

Landmark Chronicles: The Historian's Story

Welcome to the Landmark Chronicles. For 60 years, the Landmark Trust has rescued historic buildings at risk and turned them into unforgettable places to stay. To mark this milestone, we teamed up with National Life Stories at the British Library to record the stories of six long-standing members of staff.

The full interviews are now available in the British Library Archive. And we've turned some of the highlights into podcasts, giving you a behind-the-scenes glimpse of life at Landmark. Episode 6. The Historian's Story For more than 25 years, Dr Caroline Stanford has been the Landmark Trust's in-house research historian, helping to uncover and interpret the stories behind our extraordinary buildings.

In this episode, Caroline reflects on the career path that led her to Landmark and explains why lifelong learning remains at the heart of her work and research today. I was born in Chipping Norton in the, I think it was called a memorial hospital there. My mother was called Myra, born Myra Collier.

And she was born and grew up in Whitby, up on the northeast coast. She met my father, Philip, one summer holiday when she was running the kiosk Bowling Green on the West Cliff in Whitby. So my father was a Geordie, and he grew up in Newcastle.

His father was a draughtsman in the shipyard, Frederick Ord. And so that was my maiden name, O-R-D. I grew up as Caroline Ord.

And they both then went on to Durham. They were first generation going to university. Mum to do a general studies degree, my father to read history.

And they both became teachers. When she was already pregnant with me, so I guess in 1958, they came south to Chipping Norton in a little Ford T model car. My father to teach history at Chipping Norton grammar school.

He believed very, very strongly in the comprehensive system. So in 1965, he got a job as head of history at Chipping Camden, which was then a grammar school, but on the cusp of becoming a comprehensive. For all he was a grammar school boy, dad believed very fiercely in equality of opportunity.

And so was part of that wonderfully idealistic in a way generation that really, really believed in comprehensive schools, thought the 11 plus was deeply unfair. You know, that division of children so early on into better and less good. So Willesey is a little village three or four miles from Chipping Camden.

And that was my childhood home. It's a 1960s, mid 1960s, close of houses that were still being

built. So it was almost like a build.

Well, it was a building site. Our house was just about finished. But within sort of bare earth, as I remember it, there were certainly other houses in the close that were still being built.

It was a two bedroomed architect designed, apparently, as they all were. And then I was at Willesey Primary School, which was a little C of E school that's still there at the top of Church Street. So one of these little Victorian church schools, three classes only, next to a lovely old, tiny, not very big church and churchyard.

It's a very dear place. And I suppose, yes, a strong sense of place for me still. You know, very strong roots in the North Cotswolds there.

And I mean, clear memories of Miss Edmund's class, interestingly, was Tudors and Stuarts. The costumes anyway, maybe it was colouring in or something like that. But I do remember in Miss Edmund's class very clearly sort of falling in love with the romance of the Tudors and Stuarts and starting to keep scrapbooks somehow of, you know, cutting out pictures and pictures of Queen Elizabeth I dancing the volta with the Earl of Leicester.

So something sort of entered my soul at that point, I guess. When it got to third, fourth, you had to decide on your O levels. And I chose all three sciences and didn't particularly want to do history, just sort of didn't even think of history at that stage.

I was really enjoying the sciences. I took eight O levels. That was the most you could do then.

Anyway, I did very well in those. So I signed up to do biology, chemistry, physics. Then we went on holiday to Whitby.

And I can remember walking on the West Cliff with Dad on a sort of sunny, windy day and just saying, Dad, I don't think I can give up English and French because you could only do three A levels. I decided, no, I would go back and do English, history and French. And within the course of those two years, became completely hooked on history.

I still love English literature, Shakespeare, everything else we did, those sort of critical faculties. I think probably it drew out, it was a combination of both an analytical approach to slightly dissecting and understanding a text with that wonderful sort of sense of imagination and creativity. And I suppose a sort of a sentience of things, of the past, of words, of putting things down on a page, of communicating thoughts and ideas.

And all of those came together most in history. It was shapeshifting until that moment of finding history, which brings it all together for me. You know, the analysis, the romance, the imagination, the sense of identity and not always understanding, but forgiveness for what's happened in the past.

And perhaps that translates into one's outlook in life as well. I don't know. So, yes, if there was a lightbulb moment, I suppose that was it.

And the die was cast. So I took my A-levels when I was 17 and a half, my birthday being in December. The headmaster changed while I was in the sixth form, and a young headmaster called Peter Sandry came along.

He happened to have been at Jesus College, Oxford. And the Oxbridge colleges, almost for the first time it felt, were reaching out to comprehensive schools, state schools like ours. And so Mr. Sandry was very encouraging, saying, yes, yes, you must try for Oxbridge.

I thought I didn't want to at all. I had no interest in Oxford and Cambridge. To me, they seemed incredibly stuffy, you know, upper class places that weren't for me at all.

So went into my A-levels, sort of got my three A's and my A1 in S-level history. And yes, absolutely had the grades to apply for Oxford. The entrance application was me sitting by myself because nobody else was applying.

There were only two of us. One boy applied for maths and I applied to do history. It felt a very big adventure being seen off on the platform from Evesham, got the train to Oxford.

So had the interview, went home. And then a couple of days later, got a very peculiar telegram that said, congratulations, no further interview necessary. Jesus College, Oxford.

And that was really cryptic. I mean, we didn't really know what that meant, other than that presumably it was good news because it said congratulations. And a letter came a few days later saying that I'd been awarded an open scholarship, which again, at the time, I don't think I quite understood, but with hindsight was an amazing, wonderful thing.

Not very much money. I mean, I think it was only something like £30 a year or whatever. But obviously an open scholarship to Oxford was a huge accolade.

And that first term was pretty difficult, actually. The way it worked for history students at that stage at Oxford, you had your prelims at the end of the first term. So you were catapulted straight into formal exams that determined whether you could stay or not.

Having got through that first term, I then absolutely loved Oxford flu. Just had a sense of suddenly of being able to be my own self in an intellectual way. It was three essays a fortnight for eight weeks.

And I can remember an early tutor saying, you'll learn, you'll never read a book while you're here. You'll learn to gut books. And that is sort of what you have to do.

You are on such a treadmill with a new reading list every week, essays to write, notes to take. I

worked hard. I loved it.

I loved the libraries. I still love the libraries. I played hockey.

I rode. I played hockey for the college, ended up captaining the side. I also played for the university second 11 throughout.

I also acted. I mean, I was in various plays, open air Shakespeare every summer and some other productions as well. And yes, just sort of was unable to live life to the full without feeling swotty anymore, you know, just getting on with it and loved it.

The wonderful thing about the Modern History syllabus is that it gave you a broad sweep from the Anglo-Saxons through to the Second World War, basically. So we did a little bit of everything and we galloped through it. My goodness.

All I can plead is just a just a voracious fascination with the past, with anything, any aspect of it. That all, as I say, led up to these 10 three-hour papers for finals that you sat in the examination schools on the high, which is still the case, I think. Then, I mean, how much later? Perhaps three weeks later, by now back at home, was told I was going to be vivered.

I'd heard about vivers, but you don't know quite what they are until the finger falls on you. So viver voce for live voice, which basically means you have to go and be grilled on your exam papers by a panel of fellows of academics. And I think I had two weeks notice.

So, of course, you don't know which papers they're going to pick on. So not your strongest papers, but the ones that were perhaps a little weaker to see whether you can verbally defend yourself to tip you into a higher class. Obviously, you know, hoped I was at the top end, but you just don't know.

Anyway, was ushered in to a seat in front of a long table with maybe six or seven, you know, not stern exactly, but not smiling faces, and was grilled for three quarters of an hour or so on none of the papers I was expecting. And then, yes, a few days later, the phone rang. And it was my nice Dr. Walsh, the lovely, gentle college tutor who really had been a friend and a mentor, but was him ringing to say, congratulations, you've got a first.

It was a wonderful thing. It's something that I've carried with me with really glowing pride all my life. And it's not something, it's not something I talk about in life because, you know what, you don't.

But it's still when I think of it, it still makes me feel very, very proud to have achieved that. Through my second half of my final year at Oxford, obviously you start to think about what happens next. My own career path was more than a little random.

There was a career service office on the Summertown Road where, yes, we were advised to go

and be advised. So I went along and the day that they were doing, the day that I went, they were trialing a sort of newfangled questionnaire that helped identify what sort of career you would be fit for. And what came out for me, market research, interestingly.

