

= West Wycombe Park =

West Wycombe Park is a country house built between 1740 and 1800 near the village of West Wycombe in Buckinghamshire , England . It was conceived as a pleasure palace for the 18th @-@ century libertine and dilettante Sir Francis Dashwood , 2nd Baronet . The house is a long rectangle with four façades that are columned and pedimented , three theatrically so . The house encapsulates the entire progression of British 18th @-@ century architecture from early idiosyncratic Palladian to the Neoclassical , although anomalies in its design make it architecturally unique . The mansion is set within an 18th @-@ century landscaped park containing many small temples and follies , which act as satellites to the greater temple , the house .

The house , which is a Grade I listed building , was given to the National Trust in 1943 by Sir John Dashwood , 10th Baronet ( 1896 ? 1966 ) , an action strongly resented by his heir . Dashwood retained ownership of the surrounding estate and the contents of the house , most of which he sold ; after his death , the house was restored at the expense of his son , the 11th Baronet . Today , while the structure is owned by the National Trust , the house is still the home of the Dashwood family . The house is open to the public during the summer months and is a venue for civil weddings and corporate entertainment , which help to fund its maintenance and upkeep .

= = Architecture = =

= = = Ethos = = =

West Wycombe Park , architecturally inspired by the villas of the Veneto constructed during the late @-@ renaissance period , is not one of the largest , grandest or best @-@ known of England 's many country houses . Compared to its Palladian contemporaries , such as Holkham Hall , Woburn Abbey and Ragley Hall , it is quite small , yet it is architecturally important as it encapsulates a period of 18th @-@ century English social history , when young men , known as dilettanti , returning from the nearly obligatory Grand Tour with newly purchased acquisitions of art , often built a country house to accommodate their collections and display in stone the learning and culture they had acquired on their travels .

The West Wycombe estate was acquired by Sir Francis Dashwood , 1st Baronet , and his brother Samuel in 1698 . Dashwood demolished the existing manor house and built a modern mansion on higher ground nearby . This mansion forms the core of the present house . Images of the house on early estate plans show a red @-@ brick house with stone dressings and a hipped roof in the contemporary Queen Anne style . In 1724 , Dashwood bequeathed this square conventional house to his 16 @-@ year @-@ old son , the 2nd Baronet , also Francis , who later inherited the title Baron le Despencer through his mother and is perhaps best known for establishing the Hellfire Club close to the mansion , in the West Wycombe Caves . Between 1726 and 1741 , Dashwood embarked on a series of Grand Tours : the ideas and manners he learned during this period influenced him throughout his life and were pivotal in the rebuilding of his father 's simple house , transforming it into the classical edifice that exists today .

West Wycombe has been described as " one of the most theatrical and Italianate mid @-@ 18th century buildings in England " . Of all the 18th @-@ century country houses , its façades replicate in undiluted form not only the classical villas of Italy on which Palladianism was founded , but also the temples of antiquity on which Neoclassicism was based . The Greek Doric of the house 's west portico is the earliest example of the Greek revival in Britain .

The late 18th century was a period of change in the interior design of English country houses . The Baroque concept of the principal floor , or piano nobile , with a large bedroom suite known as the state apartments and only one large hall or saloon for common use , was gradually abandoned in favour of smaller , more comfortable bedrooms on the upper floors . The revised floor plan allowed the principal floor to become a series of reception rooms , each with a designated purpose , creating separate withdrawing , dining , music , and ballrooms . In this way , West Wycombe perfectly

reflects the changes and ideals of the late 18th century . Its arrangement of reception and public rooms on a lower floor , with bedrooms and more private rooms above , survives unchanged .

### == Exterior ==

The builder of West Wycombe , Sir Francis Dashwood , 2nd Baronet , employed three architects and two landscape architects in the design of the house and its grounds . He had a huge input himself : having made the Grand Tour and seen the villas of the Italian renaissance first hand , he wished to emulate them .

Work began in about 1735 and continued until Dashwood 's death in 1781 , when the older house had been transformed inside and out . The long building time partly explains the flaws and variations in design : when building commenced , Palladianism was the height of fashion , but by the time of its completion , Palladianism had been succeeded by Neoclassicism ; thus , the house is a marriage of both styles . While the marriage is not completely unhappy , the Palladian features are marred by the lack of Palladio 's proportions : the east portico is asymmetrical with the axis of the house , and trees were planted either side to draw the eye away from the flaw .

The finest architects of the day submitted plans to transform the older family house into a modern architectural extravaganza . Among them was Robert Adam , who submitted a plan for the west portico , but his idea was dropped . The architect Nicholas Revett was consulted and created the west portico . Today , the first sight of the house as approached from the drive is this west end of the house , which appears as a Grecian temple . The eight columned portico , inspired by the Temple of Bacchus in Teos was completed by 1770 , and is considered to be the earliest example of Greek revival architecture in Britain . The opposite ( east ) end of the house , designed by John Donowell and completed c . 1755 , appears equally temple like , but this time the muse was the Villa Rotunda in Vicenza . Thus the two opposing porticos , east and west , illustrate two architectural styles of the late 18th century : the earlier Roman inspired Palladian architecture and the more Greek inspired Neoclassicism .

The principal façade is the great south front , a two storey colonnade of Corinthian columns superimposed on Tuscan , the whole surmounted by a central pediment . The columns are not stone , but wood coated in stucco . This is particularly interesting , as cost was no object in the house 's construction . The architect for this elevation was John Donowell , who executed the work between 1761 and 1763 ( although he had to wait until 1775 for payment ) . The façade , which has similarities to the main façade of Palladio 's Palazzo Chiericati of 1550 , was originally the entrance front . The front door is still in the centre of the ground floor leading into the main entry hall . This in itself is a substantial deviation from the classical form : West Wycombe does not have a first floor piano nobile : had the architect truly followed Palladio 's ideals , the main entrance and principal rooms would have been on the first floor reached by an outer staircase , giving the main reception rooms elevated views , and allowing the ground floor to be given over to service rooms .

The more severe north front is of eleven bays , with the end bays given significance by rustication at ground floor level . The centre of the façade has Ionic columns supporting a pediment and originally had the Dashwood coat of arms . This façade is thought to date from around 1750 ? 51 , although its segmented windows suggest it was one of the first of the 2nd Baronet 's improvements to the original house to be completed , as the curved or segmented window heads are symbolic of the earlier part of the 18th century .

### == Interior ==

The principal reception rooms are on the ground floor with large sash windows opening immediately into the porticos and the colonnades , and therefore onto the gardens , a situation unheard of in the grand villas and palaces of Renaissance Italy . The mansion contains a series of 18th century salons decorated and furnished in the style of that period , with polychrome marble floors , and painted ceilings depicting classical scenes of Greek and Roman mythology . Of particular note is the

entrance hall , which resembles a Roman atrium with marbled columns and a painted ceiling copied from Robert Wood 's Ruins of Palmyra .

Many of the reception rooms have painted ceilings copied from Italian palazzi , most notably from the Palazzo Farnese in Rome . The largest room in the house is the Music Room , which opens onto the east portico . The ceiling fresco in this room depicts the " Banquet of the Gods " and was copied from the Villa Farnesina . The Saloon , which occupies the centre of the north front , contains many marbles , including statuettes of the four seasons . The ceiling depicting " The Council of the Gods and the Admission of Psyche " is also a copy from Villa Farnesina .

The Dining Room walls are painted faux jasper and hold paintings of the house 's patron ? Sir Francis Dashwood ? and his fellow members of the Divan Club ( a society for those who had visited the Ottoman Empire ) . The room also has a painted ceiling from Wood 's Palmyra .

The Blue Drawing Room is dominated by the elaborate painted ceiling depicting " The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne " ( illustrated left ) . This room houses a plaster statuette of the Venus de ' Medici and marks the 2nd Baronet 's risqué devotion to that goddess of love . The room has walls of blue flock , applied in the 1850s and later renewed , bearing paintings from various Italian schools of the 17th century . The Red Drawing Room is lined in crimson silk and is furnished with marquetry commodes .

The relatively small study contains plans for the house and potential impressions for various elevations . One is reputed to have been drawn by Sir Francis Dashwood himself , while the Tapestry Room , once ante @-@ room to the adjoining former principal bedroom , is hung with Brussels tapestries depicting peasant scenes by Teniers . Dashwood inherited them in 1763 from his uncle Lord Westmorland , who is said to have been given them by the 1st Duke of Marlborough to celebrate their victories in the Low Countries .

= = Gardens and park = =

The gardens at West Wycombe Park are among the finest and most idiosyncratic 18th century gardens surviving in England . The park is unique in its consistent use of Classical architecture from both Greece and Italy . The two principal architects of the gardens were John Donowell and Nicholas Revett , who designed all of the ornamental buildings in the park . The landscape architect Thomas Cook began to execute the plans for the park , with a nine @-@ acre man @-@ made lake created from the nearby River Wye in the form of a swan . The lake originally had a snow ( a sailing vessel ) for the amusement of Dashwood 's guests , complete with a resident captain on board . Water leaves the lake down a cascade and into a canal pond .

Georgian English landscape gardens , such as West Wycombe and Stowe , are arranged as a walk or series of walks that take the visitor through a range of locations , each with its own specific character and separate from the last . Planting and the shape of the landscape is used , alongside follies and man @-@ made water features , to create pleasant vistas and set pieces centred on a building , straight avenue , serpentine walk , or viewpoint . In the later years of the 18th century , the 5 @,@ 000 acres ( 20 km <sup>2</sup> ) of grounds were extended to the east , towards the nearby town of High Wycombe , and Humphrey Repton completed the creation of the gardens , until they appeared much as they do today .

The park still contains many follies and temples . The " Temple of Music " is on an island in the lake , inspired by the Temple of Vesta in Rome . It was designed for Dashwood 's fêtes champêtres , with the temple used as a theatre ; the remains of the stage survive . Opposite the temple is the garden 's main cascade which has statues of two water nymphs . The present cascade has been remade , as the original was demolished in the 1830s . An octagonal tower known as the " Temple of the Winds " is based in design on the Tower of the Winds in Athens .

Classical architecture continues along the path around the lake , with the " Temple of Flora " , a hidden summerhouse , and the " Temple of Daphne " , both reminiscent of a small temple on the Acropolis . Another hidden temple , the " Round Temple " , has a curved loggia . Nearer the house , screening the service wing from view , is a Roman triumphal arch , the " Temple of Apollo " , also known ( because of its former use a venue for cock fighting ) as " Cockpit Arch " , which holds a

copy of the famed Apollo Belvedere . Close by is the " Temple of Diana " , with a small niche containing a statue of the goddess . Another goddess is celebrated in the " Temple of Venus " . Below this is an Exedra , a grotto ( known as Venus 's Parlour ) and a statue of Mercury . This once held a copy of the Venus de ' Medici ; it was demolished in the 1820s but was reconstructed in the 1980s and now holds a replica of the Venus de Milo .

Later structures that break the classical theme include the Gothic style boathouse , a Gothic Alcove ? now a romantic ruin hidden amongst undergrowth ? and a Gothic Chapel , once home of the village cobbler ( and facetiously named St Crispin 's ) but later used as the estate kennels . A monument dedicated to Queen Elizabeth II was erected on her 60th birthday in 1986 .

The gardens are listed Grade I on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens .

= = Dashwoods of West Wycombe = =

Sir Francis Dashwood built West Wycombe to entertain , and there has been much speculation on the kind of entertainment he provided for his guests . Judged against the sexual morals of the late 18th century , Dashwood and his clique were regarded as promiscuous ; while it is likely that the contemporary reports of the bacchanalian orgies over which Dashwood presided in the Hellfire caves above West Wycombe were exaggerated , free love and heavy drinking did take place there . Dashwood often had himself depicted in portraits in fancy dress ( in one , dressed as the pope toasting a female Herme ) , and it is his love of fancy dress which seems to have pervaded through to his parties at West Wycombe Park . Following the dedication of the West portico as a bacchanalian temple in 1771 , Dashwood and his friends dressed in skins adorned with vine leaves and went to party by the lake for " Paeans and libations " . On another occasion , during a mock sea battle on the canal , the captain of the snow , " attacking " a battery constructed on the bank , was struck by the wadding of a gun and suffered an internal injury . Dashwood seems to have mellowed in his later years and devoted his life to charitable works . He died in 1781 , bequeathing West Wycombe to his half @-@ brother Sir John Dashwood @-@ King , 3rd Baronet .

Dashwood @-@ King spent little time at West Wycombe . On his death in 1793 , the estate was inherited by his son Sir John Dashwood , 4th Baronet , Member of Parliament for Wycombe and a friend of the Prince of Wales , although their friendship was tested when Sir John accused his wife of an affair with the prince . Like his father , Sir John cared little for West Wycombe and held a five @-@ day sale of West Wycombe 's furniture in 1800 . In 1806 , he was prevented from selling West Wycombe by the trustees of his son , to whom the estate was entailed . He became religious in the last years of his life , holding ostentatiously teetotal parties in West Wycombe 's gardens in aid of the " Friends of Order and Sobriety " ? these would have been vastly different from the bacchanalian fêtes given by his uncle in the grounds . In 1847 , Sir John was bankrupt and bailiffs possessed the furniture from his home at Halton . He died estranged from his wife and surviving son in 1849 .

Sir John was succeeded by his estranged son Sir George Dashwood , 5th Baronet . For the first time since the death of the 2nd Baronet in 1781 , West Wycombe became again a favoured residence . However , the estate was heavily in debt and Sir George was forced to sell the unentailed estates , including Halton , which was sold in 1851 to Lionel de Rothschild for the then huge sum of £ 54 @,@ 000 ( £ 5 @.@ 33 million in 2016 ) . The change in the Dashwoods ' fortunes allowed for the refurbishment and restoration of West Wycombe . Sir George died childless in 1862 , and left his wife , Elizabeth , a life tenancy of the house while the title and ownership passed briefly to his brother and then a nephew . Lady Dashwood 's continuing occupation of the house prevented the nephew , Sir Edwin Hare Dashwood , 7th Baronet , an alcoholic sheep farmer in the South Island of New Zealand , from living in the mansion until she died in 1889 , leaving a neglected and crumbling estate .

The 7th Baronet 's son , Sir Edwin Dashwood , 8th Baronet , arrived from New Zealand to claim the house , only to find Lady Dashwood 's heirs claiming the house 's contents and family jewellery , which they subsequently sold . As a consequence , Sir Edwin was forced to mortgage the house and estate in 1892 . He died suddenly the following year , and the heavily indebted estate passed to his brother , Sir Robert Dashwood , 9th Baronet . Sir Robert embarked on a costly legal case

against the executors of Lady Dashwood , which he lost , and raised money by denuding the estate 's woodlands and leasing the family town house in London for 99 years . On his death in 1908 , the house passed to his 13 @-@ year @-@ old son Sir John Dashwood , 10th Baronet , who in his adulthood sold much of the remaining original furnishings ( including the state bed , for £ 58 ? this important item of the house 's history complete with its gilded pineapples is now lost ) . In 1922 , he attempted to sell the house itself . He received only one offer , of £ 10 @,@ 000 ( £ 492 @,@ 000 in 2016 ) , so the house was withdrawn from sale . Forced to live in a house he disliked , the village of West Wycombe was sold in its entirety to pay for renovations . Not all these renovations were beneficial : painted 18th century ceilings were overpainted white , and the dining room was divided into service rooms , allowing the large service wing to be abandoned to rot .

A form of salvation for West Wycombe was Sir John 's wife : Lady Dashwood , the former Helen Eaton , a Canadian and sister of American novelist Evelyn Eaton , was a socialite who loved entertaining , and did so in some style at West Wycombe throughout the 1930s . Living a semi @-@ estranged life from her husband , occupying opposite ends of the mansion , she frequently gave " large and stylish " house parties .

During World War II , the house saw service as a depository for the evacuated Wallace Collection and a convalescent home . A troop of gunners occupied the decaying service wing , and the park was used for the inflation of barrage balloons . During this turmoil , the Dashwoods retreated to the upper floor and took in lodgers to pay the bills , albeit very superior lodgers , who included Nancy Mitford and James Lees @-@ Milne , who was secretary of the Country House Committee of the National Trust and instrumental in the Trust 's acquisition of many such houses . In 1943 , Sir John gave the house and grounds to the National Trust , on condition that he and his descendants could continue living in the house .

= = West Wycombe after 1943 = =

In the latter half of the 20th century , Sir Francis Dashwood , 11th Baronet , embarked on a program of restoration and improvement . His efforts included the installation of a huge equestrian sculpture as the focal point of a long tree lined vista from the house . On close inspection , it proves to be a fibre glass prop found at Pinewood Studios by the 11th Baronet who paid for it with 12 bottles of champagne . The local planning authority was furious but lost their lawsuit to have it removed . Today , from a distance , it has been " known to fool experts " .

The present head of the Dashwood family is Sir Edward Dashwood ( born 1964 ) , who is married and has three children . The contents of the house are owned by the family , who also own and run the estate . The house can be hired as a filming location , and , in addition to agricultural and equestrian enterprises , there is a large pheasant shoot with paying guns . The park , a natural amphitheatre , is often the setting for large public concerts and firework displays , and the mansion is available for weddings and corporate entertainment .

While the estate remains in private hands , the National Trust owns the house and gardens , the park , the village of West Wycombe , and the hill on which the Dashwood mausoleum sits . The hill was the first part of the property given to the Trust by Sir John Dashwood in 1925 . The village was bought by the Royal Society of Arts from Sir John in 1929 and given to the Trust five years later . The grounds are open to the public in the afternoon only from April to August annually , and the house is open from June to August .