

**Intro:** One of the lovely things about the Landmark Trust is that people's relationships with us often last for decades. Martin Stancliffe is a highly respected conservation architect, now retired but formally surveyor to the fabric of St. Paul's Cathedral among many other achievements. He's been a Landmark Trustee since 2012, one of wise and trusted friends who helped steer Landmark as an organisation. Right at the beginning of his career, Martin worked on the rescue and conversion of a number of Landmarks. I'm Caroline Stanford and in this conversation Martin reminisces with me about his work at Culloden Tower in Richmond, North Yorkshire in the early 1980's.

**Caroline:** So Martin, just tell me, when did you first see Culloden tower?

**Martin:** Oh, I first actually saw it in the late 1960s. By pure chance, I went to the Lake District with a friend and we went via Richmond. And I noticed this extraordinary tower sitting on its hill outside Richmond and thought what an amazing and romantic kind of place it was. So actually, when Landmark approached me and said, - have I ever heard of the Culloden Tower, I was actually able to say 'Yes, as a matter of fact, I've got a slide of it somewhere'. But the first time I came across it really with Landmark was very early, very early 1981, it must have been. My memory is that it was early February 1981. But I may be wrong on that. It was certainly a very strange day. It was extremely foggy and I'd been asked to go and meet people from Landmark at the Culloden Tower, and you couldn't see a thing. I didn't know quite how to get to it. I remember sort of following a fence line down with my fingers, and emerging with this extraordinary tower disappearing up into the clouds. And this little group, my memory is three people clustered at the foot, one of whom was John Smith, one of whom I think was Group Captain Williams called Groupie and the third was Tom Dulake, who had actually come and seen me a week or two before my office to check it out, I suppose. And they all emerged out of the fog and I must have emerged out of the fog, in a very strange kind of way.

**Caroline:** It sounds like a typical Landmark visit to a potential property, even today.

**Martin:** Not least because the door had been barricaded shut because the tower had been vandalised quite a bit by local vandals. And somebody had actually, barricaded the front door to make quite sure that nobody could get in. But that, of course, was a problem because we all stood there and looked at it. And I remember John Smith saying to me, 'Well, if you're going to be an architect', which at that moment, I didn't know whether I was or not, but he said, 'Well, you need to get in. So we all looked a bit puzzled as to how we could get in. But there was this window at the sort of mezzanine level, which is now into the kitchen, which was open. And John Smith said, 'Well, I'm afraid we haven't brought a ladder, but you can use me as a ladder'. And of course, he was very tall, he must have been six foot six inches. He was quite a forbidding chap, and it was the first time we'd ever met. So I had to kind of climb up him. And I remember pushing my feet up so that I could go headfirst through the window into this one abandoned space. And I suppose that was, I know that it was not untypical of how things can happen in Landmark terms, but it seemed very strange

**Caroline:** And long pre health and safety in those days!

**Martin:** Long pre health and safety. Really, it didn't occur to any of us how I was going to get out again afterwards. But anyway, I was pushed through the window. And the tower was of course accessible up the staircase from that point on, so I was able to go up to the two upper rooms and found, well, the two fireplaces in particular had been, had all the carving ripped off them. And on the top floor, a good half of the plaster ceiling had fallen and smashed. Somebody had been in and had collected up all the fragmentary bits of the plaster, and particularly of the timber carving from

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the fireplaces, which was all free-carved and attached by pins, or had been attached by pins. They put them all into a plastic bag, which they then handed me later on in the day. And the trouble was that nobody had kept the top floor carving and the first floor carving separate from one another. So I was handed this kind of bundle of bits, which proved to be an extraordinary jigsaw puzzle. And it's always difficult doing a jigsaw puzzle anyway, but doing a jigsaw puzzle when it's two jigsaw puzzles mixed with about 45% of all the pieces actually missing made it interesting. But obviously that was one of the challenges of the job when I came to it, was how to get all that carving redone. And so I took a tracing of the pattern of where the carving had all been fixed onto the fireplaces, because you could see from the paintwork where it had been. And I laid that out of my drawing board. And then I did these two kind of partial jigsaw puzzles, trying to get all the bits in and we actually managed to get all the bits but about one leaf-end, which we couldn't find a place for, somehow back in again. And in sort of typical Landmark Trust way they were they were really keen that I used all the bits because they said you will get the carving better, you'll get it more complete by doing that. And the carver we used, Dick Read, who was a wonderful carver; I mean, he complained a bit to start with and said 'I can do the whole thing, you know, it's much easier to just do it from the photograph'. But I was insistent and Landmark was insistent. And so we pieced them all in and I've got a photograph somewhere, which I hope you've got in the archive, I handed it all over to Landmark that shows it before it was painted. Which shows the exact extent of all the pre-existing bits and all the new bits that we pieced in.

**Caroline:** Well, you certainly wouldn't know today that it was a jigsaw. Knowing the tower quite well myself, it all looks in fabulous condition.