So I went for an interview to Research Bureau Limited, RBL, in Wapping, which was a standalone market research agency that was owned by Unilever. Now, I went into that world so naively, I had no idea of the commercial. I didn't even know how to use a photocopier in the early days.

We were working in this converted warehouse in Wapping. Yeah, a completely new and different world, far away from history, far away from Oxford, with other very bright young graduates, quite a lot of whom became very close friends. I mean, it was a great breeding ground for romances because everybody was in their 20s and everybody was of sort of broadly similar backgrounds.

And Julie and my husband joined in the following year. And yes, you know, we're still together. So it was a fun place to work socially.

Did I enjoy it? It felt very seat of the pants to me for quite a lot of the time, if I'm honest, if I'm truly honest. And so in 1985, I think I was headhunted actually for a job as European market research manager for Del Monte, the canned fruit and vegetable company, to go and head up their market research across Europe. So I moved jobs.

It felt very much more corporate, more lonely in a way, not that same sort of interchange with peers. I think my heart was never in it. And I also began to miss history a bit.

I had found out about Birkbeck College as part of London University, which offer out of hours specifically for workers education, but ongoing lifelong learning, if you like. And there was a master's course in early modern history that caught my eye. Early modern being 1660 to 1750, I think.

And so I began going, I signed up for that and began doing that in the evenings. A seminar once a week and associated reading and essays and exams at the end of the two years. And I absolutely loved it.

It kind of re-cemented my, or it fed my love of history that I wasn't getting out of business life. I could do the business side of it just, I think, but it never felt natural to me. It never felt as though it was my natural habitat, if you like.

We got married in 1987. In 1988, Julian was offered a job in Barcelona. I think because we'd already been working in Europe, we were both very much up for living abroad and would have had it as sort of part of the life plan.

And, you know, Barcelona, what a wonderful city. I was coming up to 30. I knew I wasn't wholly settled in corporate life and never really had been.

And therefore I was quite happy to say, okay, yep, I will stop working. Let's go to Barcelona and, you know, in due course, maybe let's think about a family, starting a family while we're away. So we flew out on New Year's Eve, 1988.

We found a flat, not in the city, but up on the hills that overlook Barcelona with fabulous views out across the city to the Mediterranean behind. And somehow, having thought I'd go to give up work, somehow I fell into being a consultant for Schweppes on their market research across Europe. And the Barcelona year, because that was all it turned out to be, was very happy.

Early 1990, we are now, Julian was asked to move to Connecticut. And this was to be marketing director for North America, I think, for the Schweppes brands. So suddenly we were about to move to America.

And so, yeah, we moved to Connecticut, probably, and so that would have been the end of February. I was due at the end of May. So it was probably as late as I was allowed to fly.

I was quite heavily pregnant by that stage. Chosen to live in Greenwich, Connecticut, which is a very old school, Eastern seaboard kind of town. We were there for three years, very happily.

In May of that year, Eleanor was born, our daughter, in Greenwich Hospital. Eleanor was a joy. And yes, in due course, little Dom came along, again in Greenwich Hospital.

So little Dom arrives. Not so little now. He's somehow got a tall, lean gene in our family.

So he's six foot plus now. But yes, he arrived as a little younger brother. And then in the late autumn, the year that Dom was born, which was 92, there began to be stirrings of the right job for Julian had come up back in Watford.

And so we came home that Christmas with Dom a babe in arms. So Dom would have been six months old. Eleanor would have been two and a half, knowing that we were going to be moving back to the UK at the end of January, 1993.

And while we were there, grabbed a few details of houses in the right price band that we felt we could afford. And one of the details that we picked up was for this big old house called Church House that had been on the market for over a year at that point and was just about affordable, which has, you know, cutting to the chase, been our very happy family home for the last 33 years. This really robust, battered, heavily timber-framed house.

The house has become sort of a defining characteristic of our lives, I think. The return to, yes, full-time employment, back to history, full on, et cetera. That was somehow crafted in a way to happen alongside that homemaking instinct.

Making a home in Church House, Julian obviously was working and I'm enormously grateful to him for sticking with corporate life and being the breadwinner, which I wasn't through the 90s. So

I managed all those works with, you know, equal enthusiasm and involvement from Julian. But because he was still in an international role, he would be away very often for quite extended periods of time.

