

History Of Marlay House

The history of the Estate can be traced back to the Anglo-Norman conquest and right through to Tudor Times when Henry VIII confiscated the lands then owned by St. Mary's Abbey, during the suppression of the monasteries. Towards the end of the 17th century, Thomas Taylor acquired the property. He built a house on the Estate, which was called "The Grange", and he began to farm the land. Both his son, Alderman Thomas and his grandson James Taylor, held key positions in political circles during the 1740's, 50's and 60's.



In 1764, the Estate was purchased by David La Touche of French Huguenot origin, member of parliament and first Governor of the Bank of Ireland. Successive generations of the La Touche family were prominent in the banking world.

David La Touche extended the original house, and renamed it Marlay, having married Elizabeth Marlay, daughter of the Right Rev. George Marlay, Bishop of Dromore. He was succeeded by his son John David and he in turn by his son David Charles. Marlay was sold in 1864 to Robert Tedcastle, the well known Dublin coal merchant.

The oldest part of the house is nearly 300 years in existence and was built by the Taylor family. The largest room in the 18th century house is the ballroom, which has three full-length windows facing the mountains, immediately adjacent to which is the unusual oval music room.



Immediately adjoining the courtyard is an enclosed garden of some four acres with a head gardener's house. Nearer the lower stable yard in the centre of the estate is a charming house hidden by trees and known as 'Laurelmere'. Gatelodges, one of which survives and has been restored, complete the buildings on the estate.

The Tedcastle family lived at Marlay until 1925. During their ownership, a wedge of land was sold upon which the neighbouring residence 'Marlay Grange' was built. This was later to become 'The Grange Golf Club'. In 1925 Philip Love acquired Marlay for the sum of £8,325.

Philip Love was a market gardener, who at one time was the largest tomato producer in Ireland. He was also a successful race horse breeder. One of his horses 'Larkspur' (subsequently sold to Raymond Guest, trainer Vincent O'Brien), won the 1962 Epsom Derby and earned approximately £40,000 during his racing life. The Love family retained the parkland landscape style as much as possible, thus little change occurred to the layout of the demesne. The Grange Golf Club already established at Marlay Grange, acquired a lease of further property from Marlay and established an 18 hole golf course.

Philip Love was to be the last private owner of Marlay before it was acquired by Dublin County Council in 1972 and developed as a Regional Park. It was officially opened in June 1975. Restoration of Marlay House began in 1992 under a FÁS scheme sponsored by the Dublin Society of Model & Experimental Engineers.

During the restoration, the La Touche Coat of Arms carved in stone was restored to Marlay House in a formal ceremony on the 16th June 1996.

Essentially, the design and layout of the demesne are typical of the late 18th and early 19th century English Landscape Style, developed by such well-known landscape gardeners as 'Capability Brown' and his successor Humphrey Repton. Designers of the time were heavily influenced by the Brownian and/or Reptonian ethos. Two who worked on the Marlay Demesne around this time were Thomas Leggett, and later Hely Dutton. However, harmony did not always prevail, as Lamb and Bowe noted in 1995 'A History of Gardening in Ireland':

"Although it was noted that Leggett (sic) was resident in Dublin at one time, surprisingly little else is known of his life and work. Three designs of his are however recorded:

Mount Bellew, County Galway; Marlay Park and Stillorgan Park in County Dublin. From contemporary maps it can be seen that the style of these parks was Brownian in that they were enclosed by curving belts of trees and their interiors formed of correctly undulating parkland varied with clumps and groves of trees. All three were, however, subsequently altered, Mount Bellew and Marlay Park being worked over by Hely Dutton in the later picturesque style of landscaping and Stillorgan Park built over in the mid-nineteenth century. Leggett's (sic) work, like that of Browne, did not escape the critical blast of the subsequent generation of picturesque landscapers, one of whom wrote in 1818 of: 'How much the gentlemen of this country have been led astray by the pompous and dictatorial manner of Leggett (sic) who I frequently met in my younger days and whom I admired with the herd, he was quite the fashion.'

Dutton, a farmer's son, from Malahide, near Dublin seems to have first established himself as a seedsman at 19 Dorset St, Dublin."

The work of these gentlemen is visible from the back of the house which faces south west towards the mountains. Its large windows overlook an extensive informal lawn and meadow bordered by woodlands so conceived as to lead the eye towards the distant wild mountain landscape. The landform lends itself to this effect.

It falls gently from the house and then rises to the base of the woodland. A cleverly concealed 'ha-ha' ditch divides the lawn from the pasture. This feature is common in such estates. Its function was to visually unify the landscape composition. It kept cattle and horses confined to the more distant pasture without the use of a fence which would truncate and interrupt the visual continuity from the house to the distant horizon. Whatever the original intention of the designers, the lakes are now not very visible from the house, being largely surrounded by woodland.

The more distant lake also provided water for the house and garden, indeed some of the plumbing for this is still there. This work was carried out in 1801. Thus a piece of Arcadia was created for the immediate location of the house. It was defined by woodland planting, allowing the presence of farm animals at a distance from the house in picturesque arrangement, but effectively concealing the balance of agricultural activity centred on the stable yard behind the trees, from view. The gaze was thus lifted from the pasture to the trees, to the distant hilltops, and the actual activity of farming went on, not affecting this idealised pastoral scene. Many of these landscape compositions appear so natural and are now found to be taken for granted! This matured effect now remains as a tribute to their creators (in this case Messrs. Leggatt and Dutton), who would not have fully savoured the fruits of their work, which pleasure was left to later generations.



The large walled garden would have seen much intensive horticultural activity in the production of a wide range of fruit, vegetables and cut flowers to supply the house and tenants. Peaches would have been grown in the conservatories and indeed the still surviving fig tree could well be a living link with that era. This garden has now been restored to its 18th century style with grant aid from the Great Gardens of Ireland Restoration Scheme. Administered by Bórd Fáilte, FÁS also co-operated in the garden restoration.

A map dating from 1760 indicates that the house at that time was surrounded by a small formal garden. To the west of the house a long tree-lined formal avenue or framed vista ran over the site of the present walled garden.

We know from records that extensive renovations were carried out around 1794, especially to the main house and surrounding grounds. The walled garden was built during that period. The garden's location in close proximity to the house was quite unusual for this period as walled gardens were normally located some distance from the main house. In the case of Marlay, the garden was suitably screened from the rest of the demesne by woodland planting. The first description of it is given in Archer's Statistical Survey of County Dublin.

The ordnance survey map of 1837 gives us the first outline of the garden and would have been representative of its layout at the turn of the 1800's and indeed a broad layout of how it is today. The garden is located on a relatively flat site with a slight slope to the south. The restored 18th century portion of the house and the renewed walled garden were formally re-opened on the 15th September 2000 as the County Council's Millennium project.