

2. Houses on the Marbury Hall Site

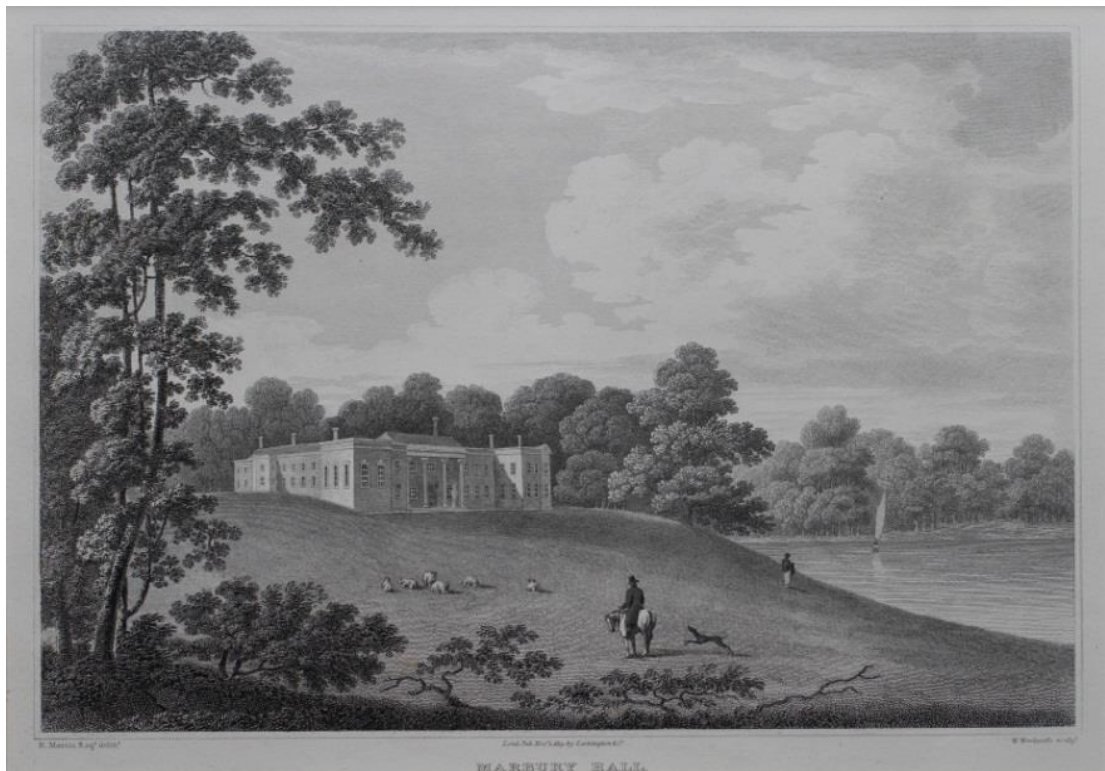
During the 13th Century, the Merburie family built a house, originally of timber and thatch, which was to remain the family home until the last male heir, Richard Marbury, died in 1684. The Marbury family sold the extensive estate to a very wealthy nobleman, Richard Savage. Following Richard's death in 1712, his son-in-law, James, 4th Earl of Barrymore, bought the Marbury estate from the trustees of the will for £21,000 in 1715.

When he first acquired the estate, the hall was a black and white timbered manor house. James encased this in stone and added wings, a portico and stables. An early 18th century description talks of courtyards, orchards, gardens and walks. There was a malthouse, pigeon house, barns, stable, ox house and cow house.



A mural of Marbury Hall, c1740, discovered at Hall Green Farm, Acton Bridge

By 1754, the mansion had more than fifty rooms.



*1819 engraving of the Georgian Mansion
Engraved by William Woolnorth from an original study by R Morris*

James Hugh Smith Barry (1748-1801) travelled extensively in Europe and the Middle East, spending considerable amounts of money building a collection of antiquities and works of art. James did not seem to settle until he inherited the Marbury estate in 1787. He had many plans for alterations although eventually he added only a Saloon. When he died, he requested that his collection was to remain in the family as heirlooms, that a Mausoleum with a vault be built in the grounds at Marbury and a reception room built within the hall to house his collection. James Hugh Smith Barry's eldest (illegitimate) son, John Smith Barry (1793-1837) inherited the estate, but did not carry out the requested building work.

John Smith Barry's eldest son, another James Hugh Smith Barry (1816-1856), inherited the estate in 1837. At the age of 25, in 1841, he married Elizabeth Shallcross Jacson, who shared his interest in architecture. Shortly afterwards he consulted with William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881), a leading landscape gardener. Nesfield said it would be a waste of money to landscape the gardens in such a grand manner when the house itself needed improvement. William Nesfield's sister, Anne Andrews Nesfield, was married to the successful and sought after architect Anthony Salvin (1799-1881). Nesfield suggested that he bring his brother-in-law, Anthony Salvin, to discuss alterations to the house with James.