I would be left running the fort here. You look back and you think, how did I get eventually three little children out of the door at 8.15 for the school run? But you do. So yes, they were very, very happy years.

For both of us, there is a sense of comfort and rootedness in old buildings, I think. And also a desire or an appreciation of having been lucky enough to live in houses that are somehow distinctive. I find the same in choosing which buildings we take on as landmarks, which is something that, as the historian for landmark, I've had oversight for all the nearly 25 years I've worked there.

I mean, we have over 100 suggestions every year for landmark properties. Actually, you can tell by the pricking of your thumbs, almost, which ones are going to work, you know, which ones are worth looking at more seriously. And I still, I get that same instinctive thing.

I think probably everybody who's involved with selecting the buildings at landmark has the same thing of an instinctive, yes, this building feels right and good. You know, for us, there is an emotional response to even buildings in complete disarray, even buildings in decay, you can still get a sense of, yeah, this is a good place. This is a place that's worth putting effort into.

In a professional context with landmark, you are also calibrating against things like, you know, how important it is, how significant it is historically, culturally, architecturally, whatever. Does it need landmark? You know, is it worth the effort as a charity or can it find another future? If it can, that's fine. And then thirdly, is it a nice place to spend for a holiday? So that's a different kind of professional calibration of thumb sensations to the one you get as a prospective purchaser of a building walking in for the first time.

Quite early on, because we wanted to know more about the history of the place, we somehow got hold of an architectural historian and she came and spent a day with me and basically, you know, decoded it for us, said, well, the secret is in the name. It's a church house and a church house is a particular typology of buildings that was very common between about 1450 and about 1550. We've never had the timbers dated, but the heaviness of the timbers would be entirely consistent with our church house being built in the late 1490s.

For the first time, I think I began to see buildings as primary sources in their own right for the lives that were lived inside them. And I joined the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Our third son, William, was born in 94 at High Wycombe.

So he's the only one who hasn't got US citizenship, which he's a bit resentful, I think. But yeah, so now as mother of three. In about 97, I suppose, I was elected as a parish councillor on which I sat

for the next, I think, seven years probably.

And that too was a very good education for eventually life at landmark in the sense of learning as a participant in the planning system how that all worked. I started doing WEA courses, you know, an hour a morning, an hour a week or something. There was a very good one on the history of the English home, I think it was called, and was basically a lecture in a village hall or something about how English domestic architecture had evolved.

That all was starting to feed that old history bug again. Coincidentally, too, we had a Danish au pair, somebody else's Danish au pair who'd come to the village. And that worked out really well.

And I discovered there was an MSc course part-time at Oxford Brookes in historic conservation. I sort of thought, well, Ria's here. And actually, you know, she's lovely with the children.

They were all at school now, except for William. You know, maybe she could cope with a day a week. And so I signed up for the course and sort of, you know, then didn't look back from there.

And a really good course. I still lecture occasionally on it. I do the sort of building analysis or an element of the building analysis module now.

And I got a huge amount out of it. I would be happily putting the children to bed, having supper with Julian and then working till one in the morning, just sort of absolutely enthralled with it all. Wrote my dissertation on why do we preserve ruins? You know, why don't we just let them fall down? Why do we like visiting them? And so on.

And so came out of all of that, 1999 are we now? And a slightly odd year of thinking, oh, you know, what next? Because I was still committed to motherhood, to basically being at home at church house. And meanwhile, had sort of stumbled on landmark. So this takes us back to Chipping Camden in the historic conservation master's course I was doing.

There was a research and analysis module for which we had to find a small historic building and draw it. So record it and research it. So I had gone back to visit my father.

We were walking around in Chipping Camden anyway. And of course, by the church is the landmark site with the banqueting houses, the two Jacobean banqueting houses. And I was telling him about my course and saying, oh, I've got to find a building, but I don't know how to find one or where to go.

And he said, well, why don't you do the East Banqueting House? I think he must have said it's owned by some charity or other called the Landmark Trust, who I'd never heard of. So I then found out that the Landmark Trust was three miles from home. Huge coincidence that Landmark's headquarters are at Shottsb Brook Park, which is three or four miles from where we live in Hurley.

So I then wrote to them, was contacted by a very personable young man called Alistair Dick Cleland, who has been a sort of cherished colleague ever since, as things have turned out. But to my polite inquiry, could I be allowed to research and record the East Banqueting House? He said, well, no, that's not really feasible because of course it's let for holidays most of the time, which I didn't know. But he said, there is another little building on that site that we're about to take on called the Armoury.

