

# LANDMARK

## ANDREW THYNNE

The impressive stately home that now forms Stowe School, near Buckingham, used to be the seat of the Dukes of Buckingham. Its grounds are extensive and contain several follies, one of which is an extraordinary triangular mass of stone towers and arches in wild "Gothick" style, designed by James Gibbs in 1740. It forms an unusual type of self-catering holiday house and people can spend a week here in interesting surroundings. The place has a slightly eccentric atmosphere, especially when the students are doing their military exercises, and visitors have commented on the experience of being surrounded by soldiers darting from tree to tree and firing rifles. This is all part of a way of life offered by a unique organisation called the Landmark Trust.

A stone's throw from the world's first iron bridge stands a large square building between the River Severn and Ironbridge Market Place. No. 34, High Street, was the premises of a substantial 19th century grocer, consisting of a large house over a double-fronted shop, three floors of store rooms with trap doors and the original crane still in the roof, stables, coach house, bacon-drying house and two cellars, one connecting by means of a tunnel with the bank of the Severn. The shop is let to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum but most of the rest of the building forms accommodation for about four people, on the same basis as at Stowe. The house is furnished with regard to its character and location: Coalport china and a Coalbrookdale cast-iron fireplace, cistern and bathroom basin.

Stowe's Gothic Temple and 34, High Street, Ironbridge, are only two of about sixty properties in Britain owned by the Landmark Trust. The Trust aims to preserve historically or architecturally interesting buildings (mainly small ones) and to find suitable uses for them, normally by restoring them for habitation and letting them out for short periods. Its success is in some respects indicated by the fact that it won eleven awards in European Architectural Heritage Year, several more than any other recipient in this country. It was started in 1965 by a man called John Smith, an influential figure in the National Trust and a Conservative M.P. He felt that there were many structures worth preserving and fast disappearing that were not really suitable for the National Trust, which is unwilling to take on small buildings individually and cannot in any case (by the terms of its constitution) accept those without an accompanying endowment. To fill the gap, Landmark came into being, funded by another charitable trust, the Manifold, which John Smith and his wife Christian had set up three years earlier. Originally, the Smiths, who were fairly wealthy, had been philanthropically

giving money for conservation schemes but they came to dislike this approach and decided to set up the Manifold Trust which, by investing in commercial property, could make money within itself. Manifold is now a considerable financial success and has given money to many preservation projects such as the S.S. "Great Britain", Ryhope Engines Trust, the Kennet and Avon Canal and the National Gallery Titian Appeal. The Landmark Trust could not exist without Manifold. Generally, of the money that Landmark spends on purchase and restoration of new buildings, about 7% comes from visitors, 9% from local authorities, Tourist Boards and the Historic Buildings Council and almost all the rest from Manifold. Many of the properties come to Landmark through schemes undertaken with the National Trust or local Councils. Obviously, large amounts of money are spent: the restoration of mediaeval Wortham Manor, near Launceston, cost about £100,000 a few years ago. It was more expensive than any other individual Landmark building.

The Trust's properties may be extraordinary or vernacular in style, often just functional buildings in a particular setting. Usually they are converted into homes, if they were not so used originally, though some Landmarks are turned into offices or shops. Some of the housing is for permanent residence. Thus the buildings can be made to pay their way to some extent. But an important part of Landmark "philosophy" is this: if structures are converted for habitation and then let out for short periods, that allows a large number of people to experience each building properly, that is by eating and sleeping in it and seeing it in daylight, at night and in all weathers. Also, each customer has the feeling of owning the place. If you go to a stately home opened to the public, you pay your money, troop round with the crowds and go away again. However fascinating the place is, you have only appreciated a small part of what it offers; you need to live in it.

The variety of their properties is considerable, in fact, simple country cottages are unusual. Most Landmarks have some element of oddity or are noteworthy from an architectural or historical point of view. There are several mediaeval halls and a few small castles such as Clytha in Gwent and Saddell in the Kintyre Peninsula in Scotland. There is even a martello tower at Aldeburgh. The intriguingly-named Bath Tower is one of the late 13th century towers of Caernarfon's town wall; a stretch of the wall is available for perambulation, with the sea directly below. There are one or two follies, for example Stowe, Luttrell's Tower near Southampton and a fantastic summer house near Stirling carved into the shape of a pineapple. The Harp Inn and Stockwell Farm, both at Old Radnor, are two others of the Welsh Landmarks. One of the Harp's less recent customers was Charles II who complained about the food. The Egyptian House in Penzance, with its ornate facade, is one of three remaining buildings in the country in a style that became briefly popular after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. Landmark owns a whole village, Coombe near Bude, consisting of several houses round a mill in a wooded valley quite close to the sea.

