

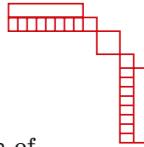
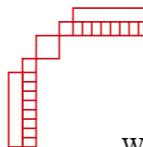
ONE HUNDRED AND  
TWENTY FIVE YEARS



All the More Determined  
*125 Years of Marstons*

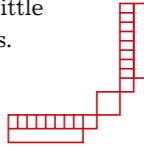
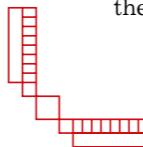


*William James Marston in about  
1900 with his dog Prince.*



This book is dedicated to  
William James Marston, on the occasion of  
the 125th anniversary of the business you  
founded and that continues to bear your name.

Having walked the same pavements,  
maintained the same buildings and served  
the same community that you did, it is little  
wonder that your values became ours.



# William James Marston

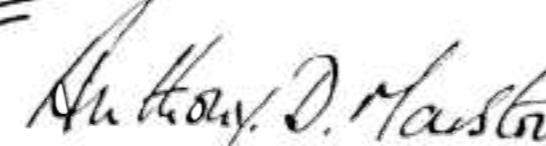
William James (WJ) Marston

Founder & first generation. Served 1895 - 1940



John Wilfrid (JW) Marston

Second generation. Served 1921 - 1981



John James (JJ) Shepherd Marston

Third generation. Served 1961 - present (2020)

Anthony (Tony) David Marston

Third generation. Served 1961 - 1999



Caroline Louise Marston

Fourth generation. Served 1986 - present (2020)

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# Foreword

Family businesses have a reputation for being the stuff of drama: intrigues, emotional outbursts, sibling rivalries, cousin bust-ups, and most divisive of all, succession struggles.

It is no wonder that so few family enterprises successfully complete the transition across several generations: thirty percent of all family firms make it from the first generation to the second, twelve percent survive to the third generation - and only a tiny amount, three percent, continue into the fourth generation and beyond.

Yet, when they do work well, family firms can be the very best of companies: more resilient, stronger performers, better employers and capable of inspiring a loyalty that often leaves their non-family counterparts behind.

I have had the good fortune of working with, and learning from, a huge diversity of family-owned businesses for the past forty years. My passion for this work has never dimmed.

I had the particular privilege of working with the Marston family in 2005. Their hotels business had reached a crossroads - and the family were trying to determine whether the long-term interests of the whole business were best served by selling or keeping the hotels. My role was to facilitate the family's discussions and help them navigate towards a decision.

The family resolved the matter within a few months, but they did much more than this through the process of discussion: they articulated the values they shared as a family, agreed a set of principles and policies to manage the interaction between family and shareholders, and put in place a programme of family education, communication and events that has stood the test of the past fifteen years and continues to this day.

Why has the Marston family business survived and thrived for four generations, when so many family enterprises disappear long before then? Based on my experience, I would suggest that the family has a number of characteristics which together might account for their longevity.

First, this is a family that 'walks the talk'. When you have a family of cousins who live separate lives in different parts of the country, it takes real effort, creativity, organisation and perseverance to build and maintain a sense of 'familiness' and to keep everyone engaged. I have worked with families who are very good at paying lip service to these things, who are full of fine intentions, but they fail to follow through; in doing so, they store up problems for future generations. This is not the Marston way, as I soon learned. When commitments are made, they are honoured; the work required to bring them to fruition gets done.

Second, the horizons of the Marston family directors are and always have been long term. Read this book, and you will find no shortage of decisions they made which paid off ten, twenty, even fifty years later - everything from buying bomb sites to hiring great people. The history of their 125 years in business has

encompassed world wars, economic cycles, market changes and, most recently, global pandemic: they do not overreact to these ups and downs as many others might. They are rooted in a place - Fulham - and they feel a deep sense of responsibility to the local and neighbouring communities. They are 'servant leaders', more concerned with serving the long-term interests of stakeholders, rather than any short-term expediency. In common with the best family businesses, they focus, not so much on the next quarter, as the next quarter-century.

Third, the firm instinctively strikes a balance between tradition and change. Again, read this book and you will discover that Marstons has adapted to change many times over, even as it continues to embrace tradition. The firm may not be a 'first adopter', but it is quick to respond. Since JW followed his father into the business, it has consistently benefited from leadership which is shared by an older and a younger generation; they work together and each brings their own perspective, insights and ideas to the advantage of the business.

Fourth - and perhaps most important of all - I believe that Marstons has endured for as long as it has, because it is built on the strong foundations of the family's own value system. These values, which stem from WJ Marston as founder of the business, have been transmitted down through succeeding generations and are evident in everything the firm does today, be it in the way it treats people or conducts business. A family business such as this is likely to be more resilient than most, because whatever issues the family face, their shared values enable them to join together and respond, as a family, with one voice.

In closing, may I take this opportunity to applaud the family for publishing this book. Marstons is far more than a name above a company door. It is, as you will read, a whole heritage: a set of values deeply held and practised, a rich history of challenges faced and overcome, and thousands of lives touched directly or indirectly by its work.

*By Peter Leach*

*October 2020*

## The heroes of 'first aid repairs'

On 16 September 1940, John Wilfrid Marston, managing director of WJ Marston & Son, sat down to compose a letter to Mrs Kay, recently appointed as manager of the company's new hotel on the Kent coast. "The bombing in London is certainly rather terrible", he began, but "so far, we have been rather fortunate."

It had been a grim week. War was declared a year earlier, but had only became a reality for most Britons over these past few days with the start of the 'Blitz' - Germany's aerial onslaught that filled each night with wailing sirens, bolts to the air raid shelter, oil bombs, fire bombs, high explosive bombs, homes destroyed, factories and shops wrecked, towns and cities left in ruins.

The first bombs to hit Fulham came in the early hours of Monday 9 September: a burst of deadly explosives, one of which destroyed a whole block of Fulham Hospital. There followed a direct hit on the turbine house at Fulham Power Station, causing serious damage to the plant. Then, a horrific incident at midnight on the Munster Road end of St Dionis Road: a delayed action bomb, next to a group of volunteer ARP (Air Raid Prevention) wardens working to rescue the injured, suddenly exploded; ten wardens died.

The bombing raids soon settled into a pattern, with German aircraft attacking targets in Fulham nearly every night. As darkness fell, the sirens started up, and before long, the throbbing of aircraft engines was heard overhead; workplaces were obliged to close early to let people reach home in daylight.

The night of Friday 13 September was particularly gruesome: among a number of bombs that exploded, a large surface air raid shelter in Bucklers Alley, off Haldane Road, designed to hold 1,200 people suffered a direct hit. Thirty-eight people lost their lives.

In anticipation of the onslaught, the local war emergency committee had divided Fulham into sectors for the purpose of emergency 'first aid repairs'. JW Marston was appointed to co-ordinate repair work for the South Fulham area, which included the industrial parts of the borough. "We are extremely busy," he wrote, "repairing and reinstating houses in order that the people can live in reasonable comfort."

Each morning, Mary Stutely, secretary to JW, received instructions from the Town Hall outlining the damage done to Fulham's southern sector the previous night. JW would arrive in the office, examine the list and ascertain which of the 'panel firms', Marstons included, was best suited to deal with each of the damaged properties. Calm-headed, JW would spend the rest of the day organising teams of builders, sorting out problems, keeping people's spirits up and getting the job done: JW was in his element. Even in reporting the scale of the attack to Mrs Kay, he used a light touch: "When you know that in Fulham alone we had 300 bombs in three days, you can well imagine it was not exactly a health resort."

There was no shortage of work that week: a house did not necessarily have to be hit to suffer damage. A bomb in the vicinity could bring down ceilings, blast off

Letter from JW  
Marston to the  
managaer of Stade  
Court Hotel, 16th  
September 1940.

ESTABLISHED 1895

  
**W. J. MARSTON & SON**  
(W. J. MARSTON. J. W. MARSTON, M.R.S.A.N.I.)

TELEPHONE: 1148  
FULHAM 1149  
2023

CONTRACTORS TO  
H.M.OFFICE OF WORKS  
LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL  
FULHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL  
—ETC—

BUILDING CONTRACTORS  
1. STEPHENDALE ROAD,  
FULHAM, S.W.6.  
16th September, 1940.

Mrs Kay,  
"Stade Court"  
Hythe,  
Kent.

Temporary telephone service  
Putney 6126.

Dear Mrs Kay,

Many thanks for your letter and postcard.

You do not state why the pieces of concrete fell from the balcony. Should the cause of this be through shell fire or bombing, formal claim should be made on the prescribed form issued by the Local Authority.

We are glad to note that you are still holding the fort at Hythe. You must indeed be thankful that, at the moment, we have been spared any devastation. Let us hope that by holding on we shall emerge unscathed.

The bombing in London is certainly rather terrible, but here again, so far, we have been fortunate. We are becoming quite acclimatized to gun fire and bombing and it is surprising how one can become accustomed to almost anything. The damage in Fulham has been fairly extensive, but fortunately the casualties are comparatively low. We are extremely busy repairing and reinstating houses in order that the people can live in reasonable comfort. It is amazing how after a few days of "First Air Repairs" how respectable the streets again appear, in fact I am sure Mr Hitler is quite disappointed at the comparatively normal state of things, even after quite severe shake ups. When you know that in Fulham alone we had 300 bombs in three days you can well imagine it was not exactly a health resort, but in spite of this everybody is putting on a cheerful face - in fact it only makes us all the more determined to see this job through.

Wandsworth Common and Balham districts have also suffered a fair amount, but the bombs have been of smaller calibre and the damage has been more confined to the particular houses actually hit.

doors and smash windows; slates came off roofs, and soot tumbled down chimneys, coating everything in black dust. Water and gas would be cut off if a bomb had damaged the mains. Shattered windows posed more of a problem as winter set in.

Householders were rightly made the priority for repairs, but not everyone appreciated the directive: JW had to inform Mambre and Garton, a large company on Willowbank Wharf, that they would have to wait. In spite of the longstanding relationship between the two businesses, they never instructed Marstons again.

Over the four months leading up to Christmas 1940, 395 high explosive bombs and forty-two anti-aircraft shells had landed on Fulham. Between thirty and forty Marston's staff spent 25,000 hours repairing doors, windows, walls, ceilings, steps and leaks for properties across Fulham, Wandsworth and elsewhere, as well as building or reinforcing air raid shelters. The company's own offices experienced several near misses, with Fulham Power Station and Sands End Gas Works - strategic targets subjected to repeated attack - only a few streets away.

Given the scale of damage, speed and efficiency were the order of the day: foreman Percy Deacon recalled leaving the yard each morning with the lorry stacked high with boards and always with his tin hat. Sent off to board up the windows of a bomb-blasted wine merchants one early morning, he had virtually completed the task by the time the owner arrived to open up the premises.

With materials in short supply, staff relied on their wits. On another occasion, Percy was sent to Sloane Street to build a shelter for a client's bedridden wife; his solution was to strengthen the uprights on her four-poster bed and place corrugated iron over the top.

A few days before Christmas, the borough engineer reported to the war emergency committee that, in just fifteen weeks, the combined forces of Marstons, other local builders and the council's own workforce had carried out first aid repairs to a total of 8,823 houses in Fulham: a staggering achievement.

"I am sure that Mister Hitler would be quite disappointed at the comparatively normal state of things even after quite a severe shake up," wrote JW, "In fact, it only makes us all the more determined to see this job through."

## *Part One:* Foundations



Friends of Temperance,  
Welcome here!  
Cheerful are our hearts today.  
We have met that we may hear  
How our cause speeds on its way.

Here we pledge ourselves anew  
Not to touch the drunkard's drink;  
Proving faithful, proving true,  
We will from no duty shrink.

*Temperance Bells: late 19th century hymn*



## Hinge of fate

If his father had not died unexpectedly when he was just thirteen, it is possible that Thomas Marston and his family would have stayed in Bishop's Castle.

After all, the Marstons had lived in the small Shropshire market town since at least the early 1700s. Theirs was a prominent family in the local community, descended from a line of burgesses, or municipal representatives. Until the Great Reform Act was passed in 1832, only a burgess had the right to elect the local Members of Parliament. The office was something of a mixed blessing, however, as Bishop's Castle had been one of England's most notorious 'rotten boroughs'. There were no secret ballots: burgesses voted by a show of hands and were expected to elect the choice of the local patron - in the late eighteenth century, this was the First Baron Clive, better known as Clive of India - or face the consequences.

Just as the Marstons established a family tradition of municipal service, so they passed on the family trade, from father to son. They were tinsmiths and braziers - hammering out sheet metal and beating out brass to make household and industrial items: spoons, kettles, pots, baths, dairy equipment. Young Thomas might reasonably have expected to be apprenticed to his father, also named Thomas, to practise the same trade in the same town.

But it was not to be. In 1843, the elder Thomas contracted typhus and died suddenly, leaving his wife Harriet to manage on her own with eight surviving children. As well as Thomas who was thirteen, the eldest, Isabella, was just nineteen and the youngest, another Harriet, less than a week old.

What to do? The industrial revolution was at its peak, and the way of life for artisan families like the Marstons was shifting: mass production was on the rise, large factories began to replace the old cottage industries, and huge numbers of people were on the move from country to the city.

Did Harriet have a prior family connection to Birmingham, or was she simply looking to improve the family's prospects? Whatever her motivation within three years, Harriet had moved the family sixty miles east to this 'city of a thousand trades' – a magnet for those looking for work in glasswork, woodwork, leatherwork, tailoring and button making, as well as for skilled craftsmen in the jewellery and metal trades.

They lived in Hurst Street, in one of the thousands of back-to-back tenement houses that were hastily built to accommodate new migrants flooding into the city. Poorly constructed, cramped, badly drained, the tenements fast became a slum.

The family scraped out a life and living over the next few years, their fortunes mixed. Isabella married in 1846. Harriet, the youngest of the Marstons, died of encephalitis in 1850, aged seven. Thomas set himself up as a tinplate worker; In 1851, when he was twenty-one, he married Emma Clarke and two years later, they celebrated the birth of a daughter, Susannah.

Perhaps in search of a better life, perhaps prompted by the death of their

mother Harriet in 1855, the family moved again, this time to London.

These were anything but settled years for Thomas and his family. Their first home was in Clerkenwell, which had become a centre for craft workshops during the industrial revolution. A second daughter, Mary Ann was born there, in 1857. But in 1861, Emma died while prematurely giving birth. The baby, a daughter also named Emma, did not survive.

Still finding his way in a new city, and with two motherless daughters, Thomas remarried in 1863. Theirs was a large household, as his new wife Sarah Sanders already had eight children (and grown-up stepchildren) from a previous marriage to add to his own.

They had their first child together, a son, and lived for a number of years in what is now Ingestre Place in Soho in a four-storey block built for artisans, named Ingestre Buildings. However good the intentions of the 'Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes', who had commissioned the new buildings, they were described by a contemporary journal as overcrowded, lacking a playground and obliging the residents to keep their windows closed to exclude the 'incense' from the nearby Lion Brewery in Broad Street.

It was here that their second son, William James, was born on 9 August 1865. He was joined over the next four years by three sisters, including twins, and grew up in a family that numbered at least thirteen surviving children.

## To Fulham

In later life, WJ Marston would recall Fulham in the 1880s as little more than a semi-rural backwater: "I remember Wandsworth Bridge Road when there were low fences on either side enclosing orchards; it was a picturesque sight to see the fruit blossom on the trees", he recounted. "I can well remember walking over fields on which Fulham Power Station now stands and seeing men shooting rabbits".

The Borough, however, was on the cusp of rapid change. The District Railway had been extended to West Brompton in 1869 and then to Putney Bridge in 1880. In just twenty years - from 1881 to 1901 - Fulham's population swelled, increasing threefold from 43,000 to 137,000. With transport links came jobs, and the area prospered.

Industrial developments included laundries and breweries. Much industry grew around Fulham's waterside, making use of cheap water transport. In 1873, Wandsworth Bridge opened. Entertainment also grew, including football: Fulham FC was founded in 1879.

William's family had moved to southwest London when he was still young. Thomas, his father, transferred his business to Winstanley Road, Battersea, and - in the days before free schooling was available - paid thruppence a week for his son to attend the local private school.

Leaving school at the age of twelve, William worked at Price's Candle Factory in York Road, only a few minutes' walk from his father's workshop. Owned by an

evangelical Christian family, Price's was a pioneer of workers' welfare, providing each of the one thousand boys employed at the factory with a bible, book of hymns, arithmetic book, free baths, and free breakfasts and suppers.

At fourteen, William left Price's to become apprenticed to his father. The work included making breastplates for the Household Cavalry. At the end of his apprenticeship, he took a job as a sheet metal worker in West Brompton, and later worked for a building contractor, Roffeys of Putney.

That William's destiny lay in Fulham may be due to his enthusiasm for the temperance cause. In 1885, when he was twenty, William met Elizabeth Ansell at a Christmas party, probably organized by the Juvenile Templars in Battersea where they were both members. The templars served as the temperance movement's youth wing; zealous campaigners for abstinence from the 'four evils' of alcohol, tobacco, gambling and profane language.

Elizabeth Ansell, also twenty, was churchgoing, took an interest in the betterment of society and had a strong work ethic. Family business was in her blood: her parents owned and ran the Ansell Perseverance Laundry, then on Dymock Street and employers to some fifteen men and women.

The young couple evidently had much in common, and William became a frequent visitor to Fulham. Three years later, in 1888, he and Elizabeth married at St John's Church Fulham. They set up their first home together in three rented rooms on the ground floor of number 29 Hugon Road.

By 1895, they had had three children, two of whom survived: Elizabeth, known as Lily, was born in 1889, a year after they married; George arrived in 1891, but died a year later; and another daughter, Alice, was born in 1893. William was probably working as a general handyman cum-builder-roofer-plumber by this time, picking up work where he could, including from his father and Roffey's.

That changed in 1895. William's mother died, and his father closed the business. Perhaps this was the spur he needed: Fulham's expansion had created a demand for local builders, and so, at thirty years of age, William James Marston set up in Fulham on his own account and began to trade out of Hugon Road.

Marstons, the company, was born.

## A new century

By the turn of the century, the Ansell and Marston family homes occupied a tight knit group of houses on Hugon Road, starting with Elizabeth's parents at number 50; the Ansell Perseverance Laundry at number 52; William, Elizabeth and their family at number 54; and next door to them, at number 56, Elizabeth's younger sister Alice and her family.

William's family grew: John Wilfrid was born in 1900, followed by Florrie three years later. They outgrew Hugon Road, and moved to a larger house at 271 Wandsworth Bridge Road, which had a separate office and builder's shop below.

The company, whose letterhead read 'William J Marston, Zinc & Iron Plate Roofer', was doing steady business. The ledgers show that Marstons carried out work on residential and other buildings around the Borough including the Peterborough Estate Houses off the New Kings Road, Bluebell Polish Co, Fulham Guardians (for the workhouse or infirmary), the Welsh Presbyterian Chapel, Trinidad Asphalt, and local laundries and grocers.

*The first letterhead for WJ Marston, used from 1900 onwards when the company was based in 54 Hugon Road.*



Landlords would send instructions for maintenance by postcard - only the privileged few owned telephones - and there were several postal deliveries a day. A typical postcard from 1908 reads: 'Please see to chimney pots at 117 New Kings Rd. They have blown on one side. Tenant says they are dangerous'. Words were not wasted on niceties, as space on the cards was limited. A card, addressed to 'Mr Marston, Plumber' complains that 'Water is coming through at no. 2 ... Also see to the flush in WC at no. 16 and the guttering at no. 14 (I thought this was done)'.

The expanding Marstons staff at this time included Bob Bence, taken on as an apprentice and plumber's mate in 1901, carpenter Fred Harper and plasterer Fred Airs.

The work was hard and the hours long. "You had certain work to be done, and you had to get it done," William noted many years later, recalling the daily routine: "Rising early in the morning, starting work at six, working many hours a day." Harry Sander thought nothing of walking several miles, often pushing a hand cart loaded with scaffold, before doing a full day's work. Harry was fourteen when he joined the business for an Easter job in 1914 as a 'smudge' on a school painting contract - in those days, a whole school was painted by forty painters in the Easter holidays.

The business soon became a family affair, with everyone pitching in. Lily maintained the invoice ledgers from aged fourteen, and sister Alice did the same when she was old enough.

By 1911, William - or WJ, as he became known - was feeling sufficiently confident about the company's prospects to move its premises to 87 Wandsworth Bridge Road: the 'smart end' of the road.

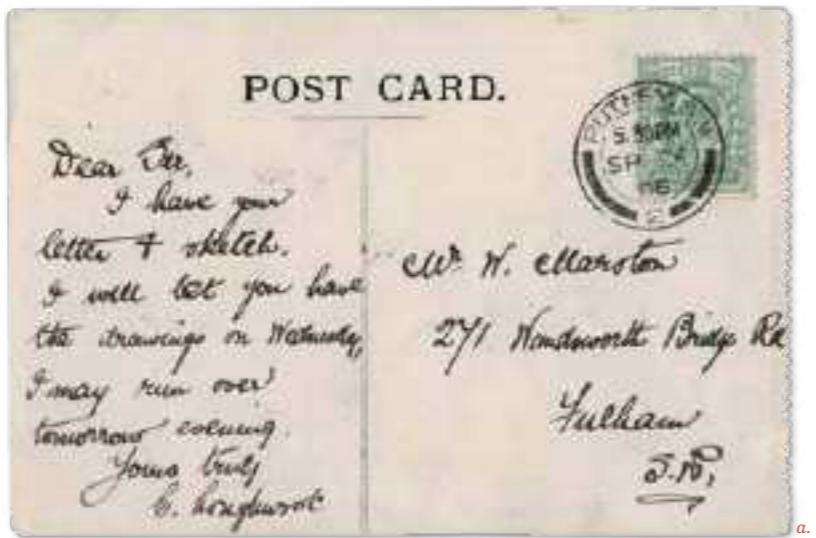
In these optimistic first years of the new century, the Marston family became increasingly active in the public life of the Borough.

A selection of postcard instructions sent to WJ Marston plumber between the years of 1906 - 1909.

a.  
‘Dear Sir I have your letter and sketch. I will let you have the drawings on Wednesday. I may run over tomorrow evening. Yours truly C Longhurst.’  
24th September 1906.

b.  
‘To Mr Marston. Please see to chimney pots at 117 New Kings Rd. They have blown on one side. Tenants says they are dangerous and oblige. Mrs Masor.’  
2nd September 1908.

c.  
‘Thanks for your postcard. When you come tomorrow please bring rather more green paint with you, as some is required in the back garden. The board you put up to shield the dustbins from the post, is broken loose. Yours truly CR Grah.’  
5th November 1908.



William and Elizabeth, both lifelong teetotalers, continued to work for the temperance cause. As an area that had a centuries-old brewing industry, Fulham was a lightning rod for the temperance movement: a dinner ‘for the poor’ at Bishops Park to mark the 1902 coronation of Edward VII included the provision of fifteen barrels of beer and two thousand bottles of beer - and a separate ‘Temperance Table’ to spare the abstainers from the smell of beer. The association between drink and poverty was not lost on Fulham’s Medical Officer for Health who reported that alcoholism was rife in the area’s worst slums. For her part, Elizabeth Marston maintained that the world would be a better place if there was no alcohol in it.

“Everybody had an interest in politics in those days,” noted WJ, who had joined the local Progressives - roughly akin to the Liberals in the days before municipal government yielded to national parties. In the 1906 general election, he successfully campaigned for Timothy Davies, the Liberal candidate for Fulham; Davies, a fellow temperance supporter and ally of Lloyd George, overturned the Conservative majority by a margin of only 630 votes. The Liberal Party won the election by a landslide; they quickly introduced a string of promised social reforms - national insurance, old age pensions, free school meals, legal protections for children, labour exchanges to help the unemployed find work - that collectively built the foundations of the modern welfare state.

As churchgoers, William and Elizabeth found a natural home in the Congregational Church on Dawes Road. Congregationalist communities involved themselves fully in civil life. Loosely associated with the Liberal party, they were hives of social and philanthropic activity, led and influenced by their ministers; the bond that the couple developed with the church endured for the remainder of their lives.

As well as volunteering for the church, organising bazaars and stalls at fundraising events, Elizabeth involved herself in other aspects of the Borough’s public life. She became a Fulham schools’ manager during a period of huge change in the provision of education: until 1870, half of England’s children had no access whatsoever to education. A landmark Act passed that year introduced free schooling up to the age of thirteen, followed in subsequent years by the establishment of secondary schools for the more promising students. Elizabeth was also elected a member of the Board of Guardians, responsible for the care of the poor across all Fulham’s parishes; she served on the board until it was replaced in 1930 by the London County Council.

The Marston girls were making their own way in the world too. The range of professions then opening up to educated women would have been unimaginable only a generation earlier: Alice became a teacher at Hugon Road School, where she had once been a pupil. Lily, a talented soprano, won a southwest London music competition - she showed ‘capital style and feeling’, noted the review in the Norwood News - and was awarded a scholarship to Trinity College of Music in Marylebone.

These were evidently good years for the family, but there was sorrow too. In the summer of 1910, the youngest Marston daughter Florrie, who had contracted tuberculosis, spent the summer with her mother, sister Alice, and brother by the sea near Brighton. WJ had stayed behind in London and kept in touch by postcard, trying not to let his obvious concern show: “My dearest Florrie”, he wrote, “I was

delighted to hear that you have had two glasses of milk; if you keep on drinking milk every day you will soon be strong. I hope you will come home all the better for your holiday. With kind love from your loving dada. Kiss your sister, mother and Johnnie for me.”

