



TRAFALGAR PARK History

A brief social and architectural history:

Trafalgar Park was originally known as Standlynch House or Park and was built for Sir Peter Vandeput in 1733 to designs by John James of Greenwich as a villa overlooking the River Avon.

Domesday - Tudor – Elizabethan – Stuart

Standlynch is first mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. During the Tudor period the Standlynch estate was owned by the Beachamp family followed by the Greene family through the Elizabethan reign; by the 17th Century the Bucklands owned Standlynch Manor which was situated beside Standlynch Church and the River Avon. The Church, still part of the estate today, was itself founded in 1146 and rebuilt in 1677 by Maurice Buckland's wife, Joan, in memory of her father, Col. John Penruddock who had been 'beheaded for fighting in the King's Cause' by Cromwell prior to the Restoration.

Georgian

In 1726 Sir Peter Vandeput, who had received his baronetcy in 1723, purchased the Standlynch estate probably due to the close proximity to Longford Castle, just three miles away, which had been acquired by the Bouverie family in 1717 – both were Huguenot families and had fled the Duke of Alva's religious persecution in France and the Low Countries. The Bouveries and the Vandeputs had been successful merchants in the City and had moved to Twickenham.

Sir Peter must have intended to re-model Standlynch Manor as he commissioned Charles Bridgeman to create a new garden layout with walkways, formal grounds and a 'Roman' amphitheatre – which commenced but was abandoned in favour of building a much grander 'villa' on the crest of the hill. So it is probable that Sir Peter wanted a country villa as a place at which to entertain and visit rather than run as a country estate. The manor and village were demolished to ensure proper views for the new house down to the River and the hills beyond – with only the Church and Mill surviving.



The Arts - Music, Painting & Literature



The Cipriani Room

John James of Greenwich had gained great respect as an architect by designing St. George's Church in Hanover Square and the re-building of Twickenham Church – which is most likely how he met Sir Peter whose sister had married the architect, Roger Morris. James was inspired by the works of Inigo Jones which is why he commissioned the marble bust of Jones to be placed above the principal fireplace in the Baroque Hall. He followed the design of the Queen's House, Greenwich at Standlynch with a substantial 30-foot cube rococo plastered Hall to impress the visitor upon arrival.

In 1748 Sir Peter died, leaving Standlynch Park to his son George who also inherited the baronetcy; however, Sir George Vandeput had ambitions to enter Parliament, and, in an expensive bid to oust the sitting MP for Westminster, was left financially stretched – which resulted in his selling the estate to Sir William Young in 1752 who held it briefly before selling it on to Henry Dawkins in about 1765.

Henry Dawkins and his brother James were born on their father's sugar plantation on Jamaica; Henry had completed his Grand Tour in 1750. James Dawkins had travelled extensively with Robert Wood discovering the ruins of Palmyra and visiting the ruins of Balbec; they also sponsored James 'Athenian' Stuart and Nicholas Revett on their trip to Athens and Delos.

Henry Dawkins married Lady Juliana Colyear (daughter of the Earl of Portmore), became the Member of Parliament for Southampton, and acquired Standlynch Park. In 1766 he transformed the 'villa' into the 'country house' that we enjoy today by commissioning John Wood the Younger (of Bath) to add a pair of substantial pavilions to the North and South. Further, he engaged Nicholas Revett to embellish the house, including the new Portico, Library and internal plasterwork. Revett took the design for the Portico directly from the Temple of Apollo on Delos and introduced a classical 'monumental' corridor into the North Wing – thereby bringing some of the first examples of the Greek Revivalist period in England. The highly fashionable Giovanni Battista Cipriani was commissioned to paint the Music Room in which he depicted the Arts, Venus and Shakespeare. Also within the painting is a sketch of the Music Temple which Revett went on to build at West Wycombe Park together with the substantial West Portico for Sir Francis Dashwood in 1770 – a fellow member of the Society of Dilettante.

