

# Media Information



**Blenheim Palace**

Woodstock

Oxfordshire

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[www.blenheimpalace.com](http://www.blenheimpalace.com)

January 2011

BP PR 7

## ▪ **‘Gladys Deacon - An Eccentric Duchess’ Special Exhibition at Blenheim Palace: 12<sup>th</sup> February - 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011**

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To celebrate the opening of the new season in 2011, Blenheim Palace will host a special exhibition in the Long Library about the fascinating life of Gladys Deacon (1881-1977), the second wife of the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough and her time as Duchess of Marlborough 1921 - 1934. Working in conjunction with Hugo Vickers, historian and author of the biography *Gladys, Duchess of Marlborough*, the exhibition will uncover a treasure trove of new and unseen material providing a rare glimpse into the intriguing world of a woman who followed Consuelo Vanderbilt as wife of the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke at the age of forty. In her youth, Gladys had lived a Bohemian life in Paris, counting Proust, Rodin and Monet amongst her friends. She was living at Blenheim Palace when the water terraces were built in the 1920s, but was evicted by the Duke in 1933 and became a recluse in her later years.

Gladys was supremely intelligent and mischievous. *“I married a house not a man,”* she said when she finally married the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke. *“Am I not the last of the Marlborough gems,”* she wrote to him, *“Greek in temper with a more modern dash about certain parts.”*

Standing in front of the main doors of Blenheim Palace visitors can look up at the portico ceiling to see the striking painted eyes, which have gazed mysteriously down for the past 80 years. The eyes were originally painted in 1928 for Gladys Deacon, by instruction of the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough. The dramatic eyes, depicting three blue and three brown, were painted by the decorative painter and artist, Colin Gill. Gladys, who was famed for her blue eyes, climbed the scaffolding to give the artist a bright blue silk scarf the same colour as her eyes, to work from. There are very few other signs of Gladys Deacon’s time at the Palace aside from a single photograph in the Palace State Rooms, and her striking features adorn two matching stone sphinxes in the Lower Water Terraces.

Gladys Deacon was second wife of the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough, and is considered one of the most eccentric Duchesses of the Twentieth century. An American who married into the peerage without being an heiress, Gladys fitted no traditional mould. Famed for her beauty, she destroyed her legendary looks by early attempts at plastic surgery. Born in 1881 she was cosmopolitan by upbringing and

inclination, but from childhood onwards she was set on marrying a Duke and preferably the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough. In the intervening years she fascinated many - Bernard Berenson, Hermann Keyserling, the Duke of Connaught and d'Annunzio. This special exhibition featuring photographs, costumes of the era, personal letters, artworks and Royal invitations will reveal the early years of her upbringing within a Belle Epoch family, to high society life at the Palace, to her reclusive years in later life.

Hugo Vickers comments: *“It is exciting to bring Gladys Deacon back to Blenheim Palace after these long lost years. She was without doubt the most fascinating person I ever met. I am sure visitors will be amazed by her and by the range of her interests.”*

### **Blenheim Palace Park and Gardens**

Blenheim Palace is home to the 11<sup>th</sup> Duke and Duchess of Marlborough and his family, and is the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill. The splendour and tranquillity of the ‘Capability’ Brown landscaped parkland and the Formal Gardens are unrivalled in Britain.

In addition to the unique Palace, special exhibitions, and the fascinating visitor experience ‘Blenheim Palace: The Untold Story’, a full programme of special events take place throughout the year. Blenheim Palace is set in 2,100 acres of spectacular parkland in the heart of the Oxfordshire Cotswolds and is only eight miles from Oxford.



Blenheim Palace is a member of the Green Tourism Business Scheme

### **Notes to Editors**

- The special exhibition is included within a Palace, Park and Gardens ticket. Adult £19 Concs. £15, Child £10.50, Family £50.
- Buy One Day Get 12 months free - when you buy a ticket to the Palace you will receive an Annual Pass for free! For more information, terms & conditions visit [www.blenheimpalace.com](http://www.blenheimpalace.com)
- Blenheim Palace and Formal Gardens open from 12<sup>th</sup> February 2011 to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011.
- The Palace and Formal Gardens are closed on Mondays and Tuesdays in November and December. The Park is open daily except Christmas Day
- The Park opens at 9am, Formal Gardens at 10am, the Palace and Pleasure Gardens from 10.30am.
- Last admission to the Palace and Gardens is at 4.45pm. The Palace and Pleasure Gardens\* close at 5.30pm and the Park at 6pm.
- Child age 5-16 inclusive. Under 5's free. Full details of ticket prices are available on request.

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For further information about Blenheim Palace please call the 24 hour information line on 0800 849 6500 or visit the website at [www.blenheimpalace.com](http://www.blenheimpalace.com)

For media information contact: Hannah Payne at Blenheim Palace

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