



The history of MARLOW'S MARKET HOUSE

The building that faces Marlow High Street has had many uses. In recent years it has been The Crown public house, but it was originally built in 1807 as the Market House. The Crown Hotel was then the building next door that is now `Boots'.

The plan to build the Market House was conceived by Thomas Williams, `The Copper King' in the 1790s. He had ambitions to further his business by controlling the two seats that Marlow then had in Parliament. So he purchased parcels of property in Marlow and threatened their tenants with eviction if they didn't vote for his candidates. One property was described at the time as "a miserable heavy building of timber. of very ancient date" and "a disgrace to the town". This was the old market house that stood in Market Place, although markets had long ceased to meet there. Williams decided to rebuild the property in coarse stone as a place to hold political meetings and to revive the Saturday market. Unfortunately he died in 1802, so his son, Owen Williams, eventually completed the venture

The structure consists of a large rectangular room, supported on what were originally open segmental arches. The market then occupied the open ground floor, while the room above became a much-needed assembly room that could be let for local events, such as receptions and balls, the meetings of the justices or the town council. It is an attractive room with a balcony, lit

by three large windows that look down the High Street, separated externally by doric pilasters in classical style. The tiled roof is topped by a simple wooden cupola, containing the town clock. This was presented to the town by Pascoe Grenfell, who was Owen Williams' partner and who joined him as MP for Marlow, 1807-20. Both the weathervane above, and the railings to the balcony within, still feature a chough (or crow), which was the Williams family crest.

The Market House is not distinguished architecturally and has been better described as just "a substantial edifice", although it is listed and is much prized by the people of Marlow. The architect is shown as 'Mr Wyatt'. This was probably Samuel Wyatt, rather than his more famous brother, James Wyatt RA.

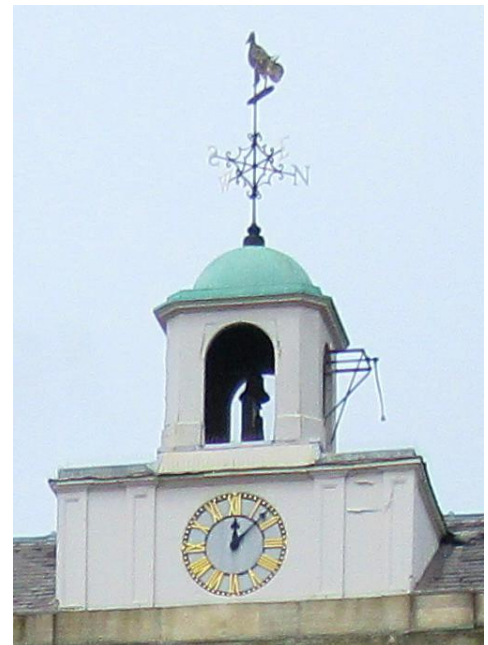
Samuel had just completed Temple House for Williams and also designed some of the buildings at Temple Mill. The contractor was Benjamin Gray; the mason, J. Smith; and the carpenter, Mr Bond, probably all local men

The revived market did not prove a success. It was described in 1830 as "very trifling" and in the mid 19th century as "ill supplied". It lapsed shortly after. Meantime, an area behind the left arch (as you face the building) was used as the Marlow town lock-up, which can still be seen, although it now has a different purpose. (The town stocks were not removed from the Market Place until 1876 and are now in the County Museum at Aylesbury). Later, the same arch was used to house the town's fire engine. There were lights round the arch and a rope to pull a bell that summoned the brigade from their jobs in the town. When a modern horse-drawn engine was acquired, the firemen had to catch and harness the horses from the field behind, before galloping off to put out the fire.

Eventually, the adjoining Crown Hotel took over the assembly room, which became the ballroom, although public meetings and entertainments continued to be held there until the 1960s.

In 1880, the Market House and the Crown Hotel were attacked by rioters, who broke many of the windows. This was a reaction to the election to Parliament of Thomas Price Williams, who had used the building as his Conservative Party headquarters.

Then in 1886 the whole building became an extension to the hotel, although the Williams family still owned the building as late as 1903. The interior was much altered, including the installation of a stately staircase. Many famous people stayed in the hotel, including, it is rumoured, J K Jerome, when he was writing *Three Men in a Boat*.



The weathervane still features the chough of the Williams family crest

During the 1930s. the hotel's trade declined and the original Crown Hotel was converted to shops (originally Aldridge greengrocery and F.W. Woolworth), with a hairdresser on the first floor and residential flats above. The Market House remained as The Crown Hotel and it was still styled as such after World War 2, although it was no longer residential. The left and centre arches were enclosed with walls and windows, while a new single door was breached into the wall on the left to give separate access to the ballroom.

The right arch became the new entrance to the hotel with a semi-circular, ironwork canopy over, the supports to which can still be seen on the wall outside. The gardens became used for extensions and car parks.

The brewers, Mann Crossman & Paulin were then the owners, although it has passed through other hands since

Finally, the frontage of the Market House took up its present appearance when the central arch was reopened as the main entrance and the right arch was enclosed with a wall and windows.

Text and production by Tony Reeve.

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