

The Landmark Trust

CULLODEN TOWER, RICHMOND, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Culloden Tower was built in 1746 or soon afterwards. The architect is thought to have been Daniel Garrett, and his patron was one of Richmond's two Whig MPs, John Yorke. It was originally called the Cumberland Temple and its purpose was clear: to mark the victory of the Duke of Cumberland's army over Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the Jacobite Young Pretender, at Culloden, near Inverness, in April that year. A great deal hung on the outcome of that battle. The Hanoverian kings had been on the throne for just over thirty years. The first, very German, George had been succeeded by the more English George II. His family were now regarded as fully representative of the Protestant Whig supremacy appointed by Parliament that, under Sir Robert Walpole, had made England a prosperous and stable place. The only cloud on the horizon was the possibility of a new Jacobite rising, carrying with it fears that had lain dormant since James II was deposed in 1688: the fear of a Catholic king who would threaten his subjects' freedom of religious worship and lead to absolutist rule - and, it was somehow felt, deprive them of their ability to profit by trade.

The battle was fiercely fought and the victorious Duke became known as Butcher Cumberland for his order to kill the wounded Jacobite soldiers in the aftermath, but after Culloden, the Jacobite cause was a spent force, no longer supported even by the traditionally loyal Tories. The Whig Augustan world could continue unchallenged, trade could increase, the New World triumph over the Old, the new Classical over the ancient Gothic - a point that was made in the interior decoration and arrangement of the Culloden Tower itself. Here, Gothic motifs are found in the tall main room, but set within an orderly Classical framework; and the scheme in the topmost room is entirely Classical. The Tower replaced an earlier one, and the design of its exterior reminds us of this. A pele tower, called Hudswell's Tower, stood here from the 14th century until the 17th century. Its ruin may still have been visible when the Culloden Tower was built, to be commemorated in the square base of its very different successor.

The Culloden Tower was built by John Yorke. He, too, held the family seat in Parliament until his death, in 1757. He was a Whig, but an independent one, who was known to vote against the Government at times. Lord Egmont described him as "a whimsical fellow but in the main will be with Government". He was most certainly "with" the Hanoverians, and the prosperity which they brought to his town. Apart from showing off the builder's political affiliations, the Culloden Tower was of course intended as an ornament, crowning the hill opposite the town and acting as a foil to the castle's greater tower. It stood in the park of a large mansion, called Yorke House after the family that lived there. This stood close to the river at the foot of the hill, with its gardens around it. A fine view of these, and of the town and surrounding countryside, would have been enjoyed by anyone in the Tower. With its comfortable and elegant rooms, each provided with a fireplace, the Tower would also have been a place where the Yorke family could enjoy some privacy, away from their large household.

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The presumed architect of the tower Daniell Garrett, began his career as a follower of the Earl of Burlington, the great champion of the Palladian style of architecture. Garrett went on to develop his own practice in the North-East, designing some rather dull Palladian houses which tend to confirm history's judgement of the Architect-Earl, as more a man of business than of aesthetics. However, Garrett also had an extraordinary talent for the design of Rococo plasterwork and, as an extension of this, for the Rococo-Gothick in all its forms. His career in this field reached its highest point of fantasy in the Banqueting House at Gibside, Co. Durham, a building for which there is no equal anywhere. It, too, has been restored by the Landmark Trust.

Yorke House was demolished in 1823, after which the park, and the Culloden Tower, became attached to Temple View, a house some distance to the North. This had started life as a Gothic Menagerie, built by the last John Yorke in 1769. The tower was used less and less. Although it is widely visible, it is also curiously isolated, which led to more problems. Thieves stole the lead from the roof, and the asphalt that replaced it leaked and caused dry rot. Vandals too did appalling and systematic damage, so that little of its interior remained intact. It was in the nick of time that the Landmark Trust came to its rescue in 1981.

THE RESTORATION OF THE CULLODEN TOWER

In 1981 the Culloden Tower was in a sad state of decay. The roof had leaked, causing dry rot in the roof timbers. This, in turn, had led to half the ceiling in the top room falling in, whose interior had been thoroughly vandalised. The base of the tower was used as a cattle shed and hay loft.

The roof was renewed in lead. New pinnacles were made for the parapet, which also needed some repair. Stonework was repaired and the whole building repointed. Finally, a new weather vane was made, a copy of the original one which could be seen in a postcard of about 1900. Some rearrangement was needed inside, but done in such a way as to respect the original design. The empty square base of the tower became a kitchen, with enough space for a bathroom and second bedroom below. A new window was made to give extra light to the kitchen, and the existing windows were given new stone surrounds. The floors and partitions on the two lowest floors are all new, of course.

The stair needed a lot of repair, but by far the most important work inside the tower was the restoration of the two richly decorated upper rooms. As much as possible of the original work was saved by careful repair. Luckily, enough of the top room ceiling survived for castings to be taken from it, to recreate the whole design in new plaster. Pieces of the chimneypieces had been saved and were used to reconstruct the design.

Luckily the doors, shutters, needed only minor repair to put them into working order thanks in part to the lead paint with which they had always been painted. When repainting, therefore, the same white lead paint has been used. Traditional paints have also been used on the walls, in colours known to have been used in the 18th century. The final task was to improve the access; great care was taken to make the drive and parking place as unobtrusive as possible, so that the setting of the tower would not be changed. The gates on the road were also repaired. The restoration architect was Martin Stancliffe and the contractors William Anelay Ltd.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Culloden Tower sleeps up to 4 people. To book this or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk