Palace and Park

Location : Oxfordshire

State Party : United Kingdom

Date : December 23, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II and IV.

C) JUSTIFICATION

On August 13, 1704 John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, with the help of Prince Eugène, won a decisive victory over the French and Bavarian troops at Blindheim, near Höchstädt. As an expression of the nation's gratitude Queen Anne bestowed on him the royal property of Woodstock, one of the oldest royal properties set in the heart of a forest, rich in game, 13 kms to the north west of Oxford.

Not so far from the site of the castle which, from Ethelred II (979-1016) to James II (1633-1701), was visited by a great number of kings, and which held Queen Elizabeth prisoner in 1554, a new palace of colossal dimensions was built between 1705 and 1722, as the engraved inscription on the facade of Flatstaff Lodge reminds us.

The palace commemorating this victory, whose name became anglicized as Blenheim, covers an area of 3 hectares. An initial donation of 24,000 pounds, which was confirmed by Parliament, enabled the first part of the work on this outstanding site to begin.

The direction of the work was entrusted to an ex-soldier named John Vanbrugh who was better known for his talents as a playwright than for his gifts as a builder. However, from the beginning he realized the need to collaborate with an experienced architect, Nicholas Hawksmoor in this case, a disciple of Wren, whose talent was already evident in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Hampton Court and Whitehall.

The construction of Blenheim Palace, which was severely criticized by Voltaire who described it as "a great mass of stone with neither charm nor taste", was completed by the Duchess Sarah, in memory of her husband, but it is in no way a reduced model of Versailles, as were so many other palaces of the 18th century.

The main interest of this building is precisely the authenticity of its national character: indeed such elements as the military trophies which adorn the pediment above the portico, the Column of Victory, the decorative and figurative rhetoric of the tapestries and painted ceilings, all exalt the triumph of the English armies over the French.

The term "English baroque" has been used when speaking of Blenheim, but this ambiguous and inadequate expression only goes to prove the difficulty art historians have in defining this unclassifiable building. The symmetrical plan, with its classic-type spatial organization, is combined with an original elevation which, nevertheless, is not without reminiscences of the past: there is something anachronically defiant in the square towers which stand at the four corners of the main building with their distinct medieval influence. The complex structure of the upper floors is reminiscent of the Elizabethan period. The eclecticism of Vanbrugh, a theatrical taste for scenographic effects which result from the heterogeneous architectural forms used, make Blenheim a pre-Romantic monument whose historical importance cannot be underestimated.

The innovative character of the Palace (less apparent in the luxurious apartments and ceremonial rooms) is accentuated by the conception of the park whose original lay-out dates back to Vanbrugh who regulated the course of the Glyme and created the Great Bridge, a veritable Palladio-style viaduct, which was never completed (it should have been crowned with towers and arcades). However, it was more especially during the period between 1764 and 1774 that "Capability" Brown, one of the most famous English landscape gardeners, turned this classical park into a wonderful artificial landscape by the creation of two lakes which lie on either side of the bridge. During the course of the second half of the 18th century, Gothic style (High Lodge and Park Farm in 1768) or Neo-Gothic style buildings (William Chambers' Temple of Diana, 1772-1773; John Yenn's Temple of Health, 1789) were built.

In what remains of the family property of the Dukes of Marlborough (the room in the Palace where Winston Churchill was born in 1874 can be visited) the evolution of the park has not been held back by conservation measures and its present state owes much to the transformations which were undertaken by the French landscape architect, Achille Duchêne, between 1908 and 1930 on behalf of the 9th Duke. These transformations have notably lessened the historical interest of the property which, nevertheless, retains its remarkable character.

ICOMOS is very much in favor of including Blenheim Palace on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II and IV.

- **Criterion II.** By their refusal of the French models of classicism, the Palace and Park illustrate the beginnings of the

English Romantic movement which was characterized by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature. The influence of Blenheim on the architecture and the organization of space in the 18th and 19th centuries was greatly felt both in England and abroad.

- Criterion IV. Built by the nation to honor one of its heroes, Blenheim is, above all, the home of an English aristocrat, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, who was also Prince of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, as we are reminded in the decoration of the Great Drawing Room by Louis Laguerre (1719-1720).

In virtue of this criterion, just like the Residence of Würzburg (included in 1981), and the castles of Augustusburg and Falkenlust in Brühl (included in 1984), Blenheim is typical of 18th-century European princely residences, a category which is still under-represented on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS, May 1987

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

LISTE DU PATRIMOINE MONDIAL

N° 425

A) IDENTIFICATION

Bien proposé : Palais et parc de Blenheim

Lieu : Oxfordshire

Etat partie : Royaume Uni

Date : 23 Décembre 1986

B) RECOMMANDATION DE L'ICOMOS

Que le bien culturel proposé soit inscrit sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial au titre des critères II et IV.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Le 13 août 1704, John Churchill, premier duc de Marlborough, remporta avec l'aide du prince Eugène une victoire décisive sur les troupes françaises et bavaraises à Blindheim, près de Höchstädt. En témoignage de reconnaissance, la reine Anne lui fit don, au nom de la nation, du domaine royal de Woodstock, l'un des plus anciens biens de la Couronne, au coeur d'une forêt giboyeuse à 13 kms au nord-ouest d'Oxford.

