

The Landmark Trust

CLAVELL TOWER, KIMMERIDGE, NR. WAREHAM, DORSET

Since 1830, Clavell Tower (listed Grade II) has stood sentinel on the Smedmore Estate above Kimmeridge Bay. It was built by the Reverend John Richards Clavell as an observatory and folly, and has served ever since as a feature in the landscape on this wide open sweep of coastline, familiar to all those who pass by it on the South West Coastal Path and to the sailors and smugglers who used it as a navigation mark.

The Smedmore Estate has been owned by the Clavell family since the 1420s (today, by marriage, the Mansels) and has been united with the manor of Kimmeridge since 1554. Its seat, Smedmore House, was built by Sir William Clavell in the early 17th century and added to during the 18th century. In 1774, George Clavell died without issue and the estate passed to his nephew, William Richards, on condition that he changed his name to Clavell. William had a younger brother, John, who went into the church and served quietly as rector for Church Knowle, Steeple and East Lulworth. In 1818, William too died without offspring and so Reverend John Richards inherited the Smedmore estate as William's nearest kin at the age of 58. He too changed his surname to Clavell.

We know little about the Reverend Mr. Clavell. His signature appears faithfully through the decades in the various parish records and a silhouette of him at Smedmore House shows an unremarkable middle aged profile in a wig, at a date when such things were going out of fashion. He turned 70 in 1830 and it may have been this that prompted him to build his tower on the cliffs above Kimmeridge. An account in the *Dorset County Chronicle* for 21st July 1831 describes the newly completed tower as supposedly viewed from the fashionable Esplanade in Weymouth, calling it 'as elegant a building as the county of Dorset can boast of.' This article and building accounts held at Smedmore House also tell us that the builder of the tower was Robert Vining. Vining was a Weymouth man and associate of architect William Hamilton, with whom he built the Esplanade there in 1795 (Vining would also rebuild it after the Great Tempest of 1824). Robert Vining also built the octagonal Spa House at Nottingham, just north of Weymouth, in the same year as Clavell Tower. The tower was built of very local materials, some quarried from the estate or taken from the beds at Kimmeridge Bay.

The Reverend Mr. Clavell died in 1833 and the estate passed to his niece, Louisa Pleydell Mansel. Smedmore House became a happy family home through the next decades, the tower a destination for picnics and family expeditions (and courting couples – Thomas Hardy drew the tower as a frontispiece for his *Wessex Poems* and may well have courted his sweetheart Eliza Bright Nicholls here, the daughter of a Kimmeridge coastguard). From the 1880s until 1914, the tower served as lookout post for the coastguards but was then left empty and increasingly derelict. Meanwhile, cliff erosion was taking its toll. Originally, it is said that a coach and four could be driven between the tower and the cliff's edge but the friable Kimmeridge shales are continuously crumbling away here at an average of 13 meters every century. By the

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late 1980s the tower was in real danger of falling off the edge. The Mansels set up the Clavell Tower Trust and English Heritage agreed to the principal of relocation, but the project proved beyond the Trust's resources. In 2002, the Trust approached the Landmark Trust for help, whose Trustees gave cautious acceptance.

The tower's proximity to the cliff's edge meant that the project had particular urgency. Various solutions were carefully assessed, with the conclusion that the only way to save the tower was carefully to record and then dismantle it, and re-erect it further back from the cliff. Further consultation took place to determine the best position for reconstruction, one that both provided a sound footing and protected as many as possible of the original sitelines. There followed four years of fundraising, during which time it became clear that the project could not proceed without major support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which was forthcoming late in 2005.

Work therefore began in Spring 2006 with contractors Carrek of Wells. The access track was put in and meticulous recording undertaken using rectified photography. The tower was fully scaffolded and dismantling began. The tower was marked into quadrants, and each piece was numbered and inventoried and then stored in wooden crates, which soon covered the surrounding site. Analysis of the fabric confirmed that most of the tower's materials came from very local sources, which helped in the selection of replacements.

Once the colonnade and outer drum were down, the new foundations were dug and filled with concrete on the new site, and the new tower began slowly to rise. The old foundations have been left in situ to record the tower's original position, at least for now. Carrek's masons moved on site to carve the many new pieces of stone required, since many pieces were missing through plunder or decay. We consulted Robert Vining's Spa House at Nottingham for internal joinery details that were lost. The old tower had been coated in Roman Cement, a hard hydraulic cement made using septarian nodules that sets through chemical reaction and was commonly used in maritime situations at the time. Today, Roman Cement is no longer available but can be closely matched with a hydraulic lime hydrate and trials were conducted through the winter to find the best mix. The aggregate used in this render has the advantage of being pleasantly self-coloured.

The approach used to save Clavell Tower represents conservation at its most intrusive and it is not a methodology to be undertaken lightly. Today, Clavell Tower's position as land- and seamark on this World Heritage Site coastline is once more assured. Its new foundations and careful reconstruction mean that moving it intact would be an easier process should this become necessary again, but it is estimated that such a need should not arise for at least another two hundred years.

In 2015, Clavell Tower was one of five Landmark sites chosen by artist Antony Gormley for an installation called LAND, a collaboration with Landmark in celebration of its 50th anniversary. From May 2015 until May 2016, five different, lifesize representations of a human figure in cast iron stood at Landmark sites representing the four compass points (Saddell Bay, Martello Tower, Clavell Tower and on Lundy), anchored by a fifth near the centre of the country, at Lengthsman's Cottage in Warwickshire.

At Kimmeridge, the work stood on the shallow ruined pier below the tower, built in 1858 by Wanostrocht & Co to ship out shale as part of their contract to light Paris with gas from Kimmeridge Shale. The company went out of business in 1862.

As Antony Gormley said, LAND in combination with the Landmark Trust's 50th anniversary was 'an occasion to think and feel the nature of our species, its history and future, and its relationship to the huge biodiversity of living beings that exist on the surface of this extraordinary blue planet.' There can be few more beautiful places to do so than Kimmeridge Bay, within the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Clavell Tower sleeps up to 2 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit

www.landmarktrust.org.uk