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# A HISTORY OF CAVERSHAM PARK

BRIAN ROTHERAY



BBC Monitoring  
Caversham Park  
Reading  
RG4 8TZ  
United Kingdom

[monitor.bbc.co.uk](http://monitor.bbc.co.uk)





*“The park has often been associated with people of strong beliefs, ready to stand up for them.”*

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# INTRODUCTION

Caversham Park is the headquarters of BBC Monitoring, the UK's leading monitor of the international media. Its aim is to keep Britain and international audiences informed about the use made of the media around the world, so as to help interpret world events. The site is also occupied by BBC Radio Berkshire and the BBC's Written Archives Centre.

Caversham Park has been part of the Thames Valley landscape for over 800 years. There has been a grand house in the park for over 400 years. The BBC has been connected with the site for almost 70 years.

- Through its history, Caversham Park has passed through numerous hands. Its occupants have had local, national and international associations.
- From medieval barons, through Tudor and Stuart courtiers, to wealthy soldiers, entrepreneurs and industrialists, the owners have reflected and influenced the course of English history.
- The park has often been associated with people of strong beliefs, ready to stand up for them.

*“Caversham Park has been part of the Thames Valley landscape for over 800 years”*



Above left: View of the south terrace at Caversham Park taken from the lake  
Left: Aerial view of Caversham Park



# A FEUDAL PARK

*Caversham Park owes its origin to hunting and was established as a hunting park in the thirteenth century.*

Caversham was a feudal manor house, held from the king by powerful figures with large landholdings in England and abroad, who had a major influence on English history.

The best known “owner” of Caversham in feudal times, William Marshal, was a man greatly admired and regarded as the epitome of knighthood, chivalry and honour.

## **SAXONS AND NORMANS**

The first written mention of Caversham is in the Domesday Book, the full record of the English counties drawn up by the Normans after 1066.

The earliest British settlers preferred high ground, like the Downs, to the overgrown and more dangerous valley bottoms. The Romans had a major centre at nearby Silchester, but no Roman road passed this way and there were no major settlements. It was the Anglo-Saxons who made Caversham. A manor house at Dean’s Farm and a nearby mill formed the east end of the village. The west end lay around the river crossing where Caversham Bridge now stands.

When the Normans took over the manor, it was rated as worth £20. There were about forty villagers. Before 1066 the manor was held by a Saxon called Swein. He lost his possessions, like most Anglo-Saxon land-owners. The first Norman to hold Caversham was Walter Giffard, a relation of William the Conqueror and one of the organisers of the Domesday Book. Over 100 years, three generations of Giffards, Earls of Buckingham, held the manor.

The first written mention of Caversham in the Domesday Book

1086

1164

Caversham Park held by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke

## WILLIAM MARSHAL

In 1164, Caversham manor passed to Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, nicknamed “Strongbow” for his part in the Norman conquest of Ireland. When Richard died, his daughter Isabel became a royal ward and King Henry II picked William Marshal to be her future husband.

Born around 1144, a younger son with no inheritance, William made his name as a knight through tournament jousting. Enormously strong, he was unbeaten in 500 contests.

William joined the Second Crusade and fought in the Holy Lands for three years. He then joined Henry II and fought in France to put down a rebellion by the king’s three sons. On one occasion, he unseated Prince Richard in battle, but spared him. The prince, known to history as Richard the Lionheart, later succeeded to the throne and remembered William. He made him Earl of Pembroke and used him as one of his closest advisers.

William (at 45) and Isabel (17) now married. They had ten children, five boys and five girls. William had become one of the greatest lords of Plantagenet England with immense estates in England, Wales, Ireland and Normandy.

When King Richard died, William served his unpopular brother. He was one of the few nobles to back King John in his struggles with the barons which culminated in Magna Carta. He did so on the grounds that he was committed by oath. This commitment did not help William. John accused him of treachery, stripped him of power and possessions and took two of his sons hostage. Yet William stood by him. For this he was repaid with general respect. When John died, William was chosen by his peers as regent for the young King Henry III.

In 1219, his health failing, William left London for Caversham, choosing it as the place to end his days. He fulfilled



Richard I (above) makes William Marshal Earl of Pembroke

William Marshal marries Richard de Clare's daughter, Isabel

1189

a crusade promise to become a Knight Templar and so was later buried at the Temple Church in London. Effigies of him and two of his sons can be seen there today. Cardinal Langton, speaking at William Marshal’s funeral, described him as “the best knight that ever lived”.

## CAVERSHAM PARK IS CREATED

In turn, William Marshal’s five sons became Earl of Pembroke and Lord of the Manor of Caversham. In the early thirteenth century, one of the happiest in English history, William’s eldest son had Caversham Park laid out and fenced as a park for the hunting of deer and other game.

The park was around 300 acres, oval in shape, and covered the area occupied today by the BBC site and the residential area Caversham Park Village. It remained essentially the same size and shape for over 700 years. The park probably had a hunting lodge to provide accommodation for gamekeepers and visitors, but this was not the Caversham manor house or a major building.

As none of the Marshal sons had children of their own, Caversham passed back to the de Clares and then on in 1314 to the related Despencer family. They held it through dark decades of English history until the Tudor period, by which time England, its power structure and forms of ownership had radically changed.