Non loin de l'emplacement du château qui, d'Aethelred II (979-1016) à Jacques II (1633-1701) accueillit un grand nombre de rois et retint prisonnière la reine Elizabeth en 1554, un nouveau palais, de dimensions colossales, s'éleva de 1705 à 1722, comme le rappelle une inscription gravée sur la façade de Flatstaff Lodge.

Le palais commémorant la victoire dont le nom fut anglicisé en Blenheim couvre une superficie de 3 hectares. Un don initial de 24.000 livres, confirmé par le Parlement, permit de financer les premiers travaux d'un chantier à tous égards exceptionnel.

La conduite des travaux fut confiée à un ancien soldat, John Vanbrugh, mieux connu pour ses talents de dramaturge que pour ses capacités de constructeur. Celui-ci sut d'emblée s'associer un architecte expérimenté, Nicholas Hawksmoor, disciple de Wren, dont les talents s'étaient déjà affirmés à la cathédrale Saint-Paul de Londres, à Hampton Court et à Whitehall. Sévèrement jugé par Voltaire qui n'y voyait qu'une "grosse masse de pierre sans agrément ni sans goût", le Palais de Blenheim, achevé par la duchesse Sarah en mémoire de son époux, n'est pas une réplique réduite de Versailles, comme tant de châteaux du XVIIIe siècle.

L'intérêt de cette construction où, des trophées militaires qui timbrent le fronton des portes à la Colonne de la Victoire, en passant par les tapisseries et les plafonds peints, toute une rhétorique décorative ou figurative exalte le triomphe des armées anglaises sur la France, est précisément son caractère authentiquement national.

On a pu parler, à propos de Blenheim, de "baroque anglais", expression ambiguë et inadéquate qui traduit l'embarras des historiens de l'art en présence d'une construction inclassable. Le plan, symétrique, avec son organisation spatiale classique, se combine à une élévation originale bien que nourrie de réminiscences : les quatre tours carrées dressées aux angles du bâtiment principal comme un défi anachronique trahissent une inspiration médiévale. La structure complexe de leur étage supérieur se réfère à des modèles d'époque élisabéthaine. L'éclectisme de Vanbrugh, un goût théâtral pour des effets scénographiques nés de l'assemblage de formes architecturales hétérogènes font de Blenheim un monument pré-romantique dont l'importance historique ne peut être sous-estimée.

Ce caractère novateur du Palais (moins sensible dans les fastueux appartements et dans les salles d'apparat) est accentué par la conception du parc, dont l'aménagement primitif remonte à Vanbrugh qui régularisa le cours de la Glyme et créa le grand pont, véritable viaduc dans le goût de Palladio, qui resta inachevé (il aurait dû être surmonté de tours et d'arcades). C'est surtout entre 1764 et 1774 que l'un des plus célèbres jardiniers-paysagistes anglais, "Capability" Brown, fit de ce parc encore classique un merveilleux paysage artificiel en créant les deux lacs qui s'étendent de part et d'autre du pont. Au cours de la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle des "fabriques" s'élevèrent en style gothique (High Lodge et Park Farm, en 1768) ou en style néo-classique (temple de Diane par William Chambers, 1772-1773; temple de la Santé par John Yenn, 1789).

Dans un domaine qui reste la propriété familiale des ducs de Marlborough (et l'on visite dans le château la chambre où Winston Churchill naquit en 1874), l'évolution du parc n'a pas été figée par des mesures conservatoires et l'aménagement actuel doit beaucoup aux transformations entreprises pour le neuvième duc par l'architecte-paysagiste français Achille Duchêne de 1908 à 1930. Elles ont notablement amoindri l'intérêt historique d'un ensemble qui reste néanmoins très remarquable.

L'ICOMOS formule un avis très favorable à l'inscription du Palais et du parc de Blenheim sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial au titre des critères II et IV.

- Critère II. Dans leur refus des modèles du classicisme français, le palais et le parc illustrent les débuts du mouvement romantique anglais, caractérisé par l'éclectisme de l'inspiration, le retour

aux sources nationales, l'amour de la nature. L'influence de Blenheim sur l'architecture et l'organisation de l'espace aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles s'est exercée largement, en Angleterre et hors d'Angleterre.

- Critère IV. Monument élevé par une nation à un de ses héros, Blenheim est avant tout la résidence d'un aristocrate anglais, le premier duc de Marlborough qui fut aussi prince du Saint-Empire Romain Germanique, comme le rappelle la décoration du Grand salon par Louis Laguerre (1719-1720). A ce titre, comme la Résidence de Würzburg (inscrite en 1981), comme les châteaux d'Augustusburg et de Falkenlust à Brühl (inscrits en 1984), Blenheim est un type achevé de demeure princière du XVIIIe siècle européen, catégorie qui reste encore insuffisamment représentée sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial.

ICOMOS, Mai 1987