Salvin's plans to redesign the house in the style of a French chateau, based on the Palace of Fontainebleau, much impressed James. The design had many elegant rooms, a particularly impressive staircase and magnificent plasterwork. The re-modelling started in 1842. Some of the old walls were never pulled down and were incorporated into the new building, but the external walls were all new.

Towards the end of 1842 there was a fire in the saloon. It is not known whether this was related to the work on the house. Many pictures were completely destroyed and others damaged beyond repair. Other articles were also destroyed.

The family lived in the west wing whilst the work was being done: this wing was never pulled down. The east wing lay in ruins for years as this was the last part to be dealt with. The central part of the house was completely re-modelled and the building, when finished, surrounded a massive courtyard on three sides, with a stable block to the west. By the winter of 1847-8 many of the rooms were completed including the dining room, billiard room, library and the hall. It was during 1849 that the situation in Ireland worsened and work stopped on Marbury Hall.

Bagshaw's Directory, 1850 states: *'MARBURY HALL is a spacious and elegant mansion of brick with stone facings, in the French style of architecture, which has been upwards of seven years in building, and considerable alteration, and additions have to be made to this stately residence before it is completed.'*



1850 print from an engraving of the remodelled hall

A gallery was also added to the hall to display the sculptures. It is not known precisely when this work was carried out, but it was certainly after 1850 when it was said: *'the present owner (James Hugh Smith Barry) is about to construct new galleries.....but this must necessarily be a work of considerable time'*.

James Hugh Smith Barry remained at Marbury hall until his death in 1856. Arthur Hugh Smith Barry (1843-1925), James Hugh Smith Barry's eldest son, was the next member of the family to inherit the estate. Arthur became more and more involved with his affairs in Ireland and from 1891 until 1914 he leased Marbury to Arthur Hornby Lewis, a merchant from Liverpool.



Marbury Hall 1898, Northwich Ref: 42146

View of the hall looking down the Carriage Drive

Several aerial photographs of the remodelled hall exist. Dates are not known precisely, but the swimming pool (c1933) had not been built at the time of this photograph, so possible late 1920's or early 1930's.



This shows the steps down to the Mere at the bottom of the photograph, where the Mere bird hide is now situated. The formal gardens lie to the left of the hall and the carriage drive leads from the hall towards the top right of the photograph.

Robert Raymond Smith Barry (1886-1949), was the last of the family to own the Marbury estate, which he inherited on 22 February 1925, following the death of his uncle, Arthur Hugh Smith Barry. In 1925, the same year that he inherited the Marbury estate, Robert leased Conock Manor in Wiltshire and lived there with his wife Charlotte.

Robert was not particularly interested in Marbury and visited only occasionally. He served in World War 1 and became Major Robert Smith-Barry, RFC at the School of Special Flying in Gosport. Locals remember Robert flying his aircraft over the Marbury estate and landing it on the runway he had made in the grounds of the east park, housing the aircraft in a hangar by the east lodge.

Robert decided to sell the Marbury estate and said the sale was due to 'continually increasing burden of taxation and the constant attacks on landlords'. Early in 1932, reports of the sale of the Marbury Estate appeared in several newspapers.

The Leeds Mercury on Friday 5th February 1932 reports:

"Another North-country estate to come into the market owing to heavy taxation is that of Marbury Hall, near Northwich. Formerly the property of Mr Robert Smith-Barry, it has been acquired by Mr T Place of Sowber Gate, Northallerton. The estate includes 27 farms and a large portion of the townships of Weaverham and Comberbach."

Thomas Place bought many large country estates, often splitting them up and selling on quickly, rather than retaining them as long-term investments.

An article in the Liverpool Echo on Friday 29th January 1932 reports:

"Marbury Hall, near Northwich, which was purchased by the Salt Union, Limited, recently, is again on the market. An official of the company told the Echo today that when the Salt Union purchased the adjoining agricultural properties, Marbury Hall was included in the deal. The company, however, do not intend to use the hall in connection with their business, and are now looking for a prospective buyer."

The remaining portions of the Marbury estate were bought by Mr T Place of Northallerton, who has offered the farms and cottages to the existing tenants on reasonable terms."

The Salt Union instructed that the 'Marbury Portion of the Barrymore Estate' be sold by auction on 29th April 1932.

NORTHWICH, CHESHIRE.
On the Outskirts of the Town.

