

The Landmark Trust

MARSHAL WADE'S HOUSE, ABBEY CHURCHYARD, BATH

Marshal Wade's House was acquired by the Landmark Trust in 1975, as a charity that rescues historic buildings and gives them a new life by letting them for holidays. In its fine position close to the Abbey, this house represents an important example of early 18th-century urban architecture in the Palladian style. It is a rare survival in Bath being built before the grand expansion of the city masterminded by the John Woods, Older and Younger. Tradition has long associated the house with Marshal Wade, so it is curious that there is no evidence that he ever held the lease of No 14. The freehold belonged to the Abbey until the early 20th century, and his name does not appear in any of its very complete records, although at least one biography states that he died there in 1748. However, it is difficult to imagine the house being given so fine a front without the influence of someone familiar with Palladian architecture, which Wade undoubtedly was at that early stage. The likelihood is that he took lodgings there - possibly most of the house which was larger at that time.

George Wade was elected MP for Bath in 1722 and this would seem the most likely date for him to set up a permanent residence here. The next year he asked Lord Burlington to design him a London house in Great Burlington Street and it has been suggested that Burlington was responsible for the Bath house too. But the house in Abbey Churchyard is not the work of a purist. It is more likely to be by a local builder/mason working from Plate 50, Volume I of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, of which the list of subscribers includes the name Thomas Greenway. An architect as well as mason practising from c1704 until c1727, he built a number of small-scale Palladian essays including the Cold Bath House at Widcombe, an Assembly Room and General Wolfe's House in Trim Street, as well as 13, Abbey Churchyard next door. All have a faintly Baroque feel – bolection architraves are found on Wolfe's house; at the group he built in St John's Court; and at the Cold Bath. The Ionic capitals on Wolfe's House along with the other Orders on No 13, although less elaborate than those on Wade's House, are like them curiously undersized. The case for Greenway is by no means water-tight but he seems to be a more likely candidate than any of his Bath contemporaries.

George Wade, a keen amateur architectural enthusiast and friend of Ralph Allen of Prior Park, is much better known in his military connection. He commanded as a general officer in the Scottish Highlands during the pacification after 1715 and between 1726- 37 he executed the great military roads through the Highlands. In 1744 he was in the Netherlands and in 1745 his army in Yorkshire was evaded by the Pretender on his march south. Marshal Wade died in 1748 and an engraving of c1750 shows his Bath house with a shop on the ground floor. Later in the century the Cheap Street front was demolished with part of the house. Around 1810-1820 the large first floor room was formed and the existing shop front inserted. In 1920 Mr Dyte bought the freehold, and that family continued there until 1961 when they sold the house to Cyril Howe's photography shop. The Landmark Trust bought the Churchyard side from him in 1975. The ground and first floors are now let to the National Trust and above we have made a new set of comfortable lodgings for visitors to Bath.

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RESTORATION BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

In 1975 the interiors needed some repair. The shop and the fine room above it had been used as the photographer's studio, with polystyrene tiles stuck to the ceiling and the windows blacked out. But the original decoration and architectural detail was still there, and simply needed sympathetic treatment to enable the rooms to speak for themselves again. Throughout the building, the pine panelling was stripped of wallpaper and painted as it would originally have been; oak floors were uncovered and polished, fireplaces removed for their hiding places and repaired. The windows had all been renewed at some point but the dummy window on the top floor still had its original thick glazing bars and this was used as the pattern for renewing the rest.

The only structural alterations were those needed to block off the shop from the staircase; and the removal of a staircase leading from the shop to the basement, which took up valuable floor space. Of course there was also the introduction of modern services to be thought of and the fitting out of the shop, as described at the time by Mr David Brain, the architect responsible.

The works included the complete renewal of services and the necessary treatment and reinstatement throughout to put the whole building in first class order, whilst retaining everything worthwhile from earlier times. Considerable ingenuity was used in several ways to achieve this. For instance in the flat, in order to expose and keep as much as possible of the panelling, a complete kitchen was purpose made in the form of an island unit placed centrally in the room.

In the lower floors, much rich decorative plasterwork has been cleaned and restored. The shop fitting inside has been carried out in a manner in keeping with the several surviving Regency features, and the shop front itself has been restored to its original appearance. Glazing bars have been reinstated and much architectural detail in the enriched mouldings has been cleaned and revealed and the whole decorated in such a manner as to expose it once again to its former magnificence.

The interior would thus have satisfied the Marshal himself and was to be enjoyed by many over the next few years, but the state of the front still gave cause for concern. In 1979 it was decided that something must be done to stop the erosion of the stone work, which was rapidly crumbling away. The work was too delicate to withstand the sand-blasting or fierce acids most commonly used for such cleaning work. The stonework was first washed with an intermittent spray of water, to soften the black encrustation and wash out damaging salts with a minimum amount of water. The sculptured decoration was given an extra cleansing by applying a poultice of newly-slaked lime directly to its surface, an even gentler method of softening the encrustation (in some places 2" thick) and removing the hard chemical surface skin.

To prevent any further erosion and decay, the facade was flooded with about twenty applications of lime water to replace the calcium which had been dissolved from the weaker parts. Projecting mouldings were covered with lead to throw off the rain. Lastly the surface of the stone was treated with a very thin coat of slaked lime and stone dust to fill any remaining cavities. Finally the stone urns, the detail copied from those at Widcombe Manor, were reinstated.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Marshal Wade's House sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.