

Brief History



Boughton has been the home of the Montagu family and their descendants since 1528. It started life as a simple Tudor manor, with a Great Hall at its heart and for 150 years it has expanded gently and organically as various courtyards and appendages were added. Then in two decades of hectic building the North front, rose up, creating State Rooms and also huge Stables with a distinctive Mansard roof and the flavour of Versailles

For Ralph Montagu, later to be 1st Duke of Montagu, a passionate builder and patron of artists, craftsmen and decorators of every sort, this transformation was the pursuit of a dream – to bring French beauty and style to an English landscape.

Yet magnificent though Boughton appears today, his original vision was never completed. One wing remains empty and new facades on the south and west fronts never materialised. Ralph's son, John, the 2nd Duke was more interested in developing the formal garden and landscape which his father had embarked on. In retrospect we can see how fortunate this was. It left a rare amalgam of grandeur at face value and village like charm and complexity behind, with its plethora of courtyards, staircases, chimney stacks and roof levels.

Ralph inherited Boughton in 1683. John died in 1749. For 65 years activity in the house and park was at its zenith. From the surviving accounts we know that work of some sort was going on almost all the time. Visitors were constantly passing through and, the entertaining must have been incessant. And then it fell mostly silent. John's heir, his daughter Mary, married a neighbour, the Earl of Cardigan at nearby Deene. Their daughter, also an heiress, married a Scottish Duke and his family, the Scots of Buccleuch, who had plenty of houses of their own.

Suddenly, Boughton was no longer required, let alone centre stage and there was no demand to refashion the house to the latest Victorian enthusiasm, nor by virtue of its 150 years of slumber did much wear out through over use. Members of the family would use it on occasion and if convenient and occasional visitors.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Boughton came back into family focus again with the family very much embracing it as a home. And Boughton today remains very much alive as a place of beauty and serenity, but also a treasure house that opens its doors to visitors as it has done for centuries.

Aerial views of Boughton reveal the extraordinary complexity of the building, with its 7 courtyards, 12 entrances, 52 chimney stacks and 365 windows. The 1.25 acres of Collyweston tile roofing blend with the great spread of lawns, lakes, woods and over 250 year old avenues stretching for many miles.

Notwithstanding the magnificence and beauty of this landscape, the land surrounding the House makes a serious contribution to the food and timber production of the Estate, a factor not only of national benefit, but also essential in providing for the maintenance of an historic asset such as Boughton as well as its

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five associated villages. Without the continuous loving care of generations of family occupants, skilled craftsmen and the financial backing of an efficiently managed rural estate, house and villages would soon fall victim to the ever present threats of death watch beetle, dry rot and decay.

The special attraction of Boughton lies in the harmonious blending of the superb collections of paintings, furniture, tapestries, needlework, carpets, porcelain, arms and silver. All these in a setting of extreme beauty with a magical atmosphere to match, just as the artists, craftsmen and discriminating collectors had intended. These are the furnishings for a living home, for real people in their correct historical context. It is not a lifeless showcase, but a reminder to future generations of some of the higher cultural aspirations and achievements of civilised man.

The Tudors

Boughton has a wealth of Tudor portraits in the collection including members of the royal family – Henry VIII, Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth as well as Courtiers such as Sir Edward Montagu, Lord Chief Justice to Henry VIII and the Earl and Countess of Southampton. In contrast there are also opportunities to view a depiction of a Tudor era Market Seller, to look at Stuart era paintings and discuss and understand the changes in fashion and style.



Left: Edward VI (1537 – 1553)

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Boughton and Religious Disputes

Below: **Sir Thomas Tresham** (died September 11, 1605), was a Catholic politician at the end of the Tudor dynasty and the start of the Stuart dynasty in England.



Sir Thomas enjoyed a lavish lifestyle, frequently entertaining vast numbers of friends and acquaintances. But it was his Catholic religion that burdened him most frequently with debt.

At a time when Queen Elizabeth was anxious about the Catholic threat posed by Spain and by her cousin Mary Queen of Scots, nonconformists were targets for persecution. As a result between 1581 and 1605, Tresham paid huge penalties totaling just under £8,000. These heavy financial demands created spiraling debts, with borrowing as his only resource. Tresham's credit never fully recovered.

He left two buildings as part of Northamptonshire's heritage:
Rushton Triangular Lodge, a folly and the unfinished **Lyveden New Bield**.

Boughton and the Gunpowder Plot

The **Gunpowder Plot** of 1605, in earlier centuries often called the **Gunpowder Treason Plot** or the **Jesuit Treason**, was a failed assassination attempt against King James I of England and VI of Scotland by a group of provincial English Catholics led by Robert Catesby.

In January 1606, during the first sitting of Parliament since the plot, the Observance of 5th November Act 1605 was passed, making services and sermons commemorating the event an annual feature of English life; the act remained in force until 1859.

The Bill was drafted and introduced on 23 January 1605/06 by Edward Montagu (portrayed below). It called for a public, annual thanksgiving for the failure of the Plot.

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“Forasmuch as almighty God hath in all ages showed his power and mercy in the miraculous and gracious deliverance of his church, and in the protection of religious kings and states, and that no nation of the earth hath been blessed with greater benefit than this kingdom now enjoyeth, having the same true and free profession of the gospel under our most gracious sovereign lord King James, the most great learned and religious king that ever reigned therein, enriched with a most helpful and plentiful progeny proceeding out of his royal loins promising continuance of this happiness and profession to all posterity: the which many malignant and devilish papists, Jesuits, and seminary priests much envying and fearing, conspired most horribly, when the king's most excellent majesty, the queen, the prince, and the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, should have been assembled in the upper house of Parliament upon the fifth day of November in the year of our lord 1605 suddenly to have blown up the said house with gunpowder, an invention so inhuman, barbarous and cruel, as the like was never before heard of.”

The tradition of marking the day with the ringing of church bells and bonfires started soon after the Plot's discovery, and fireworks were included in some of the earliest celebrations. Now the, the 5th of November is variously called Bonfire Night, Fireworks Night, or Guy Fawkes Night

Black History: Sancho and the Boy Charles

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Charles

Portrayed in the painting of Lady Mary Churchill, Duchess of Montagu. Attributed to Enoch Seeman in the 1720s.

He is identified in the family cash books as “ye Black of her Grace” and “The Boy Charles” and was paid wages as a servant. The cash books reveal that he was educated, nursed when ill and clothed in fine livery or exotic outfits. Indeed, his shoes were made by the Duchess’s own shoe maker.



Ignatius Sancho (1729 -1780)

He was born on a slave ship and baptised at Cartagena (Spanish America) and brought to England when two years of age. Sancho was then given to three sisters in Greenwich as a slave-servant and describes this part of his life thus:

“The first part of my life was rather unlucky, as I was placed in a family who judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience. A little reading and writing I got by unwearied application – the latter part of my life has been – thro’ God’s blessing, more fortunate.”

His plight was noted by John, 2nd Duke of Montagu who “brought him frequently home to the Duchess, indulged his turn for reading with presents of books and strongly recommended to his mistresses the duty of cultivating a genius of such apparent fertility.”

He entered service with the Montagu family in 1749/50 and rose to become butler – when the Duchess of Montagu died in 1751 he was left a legacy of £70 and annuity of £30 a year. Having left the household, he is noted as being somewhat profligate with his money, both on gambling and women but gaining a large circle of friends in the theatrical world.

In 1758 Sancho returns to service with the Montagu family, acting as a valet to the 3rd Duke of Montagu and was able to marry Anne Osborne on the December 17th that year. He was able to take advantage of the Families enthusiasm for art, literature and music and produced and published several works himself. 1766 saw the publication of a letter to Laurence Sterne and he became widely known as a man of letters. Painted by Gainsborough in about 1768 as a superior servant, he retires from service in 1773 and sets up a grocery store with varied callers to his shop including aristocrats and other patrons. He is also reported to be the first Black man to vote in an election.

He died on December 14th 1780, receiving an obituary in the Gentleman’s Magazine and in 1782 his *Letters* were published to great success with 1181 subscribers including the Prime Minister, Lord North.

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Historical Background – French Influence Ralph Montagu (1638 – 1709)

Charles II sent Ralph as Ambassadorial Envoy on four separate occasions to the Court of Louis XIV between 1666 and 1678. He became a proponent of French art and architecture and “commissioned the most Francophile architect working in England to build his first London house in Bloomsbury in 1675.” Ralph was also a friend to Charles de St-Evermond an Enlightenment thinker.



He spent his period of exile (1682-1685, after the Rye House Plot) in Paris and following his return to England and Louis XIV’s Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; he assembled around him a circle of important and talented French Protestants (Huguenot’s).

These included aristocrats such as the Marquis de Ruvigny, his son, Lord Galway, Hortense Mancini, Duchess of Mazarin, the soldier, poet and essayist, Saint-Evremond, the historian, Michael Le Vassor and the librarian and bibliophile, Henri Justel. His Son, John (later 2nd Duke) was tutored by Pierre Sylvestre.

Ralph used a large number of French artists and craftsmen to work on his house at Boughton (as well as in London and Ditton), notable amongst there were:

Painters: Charles de Lafosse, Jean Baptiste Monnoyer, Jacques Rousseau, Jaques Parmentier and Louis Chéron

Carvers /Guilders: John and Thomas Pelletier,
Sculptor Gideon du Chesne
Cabinetmaker: Cornelius Gole



Left: ceiling by Louis Cheron

Right flower painting by Jean Baptiste Monnoyer