Travellers on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal near Great Haywood junction see an imposing Elizabethan gatehouse on one hill near Tixall Wide. Tixall Hall used to stand behind it but

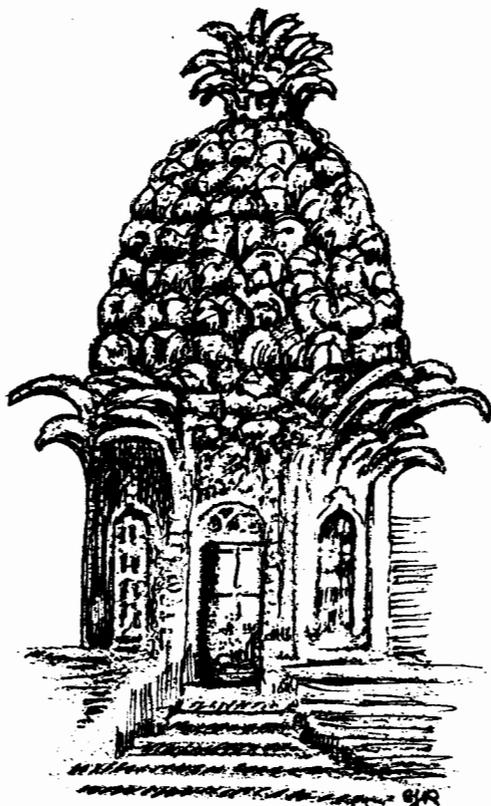
now only the gatehouse survives; Landmark visitors can stand on its roof among turrets and balustrades and, in imagination at least, be masters of all they survey. There is a clock here which occasionally strikes the half hour and has no hands or face. Tixall Wide was in fact an artificial alteration of the canal made by the owners of the Hall (the Astons) for ornamental effect.

More remote is Fort Clonque, covering a group of large rocks off the steep and uninhabited south-west end of Alderney in the Channel Islands, and linked at low tide by a causeway 300 yards long. It was built in the 1840s as part of Alderney's harbour works, dismantled forty years later and then strongly refortified by Hitler.

Clonque is a relatively small fort but its sprawling shape is determined by the layout of the rocks which it covers almost entirely. Some of the walls are 19 feet thick and there is a great sense of isolation and security here.

Isolation, though not security, is a feature of Lundy Island, in the middle of the Bristol Channel, ten miles off Hartland Point. The National Trust owns the island but Landmark runs it and has restored the few scattered buildings, some of which are fairly primitive. Lundy is 3 miles long and half a mile wide with some good cliff scenery. It is exposed to all winds and in a south-westerly direction there is no land for thousands of miles. This project was and is more trouble to the Landmark Trust than all the other places put together, but John Smith's opinion is that it is "tremendously worthwhile".

Many Landmarks are industrial; they include a stocking factory in St. Mary's Lane, Tewkesbury, a Victorian water tower at Appleton in Norfolk, Alton Station on the disused Leek to Uttoxeter railway and Wellbrook Beetling Mill in Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Other locations of interest to industrial archaeologists are North Street, Cromford, the earliest planned industrial housing in the world, built by Richard Arkwright in 1771, Edale Cotton Mill and Cotehale Consols copper and arsenic mine near Calstock in the Tamar Valley. With these three in particular, there are many industrial remains near at hand. The same is true of the Master's House, part of the Gladstone Pottery in Stoke which the Trust leased from the Museum there.



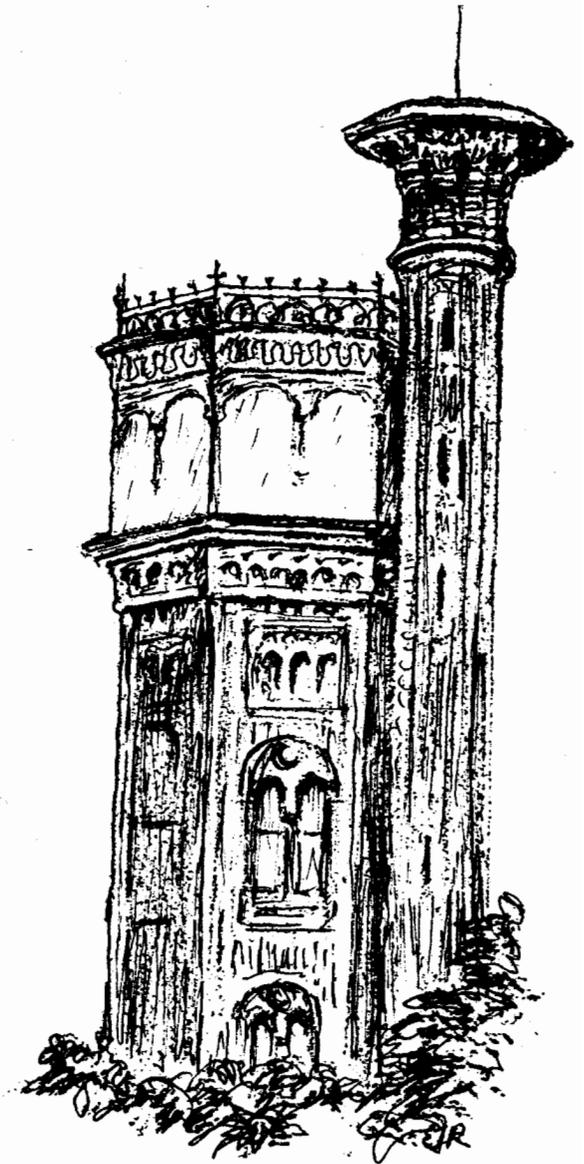
The "Pineapple"  
in Stirling.

The Landmark Handbook waxes lyrical about the house: "It is not very quiet and the view is terrible, but we can promise unimaginable sensations here to anyone who finds the Potteries as genuine and moving as we do". Among the possibilities for the future is an example of the distinctive circular lock-keeper's cottages on the Thames and Severn Canal, of which five now remain, in various states of preservation or ruin.

Landmarks are scattered all over the country, from Stirling to Penzance. There is an unintentional bias towards the South-West for some reason, with a cluster in Devon and Cornwall. The North Midlands have several, Wales has eleven and Scotland five. As yet, the North of England is poorly represented, there being only the Music Room at Lancaster ( a fine classical building in the middle of the city), the Old Grammar School at Kirby Hill near Richmond and Gibside Banqueting Hall outside Newcastle.

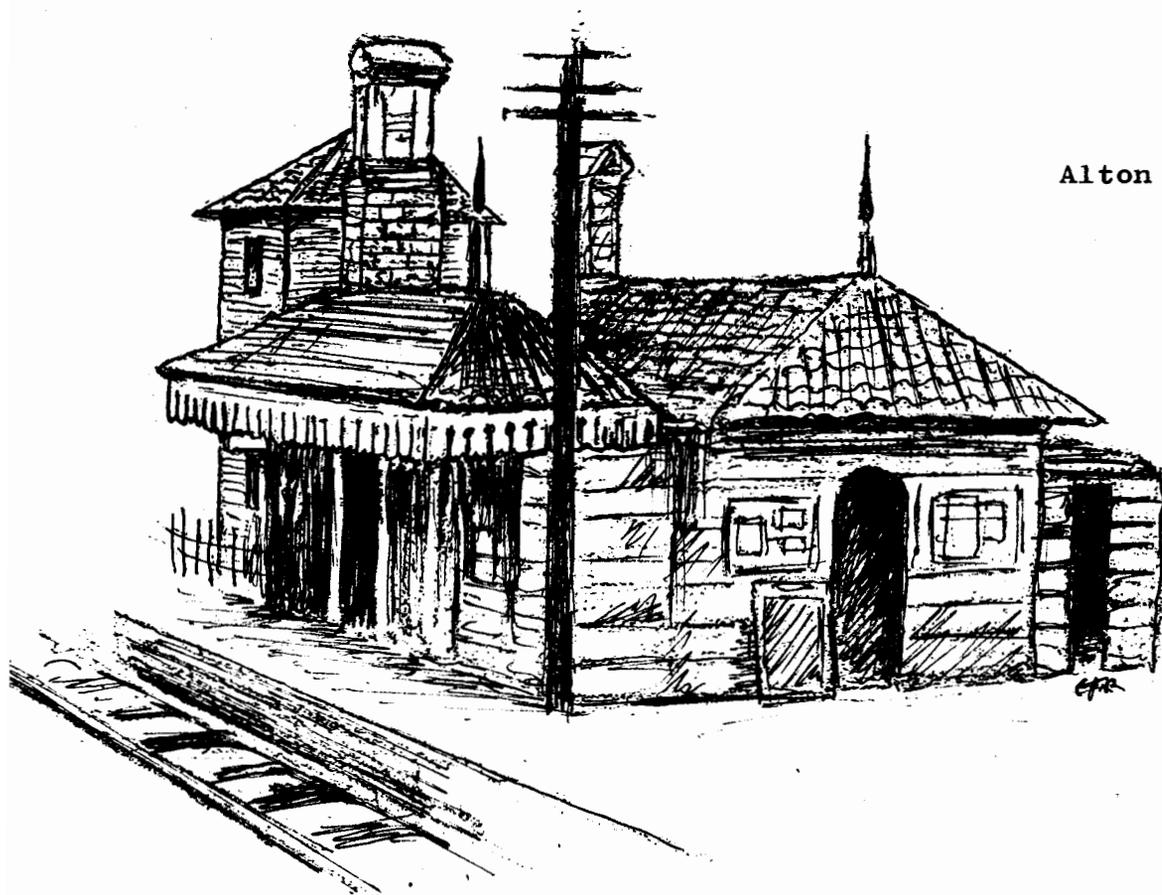
Letting buildings for short periods has architectural advantages. In these conditions, there is no need to make alterations which might spoil the character of the place, whereas if it were a permanent home the owner might to add a garage, improve the access or cut through the low beam that damages your head each time you enter the front door. On the other hand, a "high state of preservation" is not favoured. The general policy is to make the interiors as comfortable and practical as is compatible with the building's atmosphere, without falling into the trap of modernising too much. So there is clean but sympathetic paint on the walls, old doors are mended rather than replaced, the bathrooms have heated towel-rails, most of the furniture and the carpets are old. All the pictures have a reason for being there. Sometimes comfort conflicts with character: an elegant, upholstered Victorian armchair may not be suitable for very large people.