The Despcncers had local impact. They granted large quantities of gold to the chapel of Our Lady at Caversham for ornamentation. The chapel became a significant place of pilgrimage. The Despcncers played a part nationally in the damaging War of the Roses, with the notorious Warwick the Kingmaker successively supporting both sides before he died in battle in 1471. The Warwick-Despcncer lands, including Caversham, were confiscated by the Crown, but feudal ownership was nearing its end.



William Marshal (c.1144-1219)  
His health failing, William left London for Caversham choosing it as the place to end his days

1219

# ELIZABETHANS & THE FIRST GREAT HOUSE

*The new “owners” who acquired Caversham Park from the Crown under Henry VIII were typical of the new Tudor age and very different from the barons who had held the manor under feudal ties for around 500 years.*

The first individual owners of Caversham Park were the Knollys, local gentry based at nearby Greys Court. They were resourceful, sturdy and long-lived. They had a strong feeling of family and a reputation for dependability and loyalty. They also had aspirations and built the first great house at Caversham Park to match them.

Francis Knollys, born in 1515, was a relatively modest local landowner who established a position of trust at the court of Henry VIII. He was one of the first members of Henry VIII's new bodyguard, the Honourable Company of Gentlemen of Arms. He gained a reputation as a soldier in France and Scotland in the 1540s and was knighted.

He married Catherine Coney, daughter of Mary Boleyn. It was a happy and fruitful marriage, like William Marshal's. Francis and Catherine had sixteen children, eight sons and eight daughters.

In 1542, Francis was given a lease on Caversham with permission to pull down the old manor house by the Thames and build a new one. He was granted the land outright in 1552.

Francis suffered changes in fortune when the Catholic Mary became Queen of England the next year. He was known for his Protestant beliefs and lost his position at court. His ownership of Caversham was disputed and he had to surrender the manor.



Sir Francis Knollys (c.1515-1596) (above)  
The Knollys family built the first great house at Caversham Park

Francis Knollys is knighted

1515

1540



Queen Elizabeth I – Francis looked after the Queen's finances, personal safety and advised her on financial and military issues

He went into exile in Switzerland and Germany with his wife and family, only returning when Elizabeth I came to the throne.

The Knollys' place at court was then restored, though the Caversham ownership issue was not quickly resolved. Francis' wife was Elizabeth's cousin and she became Chief Lady of the Queen's Bedchamber. Francis was a member of the Privy Council, a key instrument of the Tudors' power. He looked after the Queen's finances and personal safety and advised her on financial and military issues. He also maintained his local role, was a JP and Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and an MP.

Francis was not born rich and the offices of state which provided income and status also dictated a standard of living to be kept up. To help, the Queen granted a lease on Syon in Middlesex as a suitable residence near London.

### MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

Knollys was described as a man combining cousinly loyalty to the Queen with puritan frankness. This fitted him for his most difficult role.

In 1568, Mary, the Catholic Queen of Scots, arrived in the North of England after she was forced out of her country. She placed herself under the protection of Queen Elizabeth, her cousin. It was a situation full of potential trouble to Elizabeth, because of Mary's scheming nature and England's vulnerability to attack.

Francis was dispatched to take charge of her, first at Carlisle Castle, then at Bolton Castle (in Yorkshire) and lastly at Tutbury Castle (in Staffordshire), but he had no clear instructions or proper funds. He was kept away from London and home for nine months, during which time his wife died. Francis was not told or recalled to London for the funeral. Later, Queen Elizabeth had a monument erected to Catherine in Westminster Abbey.

Francis' career continued. He built a house alongside the Palace of Westminster. In the 1580s, when the Armada was imminent, he was tasked to report on national defences. Two armies were formed, one to defend London, the other to protect the Queen at Windsor and Francis was placed in charge at Windsor.

### THE FIRST GRAND HOUSE IN CAVERSHAM PARK

After the Armada, Francis, already over 70, got down to his plans to build a grand house at Caversham Park where he could entertain the Queen. If it seems incredible he should start now, actually he could not have started earlier because his ownership was not restored until 1588.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries, this was an age of great opportunity to acquire land and start building on it. Grand houses were built all over the country. Nearby, a fine house was built at Mapledurham, though more modest in its situation and style and held in one family for centuries. Francis planned something more flamboyant, a mansion fit to entertain the Queen, a house meant to be looked at.

Francis did not see the house finished. In 1593, he was awarded the Order of the Garter, a rare honour for a non-peer and his last. He died in 1596 and was buried not at Westminster Abbey, but in the church at Rotherfield Greys, between Greys Court and Caversham Park. In his memory, his eldest son erected a magnificent effigy, huge in proportion to the little parish church, showing Francis and his wife and all sixteen of their children, eight sons on one side, including Henry the privateer and Thomas the mercenary, and their daughters on the other. While somewhat like William Marshal's effigy in the grand Temple Church in London, this is a local and family monument.

Though a typical Elizabethan, Francis had parallels to William Marshal. He had the same impeccable reputation; shifts in political fortune meant that he lost position; he lacked financial resources and needed patronage. He had several sons, but none of them had children.



Knollys in charge of protecting Queen Elizabeth at Windsor

1580

Knollys awarded Order of the Garter

1593



The Great Tower at Greys Court, home of the Knollys family.

Death of Knollys

1596

### IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

It was Francis' eldest surviving son, William, who finished the big house at Caversham Park and entertained Queen Elizabeth there in 1601.

William's life paralleled his father's. He had the same combination of national and local roles. He was a soldier, who advised on national defences. He was a Privy Councillor, a JP, MP, and Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and Berkshire. And he was long-lived, dying in 1633 at 88.

He was conscious of what his father had achieved, but aware of the limitations. His father was never ennobled, because he lacked the means to keep up appearances. William put more into acquiring wealth and title than into assuring the continuity of the family. He married a wealthy widow and their marriage was childless.

After Elizabeth's death, William continued to acquire money-making positions and titles. He entertained King James I at Caversham Park in 1612 and Queen Anne of Denmark, James' wife, the following year, with lavish entertainments. James made William Baron Knollys and then Viscount Wallingford. When Charles I came to the throne, William became Earl of Banbury.

William's first wife died in 1605 and though he quickly married again, there was no recognised heir. So in the end, his twin aim of securing the family fortune and position and having a family to pass it on to ended in failure. Because William's manors would revert to the Crown as he was childless, he sold or mortgaged them to provide for his wife.



King James I (above) visits Caversham Park

William Knollys entertains Queen Elizabeth at Caversham Park

1601

1612

## KING CHARLES I & THE CIVIL WAR

*In the reign of King Charles I, Caversham Park was owned by a Royalist supporter – Lord Craven. During the Commonwealth period the property was confiscated from him, but later he made significant efforts to restore and improve it.*

King Charles I is known to have been in Caversham twice, the first time during the Civil War, the second time as a prisoner prior to his execution.

During the Civil War, Reading was initially held for the Royalists and in 1643 was besieged by the Parliamentary army under Fairfax. King Charles and his nephew Prince Rupert brought forces from Oxford to relieve the siege, attempting to take Caversham Bridge from the besieging forces. There was intense fighting, the Royalists were beaten back and Reading was surrendered.

After the Civil War, in July 1647, King Charles was brought as a prisoner to Caversham Park where he was held for some weeks. He asked to see his children who remained in England and was allowed to travel to Maidenhead, where they met at the Greyhound Inn. The children were permitted to travel back with him to Caversham Park where they stayed for two days.



The children of Charles I. Those still in England visit him while imprisoned at Caversham Park

Caversham Park sold to Lord Craven

1633

1647



## THE CRAVENS

Caversham Park was sold to Lord William Craven in 1633 for £10,000. Craven said he spent £20,000 on improving the house and estate before the Civil War.

Again, the family was not one with long-established wealth. Craven's father was a Dick Whittington figure. Born in the pretty Wharfedale village of Appletreewick in 1585, he left Yorkshire young, established himself in the London silk trade and made money. He was knighted and became Lord Mayor of London. He also founded Burnsall Grammar School near his home village.

William Craven the younger, born in 1606, entered military service when 17, fighting for the Protestant cause in the European Thirty Years' War. In the 1630s, he fought under Prince Rupert and was taken prisoner, but was able to find £20,000 in ransom.

Craven then served Frederick V, Elector of the Palatinate, a Protestant leader and briefly King of Bohemia. His wife Elizabeth was the sister of King Charles I of England. She was beautiful and much admired and called the Winter Queen. Craven, who had considerable resources and was devoted to her, helped her financially and was rumoured to have married her. Craven gave financial support to Charles I during the English Civil War, but did not fight in it.

In 1660, he returned to London with Charles II, whom he also supported and advised as a Privy Councillor. Craven was made Earl in 1665 and was a prominent and admired figure in London and at court, a promoter of science and a Fellow of the Royal Society. The poet John Donne described him as "a most perfect character of what England was in all her pomp and greatness".



Lord Craven (above) appointed Privy Councillor to Charles II

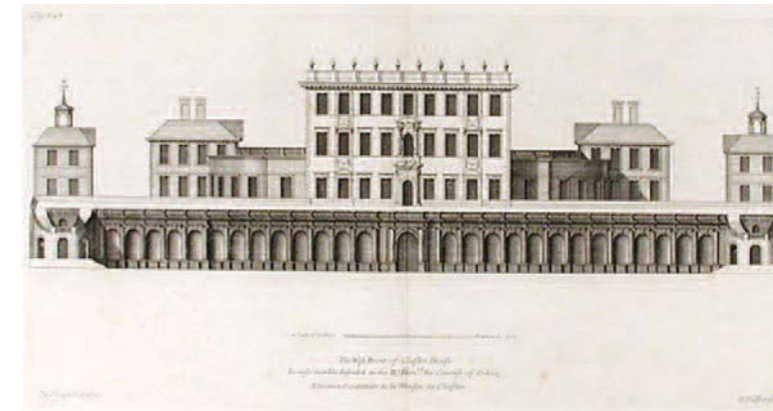
1660

## CAVERSHAM PARK RESTORED

After the siege of Reading, some of the Parliamentary forces, in poor health from the siege and occupation of the town, were moved up to the better air of Caversham Park to recover.

Craven's estates were confiscated and sold to a speculator. The diarist John Evelyn wrote in 1655, "Saw my Lord Craven's house at Caversham, now in ruins, his goodly woods felled by the rebels".

