



BLenheim PALACE

EDUCATION

This is an introduction to Blenheim's Local History

This module is an historical overview of how Blenheim came to be in Woodstock, and the relationship between the Family and the local community.

“The longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward.”

Winston Churchill, March 1944

Blenheim and Woodstock today

Q: **Who** lives at Blenheim Palace?

A: The **12th Duke of Marlborough** lives here. His name is Charles James Spencer-Churchill.

Q: **When** was it built?

A: Over 300 years ago. The building work started in 1705 and finished in 1722.

Q: **How** many years did it take to build?

A: The main body of the house took 17 years (1705-1722), although the works were halted between 1712 and 1716.

A: The whole house was finished in 1733 (including indoor decoration).
1705-1733 = 28 years

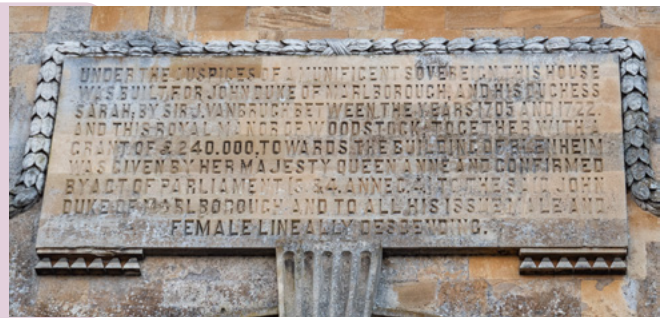
Q: **Why** was it built?

A: It was built to reward a soldier for his military service.

Q: **Who** was this soldier and what service did he perform?

A: It was the **1st Duke of Marlborough**. His name was **John Churchill**.

He fought in the War of the Spanish Succession. His first significant victory was at the **Battle of Blenheim** in 1704. Queen Anne rewarded him with land and money to build himself a home. The land was the **Royal Park of Woodstock**. The money was a total of **£240,000**. The home is this palace.



Woodstock before Blenheim

Prehistoric people in the **Iron Age** built settlements and marked them with trenches.

Q: What is a Grim's Ditch?

A: It's a series of trenches that marked people's territory, and separated settlements.

There is evidence that the land was inhabited during the **Iron Age**. To the north side of the Park, there is what appears to be a segment of the North Oxfordshire **Grim's Ditch**.



The **Romans** called England, *Britannia*. The Romans built roads.

There is evidence that there were settlements during the **Roman period**. On the same side of the Park, there is a Roman road called **Akeman Street**. It is a segment of the road that linked *Alchester* (Bicester) to *Corinium* (Cirencester).



A place's name ending with **-caster**, **-cester** or **-chester** is a place that was founded on a Roman settlement. The Latin word *castrum* means a 'Roman fort'.

During the Middle Ages, the **Anglo-Saxons** came to *Britannia*. The Angles were from today's Denmark, and the Saxons were from today's Germany and The Netherlands. They renamed *Britannia* *Angle-Land*, (England), which means "the land of the Angles".

King Alfred the Great (r. 871-899) was known for being the first King of all Kingdoms: Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, and Sussex.

- King Alfred started the process of **central administration** of England: one king, one church, one currency, one language.
- He commissioned a series of historical records about the settlements in England called the **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**.

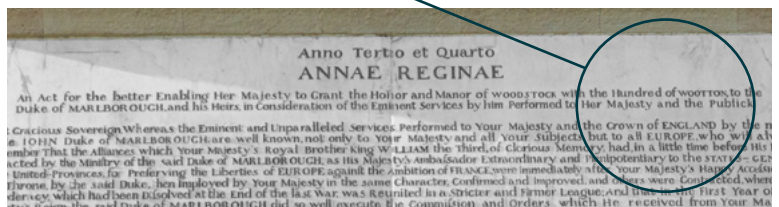
Woodstock became the royal estate where King Alfred and King Ethelred II met their council, called the *Witan*.



A place's name ending with **-burgh**, **-bury**, or **-brough** is a place that was most likely founded in the medieval times. King Alfred's reign called the settlements, **boroughs**.

King Edmund I (r. 939-946) divided the kingdom into **shires**.