Florrie died the next year, aged eight.

*1910 postcard from WJ to his youngest daughter Florrie who was staying in Brighton when she had TB.*



## ‘Are we downhearted?’

On 4 August 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany, following its invasion of neutral Belgium. News spread fast that the Kaiser’s army was massacring civilians, confiscating food and property and destroying houses: these atrocities were dubbed ‘the rape of Belgium’, and led many Belgians to flee their homeland.

Between late August 1914 and May 1915, 250,000 Belgians arrived in Britain, seeking refuge - the largest influx of political refugees in British history. Today, this episode is almost entirely forgotten; yet in the early part of the war, with the government preoccupied, local communities across the country took the lead in helping Belgian refugees, organising food, shelter and employment for them.

WJ and Elizabeth became involved with refugee aid in Fulham through the Dawes Road community. Working with the church’s minister, Reverend FW Bryan, WJ established two homes for the ‘plucky Belgians’, one in Rostrevor Road and the other in nearby Lilyville Road. During the war, they housed more than two hundred refugees and found jobs for many of them.

Not everyone in Fulham welcomed the newcomers, especially as British casualties in Belgium mounted. In May 1916, anti-Belgian riots took place, provoked by a housing shortage and the belief that Belgian refugees were receiving better treatment than families of British servicemen dying in the trenches. One eyewitness reported a night ‘beyond description’ when hundreds of rioters gathered in Lillie Road, where a number of Belgian shops had opened: boys as young as twelve were armed with bags of stones and there were ‘windows and shops smashed everywhere’.

*A card sent to Alice 'to greet you' for her birthday with love from Will, 21st October 1915.*



Such hostility was brief, though; most people welcomed the refugees, meriting Lloyd George's observation that the country had shown 'great humanity'. The Marston family kept in touch with some of the Belgian families they had looked after, including a couple called André and Adrienne. The connection remained through to the 1970s, with occasional family visits to and from Ostend.



When conscription was introduced in early 1916, Alice's fiancé Will Phillips was called up. He served as an ambulance driver at a time when ambulances were still horse-drawn, and in addition to driving duties, was required to look after the two horses. One night, a shell hit close to the spot where Will was sleeping, beside the horses; the blast would have killed him had one of the poor animals not shielded him. Will returned home safely after war's end and married Alice.

WJ, at fifty-one, was too old for the draft, while his son John, still at school at Latymer Upper in Hammersmith, was too young. John left school that summer and found work at the London Joint City and Midland Bank, then the world's largest bank.

He turned eighteen on 31 May 1918 and was immediately called up to join the Middlesex Regiment, the Duke of Cambridge's Own. Germany had launched a spring offensive in Flanders only two months earlier, and Allied troops were struggling to hold them off until promised American reinforcements were able to arrive. The outcome of the war was still far from clear.

John arrived at Aldershot on 10 June, and wrote to his sweetheart, Elsie Shepherd. In the letter, he notes that he was given a haircut directly on arrival, and that the officer in charge kept shouting "Are we downhearted?", to which all the recruits were obliged to reply "No!" They were served rabbit for dinner - he was lucky as he had a leg, but 'lots of chaps had heads' - and each assigned a bed, which was no more than a 'blanket and board: nothing is washed, just fumigated.'

In mid-July, his battalion was moved to Drayton in Norfolk, but John was kept behind in an isolation hospital with 'flu'. (Aldershot was in fact one of the earliest spots where the high mortality symptoms - fifty percent - of what became the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic were identified.) Their friend Arthur from Dawes Road

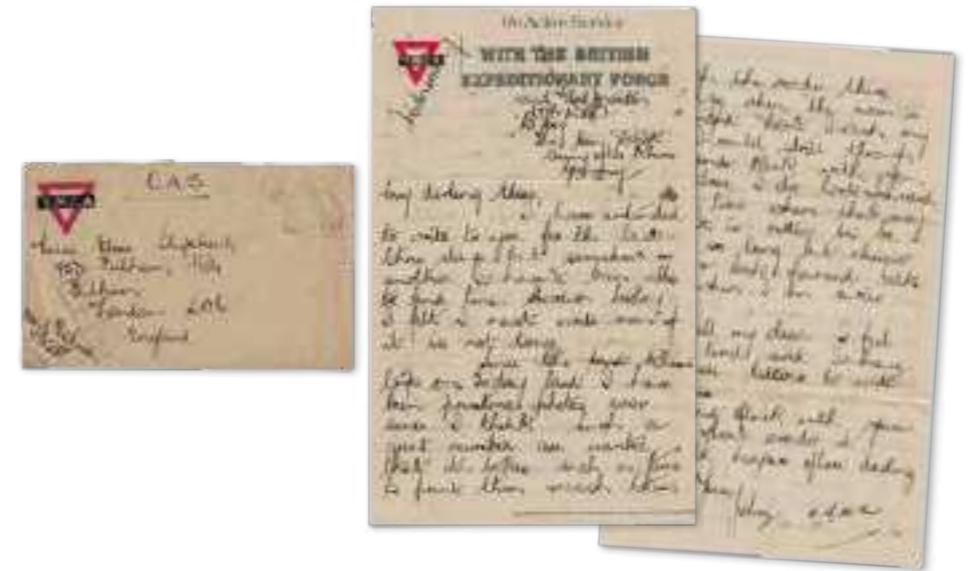
Church, serving in the navy in Dartmouth, wrote to Elsie saying, 'The sick bay here is full to overflowing with flu cases and I hear that thirty-two chaps in the sick bay died with it.' Not wishing to alarm Elsie, however, John joked that, 'I must be lovesick or something - everyone is on parade except those with the flu.'

John was an attentive boyfriend, writing nearly every day. His letters were full of concern for Elsie's health and nerves and he did his best to raise her spirits, although some of his efforts at reassurance may not have had the effect they intended, as when he noted that 'temptations around the camp are rather terrible, but chiefly, I am sure, why they have not any attraction for me is simply because of you.'

For her eighteenth birthday, John wrote to let her know he had 'been thinking of you especially today', but Elsie - not always an appreciative correspondent - complained to her sister Wynne that it was 'the beastliest, dreariest, rottenest birthday I've ever had,' and that John 'wrote for my birthday, but not much.'

John rejoined his battalion a month later, having earned a stripe, as Lieutenant Corporal J Marston. The ensuing months of training at Drayton comprised route marches, field kitchens, bayonet drills, tear gas drills with and without masks ('very unpleasant'), cleaning equipment in readiness for moving, parades, physical drills, lectures and two lots of inoculations, which made everyone ill for several days.

*1919 'On Active Service' censored letter to Elsie from John, one of dozens written during his two years in the Army of the Rhineland.*



Rumours of possible postings - were they going to India? Or Egypt, maybe? - were rife. In the event, the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, and the battalion was dispatched in April 1919 to Dunkirk, from where they were to travel east to the Rhineland. Transported in German cattle trucks, they passed through the shell-torn battlefields of northern France - 'impossible to imagine,' recorded John. They crossed the border into Belgium at Maubeuge, saw remains of more villages, and finally crossed the German border 'into enemy country', bound for Cologne.

Billeted in a sixteenth century castle, John was transferred to 7th Division, which had fought in most of the major battles on the Western Front. Notwithstanding the armistice, he and his fellow troops continued to train and make ready for battle. It was only when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919 that they were stood down for good.

John saw out the remainder of 1919 in Germany with the British Army of the Rhine and came home just before the New Year to restart his life and career.

## A family business

In the company's thirty-sixth year, the second generation of the Marston family entered the business. John had returned to his job with the bank in 1920, but a year later, albeit with some misgivings, he agreed to join his father's business.

In June 1926, John and Elsie were married at Dawes Road Church; it was 'a pretty wedding', noted the Fulham Chronicle. It had been an unusually long courtship - eight years - and in the early days, Elsie's uncle had expressed concern at 'your stage of friendship with that boy': the Shepherds were well-educated people - and it is possible that John, coming from a family in trade, was not initially seen as ideal husband material.

Elsie Shepherd was the younger daughter of Frederick and Clara Shepherd. The Shepherds owned at least two properties, one of which served as their business: Shepherd's Library, on the Fulham Road, where they lent and sold books, and operated a small printing press. Private libraries had grown in popularity over the previous century, as the need for books and general education made itself felt among social classes created in the wake of the industrial revolution.

The young Elsie was never short of friends or things to do. She was a keen tennis player, member of a cycling club, and holidayed with friends in Bournemouth and Margate, and even in Paris and Switzerland. She was a Sunday School teacher at Dawes Road church - where she and John first met. Elsie was the leader of the 14th Fulham Brownies having trained at Foxlease in the New Forest (where almost a century later, forty members of her family would stay for their 2014 retreat)

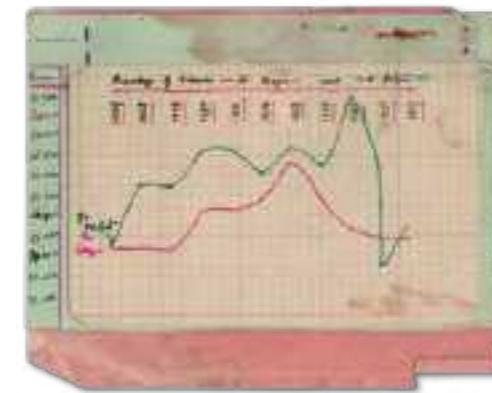
Elsie had been a bright student: she gained a free place to Godolphin and Latymer girls' school in Hammersmith and usually came top of her class and became head girl. She shone in English. One of the school's specialisms was to prepare the girls for positions in the civil service, and indeed, she left school at seventeen to become a war pensions' clerk before moving to the Board of Education.

Elsie was required to resign as a civil servant when she married - the guidelines stating that 'the responsibilities of married life are normally incompatible with the devotion of a woman's whole-time and unimpaired energy to the public services.' It would take the conclusion of another world war, some twenty years later, before the civil service marriage bar was finally lifted.



The end of the Great War and advent of peace brought an initial burst of prosperity to the country, but this was short-lived; a slump soon followed, and unemployment rose sharply. Shortly after a memorial was unveiled in 1920 to the 1,100 Fulham men killed in the war, an angry mob of jobless ex-servicemen invaded a public meeting at the Town Hall. The shadow of unemployment hung over SW6, as it did over the whole country, for the next fifteen years.

*Graphs and notes written by JW plotting growth of the business between the turbulent years of 1927-1937.*



Fortunately, the company had maintained a regular flow of work during the war and was now busy enough to provide employment for those who were willing and able.

All the lifting, carting and digging still had to be done by hand by labourers under the watchful eyes of their gangers. Among the hardest workers were the Sackett brothers, two of whom worked for Marstons in the 1920s, and four by the next decade. Another new recruit during this period was plasterer Fred Airs' son, also named Fred. So began an unbroken Marstons' tradition of employing multiple members of the same family.

Dawes Road Church was another fertile recruiting ground for the business. In 1924, WJ persuaded Fred Reynor, a promising violinist, to try building as a career; Fred joined as John's assistant and stayed with Marstons for the rest of his working life. Other members of staff who came from the church congregation were Tom Davies, recruited as an accountant and the future company secretary; Miss Goode, the typist; and Mister Sims, the cost clerk who spent his days perched on a high stool obtained second-hand from a bank.

The company did steady business throughout the twenties, nourished by a regular diet of building works and repairs to local houses and commercial premises; a company promotional brochure drafted around this time extolled the firm's motto since its formation: 'service, personal attention, straightforwardness'.

A joiners' shop and store in the rear mews of Stephendale Road was added in 1923, after WJ bought the freehold of numbers 1 to 11. Most joinery for sites was manufactured in the shop, including windows, doors and fitted furniture as well as specialist items.

*1920 London City  
and Midland Bank  
book account no 2:  
JW worked for the  
Oxford St branch of  
the bank when he  
left school in 1916.  
In 1923 it became  
The Midland Bank.*



Perhaps the firm's most unusual job of the time was the building of London's smallest police box. After the war, a temporary police box by Trafalgar Square tube station was due to be renovated and made more permanent; its purpose was to be a lookout post on occasions when large protests had the potential to turn violent. The scheme was scrapped, however, following public objections. In its place, Marstons was commissioned to hollow out an existing ornamental lamppost in the south-east corner of Trafalgar Square and install a set of narrow windows. This would provide the officer stationed inside with a clear view across the whole square. The box contained a direct line to Scotland Yard, and if the officer raised an alert, the ornamental light on top of the box would flash until backup arrived. Work on the box was completed in the spring of 1928.

WJ and Elizabeth travelled to Canada in June the next year for a month-long trip. JW clearly felt confident to leave the company in the capable hands of his son John.

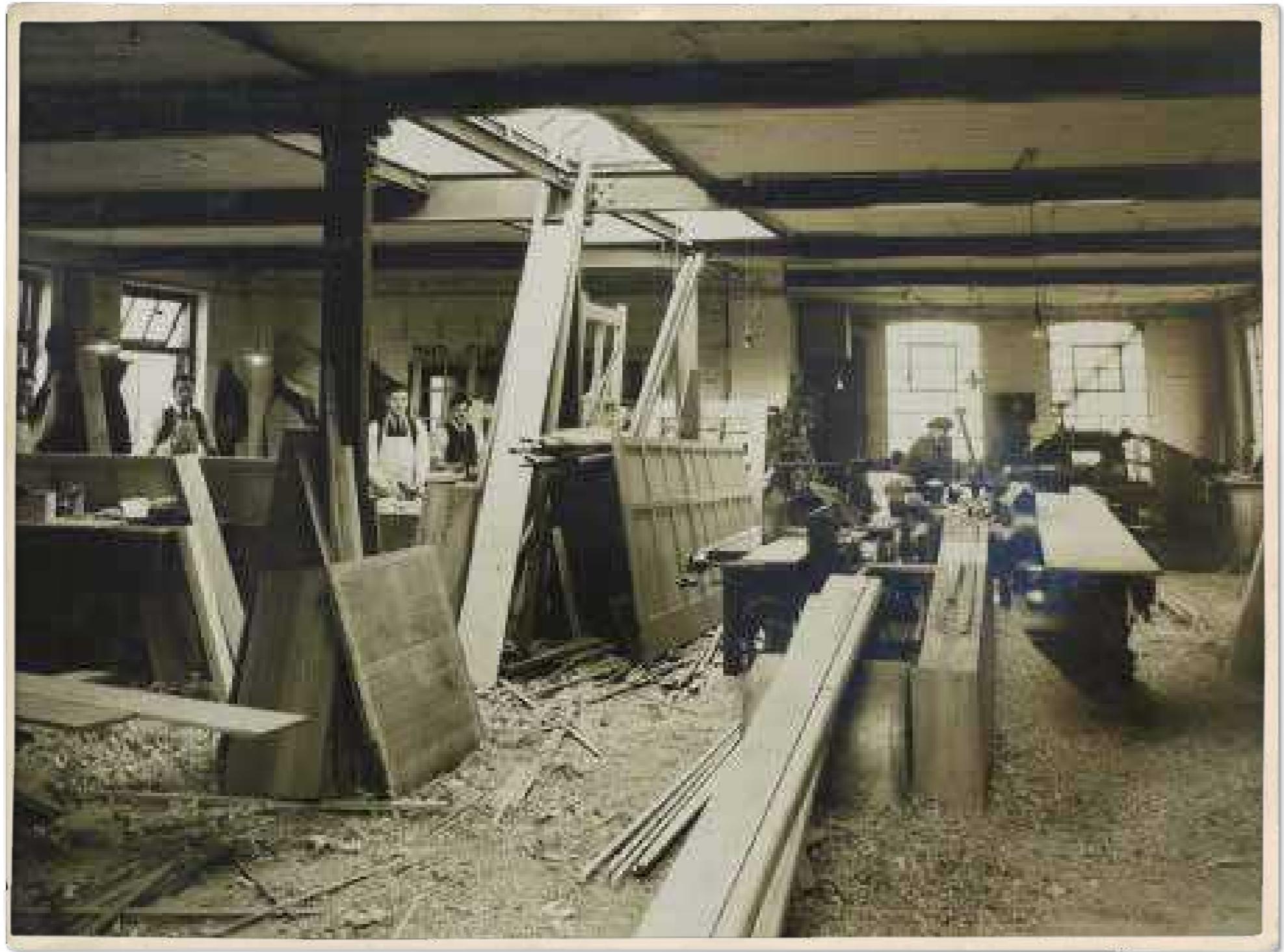
*Christmas postcard  
1939 sent to suppliers  
after the start of the  
war from both Mr  
Marstons, WJ and  
JW. WJ died 3  
months later.*





STAFF OF ROFFEY'S OF PUTNEY





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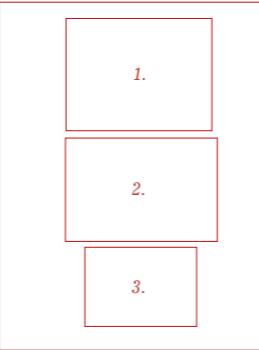


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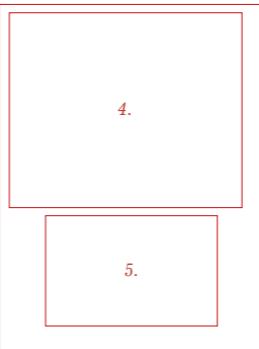


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1.  
The visit in 1912 of Uncle George from America to 271 Wandsworth Bridge Road SW6, home to WJ and Elizabeth (both pictured on the far right) with some of WJ's brothers and sisters.

2.  
WJ and Elizabeth (hidden under her veil) pictured on their wedding day. They were married in St John's Church, North End Road SW6 on 15th September 1888.

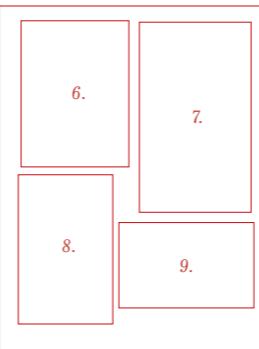
3.  
1890s: The laundry run from 50-52 Hugon Road SW6 with a sprinkling of Marstons and Ansell's. Elizabeth is in the front holding one of her babies.



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4.  
Construction staff of Roffey's of Putney. WJ Marston is seated in the front row second from left holding the tools of his trade, a hammer and piece of zinc. Early 1890s.

5.  
1910 Postcard showing the family home and business premises at 271 Wandsworth Bridge Road SW6.



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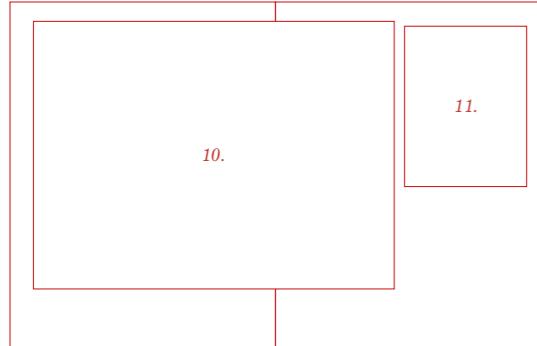
6.  
1919 Note on photo from JW to Elsie 'a few of our stalwarts on jerry howitzer. What would they have thought of this happening in 1914?'

7.  
Will Phillips survived the war and married Alice on 19th April 1919, primrose day.

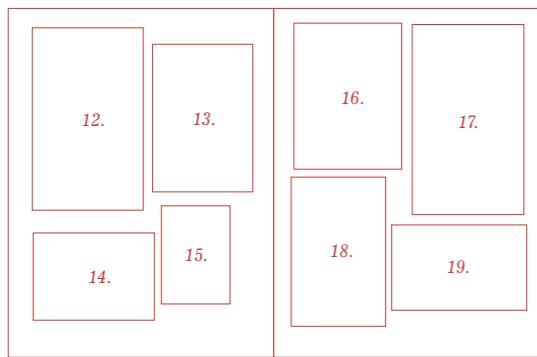
8.  
1918 JW Marston at 18 years of age is called up.

9.  
1919 Postcard sent from JW to Elsie from his billet near Cologne. His room is at the front of the building. It's now a golf club.

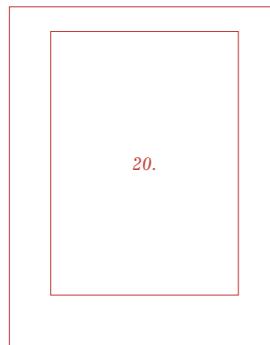
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10.  
1923 The joiners shop was established on two floors of 1 Stephendale Road SW6. It closed in 1998 and has been offices since 2001.

11.  
1933 WJ Marston pictured on the steelwork of the new electricity board showrooms in Fulham Broadway, on the left of the photo in a bowler hat. The Granville Theatre demolished in 1971 is pictured behind.

12.  
JW and his sister Lily in the garden of 87 Wandsworth Bridge Road SW6. Early 1920s.

13.  
Elsie and friend enjoying a trip to Bournemouth. Early 1920s.

14.  
1917 Elsie practising her Brown Owl Salute.

20.  
1929 WJ and Elizabeth crossing the Atlantic on the SS Doric for the Free Church pilgrimage to Canada.

15.  
JW delivering Elsie back home to Brodrick Road SW18 on his motorbike, Elsie in the sidecar. Her parents had moved there from their bookshop on the Fulham Road for the fresh air. Early 1920s.

16.  
1928 Elsie and Wynne posing by the pond at their holiday home in Seabrook Kent.

17.  
Elsie was a keen tennis player and belonged to a cycle club. Early 1920s.

18.  
1920s JW and Elsie on the right with sister-in-law Evelyn outside Dawes Road Church SW6.

## Part Two: Building Up



It's not just selling wall papers  
Or hanging it on walls,  
It's bringing sunshine and  
Romance to villas flats and halls.  
The gayest room in the dullest street,  
So filled with light and flowers  
When a decorator's been at work  
For half a dozen hours.

It isn't quoting estimates  
Or handing out advice,  
It's making dreary houses gay  
And nasty houses nice.  
It's making mansions 'livable'  
Treating cottages like poems;  
In fact, a decorator's job  
Is making 'houses' into homes!

*Draft for a company brochure:  
handwritten by JW Marston, circa 1925*



## Opportunity

The 1930s conjures up images of financial crash, economic ruin, mass unemployment and bleak prospects for millions.

The reality of Britain over this period, however, was more a tale of two countries: one of older industrial towns on the decline where the most severe unemployment was to be found, and the other, especially in the south, of a growth of 'Metroland' suburbs and satellites where people more commonly experienced higher standards of living, improved access to transport and public utilities and greater wealth. During these difficult years, it was luckier to be born in Walham Green than in Warrington.

At Marstons, John, or JW, had gained a qualification as a sanitary engineer, and was beginning to exert an influence on the company's direction.

He had a flair for business, was a natural entrepreneur and seeker of new opportunities. Unlike his father, whose instincts were to avoid debt, JW had learned from his banking days both the value and art of borrowing money to build a business. He saw that this was the time to raise the company's sights well above its traditional quick-turnaround fare of work by pursuing larger, higher profile projects.

By the start of the new decade, the business had three impressive contracts underway: a new clubhouse in Richmond Park, additions to the Natural History Museum and the sports pavilion in Regents Park, the latter commissioned by the Government's Office of Works. Marstons had more than doubled its size in just two years, now turning over £32,000 - amounting to £2m at 2020 prices - and employing almost seventy men.



*left  
Fulham Chronicle  
from 1931 announcing  
the completion of  
the Bernard Barron  
building in Regents  
Park.*

*right  
1934 Sales brochure  
for the houses built  
in Titchwell Road,  
Multon Road and  
Burcote Road SW18  
where a 4 bedroom  
house with garage  
and garden cost  
£1,060.*



While the larger contracts were welcome, they were by nature 'lumpy'; it was important to ensure continued supply of bread-and-butter work to keep everyone busy. This may be why, for example, seven men were assigned to the refurbishment of Fernbank, a large house for William and Elizabeth in Broom House Road, Hurlingham. Their new home was completed in 1932, and became the venue for many company and family parties in years to come.

Three major projects in Fulham would dominate the company's fortunes over the next five years.

The first was construction in 1933 of a showroom on Fulham Broadway - Walham Green, as it was then - for the Borough's electricity company. Although Fulham had its own council-run generating station by 1901, it was only during the 1930s that mains power was installed into most homes. The showroom was commissioned to market new appliances to the public, and it continued to be used by London Electricity for the next sixty years.

In the same year, Marstons built an extension to Fulham Town Hall. The building was erected in 1890, but it soon proved too small. An initial extension was added fifteen years later, and this second extension was undertaken to accommodate offices for the local registrars and health and sanitation officials. This was an era when pride in civic architecture was celebrated - and an official ceremony was hosted by the Mayor of Fulham in July 1934 to mark the new building's opening. 'As things go in Fulham, it was a very brilliant scene indeed,' waxed the Fulham Chronicle: 'The elite of Fulham lolled lazily in sofa stalls beneath the shade of sheltering palms. Rippling laughter, the hum of conversation and the rustling of rich silks filled the air, heavy with the perfumes of Arabia and Walham Green.'

The largest project of the period was the tender to build Fulham Maternity Home. By 1933, two-thirds of the Borough's 'confinements' took place in institutions, but the council - responsible for maternity services since 1929 - could only accommodate a small fraction of the total.

The new maternity home was designed for four hundred births a year - a fifth of the borough's annual total. Its three floors contained twenty-five maternity beds, with reading lights, a luminous call system, wireless headphones and doctor's inspection lamps for each bed. The two labour wards each had a sterilising room, sink and sluice room, matron's office, night nursery and babies' bathroom. The wide sun balconies could accommodate babies' cots in fine weather. When the home opened in 1937, the Fulham Chronicle reported mothers effusing that 'the fourteen days in the home is as good as a holiday.'



*left  
Official opening of  
Fulham Maternity  
Home and Clinic,  
16th October 1937.  
Closed in 1968 so if  
you want to have a  
baby in SW6 today, it  
has to be a home birth.*

*right  
Official programme  
for the opening of the  
Town Hall extension.  
WJ Marston presented  
a golden key to the  
Worshipful Mayor of  
Fulham at the start  
of proceedings, 18th  
July 1934.*



In photographs taken during construction, the gaffers are wearing bowler hats and all the men on site are in white shirts and buttoned up waistcoats; some with no collars wear neckerchiefs, and others even wear a collar and tie. Other photographs show the steels being hoisted by ropes and pulleys from a timber scaffold - euphemistically called 'the stick' - with no protection for anyone working at height. There were mechanical cement mixers, but the foundations were still dug by hand.

1936 was a high watermark for the business: the hospital contract helped it achieve its highest turnover - £80,000 - and its highest profit margin to date.

WJ Marston & Son was ready to branch out from pure construction: property was a natural adjunct. In the same year that the town hall extension opened, Marstons had moved to new premises at number 1 Stephendale Road. At the time, the offices only occupied the ground floor; the flat above was occupied by Harry Sander and family and numbers 5 to 11 were also flats.

Elmar and Wilston Courts in the Fulham Road, named after Elsie and Wilfrid Marston, were converted into sixteen flats from four houses. The facilities were modern for the time: two-bedroomed flats with bathrooms, fitted kitchens, central heating, parking and communal gardens. The buildings are still owned by the company today.

On a more ambitious scale, JW leased land from Holloway Properties to develop the Magdalen Park Estate - seventy-one houses that formed the new Titchwell, Multon and Burcote Roads, and Herondale Avenue, from a greenfield site close to Wandsworth Common. The development was a mix of three-bedroom houses priced at £950 and four-bedroom properties at £1,150. All had garages and an eighty-foot garden. Marstons produced its own sales brochure and offered to arrange mortgages directly, cutting out the need for sales agents. All the houses were sold off plan before building even started.

By 1938, the firm owned enough properties to warrant a separate company - Marston Properties - being formed to run them.

JW and Elsie moved to one of the new homes, 15 Herondale Avenue, in 1935 to accommodate their growing family. The couple's first child Daphne was born in 1928, but she died only two years later in 1930 of 'atrophy of the nerves.' Marilyn was born that same year, followed by Barbara in 1931.

A congratulations card from a fellow mason on the birth of John James - 'Marston & Son will be perpetuated' 19th February 1939.



After three daughters, Elsie was anxious for a son; she wrote to a Lady Erskine for advice and was rewarded with three pages' worth of instruction on diet, rest and exercise. Her wishes were fulfilled twice over: John James arrived in 1935, and Anthony David was born the following year.

## Hythe

In the late thirteenth century, the town of Hythe, one of the original Cinque Ports, was a hub of international trade and front line against a feared French attack. The town's finest hour in defence of the realm was in 1293 when a French invasion force of two hundred men was repelled by the townsmen; the French fleet took sail and left.

By the late 1930s, Hythe was a pretty seaside town on the Kent coast, seventy miles southeast of London. Although its natural harbour had been removed by centuries of silting, it could still boast a two-mile beach which backed the full length by a promenade. WJ and JW had come to know and love Hythe through Elsie's holiday home at Seabrook, a mile up the coast; she and her sister Wynne had bought the property together shortly after a change in the law in 1926 allowed both single and married women to hold and sell property on the same terms as men.

Hythe had its own train station, but the family, who by then owned cars, preferred the drive, even though it took over three hours, including picnic stop. (JW would go on to buy Hythe station in 1965 after the Beeching cuts closed the branch line. He sold the land off in parcels and kept the stationmaster's house and railworkers' cottages to house hotel staff; they were sold only in 2016.)

Always with a keen eye for an opportunity, JW purchased from the parson five cottages along a seafront terrace, intending to develop them into a block of flats. He bought them vacant, except for one tenant - a Mrs Simms, whom he persuaded to move into a house a little further back from the sea for the same fixed rent for the rest of her life. This turned out to be an excellent arrangement for Mrs Simms, who lived to be 102 and still paid a rent of twenty-five pence when she was 97.

*The grand opening of Stade Court Hotel which opened in May 1939.*



Despite the impending threat of war, WJ and JW decided to go ahead with construction of the flats, which they named Stade Court. The architect Maurice Swan's original plans show that a number of changes took place during the construction - not least because it was decided to repurpose it into a hotel. Nineteen bedrooms were built for tenants' guests and other visitors. In addition, the planned garage beneath the building became a restaurant with a sprung dance floor, while

the caretaker's flat was turned into a kitchen and milk bar, in keeping with the family's predilection for temperance. Ted Perrett, then newly apprenticed to his electrician father Edwin, remembered cutting through pre-cast concrete floors to fit all the power points - considered a luxury in those days, because electrical appliances were still not commonplace.

The Stade Court Hotel was officially opened in 1939 by the Mayor of Hythe. It offered a two-room flat with bathroom, electric lighting and central heating, plus cuisine and service, for £3 10s per person per week.

## Marstonians

By the mid-1930s, the Marstons' workforce was a hundred strong. Many of the men and women who joined over this period would go on to form the backbone of the company for the next half century.

They included seventeen-year-old Mary Stutely, who joined the firm after seeing a Marstons board outside the Town Hall on her way to work each morning. She began work in December 1934 as an office junior on £1 week - about £65 today. She was the receptionist, filing clerk, tea-maker and occasional typist. Five years later, her wage had risen to £2 a week; she remembered her mother believing such a wage to be 'quite improper' for a girl of her age and experience.

Mary Stutely's first impressions of the office was that it was rather dated. She discovered that, although the Marston family bestowed great care on properties for sale or let, they were reluctant to spend money on themselves. WJ did not have an office, and JW occupied a room only ten feet at its widest, behind which was a small office for Fred Reynor. She was joined a year later by a second woman in the office, Eleanor Must, who started her long career with Marstons as a bookkeeper. She was always 'Miss Must' though - first names were not used for female employees.

Bill Harris joined in 1937 to work on the maternity hospital. He was to become the driving force behind the 'upstairs' team and later became a director of Marstons, finally retiring in 1975.

More families joined the payroll. Fourteen-year-old trainee bricklayer Jimmy Carter followed his father Charlie into the business in 1935, starting on 7s 6d per week; he stayed with the company for fifty years.

Another recruit that year was Dennis Chambers, who joined aged seventeen. He trained as a surveyor and gained his qualifications through evening classes. Popularly known as 'Chase', Dennis also ran the committee that organised a newly-established Marstons' tradition: the summer 'beano'.

The beano was an annual trip to the seaside over a Saturday for the male employees (female staff enjoyed a more sedate lunch). Paid for by the company, the beano was treated as a special occasion by the men, who usually worked on a Saturday. All sported red and cream rosettes, pinned to their best suit, and new caps - although most of the caps were lost during the day.

The beano soon became a well-oiled event. The return from the 1938 beano to France witnessed by Elsie Marston entered family and company legend: as she watched men staggering off the ferry in Folkestone harbour, she remarked that they could not possibly be Marstons' men. Her mood quickly changed on catching sight of one Alf Beaton - so far gone that he was carried ashore on a ladder.



*The tickets for the pre-war Beano to France, for the team who had built the Stade Court Hotel, when family abstinence was put to one side.*

Camaraderie among the Marstons' workforce also extended to football: Marstonians - which included three members of the Sacketts' family - were a formidable force in the local league throughout the 1930s. In 1934, the team reached the final (played at Craven Cottage), but the game did not start well for them. Marstonians conceded two early corners to St Anne's, as their centre forward, labourer Robert Parker, started to limp from an injury sustained in an earlier game. St Anne's pressed hard and often, but thirty minutes into the game, Parker intercepted a neat pass to score for the company team. St Anne's redoubled the pressure, but to no avail: the still-injured Parker scored a second goal, and a jubilant Marstonians team lifted the 1934 South West District League Cup.



In 1937, William and Elizabeth made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the following year, they celebrated their golden wedding. Many business and personal friends, including the mayor of Fulham, joined them at a reception held at the Town Hall.



*1938, WJ and Elizabeth's Golden Wedding invitations. Two parties were held, one in the Fulham Town Hall and one in Hammersmith.*

A few days later, they celebrated with Marstons' two hundred staff members and 'their ladies' at a grand dinner. Daughters Lily and Alice both sang and some of the staff put on entertainment. Plumber Bob Bence presented the couple with a gold coffee set from all the staff. Bert Wright, one of the many speakers to pay tribute to the couple, praised the special 'bond of cooperation' that WJ had fostered among staff. WJ expressed himself taken aback by the warmth and affection shown towards the Marston family that night.

WJ never formally passed on the business to his son John, nor did he ever properly retire. But as the 1930s had advanced, he increasingly left the day-to-day running of Marstons to JW to spend more time on civic interests, including Fulham's Chamber of Commerce which elected him president in 1938.

After their golden wedding celebrations, William and Elizabeth decided to move down to Hythe to live in Stade Court. Two years later, at the age of seventy-four, WJ died.

The funeral service at Dawes Road Congregational Church was attended by three former Mayors of Fulham. Black limousines carried the mourners from the church to Putney Vale cemetery, but unfortunately, one of the limousines ran into the back of another and ruptured the external petrol tank. A great fuss ensued, but emergency arrangements were swiftly made to ferry the mourners to the cemetery.

WJ had founded a business with his own name above the door and led by example for the forty-five years that followed. He had built a highly regarded firm, respected by their many business partners and tenants alike, and trusted by the local Borough for their own buildings. Above all, staff knew he cared about them and their welfare - and even into his late sixties, he was the first man up a ladder to investigate a problem.

His final legacy was campaigning for the new Wandsworth Bridge. Built sixty years earlier, the old bridge was unable to bear heavy traffic owing to its narrowness and weight restrictions. As a result of WJ's and others' longstanding campaign to replace it, the London County Council approved construction of a three-span steel cantilever bridge, sixty feet wide, that allowed for two lanes of traffic in either direction.

The new bridge was due to be completed in 1939, but a shortage of steel resulting from preparations for war delayed its opening until 25 September 1940. The steel panels cladding the bridge were painted in dreary shades of blue - colours it retains to this day - to camouflage it from German bombers.

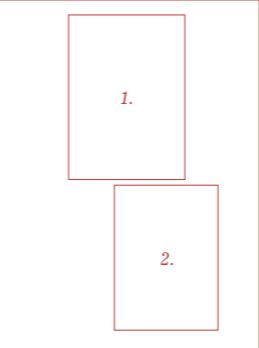
WJ liked to joke that on his wedding day, he had had to take the long way over Battersea Bridge to get to church because Wandsworth Bridge was closed: "It cost me £2 10s, and I never liked the old bridge after that." He did not live to see the new bridge opened, as he passed away six months earlier, on 31 March 1940. He would have felt a certain satisfaction that the first lorry to cross the bridge that September day had Harry Sander behind the wheel and WJ Marston & Son painted on the side.



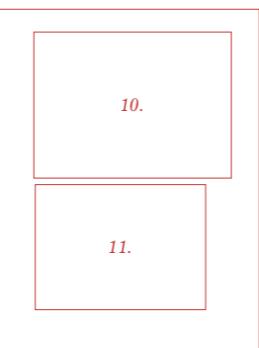








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1.  
1935 Elsie and John with their first baby boy, John James on the terrace of their new home 15 Herondale Avenue.

2.  
1937 Elsie holding baby Tony, born in October.

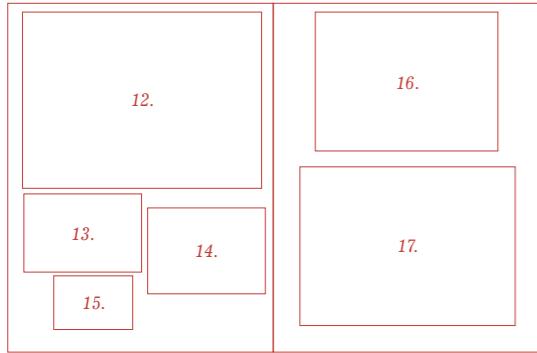
3.  
1934 William and Elizabeth Marston on the left with the Shepherd grandparents, Wynne, Elsie's sister, Elsie and young daughters Marilyn and Barbara.

4.  
15 Herondale Avenue, SW18 one of six newly built homes completed in 1934. It was to be the Marston family home until 1984.

5.  
Driving down to the house; 'Seafield' on the Kent coast, about 1928.

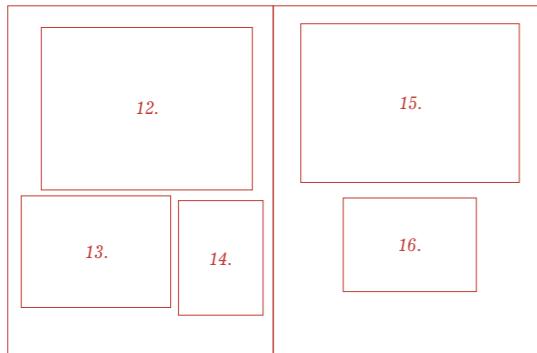
10.  
WJ and Elizabeth celebrate their Golden wedding with JW on the right, 15th September 1938.

11.  
1938 The staff of Marstons and their ladies attending the Golden Wedding party.



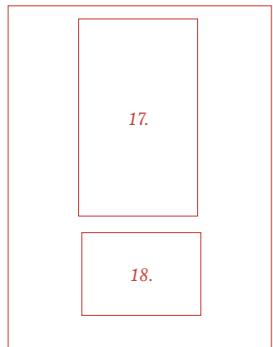
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12. 1934 The victorious football team with WJM second on the left in bowler hat and JW third from right in a dark coat. The Sackett brothers are seated in the front row.
13. Labourers digging at the beginning of construction of the maternity home. Note: their flat caps, laundered shirts, waistcoats and cigarettes.
14. 1935 Lifting the steels up to form the framework for the maternity home. Note: The block and tackle at the top of the 'stick' showing the steels were hoisted by manpower.
15. 1933 Building Magdalen Park houses.
16. 1933 The 16 flats at Elmar and Wilston Courts in Fulham Road complete. WJ stands proudly in the doorway.
17. 1930 Building the Regents Park Pavilion.



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12. 1939 Elsie front row second from left and WJ second from right. JW standing behind the mayor to the left.
13. Early 1930s. Two Marston lorries outside the yard in Pearscroft Road which was demolished in the 1960s to make way for a tower block.
14. 1933 The steelwork in place for the Fulham Town Hall extension that opened in 1934.
15. A post war Beano with JW in the dark jacket, Denis Chambers sitting to his right, Percy Deacon to his left and Bill Harris on his left - 'The Beano committee'. Even JW had to wear his red and cream rosette. These were worn to make sure no one was left behind.
16. 1938 On the ferry back to Folkestone from the Boulogne Beano.



p.45

17. JW on a company Beano to the South Coast. JW didn't drink but he accepted that his employees would want to let their hair down once in a while.
18. 1939 John and Tony standing next to Admiralty Scaffolding in Cornwall.

*Christmas postcard to suppliers in 1940 from just JW Marston, WJ had died the previous March. The handover was complete.*



## Dig for victory

John James Shepherd Marston, William's (WJ) grandson, was five years old when he stood at the Folkstone West station platform with his mother Elsie, two sisters, brother and grandmother on a sunny day in late May 1940, watching the trains go past.

The family had been staying in Hythe when news came that the whole of the Kent seaboard was to be evacuated, for fear of a German invasion. They had been deposited at the station, and were waiting for the train home to London. Every train was chock-full of soldiers, rescued from Dunkirk and en route to various destinations up-country. John vividly remembers the sight of the soldiers: exhausted, some wrapped in makeshift bandages, but all looking relieved to be back in sunny Kent.

John and his younger brother Tony were not back in London for long. Once the Blitz began, the city was deemed unsafe for young children: it was decided that sisters Marilyn and Barbara would stay at home, but the two boys - now aged six and five respectively - would be evacuated. As they stood at Euston station, labels on their jacket lapels, their mother Elsie instructed John to look after his brother, as the older of the two. "I remember feeling I couldn't look after myself, never mind anyone else," he recalled.

John and Tony spent the next five years in the village of Betws-y-Coed in Snowdonia, North Wales. For the two boys, separated by age group into different school buildings and living quarters, these were not happy years. They saw their parents and sisters over the summer holidays only, although, noted John, it felt "like we came back to London to be bombed."



At the declaration of war in 1939, Marstons had 122 employees. A number of the men volunteered or were drafted for the war effort. Bill Harris volunteered early, and was evacuated from Dunkirk. He served for the whole of the war in the Royal Engineers, rejoining the firm after he was de-mobbed.

Harry Sander spent from 1940 to 1946 in the Royal Army Service Corps, having previously served six years in the army of occupation in Germany after WW1. He was an ambulance driver from D-Day to VE Day, driving a variety of ambulances - and christening each of them 'Fulham'.

Recruited by Bill Harris four years earlier, Percy Deacon joined up in 1941 - much to JW's chagrin, as he had declared himself a foreman, not a carpenter, thereby becoming eligible for the draft.

During the early years of the war, Marstons' employees deferred from the draft were kept busy building defences and air raid shelters across southwest London. Fulham's war emergency committee had quickly discovered how inadequate surface shelters were as a means of protection for the Borough's residents during air raids; Marstons, along with other local builders, replaced these with new underground shelters. This kind of work was governed by a scale of fixed charges, so for works costing £500 - the average cost of an air raid shelter for a street in Fulham - Marstons would be paid just £62 10s; employees were obliged to take a pay cut.

One of the company's first war contracts was at the factory in Bayham Street, Camden, for Ernest F Moy. Moy manufactured electrical and camera equipment, but turned the factory over to armaments to help the war effort.

Petrol was the first commodity to be rationed in wartime as all oil was imported from overseas. Marstons owned the petrol garage at the junction of Townmead Road and Wandsworth Bridge Road; Miss Must remembered rushing between the office and the garage to collect the petrol coupons.

*JW became an ARP (Air Raid Precautions) warden in October 1939 covering the area around his home in Wandsworth.*



In late 1941, when Lord Beaverbrook demanded metal for aircraft production, Marstons was contracted to remove iron railings from house fronts. It is probable that much of it was quietly dumped at sea by a government wishing to save itself embarrassment, as far too much was collected.

Marstons also undertook their own large flat development at 261 Upper Richmond Road, designed once more by Maurice Swan. The building had not reached roof level when war was declared in September 1939; JW pushed the works on to completion before the 'real' war started. The building was let to the American-owned Citi Bank as a backup in case their City offices were bombed out. As it was unoccupied, however, the army commandeered the building later in the war.

The canteen at Stephendale Road was established during the war. Individual coupons were not required to obtain food, which meant that those working in the office would get an extra meal - prepared by the cook, Mrs Sander (wife to Harry) - to help them through the long hours.

Over in Hythe, JW had kept Stade Court going even after war was declared and in spite of complaints of shortages from manager Mrs Kay. The hotel stayed open until July 1941, over a year after the evacuation of Dunkirk with Mrs Kay staying on to 'hold the fort'. JW met her anxieties about pieces of concrete falling from the balcony with an enquiry as to the cause, as the company could make a claim if it was the result of shell fire or bombing.

The hotel was commandeered by the navy in 1943. JW was worried about the contents: he had the carpets rolled up and dispatched Miss Must to take an inventory.

*Bombed-out building on Langland Gardens NW3, rebuilt by Marstons after WW2: this would have been a familiar sight in many London streets, well into the 1950s.*



By late 1943, the Blitz had been over for two years, and the skies over Fulham had been relatively quiet. But in reprisal for Allied bombing raids over Germany, Hitler ordered renewed air attacks against London - and over the next six months, Fulham endured a 'hammering' from a frightening new weapon: the incendiary bomb. Many were killed or injured, and numerous houses were destroyed. JW, who served as a volunteer Air Raid Precaution fire warden, would have seen first-hand their devastating impact.

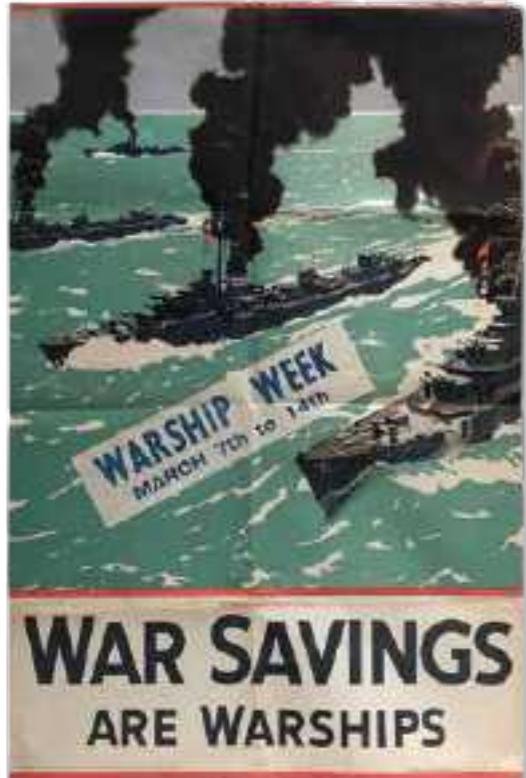
Miss Must recalled that people were becoming war-weary and many would not dive for cover when the sirens sounded: "Indeed, the sirens would be going most evenings and still wailing when we returned to work in the morning."

On the night of 14 March 1944, several incendiaries were dropped on Dawes Road and adjoining streets. Many houses were fire-damaged and one person died. Also hit that night and badly damaged by fire was the Congregational Church, spiritual home to the Marston family for the past forty years. It was never repaired or rebuilt.



War posters found at the back of a cupboard in Herondale Avenue, possibly issued to JW when he was an ARP warden.

Warships week March 1941. As a focal point for fundraising Marstons built a large ship's stern made out of scaffolding and canvas jutting out in to Fulham Broadway. The National Savings Movement set up in 1916 was used by the War Office to support the war effort supplemented by volunteer local committees.



Wings for Victory week in Fulham Broadway March 6th-13th 1943 arranged by Fulham National Savings Movement. Marstons built a temporary full sized 'control tower' complete with wind sock and bunting to signify the wireless waves. Fulham raised £1,127.



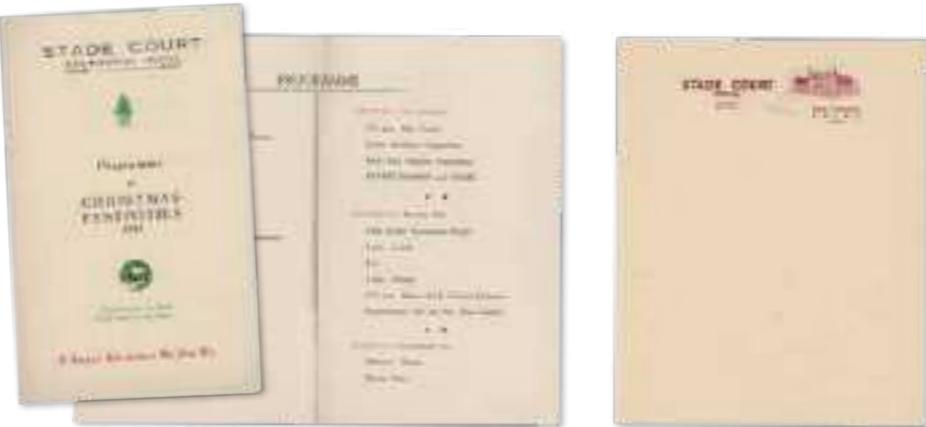
## Aftermath of war

1945 brought the end of the war, overshadowing Marstons' fiftieth anniversary.

JW was determined to re-open the Stade Court as soon as possible. This was no mean feat, as its requisitioning by the navy two years earlier had left it in a part-dilapidated state, including the removal of the ice cream tanks and smashing of the milk bar counter. With the help of new manager Dorothy Adams-Acton, however, the hotel opened in time to host Christmas 1945 with a special celebration: 'gala dinner', dancing to the K de Vere Orchestra, children's entertainment by 'Victor J Percival & Pretty Polly', and whist drive for the adults.

*left  
Stade Court Hotel  
Christmas 1945:  
the beginning  
of hosting many  
family Christmases  
for other families.*

*right  
Stade Court  
letterhead right  
up to the 1970s.*



Back in Fulham, Marstons endeavoured to create employment for men returning from the war. JW took the long term view: so long as he could borrow money, and make enough of a return to pay down the interest and a little more, a job was worth doing; Stade Court Hotel newly mortgaged allowed him to move the business forward, serve the householders of Fulham and keep men working. A generation whose lives had been put on hold were grateful to return to a home and a job; they worked hard and showed exceptional loyalty.

Many of those who joined in the 1940s spent the rest of their working lives serving the business. Among the new staff was Jim Golding, who joined the firm from the Royal Engineers. He was a Fulham boy, and other members of the Golding family had already worked for Marstons.

Ted Atkins entered Marston joiners' shop in 1946 having been on a government training scheme. Ted worked for the company for the whole of his working life, rising to head of joinery. Evidence of Ted's skills can still be found around Putney and Fulham: the organ loft, with secret fixings and east screen in St Marys' Church Putney installed forty years ago, and the oversized heavy oak doors originally installed for the 'Holiday with Pay' offices in Fulham Broadway sixty years ago now form the entrance to a sixth form college.

Jock Gibb joined the firm after being released from a POW camp. He had been

shot down in a bombing raid over Germany, only realising he had lost his leg after dropping down from the tree into which he had parachuted. In his early days at the firm, Jock specialised in war-damage work; he never let his artificial leg deter him from climbing to the top of any scaffold.

Owen Street joined from the RAF in September to run the switchboard; he would eventually become the company's buyer. When Owen joined the office staff, the clerks in the general office still sat at high level back-to-back desks on high stools, using pens dipped in inkwells - blotting paper was tightly rationed. The prime cost book, in a big leather tome, was hand-written in copperplate for each contract every day, so that surveyors always knew the up-to-date cost of every job.

Iris Parish (Iris Tippetts, as she then was) started in December 1947 as a fifteen-year-old office junior. She worked for Miss Must in the accounts department, matching cheques that came back from the bank - all company cheques, once submitted by the payee, would be returned by the bank to make sure that they had not been tampered with.

Alan Burfield joined in 1947 as a cost accountant. He had served in India and Burma, his training as an architect having been cut short by war. Alan recalled that organising war repairs was urgent and frantic most of the time, with shortages of both materials and labour.

One job that kept staff busy at this time was reinstatement work of iron railings removed in 1941: bunk bed frames from air raid shelters were re-purposed to form railings; a set that the firm fitted outside a block of flats in Clapham were still in place until recently.

The first major postwar contract was begun in 1946. Frigidaire, a division of General Motors, had operated for the previous twenty years out of a wooden shack in Aerodrome Road, Colindale, from where they made the first automatic household fridges sold in England. Now they were moving to nearby Edgware Road to a larger GM-owned site, originally built for Airco in the run-up to WW1. From this site, Airco had supplied the airforce with fighter aircraft, courtesy of their chief designer, Geoffrey de Havilland; at its height, Airco was producing a finished aircraft every forty-five minutes.

Marstons' work for Frigidaire occupied the firm through to 1949. Not only did it require the building of a new factory premises; it also involved a continual programme of amending the production lines to suit the various refrigerator models being manufactured.

It was also in 1946 that JW attended an auction in Folkestone, with Elsie's words ringing in his ears: "Whatever you do, John, don't buy that hotel."

'That hotel' was The Imperial, built by the South Eastern Railway Company and opened in 1880, boasting 'the most recent appliances for securing that luxurious comfort which enters so largely into modern life and manners.' The hotel suffered its first bout of war damage in WW1, when German Goth bombers, targeting Hythe, dropped bombs on the golf course during a daylight raid in 1917.

Between the wars, it was restored and extended. The War Office requisitioned the hotel for the duration of WW2, but it had stood empty and, as Elsie knew, was in a sorry state: the windows had all been blown out, shattered by the blast of the four heavy guns crouching on the sea wall in front of the hotel; the curtains hung in tattered ribbons.

The auction did not begin promisingly, as the auctioneer was unable to answer JW's question as to whether war damage compensation was included in the sale. 'You'll have to bid for it as it stands' he said. Not one person bid on the opening price of £100,000, so the auctioneer reduced to £75,000, then £50,000. JW proposed £24,000 - possibly just to stir the auction into life. But no other bidder was tempted to follow, and moments later, down fell the hammer.

*left  
1947 auction catalogue  
for the sale of the  
Imperial Hotel.*

*right  
Letterheads for the  
hotel from the 1950s  
and 1960s.*



The company was unprepared for the mammoth task of restoration, as the challenges piled up: two further legacies of the war were the concrete pill boxes guarding the building and the mines which had been laid in the nine-hole golf course. Plus, there were no convenient bathrooms for guests. And just for good measure, at that time, major building work could only be carried out with a building permit - but no permits were available to restore hotels.

JW's initial coup, with the help of the company's canny surveyor, Dennis Chambers was to secure the funds to repair the war damage. He then overcame the planning consent issues by obtaining a permit to convert the building into twenty-six serviced apartments, which, he submitted, required a kitchen, restaurant and staff accommodation. This left The Imperial in a position to evolve back into a hotel when the flats became vacant, without upsetting the authorities - the last flat being converted into hotel rooms a little over forty years later.

The mines on the golf course were cleared by the army. Understandably, no-one was keen to drive the first tractor out on the course, so JW volunteered himself; thankfully, he lived to tell the tale.

Whenever cash was needed for the hotel, Frigidaire was billed for work to its factory and always paid promptly - the joke at the time being that The Imperial should have been renamed 'Hotel Frigidaire'.

Next problem: the bathrooms. When the hotel was built, all its bathrooms were sited at the end of corridors, so hot water for shaving had to be carried to bedrooms. How to find space for new bathrooms next to bedrooms? The solution was to convert the chimney stacks and lightwells.

The greatest feat, however, was to create an entirely open ballroom overlooking the sea. This required the removal of the four columns of unreinforced Victorian concrete in the middle of the existing dining room, which supported the four storeys above. The whole building stood on a timber frame while the new steels were installed through two floors.

Work on the refurbishment was carried out by a crew from Fulham under general foreman Percy Giles. New employee Joe Dutton recalled ten-and-a-half hour days with only a half hour break in between: "It was hard work, but enjoyable with the sea close by to wash off the grime at the end of the day." (Joe would spend another fifty years at Marstons: he and wife Chris later became indispensable as caretakers of two of the company's properties in Folkestone.)

JW's faith in the hotel paid off when it started to trade in 1949: that the restoration was completed over so short a time was credit to the dedication and toil of the Marstons' workforce. That it was accomplished at all, was a measure of JW's resolve, his capacity to find a way through almost any problem and his sheer indefatigability.

## Rebuilding southwest London

The daily hardships endured by Britons in the early post-war years - austerity, shortages, rationing - were far greater for the many families in want of decent shelter. It was estimated in 1945 that one and a quarter million houses were needed to replace the half million already needed in 1939, the further half million lost in German air raids, the normal needs of six years' replacement and the additional demand resulting from a growth in the number of families.

As for Fulham, much of its housing stock was in a sorry state even before the war. A report from Bishop Creighton House Settlement in the late 1920s noted that very few dwellings in the Borough were in single family occupation, with many sharing cooking facilities on the landings, an outside lavatory and lacking a bath. A 1928 political manifesto described slums in Fulham where 'water streams down the walls, and the floors are so rotten that the furniture legs fall through.' Between the wars, over 23,000 people left the area to seek housing elsewhere.

Then came the Blitz of 1940-41, the fire bombings of 1943-44 and flying bombs in the final year of war. By the end of WW2, a thousand houses and flats in Fulham were destroyed by German attacks, and another thirty thousand damaged.

Service men and women returning from war had looked forward to starting a new life, a family and a home of their own: a massive programme of rebuilding was urgently required.

JW entered the firm for a competition to design an 'economic house' - part of the

drive to build affordable new homes in 1949. Marstons won both the Middlesex and Kent divisions of the competition and was awarded the prize of a building permit.

The Kent prize kickstarted an estate of fifty-four houses on Barrack Hill, Hythe. The special features of the houses were fitted cupboards and draftproof wood block floors, which eliminated the need to buy large pieces of furniture and floor coverings. Only the four main rooms were fitted with power points and only the living room had a solid fuel stove, with electric panel heaters to be used elsewhere.

The Middlesex prize was for a ten-acre site in Rickmansworth. Before work could begin, however, planning permission was withdrawn as the site sat in the newly designated 'green belt'; the company still owns the land today.

*right  
Housing competition  
1946 'the rooms must  
be large enough for  
a real family'.  
left  
1961 housing  
improvement  
exhibition sponsored  
by the Ministry of  
Housing with catering  
provided by the  
Imperial Hotel.*



Work on large housing estates for the London County Council began with the Browning Estate, Walworth in 1951. It was the first of many such large contracts for the LCC, and subsequently for the Greater London Council. These continued until the abolition of the GLC thirty years later.

Marstons won its largest project to date in 1956, to build ninety-four flats and three bungalows in Croydon. The contract, worth over £180,000 (around £3.8 million in today's money), included the diversion of a feeder stream to the River Wandle. It was the first of many successful contracts for general foreman Jock Stewart.

Three years later came the company's first contract to build a hundred flats, with the 115-flat project in Fulham Broadway. At one stage, there were over thirty bricklayers working on the four blocks under Jack Hardy. He required labourers to be in at 7.30am to prepare the mortar boards, ready for the 'brickies' to start work on the scaffold at 8am: "That's when the guv'nor starts to pay; that's when he expects you to start work."

By the 1960s, much of London's poor-quality Victorian housing stock was being cleared away by local authorities, but Marstons felt that some of it still had value and could be upgraded. The company joined forces with Fulham Borough Council and the Ministry of Housing to mount a 'Housing Improvement Exhibition' in early 1961 in three houses owned by the firm on Hugon Road. Visitors were ushered into

an unmodernised property without a bathroom or heating - then led through the adjacent house fitted with modern kitchen, central heating and running hot and cold water. Henry Brooke, the Conservative Minister for Housing, came to inspect.

Michael Reynor, who followed his father Fred into the company in 1957 as an assistant estimator surveyor, remembered a contract to build flats for Acton Borough Council two years later as being one of the company's first to involve arbitration: "We were innocents when it came to claims in those days. Things had been more laid back, and architects and owners took a more far-sighted view."

In 1964, Fulham Borough Council instructed the firm to build thirty-six flats and seventy-four maisonettes in Hammersmith. It was the last order they would place with Marstons: the council was abolished only weeks later.

Rebuilding Britain was not just about creating homes: the dearth of schools was scarcely less severe than the housing shortage. The 1944 Education Act raised the school leaving age to fifteen, but improvements were hampered by a lack of suitable buildings. The shortage of schools was only exacerbated by the post-war baby boom. From the early 1950s onwards, the company was involved in building new schools. Jock Gibb, who in his early days at the company had focused on war-damage work, was instrumental in delivering schools' projects: in the peak years, he was tendering, managing, buying and surveying for six contracts at a time.

One of these was Bousfield School in Kensington, designed by architects Chamberlin Powell and Bon, who later went on to design the Barbican. The modernist building, opened in 1956 and subsequently Grade II listed, included glass curtain walling with distinctive coloured panels in blue, yellow and green. The several other schools built during this period included a School in Hounslow in 1958 and a School in Morden in 1959, both large secondary schools.

These were heydays for Marstons: the company was fueled by local government contracts and driven by the triumvirate of JW, Fred Reynor and Bill Harris. The twenty-three-year-old Michael Reynor was keen not to work directly under his father, who ran everything 'downstairs', and so he joined Bill Harris's 'upstairs' team. Michael was struck by the competitive spirit between the two teams, that emanated from the healthy rivalry between Fred and Bill - a rivalry that JW was happy to encourage: "I always thought he was very shrewd the way he did that. He always made sure there was a little bit of needle between us to keep us on our toes."

'Providence' was a byword at the firm's offices: waste was frowned upon and everyone was expected to make-do-and-mend. Iris Parish remembers covering for Miss Stutely while she was on holiday and noticing a number of stubby pencils on JW's desk; taking the initiative, she bought him some new pencils - but as soon as he came in, he asked for his pencil stubs back. Eleanor Must in particular was maddened by any discovery of waste, and Iris soon learned not to incur "the wrath of Miss Must".

There were no photocopiers, and all copies had to be typed and retyped. When Marstons acquired a Gestetner machine, Iris would don overalls to fill the machine with black ink; after typing the stencils, she hung them outside to dry before the backing sheet could be removed and printing proceed. Wax cylinder dictaphones

were also in use up to the early 1950s. These were shaved down after each recording, so the cylinders would become thinner and liable to break.

JW was always 'Mr John' to staff. "The switchboard opened at 8am and he would phone shortly after to check you were there," Iris recalls. "If you weren't, woe betide you!" Above all, she found him 'a real gentleman': "He would come in to the office after visiting sites, and as soon as he arrived you felt safe - you just had a feeling that everything would be OK."

JW introduced two important new benefits for staff during this period. The first was holiday with pay - before which, most employees and their families would simply not have been able to afford to take a holiday. The second was the provision of a company pension, not yet the norm in Britain: the first half of the twentieth century had seen a large increase in the number of company pension schemes, but even by the mid-1950s, only a third of the nation's workforce were covered.

It was a happy, productive office, remembers Iris. She was married in March 1952, and the whole office was given the morning off to attend the wedding. "You had to do your bit, but everyone enjoyed it; you didn't expect to be promoted and just got on with what you could do. No one would ever say, that's not my job."

Family Christmases in the 1950s were spent at the two hotels, where hosts John and Elsie welcomed guests for five days of festivities. Their four children played their part too, joining in with the dressing up, dancing and quizzes. Magic shows and entertainers kept young guests occupied, and films were shown on a huge wobbling screen at one end of the ballroom from a tiny projectionist's cupboard.

The entire foyer and central staircase would be a theatre echoing that year's particular Christmas theme: Paris saw the Eiffel tower constructed up the five-storey staircase, with small shops and cobbled road beneath; the canals of Holland were graced by a tall windmill and tulips; and for the pantomime theme, a huge beanstalk was wound up the central staircase. All the front-of-house staff dressed in theme for the whole of Christmas.

In 1955, Elizabeth, still living in Stade Court, celebrated her ninetieth birthday with family and friends. The news report of the event described her as 'a tiny figure with white hair, smoothly dressed, leaning only lightly on her stick.' She died three years later, in 1958.

Elizabeth Marston had lived through ninety-two years of change. She had gained the vote and the right to own property in her own name; had laboured steadfastly for teetotalism long after it went out of fashion; and lived through six monarchs, two world wars, fifty-two years of marriage and eighteen years as a widow. She had worked as a girl in her parent's business, witnessed the transformation of Fulham into a bustling London suburb, and was matriarch to one of the Borough's most respected business families.

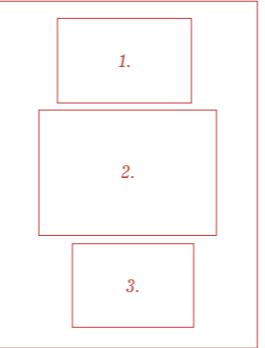
A generational era for the Marston family and business had passed; a new one was about to begin.



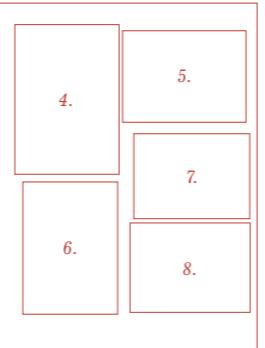






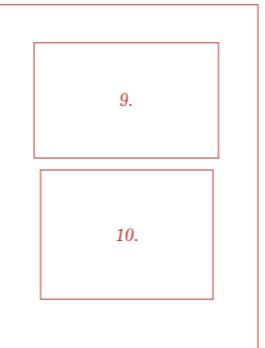


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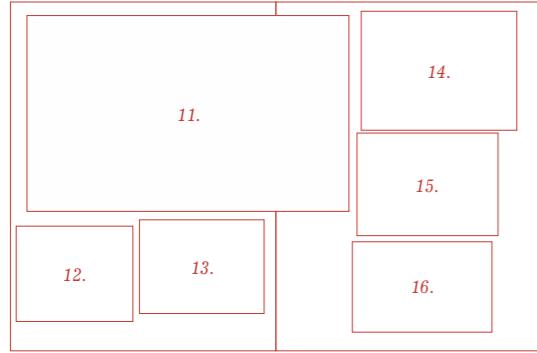
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1. 1940 Tony and John the smallest in the row of children with Barbara and Marilyn, with dark hair and matching dresses, in front of a wartime house with taped windows.
2. 1947 From left to right: the four siblings Tony, John, Barbara and Lyn outside the Stade Court.
3. 1945 John and Tony playing on the temporary pontoon across the Military canal in Hythe before the bridges were rebuilt.



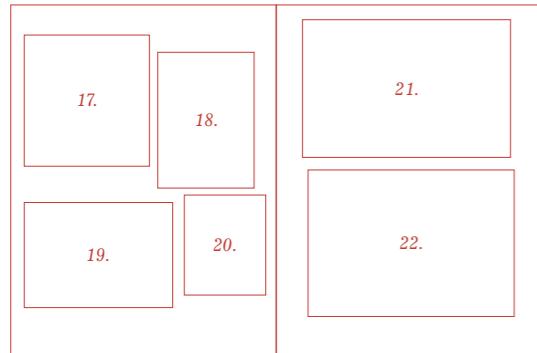
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4. Charlie Price tuck pointing, a skill learned from his father.
5. 1939 Building an air raid shelter Phillimore Gardens, W8.
6. Leinster Gardens W2, a bombed out building providing work for contractors like Marstons for over three decades.
7. Building the ground works for a new factory for Frigidaire, late 1940s.
8. 1947 Mills Yard under construction, another job to keep men returning from being demobbed busy. Originally a plant yard it is now Marston Properties office.
9. Postcard showing Stade Court Hotel after 1948, dated by the Citroen 2CV on the far side of the road.
10. 1947 Postcard showing the Imperial Hotel from the air. The dark patches on the sea front to the left show the positions of the gun emplacements which can just be seen.



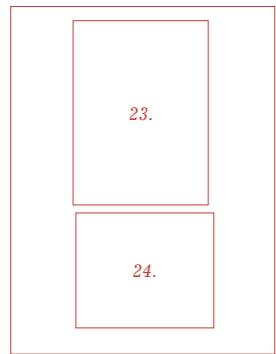
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11. A post war Beano. Buses collect everyone from the office in Stephendale Road.
12. Mrs Sander, the cook, and her son wave them off from the first floor window, late 1940s.
13. Beano: plumber Bill Polden is in the centre, 1950s.
14. 1970 JW's 70th birthday party. Miss Stutely presents flowers to Elsie.
15. John W Marston giving speech to the building staff at the Imperial Hotel, 1950s.
16. A Beano to the South Coast. JW on the left foreground with electricians, the Perret family, 1940s.



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17. Mary Stutely in her office in the mid 1960s. Mary retired in 1987 after 53 years service.
18. 1947 Young Iris Parish outside the Stephendale Road office.
19. The ladies of the office in the canteen before the Christmas lunch in the mid 1960s; Iris Parish is standing at the back on the right.
20. Fred Rayner in his office in Stephendale Road. Fred retired in 1984, having spent his whole working life at Marstons.
21. Marstons team of painters in their 'whites', 1950s.
22. 1959 The Bedford lorry outside the yard and office in Stephendale Road.



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23. 1960 Elsie being presented with flowers from a brownie at the opening of St Barnabas Church.
24. 1955 The 90th birthday of Elizabeth Marston at the Stade Court with her 3 children. From left to right: JW, Lily, her sister Mini, Elsie Elizabeth and Alice.

## Part Three: Developing



There is a tide in  
the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the  
flood, leads on to fortune.  
Omitted, all the voyage  
of their life  
Is bound in shallows  
and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are  
we now afloat  
And we must take the  
current when it serves  
Or lose our ventures.

William Shakespeare: Julius Caesar, Act 4 Scene 3



## 'Your father needs you'

Neither of the girls were expected to join the family firm, but it was Marilyn who was the first of the third generation to work in the business.

Marilyn (Lyn) had qualified as an architect, graduating from Liverpool University. A contemporary of James Stirling, she was one of only a handful of women on her course. Her tenure at WJ Marston & Son was brief: she worked on the design of a roof extension for the Imperial Hotel, and left shortly afterwards. Lyn would later be appointed chief town planning officer for East Anglia. She turned to painting when she married Richard in 1966 and had a daughter, Bridget, two years later.

Her younger sister Barbara studied at the London School of Medicine for Women and qualified as a GP in 1955. Barbara won the head of the river race in a coxed four when she rowed for Quintin Rowing Club, but in those days women could only win half a purple rather than a whole (equivalent to a Cambridge blue). She met Vincent Tonge in a pathology lab where they were both working as registrar and houseman respectively in Nottingham; they married in 1957, holding their reception in the garden of Herondale Avenue. After working in hospitals in Stoke-on-Trent, Grimsby and Wolverhampton, Barbara and Vincent settled in Chester, where they ran a practice with two other GPs, while also bringing up their three children, David (born in 1958), Peter (1960) and Clare (1962).

In 2004, Barbara Tonge was awarded an MBE for her contributions as a VSO medic in Zanzibar, her work in Chester in support of 'The Barn', (a safe place for disadvantaged children to spend time out) and as her community work as a GP. The award also recognised her work on women's sexual health in Uganda for the United Nations at a time when HIV was beginning to take hold. Barbara said one of the many things she learned was that "it is possible to wash using one tin of water the size of a baked bean can!" Barbara is a Quaker and, to this day, nearing her 90th year, advises and visits the sick and aged from her home in Kendal.

Tony was the first of the brothers to join the business. He had wanted to be a mechanic: Tony loved motorcycles and cars, and had bought a motorbike against his parents' wishes while they were holidaying in Australia. One morning, as the seventeen-year-old Tony was lying in bed, his father walked into his room and suggested that he might go to Westminster College - Marstons had recently built an extension for the college - to train as a hotel manager. His future was set.

After gaining his qualification in catering and management, Tony worked at the Royal Spa Hotel in Tunbridge Wells, followed by a stint as chef at the West Kent Country Club, where he interviewed Anne Hughes for a job on reception; she was looking for some experience in hospitality before becoming an air hostess. They were engaged in 1959. Tony went to work in a Paris kitchen, followed by a hotel on the island of Ischia, off the Naples coast. On his return in 1961, they were married.

Tony joined the business to take over as manager of Stade Court Hotel from Dorothy Adams Acton, who had recently retired. Returning from their honeymoon, he and Anne moved into a small flat in the hotel - which meant that when the hotel

was full, they had to share the bathroom with guests. Their eldest child Caroline arrived in 1962, then James the following year, and Lucy five years after that.

It was a struggle for the young couple to adjust to life in sleepy Hythe: they were Londoners and were used to working in more vibrant establishments - added to which was the strain of running a business where the wages and petty cash were controlled by the company patriarch from seventy miles away.

But they got on with it. Tony took charge of operations and Anne helped out at busy times, at least until she had three children to take care of. Running Stade Court was hands-on and often physically demanding work: on one occasion, in 1967, the sea flooded the hotel and the family's house (they had moved to a tiny house next to the hotel three years earlier); Tony had to spend several days afterwards, sandbagging and cleaning up. On another occasion, he rescued a group of guests who were stuck in the lift by battling a force nine gale on the roof, from where he was able to hand-wind the lift. He liberated the guests, only to discover that the roof door had blown shut behind him and locked from the inside.

Father and son clashed over the need to invest and modernise. Tony had inherited the running of a hotel originally designed in the 1930s as a block of flats; he felt that little had been done to it since and the facilities were dated. For his part, JW did not see why they needed to invest; they disagreed about ensuite bathrooms, an argument which Tony eventually won when they were added in 1967.



Like his younger brother, John James had never anticipated a career in the family business. But his card had been marked early in life - literally - when a friend of his father sent WJ a note days after his birth: 'Heartiest congratulations,' it read, 'Marston & Son will be perpetuated.' Graduating from Manchester University where he studied engineering, JJ joined civil engineering company Costain in 1957. He was soon assigned to build the first piece of the M26 motorway in Kent, where he directed bulldozers to crash through thickets to clear the way.

In the summer of 1958, Costain sent the young JJ to the Maldives as a runway engineer. The Maldives had been under British control since the empire extended itself into nearby Ceylon (Sri Lanka) a hundred and fifty years earlier. In the process of winding down the empire in the 1950s, the Maldives granted Britain a thirty-year lease on the island of Gan and permission to reestablish its wartime airfield, RAF Gan, as a staging post for military flights to eastern Asia and Australia. JJ arrived as one of a party of fourteen engineers, to rebuild the airfield. He was the last engineer to leave, at the end of 1959 - the deadline for British armed forces to vacate the islands.

John was admitted into the Institute of Civil Engineers in 1960; his first post-Maldives project for Costain was Flowers Brewery, completed on time and to budget: a first for the company. He was all set to continue his career at Costain until the fateful day Fred Reynor paid him a visit: "He said 'Your father needs you', pointing at me like Lord Kitchener." JJ knew what was expected of him; he handed in his notice.

On his first day at Marstons, John was welcomed by his father, who led him into a freshly whitewashed room, and said, "Well, this is your office; I hope you enjoy your time here." JW turned on his heel and left the room.

## Getting the job done

On a snowy morning in February 1963, JJ and two flatmates went to see a Victorian yacht Tigris that was for sale; she was out on a mooring in Gosport Harbour, so they had to row out to what appeared to be an abandoned yacht. The main sail had snow in it with no sail cover. Below there was washing up in the sink, cigarette ends in the ashtray and rubbish in the bin, but she had Victorian coach work below and narrow lines with a counter stern. She would need a good deal of care and work on her, but it was an exciting prospect.

They returned to London in the evening to visit some Norwegian girls who had invited them to dinner of reindeer with redcurrant jelly to reciprocate the New Year's Eve party invitation from the boys six weeks before. Mette, from Oslo, worked at the Norwegian Embassy in London. JJ's heart had been softened earlier by the sight of Tigris and now seeing Mette again he fell in love for the second time that day. Mette was about to visit her sister in the US, and they started writing to each other: so began their relationship.

Later in the year, JJ and his flat mates Philip, Richard and JKL set out to sail Tigris across the North Sea to the Baltic. The shipping forecast was not good, with strong winds expected in the North Sea and another system in the Channel. As they cleared Felixstowe, there was little wind but it quickly filled in as the two weather systems collided. Reefs were put in and the head sails reduced. The sea built up and Tigris was ploughing into the waves ahead, the bow wave level with the guard rail, doing seven knots. It was time to drop the storm jib and run on bare poles. Tigris did not feel to be under control. It was gone 10pm and dark with just the white foam on the crests of the waves like boiling milk. JJ went up the starboard side; as he did so, Tigris dived down the next wave, slewed to port and dropped. The deck went from under JJ and he fell to starboard under the guard rail.

Original plans for  
Tigris, a 20 ton one  
design built on the  
Clyde in 1899 and  
bought by JJ  
Marston in 1963.



JJ went overboard, untethered, with no life jacket. As he fell, he turned to catch Tigris racing past - his hands just managing to close around a rope. Tigris swept on as JKL watched John pass by in the water: he saw a vision of JJ's mother's face when he had to deliver the bad news. JKL then looked astern and shouted to Philip, "He's here!" Philip bounded aft to find JJ at the end of a long line, his face ghoulish amid the phosphorescence spuming up around him. Philip made the rope fast, and on the next wave, he and Richard hauled John back on board.

Mette, who learned about this incident only much later, returned to the UK earlier than planned to see John. They married in Saltwood, the village to the north of Hythe, in 1964. Nicola was born in 1968 - and Andrew arrived two years later. None of this would have happened but for the lucky rope.

JJ's grit would serve the firm well over the period of the 1960s, as Marstons took on increasingly complex construction projects and it became more important than ever to manage the work efficiently, deliver to a high standard and complete on time. Under the wings of Bill Harris, and of Dennis Chambers, who took the new recruit around the sites to introduce him to everyone, John learned the business.

One of the most challenging schemes of the period was the Richmond Swimming Baths project in 1965 in Old Deer Park. It was to have indoor and outdoor international-size pools, plus a large learner's pool. The landscaped sunbathing areas around the outdoor pool were to be set over three acres of contoured banks with imported fully-grown trees.

To mark the start of excavations, a ceremony was held for the Mayor to place a shilling, minted in the year in which foundations were laid, under the foundation stone. After the Mayor tapped the new shilling into place, the assembled dignitaries went off for tea and sherry in the Town Hall. When Jock Stewart, who was in charge of the job, returned to the site, he was taken aback to find that someone had moved the stone to remove the shilling; he found a replacement shilling and the stone was swiftly reset.

Just six weeks before Lord Hill, Chairman of the Independent Television Authority, was due to open the baths, a more serious problem occurred. One evening, as the night watchman prepared to go home, he threw the switch to turn off the electrics. No-one had told him that the pools were on test and still on a temporary electrical supply: overnight, the pool water flooded into the basement plant area, inundating twenty-four pumps and all the control gear to a depth of five feet. A frantic search ensued to find replacement pumps, with equipment sourced from all over England and France; amazingly, everything was completed in time, and the opening went ahead as scheduled.

Marstons was tested once more in 1969 when the firm won the contract to build Tottenham Hale Underground Station, including the overground connection and bus terminal. The contract went smoothly - again, until six weeks before completion: a fire broke out and gutted the booking hall, which had been virtually completed. Within hours, the firm was under instruction to rebuild the burnt-out hall in time for the line to be opened by the Queen. The only option was to work around the

clock, twenty-four hours a day: JJ and the site team put in twelve-hour shifts in rotation, and on the final night, they worked a straight twenty-four hours. Everyone was exhausted but relieved at 8am the next morning to see Maurice Holmes, chairman of London Transport, come through on the first train and stop off to praise their herculean efforts.

Problems on site, however, were more commonly resolved with a keen eye and cool head. In 1967, Marstons was contracted to build a new school - including chapel, swimming pool and workshops - for the 750 boys of the London Oratory School; it was the fourth school Marstons had built in the decade with Jock Stewart as site agent. The Oratory was to be built on the site of the redundant Fulham Fever Hospital on the north side of the District Line, directly opposite Chelsea football ground. Early on in the project, Jock found that the site was being continually broken into over weekends; it was when he realised this only occurred on match days at Stamford Bridge that he was able to prevent break-ins by keeping the site open on Saturday afternoons, allowing fans to nip across and into The Shed to cheer on Chelsea. He secured the site once the game kicked off.

Over the course of the decade, John James (JJ) came into his own. He admired his father's practical commercial wisdom, and John W for his part encouraged him. Father-son relationships in business are rarely all smooth-going, and they argued a fair amount. JJ and his father both suffered from epilepsy, and the stress resulting from a heated discussion would often cause one or other of them to have a fit afterwards.

Disagreements aside, their relationship was founded on mutual respect. When JJ remarked that he had passed by a for-sale board in front of the derelict Plough Brewery building on Wandsworth Road, and that Marstons might want to buy it, his father readily agreed to purchase the property.

JJ also discovered that his father's 'no' did not always mean 'never': he once suggested to 'the old man' that the company, which already owned a compressor, should buy another. He reasoned this would be cheaper in the long run, as the firm was forever having to hire a second and sometimes a third. JW dismissed the idea out of hand. Some months later, however, his father called him in to complain about the number of cheques he was having to sign to hire compressors: "We ought to buy one!" exclaimed JW. His son nodded in agreement.

## A race against time

How feasible was it to build a sixty-six-bedroom hotel on a bomb site in the middle of 1970s London in just eighteen months? In late 1971, when they broke ground for construction of the Hogarth Hotel, the company was about to find out.

Marstons had owned the site on Hogarth Road, Kensington for the past quarter of a century - JW had acquired it in 1944 - before doing anything with it. The impetus to develop it into a hotel was provided by the introduction of the hotel development investment scheme - a Labour government subsidy aimed at increasing inbound tourism by forcing the pace of hotel construction. The developer of

a new hotel in London could claim a grant of £1,250 (around £12,000 at 2020 prices) per bedroom - but would qualify only if completion was achieved by April 1973.

Time was precious: JJ commissioned his architect brother-in-law David Wall to design the hotel with an underground car park. To fund the development, Marstons sold the freehold of its thirteen-storey octagonal office block in Parker Street, off Kingsway, a site JW had created by purchasing parcels of land and subsequently rented to them the British Institute of Management.

Creating the Hogarth Hotel was a true family endeavour. JJ took charge of the building works and Tony set up the operations, while Anne and Mette designed the interiors and coordinated furniture buying.

Percy Deacon took over as site agent halfway through construction. He had a strong team behind him, including foreman Jim Rodbard and electrician Ted Perrett, who had worked on the construction of Marstons' first hotel, Stade Court, over thirty years earlier. The pressure never let up, and stress from the long hours and urgency took its toll on Ted and Jim, each of whom had to take sick leave. Not long after, the hotel manager went missing only to be found three days later, sitting under a hedge near Crawley.

The hotel opened on time and to great acclaim. A further twenty rooms were added later in the decade, and an AA award for care and courtesy followed.



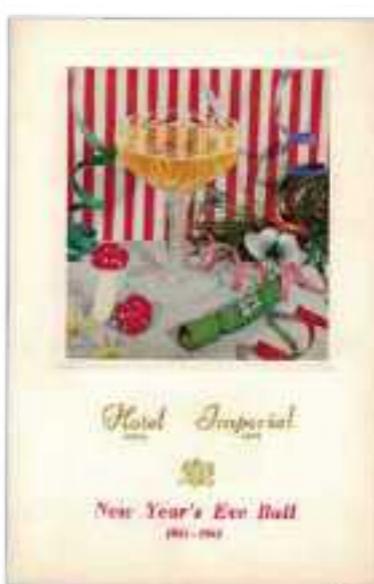
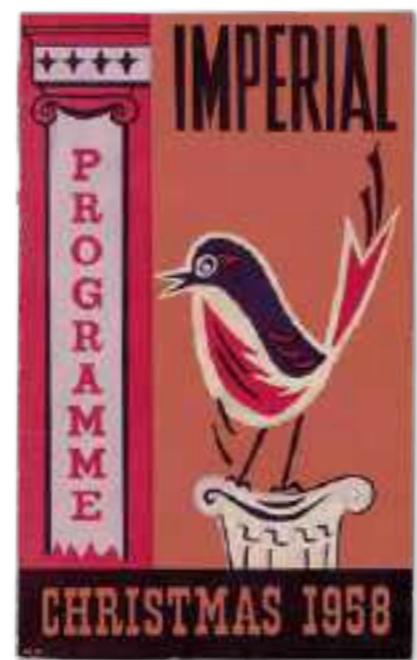
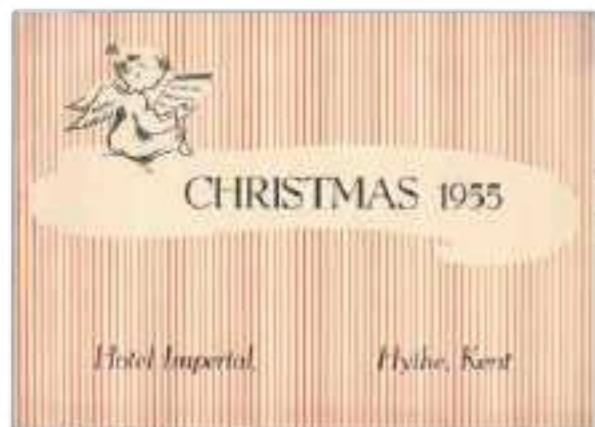
The Hogarth was Percy Deacon's swan song for Marstons. Throughout the project, he had left the site each evening at seven to share an evening meal with Eleanor Must. They were married at the Hogarth, six months after the hotel opened: its first wedding reception. After honeymooning in Australia, visiting relatives, they retired to their Marstons' flat on the Fulham Road. Between them, Percy and Eleanor had worked for the firm for eighty years.

Other Marstonian stalwarts followed suit over the rest of the decade. Fred Reynor - director of the 'downstairs' team, who had been plucked by WJ from the Dawes Road Congregational Church all those years ago - retired from full-time work in 1972, although he was to stay on in a part-time capacity for another twelve years.

Bill Harris, who ran 'upstairs', retired in 1974 to a quiet village in Dorset after thirty-seven years at the firm. He had educated the many who worked with him to never waste money - anybody's money; if it was the company's, it meant less profit, and if it is was the client's, it means less money to settle the account.

Dennis 'Chase' Chambers, who had been with the company since leaving school before the war, started the Marlin House development (designed by David Wall) of twenty-eight flats in 1978; the site in Putney had been owned by the firm since 1935 when JW bought the lease of two Victorian houses and converted them into flats. Dennis did not live to finish the scheme; he was overtaken by Hodgkin's disease and died before completion. He was greatly missed by all who knew him, but most particularly by JJ who had a close working relationship with him.

*Hotel Imperial*  
Christmas programmes  
1953-1974. Mr & Mrs  
John W Marston would  
host the welcome cocktail  
party followed by five  
days of celebrations  
including a car rally,  
scavenger hunt, tea  
dance and gala ball  
with fancy dress parade.  
The family were expected  
to muck in.



Hardest of all for JW, though, was the loss of his wife Elsie in 1978.

Over the previous years, Elsie and JW had made The Imperial their summer holiday home and delighted in having their nine grandchildren to stay with them. They were blissful times for the cousins: early morning swims, breakfast in their rooms and later, the assorted delights of the sweet trolley. As JW did not drink alcohol, having been brought up by temperance worker parents, Elsie would be served with a jug of fruit cup, a special non-alcoholic mix; on occasion, though, she would ask for her 'special fruit cup', which staff knew to lace with Pimm's.

Elsie and JW had celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary only two years' earlier with a party in JJ and Mette's garden in Putney on a fine summer's day, followed by a staff celebration in the canteen at Stephendale Road.

JW never fully recovered, nor came to terms with Elsie's death. He withdrew from the business and went to live at Stade Court, where his father had retired. The triumvirate of JW, Fred Reynor and Bill Harris who set such solid foundations for Marstons had now all moved on.

## A time to change

In 1980, JJ was presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to rebuild his own parish church, St Mary's at Putney Bridge.

It was here in October 1647 that Oliver Cromwell presided over the 'Putney debates' for the opposing New Model Army factions to deliberate on a new constitution for England. The debates, which raged for several days, aired for the first time the novel idea that government should be for everybody, not just the wealthy and propertied. Inscribed on a wall of the church are the words of the leading radical, Colonel Thomas Rainsborough: "For really, I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he."



St Mary's Church in Putney featured in 'Building' magazine January 1983.

The church had been gutted by fire - the result of an arson attack in 1973 and stood derelict since. Following six years of deliberation in the parish as to how

best to attempt the restoration, Marstons won the contract to rebuild the church. The plan called for the re-orientation of the church with the altar at the north, the conversion of the chancel into a church room, installation of underfloor heating, the removal of the balconies (except for the charred timber support beams), the cleaning of gold-leaved monuments, and bespoke secret fixed joinery made in the Marstons' joiners' shop.

Led by Harry West, the building works took less than two years. The four plaster archways lost in the fire were re-formed in their elliptical shape to match the stone by foreman plasterer Dave Leaper, a Marstons' man of twenty years standing. The remnants of the charred pews and balconies were burnt on the beach at low tide. JJ left his own mark on the church, turning the wooden finial on his lathe at home for the entrance roof, which the architect only requested four weeks before the bishop re-consecrated the church on 6 February 1982.

With his father now retired to Hythe, JJ took over as the company's managing director. Succession was never openly discussed between them, but they both understood that he would step into the role when the time came. At JJ's side was Alfred Bole, the trusted company secretary who joined Marstons in the early 1960s as financial controller.

These were challenging times for the industry and for the company. Over the 1970s, more and more in the building trade had come off company payrolls, preferring to be self-employed. Marstons - used to employing people by the decade, not by the project - suddenly had to find capable and responsible subcontractors who could be relied upon to work hard and to a high standard. When they did find good people, the company made sure to rehire them again and again.

A casualty of the times was the summer beano: for forty years, it had brought everyone on the payroll together for a day out, but with 'subbies' now so commonplace on site, its purpose was diminished. The last beano took place in 1978.

The company also needed to diversify. For the previous thirty years, a mainstay of its work had come from building council housing for both the London County Council and Fulham Borough Council. In 1965 the LCC was abolished in favour of the GLC, Fulham was swallowed up in to the a larger Metropolitan Borough with Hammersmith. The political tide turned and by the end of the 1970s Margaret Thatcher's government tapped into people's intrinsic desire to own their own home in producing legislation that sought to give 'the right to buy' their homes to tenants of local authorities.'

Being opportunistic by nature, JJ had explored different avenues before. In 1976, the company embarked on its first venture into taking over contracts from receivers, taking on thirty-eight half-finished houses in Uxbridge and a block of flats for Wandsworth Borough. Both these contracts were successful and prompted another opportunity two years later to take over from the receiver the construction of over eighty dwellings and five shops in Peckham. This was the company's first contract worth over £2 million, but the returns were insufficient.

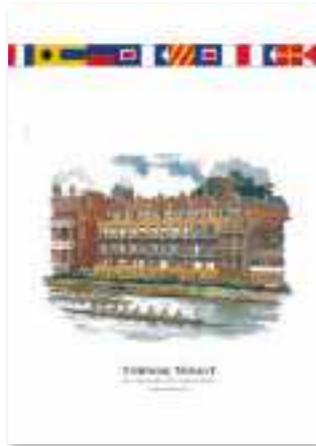
The root of the problem was that the old construction business model had changed and no longer favoured a local family-owned building firm like Marstons.

Margins were too tight to make enough of a profit and the company was too exposed to the risks inherent in contracting for clients.

So, the firm took on developments directly, and began a succession of its own developments and joint ventures over the 1980s. Among them were Coombe Hill Stables, Cavalry Gardens, Kendal Place – and the most ambitious, Tideway Yard.

*left  
1989 Eighteen  
'warehouse' style  
apartments built  
on the riverside  
in Mortlake.*

*right  
1986 An artist's  
impression of  
converted Coombe  
Hill Stables,  
converted into  
apartments.*



In 1984, Marstons teamed up with Philip Lancashire and Gillian Harwood who had won a Richmond Borough Council competition to refurbish the old Council yards, which sit on the stretch of the Thames that serves as the last straight of the Putney-to-Mortlake Boat Race course. Built in 1901, Tideway Yard was formerly a stables, coach house and steam-engine shed for Barnes Council depot. In return for the 125-year lease and planning permission for eighteen flats, the scheme promised to house a youth club, a social club for council staff and the parks department.

Tideway Yard development was completed in 1989, and swiftly attracted awards: one from Prince Charles for environmental refurbishment, one for conservation from The Times in conjunction with RICS, and another for the UK's best refurbished waterside development of the year. The flats at Tideway Wharf were sold to fund the development, and eventually in 2009 Marstons purchased the freehold and took over the management of the commercial units. The development is still in the portfolio today. The Yard was home to the Depot Restaurant, a well-loved neighbourhood destination for thirty years, until it was taken over by Rick Stein in 2016 to become an equally popular restaurant.

Marstons had learned to be nimble - and following the property market crash of 1989, the firm scaled down its developments and sought work elsewhere. Housing associations had recently been granted the freedom to borrow private funding to build new homes, and before long, they became the most prolific providers of new public-sector housing in the country. The firm established contacts in the sector and went on to win several housing association design-and-build contracts in the early 1990's including a contract for Network Housing Association for thirty-six flats and a warden's house. The work proved successful and saw the firm through until the property market recovered.

## Marston Hotels

While his brother John was wrestling with the construction and property side of the business, Tony Marston had been weighing up the options for the three hotels.

Tony had become general manager of Stade Court, The Imperial and The Hogarth in the mid-1970s. His appointment came just at the point when hotels in the UK - and particularly on the south coast - began to lose business to the allure of cheap holidays abroad with guaranteed sun.

In an effort to update The Imperial, a new David Wall-designed extension was built in 1975 to house a bar and reception. To mark its opening, JW fired an eighteenth-century cannon, installed to defend the coast during the French Revolutionary Wars and recently discovered in the hotel grounds; several people were rendered temporarily deaf after the event. At the same time, the open-air swimming pool was enclosed and squash courts built that would later be converted to conference rooms.

Pat Lindsay, a local builder was hired to run the construction team for the hotels. Pat was an inspired choice: a keen footballer, he put together a team - many from his football club - who were responsible over the next thirty years for maintenance on all the hotels, as well as for building extensions and remodelling. As elsewhere in the company, family ties were strong: Pat was later joined on the building team by his nephew Paul Lindsay; and the Lindsays were related by marriage to the Bentleys - father, son and grandson were chefs at The Imperial.

In 1978, the Queen Mother came to lunch at The Imperial to celebrate her inauguration as the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and two years later, the hotel celebrated its first one hundred years with an anniversary ball and Victorian music hall entertainment. Grand as these occasions were though, they were no substitute for a profitable hotel. In spite of a succession of hotel managers, The Imperial always struggled to cover its running costs; its nickname among the family was 'The White Elephant'.

Carrying on as before, Tony knew, was not a viable option. But unwilling to give up on the hotels just yet, in 1982 he decided to bring in a new face, Chris Scragg, initially in the role of general manager of The Imperial.

Tony Marston and Chris Scragg - both graduates of Westminster College - were to make a formidable team. Where Chris was ambitious, commercial and 'big picture', Tony was every inch the hotelier, focused on all the smalls details that make a difference to guest comfort and enjoyment. Chris had the big ideas, and Tony - the more cautious of the two - provided the check-and-balance.

Within a couple of years of his appointment, Chris had refocused The Imperial's business into weekday conferences and weekend leisure, and steered the hotel into profitability. Over the same period, Marstons purchased a third share in a trust that owned the freehold of the Hotel Strand Continental, close to Somerset House with a view to running the hotel once the head lease expired, thirty years hence. In 2008, the company bought out the trust; the head lease fell away in 2009 and a ransom strip

purchased and so the building now wholly owned as planned sits within the portfolio.

The firm's confidence in its hotels business was renewed. In 1987, negotiations were concluded with a developer to build Bridgewood Manor Hotel, a few miles north of Maidstone, with a hundred bedrooms, conference facilities and health spa.

*The Marston Messenger, an inhouse magazine used for PR, including staff and company news across the three parts of the business, affectionately called 'The Scragg Mag' after the CEO Christopher Scragg.*



Anne Marston, assisted by her daughter Caroline, took on the challenge of interior design for the new hotel. To create a distinctive character for the dull shell, they made trips to Yorkshire and the west country to buy redundant church furniture and fittings: an altar table and organ loft were turned into the reception desk, a pulpit base was converted into the entrance hall table, the bar was made from oak panels and a hymn board was repurposed to display the bar tariff. The Marstons' joiners painstakingly carved and converted each item as well as making up new joinery to match the old. The project was one of the last for Ted Atkins, who joined the joinery shop after leaving the navy in 1947.

The building contract for the Bridgewood Manor was a fifty-week programme that began at the end of 1987; the schedule provided a few weeks' grace for the Marstons' team to undertake the fit-out in time to open in the spring of 1989. In the event, the developer was late, both with planning and building. The hotel was eventually opened by tourism minister John Lee in July 1989 - but with the contractor still plastering the top floor.

The challenges of Bridgewood Manor did not end there: a poorly-drafted development agreement had allowed the developer not only to call down a payment but also to take possession of the hotel under certain conditions. Marstons legitimately withheld payment due to a late handover of the mechanical and electrical installation, entered into arbitration with the developer and separately sued the author of the development contract. JJ found himself in ten years' worth of Dickensian legal tangles, during which time the arbitrator died and the developer went bust. But by the end, Marstons had won a large settlement and kept the hotel, which became very profitable.

In 1990, the company created a new subsidiary, Marston Hotels. "Before, the hotels operated as separate limited companies and the managers hardly spoke to each other," noted Chris Scragg. Now they could grow under a single management - with Tony as chairman and Chris as managing director - and under a single brand. The new Marston Hotel flag proudly bore the motif 'Onward', in homage to the motto of the South Eastern Railway, builders of The Imperial Hotel, Hythe.

*Marston Hotels Holdings Ltd was incorporated in 2000 and used the 'Onward' crest, originally belonging to South Eastern Railway, still prominent today on the Hythe Imperial façade.*



Throughout this period, Anne Marston played an increasingly important part in the operation of the hotels and the wellbeing of staff. As her children became older, Anne had more time, and took on a role akin to head housekeeper - ensuring high standards of service, buying furniture and fittings and overseeing refurbishments. Anne led by example and was respected by colleagues as a fellow hotelier. Later appointed a director of Marston Hotels, she worked hard, knew all the staff in all the hotels by name and took care to find out about their family life. She and Tony were known affectionately as 'Mr and Mrs M'.

By now, Anne, Tony and children were living in The Watermill, a picturesque grade II listed mill built in 1773 to supply grain to the local garrison as it guarded against invasion by Napoleon. They bought the property in a dilapidated state after it came up for sale in 1980 - Anne having admired it for many years when passing on family walks between The Imperial and Saltwood Castle. The restoration project was an eighteen-month labour of love, supervised by Pat Lindsay: as well as refurbishing the house, Pat's team overhauled the pond, mill race and waterwheel and rebuilt the whole watermill workings to enable flour to be ground again (which Tony did for a few years afterwards). "I'll never forget the sound of the waterwheel turning, splashing water, and the gentle rhythmic thump of the apple wood and iron cogs," recalls Caroline.

During the first half of the 1990s, Marston Hotels grew rapidly and continued to prosper. The thirty-five-bedroom Coulsdon Manor in Surrey, complete with eighteen-hole golf course, was purchased from Wates Construction in 1993; previously an ailing hotel, the business was turned around, the public areas refurbished, and more bedrooms were added.

Three more acquisitions followed in quick succession: the Centrecourt Hotel in Basingstoke (1994), the Stratford Manor Hotel in Stratford-upon-Avon (1995) and the Oxford Belfry in Thame (1995) - the latter of which was developed and

extended from the original pub-with-rooms into a hotel of 130 bedrooms, plus conference facilities and swimming pool.

By the close of 1995, Tony Marston could look back on the past decade with a certain satisfaction. He was chairman of a thriving chain of eight hotels and new chairman of Best Western Hotels UK, having been appointed in the previous year. The now renamed Hythe Imperial Hotel had long ceased to be the family's 'white elephant' - and in 1994, was cited by Egon Ronay's Guide as one of its eight dream UK hotels.

The bravest decision he had ever made, noted Tony at the time, was accepting that someone else could do a better job than himself as managing director.

## A path of their own

JW's final years were spent living, in turn, with his four children and their families, until he retired to a nursing home in Cheshire. He died in 1984.

John W Marston had devoted himself to WJ Marston & Son for fifty-seven years, during which time he drove the transformation of the firm from a small property repairs business to builders of civic Fulham and rebuilders of postwar London.

Imbued with his own father's integrity, long-term outlook and can-do spirit, he showed unfailing commitment to his employees - who gave him extraordinary loyalty in return. Like WJ before him, he never took a dividend, always putting employee needs first and returning any profit to the company.

He took enormous pride in the company and its achievements: when the Mayor of Fulham opened Sands End Slipper Baths in the early 1960s - one of the Council's last events before the Borough was amalgamated with Hammersmith - JW arranged for The Imperial to cater, never mind that it was seventy miles away in Hythe. In a dramatic turn of events someone had the bright idea of warming the plates in the dryers in the ground floor launderette, realising too late that this set the drums spinning. JW remained characteristically calm under fire, arranging for a new set of plates to be delivered while pouring the Mayor another glass of sherry.

JW suffered from epilepsy from an early age, something his new wife knew nothing about until their honeymoon. He never let the condition hinder him, keeping it secret for most of his working life. As a precaution, JW had a succession of drivers from his middle age onwards, including his secretary Miss Stutely, who would drive him to and from the office.

"He was a strong and tireless man," says JJ of his father: "A patriotic Englishman, inexhaustible, very supportive of anyone, and would search for an honest way round any problem and then drive it through."



1984 marked the passing of another era in the Marston story. As well as JW's death, it was the year that the company said goodbye to the last of the pre-war

generation. Fred Reynor, who had devoted the entirety of his sixty-year career to the firm, left his part-time role to enjoy a well-earned retirement.

Harry Sander also retired in 1984. Having joined the firm only to help paint a school over Easter 1914, Harry went on to become foreman and stock controller. He ended up working for Marstons for a remarkable seventy years.

JW had raised his children with the tacit expectation that the boys would work in the business. As society changed, so did parental attitudes - and when it came to their turn, JJ and Tony encouraged their children to follow their own paths in life and work.

"Dad felt obliged to join the business and he was keen that we shouldn't be under that pressure," says Andrew Marston of his father, JJ. Andrew lives in Cornwall with his three young daughters, where he built and manages an eco-friendly development that supports small businesses, artisan workshops and a nursery. His elder sister Nicola obtained a doctorate in molecular biology and for many years worked in the field of cancer research before moving to Norfolk where, along with bringing up her two sons, she became a keen rower and chair of governors at the local school.

The first of the fourth generation to enter the family business was Peter Tonge, son of Barbara and Vincent; he joined from the merchant navy in 1983.

Peter had an early taste of Marstonian tenacity, when he worked that same year on the Mendip Crescent development, a former slum on a 1.5-acre site which the firm had purchased from Wandsworth Council. In August 1982, Marstons had struck a deal to build a forty-thousand square foot factory on the site to rent to a window manufacturer - provided it was completed by Easter 1983. By Christmas, the roof was on, but the tenant had still not signed the lease. JJ called a meeting in the Christmas holidays with the tenant and lawyers at the company's offices to talk it out. The meeting started at 2pm, but at 6pm the heating went off, so by 9pm it was cold. No food was served, and it was not until past midnight that the deadlock started to be resolved; the lease was signed at 2.30am. The factory was handed over on time on Good Friday and was in production two days later.

Peter rose up the company ranks to become a contracts manager in 1991, having qualified as a member of the Chartered Institute of Building. He stayed with the firm for a further six years.

Of Tony and Anne's children, Lucy qualified as an architect, ran her own practice for several years (during which time she carried out a number of projects for Marstons) and subsequently, not unlike her aunt Lyn became a painter. James studied art and furniture design, built a career in woodcraft and moved to Dorset.

Their eldest, Caroline, trained as a designer and took a job in a commercial design agency in Soho, metres away from where her great grandfather had been born. Having been brought up to eschew waste and conserve resources, she was soon disillusioned to see office and shop fit-outs produced "at vast expense, only to be stripped out and scrapped less than twelve months later." She left shortly afterwards.

Working in the family business was only ever meant to be a stop gap for Caroline: she was planning to go travelling and then figure out what next. She joined Marston Properties in 1986, working under Mary Stutely.

As the company had grown, the offices at Stephendale Road had spread to include the adjoining seven flats from numbers 3 to 13a. Now a maze of tiny rooms and narrow corridors, it was quite a shock for Caroline, who had come from a smart open-plan design office. Walking in for the first time, she felt she had stepped thirty years' back in time: the offices were shabby and brown, the walls were stained with nicotine, and a patchwork of different carpets were old and threadbare. When she enquired as to who she should ask for a new biro, she was told by Iris Parish that staff had to hand in their old pen before they could be issued with a new one.

Shown to the Marston Properties' office, she was met with the sight of piles of paper and bags of unlabelled keys on every surface. In the middle of it all sat Mary Stutely, "a minute woman with milk bottle lenses", unperturbed, typing at a tiny desk, seeming to know what she was doing and where to find whatever she needed. She had run property rentals for the previous fifty years in the absence of anyone else doing so, while also acting as secretary to WJ, JW and then JJ.

Over the months that followed, Miss Stutely would stand in the office doorway, holding on to the door frame to make herself look bigger, and spell out company lore to her new pupil: "All tenants receive the same service - it doesn't matter what they pay," she would insist. "Never turn anyone away."

Computers were not then in common use in the office, recalls Caroline. Handwritten draft letters would be placed in the typing pool tray, and would be returned, typed, for signature a day or so later. Internal written communications would be handwritten on a printed memo, photocopied and left on the recipient's desk to wait for them to either phone or visit in person.

*Stationery through the years from the 1940s to the 2010s including the 'memo' made redundant by arrival of the email.*



Marston Properties' rent ledgers were oversized gridline sheets that sat in a weighty leather-bound cover. Each week, tenants would bring in their rent books and a duplicate page would be overwritten into their books and the ledger. Computerised

rent collection was still five years off, and even then, several protected tenants still had rents books to fill in by hand and would come to the office to pay in cash.

On one early occasion, Caroline remembers a flat becoming vacant; she asked who she should contact in order to arrange the cleaning. Miss Stutely reached under her desk and brought out a plastic box, complete with feather duster and furniture polish; Caroline did not argue.

It had all come as something of a shock to the twenty-four-year-old Caroline Marston. But in spite of everything, she still recognised the fundamental values of the company as her own. She also resolved to read plenty of books about property management and to find a cleaning contractor.

As well as the family members who joined the firm, the 1980s also marked the entry of a new generation of Marstonians, a number of whom would see the firm into the next millennium and well beyond.

Janet Bilbie joined the 'upstairs' team as financial controller during this period. She worked alongside Alfred Bole during a tough time for the construction company, with trading margins diminished, clients failing to honour payments and contract liabilities growing. Alfred had been responsible for computerising the accounts in the late 1970s, although he always worked out his figures in pencil on old Marston's stationery and refused to have a telephone at his home. The company benefited from his negotiation skills for almost thirty years: "Always have a reason," he would say, "even if you have to concede it." Janet took over as finance director when Alfred Bole retired in 1990.

Elsewhere in the company, Dave Ingram joined in 1981 as an apprentice plumber. Aged sixteen, Dave had recently left school and went for an interview with Mary Stutely. "I didn't know what plumbing was and didn't even know where Marstons was, even though I lived two minutes from the front door," he says. "I was interviewed on the Thursday, got the job and started on Monday, and have been here ever since." Dave learned the plumbing basics from Bill Polden, who had joined the firm in 1949. He completed his five year's apprenticeship and two year's site experience, after which time he was entitled to a wage at 'plumbers' rate'.

*1985 Dave Ingram's apprentice papers.*



By the late 1980s, Dave was working on the firm's larger construction contracts - including works for the V&A and Natural History Museum - but was asked to take over property maintenance after Bill had a heart attack and was no longer able to work. He needed to drive but had never learned, so the firm booked him on a week's intensive course; he took his test, but was failed on the grounds of 'being too relaxed'. So, he took the test again the following week: "I passed, after pretending to be a little less relaxed."

Painter Leroy Chase rejoined Marstons in the 1980s, having tried self-employment for a couple of years and concluded that he preferred the regular work he could rely on at Marstons. Leroy had originally joined in 1972 from school, aged seventeen, to undertake a four-year apprenticeship at the firm. "I have no regrets about coming back," says Leroy: "The days go quickly, and being here all this time has made me what I am today."

Peter Bull started in 1987 as a sixteen-year-old apprentice carpenter, his time split between the joinery shop and site work. He went through his apprenticeship while the economy was struggling through recession: "A lot of guys I was at college with lost their jobs," he remembers. "Some were with small firms that folded and others, who were with the bigger companies, were moved on to a subcontractor once they came out of their apprenticeship, to get them off their books; whereas Marstons was happy to take you on and keep you as part of the company." After spending seven years studying - completing his City & Guilds, advanced craft certificate and HNC - Peter was made assistant site manager and a few years later, site manager, with his own projects to look after.

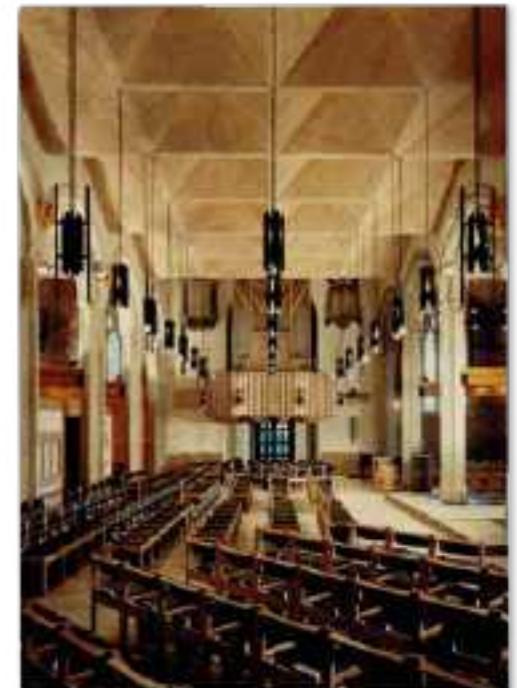
Also in 1987, Mary Stutely retired to live in her company flat in Earlsfield; she took over as gardener and caretaker for another fifteen years and was near enough for the office staff to keep an eye on her. Eventually, she moved into a home near her godson who, along with the Marston family, organised her funeral when she died at the grand old age of ninety-six.

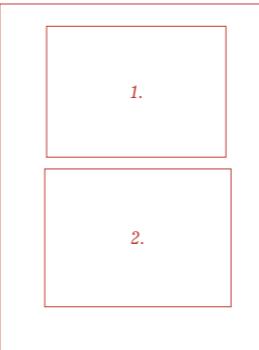
Never married, Mary Stutely gave fifty-three years to the company. She served three generations of Marstons' managing directors, went to extraordinary lengths during WW2 to keep things going and single-handedly ran property rentals for thirty years. Mary was seventy when she retired and so her taste prevailed at the tenanted properties: all beds were single, walls were invariably hung with Sanderson floral paper, and clothes washed at the launderette. Times had changed.







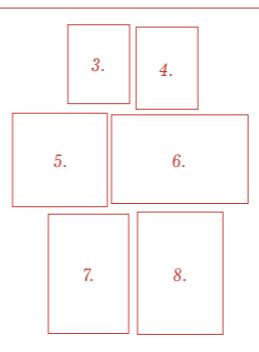




1.  
Tony and Lyn dancing at Stade Court Hotel, late 1950s.

2.  
Leading the hokey-cokey at The Imperial. Putting their left legs in with the hotel guests. Tony on the far end and John high kicking.

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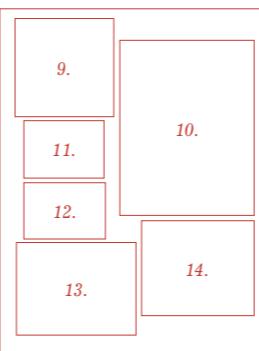


3.  
Lyn graduated from Liverpool University.  
4.  
Barbara as a student at the London School of Medicine for Women in London, part of UCL.

5.  
1959 JJ surveying for the new runway in the Maldives.  
6.  
Tony joined the firm in 1961, although he would have preferred working with motorbikes.

7.  
1961 Tony takes over management of The Stade Court Hotel.  
8.  
1959 Anne at the Imperial Hotel on her engagement to Tony.

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9.  
1966 The three Mrs Marstons. Left to right: Anne, Elsie and Mette.

10.  
1966 Left to right, back row: Tony, John. Front row: JW, Mette, Elsie, Anne, Lyn and Richard.

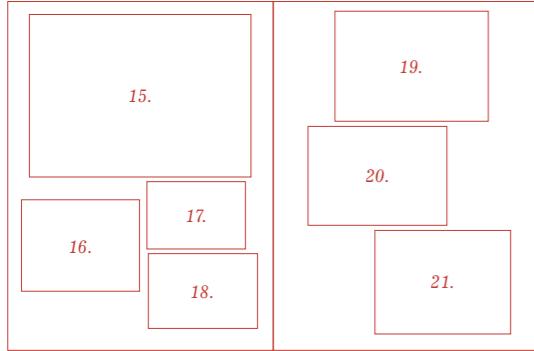
11.  
1970 JW pushing Caroline on the see-saw at the Imperial Hotel.

12.  
1964 JW and Elsie at Herondale Avenue with their grandchildren so far. Left to right: David, Peter, Clare, Caroline and James.

13.  
1965 Christmas at the Imperial Hotel. Left to right: Elsie, John, Lyn and newly-weds JJ and Mette.

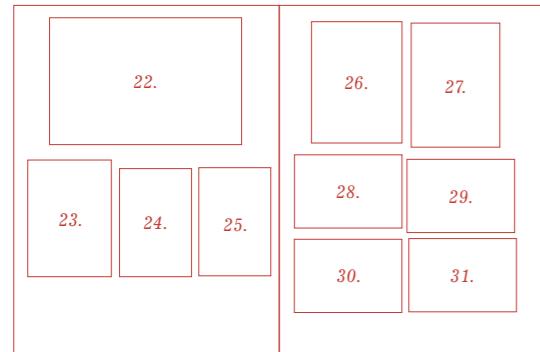
14.  
JJ at the helm of his new boat Tigris, in 1964. JJ took over the helm of the company 20 years later.

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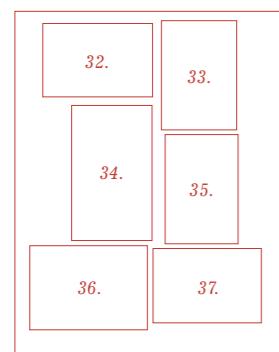
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15. 1976 John and Elsie Marston celebrate their Golden Wedding with staff in the canteen. Miss Must with her handbag, husband Percy behind.
16. 1976 Firing the c18th cannon, dug up during building work at The Imperial Hotel and refurbished by the workshop in London.
17. 1976 John and Elsie Marston with their four children and spouses in the garden of 40 Carlton Drive.
18. 1972 The Hogarth Hotel Earl's Court built at great speed on a bomb site.
19. 1976 The derelict Plough Brewery was purchased in 1968 and is still owned by the company today.
20. 1978 The Last Beano marking the change from directly employed staff to self-employed sub-contractors.
21. Office staff Christmas party, John and Mette and Miss Must at the far end on the right.



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22. 1990 Tony, Chris Scragg and Anne in front of the Hotel Imperial with some of the hotel staff.
23. Left to right; Tony, Anne, Mette and John in the mid 1980s', by now the business leaders.
24. Anne Marston setting up Bridgewood Manor Hotel ready for the opening by the Rt Hon John Lee MP, Minister for Tourism, 19th July 1989.
25. The Hotel Imperial gardens in about 1980; a team of 5 gardeners cultivated the garden flowers and indoor pot plants as well as fruit and vegetables for the hotel in 3 large greenhouses, an orchard and kitchen gardens.
26. St Mary's Church, Putney after the fire, 1973.
27. The re-oriented St Mary's Church Putney after the 3 year refurbishment by Marstons, 1982.
28. 1984 John JS Marston signs the Mortlake development agreement in the portacabin that once served as the youth club and where the Tideway Wharf apartments now stand.
29. WJ Marston awarded an NHBC commendation for their building at St Ann's Hill Wandsworth. WJ Marston was one of the early members of the National Housing Building Council with the membership number 00073.
30. 1990 WJ Marston staff visit the new flats at Tideway Wharf.
31. 1989 The Depot Restaurant at Tideway Yard Mortlake, a neighbourhood restaurant for 30 years.



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32. 2008 Miss Stutely at the age of 91 cutting the cake at the 70 year celebration at Fulham Palace of letting flats in Fulham.
33. Leroy Chase celebrated 40 years working for Marstons during lockdown on 1st April 2020. He was not impressed by the dribbles of paint on his paint tin cake.
34. 1987 John JS Marston.
35. Peter Bull the Construction and Maintenance Director being awarded his certificate by Cecil Parkinson in about 1985.
36. 1985 Dave Ingram as an apprentice plumber being awarded his certificate.
37. 1991 The women of the office before the Christmas party. Left to right: Kim Peacock, Janet Bilbie (FD) Joyce Newberry, Elaine Goodridge, Joan Bentley and Anna Coote. Anna's three sons also worked for the company.

## Part Four: Remodelling



To everything  
There is a season.  
And a time for every  
purpose under heaven.  
A time to be born  
And a time to die,  
A time to plant  
And a time to harvest  
That which is planted.

*Ecclesiastes 3, 1-3*



## Property rises

As the eldest of three children, says Caroline Marston, "I was allowed to stay up with the adults and regularly listened in to business talk around the dinner table." She remembers the tales of woe - usually about hotel managers, long since gone; the animated discussions to plan Stade Court's fiftieth anniversary and The Imperial's centenary; and her first Indian takeaway at uncle John's house in Putney, listening to his travails of clearing tomcats from the ventilation shafts at the Hogarth site.

"A process of osmosis," she reflects, "gave me a ready understanding that has served me well."

Joining the company when she did, Caroline soon discovered that letting properties in the 1980s was a precarious affair. If the rent was 'registered', any new tenant - irrespective of their circumstances - could take over the registered rent, which was a fraction of the market rent. Landlords found themselves in a difficult position: often, as Marstons found, they had no option other than to keep a property empty until the registration ran out or could be cancelled. To prevent tenants gaining a lifelong entitlement to registered rents, it also became common practice to let flats to 'off-the-shelf' companies rather than to named individuals; this suited neither the occupant, as it required them to submit company accounts, nor the landlord, as the practice meant they were never really sure who was in residence.

By the end of the decade, the private rental market reached its lowest ebb. Whereas most people in Britain had rented their home and business property in the early 1900s, this situation changed dramatically over the course of the century: the drive to build social housing after WW2, the rise of home ownership in the fifties and sixties, and most recently, Mrs Thatcher's 'right to buy' scheme - these factors, along with the economic disincentives for residential landlords, all conspired to reduce the number of people who rented their homes to only nine percent of Britons by the end of the 1980s.

Everything changed in January 1989, when a new rent act made 'assured shorthold tenancy', or AST, the default residential tenancy in England. Overnight, the new provisions gave clarity to occupiers and tenants and certainty to the landlords. The rent would be agreed in advance, with no rights to apply for a lower rent, and the length of the tenancy could be a term to suit both parties. If either party was in default, the terms were also clear.

Right from the start, the AST made letting easier. In 1990, Caroline set out to restore all the properties that had been kept empty back into lettable condition. The company was forced to stretch its finances, but after two years, virtually all the properties were refurbished and occupied.

In 1991, Caroline was appointed as a director of Marston Properties. That same year, she was gifted shares in her own name by her father Tony.

It was time to step things up. In 1968, JJ and his father had bought the Plough Brewery - where a brewhouse had stood since 1801 - on Wandsworth Road SW8.

The present building, erected in 1868, was converted into offices. Twenty-six years on, Marston Properties obtained planning permission to rebuild the yard at the rear of the main building. The yard, originally a keg and bottle store for the brewery, had been let in the 1980s to a chicken processing firm, which had left behind their decrepit chillers and a flock of pigeons. In 1994, planning permission was granted and in 1995 Marstons cleared the yard and developed the main building into eight office units. Renamed Tun Yard, the building was fully let within a year of completion - and this at a time when commercial property was generally going through one of its rough patches.

Just as the property business was starting to take off, Caroline had her first child, Joshua, in 1993. She quickly discovered that the company had no maternity leave policies - no doubt because it had been decades since any female staff member had had a baby while at the company. She was given three months paid maternity leave - but with a mortgage to pay and husband Jeremy, a resting actor, she decided the baby would have to come to work with her.

By this time, the property team - all of two full-timers and two part-timers - had moved to Unit 2 in Mills Yard, a lighter brighter space with no smoking unlike the main office. Everyone became used to baby Josh sleeping next to Caroline's desk until he was old enough to attend the nursery in the church opposite the office.

Caroline had her second baby, Barnabas, in 1995. This time, she was determined to take a decent period of leave, so a property manager was hired to provide cover while she was away. Unfortunately, the rigours of the job overwhelmed the new manager; Janet Bilbie, the company's FD, called Caroline at home and asked her to come back early. Her maternity leave was foreshortened, yet again: there and then, she determined to improve the company's maternity leave arrangements for the future.

## One step back, two steps forward

In September 1995, the company held its centenary celebration in Fulham Town Hall - the same venue that WJ and Elizabeth had chosen for their fiftieth wedding anniversary party fifty-seven years earlier. The event was attended by all the firm's directors, employees and partners, with a further celebration held a few weeks later at Coulsdon Manor Hotel for suppliers and contractors.

1995 WJ Marston & Sons Ltd centenary brochure.



Well-wishers at both events bid WJ Marston & Son another hundred years of success, but it was becoming increasingly clear to the family that the construction company had had its day, and the business would need to adapt.

In 1997, with the building company still struggling to turn a profit, the painful decision was made to move its headquarters down to Hythe; this enabled the accounts and HR functions to be shared with the hotel company, and so reduce costs. The move was a major upheaval, and many staff - including family member Peter Tonge - understandably chose redundancy rather than commute or move to Kent.

New business was sought in Kent, including a development on a piece of land on the Hythe seafront that the company had owned since WW2. But the writing was on the wall, and over the five years that followed, the last of the WJ Marston contracts were completed.

The small property team, meanwhile, stayed in the downsized Fulham office to look after the London portfolio. Everyone pitched in, recalls Anna Nicholls, who joined in 1997 as an administrator to cover a maternity leave: "From very early on I felt an integral part - we were a small team, so I was showing flats and overseeing any maintenance that needed doing, as well as handling the general admin." There was no email in the office, she remembers: "It was a slower pace of business back then: we communicated by letter, so there was always breathing space between writing and receiving a reply."

The team finally went online in 1998. Until then, advertisements - each a brief description in recognised shorthand - would be phoned through to The Times on a Wednesday to appear in the classifieds on the Friday. Applicants would arrange to see the flat over the weekend or the following week. Viewings would be held, a paper application form given out or filled out on the spot, and references taken. By the time reference requests were sent to the bank, other referees followed up and the first payment taken, several weeks could have passed. Turnaround time improved when advertising switched to online from the late 1990s onwards.

Peter Bull moved over to the property business in 1999 to oversee new builds, having just completed a contract that involved rebuilding part of the Thames wall. His first job in the new role was to upgrade a large eighteen-room house in multiple occupation that had just been handed back on the expiry of a fifty-year lease. Peter had worked his way up WJ Marston & Son since joining twelve years earlier and, aged thirty-eight, was appointed a director of the company.

Caroline's son, Joshua Beckman, has vivid memories of the office as it was then, because "mum would pick me up from school and we'd go back to Mills Yard." He would say hello to Leroy, Peter, Anna, Prince [McCammon] or Nicky [Hooshangpour] - "people who've known me since before I had adult teeth, and who're still with the firm." He remembers "paper everywhere, and so many keys; there was a huge jar of keys on a table - no one knew what any of them were for, but it I was told it was important to keep them all, just in case."

1999 marked the retirement of Michael Reynor, who spent his final years at the firm supporting property and hotel projects. Between Michael and his father Fred,

there had been a Reynor employed at Marstons for seventy-five years.

In March that same year, Tony Marston booked a skiing holiday in the French Alps resort of Avoriaz. He had retired the previous year, and was now keen to take his two grandsons skiing for the first time. The chalet into which his family and friends were booked was named L'Eau Vive - a perversely prophetic name, as it turned out: on the third day of the holiday - a gloriously sunny day to ski at altitude - Tony appeared to have boundless energy, but on the final run of the day, he suffered a fatal heart attack. The next day, all the ski guides and instructors expressed their condolences to the family, saying that was just how they wanted to go: with their boots on.

Tony's death prompted the board to question the company's direction. As a result, it was decided in 2000 to liquidate WJ Marston Holdings and form two new companies: Marston Hotels Holdings and Marston Properties Holdings.

The hotel company would create director shareholders, in addition to the existing family shareholders, and look to grow the group as quickly as possible. JJ, Anne and Caroline were appointed directors to represent the family, with Chris Scragg and other non-family directors making up the rest of the board. Tony had disliked the idea of debt, but the new board was given a remit to borrow money and gear up, with an injection of cash from the property company. To raise money, all the Folkestone portfolio and some outlier London flats were sold, and loans taken out.

Marston Properties, on the other hand, would remain solely family-owned, with WJ Marston & Son becoming a building company serving only in-house property development.