**Martin:** On the carving, the two bits that were saved and were handed to me were the two faces. They had been preserved because somebody had lit a fire in the grate using the sort of bits and burnt a whole lot of them. But luckily the faces were preserved so they were handed to me along with some curly bits of leaf and things.

So, the wonderful ceiling. The plaster face had gone there. We've got a photograph of it and Dick Read modelled that, and then the plasterer cast it from the model face. But it was accurately based because we've got photographs that I think the Royal Commission must have taken. They were very good photographs at the time. And the nice thing about the ceiling was, you know it's got a sort of sea theme to it – it's got a lot of shell work in it. And we discovered that the shells had actually been cast from actual sea shells. So we did actually collect a few more sea shells, that were then cast by the plaster to be able to be put back in place. Yes, rather more than half the ceilings are gone. And in fact, you could see right through to the sky beyond it. I mean, we were only just in time really, I think to kind of save the whole of the ceiling. But of course it gave us a wonderful ability to get the setting-out of it quite right from that and we knew which way round things were; which if we had lost it completely I think we might not have been able to have traced

**Caroline:** What about materials? Where you using lime in the early 80s? Already?

**Martin:** Yes, but not probably quite as purely as we would have been doing more recently. I can't actually remember them the plaster mix, but it was, I think mostly Plaster of Paris. I mean, I think it was a gypsum product that was largely used. And we used lovely old fashioned plasterers, who certainly were used to using the traditional materials. And we certainly had a horse to make up the, the cornices, the cornices were run by hand and not moulded. And so actually, it was all done pretty

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well in situ. And then the cast elements of face and the mask and the seashells, they were stuck on then afterwards.

**Caroline:** It's so wonderful to think of these techniques being used, essentially in the same way over centuries and centuries, isn't it? Although I'm sure in the early 80s, there must have been a revival that was going on through this kind of work.

**Martin:** To be honest, it was early in my career. And I hadn't done anything quite like that. I'd done plaster ceilings for the National Trust before but I'd not done anything quite as sort of intricate or small in scale before. I was incredibly lucky, by the way that Landmark approached the whole handling of that project, in that they said to me. 'We're happy to use whatever contractor you think is the right contractor to do the work. We're happy to do it on a cost-plus basis. We're happy, to use the subcontractors that you and the main contractor are happy to work with.' So all this sort of modern business about, you know, competitive selection of people just wasn't an issue at all. And we could really just poke around for the people who we felt were best suited to do the work.

And actually in the early 80s, in York and Yorkshire, you really get a feel that the contractors and subcontractors, the plastering subcontractor, certainly, and the carving subcontractor - they were people who had... they weren't reviving anything, they were just continuing what they had learnt themselves, as apprentices and young workers. So that it was a different feeling I think in those days. That you were working with people who knew how to do their job, and were going to do it.

**Caroline:** And had learned from father to son, perhaps.

**Martin:** They probably had. Alas, I don't remember now about quite how we are how we selected the plasters. Anneleys who were the main contractors were certainly wonderful kind of contractors in the sense that they had most of the trades in house. They had wonderful joiners, they had wonderful stonemasons, and so on. So that most of the work could be done with their own people in house. And Billy Lamb, he who was the main joiner contract he was a carpenter himself, who was the site foreman, and he was a wonderful time-served carpenter who could just do all those tasks. I remember him adzing a beam with his own hands, just in front of my eyes to get, to get a quarter of a millimetre off it in the way that I'm not quite sure whether people can do these days.

**Caroline:** Is it different today in terms of the traditional crafts skills availability?

**Martin:** Not necessarily, in the sense that I think those craft skills are still there. But I think this sort of sense that actually it's a continuation of a long tradition has in many cases been broken. And a lot of the specialist contractors, you know, they've been away, they've done specialist courses with the SPAB or they've done specialist courses at West Dean or whatever it is - and they've all been sort of taught, the science of it all and the background to it all. These people weren't like that, they just did it. So in that sense I think it was slightly different. It feels slightly like a golden age, and it was in fact to me golden. I mean it remains throughout my career my most favourite project because in a way I was given such free hand to do what I wanted. I mean, I remember coming up with issues on the job saying that - we had a particular issue with the main beam that supported the ceiling and the roof. You know, we could have left it in position and spliced knew ends on to, but it was very ropey and I remember Landmark saying to me, what did I think, did I think it was right to keep the main beam or repair it or replace it? And I said, I thought it was right that we should replace it. And they said, 'Well, you're the architect, if that's what you think'. That involves a lot of complexity of supporting

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the ceiling in place while we took out the main beam and things, but they were happy to go along with me. And because we had this conceptual freedom, that we just saw the figures of the time and materials all the time, there was terrific freedom for me to say, to the contractors 'Just hang on for two days, and I'll be up. Use your time best you can on something else, but don't worry'. And so actually, one wasn't driven by that sort of, complete sense that the cost of everything was really what you should do. It probably didn't make much difference in the long run, I don't think, but it certainly relieved us all a lot of, kind of, sort of worry and anxiety. Later on in the project, which I didn't know right when we started, of course, I realised that we had this wonderful support from the Theo, from Theo Williams. Who, of course, was an absolutely brilliant QS (Quantity Surveyor) in two particular ways. One was that he was tremendously supportive to the architect, and was never wanting to sort of obtrude himself but always wanting to sort of make you feel that you were comfortable with things. But he also had an extremely wide experience, so that he was always saying, 'Actually, Martin, you know, if you're going to do that, have you thought about the extra that you might need'? And I think I'll squirrel a little bit more away here because my experience shows that you will probably need it a little bit later on'. And he was always absolutely dead right. I mean, he used to get his figures amazingly close, just through having a real sense of what the project was going to entail.

**Caroline:** Yes, I didn't realise Theo was around so long to be honest. Because I remember Theo from joining Landmark in 2001, and worked with him on Beckford's Tower. He was a trustee by then. It's wonderful thing for us that so many of our long standing collaborators, then support us through Trusteeships and so on.

**Martin:** Theo was a wonderful supporter of Landmark, of course, and I think he had been already involved quite a long time. I'm not quite sure when he when he first became involved. But of course, he became a really good friend of mine. And I then involved him in turn. I pinched him for Lichfield Cathedral and pinched him actually for St Paul's Cathedral to help me with initial costings there.

**Caroline:** Was there a grand opening of Culloden? Maybe not because of course, then Sir John Smith was basically funding the project, so there wasn't the same kind of donor involvement that we rely on so heavily today?

**Martin:** No, I don't think there was. My memory is that it went into all that sort of furnishing phase very kind of inevitably smoothly from the ending of the building phase. And I certainly was invited to spend a week there. I think immediately after it was furnished. They said, 'You better go and spend a week there and tell us whether it works or not'. And in fact, I took my family and my youngest took her first steps there. Actually, while we were staying there. But I don't think there was a grand opening. The furnishing stages were very delightful because, Christian (Smith) and Claire Percy did together. And there were a scream. I mean they came in and I wasn't too involved in what they were doing. But they were to-ing and fro-ing. I was very involved with the choice of the colour for the top room because it had been green a rather bright green. I was quite interested in what other people were doing at that time trying to discover what colours they would have originally been. Ian Bristow was doing research at Kings Manor, just over the wall from my office, and I remember talking to him about how the green might have been made if it had been original. Clearly it wasn't original. And Christian Smith said to me, 'Well, you know, we'd better see what the green you suggest is'. So we put up this green, which was absolutely horrifyingly too bright. And they said 'We better quieten it down a bit, if that's what you think it should be. That's what we'll try and do'. And I think Landmark

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mercifully painted it out relatively soon after we'd done it because it was rather too bright. But it was based on my understanding of what Ian Bristow had said would have been the pigments that they would have used at the time.

**Caroline:** And what about the services? I mean, there must have been a challenge getting water and electricity up to the top of the hill?

**Martin:** Yes. That wasn't too bad. They were taken straight up the hill and moulded into the ground. What was quite entertaining was the road. Because of course there was no roadway up to the tower for contractors or visitors. Tom Dulake and I were both very concerned that the contractors shouldn't make a kind of, sort of, too straight a road up. And so I was delegated to choose the road route in my car. And I drove up the field in what I thought was a nice 18th century sort of curvilinear kind of way, followed by the JCB who dragged his bucket to trace where I had driven. And that's how we arrived at the route of the road. So that that was all right.

The services of course, which were terribly difficult were the heating. Because in those days, we felt there shouldn't be an open fire. And I mean, mercifully that has now been altered because, it is lovely to have a fire there, but we thought that there shouldn't be. And of course, it is a very exposed location being eight sided and exposed to all the winds, and we only had electricity. And so we did the best we could. But there was a relatively new kind of heating system which had just come on the market which Landmark and I in discussion with one another decided we would give a try. And it involved drawing in fresh air from the outside and blowing it ducted - blowing the air over the heating coils in the electric heaters. Which was an ingenious idea of getting kind of fresh air into the system. We had a piped air coming up through the building, not in ducts but in quite small diameter tubes to these to these radiator positions. But it didn't really work. It was cold in those early days as we know, I think it still is.

**Caroline:** A couple of years ago we went back on the on the annual Landmark trustees tour, to Yorkshire and we went to Culloden Tower. What was that like coming back almost 40 years later to a project?

**Martin:** Well, it was surprisingly confirmatory really in a way. Nothing terribly substantial had changed. I mean, the heating had changed mercifully. But actually the way it was furnished, the way it was finished, the way it looked, and I mean, the contractors have clearly done a good job - everything seemed to be relatively robust. And it felt very, it felt very comforting actually, to come back to it after close on 40 years and see it still well-loved and being enjoyed and feeling fairly much the same as it always had.