And so I had to look at the Armoury and yes, it was perfect, basically. Landmark at that point had just been given the West Banqueting House, but that was as yet unrestored. I can remember as part of that process going over, I can remember the first time I ever went to Shottersbrook and I can honestly remember walking up the garden path to the front door thinking, this is a place I could work.

I'd like to work here. You know, even before going in through the front door, very strange, crystallised thought. Yes, this is somewhere I could belong.

I've still got the piece of work somewhere. But it was a perfect task, a very good exercise of how to look at a building and decode it. I mean, I'm not a buildings archaeologist and never will be, but I suppose it makes you scrutinise, why is that side different from that side? You know, what's happened there? There's a break in the masonry.

It's not necessarily understanding what you're seeing, but understanding that there's something there that needs further explanation and also learning that there will be other people you can ask, but it's up to you to frame the questions perhaps. And that was my first sort of toe in the water of taking a building and researching its history and its purpose and so on, through photographs, through depictions, through the people involved with it. So having done that and then having completed my course, as I say, I was left feeling a bit high and dry of, I kind of found my niche, but I didn't know what to do next.

The other thing to say is that in 1997, which was more or less when I turned up at Landmark at that stage, maybe into 98, I'm not sure, the only other historian there's ever been in this 60 years had just died. So her name was Charlotte Haslam. So they were without a historian.

There'd never been a proper history album for the Chipping Camden site. Would I write one as a volunteer? And so I did just purely as a volunteer, just wrote up what I'd found out so far. And then that led to another commission.

I think it was North Street, Cromford, which is a little Richard Arkwright cottage up in Derbyshire. At some point with the children, as a thank you for these history albums, I was offered a late notice stay in a landmark. And so as a thank you, I was able to choose a building that was available at the last minute and go away for the weekend.

Julian, I think, was away. So the children and I went down to the old hall at Crosscombe, which is

a tiny remnant of a medieval manor house. And so that was my very first experience of staying in a landmark.

Very embarrassingly, we hadn't realised that there was a 10 o'clock kicking out deadline on the Monday morning. And so I arrived back from having had a nice morning out with the kids at about midday for lunch to find all our belongings in black bin lines on the doorstep. And of course, no mobile phones at that point.

So they couldn't ring me up and say, where are you? You're supposed to be out by now. So that was very embarrassing. Anyway, notwithstanding that, in, I guess, 99, I think again, I think it was Alastair who got in touch with me and said, we're advertising for a historian.

They've decided to re-recruit. And so, I mean, of course, I applied by return and then didn't hear anything for six or eight months. I mean, just nothing.

But everything just went quiet, completely quiet. And then finally, in about the October, they did get in touch again. So I was duly called for interview and was interviewed by the then director, Peter Pearce, and the then head of buildings, he was called, David Alexander, who would become sort of great colleagues over the next 10 years or so, as things turned out.

So then I was called in for a second interview. And this time I met Lady Smith as well, Christian Smith, who was a sort of tall, aquiline woman, probably in her late 60s by then, I would think. Quite a sort of Virginia Woolf kind of a face somehow, sort of slightly long face and sort of thinning grayish hair.

And rather frosty, I felt in that interview, whether it was the fact that here was a replacement for Charlotte, which was certainly a sense I had in my early years with Landmark, that these were very big boots to fill. I suspect Charlotte and I are very different in background, approach, probably everything except love of history. But yes, Christian was somehow a bit scary, which wasn't at all how she was once I got to know her.

Anyway, wonderfully, thrillingly, I was offered the job. My original job description was a most wonderful one in that the historian was described as Landmark's spirit guide, which is a rather wonderful thing. The role has always been intended to be one that reaches right across Landmark's activity.

It feeds into the design, the building design schemes and the treatment of the building. It also feeds into the fundraising, feeds into the marketing communications. I've always loved the title simply historian, because I think as a calling card for wider communications, that's what people want to hear about.

It's the stories that people like to hear. And that's essentially what a historian does based on careful research. But you're a storyteller, you're a kind of conduit to try and help people see

things, in this case, a building or a life through slightly different eyes or to be able to tell them about it.

