



BOSTON MANOR HOUSE

History

Boston Manor House is a Grade 1 listed building dating from 1623. Although an earlier house existed at Boston Manor nothing is known about its architecture. In 1623 Lady Mary Reade, a young widow (born Mary Goldsmith in Suffolk), had the house built, and her initials and this date can be seen in the corners of the elaborate plaster ceiling in the State Drawing Room on the first floor. It is not known who the architect was. Much of the subsequent architectural history of the house is conjectural, but we know that it was substantially enlarged in 1670, when James Clitherow, a City merchant (younger son of a former Lord Mayor of London) purchased the house for £5,136. The Clitherow family remained the occupants for more than two and a half centuries until the house was sold to the local council in 1924 for £23,000. Around the same date the contents of the house were dispersed at auction.

The House was renovated in the early 1960s, with further restoration to the ground floor in the late 1990s funded by the Brentford Single Regeneration Bid and Section 106 monies. Some 80 works from Hounslow's collection of local pictures are on display at the House.

Exterior

The House is a three-storied mansion of red brick and stone with straight-sided gables. Four old rain water heads can be seen, three dated 1622 and one 1670. The entrance porch was added in the early 19th century. The architraves to the windows on the ground and first floors, and the bold entablature between the first and second floors (interrupted at the rear by a staircase window) date from the period of James Clitherow's alterations following his purchase of the house in 1670. Looking at the front of the house (from the Boston Manor Road side), it is thought that the right hand part (under the third gable from the left) is an addition of circa 1670. The service wing to the right is of a later period. The park landscape contains some ancient cedar trees and a lake.

Entrance Hall and Dining Room

The entrance hall was re-modelled in the early 19th century. The stone screen probably dates from this period.



The plaster ceiling, until recently, was thought to be 19th century; however it is now believed to date from 1623, despite being in a somewhat older style than the State Drawing Room ceiling of the same period.

On your left on entering the building is the Dining Room, which has a marble fireplace with a painted surround showing entwined Clitherow initials. The room has been restored and is painted Naples yellow, pre restoration paint analysis revealed it had been painted in the early 19th century when this colour was very much in vogue. In 1834 King William IV and Queen Adelaide, friends of the Clitherows, came to dine here, a rare instance of a reigning monarch dining at the house of a commoner - for although the Clitherows were wealthy gentry they did not hold any titles of nobility.

The Library

Unfortunately the Library is closed at present.

The Staircase

The main staircase is of oak and is part of the original Jacobean house. The lions on the newel posts were added in the 19th century. The balustrade is reflected in the painted trompe l'oeil on the other side of the stairs, and was uncovered during restoration, as was the 18th century wallpaper to be seen from the half-landing between the first and second floors.

First Floor: State Drawing Room

The magnificent plaster ceiling is an intricate geometrical design divided by moulded bands decorated with a floral pattern. It has been remarked that the design resembles those of 17th century parterre gardens. The panels depict the Five Senses (Sight, Taste, Touch, Hearing and Smell), the four elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water), the three Virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity, Peace and Plenty, and War and Peace). Some of these inscriptions are in Latin, others in English. Of these figures all are female, except for War, possibly a reflection that the ceiling was commissioned by a woman, Lady Mary Reade, in 1623.

There are also some smaller figures representing Time (as a winged cherub and as Old Father Time) at one end of the room. In all there are 37 panels in this ceiling including a number containing emblematic devices and animals and birds. We do not know which craftsman was responsible for the ceiling but stylistic similarities have been noted with ceilings at Bury Hall in Edmonton and the Priory in Tottenham.

The plaster overmantel above the fireplace contains a central medallion showing Abraham about to sacrifice his son Isaac but being stopped by an angel. The inscription ***In the Mount of the Lord it shal be seene***, a quotation from the Genesis account of this biblical story, has been ingeniously shortened to fit the panel.

First floor: State Bedroom

The ceiling here is also elaborately decorated but includes only one figure, that of Spes (Latin for Hope). Above the fireplace is a portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller of Christopher Clitherow; nearby is a portrait of his great-grandson, James Clitherow, at the age of 18, painted by George Romney. A recent addition is a copy of a portrait (now in the Frick Collection in New York) by Gainsborough of Mrs. Peter William Baker - formerly Jane Clitherow, sister of the James Clitherow in the Romney portrait. Off this room is a small ante-room which has a plain ceiling.



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Boston Manor House: a note on the architecture

“Besides gaining the loyalty of their occupants and visitors, old buildings that stay in use rise to other freedoms. By spanning generations, they transcend style and turn it into history. The tiresome furniture of one’s grandparents is put into storage to be rediscovered by one’s grandchildren. The Baroque wing that once was thought so marvellous, then became risible, now is honoured for its contrast to later additions. By showing a tangible deep history, the building proposes an equally deep future and summons the taking of long term responsibility from its occupants.” **Stewart Brand, How Buildings Learn, Penguin, 1995**

Boston Manor House was built for Lady Mary Reade, whose initials and the date 1623 appears on the ceiling of the State Drawing Room. In its original form, imagine a Jacobean-looking cube, i.e. square on plan and elevation, topped by two gables on each façade, windows on all sides, a staircase in the north west corner, and a massive core of fireplaces and chimney stacks. On the south façade there are remains of a small circular window, long blocked up, evidence that the window detailing may have been very different at this time.

In 1671, 48 years later, James Clitherow, second owner of the house, recorded expenditure of £1,439 on restoration and repairs. This (then substantial) sum would seem to have covered the cost of expanding the house to the north with a large addition blended with the original work and topped by more gables. So the east (front) façade presented a pleasing 3-bay symmetry, a desirable asset now that the classical ideals of the Italian High Renaissance were appearing in built form in England with the work of fashionable architects like Inigo Jones, John Webb and Roger Pratt.

But note, the house in its expanded form is not quite symmetrical! Stand in front of the east (front) façade and observe the increased width of brickwork between the windows and especially the parapet between the gables. And on the west (rear) façade, the staircase windows upset any attempt at symmetry. However, the desire to be up to date overruled such Jacobean inconsistencies and Mr. Clitherow or one of his immediate successors had the house classicized à la mode with a bold, dentilled cornice and heavily modelled window surrounds, dramatically altering its appearance. But the desire for classical styling hit the underlying Jacobean reality on the west façade, giving the curious and rather endearing façade we see today.

The service wing to the north, though much altered, may form part of the 1670 addition. The porch at the main entrance was added in the 19th century during the Jacobean revival, and attempts, rather fussily, to turn the clock back to 1623.

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