Particulars, Plan and Conditions of Sale of
The Valuable Freehold Agricultural Property
comprising:
THE MARBURY PORTION OF
THE BARRYMORE ESTATE
including:
Seven Capital Mixed Farms
as follows:

	ACRES.
MARBURY MILL	33
CLAYCROFT FARM	97
DAIRY HOUSE FARM	212
STONEHEYS FARM	81
BROOK HOUSE FARM	136
MARBURY HOME FARM	110
UPLANDS FARM	29

The SITE OF MARBURY HALL
With Buildings, Gardens and Parklands — 204 Acres.
7 Cottages & Valuable Accommodation Lands
The Whole Extending to an Area of some
908 Acres.

HENRY MANLEY & SONS, LTD.
E. Manley, F.A.I. E. E. Wright, F.A.I.

are instructed by THE SALT UNION, to offer the above Estate for
Sale by Auction
At the CROWN & ANCHOR HOTEL, NORTHWICH.
On Friday, 29th April, 1932, at 3 o'clock, subject to conditions.

Copies of these Particulars and further information may be obtained from
the Auctioneers' Offices, Northwich (Tel. 19) and Market Drayton, Shropshire,
Northwich and Crewe, or from the Solicitors:
Messrs. BATESONS & Co., 14 Castle Street, Liverpool (Tel. Bank 615).

The Hall and Parkland were purchased by George Smith, a Warrington builder. The Crewe Chronicle on Saturday 22nd July 1933 included an article about a reception of newspaper representatives held by George's son, Sydney Smith and reports Sydney as saying:

"The estate of the Marbury family was disposed of about 12 months ago by private treaty, and the hall and park, together with the mere, were purchased by his father, Mr George Smith, with a view to demolishing the mansion and breaking up the estate for building development."

However, the family decided to establish a Country Club on the estate, which opened officially on 22 September 1933.

In 1940, Marbury Hall and Park was requisitioned by the army for the war effort, initially housing British and American soldiers. Huts were built in the park and the American Army made roadways for their trucks. Some of these tarmac roads are still in evidence today. The Polish Free Army was stationed at the hall and, later in the war, Marbury became a Prisoner of War camp.

In 1948, ICI bought Marbury Hall and Park. They used the hall as a hostel for employees and the huts were converted into temporary dwellings, which were used initially to house their employees. Eventually these became available for families waiting for council housing. The last of the families moved out in 1966.



View of the east side of the hall



View of the south side of the hall

The Hall and land immediately surrounding it was sold in 1961 to Lesley Fink and Company, a property developer from Manchester, who said their concept was to turn the Hall into offices or flats. ICI retained the swimming pool and the east side of the parkland.

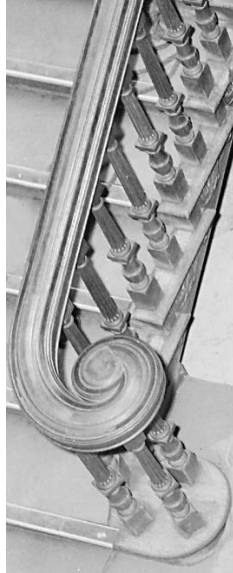


Starting to suffer neglect

Lesley Fink and Company never undertook the work to convert the Hall into offices or flats and the condition of the Hall continued to deteriorate.



Neglected and no longer weather-tight



Handrail and balustrade detail from Hall staircase



Plasterwork detail

These pictures, showing examples of the elaborate plasterwork, were supplied by Len Morton, who took them two weeks before the hall was demolished.

In July 1968, the developer, Leslie Fink and Company, applied to the Council for the hall to be demolished owing to dry rot caused by neglect.

New powers had been given to Local Authorities for the preservation of historic buildings under the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act, which came into effect on 1st January 1969. These powers came too late for Marbury as consent for the demolition had been given prior to the passing of the Act.

These photographs were taken on 4 January 1969, just before demolition, and show clearly the extent of neglect.



Main staircase looking towards hall



Hall – once used as the sculpture gallery



Library



Entrance hall from Mere

The hall's inglorious end came in January 1969 when, suffering from vandalism, damp, 'galloping rot' and neglect, it was pulled down.





Demolition of Marbury Hall

The remains of the house were collapsed into the cellars, where they remain today. Nikolaus Pevsner described Marbury Hall as “quite a document of architectural history” and called its demolition “a great pity”.

No sign of the house itself still exists following its demolition. However, raised terraces, a pair of rusticated gate piers, stone walls, the arboretum and walled garden still exist within Marbury Country Park. The walled garden is now a garden centre. Dead trees in the Lime Avenues were replanted and the avenues were renamed Queen Elizabeth Avenue to commemorate the 80th birthday of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother in 1980.