The property was returned to Craven in 1660 and he employed the architect William Winde to restore it. Winde built the famous terrace at Cliveden and at Caversham is known to have created a tiered garden on the Thames side of the house, which can still be visualised. It comprised a terrace leading down to a square of flower beds with a further garden below and a double line of trees to either side. This would form the basis for further work in the next century.



Drawing of the terrace at Cliveden created by William Winde, who designed the tiered gardens at Caversham on the Thames side of the house



The poet John Donne (above) describes Craven as "a most perfect character of what England was in all her pomp and greatness."

Craven is made Earl

1665

# GEORGIANS GRANDEUR & DEBT

*It was in the Georgian era that Caversham Park reached the heights of grandeur and magnificence. The owners brought an aura of splendour and also of exoticism and scandal. At times the extravagance and debts threatened to ruin the place.*

It was the two Irish brothers, William and Charles Cadogan, who had the greatest influence on the development of the park.

## THE FIRST CADOGAN

William Cadogan, son of a Dublin barrister, was born in 1672. A military man, he saw service at the Battle of the Boyne and in Flanders before coming under the command of the Duke of Marlborough. Taken prisoner and twice wounded, he rose to be Marlborough's Quartermaster General and chief aide through ten campaigns and was Queen Anne's ambassador to the Netherlands. This ascent was interrupted when the Tories took power in 1710. Marlborough went into exile, just six years after his great victory at Blenheim, and Cadogan lost position with him.

When George I came to the throne and the Whigs returned to office, Cadogan was restored to favour and bought Caversham. He was a Guards colonel and Master-General of Ordnance. He was second-in command to the Duke of Argyll in suppressing the Jacobite Rising of 1715. In turn he became Baron Cadogan of Reading, Viscount Caversham and Earl Cadogan.



George I crowned.  
Cadogan buys  
Caversham Park.

Birth of  
William Cadogan

1672

1714

Cadogan was a lover of gambling in a great gambling era. He even bet on the outcome of his own military campaigns, such as which fortress might be taken first. To a degree, his offices made this gambling supportable, providing ample opportunities for making money.

Cadogan's building programme at Caversham Park, once he had acquired the freehold, was lavish. The house and park he created were described as "one of the noblest seats in the kingdom". He spent £130,000 on the undertaking and aimed to compete with Blenheim Palace and Cliveden.

The house was to be imposing, visible from the valley and with a fine view down to the Thames. The layout resembled Cliveden and a lengthy avenue led to it from the North.

The gardens were magnificent. A terrace 400 yards long ran along the south front of the house, facing the Thames. Below that were formal gardens, and to the east and west of them were great canals 300 yards long. The eastern lake, indicated in the maps of the time, is no longer there. Beyond the gardens was a deer park.

Cadogan did not enjoy this for long. He died in 1726 without male heirs, leaving a Dutch widow, a lady who may have attracted him as a major lottery winner of the day, two daughters and a mountain of debt.



William Cadogan (1675-1726)

Cadogan involved in  
suppressing the Jacobite  
Rising. Embarks on lavish  
building programme at  
Caversham Park



1715

1726



Capability Brown engaged to refashion the grounds at Caversham Park

### THE SECOND CADOGAN

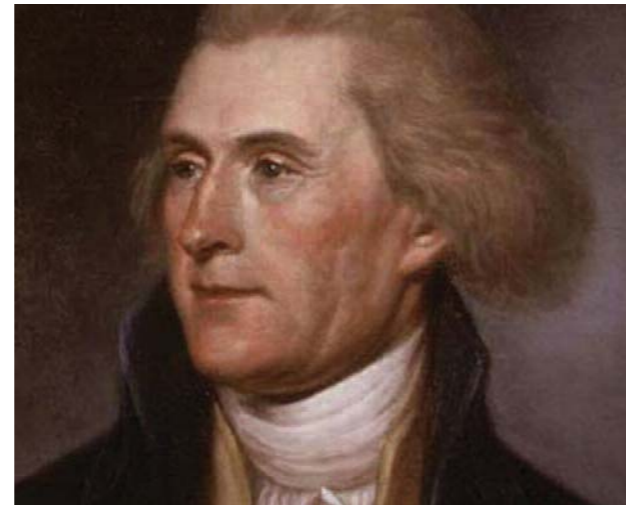
William Cadogan's younger brother Charles bought Caversham Park for a knock-down price of £13,000, which his position as executor allowed him to do.

Charles was another soldier who served under Marlborough. His finances were limited and he corrected this by marrying the heiress of Sir Hans Sloane, a rich society doctor.

Charles was the owner of Caversham Park for fifty years and did much to shape the style seen today. Significantly, he engaged the landscape gardener Capability Brown to refashion the park and gardens in the 1760s.

The mansion had its two side wings removed and was restricted to a central block around the current size. The drive was changed so that it ran up to the house from the south east, linking with the London-Bath coach road via the new Sonning Bridge. The grounds were altered to match the new fashion. Capability Brown kept the grand terrace, but did away with the formal gardens and introduced his trademark look, that of the English countryside. He let the parkland flow up close to the house, with a ha-ha, which is still doing its job, to keep animals away from the immediate vicinity.