And okay, yes, I mean, I'm always very conscious that I'm a filter. I'm bringing my own self to this. But as far as one can, you try and make sure it's based on sound research, sound knowledge, sound fact.

In 2001, it was the spirit guide, according to the Smiths, that was what was wanted. From my own point of view, I suppose in not having any handover of any kind, because Charlotte Haslam had died three or four years ago by this time, I was sort of very much left to myself to decide how to approach things. I have learned an awful lot in terms of being a research historian and in a sense, an informal archivist for Landmark, I suppose, simply on the job.

In joining, I definitely was parachuted in to two very major projects, three actually, probably even more than that, I don't know. The crystallization of, we need another in-house historian, research historian, was Ockinleck House and was the former ancestral home of James Boswell, built by his father in 1760, Lord Ockinleck, who was an Edinburgh law judge. I do remember on my first visit being taken up onto the scaffolding up at roof level to show me the roof, I guess, and see the view across the policies west.

You could just see just about get, see Arran on a good day. And that was a kind of another kind of revelatory moment of, my goodness, I'm so lucky here I am on the top of this amazing building, this amazing house. And it's still the same today that I will go out on site as often as I can during a given project, just to absorb the craftsmanship that's going on, understand the process of what Landmark is doing, because it's a really important part of the archive for a restored building, to record what it is you've done to it, because decisions have been made.

The Ockinleck account certainly, and the Boswell papers, have ended up in Yale, of course. At that stage, remembering that we'd lived in New England, you know, we'd been in Connecticut for three years. So it felt very familiar territory.

Julian was still traveling a great deal in the international jobs that he's always done. And every time you flew the Atlantic on Virgin in business class, you got given a free voucher for another economy flight. And so I asked if I would be allowed to go to Yale for a week to go and research the papers.

If I used the vouchers to go, would I be allowed to do that? And I was. And so I had a wonderful week going through the household accounts of Ockinleck. The lovely steward, Mr. Bruce, he was called, who held the whole estate together and sent all these letters and kept meticulous accounts and things, all of which are there at the Beinecke.

To have the luxury of having two or three days completely focused on a single archive, as I was able to at the Beinecke, was wonderful because you then, you can begin to get a sense of the

shape of the whole thing. That sort of bald, but fascinating household accounts of who was paid how much for how many nails in which year. And, you know, being able to trace through, okay, so now they're putting the roof on, or now they're building the pavilions.

Now they've got the plasterers in. All of that comes alive through estate accounts. And I think also in, for me in doing the research, in a sense, I'm following my own nose as to what's going to be interesting for me, but I always feel like I'm a landmarker.

And there are definitely times where I have to rein myself in, where I think, no, you're going too far down this rabbit hole. Even if you're interested, come back because what will be sufficiently interesting and in context in this building for a landmarker on holiday? So there is always that slight filter. And maybe the fact that I don't know so much about things, maybe that helps because you're feeling in the same spot as the landmarker arriving, of thinking, well, why is that? Or how did that come about? And the questions almost present themselves for you to answer, I suppose, in the research process.

For me, quite often as well, I need to get a sense of the personages involved quite early on in the process. So that might be more general reading of a biography or something that just gives you a sense of, what's the mind behind this home? What sort of person is this? And of course, if it's an inocular building, then that could be quite a different way in. So there you would be, yes, you'd be trying to find out about the way of life of a North Welsh slate miner and so on.

So it's a very organic process. I mean, people often say, how do you do it? And I suppose the honest answer is, I don't really know because every time is different, but it's like a detective story. It's like you're following a trail somehow of trying to bring this building and the people in it, crucially for me, the people to life.

Dolbellada in North Wales, which had not started work on site when I joined, but the decision had been made to take it on. It was an entirely roofless gutted shell with a tree growing through the walls and the roof had collapsed entirely into a sort of pickup sticks on the ground floor. It was known to be associated with Henry Salisbury, who wrote the first English Welsh grammar book, the Grammaticus Britannicus in the 1590s.

So it is a really important building in the history of Wales, but in a very, very parlous state and a long way away again, more early starts and long drives on dark winter mornings with David out to Dolbellada. And that was a complete counterpoint to Ockynet because although it was a gentry house, it was vernacular in construction. All the timbers were picked out from the floor, from the ground and carefully reassembled.