- Each shire was divided into **hundreds**.
- Each hundred was divided into 100 **hides**.
- A hide was the land of one household.
- Each shire was led by a *shire-reeve*. That is where the word **sheriff** comes from.
- A shire is known today as a **county**.



Today, England is made up of **48** ceremonial counties.

During the Middle Ages, the **Anglo-Saxons** called Woodstock, *Vubeztob*.

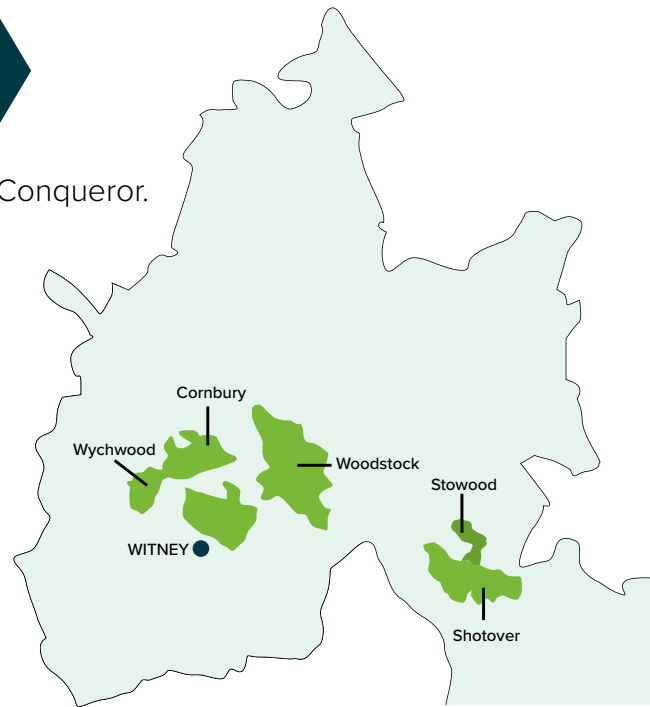


William Duke of Normandy invaded England in 1066 with his followers. The **Normans** established a new system of land management.

King William I (r. 1066-1087) was best known as William the Conqueror.

- King William established a **parliament**.
- King William built many **castles** to control the land.
- King William commissioned the **Domesday Book**.

In the Domesday Book, Woodstock appeared as *Wodestoch*, which means a “clearing in the woods” in old English. Woodstock remained a royal place. **Woodstock Forest** was one of the five **royal forests** in the county. The other forests were Wychwood, Cornbury, Stowood and Shotover.



Castles and Palaces

A castle is a defensive building. A palace is a residence.

CASTLE	PALACE
Castles were built in towns and at river crossings.	Palaces were first built during the Bronze Age.
The first castles were built with wood.	The first palaces were built in today's Greece.
The main castles were built with stone.	Palaces are usually built with stone.
A main castle had a tower called a keep.	A palace had a grand courtyard at the front.
A main tower had an outer gate called barbican.	A palace has a grand reception hall.
Motte-and-bailey castles were built on a mound and surrounded by a stockade.	A palace is usually a royal residence, a former royal residence, or an episcopal residence.
The bailey was made from wood and earth.	A palace sits in a landscaped garden.
A castle might have arrow slits.	A palace has windows.
A castle might have a drawbridge and a portcullis.	A palace might have ornate gates and ornamental bridges.
A castle might have turrets.	A palace might have statues and columns.
There might be a catapult.	There might be decorative canons.

Castles have now become residences. For example, Windsor Castle is now a royal residence.

The first architectural plans for Blenheim Palace alternatively called the building a “castle” and a “house.” Today, it’s known as a palace. It’s the only palace in the UK that is non-royal and non-episcopal.

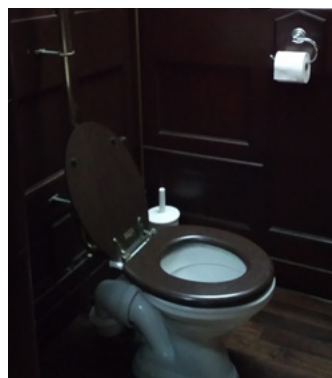


A palace is a large residence.

Blenheim Palace is a large country house. It has evolved like any other house.

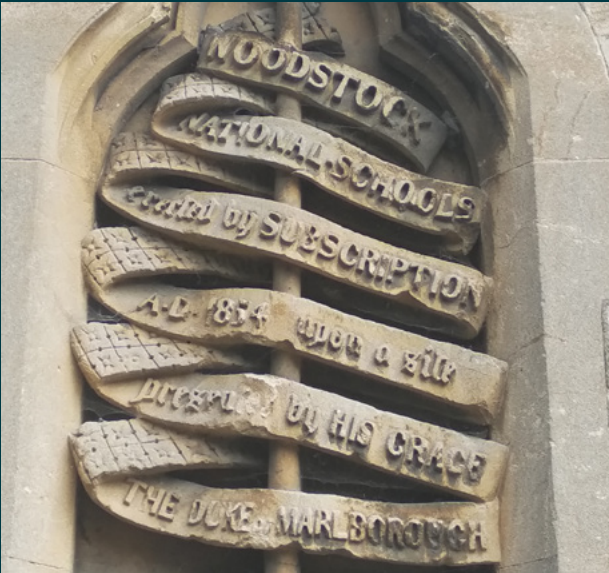
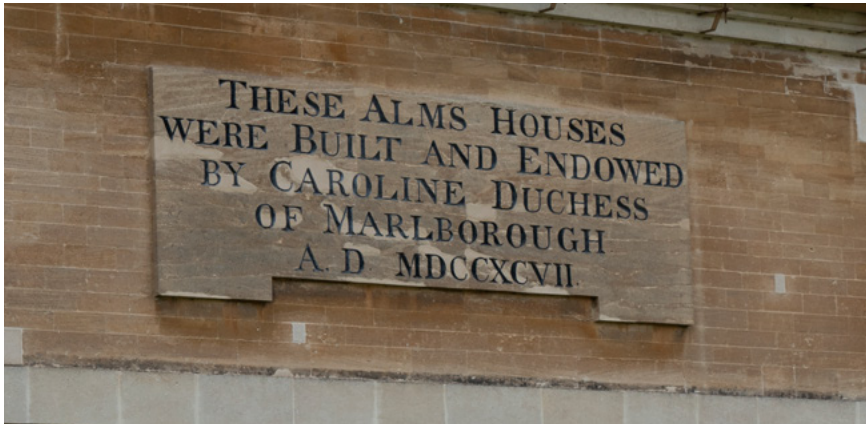


AMENITIES	BLENHEIM IN THE 18TH CENTURY	BLENHEIM IN THE 21ST CENTURY
Reception Hall	It was a large room to welcome and impress important guests.	It’s where we welcome all visitors.
Library	It was originally a large room to display family portraits, like a human-size photo-album.	It became a library. Then it became a music room and a ball room.
Heating	Open fires in every room	Central heating system with radiators
Lighting	Candles on candelabras (on tables) and chandeliers (ceiling)	Electric lighting
Personal hygiene	Chamber pots and tin bathtubs	Bathrooms and toilets
Pictures	Paintings	Photos



The Dukes of Marlborough and Woodstock

- The 4th Duke of Marlborough paid for the building of the **Town Hall** in 1766.
- The 4th Duchess Caroline endowed the **alms-houses** in 1796.

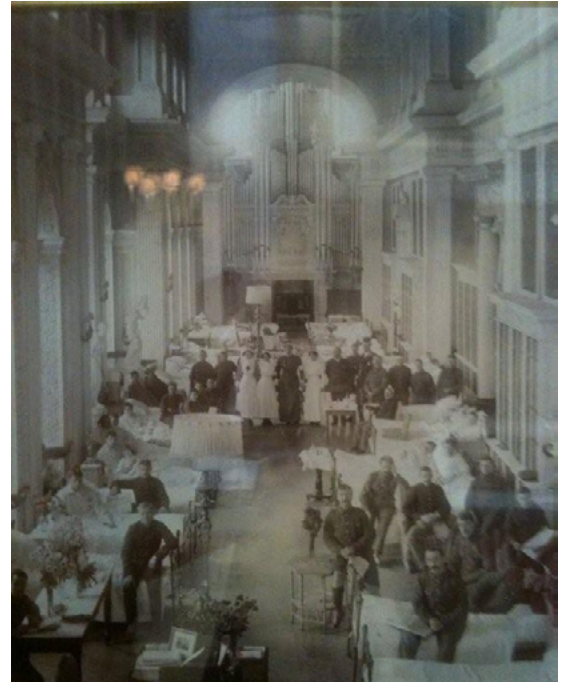


- The 7th Duke of Marlborough supported the building of schools. Woodstock National School (1854-1985) was built on Blenheim land. In 1940, the school was reorganised as a primary school, and the senior pupils were moved to **The Marlborough CofE School**. In 1968, the remaining pupils were moved to **Woodstock CofE Primary School**. **Bladon CofE School** was founded in 1858, and it was then known as The Duchess of Marlborough School.