When Charles Cadogan died, his son inherited the estate. Charles Sloane Cadogan, was the holder of lucrative offices and had money to spend on Caversham, but a scandal involving his second wife led to him abruptly selling up and moving away.



Thomas Jefferson (above) visits the house while Ambassador to France

### THE NABOB

The new owner was its most exotic. Major Charles Marsac, who bought the house and park in 1784, had made his fortune in India. In the language of the day, he was a "Nabob".

His family origins are probably Huguenot. It is also suggested that Marsac was the illegitimate son of George II. Supporting the story, Marsac held a number of court positions as a young man. But there are many blank areas in his life, including how he came by his money.

The new owner of Caversham attracted negative comment, as the Nabobs did. The *Public Advertiser* complained that the homely local servants had been supplanted by exotic foreigners. Marsac was called "Major Massacre" for having trees felled and criticised for charging entry to the park.

Marsac was in company. Nearby Basildon Park was being built by Sir Francis Sykes, who made his fortune with the East India Company. Warren Hastings, former Governor-General of Bengal, occupied Purley Hall while awaiting trial for corruption. The district was known as the "English Hindoostan".

In 1786, Thomas Jefferson, later President of the USA and at the time Ambassador to France, visited the house on a tour of the gardens of England.

When Marsac died a wealthy man in 1820, the house and park were magnificent. But his son and heir Richard, a Grenadier Guards officer, was an inveterate gambler with substantial debts. He had to sell his commission and moved to France with his wife to escape their creditors. They settled in Boulogne and stayed there until their death in 1852.

The Marsacs made three attempts to sell Caversham Park, but in the slump following the Napoleonic Wars there was little



Major Charles Marsac, who bought the house and park in 1784, had made his fortune in India. Caversham Park was sold again in 1838

interest. The park was offered for sale in 1822, 1832 and 1837 before the leasehold was finally bought in 1838, by a very different kind of owner. By then the property was a ruin. It was "dilapidated within" and the gardens were entirely overgrown, "hot houses leaning in all directions".

# IRONMASTERS

*The Victorian era brought the house at Caversham Park that we know today. The new owners, the Crawshays, were part of the Industrial Revolution. Like the Cravens, they had their origin in Yorkshire.*

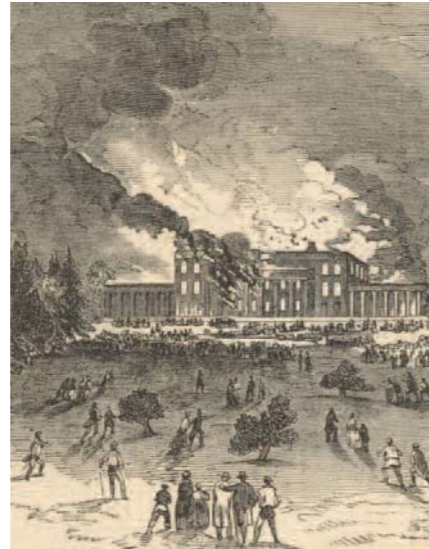
Richard Crawshay, born in 1739, left home at 16 and travelled to London to make his fortune. He was recruited to Wales by Anthony Bacon, an industrialist who was establishing Merthyr Tydfil as a centre of iron production. He had acquired the money for this through the slave trade. After Bacon's death in 1786, Crawshay became the owner of the Cyfarthfa ironworks. By 1800, he alone employed over 2,000 men.

When Richard died in 1810, his only son William took over the enterprise. William based himself in London and he concentrated on the selling rather than the iron production. He was extremely successful, not least at ensuring control of the business and ridding himself of several partners. William left a fortune of £700,000 when he died in 1834.

## THE IRON KING

It was William's son, William II, who was responsible for the house at Caversham Park today. William II, known popularly as the Iron King, concentrated his work in London, like his father, and left the management of the Cyfarthfa works to his sons.

The Iron King liked show. In 1825, in his father's lifetime, he built a lavish house in Merthyr Tydfil, known as Cyfarthfa Castle. He quarrelled over this with his father, who thought the expense excessive, the house



The house burns to the ground, only the columns to each side of the main house remain

1850



too showy and the undertaking a distraction from their real business.

William II enjoyed mixed opinions in Wales because of his role in the Methyr Tydfil riots of the early 1830s, following wage cuts during a depression. He was involved in calling out troops to suppress the rioting. But generally he is regarded as progressive and a fair employer who avoided the worst abuses of the period.

By the 1830s, the Iron King was living in his father's old London house, but did not think it good enough. Caversham Park was cheap and occupied a fine position. Work had started in 1836 on the Great Western Railway from Paddington to Bristol, so Caversham was on a direct and fast route from London to Wales.

The leasehold to Caversham Park was bought in 1838, the freehold in 1844. Disaster followed. In 1850, the house was burnt to the ground, only the columns to each side of the main house remaining.

One story about William II is that he had not insured the house, but was so wealthy it did not matter. He rebuilt and improved it. A west wing was added to give better servants'

Rebuilding of the house begins incorporating an iron frame, one of the first houses in England to be built that way

1851

accommodation, a winter garden was built and the house was put up around an iron frame, one of the first houses in England to be built that way.