Henry Dawkins had eight sons and three daughters. This might leave one to surmise that he used and enjoyed Standlynch to the full, embracing his family, politics and the Dilettante. By the time of his death, in 1814, Dawkins also owned estates in Wales and Oxfordshire and under the terms of his Will commanded the Standlynch estate to be sold. The estate was then purchased by the Nation and given to the heirs of Nelson.

The pinnacle and final act of Admiral Viscount Nelson was encapsulated at the Battle of Trafalgar off the Spanish Coast in 1805. His death and great victory had captured the imagination of the British people who wanted to honour him. Horatio Nelson's colourful personal life left behind his widow but no children by the marriage; the Admiral's famous relationship with Lady Hamilton left illegitimate issue in the form of Horatia. The closest male relative was Horatio's elder brother, the Rev. William Nelson who, by all accounts, was a somewhat pushy and ungenerous character. Nevertheless, he was created Earl Nelson in 1806 and assumed Horatio's other titles including the Duke of Bronte in Sicily.

But what was an Earl to do without an estate ? This was a point consistently made by the new Earl Nelson until Parliament eventually agreed to fund the purchase of a suitable estate in 1813 as a lasting tribute to Admiral Nelson and the heirs of his family. In 1814, the Standlynch estate became identified as the appropriate gift which, by Act of Parliament, required the name of 'Trafalgar' to be instated. Thereafter, the name of Trafalgar House or Trafalgar Park appeared on all subsequent maps and the Earl was installed into a life to which he became comfortably accustomed. (His nephew, Thomas Bolton, subsequently married Frances Eyre who owned to adjoining estate and who was the eventual heir).



The Bust of Admiral Nelson in the Staircase Hall



A view of the west front of Trafalgar Park

The pronunciation of 'Trafalgar' must also be understood – for it takes the Spanish form of 'Traf – al – gaar' which is how Nelson would have recognised it. In turn, the Spanish took the word from the Arabic description of the Bay to the West of Cadiz – literally, 'the peninsula of the furthest point' that is ' Al Taraf al alghar' (Taraf means peninsula in Arabic).

Victorian - Edwardian

Earl Nelson's male heir died in 1808; despite a second marriage to Hilare there was no male heir, and so, upon his death in 1835, the estate was passed to Thomas Bolton, the son of the Nelsons' sister Susannah, who changed his family name to Nelson and inherited the Earldom. He died later that same year and so his son, Horatio, the 3rd Earl at the age of 12 inherited Trafalgar Park. The 3rd Earl played an active role in his local community and commissioned William Butterworth to remodel Standlynch Church and lay out a new garden plan for the house as seen now. He died at the age of 90 in 1913 – and the obelisk erected in his memory- by which time two of his sons had predeceased him without issue. (The first Earl Nelson's daughter, Charlotte, married Samuel, 2nd Viscount Bridport – and succeeded the Dukedom of Bronte).

20th Century

Thomas, the 4th Earl was a Roman Catholic, through his mother, Mary, and so had Standlynch Church rededicated to Mary Queen of Angels and St. Michael and All the Angels, served by a resident priest. In 1929 he purchased the panelling of the Captain's Cabin of the HMS Ganges, built in 1821, which was being broken up. He installed the panelling in the principal top floor room at Trafalgar. During the Second World War the North and South Wings were occupied by tenants with the bachelor Nelson brothers in the main house. Following the death of Thomas in 1947, his brother, Edward, the 5th Earl, inherited the estate. A combination of Death Duties and the cancellation of the annual Government Nelson Pension, granted in 1806, by the incoming post-War Labour Administration caused the estate to be put up for sale.

In 1948 the 10th Duke of Leeds acquired Trafalgar Park largely as a tax mitigation arrangement. His son in law, Oliver Lyttleton, became the Duke's tenant and pursued a political career in the House of Commons before being elevated to the Lords as Viscount Chandos. However, in 1953, the estate had been sold to the neighbouring Longford Castle estate of Viscount Folkestone (later the 8th Earl of Radnor) leaving its sitting tenant in the house on rather favourable terms – which led to the house being sold to Oliver Lyttleton with just 10 acres of land.

