

# The House of the Churchills: Blenheim Palace [B2]

Regalo della regina Anne al primo duca di Marlborough dopo un'importante vittoria bellica, questo gioiello del Barocco inglese offre una mostra del glorioso passato dell'Inghilterra e un'esperienza culturale indimenticabile. Tra i suoi splendidi spazi e giardini si trova il luogo di nascita di Winston Churchill.



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Blenheim Palace is an impressive and [ornate](#) country estate in South East England that dates back to the early 1700s. England [boasts](#) many large country homes, but Blenheim stands out among them for a variety of reasons, [not least](#) because it was the birthplace of former prime minister, Winston Churchill. Blenheim, one of the only historic homes in the UK to be named a UNESCO [World Heritage site](#), is opulent and imposing. It is built in the [short-lived](#) English Baroque style and as such is an architectural rarity in England.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME

The palace takes its name from a town in southern Germany that was the site of a famous battle during the War of the Spanish Succession. This Europe-wide conflict in the early 1700s was provoked by the death of Spanish king Charles II, who left no direct heirs to rule the Spanish Empire. A struggle for control ensued between European powers: France, Austria, the Netherlands and Great Britain. John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, secured victory for the English crown at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. To thank him, Queen Anne presented him with a plot of land and the financial support to build the country home that would eventually become Blenheim Palace.

## AN ANNUAL FLAG

Blenheim Palace is called a palace because of its origin as a gift from the Crown and it is the only non-royal palace in England. But the gift was not without strings attached: every year the Dukes of Marlborough are required to pay a ceremonial 'rent' to the Crown on the anniversary of the battle, by presenting a replica of the captured French standard, the French flag at the time, in commemoration of the triumph. The palace is filled with references to the Battle of Blenheim, from frescoes on the ceiling to the cannons built into the archways.

## OUT OF FAVOUR

The construction of the palace took place over the course of many years, from 1704 to 1722. Funds from the Crown came and went, as the Duke and his wife Sarah Churchill rose and fell from royal favour. The duchess was a childhood friend of Queen Anne and the two had a fraught and tumultuous relationship. Eventually, they fell out so badly that all funding was stopped.

## HARD TIMES

Years later, in the late 19th century, the Dukes of Marlborough fell upon hard times and risked the loss of Blenheim Palace. Like many other European landed noble families of the time, they looked to arranged marriages to revive their fortunes. Charles Spencer Churchill, 9th Duke of Marlborough, married Consuelo Vanderbilt, the daughter of the American [railroad tycoon](#) Cornelius Vanderbilt. It was not a love match, and it ended in an annulment. However, Consuelo's generous [dowry](#) enabled the duke to restore Blenheim Palace. During the First World War, Blenheim was adapted to house the Women's Land Army, a civilian organisation set up in 1917 to bring women into work in agriculture, replacing men who were fighting in the war.

## BLEMHEIM TODAY

Blenheim Palace opened to the public in 1950, and while Charles James Spencer-Churchill, 12th Duke of Marlborough, still lives in a private area of the palace, both the grounds and certain areas of the palace are open for public tours. The palace [strives](#) to be a prominent member of the local community by hosting many local businesses, offering activities for families and affordable annual passes for local residents.

## THE FAVOURITE

In her memoirs, Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, [hinted](#) at the existence of scandalous intimate letters shared between herself and Queen Anne. These letters and the [fraught](#) friendship between the two women has been the subject of many biographies, and in 2018 it was portrayed (in a fictionalised form) in Yorgos Lanthimos' Oscar-nominated film *The Favourite*, starring Olivia Colman as Queen Anne, Rachel Weisz as Sarah Churchill, and Emma Stone as the intrusive new favourite.

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# Glossary

- **dowry** = dote
- **strives** = adoperare
- **not least** = in particolare
- **fraught** = tesa
- **presented** = regalare
- **fell out** = essere in disaccordo
- **ornate** = riccamente ornato
- **boasts** = vantarsi
- **without strings attached** = privo di condizioni
- **short-lived** = breve durata
- **ensued** = seguire
- **archways** = arcate
- **railroad tycoon** = magnate delle ferrovie
- **hinted** = insinuare
- **World Heritage site** = patrimonio mondiale
- **plot** = appezzamento di terreno