

The Landmark Trust

THE MUSIC ROOM, SUN STREET, LANCASTER

Like so many Landmarks, plenty of questions remain unanswered about the Music Room. It was built in about 1730 as a garden pavilion, probably for Oliver Marton, a prosperous lawyer of the Middle Temple, London. He lived at 76 Church Street, Lancaster, an early 18th century house, which he had purchased in 1723. As well as a garden behind this house, he owned a much larger one behind the Sun Inn on the opposite side of the street.

We do not know who designed the Music Room. Oliver Marton was on friendly terms with Edward Harley, the 2nd Earl of Oxford (his will records that Lady Oxford gave him a present of a silver cup), and although there is no evidence for it, this aristocratic connection may account for the unexpected sophistication of the Music Room. Marton died in 1744 and the house and its gardens were inherited by his eldest son Edward, who remained a bachelor until his death in 1758 when the property passed to his youngest and only surviving brother, the Rev. Dr Oliver Marton, who was vicar of Lancaster and squire of Capernwray Hall.

The Music Room was almost certainly not built for listening to music - indeed its name is probably a corruption of 'Muses Room' as the nine Muses decorate the walls. Instead, it would have been used simply as an outdoor sitting room from which to view the garden, and also possibly to watch the playing of bowls (a bowling green is marked on a map dated 1776). Being on the first floor it would allow family and guests to look down onto a comparatively formal garden which was still the fashionable style in the early 18th century, before the arrival of 'natural' theories of landscaping when such formal gardens were swept away all over England, and with them very often such similar summerhouses.

We are also not sure who was responsible for executing such splendid plasterwork but a strong contender is the 'stuccadoro', Francesco Vassalli, who is known to have been working at other houses in Lancashire in the 1730s. The uncertainty remains because such Italian craftsmen often worked as partners in a team and it is equally possible that Vassalli's assistant, Quadri, or the Franchini brothers were responsible. Zeus and Mnemosyne's nine daughters grace the walls - the Muses: Calliope (eloquence), Clio (history), Euterpe (music), Urania (astronomy), Melpomene (tragedy), Polyhymnia (rhetoric), Terpsichore (dancing), Thalia (comedy) and Erato (amorous poetry). Apollo presides over the fireplace and Ceres commands the ceiling.

After Dr Marton's death, the garden overlooked by his Music Room was sold for development and by the end of the 18th century there were plots that went right up to its walls. During the 19th century the Music Room was owned by the Seward family, who ran a stained glass, leaded lights and ironworks business in Sun Street that had been established in 1778. Despite the first floor being used at one stage as the local Masonic lodge, the Music Room declined from 18th-century elegance into 19th-century industrial mire and it was used as a factory. When A Seward and Co. went into liquidation in 1934, the Misses Seward bought a parcel of land which included the Music Room. Eventually the site, including several buildings, was bought by the Willans in the 1950s and they were the owners when the Landmark Trust first heard of it in the early 1970s.

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REPAIRS BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

The Music Room was in an appalling condition when it came to Landmark. Nikolaus Pevsner in his *Buildings of England* series fumed about the condition of what he considered the finest interior in the town - "The main room inside was on the first floor - was, because it is now so decayed that there can be no hope of saving it. It is a disgrace ...It is no good saying more. In a few years it will all have disappeared."

One reason it was so decayed is that the Music Room had other buildings hard up against it on all four sides and was reached by walking through the toy warehouse of which it formed a part. Landmark had to buy all these, which took several years, and demolish them before the builders could gain access. The building had a temporary roof, many of the windows were broken and even the fine facade had a lean-to building half covering it. Working with architect Edward Mason of Charles B Pearson Son & Partners of Lancaster and Thompson and Jackson, our builders, Landmark set about a comprehensive repair programme.

The stone work on the front had to be extensively repaired and then cleaned. The roof was renewed and the side and back walls repointed. There was evidence for at least three different types of glazing bar for the windows, and we settled on the oldest, a thick one typical of the early 18th-century style. There were three windows at attic level - we enlarged one, unblocked the second and moved the position of the third. The parapet was also rebuilt. The ground floor loggia was made into a shop by glazing the central Ionic arch, and removing an inserted floor, to introduce a gallery instead.

Inside, the stairs were renewed and new accommodation was created in the attic with new doors and partitions throughout. In the Music Room itself a new oak floor was laid, a marble hearth inserted, and the door and panelling all fireproofed. Lighting was concealed behind the cornice. The plasterwork of the Music Room, an exceptional Baroque interior, took 6,000 hours of work to repair and for this we used a specialist firm, Allied Guilds of Sutton Coldfield. Wherever possible the fallen fragments were reused, with carefully matched new sections where it was not possible. One of the nine Muses, Terpsichore, had completely disappeared and so our plasterers recreated her from scratch. She was described by Landmark's then historian, Charlotte Haslam, as "a modern girl, big and busty, with a cheerful eye."

With the City's help, Landmark then created a quiet pedestrian square in the opened area in front, from which the Music Room's refinement may be admired.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The Music Room sleeps up to 2 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk