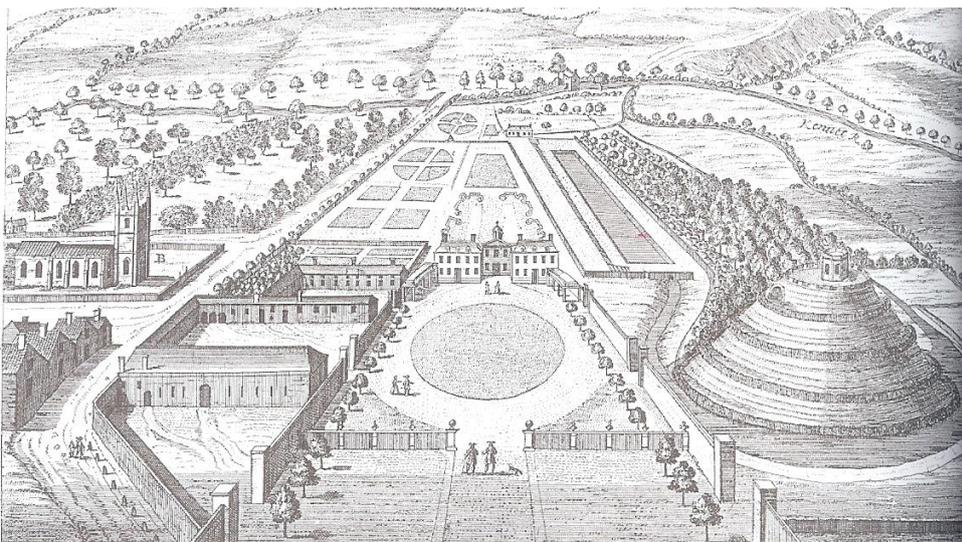


Marlborough, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

Marlborough became a town in the eleventh century, although its precise origins are in doubt. William the Conqueror moved the mint to it from Bedwyn, and a reference to a bishop being imprisoned in Marlborough is usually taken to mean that he had built a castle, although one is not referred to directly in a document until 1138. There was somewhere for King Henry I to stay when he visited Marlborough in 1110, however, and there was a prison then, according to an early twelfth-century source. The earliest, eleventh-century, place-name spelling, *Merleberge*, suggests an already prominent *beorge*, barrow/hill, rather than *burh* (as in Amesbury or Malmesbury: see on-line entries); the name might refer to the steep slope up from the River Kennet, what is now Kingsbury Street, or to a 20-metre high mound in the college grounds (private). Drilled cores taken from the latter recently have given mid third millennium B.C. dates, favouring a long-held belief that it is a prehistoric monument (Leary et al. 2013) and to be seen as one of three great Wiltshire prehistoric mounds, the others being Silbury Hill and one inside Marden henge (see on-line entries).

The mound was converted by the Normans into a motte for their castle, which was a civil war stronghold in the twelfth century, and was much frequented by royal visitors in the thirteenth. The inner bailey is obscured, but excavation found a 4-metre deep ditch 200 metres north of the motte, suggesting a second, outer bailey incorporating St Peter and St Paul's Church and some medieval tenements (Heaton and Moffatt 2001). The mound is now surrounded by buildings, and recent geophysical survey in such areas as are still open ground unsurprisingly found nothing that could with certainty be related to the castle.

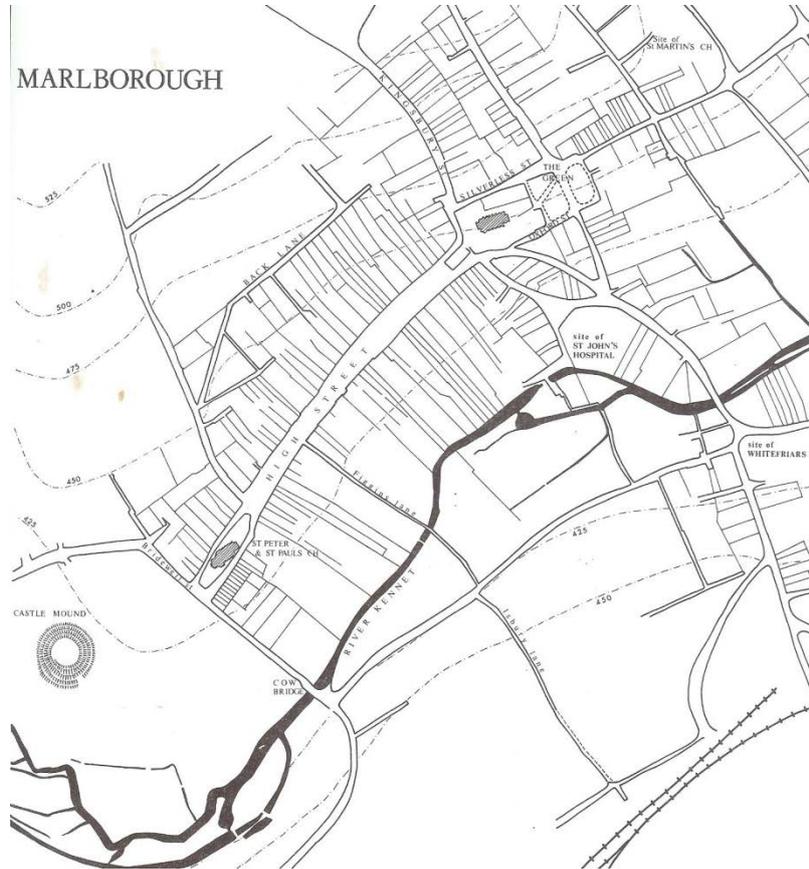
The castle had little fourteenth-century relevance and was left to decay. The site was acquired by the Seymours in the mid sixteenth century, and a grand brick-built mansion was



begun at the very end of the seventeenth (illus. by William Stukeley, 1723). The grounds were landscaped, and the motte became a garden feature, with a spiral walk up to a

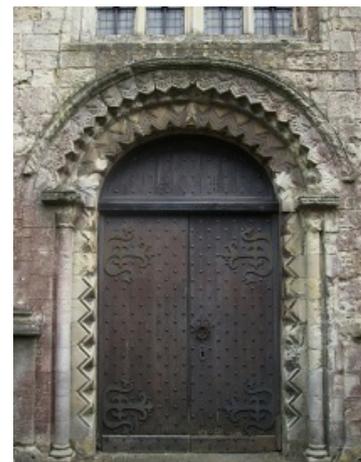
temple on the summit, and a cascade that is no longer operative. The site was acquired for the College in 1843; the mansion survives as one side of the school's quadrangle (private).

Marlborough's main settlement area may have shifted, perhaps like Amesbury, in this case from an area north of the crossing of the Kennet and of St Mary's Church, where Kingsbury Street is a name that may indicate a royal vill in the mid Saxon period, as postulated for instance in Wilton (Haslam 1976, 41; map, p. 83). If so, a market-place would have been to the east of the church, around 'The Green' On the other hand, nothing earlier than the twelfth century was found in



excavation in the Kingsbury Street area in 2012 (Cotter 2013), and the earliest part of St Mary's is twelfth-century, not Anglo-Saxon (photograph of the Romanesque west door of St Mary's by Poliphilo, reproduced under common licence from Wikimedia). It is not known when a Roman statue of a deity, the goddess Fortuna, probably taken from nearby *Cunetio* (see on-line entry), was put into the church, but in the Middle Ages it was probably thought to be a statue of Our Lady, to whom the church is dedicated.

A second area of growth was adjacent to the castle and the church of St Peter and St Paul. It was between these two foci that the grand market-place was laid out, with a series of long urban tenements running back on both sides. It is difficult to date this development, but none of the later medieval institutions, two hospitals, priories and friaries, were amongst the houses, suggesting that the market-place predates them, which in turn would indicate that it was planned and laid out in the twelfth century, when there is documentary evidence for royal support for the town. It was granted a merchant guild in 1163, confirmed in 1204, and in 1220 the burgesses were privileged with exemption from all tolls at Southampton, the nearest port. Continued expansion resulted in the construction of a new chapel, dedicated to St Martin, to cater for the growth of the town's eastern suburb. Its status as a chapel within the parish of Preshute reflected its later date of foundation, as by the



thirteenth century it had become much more difficult to create a new, independent parish, depriving another of income from tithes and burial rights.

The town would have fulfilled a variety of functions. Situated at the junction of the rivers Og and Kennet, it was well placed as a market centre for a prosperous agricultural area, as well as to service the castle. In the twelfth century it possessed a significant cloth industry producing poor-quality burrels. By 1379 its main industry seems to have been leather tanning, although still with some cloth production. But in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries it flourished as a centre of the cloth industry, part of the growing Kennet, Thames and north Hampshire industry. It supplanted Wilton as the second most important town in Wiltshire, and was also second only to Salisbury for trade with Southampton, rising by the time of the 1524/5 tax assessments to 66th by population and 43rd by wealth in England. It was a major centre for the fish trade from Southampton and also imported wine on a substantial scale.



Photograph of Marlborough from the tower of St Peter and St Paul, looking east over the A4 and the market-place. On market days, stalls replace the parked cars, filling the space as they would have done in the Middle Ages (reproduced by courtesy of Brian Marshall, accessed from Wikimedia)

A fire in 1635 destroyed most of St Mary's, and many houses. A few medieval buildings survive in part, but those facing the market-place had to be rebuilt and present a range of different façades to the street, although some still show the widths of the earlier medieval tenements. One that was built immediately after the fire is The Merchant House in the High Street, which retains a fine oak staircase and some oak panelling and wall-painting of the period.

During the eighteenth century, the roads into Marlborough were improved by turnpike trusts, so that all but local traffic used what is now the A4 London road, and a new street was created to improve the route down to the bridge at the east end of the town. Inns to serve the coaches developed along it, and in the market-place, at the end of which the town hall is an early twentieth-century town hall encroachment. The traffic that had brought

prosperity from travellers stopping to trade and for refreshment became increasingly a bane, and there was even a plan to demolish St Peter and St Paul's church to remove one bottleneck, but the M40 came in time to save the town's character.

Overlooking the south end of the town is the Preshute white horse, cut in 1804, one of several in Wiltshire that celebrate the Hanoverian royal family (Edwards 2005; and see Marden on-line entry).

References and further reading:

- COTTER, J. 2013. Medieval and post-medieval activity at Kingsbury Hill House, Marlborough, Wiltshire, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 106, 267-72
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- HEATON, M. AND MOFFAT, B. 2001. A possible outer ditch to Marlborough Castle: excavations at Marlborough College pool, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 95, 100-6
- LEARY, J. et al. 2013. The Marlborough mound, Wiltshire. A further Neolithic monumental mound by the River Kennet, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 79, 137-63

These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent research to archaeological understanding of the county. The notes on Marlborough were prepared by John Hare and David A. Hinton. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site.