This was typical of the man and in the spirit of the time. The Great Exhibition had started in the iron-framed Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851. It was a symbol of modernity. William was an iron founder. So with the architect Horace Jones, early in his career but later responsible for many important London buildings, including Tower Bridge, he set about creating a new building on the site of the old with a classical exterior, a modern structure and modern facilities.

Another story told is that the Iron King was not on good terms with his wife (his third) and had the house designed so that they did not have to meet. The story may originate from a design feature. Separate staircases were provided for the male and female servants to reach their respective quarters without confusion.

William II was a lover of show in both houses and parks. Cyfarthfa was a mock castle, complete with crenellations. Caversham was even more splendid. At both sites, much was spent on the gardens, in Wales on growing pineapples, in Caversham on colourful flowerbeds and a fernery. Fifteen gardeners were employed at Caversham alone.

On the inside, after passing through the carriage entrance, the visitor entered in turn a vestibule, an outer hall and a great inner hall, which was over 50 foot long. There was a morning room, a dining room with a mantelpiece from Chesterfield House in Mayfair, a library, a stately drawing room over 40 foot long, a billiard room, smoking room, a set of gentleman's lavatories plus a winter garden.

Upstairs came six principal bedrooms, four dressing rooms and a large boudoir on the first floor. On the second floor there



William Thompson  
Crawshay and friend

were seven large secondary bedrooms, four dressing rooms plus eleven large servants' bedrooms and three housemaids' pantries.

The servants' area also included the kitchen, servants' hall, housekeeper's room, butler's pantry with silver safe, a cook's parlour, and a housemaids' sitting room. There was excellent stabling with a harness room, hay lofts and a coach house.

#### TROUBLES AND DECLINE

This time of the greatest grandeur for the Crawshays was the beginning of the decline of the family's industrial fortunes.

When the Iron King died in 1867, he left a fortune of £2 million, but the new owner of the foundries, Robert Thompson Crawshay saw the demand for iron fall in the face of competition from steel producers. Known as a cantankerous and autocratic employer, he closed the foundries in 1874 rather than recognise the trade unions. He died in 1879 and his grave outside Merthyr was marked by a massive granite slab, looped round with iron chains and inscribed *God Forgive Me*. Local legend had it that the slab and chains were to make sure he did not come back to run the ironworks.

#### THE LAST CRAWSHAYS AT CAVERSHAM

What remained of the Crawshay empire passed to Robert Thompson's son William Thompson. He and his brothers converted the foundries to steel production and reopened, but it was too late. The enterprise declined and the family sold it off in 1902.

William Thompson Crawshay lived privately at Caversham with his wife Florentine from the 1880s until his death in 1918. They had no children. Yet they still increased the estate, purchasing of a number of outlying farms. Florentine was a Catholic and helped fund the new Catholic church in Caversham and the building of its parish hall. During the first World War, the hall operated as a hospital for war wounded and Mrs Crawshay, already elderly, worked there as a nurse.

The last Crawshays to live at Caversham Park are just within living memory. In recent years, visitors to Caversham Park have recalled seeing the Crawshays at school speech days or local fetes. Always they have been recalled with affection.

Crawshay enterprise  
declines and is sold



William Crawshay II  
who died in 1867

1902

# SCHOOL DAYS

*After the First World War, Caversham Park passed out of individual ownership. For twenty years, it became a boarding school.*

When William Thompson Crawshay died in 1918 and his widow in 1919, the estate passed to their nephew, Captain Jack Crawshay. Taxes and the post-war cost of keeping such a grand house meant that the entire estate was put up for auction, a situation repeated countless times across the country during the period.

It was not a sellers' market and Caversham Park failed to reach the modest reserve of £45,000. It recalls the situation one hundred years earlier when the Marsacs put the property up for sale in the post-Napoleonic depression. However, in 1921, the estate was sold privately to local investors and split up. The mansion and the park were sold on in 1922 to the Oratorians, a Catholic order based in Birmingham, to replace the school they ran in Edgbaston.

The Oratory School was established in 1859 by John Henry Newman, one of the leading figures in the upsurge of Catholicism in England following the emancipation of Catholics in the 1820s. Newman was asked to set up a Catholic boarding school operating on public school principles.

In 1922, the school moved to Caversham Park from Birmingham, where its accommodation had been limited and the area was becoming increasingly built up. The headmaster of the time, Father Edward Pereira, a Warwickshire cricketer, put his money into expanding the school and its facilities. The chapel was expanded to take larger numbers. Sports facilities were laid out. A substantial "sanatorium" was built slightly aside from the main buildings.



The Oratory School moves to Caversham Park

1922



The graves of three boys who died at the school lie to the north east side of the house

In 1926 there was a major fire during the school holidays, which caused considerable damage to the first and second floors and the roof, but this time the house was insured and the damage made good.

The school was "hearty", proud of its standard of cricket, and Newman's ethos of personal independence and responsibility prevailed. There were connections with writers. Both Hilaire Belloc and J.R.R. Tolkien sent their sons to the Oratory, the latter while it was at Caversham.

In the 1930s, the school, like others, experienced difficult financial times and pupil numbers fell. By early in the Second World War other potential uses for the site had been identified, including possible use as a hospital. In 1941, the school sold the entire Caversham Park site to the BBC for £55,000 and moved via Downside to Woodcote just a few miles from Caversham, where it expanded and remains today.

The Oratory keeps up connections with Caversham Park and helps to maintain the graves of three boys who died at the school, in 1925, 1927 and 1940. They lie to the north east side of the house. The school's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary is being marked by the publication of *Cardinal Newman's School* by Antony Tinkel.



The roof, first and second floors were damaged by a major fire during the school holidays

1926

# LISTENING IN

*From 1943, Caversham Park has been the headquarters of BBC Monitoring, whose aim has been to keep Britain informed about the use made of broadcasting and other media around the world, so that the influence of the media should be properly understood.*

For 70 years, BBC Monitoring has played a major role in the BBC's reporting of world events and had a significant influence on Britain's international policy.

Caversham Park also houses two other parts of the BBC, the Written Archives Centre, which contains the documentary history of the BBC, and BBC Radio Berkshire.

## WARTIME BEGINNINGS

It was in 1939, just before the outbreak of war, that the government asked the BBC to establish an organisation to monitor the Axis powers' use of the media and especially the powerful new medium, radio. Monitoring of the press had long been carried out by embassies in all countries. But radio was a more elusive medium to track and be sure what was being said and in what tone. Radio monitoring needed more system and skill.



Radio was a more elusive medium to track and be sure what was being said and in what tone



Recordings being filed

BBC Monitoring established

1939

1940

1941

In the summer of 1939 a number of language monitors, editors and engineering and support staff were recruited. In late August, thirty were assembled at short notice and sent down to Worcestershire by bus to establish the BBC Monitoring Service at Wood Norton, near Evesham.

Work started days before the outbreak of war and developed rapidly. A daily briefing was produced for the War Cabinet on developments across Europe and worldwide. There were other more detailed reports for a wider range of readers in government, the forces, the BBC, and for Britain's allies.

Soon more thought was given to the siting of the service. The bombing of London brought plans to move some broadcasting facilities out of the capital and BBC Monitoring had to make room. Alternatives were sought. Caversham Park was big enough for the staff and Crowsley Park, three miles north, was suitable for the aerial systems needed. Although living accommodation was not available in Reading because it was needed for munitions workers, it could be found in Oxfordshire and large houses were taken over in nearby Shiplake and Goring Heath. The school sanatorium became dormitories.

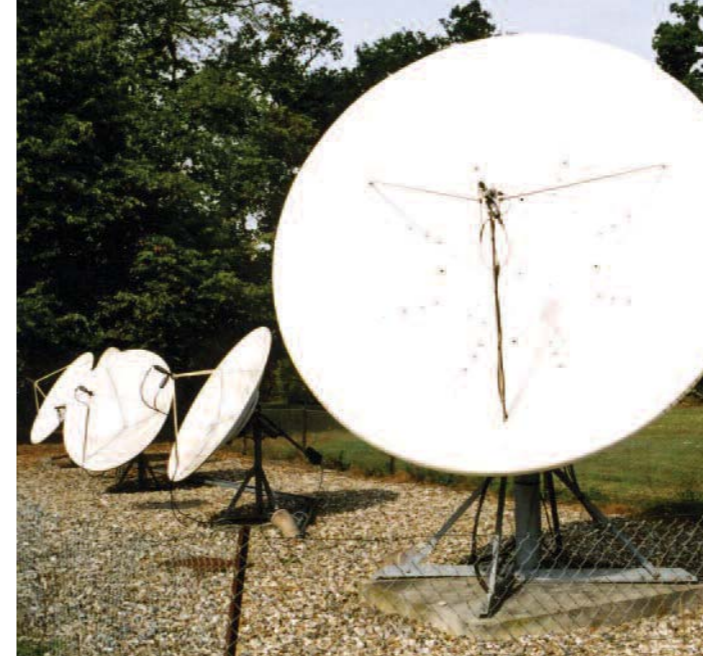
Some additions and changes were made to the mansion to accommodate monitoring operations, but the building was suited to the task and the fabric and layout remained unaltered. The final years of the war and the Allied victory were monitored from here.

Then, as the Cold War shaped a divided Europe, the wartime complement of 1,000 staff was halved and BBC Monitoring's attention gradually moved from Germany to the Soviet Union and its satellites. BBC Monitoring covered the



Home guard on parade at Caversham Park

Caversham Park becomes the headquarters of BBC Monitoring



Satellite communications which started in the 1960s were now sufficiently structured for television broadcasting



invasion of Hungary by the Soviets in 1956, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Cultural Revolution in China of the 1960s and 1970s, the whole evolution of Soviet communism from the 1940s until the 1990s.

Over time, the facilities for housing staff were sold. In the 1960s the larger proportion of the park itself was sold for housing development and what became Caversham Park Village. The park no longer existed as it had been since 1220.

By the 1980s, the house and grounds at Caversham Park had a neglected air. Two major modernisation programmes carried out in the past twenty-five years have changed that.

The first programme, in the 1980s, saw the building of a major new operations room at the West End of the building, refurbishment of the main building, and the development of a computer system which made possible big changes in the way news reports could be prepared and delivered. Upkeep of the grounds was improved.

Soon afterwards, and for over a decade after the end of the Cold War, a series of reviews took place to consider the future of BBC Monitoring. Changes to funding in 1997 and 2005, accompanied by parliamentary debates and change in government sponsorship, resulted in two waves of restructuring, significant reductions in the numbers of staff based at Caversham and a shift in the emphasis of operations, with more work done abroad.