- The 8th Duke of Marlborough set up the **Woodstock Railway Company** in 1888. He built a railway line from Kidlington to Blenheim. The line opened in 1890. The line closed in 1954.
- The 9th Duke of Marlborough was **Mayor of Woodstock** on three occasions.
- The 10th Duke of Marlborough was **Mayor of Woodstock** from 1937 to 1942.
- The 10th Duchess Mary was **Mayoress of Woodstock** from 1946 to 1952. She was also Councillor on the Woodstock Borough Council.
- The 12th Duke of Marlborough is a **Town Councillor** on the Woodstock Town Council.

Woodstock and Blenheim during the First World War

- The 9th Duke of Marlborough served in the **Army** for the first two years of the war. He served in the **Government** for the rest of the war.
- Many stately homes were turned into military hospitals. During the first year of the war, the house was used as a **convalescent hospital**. It opened on 17th September 1914 and closed on 31st May 1915.
- The park and gardens were used as a national **allotment** where vegetables grew instead of flowers.



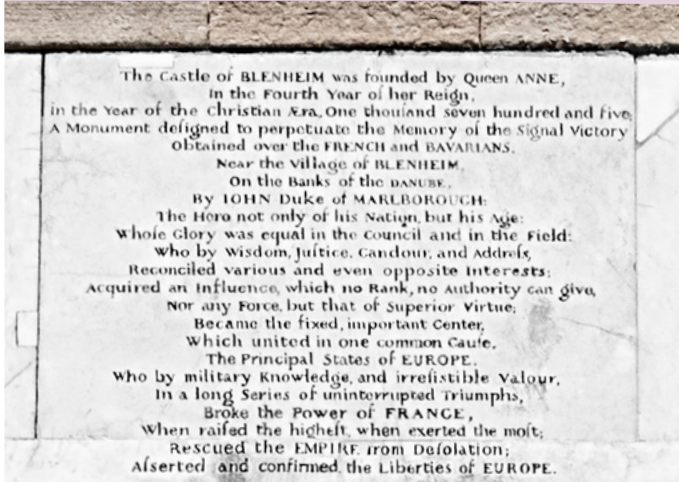
Woodstock and Blenheim during the Second World War

- The 10th Duke of Marlborough welcomed 400 schoolboys from **Malvern College** who were evacuated from their school. They lived at the Palace from arrived on 15th September 1939. They left in July 1940.
- From 1940 to 1945, Blenheim Palace was requisitioned by MI5. **Nissen huts** were built in the Great Court.
- In Woodstock, a **British Restaurant** was opened to offer meals to residents.
- Queen Pool was used to practice the landing of an **amphibian vehicle** in preparation for **D-Day**.



Two significant people at Blenheim

John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough was **Captain-General of the English Army**. He was **one of the greatest military commanders** in British history.



- He fought in the War of the Spanish Succession.
- His first significant victory was at the **Battle of Blenheim**. He defeated the French Army, which was a feat because the French Army had not been defeated for at least 50 years!
- He built Blenheim Palace in Woodstock. Today, Blenheim Palace is a major visitors attraction. It first opened in 1950. It became a World Heritage Site in 1987.
- Blenheim Palace is one of the big employers of the area.

Winston Churchill was the **British Prime Minister** during the Second World War. He was **one of the greatest political leaders** in British and world history.

- He was **born** at Blenheim Palace on 30 November 1874.
- He **spent a lot of time** (school holidays, Christmas) at Blenheim. He visited his grandparents (7th Duke and Duchess) and his cousin (9th Duke) very often.
- He **proposed** to Clementine at the Temple of Diana in 1908.
- In 1965, he died and was **buried** at St Martin's Church in Bladon.



Q: Why is John Churchill significant in history?

A: The defeat of the French Army at the Battle of Blenheim was the event that changed the balance of power in Europe and the World. The French King Louis XIV's ambitions to conquer Europe and the World were stopped by the 1st Duke of Marlborough's Army.



Winston said of the 1st Duke of Marlborough's victory at the Battle of Blenheim: "It changed the political axis of the world."

Q: Why is Winston Churchill significant in history?

A: His wartime speeches and leadership made him very popular around the world. His speeches still resonate with today's influencing people. The current £5 note shows Winston with one of his most famous wartime quotes: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." On the top right corner appears a small circle representing the Marlborough Maze and spells out B-L-E-N-H-E-I-M.



Winston said of Blenheim Palace: "I am proud to be born at Blenheim."

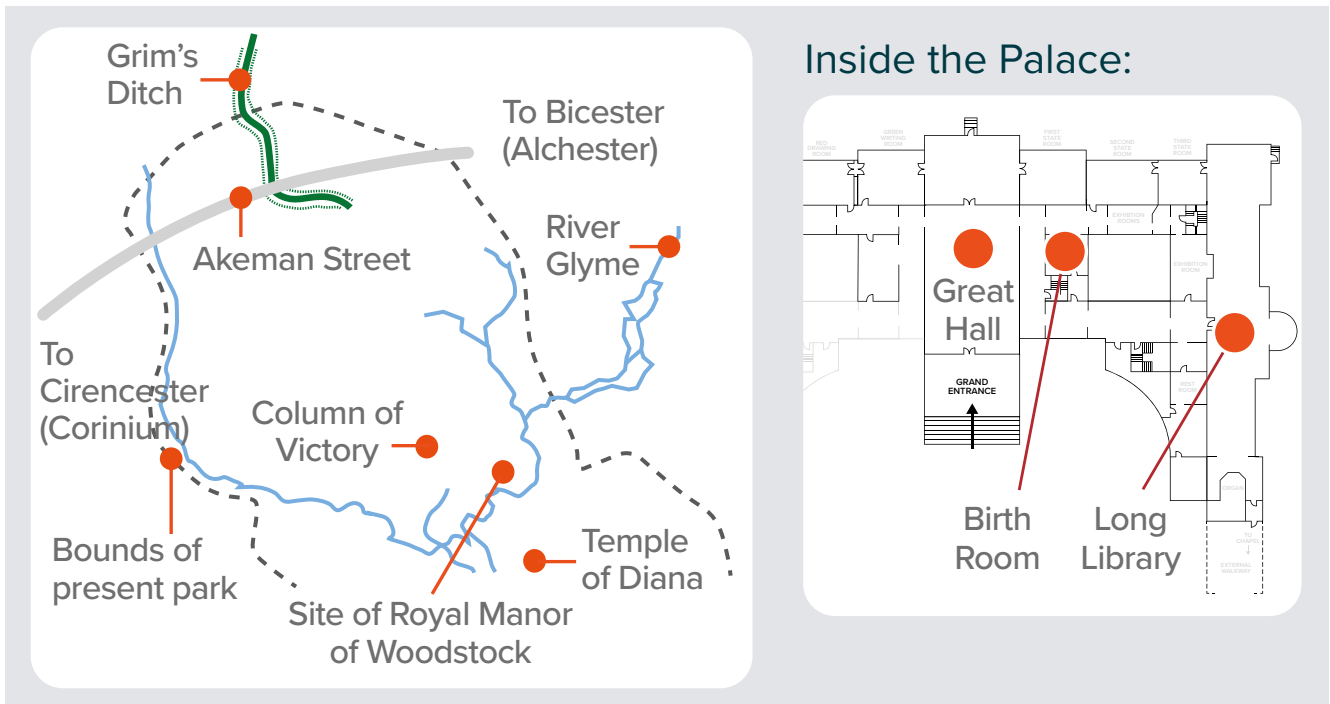
If you have any questions or comments about this self-led resource, please contact our Education Team at education@blenheimpalace.com



“Understanding the Past is instrumental to better appreciate the Present and to better prepare the Future.”

Blenheim Education Statement

Points of interest:



In Woodstock:

