

7 December 2023

Dear Friend of Landmark,

From Ross and Cromarty to Rome some 800 people are inhabiting a Landmark at this very moment. In a few days' time it will be a different 800 people. The marvel of the Landmark model is that the buildings have a use that is both beneficial and economically viable. This is both a means, and an end to our work: it provides the income to sustain our charity and keep our places in good repair, and it gives people experiences that inspire and delight.

This year we have been about 87% full, still unusually high but slightly down on last year. Costs have continued to rise, though thankfully, a combination of energy efficiency measures and falling prices have brought our gas and electricity costs down. Given the financial strictures of the times, however, we anticipate we will need to work hard to keep bookings high enough to cover our costs. We plan to experiment this coming year with offering buildings available at short-notice for a reduced price – to maximise income and public benefit and ensure our housekeepers are not left without work in periods of lower occupancy.

Landmark's buildings need a lot of care and a lot of money - looking after them will never be cheap and sustaining them is all about the long term. One example coming up is Saddell Castle, which was built in 1508 on the flank of Kintyre in Argyll, and was an early Landmark, opening almost 50 years ago in the mid-1970s. It now needs a major refurbishment, roof and harl, fixtures and fittings, and will be closed for about a year from mid-2024. It is just one of the scores of maintenance projects we undertake annually, benefitting not only the buildings, but the continuation of the traditional craft skills needed for their care.

New building rescues are at the heart of our work – and would not be possible without the support of the wonderful body of Landmark supporters. The Landmark year of new projects in 2023 got off to a glad start with the opening of Fairburn Tower in Ross-shire. The proof of its success is in the bookings, in which there has not been a single gap since we launched.

At Calverley Old Hall, in West Yorkshire, work has been progressing well. Our contractors Dobson of Ilkley are now getting to the thrilling final stages. The bathrooms are being tiled, the limewashes applied, the panelling installed, and the furniture assembled. The astonishing wall paintings, which research indicates are early Elizabethan, have recently been fully revealed and initial cleaning trials promise wonderful end results. We hope to be ready to open in the autumn.

This time last year our plans for the Station Agent's House in Manchester, a surviving structure from the world's first passenger railway station, required over £200,000 to be realised. I am pleased to say that we now have just £21,000 still to raise, giving us the confidence to begin work earlier this year. Meanwhile the transformation of the Mayor's Parlour in the Maison Dieu at Dover is well underway, a key part of the regeneration of this remarkable historic town, and all being well we hope to open it in 2025.

Earlier in the year we launched our campaign to save the horribly imperilled Watch Office at RAF Ibsley in the New Forest. The story of this outstanding place, and the courage and fortitude of the men and women who worked in and about it, has caught the imagination of many, and I am glad to say we so-far have 70% of the funding. We have put in a planning application for our scheme, which given the many designations of this beautiful site is not without complexity, and we hope to be ready to go out to tender in the spring. Raising the remaining funds (£924,000) in the next few months is going to be absolutely crucial to our ability to proceed.

Landmark has long considered William Adam's masterpiece, Mavisbank in Midlothian, a strong candidate for the most important building at risk in the entire UK. We have been trying to find a solution for its many and complicated challenges for some time. Following an enthusiastic response from the National Heritage Memorial Fund's expert panel to an initial approach, we are putting in an application for £5 million to support the acquisition and a programme of essential repairs to this outstanding Category A building, exactly 300 years after construction first began in 1723. A decision will be made in late March and, if positive, will mark the beginning of a long journey. We will keep you posted.

'Thank you's' can sometimes seem formulaic, especially in a letter like this. But please know that there is nothing routine about the thanks this letter brings. What you have enabled this year, and over the past years, are not small things. They are big, complicated, and important things: extraordinary buildings, singular survivals of our history, retrieved from abject dereliction, repaired with the very best skills and expertise and given a new use that brings joy - and funds their long-term care - in perpetuity. It is work that will endure for generations after we have all gone and that, I hope you agree, is something really to celebrate.

With warmest wishes to you and your family for a very happy Christmas,



Dr Anna Keay OBE  
Director