

MERTON PLACE: FORMER HOME OF ADMIRAL LORD NELSON



Image Courtesy of: London Borough of Merton

TREASURE DESCRIPTION:

Former house of Admiral Lord Nelson, one of Britain's greatest naval heroes, who lived there with his mistress Lady Emma Hamilton and her husband, Sir William Hamilton.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

It was the only house that Nelson ever owned and lived in. He bought the house in 1801 and lived there from 1801-1803, and also in the Autumn of 1805, before his death in the Battle of Trafalgar.

Nelson lived there with Lady Emma Hamilton and her husband, Sir William Hamilton. The rather unusual, *ménage à trois* living arrangement, scandalized British society and seemingly Lady Hamilton referred to the household as *tria juncta in uno* or 'three joined in one' (the motto of the Knights of the Order of Bath to which both Nelson and Sir Hamilton belonged).

Despite spending much time at sea, Nelson was a countryman at heart and greatly enjoyed the peacefulness and charm of the area - which he referred to as 'dear, dear Merton'. Lady Hamilton sometimes referred to Merton Place as 'Paradise Merton'.

The house was originally known as the Moat House Farm, built c. 1750 by Henry Pratt. Subsequently, it was owned by Sir Richard Hotham, a wealthy hat manufacturer; and then later, the estate passed onto Charles Greave, a partner in a local calico-printing works.

VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS

Fascinating back-story about the lives/relationships of people living in a building that no longer exists, but was regarded as a treasure and safe-haven for Lord Nelson – one of Britain's most significant historical figures. Also interesting to find out about the relationships people can have with place across time.

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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Continued...

Having separated from his wife, Fanny, in 1801, Nelson bought the house for £9000 (with the financial help of his friend Alexander Davison) - despite a highly discouraging surveyor's report.

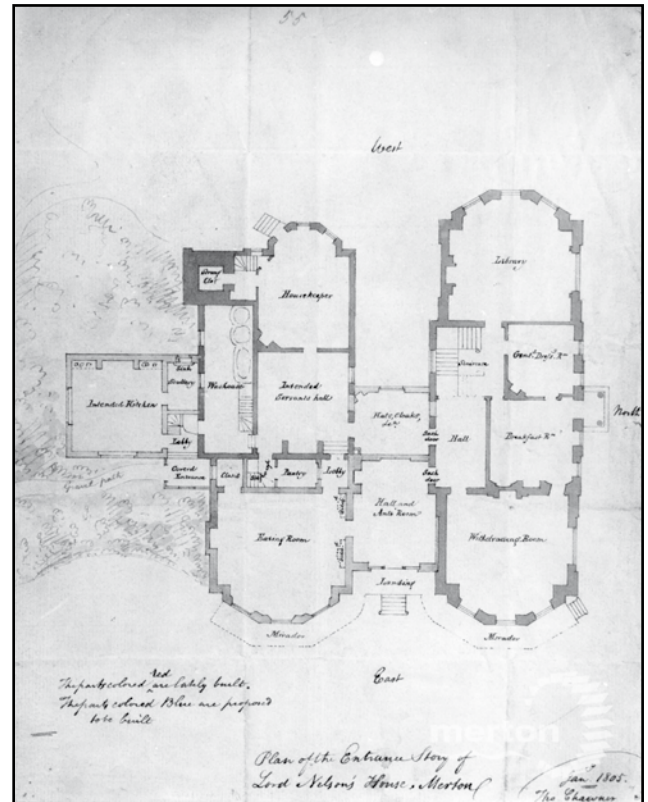
Initially, it was a one-wing property with an annex, but under the supervision of Lady Hamilton, the house was renovated and expanded. The Gardens had a canal, which included a moat (supplied by the River Wandle), and was referred to as 'The Nile' in honour of Nelson's first naval battle.

The house was frequently used for entertaining guests including relatives and fellow naval officers, and Emma became renowned for hosting large dinner parties.

By 1805, Nelson and Emma's daughter, Horatia, joined the household having previously lived elsewhere to avoid scandal. Prior to his death, Nelson had dreamed of retiring at Merton Place with Emma.

Following Nelson's death, Lady Hamilton's lavish lifestyle forced her into great debt, and despite a group of friends acting as trustees, she was forced to sell Merton Place, which was purchased by the Goldsmith Family. The house remained empty, and was eventually pulled down in 1823.

Today, much of the Merton portion of Nelson's 160 acre estate now lies under High Path estate - a local government housing initiative started in early 1950s. A block of flats within the estate covering the former residence is named 'Merton Place'.



Plans of Merton Place
Image Courtesy of: London Borough of Merton

The London Borough of Merton has developed The Nelson Trail, consisting of several properties associated with Nelson's life ranging from historic buildings to churches to Merton Place. The Trail is designed to raise awareness of these diverse historical locations, and several of the sites are open daily to the public or by prior appointment.

References:

The Nelson Trail – A visitor's guide to Lord Nelson and his Merton Connections, Brochure produced for Merton Heritage Centre, 2005, Local Hero Exhibition, and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund
Merton.gov.uk: www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/visiting/attractions/nelsontrail.htm
and
www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/history-heritage/heritage-sites/merton_place.htm

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SIGINIFICANT PEOPLE

Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), the great British naval hero, owned and lived at Merton Place from 1801-1805. He was commended for a number of decisive naval victories, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars. His final victory was the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, during which he was fatally wounded.

Lady Emma Hamilton (1765-1815), lover/mistress of Nelson, had bought the house on his behalf, and lived there with Nelson and her husband. The daughter of a blacksmith, Emma had come to London in her teens and had initially worked as a maid before becoming the favourite model of artist George Romney.

Sir William Hamilton (1731-1803), husband of Emma Hamilton, had been the British envoy in Naples. Married Emma in 1791, despite large age gap: Sir William aged 70, Emma aged 35.

Horatia Nelson (1801-1881), daughter of Nelson and Emma, initially lived elsewhere to avoid scandal. Joined Emma and Nelson to live at Merton Place by 1805.

Henry Pratt, had built the original building c.1750 known then as the Moat House Farm.

Thomas Chawner, architect, who expanded and created a new layout for the house in 1805 under Lady Hamilton's supervision.

References Continued:

Royal Museums Greenwich website: www.rmg.co.uk/explore/sea-and-ships/in-depth/nelson-a-z/merton-place

MertonHistoricalSociety.org.uk: www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/doc_library/nelson.pdf

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio_Nelson,_1st_Viscount_Nelson