

# The Landmark Trust

## MARGELLS, BRANSCOMBE, DEVON

Margells was originally a hall house, open to the roof, and probably built in the late 15th century. The frame is a very early construction, the cruck coming at first floor level. There would have been a sleeping gallery at first floor level reached by a ladder type stair probably from the sitting room side, using the rounded door which now goes into the painted bedroom.

About a hundred years later the present first floor was put in, making two big bedrooms. The fine coffered ceilings are typical of this period, and there is a similar, though not such a good one in another Landmark, No. 2 Hawker's Cottages at Coombe. The spiral stair would have been added at this time. It is made of solid blocks of chestnut, except for the top two treads which are oak, as is all the rest of the wood used in the house. At about this time, the two fireplaces were built on, added to the outside of the house.

The quality of such a small cottage has led some people to suggest that Margells was the cross-wing of a larger house. The doorway, which is clearly visible in the wall of the bedroom above the kitchen certainly suggests this. The door from the kitchen into the bathroom was at one time bigger than it is now, and that it was an important door is shown by the decoration in red-ish paint that can still be seen on the beam. The village of Branscombe contains a remarkable number of good houses of 16th and 17th century date, and as the church records show, it housed a number of minor gentry. Margells almost certainly belonged to one of these families.

Since the 16th century Margells has been altered very little. It looks as though at one time the wall onto the road had to be rebuilt. This would explain why the timber frame at that end is different from the rest; it does not come down to the first floor and the wall painting has disappeared from that end of the bedroom. It was probably when this was being done that the big fireplace in the sitting room was made deeper.

There were a few superficial additions and alterations. Outside a small porch was added and a galvanised iron lavatory. Inside, a staircase was put into what is now the kitchen. In the sitting room the big fireplace was partially bricked up, and ceilings were put into the bedrooms. They have now been taken out, but you can see indentations where the rafters were laid on top of the partition between the middle bedroom and the passage. The old floors on the first floor were boarded over in softwood, and the east window in the bedroom above the kitchen was blocked up.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW  
*Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205*

*Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)*

## The Restoration

Margells came to the attention of the County Planning Department in 1973, when its rapidly deteriorating condition gave cause for concern. The intrinsic architectural quality of the building, its extremely pleasant rural surroundings, and the building's eminent suitability for holiday accommodation combined to persuade the Landmark Trust to acquire it, which we duly did in July 1975.

As ever, Landmark aimed to keep alterations to the minimum. Our architect, Paul Hearn, quickly arranged for a temporary cover for the roof, before it was rethatched by Mr Turbitt of Sidmouth using imported Austrian reed as there was no local reed available at the time. A major part of the work was concerned with masonry repairs, including stabilisation of the walls by underpinning. The timber screens and the roof trusses were repaired, and as all the old door openings were still in the screens, it was possible to re-make the doors to the old shape. The fireplaces were opened up, and the external porch and lavatory removed. Rising damp was treated by inserting an electro-osmotic damp-proof course. The window in the east elevation was re-instated.

The existing ground floor was of lime-ash construction and in poor condition. Despite extensive research by the architect it was found to be impractical to repair, and so a local stone, Blue Lias, was used as paving slabs, retaining the lime-ash finish as an edging. On the first floor, the floors beneath the new boarding were found to be oak, laid in panels between the beams - typical of good quality 16th century work.

During the restoration, a wall painting was uncovered in the bedroom above the sitting room. It had been painted in a lime and skimmed milk medium with dry colour directly onto the lime and sand plaster of the wall. Over the centuries, this had been covered with a number of layers of lime wash and wallpaper. The painting is typical of the late 16th century, and consists of a foliated pattern in several colours, with a chevron patterned border and frieze. The restoration and stabilisation of the painting was carefully carried out by Mrs. Krystana Barakan.

The contractor for the works was J. Trivett & Co. Ltd of Cownhayne, Cloyton. The work was completed in the autumn of 1976, and Margells opened as a Landmark in November the same year.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Margells sleeps up to 5 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*