Well, you know, a massive sort of archaeological piece of detective work, but that was a masterclass for me in that project, in groping my way towards an understanding of the evolution of plan form of Welsh houses, Welsh vernacular architecture and so on. Introduced me to Fox and Raglan, the great sort of gentlemen and architect surveyors of the 1950s who went round

recording so many of these houses like Dolbellada that were, many of which have since been lost. You know, we think of our slate miners cottages or this little bush cottage, which was a very humble cottage in Shropshire that speaks more not to a single person, but to a lost period of how you eked out your living in these precarious places.

But the fabric of the building is always, I suppose at the heart of it, really where it starts. And if you have the bonus of a famous person or a lost way of life or whatever, then so much better. And it comes back to the pricking of your thumb.

I think we talked about before that sense of an alignment of the stars almost. There's something about all of our buildings that makes it bigger, gives it a bigger significance than it is in concrete physical terms itself. Well, the handbook has been there since the very beginning of Landmark.

I think the first one came out in 1968. And then it was written by John Smith himself, I believe. Later on, my predecessor, Charlotte Haslam, took over writing the entries, but they were always very, very closely scrutinised by John Smith.

And yes, I inherited that mantle when I joined in 2001. And it was quite a scary, scary but wonderful mantle to inherit in the sense of within those normally 250 to 350 word entries about a given building, you somehow had to capture the history, the quirks of the building. If you have to flit across a terrace to get to the loo by moonlight at the ruin, for example, that it's a thoroughly gothic experience or something.

So you try and be honest about the inconveniences of a given landmark while at the same time conjuring a picture. So yes, the writing of the handbook entry is always a task that I sort of relish and tremble at at the same time. I mean, I'm very lucky in the sense that my role not only allows, but requires me to do quite a deep dive into the buildings we work on and really get under the skin of them and think about them.

And so I suppose I'm aware very often of almost opening myself to the vibes of a building. It's not just about the period and the history of it. It's also about just its own soul.

And it's a kind of slightly magical process I find. You can't make it happen, but at some point in every project that there is somehow a moment where just something crystallizes about what it is that makes this building particularly special and distinctive. Each landmark has its own specially curated collection of books.

Again, this goes right back to the very beginning. This was part of John Smith's vision of what he wanted in a holiday led. And in the earlier years, I mean, really up to 2010, these books were managed by two redoubtable ladies called Claire Percy, Lady Richard Percy.

She'd been at Oxford with Christian, with Lady Smith. And then the other was Sonia Rolt. They were two distinct characters really.

Both of them quite terrifying actually to me as a young historian. Anyway, they looked after the books. I didn't get very involved with it in my first sort of 10 years or so really.

And by that stage, it began to be clear they were getting a little bit neglected. Both Sonia and Claire couldn't get round the country in the same way as they perhaps had. There came a time where we had to terrifyingly tell them, you know, I think I had to do it because I was then taking them over that actually it was time to hang up your librarian boots.

I think they were very good about it. I think they sort of knew. Anyway, out of that, I sort of came up with a structure that did formalise it a bit more rather than just having, you know, two or three people.

But instead, we'd have a regional team, very, very part-time librarians. And all they have to do is go round once a year and check the books in each building. I'm the one who puts together the libraries for new landmarks simply because it makes sense.

You know, a lot of the time I'm buying books as I go through the research process or I'm coming across particular themes and so on. And I always try and keep in mind that it's the kind of things that landmarkers might want to, you know, read on holiday. And also what a diverse bunch of landmarkers are.

It's one of the things that landmarkers are most interested in. So it's lovely the feedback we get. When it was our 50th anniversary in 2015, that probably hit a sweet spot of enthusiasm and creativity in Landmark, I think.

And we did all sorts of wonderful things that year. Channel 4 made a series of documentaries about Landmark and about the projects that we had on. And that gave us a huge boost in awareness.

The 50th year is one of the things I'm most proud of for Landmark. We hit on the idea of opening 50 landmarks all on the same weekend in May. It was the first or second weekend in May, which coincided with the date of Landmark's founding deeds in 1965.

That's an expensive thing to do because it's 50 weekends of lost income. Nevertheless, it very much felt within our mission to allow as many people as possible to appreciate and enjoy Landmarks. To me, it encapsulated everything that is and should be uplifting and meaningful about Landmark.