Furnishing is done without economy or extravagance, but it is important that each Landmark has furniture that is entirely in keeping with the nature of the house. Creating a new home with



Victorian Water Tower at Appleton, Norfolk.

considerable attention to detail, five or six times a year, is a demanding job and it is performed with enthusiasm by Joanna Chorley. (Indeed, all Landmark staff are dedicated people). Her predecessor in the task, until a few years ago, was Sonia Rolt, wife of the late L.T.C. Rolt. Furniture and pictures would be bought at Sales or unearthed from junk shops and restored near Winchcombe by a few helpers, including the author. The storage place and workshop was crammed with all manner of objects, each with labels bearing names of mystical castles or unpronounceable Welsh cottages, their future homes.



Alton Station

Alton Station, referred to above, is an Italianate structure on the old North Staffordshire Railway's Churnet Valley line, standing among woods below Alton Castle. The remains of the Uttoxeter Canal lie behind the platforms. Period atmosphere in this place is enhanced by the plumbing which makes a strange chuffing noise. An important feature of every Landmark is the library of about twenty books - not just guide books but literature pertaining to the area, such as Daphne du Maurier in Cornwall or Kilvert in the Welsh Border Country. At Alton there are books by Arnold Bennett, and "The Railway Children" and so on. Each place also has a file of appropriate historical papers, large-scale maps with local rights of way marked on, and (very useful for the Trust) a log book in which visitors can record their experiences and comments. Every Landmark has a caretaker living locally.

Apart from the very beginning, Landmark has never had to advertise. Most visitors come back year after year (whether to

the same or to a different building) and all promotion is by word of mouth. About 10,000 people stay in the Trust's properties every year and bookings are sometimes made many months in advance. The Trust prefers to let for a minimum of a week; weekend or midweek stays are only possible in the winter months. The prices, inclusive of V.A.T., heating and electricity, vary considerably. They are not cheap, but probably represent quite good value considering the type of accommodation. At the lower end, the Music Room at Lancaster costs £46 per week from January to mid-March (the cheapest period), rising to £96 in midsummer. On the other hand, the prices for Fort Clonque range from around £80 to £210 at similar times. For a November weekend, one of the more expensive places is Saddell Castle (£36) which has four floors and a battlemented roof-walk, massively thick walls with intriguing nooks and crannies, and a piece of floor inside the front door that used to be removable so that unwelcome visitors could fall through into the prison below.

A handbook containing photographs, plans and an interesting text, is produced by the Trust (cost £2) and has been of great assistance in the writing of this piece, as has an article in the Daily Telegraph Magazine of August 22nd, 1975. For copies of this handbook, and for further information, contact Group Captain W.R. Williams, O.B.E., D.F.C., R.A.F.(retd.), General Secretary, Landmark Trust, Shottesbrooke, Maidenhead, Berks. Tel: Littlewick Green 3431. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Rowles for producing the illustrations.

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