Reporting over recent years has covered momentous events in all continents, examples being wars in Yugoslavia, genocide in Africa, tensions in Korea, revolution in Iran, wars in the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism across the world and everything that has followed 9/11. In all of these the media have played major roles.

1943

1990





Broadcast reception in the Listening Room

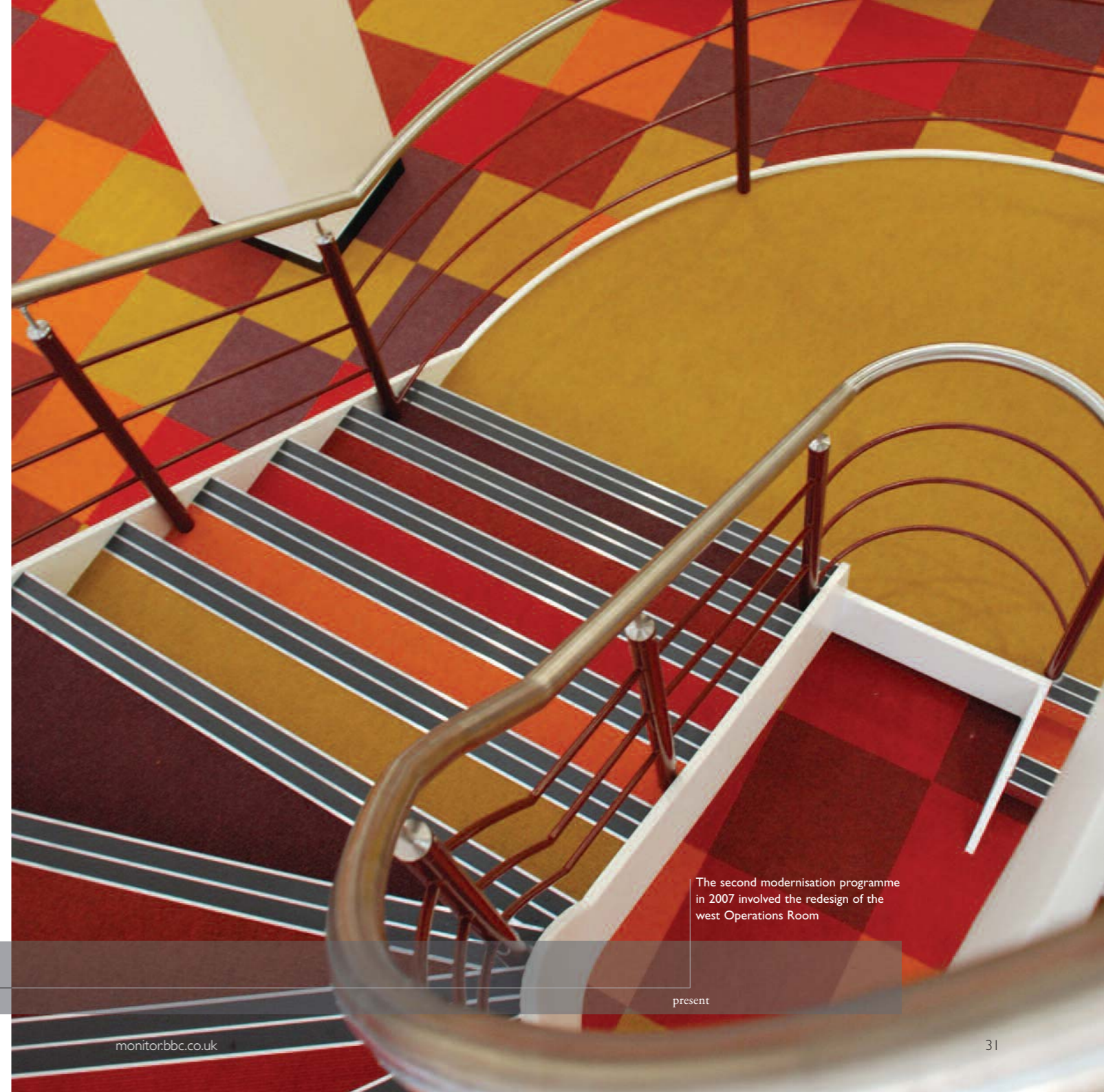
To handle this, a second modernization programme, started in 2007, has involved the redesign of the west Operations Room, extensive work on the remainder of the building, and a Technology Refresh Programme to improve radically multimedia news production and the delivery of volumes of output matching that of any of the world's major news agencies.

BBC Monitoring was not widely known about in its early war years or throughout the Cold War. This has also changed. There have been radio and television programmes and numerous newspaper and magazine articles about it. Annual Open Days have meant hundreds of people could be shown round the buildings and grounds. BBC Monitoring's role is important and the organization needs to be recognised and supported both for its work and as a good custodian of Caversham Park, a significant site and a beautiful listed building where the staff take great pride in what they do.



The first modernisation programme in the 1980s saw the refurbishment of the main building

Changes to funding in 1997 and 2005 resulted in two waves of restructuring



The second modernisation programme in 2007 involved the redesign of the west Operations Room

present

1990

1997



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