

The Landmark Trust

THE PIGSTY, ROBIN HOOD'S BAY, NORTH YORKSHIRE

The Pigsty was designed and built by the owner of Fyling Hall, John Warren Barry. The date of its construction is not quite certain. Mr Matthew Hart, one of the men who carried out the work, is recorded as having said that it was started in 1889 and completed two years later, in 1891. Mr Hart was a 15-year-old apprentice when work began, and when it was finished he and a workmate celebrated by dancing on the roof – until Mr Hart fell off and broke his nose. One would suppose that such an occasion would be clearly remembered by Mr Hart; confusingly, however, the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1895 (re-surveyed in 1893) does not show the Pigsty at all, although it does appear on the 1914 edition (re-surveyed in 1910). Moreover, during the 1990 restoration the date 'October 1906' was found carved on an apparently original roof timber. So the Pigsty may date either from the late 19th or the early 20th century – we cannot be sure which.

One reason why it took two years to build, according to Mr Hart, was because Squire Barry changed his mind frequently about the details. He tried out several alternative columns before settling on the final version, for instance. Perhaps this is why the building has a somewhat hybrid quality – neither fully Ionic nor Doric nor Tuscan, but containing elements of all these three styles of Classical antiquity.

Mr Hart attributed the building of the Pigsty to Squire Barry's dislike of the Victorian practice of building pigsties in the backyards of cottages, often right next to the back door. A family that kept a pig could enjoy not only an improved diet, but a little extra income from the sale of piglets as well. As there were two farm cottages on the Fyling Hall estate, the Squire provided accommodation for two pigs – Large Whites, a local breed.

We can only guess at his reasons for building the Pigsty in the style of a Grecian temple. We know that he was passionately interested in the island of Corsica, and wrote a book about it; perhaps he was inspired by some of the Etruscan and Greek buildings that have survived there since the days of antiquity. At another of his farms he built a cowshed in dressed stone with carved church windows and louvres, and an arched doorway with an iron-studded door like that of the church; the stalls were all of carved oak and looked almost like pews. One may conclude that he simply enjoyed these quirky buildings, and took pleasure in the confounding of sightseers who discovered that his temple was not for picnics but for pigs.

The design was carefully thought out. The building was divided into two by a central partition, each half with its own feeding trough, which was filled from the outside through a hinged shutter. For extra ventilation there were shuttered windows at the back as well; the shutters and the front gable were pierced so that air could circulate freely. In the portico floor were chutes down which water could be poured into two drinking troughs in the field below. It is not clear how the pigs reached their homes from the field. It is said that they went up a wooden ramp, now long vanished, and so on to the platform at the side of the building. Others have claimed that the pigs firmly refused to go up into the sty at all, and stayed stubbornly in the field.

Almost no other Landmark has attracted as much attention as the Pigsty – or so many (admittedly irresistible) feeble jokes; it has been extensively photographed, filmed and written about in the media. It seems that pigs, and anything to do with pigs, are deeply embedded in our national consciousness as a source of endless amusement and fascination.

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RESTORATION BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

After Squire Barry's death in 1920, the Pigsty was used for hens and later as a kennel for dogs. It deteriorated steadily, however, and by the 1980s its condition gave cause for serious concern. At this point it came to the attention of Lucinda Lambton, who was researching her book and television programme *Beastly Buildings*. She told the owner about the Landmark Trust, a charity that specialises in rescuing buildings of architectural and historic importance, and told Landmark about the Pigsty; as a result it came into the hands of the Trust in 1988.

Even the most devoted Landmarkers would find it hard to live and sleep only in the space allotted to the pigs. The necessary extension was designed by the architect Martin Stancliffe in such a way that the main range of the building was simply extended into the hillside by a few feet, which happily gives it the proportions of a genuine temple. The adjoining privy was incorporated to provide a kitchen.

By now Squire Barry's building was in a poor state. The roof had been stripped of its copper covering long before, and much of the timber construction, including four of the columns, was severely rotted: all of it was therefore dismantled and taken away for conservation and repair. Meanwhile the Pigsty's foundations were found to be moving gently but inexorably down the hillside, and new retaining walls and drains had to be constructed to deal with the problem. The contractor, A. E. Houghton, of York, built new steps leading downward from the parking space on the road, and made good the stonework of the privy and the base of the Pigsty. It took some time to find a stone to match the original, but eventually one was found among the landslips on the moor. More stone was needed to repair the drystone walls, however; this time the need was met by seeking out unused piles of stones dumped by local farmers from redundant field walls. York stone flags were laid around the building and in the portico floor.

Once the walls of the new bedroom and bathroom had been built, the restored timbers could be reinstated, although the central partition of the Pigsty was removed (the timber division in the roof space was retained, however). One of the former window openings was transformed into a door and the other into a bookcase. The old windows and shutters were transferred to the new back wall, and the timber surrounds and columns from the original back wall were also moved, so that from the rear the Pigsty's appearance is exactly the same as before.

The tiles from the roof of the old privy had been carefully set aside, and were now replaced. The decorative ridge tiles were also put back; some were broken, but these were kept rather than patching in new ones. The carved barge boards were all either entirely rotten or missing, and had to be renewed. A new copper roof was laid, with new gutters and downpipes, copies of the originals. The side and back walls were rendered with lime plaster darkened by using black slag instead of sand, together with some black ochre. The front wall was reassembled, its opening now glazed. Finally, the outside paintwork was renewed in the original colours, based on careful analysis of surviving paint fragments: a sample of the faded original can be seen inside the portico. The Pigsty received its first visitors in June 1991. Space is perforce extremely limited, but admirers of pigs claim that there is no tidier animal, when given the right quarters.

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