*Balancing the portfolio led to expanding the commercial portfolio in the early 2000s.*



Now independent, the property company could use its own funds to start investing in London property. Most of the portfolio was residential with a small amount of commercial property; the intention going forward was to rebalance the portfolio with a greater proportion of commercial property. Anna Nicholls, who had spent a few years outside Marstons gaining a wider sector experience, returned to the team in 2000 to manage and grow the portfolio. The company initiated new developments, such as Ackmar Road - a former industrial building purchased in 2003 which it converted into thirteen offices. "It was very satisfying to take a commercial

development through from start to finish," she says: "Finding the site, seeing the building go up, filling it up with tenants, and then sustaining a relationship with them."

Towards the end of 2003, John Marston, still a keen sailor, signed up to crew a boat delivery across the Atlantic to St Lucia. The 3,000 mile sea passage started going wrong on the first night when the genoa sheets wore through. On the second night, when charging the batteries from the engine, the cooling pipe split so all the fresh water was pumped into the bilges. JJ had bought a hundred litres of fresh bottled water with him as well as twenty-four bottles of champagne - one for each day: he had come well prepared, unlike the boat.

The business needed John back. He was key to both the hotel and the property company's imminent construction projects. Everyone was delighted and relieved at his return, complete with beard - in the nick of time for Lucy Marston's wedding just before Christmas 2003.

## A difficult decision

During the four years from when it was formed, Marston Hotel Holdings grew at breakneck speed, adding to its fold the Aldwark Manor near York, Cambridge Belfry, Chester Crabwall Manor, Crewe Hall, Helidon Lakes in Northamptonshire, Lansdowne Grove in Bath, Stratford Victoria, Tankersley Manor near Sheffield and the Winchester Royal. All the hotels were extended and re-modelled by Marstons under JJ's direction.

The hotel operations were led by Chris Scragg and a team of experienced management and hoteliers. The company struck on a business model that proved highly effective: first, find and buy freehold hotels that could be turned around without significant investment; then, bring in the management team to improve efficiencies in purchasing and inventory management; and finally, move the marketing function into the centre and process sales through the group's website and what was then a leading-edge central reservations system.



*Marston Hotels' growth was exciting and successful but nationwide growth was exposing weakness and causing family tensions.*

By 2004, the hotel group was highly profitable and had grown to eighteen, mainly four-star hotels across the UK - ranging from historic to contemporary properties in rural, town centre and resort locations. There was no longer a place

in the portfolio for The Hogarth, which was sold in 2002, nor for the family's first hotel, the three-star Stade Court, which was relinquished in 2004. Marston Hotels' achievements were widely recognised that year, with the company winning both the AA's Hotel Group of the Year Award and the RAC's Credit to the Industry Award.

In every successful business-owning family, there is a moment when family members begin to wonder whether it is better to stay in a line of business or to exit - and for the Marston family, that time had come. They had after all been hoteliers for an uninterrupted period of sixty-six years, even though for most of that time, there was little or no profit - and certainly no dividend - to show for their continuing faith; but they had taken the long view and stuck with the business.

No business lasts forever, some of the family were starting to think, and no wise owner waits for their business to fail. Yes, the hotels were very successful now - and might continue in that vein for some time yet - but the industry was notoriously volatile and prey to the vagaries of tourism, changes in taste and economic wobbles. Added to this was the level of company borrowings - already high from previous acquisitions and bound to increase as the portfolio grew further. For a family born and bred on the virtues of prudence, how comfortable was everyone with these risks?

Perhaps they might all have felt a little more relaxed, had the family's values been more evident at Executive Board level. The hotel company was run by an expert management team who, skilled though they were, had little Marston family supervision over their day-to-day operations.

Matters were compounded when the executive directors effected the sale of the last of three smaller hotels, without consulting all the family directors on the sale terms - including an obligation on Marston Properties to purchase the staff accommodation. By this time, Anne, although still a director, was becoming overwhelmed by the number of hotels to be visited each week. Caroline, the only non-executive director, newly appointed, found herself increasingly at odds with the executive Board - which left only JJ with strong working relations with Chris Scragg.

The sense of family disconnect was growing in some branches, with an increasing feeling that even though the family as a collective owned most of the company, its destiny and direction were in the hands of others. And with no obvious family successor to JJ, the distance between family and management would surely only widen in the future.

Family members exchanged views over a number of months, but without reaching any resolution. Finding themselves in unfamiliar territory, JJ suggested to everyone that they might benefit from some outside assistance. They were hardly the first family firm, after all, to be faced with a difference of opinion on a difficult question - and if there were experts who could help them navigate their way through the issues, so much the better.

JJ was introduced to Peter Leach, head of the family business team at BDO Stoy Hayward, the company's accountants - and over the next few weeks, Peter and his colleague Juliette Johnson met with each shareholder and executive director. They

gathered views, not just on the immediate question of the hotels business, but on the wider set of issues common to any family enterprise that endures over the generations.

One important issue to emerge was the historical bias in favour of the male members of the family that had been perpetuated in the way that shares were passed down the generations. WJ's daughters Alice and Lily, who both worked in the business in the early years, did not inherit any interest in the business, nor did their mother: everything was left to their younger brother, John W. When JW died, his shares in WJ Marston went to the boys; Lyn and Barbara received around ten percent of the shares in the property company, while the boys were each left forty percent, along with the responsibilities. These practices have distorted the balance of the ownership ever since.

Everyone came together in June 2005 for a family shareholder conference in Shoreditch, facilitated by Peter and Juliette. Each person had their say, every issue was discussed - and over the course of two days, the group was able to map out how they wanted things to proceed and what they wished to change in the future.

A key part of the day was the discussion of Marston family and business values - those (usually) unspoken rules that guide how people choose to live and behave with one another. "It was striking", remembers Caroline, "how quickly we all agreed and how much we each identified with broadly the same set of values." Andrew recalls honesty and integrity featuring at the top of most people's list: "Honesty in the way we deal with people and do business - the kind that stands you in good stead for generations," he says, "And quality: not flash, surface quality, but real substance - using quality materials when we build, for example, that last the test of time."

On the question of ownership, all agreed they wanted to keep the property company exclusively in family hands, but from now on, shares could only be held by 'privileged relations' - that is, the male and female direct descendants of JW Marston. At the same time, it was felt that family members should continue to be shareholders only by choice, and not compulsion, and that if anyone really wanted 'out', there should be a means to exit; to this end, a company buyback was offered two years later, when only two of the ten family shareholders chose to sell.



*The four silver 'value cups' awarded at Christmas to individuals or teams who have reflected the company values during the year; The Shareholders' Cup, on wooden plinth, is awarded on the family retreat for the team or person who has best reflected one of the values during the retreat.*

Communication and family bonds were also a key theme. Marstons was no longer the sibling company it had been in Tony and JJ's heyday, when there was no expectation among other shareholders that they would have a say or be asked to contribute a view. Among the cousins of the fourth generation, only one - Caroline - currently worked in the business, and if everyone else was to stay engaged and committed, they would need to feel far more connected to it.

Everyone was in favour of codifying how things would operate in the future, and so it was decided to draw up a 'family constitution' that would set out the family's purpose, values and principles, how share ownership would work, and how the family and the business would interact with each other. The document would also address the need for greater family engagement, by proposing a programme of shareholder communication and education, as well as an annual weekend get-together for all Marston family members.

The constitution, which took two years to agree in detail, was signed by all shareholders in 2008.

The only matter that remained to be resolved was the future of the hotel company. This, however, was dealt with in subsequent discussions; it was finally agreed in 2005 that family shares would be bought out by those family members who wanted the company to continue, in conjunction with the hotel directors. In 2006, they decided to sell, with three hotels bought by Swallow Hotels (which promptly went bust) and the rest of the group going to Q Hotels.

The model of Marston Hotels had been incredibly successful over a very short time, and due in no small part to John's vision, leadership and determination. The decision to 'harvest' was not an easy one for the family shareholders, but they concluded that it was the right choice at the right time. For many, the payout they received was life-changing; it allowed them to live financially independent lives and in some cases, fulfil their ambitions, whether these were to finance a new eco-business (Andrew) or rescue a much-loved local community theatre from closure (Bridget).

As it so happened, the timing of the sale was highly fortunate: just two years later, in 2008, a 'credit crisis' would hit the world's financial markets and spark the longest period of economic decline since the 1930s.



One of the most important decisions made at the 2005 conference was a commitment by all present to an annual weekend for the whole family. Given how dispersed the Marston family had become - out to Cornwall in the west, Kent and Dorset in the south, Norfolk in the east and Chester in the north - this would be a once-a-year occasion for siblings, cousins, grandparents and grandchildren to get together, swap news, celebrate the family's heritage and generally enjoy one another's company

Birmingham may not seem the most glamorous of places, but it was the destination of choice for the first weekend, which took place the following year, in 2006. The family had moved there from Bishops Castle one hundred and sixty

years earlier, prior to their move south. Three generations of Marstons - some thirty-five adults and children - visited the back-to-back tenement building in Hurst Street, Birmingham next door to where the Marston family had lived. The 1850 accommodation seemed shockingly small for dozens of people to share, recalls Caroline: "A salient reminder for each of us of where we came from."

Andrew Marston credits the Marston family weekends, which have continued for the past fourteen years, with strengthening the bonds across family branches and generations. He usually comes with his three daughters, who have now got to know second-cousins-once-removed they might otherwise never have met. "They've really profited from spending time with family, such as my auntie Barbara, whose values are apparent in everything she says and does."

Joshua Beckman, Caroline's son, organised the most recent weekend: a nostalgic return to the Hythe Imperial Hotel (as it is now known), in 2019. Some of the older generation present, noting that the hotel was a little glitzier these days, nevertheless delighted in the same views from the window - and the same creaking floorboards. Joshua remembered The Imperial from childhood, but realised that his younger cousins would have no memory of the hotels, nor of Hythe.

*A guide for visitors to the Watermill, the venue for family and town events since the early 1980s and winner of Civic Trust award 1991.*



A highlight of the weekend was the duck race down the stream at The Watermill. The very same ducks, numbered for identification, had been raced many years earlier on the occasions of each of Caroline's and James' wedding, and had featured at countless local events hosted by Anne ever since - The Watermill being a draw for Easter egg hunts, church teas, painting classes, Rotary fundraisers and more. "Everyone in this town knows my grandma Anne, and knew grandpa Tony," says Joshua. "I wanted the generation below me, who weren't around when we had Marston Hotels, to experience a special little piece of family history."

The number of cousins who attend the family weekend grows each year, with sixty-nine people gathered for the 2019 event.

## Moving on

"When I started at Marstons," says Dave Ingram, "We were mainly a building contractor; then we were a hotelier, and now we're a property company." What has kept the firm going, Dave believes, is its ability to "adapt to the big wide world - staying at the front of things all these years."

In 2004, Marston Properties commissioned a new major development from a third-party contractor – the first time it had outsourced construction. Carlton Square in Putney, completed in 2006, is forty-seven apartments set around a large courtyard and lily pond between two Victorian villas and two new-build blocks. Designed by Stirling prize winning architects Feilden Clegg Bradley and built by Wates Construction, the development won a Civic Trust Award in 2007.

Up until that time, the property business had always shared its back-office functions with the hotel company HQ in Hythe. But with the new development about to start and a large development loan to manage, Marston Properties needed its own accounts function in Fulham. Noreen Tapp was hired as financial controller, and given the brief to form an accounts team.

*left  
The acre of land held jointly by JJ Marston and the Company became Carlton Square - 2004 the first brochure.*

*right  
Carlton Square won a Civic Trust Award 2007 and was runner up for a RIBA housing award.*



Noreen had come from a much larger life sciences company, where she was "used to a more corporate environment"; she remembers having to "adapt quickly" to the informal, and sometimes disjointed, systems she had inherited. On her first day, she was asked to finalise an account for one of the last contracts carried out by WJ Marston five years earlier, converting the London College of Organists into a home for property investor Robert Tchenguiz; there was a significant sum of retention monies due. Looking through a massive stack of unlabeled files sent up from Kent on a project that no one in the office had been involved in, seemed like a forlorn hope. When Noreen found the necessary paperwork, "we realised she had filing Karma," says Caroline. Payment was requested, and the money was remitted in no time at all.

A soaking wet winter in 2005 followed by a hot dry summer in 2006 helped ensure that Carlton Square was completed more or less on time. Forty of the apartments were sold and occupied by the beginning of 2007, with the remaining

seven retained in the firm's rental portfolio. At the same time, eighteen flats at Heathfield Square in Wandsworth, including thirteen affordable housing units, were completed for the company by Soden Construction and handed over to Thames Valley Housing. And it was all done just in time to avoid the market dip that year and the post-2008 slump.

That the firm avoided the worst of the recession was not, however, simply a matter of lucky timing. It was also in part due to its conservative approach to borrowing: this limits the pace at which it can grow, notes Caroline, "but it's a price worth paying for stability." Peter Bull, who joined as an apprentice carpenter and is today construction and maintenance director of the group companies, says the firm has been consistently "solid" in his thirty-three years working there: "We've always managed within our means, and made sure we only take on projects when we're confident we can see them through to our standard."

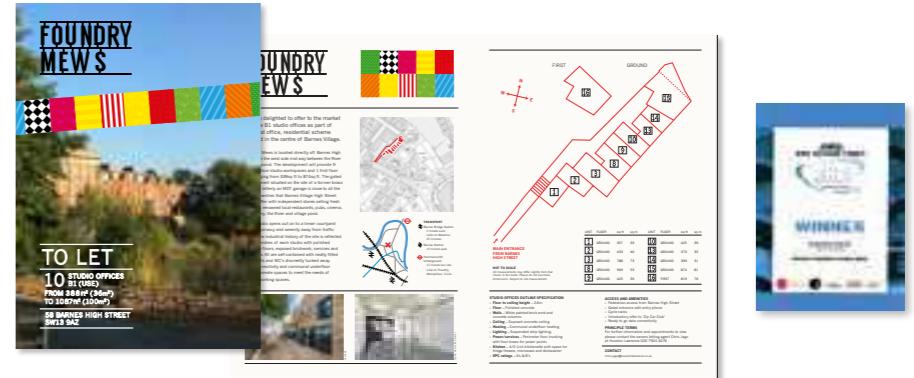
More recently, the business has focused increasingly on developments to trade. Upper Lawn in Heath Rise, a modern take on a traditional Putney mansion block, began as a development agreement with Dorrington. Planning permission was granted in late 2009, but the purchase was completed only in 2012. This left the firm only four months to begin work on site before the planning lapsed and the site became eligible to pay CIL, a new local authority infrastructure tax. The nine completed apartments were launched to the open market in July 2014.

*2014 Upper Lawn brochure showing the restrained, high level of finish for the nine large apartments, Architect Tina Roscoe, Casson Condor Partnership.*



Foundry Mews in Barnes was developed in the same vein, with the intention to sell. An empty and dilapidated MOT garage, the existing buildings were fit only for demolition and consequently had been the subject of a large number of redevelopment proposals by the previous owner - none of which had succeeded in gaining planning consent. Designed by Project Orange, the mixed-use scheme was developed as a space to combine ten business units and seven apartments in a courtyard modelled on an artisan mews. The firm liked the end result so much that it has kept all the properties to rent. Foundry Mews won the Sunday Times' best small development award in 2016.

*Letting brochures for Foundry Mews in Barnes - winner of the Sunday Times best small development award 2016.*



Inside the business, Caroline, as its managing director, has introduced a number of changes over the past few years - designed mainly to modernise the company and ensure it is in a strong position to handle the challenges and opportunities ahead. Noreen, who by 2005 had created a team and upgraded the accounts system, was promoted to finance director.

With a nudge from non-executive Director David Robinson, Caroline signed up for a Business Leaders Programme at Cranfield University in 2008/09. Having spent nearly 20 years learning from within the family business it gave Caroline not just an outside influence but put her together with other business leaders who although heading up much larger companies were contending with just the same challenges. The 'management speak' phrase that stuck with her was 'Be yourself more'. The weight of her predecessors success fell away and instead became a source of authenticity and strength. 'I chose an old door key as a trigger to remind me of all that I had learned on the course which is just as well as we have no shortage of those!'

By 2009, the property portfolio had grown sufficiently to warrant splitting the commercial portfolio management from the residential. Anna Nicholls managed both portfolios, but on her return from maternity leave, asked to work a four-day week. Caroline's own lack of maternity leave and non-child-friendly hours on her return to work meant she was keen to give Anna the time she needed. So, Anna returned after nine month's leave to run residential management, and a new manager was taken on to look after the commercial sites. Commercial property, now a growing part of the portfolio, is led by Jane Thompson, who sits as an executive director on the Board.

That same year, Marston Properties joined the Accredited Landlord scheme, which requires landlords to follow a code of practice founded to respect the needs of tenants. Firms need to have at least one 'accredited' staff member - although Anna felt it was important to go a step further and ensure all the residential lettings team were accredited; this means that everyone on the team keeps up to date with the many and frequent changes in legislation.

Keen to encourage staff to get together socially and acknowledge everyone's contribution, Caroline resurrected the summer beano (renamed the summer outing) in 2012, with a company trip to watch the London Olympic basketball at Earls Court.

In 2017, Caroline turned her attention to the workplace surroundings. She kitted out the recently fitted-out office with a full set of new furniture in a move that was welcomed by all: until then, Marstons' staff had had to make do with a random assortment of chairs, desks, tables and drawers left behind by commercial tenants, as well as a number of ancient cupboards inherited from the WJ Marston offices.

Looking outward, Caroline was keen to raise the firm's profile among a local community it had served for over a century: a refresh to the company brand in 2015 provided the platform for a new website, as well as branded vehicles, hoarding signs, lettings boards and workwear.

*2015 brand refreshed using the company red used since the 1950s.*



Marstons was also able to revive the Parsons Green Fair in becoming its leading sponsor and helping Fulham Good Neighbours to resurrect the fair after a one-year interruption in 2017. The tradition of an annual fair at Parsons Green is older than even Marstons, although these days the event is a more humane affair than it once was: a visitor in the early part of the nineteenth century described it as "wonderful nice", spoiled only by the "poor live cocks tied up by their legs [for] people to throw sticks at them."

*The residential property lettings boards, the main 'shop front' for Marstons to let their own properties directly.*



The Board has been strengthened too, with JJ as chairman, and David Robinson, formerly an audit partner at BDO, the UK's fifth largest accountants, appointed as the firm's first non-executive director in May 2007. Michael Daniels joined as a non-executive director in February 2015, having served as the company's commercial lawyer since 1984. Michael acted for the company on all its hotel acquisitions, sales and portfolio transactions. The company constitution requires a family member to serve as a non-executive director; David Tonge has occupied this position since April 2011.

Having watched her grandfather reluctantly hand over the reins, Caroline is now preparing to relinquish the managing directorship to a non-family director and take over the role of Board Chair from JJ.

However just like her ancestors, Caroline has no intention of retiring anytime soon.

## If...

If WJ Marston was to visit the company today, how would he react?

Surprise, probably, at first: that the construction firm of old now builds and services only its own properties; that the decorators are not at their workstation, paint in hand, at 8am sharp (not realising that paint comes ready-mixed these days); that the office at Mills Yard is - inconceivable in his day - open, spacious and comfortably furnished.

Surprise too (astonishment, even) to discover that of the five executive directors, three are female - and that ownership of the business is evenly split, more or less, between females and males in the current and next generations.

But give him a little time to adjust. He might notice there are still familial connections among staff: that where once there were families of Airs, Goldings, Reynors and Sacketts, today there are Tapps (Noreen and husband Graham) and the Walshs (Darren, who followed his father Brian into the firm, and his wife Krystle).

Wandering over to the maintenance depot, he would meet Leroy Chase - forty years a painter at Marstons - and learn that the firm continues to directly employ decorators, as it has done since 1895. He might also run into Jamie Leask, a plumber trained by Dave Ingram, who was apprenticed to Bill Polden, who in turn was apprenticed to Buddy Wright, who was trained by Bob Bence, who was hired in 1901 as plumber's mate to ... WJ Marston.

Returning to the office now to inspect the list of properties on the company's books, he would recognise most of the street names as comfortably within the firm's traditional 'manor': Fulham, Putney, Battersea, Clapham, Wandsworth. Looking down the list, his eye might fall on three addresses in Hugon Road: number 29, his first marital home; number 50, the Ansell family laundry; and number 54, the house where he and Elizabeth raised their family - all three properties still owned by the company today.

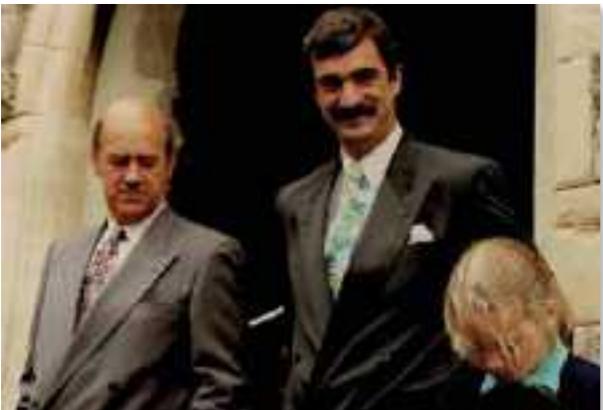
As he walked along the corridor, he might pass a photograph of his grandson John James receiving an MBE in 2011 for his work as chair of governors at Granard Primary School where he was responsible for the new swimming pool, and as governor of Ealing, Hammersmith & West London FE College where he led the campus rebuild. Setting great store by public service, he would be doubly pleased to learn that John's sister, Barbara, had also been made an MBE.

So much that is different, he might reflect, but so much too that has remained steadfast: the firm's sense of integrity, the respect for quality, and the responsibility and care shown towards staff, tenants, suppliers and the wider community.

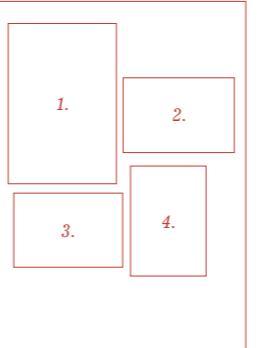
Of all his encounters, would anything in particular stand out? Perhaps this: that after 125 years, the firm is still in Fulham, that it still provides shelter and a workplace for local people, that it is still owned by the Marston family, and that every day it continues to live and breathe the values dear to him.











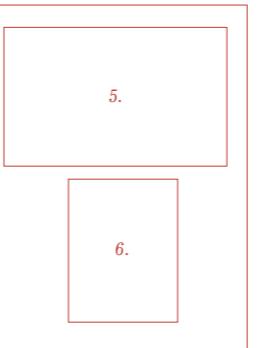
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1.  
2011 John receives his MBE for his work as Chairman of Hammersmith College and his work as chair of Governors of Granard School, where he helped them convert disused kitchen into a swimming pool.

2.  
2001 Caroline's sons, Josh and Barney. Josh was born in Hammersmith & Barney was born in Fulham.

3.  
1981 Tony and Anne buy The Watermill in Hythe, pictured in front of the building restored by the hotel maintenance team before they became too busy with the expansion of the hotel group.

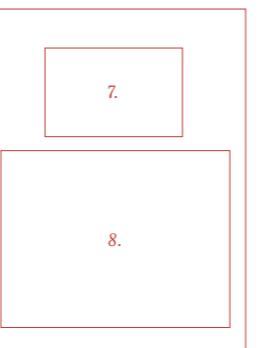
4.  
1999 Tony on the ski holiday in the French Alps from which he would not return.



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5.  
1995 All the staff, Directors and shareholders of WJ Marston & Son Ltd with partners at Fulham Town Hall.

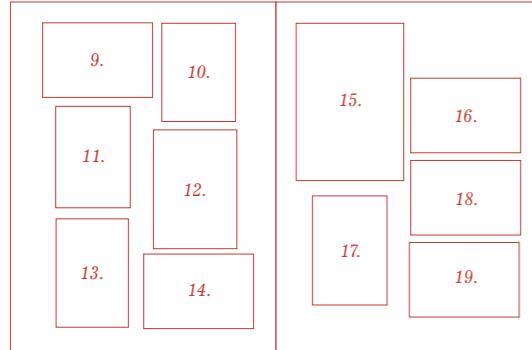
6.  
1995 On the stairs of Fulham Town Hall. Direct descendants and spouses of WJ Marston, including Australian cousins.



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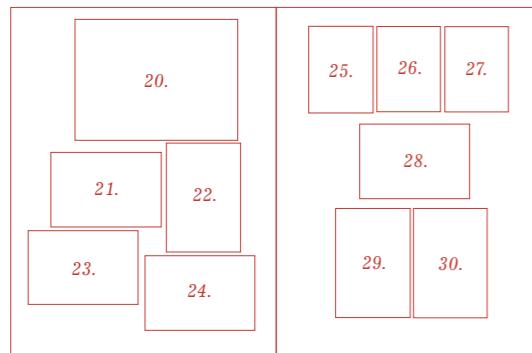
7.  
2006 The Marston family's 19th century journey from Shropshire took them via Birmingham so this was chosen for the first shareholder retreat with lots of babies attending.

8.  
2019 The shareholder retreat was to 'The Hythe Imperial'; a building of significance for the family and company from 1946 to 2016.



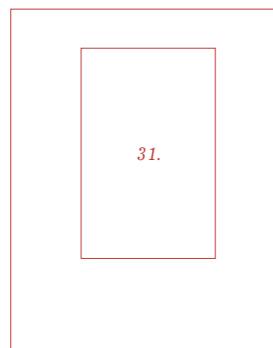
p.119 & 120 (previous pages)

9. John Marston and Chris Scragg became a powerful duo investing and developing hotels for 15 years.
10. 2008 Michael Rayner who followed his father into the business spent his whole career at Marstons. He retired in 1999.
11. 1993 The two brothers Tony, left, and John. Balancing the construction company and hotel business was becoming more difficult.
12. 1994 Company sports day at the Imperial. WJ Marston & Son Ltd football team, beaten by the hotel team; pictured centre Dave Ingram and Peter Tonge, kneeling on the right.
13. 143-145 Strand purchased in 1981 to add to the hotel portfolio pictured in 1993.
14. 1997 Knaresborough Place under construction, one of the last WJ Marston contracts.
15. 2016 Caroline accepting the Sunday Times award with Christopher Ash of the Architects, Project Orange.
16. 2016 Caroline accepting the Best Portfolio Landlord UKLAP award.
17. 2008 The accountants are smiling. David Robinson, Marston Properties Ltd first non-executive Director and Noreen Tapp who joined in 2004 and quickly became Marston Properties Finance Director.
18. 2017 Caroline and Anya Hindmarch at the Plough Brewery when it was awarded a Green Plaque by the Clapham Society.
19. 1997 The entire property team in The Seattle Coffee House in Parsons Green before Starbucks had arrived. Left to right: Caroline, Cindy, Anna (before she left to come back again) and Rashida.



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20. 2013 The staff summer outing to Greenwich to look at the Old Royal Naval College and the Queen's House built in 1616.
21. In 2015 the vans were rebranded, saying it loud and proud with the maintenance and construction team in their workwear.
22. 2018 Everyone mucks in getting the signage painted for Parsons Green Fair.
23. 2018 Vera Cutler and Margaret Lule, both of the accounts team, handing out balloons at Parsons Green Fair.
24. 2016 Foundry Mews building, launch and letting team, left to right: Yashpal, Simon, Caroline, Peter, Andrew, Margot, Anna, Jane and Emma.
25. Michael Daniels, a property lawyer joined as a non-executive Director in 2015.
26. David Robinson, retired from BDO Stoy Haywood and has been a non-executive Director at Marstons since 2007.
27. David Tonge has been the family non-executive Director since 2011.
28. 2008 Caroline making a speech at Fulham Palace celebrating 70 years of letting property in Fulham.
29. John's 85th birthday hosted by the company at Rick Stein's in Tideway Yard Mortlake on 19th February 2020.
30. Barbara pictured in 2019, awarded an MBE in 2004 for her work in women's health in the UK and Africa and at 89 still tending the sick.



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## People and places



Our buildings have seen bombs drop

They've seen prices soar,  
bubbles burst, markets rally

They quietly watched,  
and stood their ground.

Their walls have been plastered  
with teen-dream posters,

as Beatles became Bowie,  
Robbie became Harry.....

Their rooms have seen Deco  
and G-plan and Shabby Chic  
They've seen it come and go.  
And come back again.

They've heard the clack of typewriters,  
the squawk of a fax and the ping of an email.  
Victorian, Edwardian, Georgian, Elizabethan.

The Monarchs passed through leaving  
their names on the bricks.

Through wars, through fashions,  
through boom and bust.

Through four generations in SW6

*Courtesy of Koto rebrand pitch 2015*



# Map

Significant properties owned and/or developed by Marstons in SW6 and neighbouring areas.

## 1890s

- 00 54-56 Hugon Road  
Fulham SW6 - 1890s

## 1910s

- 01 87-91 Wandsworth Bridge Road Fulham SW6 - 1911 & 2016

## 1920s

- 02 Stephendale Yard 1-8  
Fulham SW6 - 1923 & 2001

## 1930s

- 03 318-326 Wandsworth Bridge Road  
Fulham SW6 - 1930s

## 1940s

- 04 Broughton Road  
Fulham SW6 - 1930s

## 1950s

- 05 Fulham Vicarage  
Fulham SW6 - 1930s

## 1960s

- 06 Fulham Town Hall Extension  
Fulham SW6 - 1934

## 1970s

- 07 587 Fulham Road  
Fulham SW6 - 1935

## 1980s

- 08 35 Earlsfield Road  
Wandsworth SW18 - 1935 & 2015

## 1990s

- 09 Fulham Maternity Home  
Parsons Green SW6 - 1935

## 2000s

- 10 Titchwell Road  
Herondale Avenue  
Putney SW15 - 1935

## 2010s

- 11 Elmar and Wilton Court  
Fulham SW6 - 1938

## 2020s

- 12 79-91 New Kings Road  
Fulham SW6 - 1939

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 19 Block of Flats  
Hammersmith W6 - 1958

## 1960s

- 20 Portinscale Road  
Putney SW15 - 1960s

## 1970s

- 21 Riverhouse  
Barnes SW13 - 1960s

## 1980s

- 22 South Park Studios  
Fulham SW6 - 1960s

## 1990s

- 23 Plough Brewery  
Clapham SW8 - 1968 & 2001

## 2000s

- 24 The London Oratory School  
Fulham SW6 - 1970

## 2010s

- 25 Pardon Street  
Clapham SW8 - 1971

## 2020s

- 26 Hogarth Hotel  
Earls Court SW5 - 1973

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 43 East Hill Baptist Church and Flats  
Putney SW15 - 1988

## 1960s

- 44 Cavalry Gardens and Kendal Place  
Putney SW15 - 1989

## 1970s

- 45 Lancaster Mews  
Putney SW18 - 1989

## 1980s

- 46 Upper Richmond Road  
Putney SW15 - 1990s

## 1990s

- 47 3,5,7, Colinette Road  
Putney SW15 - 1990

## 2000s

- 48 Tun Yard  
Clapham SW8 - 1995

## 2010s

- 49 Royal College of Organists  
Kensington SW7 - 1998

## 2020s

- 50 5-15 Stephendale Yard  
Fulham SW6 - 2001

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 51 27 Ackmar Road  
Fulham SW6 - 2004

## 2000s

- 52 57 Fulham High Street  
Fulham SW6 - 2005

## 2010s

- 53 Carlton Square  
Putney SW15 - 2006

## 2020s

- 54 1 Colinton Road  
Putney SW15 - 2007

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 55 281-283 Wandsworth Bridge Road  
Fulham SW6 - 2008

## 2000s

- 56 11 Eardley Crescent  
Earls Court SW5 - 2009

## 2010s

- 57 163 New Kings Road  
Fulham SW6 - 2010

## 2020s

- 58 88-90 Fulham Palace Road  
Hammersmith W6 - 2011

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 59 Dovetail and Mitre Cottages  
Putney SW15 - 2014

## 2000s

- 60 Upper Lawn  
Putney SW15 - 2015

## 2010s

- 61 170 Wandsworth Bridge Road  
Fulham SW6 - 2016

## 2020s

- 62 Foundry Mews  
Barnes SW13 - 2016

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 63 65 New Kings Road  
Fulham SW6 - 2018

## 2000s

- 64 Crosland Place  
Battersea SW11 - 2020

## 2020s

- 65 9-13 Kings Road  
Chelsea SW1 - 1988

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 66 317 Upper Richmond Road  
Putney SW15 - 1988

## 2000s

- 67 41-43 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 1989

## 2010s

- 68 27-29 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2010

## 2020s

- 69 10-12 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2011

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 70 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2012

## 2000s

- 71 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2013

## 2010s

- 72 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2014

## 2020s

- 73 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2015

## GRADE II LISTED

## 1890s

- 74 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2016

## 2000s

- 75 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2017

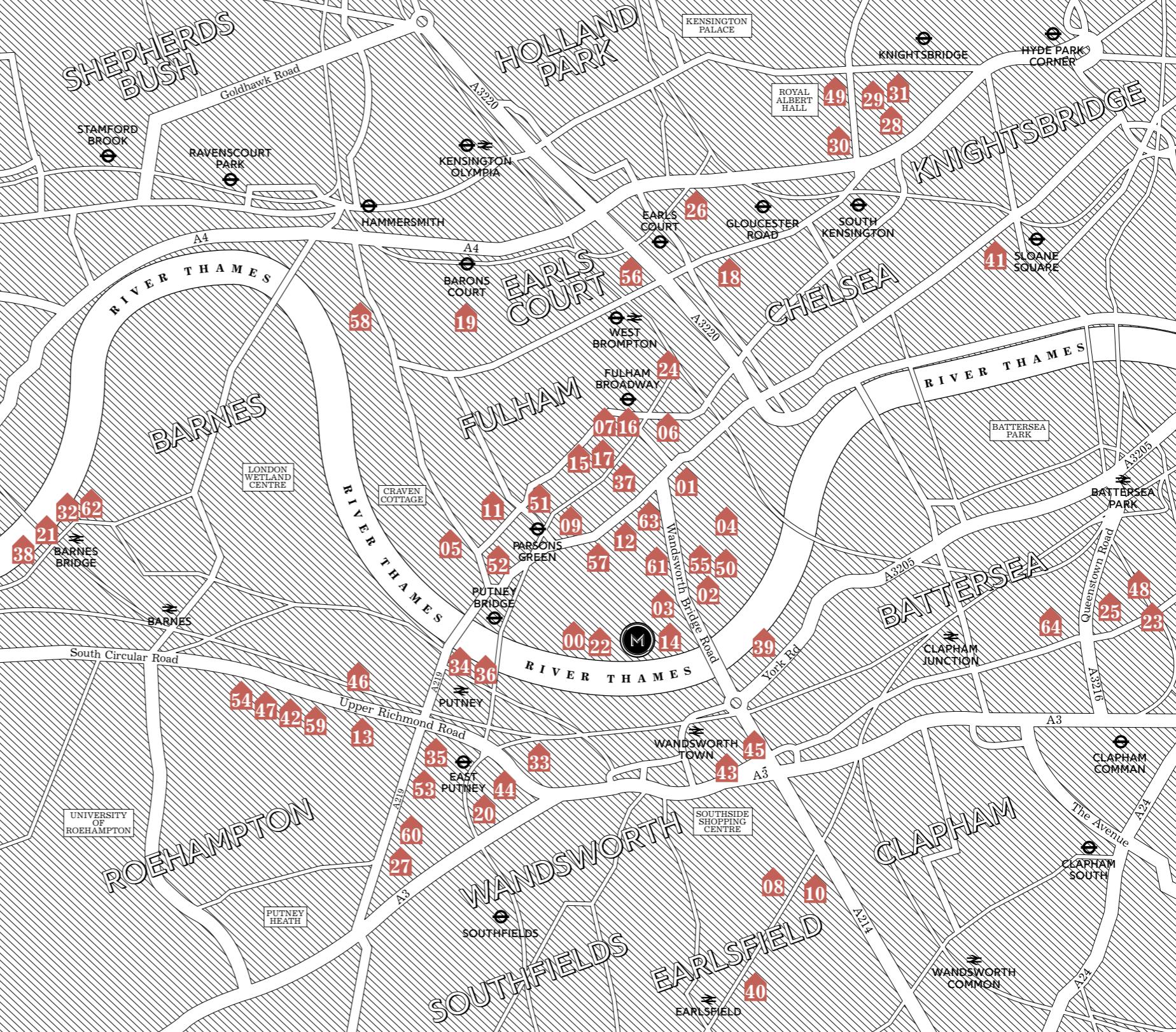
## 2010s

- 76 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2018

## 2020s

- 77 29-31 Putney Heath  
Putney SW15 - 2019

## GRADE II LISTED



## Contracts 1930s

a.  
1931 Bernard Baron Pavilion Regent's Park.

b.  
1933 Fulham Town Hall under construction shrouded in timber scaffolding.

c.  
1934 Fulham Borough Council electricity board demonstration room to tempt people away from their coal-fired ranges.

d.  
1934 Electricity board showroom interior.

e.  
1933 HG Cox Vanston Place Fulham, note the timber scaffolding standing in barrels.

f.  
1933 Wandsworth Gas Company in Wandsworth High Street.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.

## Developments and contracts 1930s

a.  
1938 Elmar and Wilston Court Fulham Road SW6 with WJ standing in the entrance.

b.  
1936 Fulham Maternity Home & Clinic Parsons Green. Note: the Maple van delivering furniture. Maple and Co was the largest furniture retailer in Europe.

c.  
1935 15 Herondale Avenue SW18 built by Marstons and became the family home for almost 50 years.

d.  
1935 Herondale Avenue (photo 1987). The oak-panelled dining room with a serving hatch from the kitchen to the right of the fireplace.

e.  
1935 Herondale Avenue (photo 1987) showing the original tiling to the bathroom. JW took a cold shower every day out of choice.



a.



c.



b.



d.



e.

## Before and after WWII

a.  
1954 Coates Brothers factory Easton Street WC1.

b.  
1940 Ernest Moy Factory converted to armament manufacture.

c.  
1946 New entrance to the Frigidaire factory

d.  
1947 Building Mills Yard SW6, originally a plant yard and store it is now Marston Properties office.

e.  
1949 Frigidaire factory under construction.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.

## Building new homes

a.  
1948 The Housing Competition winner for affordable housing after the war in Bartholomew Lane Hythe Kent.

b.  
1948 Bartholomew Lane Hythe Kent, the lounge with parquet floor so that owners wouldn't need to purchase carpets.

c.  
1951 Cathcart Road - a Chelsea kitchen.

d.  
1948 Bartholomew Lane Hythe Kent, the utility room, the brochure declared that 'every woman should have a utility room for washdays.'



a.



b.



c.



d.

## The hotels after WW2

a.  
1948 The timber scaffold in the ballroom during the process of taking out the columns.

b.  
1950 After the refurbishment, The Hotel Imperial Lounge overlooking the sea.

c.  
1950 After the refurbishment, The Hotel Imperial ballroom without the columns, ready for the dinner dances and family Christmases.

d.  
1950 After the refurbishment a Hotel Imperial single bedroom. Initially not all bedrooms had their own bathrooms.

e.  
1947 A Stade Court Hotel bedroom - twin beds were the fashion.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.

## The Hotel Imperial

a.  
1947 The Hotel Imperial aerial photograph showing gun emplacements still evident in front of the hotel to the bottom left of the image.

b.  
1950 The Hotel Imperial tennis tournament on the front lawn.



a.



b.

## Rebuilding London after WWII

a.  
1954 One of many blocks of Council flats built for the Borough, the one pictured is off the Fulham Road SW6.

b.  
1958 Home for the blind one of many homes built for the elderly or disabled for local Boroughs.

c.  
1954 St Josephs Hospice.

d.  
1952 Block of flats in Wandsworth Road SW8, for Cluttons.

e.  
1954 London County Council flats completed. The LCC was abolished in 1965 replaced by the GLC.

f.  
1955 94 flats and 3 bungalows in Croydon under construction, including a diversion of a feeder stream to the River Wandle.

g.  
1964 Starting the build of 74 flats and maisonettes in Hammersmith for Fulham Borough Council, the last order placed before it became Hammersmith and Fulham Borough.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.



g.

## Rebuilding London after WWII

a.  
1961 Block of Flats Fulham Broadway SW6.

b.  
1953 Block of flats, W14, overlooking Queen's Club.

c.  
1963 Construction of block of flats Fulham Broadway SW6. 115 flats built by 30 Marston employed bricklayers. Contract value £250,000.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.

## Contracts and developments in the 1950s and 1960s

a.  
1961 Bishop's Park Open Air Theatre. Cantilevered white concrete roof cast in one continuous pour. Demolished 1994 after a fire.

b.  
1965 Land Assembly off Kingsway WC2, the first £500,000 project to build a 13 storey office block.

c.  
1955 Bousfield School under construction. Single storey classrooms with blue, green and yellow curtain walling.

d.  
1955 Bousfield School Kensington completed, designed by Chamberlin Powell and Bon, Grade II listed.

e.  
1962 Sands End Library and Slipper Baths Wandsworth Bridge Road (demolished 2014). The last contract opened before the amalgamation of Fulham with Hammersmith.



f.  
1968 The derelict Plough Brewery SW8 purchased from 'Courage Brewery'. The pubs opposite and adjacent are now in the portfolio waiting to be redeveloped.



## Contracts in the 1960s

a.  
1964 Richmond Swimming Baths Exterior (now Pools in the Park) Richmond. The copper cladding was installed by Ted Long. The building is Grade II listed.

b.  
1964 Richmond Swimming Baths pool hall. The Fine Arts Commission didn't want chimneys, so the pool was electrically heated.

c.  
1967 The London Oratory School, SW6. The fourth school built to architect David Stokes design, included swimming pool, workshops and chapel.



## Contracts in the 1970s and 1980s

a.  
1978 School For  
The Deaf in Swiss  
Cottage designed by  
the GLC Department  
of Architecture  
and Design.

b.  
York Road SW19  
Wandsworth, old  
people's home.

c.  
1975 The Hotel  
Imperial swimming  
pool, originally built  
as an open air pool,  
and later enclosed.

d.  
1975 New build  
flats in Putney for  
Wandsworth Council.

e.  
1982 Balmoral Court  
WJ Marston took over  
the project under a  
novation agreement  
from CG Killick  
Builders Ltd, seen  
here featured in  
'Building' Magazine.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.

## Contracts in the 1980s and 1990s

a.  
Babington Rise,  
Wembley.

b.  
Flats at Coburn  
Road, Bow.

c.  
Apartments at  
Upper Richmond  
Road, Putney.

d.  
Flats at Baldock  
Street, Bow.



a.



b.



c.



d.

## Developments 1995-2015

a.  
Upper Lawn Kersfield Road SW15, nine apartments sold in 2015 - 40 years after an adjacent block of flats was completed in the same road for Wandsworth Council.

b.  
Ackmar Road SW6, purchased in 2004 and converted into 10 small offices.

c.  
1994 Unit 3 Tun Yard SW8, under construction.

d.  
1995 The eight commercial units at Tun Yard, Peardon Street SW8, were completed the year the company celebrated its 100th anniversary.



a.



b.



c.



d.

## Development interiors 2006-2017

a.  
2012 163 New Kings Road SW6, an interior of one of the six flats to rent.

b.  
2016 Foundry Mews SW13, living room of one of the seven flats to rent.

c.  
2015 Upper Lawn Heathrise SW15, a typical kitchen of one of the nine new-build apartments, all sold.

d.  
2017 65 New Kings Road SW6; interior, one of the six flats to rent.

e.  
2006 Carlton Square SW15, 47 apartments built and sold in 2006; interior of a typical living room and kitchen.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.

## Award winners

a. Carlton Square SW15, runner up for a RIBA award and winner of a Wandsworth Council Civic Trust Award 2007.

b. Tideway Yard SW14, winner of one of the Community Enterprise Scheme Awards presented by Prince Charles in 1986.

c. Rick Stein's Restaurant at Tideway Yard who took over The Depot Restaurant in 2016, a popular local haunt for over 30 years.

d. Foundry Mews SW13, Barnes High Street winner of the Sunday Times best small development 2016.

e. Plough Brewery SW8, new window detail, winner of a Green Plaque from Clapham Society in 2017.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.

## Portfolio projects

a. 65 New Kings Road SW6, purchased to keep as a pub in 2015 with 6 flats to rent created above, completed in 2017.

b. 163 New Kings Road SW6, purchased in 2010, the scheme provided children's nursery in the lower floors, 6 flats above for rent and four houses to the rear.

c. Four houses converted into 16 flats into 1938 to form Elmar and Wilston Courts, Fulham Road; still owned managed and let by the company.

d. 87-91 Wandsworth Bridge Road, the three buildings amalgamated to form seven lateral flats to rent in 2013. 87 had been purchased 102 years earlier as the family home and office.

e. Purchased in 1968, The Plough Brewery SW8, converted to offices in 1971 pictured with new steel double glazed windows installed in 2016.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.



a.



b.

## Staff

April 2020.  
The current staff  
of 32 who have  
each taken a selfie  
due to the covid  
lockdown which  
prohibited people  
from meeting up.



Jane Thompson  
*Commercial Portfolio Director*  
5 YEARS



Nicky Hooshangpour  
*Maintenance Administrator & Reception*  
19 YEARS



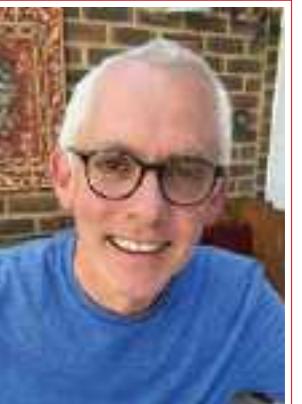
Nilli Gianfrancristo  
*Accounts & Office Assistant*  
9 MONTHS



Jenny Bent  
*Office Manager, Communications & HR Manager*  
11 MONTHS



Paul Giacopazzi  
*Site Manager*  
10 YEARS



Andrew Sowton  
*Quantity Surveyor*  
8 YEARS



Alessandra Mesei  
*Commercial Property Administrator & Facilities Co-ordinator*  
2 YEARS



Anna Nicholls  
*Director of Residential Property Management*  
1 YEAR & 20 YEARS



Peter Bull  
*Construction & Maintenance Director*  
32 YEARS



Adam McCullough  
*Maintenance Manager*  
2 YEARS



Prince McCommon  
*Painter*  
14 YEARS



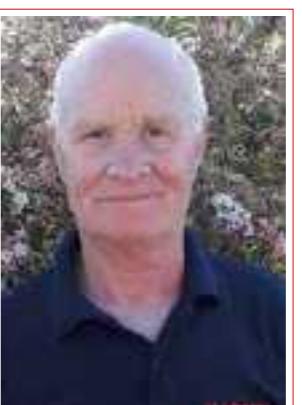
Anthony Gaughan  
*Painter*  
3 YEARS



Dave Ingram  
*Senior Technical Plumber*  
39 YEARS



Krystle Towner Walsh  
*Residential Administrator*  
2 YEARS



Steve Boreham  
*Foreman Carpenter*  
8 YEARS

## Staff



Hilary Horne  
*Building Surveyor*  
4 YEARS



Noreen Tapp  
*Finance Director*  
16 YEARS



Christian Kortlang  
*Development Manager*  
2 YEARS



Margaret Lule  
*Accounting Assistant*  
13 YEARS



Graham Tapp  
*Commercial Caretaker*  
9 MONTHS



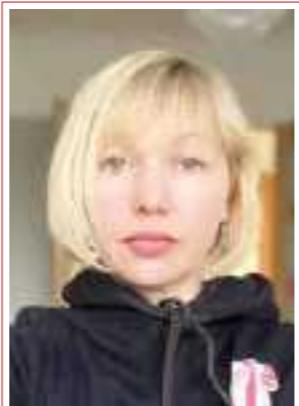
Gerson da Silva Fontoura  
*Site Assistant*  
4 YEARS



Darren Walsh  
*Carpenter Multi Trade*  
16 YEARS



Leroy Chase  
*Foreman Painter*  
4 YEARS PLUS 40 YEARS



Vera Cutler  
*Group Accountant*  
4 YEARS



Dele Garnes  
*Site Assistant*  
4 YEARS



John Clark  
*Property Director*  
9 MONTHS



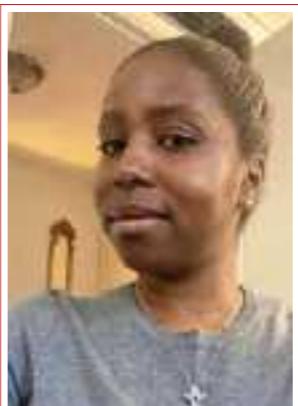
Rachel Derrick  
*Residential Administrator*  
6 YEARS & 18 MONTHS



Jamie Leask  
*Plumber*  
3 YEARS



Ollie Saunders  
*Painter*  
15 YEARS



Patrice Mark  
*Accounts & Office Assistant*  
11 MONTHS



Caroline Marston  
*Managing Director*  
33 YEARS



Tansie  
*Office Dog*  
12 YEARS

# Timeline

Regular text -  
company events.

*Italic text* -  
family events.



## Acknowledgments

As the known universe closed down around us, one by one our 125 year celebrations had to be cancelled, leaving our anniversary book as the sole marker of our quasquicentennial year. Therefore huge thanks go to Philip Rubenstein for keeping the research going just as all the archives and libraries closed and also to Anne Roache of KM Heritage for pointing him in the right direction.

Thanks also go to Philip Rubenstein and Jane Chipchase for turning a jumble of recollections, ledgers, photos and newspaper cuttings into an illustrated coherent account of the ebb and flow of our family business. Thank you also to Jane Chipchase for her special book design, for the unexpected need to do all the scanning and for accommodating the changes we had to make as we all worked from home.

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Two external sources were invaluable - 'Fulham in the Second World War', by Leslie Hasker, published 1984 by Fulham and Hammersmith Historical Society and 'A History of Fulham', by Barbara Denny published 1990 by Historical Publications. We included many of the recollections of employees, some long since gone that were compiled by John Marston for the WJ Marston & Son Ltd centenary booklet in 1995.

Finally thank you to all our current team members who have graciously allowed us to use 'lockdown' selfies instead of professional portraits, a necessity that has turned in to a fitting tribute to everyone for playing their part.

This book is about the obstacles and setbacks that have to be navigated through life; none more challenging than we have all experienced together and 'virtually' over the last six months.

Thank you all.

Caroline Marston  
Managing Director and Shareholder - Marston Properties Ltd  
31st October 2020

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Pages 51 - 52:  
Notwithstanding strenuous efforts, it was not  
possible to identify the copyright holders.

1907 ledger kept  
for their father  
by Lily Marston  
age 18 assisted  
by Alice age 14.