That sense of being inspired, that sense of participation, that sense of regional reach and spread. And always for me, very importantly, that it's not just about the holidaymakers in Landmarks. It's also about the local communities where the buildings stand.

We went on holiday to Austria that summer and encountered an installation in the mountains by

Anthony Gormley called Horizon. And this placed no fewer than a hundred of his body casts along the same contour line of this region of the Austrian Alps. And it was wonderful.

But sort of driving back after that day, we sort of said, wouldn't it be great to do something within a Landmark context? So this idea got added to the long list. We made the first cold call to the Gormley studio or sent an email just saying, you know, this is the situation. Would there be any interest? To our amazement, he came back saying, or the studio came back initially saying, yes, Anthony stayed in a Landmark at Saddlecastle and he would be interested in talking more.

Gradually, the project honed itself down to the idea of five individual works that broadly represented the compass points with one in the middle as an anchoring point. So the Gormley installation, which was called Land incidentally, I don't think I said that. We were incredibly lucky that that was funded by two of our major supporters, private individuals who got the vision.

Thank goodness they did. Because this was not something that could be justified within our remit as a building preservation charity. They saw the vision and between them, they funded it for which we'll be eternally grateful.

The figures just stood quietly for the anniversary year and people came and went and interacted with them, which Anthony loves. He loves it when a bobble hat gets put on or a little girl gives it a hug or whatever it might be. So there was again something appropriate and wholesome about them that they were just quietly there.

They weren't showy particularly, but people did get to know about them and people did go and could interact with them in their own personal ways. I don't know whether Landmark will ever do anything like that again, but I'm really glad we did in 2015. For me, I mean, yes, Landmark has evolved enormously.

I think the cor d'esprit felt tighter and almost more idiosyncratic in the early years, you know, with John, Evert, David, Alexander, Lady Smith. There was kind of a sort of almost buccaneering spirit of us all, a little bit wayward, fun. Yeah, sort of a little bit sort of freewheeling almost.

And the buildings very much led, the buildings were in charge. As Landmark has evolved, that balance has perhaps shifted. Landmark now is much more of a kind of tripod between the estates team.

There's the fundraising team, which just about existed when I started, but has grown infinitely in its expertise since then in the sheer professionalism of our warm, engaging, lovely fundraising function. And then the third leg of the tripod is what's now called the visitor experience arm or team, and that encompasses all of the operational side. So the visitor experience side is totally focused upon the letting side and how we keep our head above water in an increasingly competitive and compliant, rigorous sector.

I suppose the big overarching question is why do we hold our own? Do we hold our own because of the specificity of our buildings and the quirkiness of our soul, let's say? How far should we be trying to match ourselves against other more mainstream organisations? We're meant to be for everybody and therefore we have to continue to make sure we can be for as many people as possible. And nevertheless, that is a balancing act. And so there is a yin and yang, if you like, I think, between the hard-nosed holiday sector and what is it important to save? Where can we make most difference as a charity? That balance has always swung sort of a little bit to and fro in my time.

I think probably at the moment it's in quite good balance. There is something about Landmark as an organisation that seems to generate this deeper loyalty than you would normally expect in a working environment. I'm sure we're not unique in that, but it is something very wonderful.

For me, certainly, Landmark has been such a deep interface between work and home life or personal life. I mean, it's not exactly home life, but what you find satisfying, I suppose, in a personal capacity. And as a historian, that's relatively easy for me because I have this strange history gene and I'm fascinated by all of it.

I think Landmark will keep going. I hope it's still here in 100 years. I really, really hope that we can keep the Smiths' original conception and spirit alive in Landmark.

I really hope that the exigencies of economic viability and perceived customer wishes don't overshadow the standards and the character of Landmark that we've been able to keep going to date. I think the signs are good in the sense of a continuing appetite to keep up standards. So let's hope that we move through the next generation of enthusiasm and that occupancy stays high to cover our costs.

It would be very easy to be kind of flippant and say, yeah, of course, Landmark is fine. Landmark will go on forever. But I think it gives a huge amount of enjoyment and pleasure and interest to so many people that I hope it will continue for the good of humanity.

Thanks for listening to this episode of the Landmark Chronicles. We hope you've enjoyed hearing more about Landmark and the people who make it special. To hear more stories like this, head to landmarktrust.org.uk forward slash podcasts.