Viscount Chandos sold Trafalgar House in 1971 to City financier, Jeremy Pinckney, who lived there with his family until 1977 when he sold it to Tertius Murray-Threipland. The Stable Block was converted into offices for Mr. Murray-Threipland's business and he married Claire, Countess of Pembroke, who moved into Trafalgar with their children by previous respective marriages including her son, William, the current Earl of Pembroke of Wilton House. In 1992 the house was sold to Mr. Gunnar Bengtsson – a Swedish entrepreneur with a passion for Nelson who owned such hotels as the Victory and Lady Hamilton in Stockholm. His plans to convert the house and stable block fell victim to the economic recession – and so the house was again put on the market.

21st Century

In 1995 Michael Wade, another City merchant - from the Lloyd's insurance market – with musical interests, acquired the house but by which time it was truly jaded. The North Wing had been dis-used since 1948 and was deteriorating rapidly; the South Wing largely abandoned and the centre block, electricity disconnected, in need of refurbishment and restoration. Michael Wade is a descendent of a long line of shipbuilders – who built ships including the HMS Ganges – and whose Coat of Arms opposite includes the HMS Asia launched in 1824. He married Dr Caroline Dashwood, the daughter of Sir Francis Dashwood Bt of West Wycombe in 1997 and so their son, Alexander, already has some interesting associations with Trafalgar Park emanating from both sides of his family.





Venus by Cipriani

Current progress & activities

A helpful relationship was struck with the Longford Estate which enabled vital parkland to be transferred back to the estate together with Standlynch Church; in turn this enabled a new driveway to be constructed from the East across the repatriated park and the parkland opened up adjacent to the house – and the estate reviving its name of Trafalgar Park.

Mains water was installed and all key roofing repairs executed; this has been followed by the restoration of the Cipriani Room and Saloon. The 1950's kitchen and breakfast room have been removed from the South Wing corridor link thereby restoring the walkway through to the C18th Dining Room – and a family kitchen created in the South Wing also giving the house a practical secondary entrance. The collapsed South Wing ground-works have been rebuilt.

Permission to construct a pair of lodges at the new driveway has been granted and the south Stable Block has been refurbished as offices. There are plans to restore the Standlynch Church windows and building for occasional use. One day it might be possible to bring in more of the parkland and replant to a coherent new plan for future generations – so an unfolding vision is developing. Since 1995 a range of activities have taken place at Trafalgar Park; films such as *Sense & Sensibility*, *Emma* and *28 Days Later* have been made, numerous charitable events have been hosted for local organisations involving thousands of visitors, an opera series continues, occasional conferences and weddings also take place. Visiting groups are welcomed by prior arrangement. Trafalgar Park is now evolving a new role within it's community whilst also generating income to sustain it.

...and to the future

As with many of Britain's great private houses it is necessary for them to adapt the architecture for successor generations to enable the buildings, rather than the land, to earn funds both to improve and maintain them. Politicians are creating huge burdens for owners in the quest to find sound economic solutions as they pile on endless regulations and adverse tax treatment – to name but a few: the Licensing Act, the Health & Safety rules, Fire Regulations, Disabled Access, Business Rates, VAT, employment taxes and the taxation of income generated before it can be applied to a restoration project.

In the case of Trafalgar Park, perhaps the main conundrum relates to its North Wing. Practically derelict for over 50 years, the most useful facility would be to remodel the interior to create an auditorium or ballroom of double height – which could be used for concerts, dinners, conferences and other income generating events appropriate for the house. Some heritage experts seek restoration of the suite of rooms to the C18th plan which suggests residential visitors or office use if income is to be achieved. The unresolved debate rumbles on.

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