

The Landmark Trust

QUEEN ANNE'S SUMMERHOUSE, OLD WARDEN, BEDFORDSHIRE

Queen Anne's Summerhouse stands in Old Warden Park (now the Shuttleworth Estate). This which was once part of the lands owned by Warden Abbey, which lay to the east of today's village of Old Warden. What remains of the monastery has also been restored, and is let for holidays, by the Landmark Trust. After the Dissolution of the abbey in 1537 by Henry VIII, the Old Warden manor at first into into royal hands. Eventually, in the 1690s, various portions of land were consolidated into a single estate by a rich linen draper called Samuel Ongley. A bachelor, Ongley made his fortune through involvement with the East India Company and the early South Sea Company. By buying the estate at Old Warden, on which then stood an old brick manor house, Ongley was seeking to gentrify himself. In 1712, he was knighted by Queen Anne and it was almost certainly Ongley who built Queen Anne's Summerhouse, at the top of the warren. Ongley has a fine funerary monument in St Leonard's Church, Old Warden, looking every inch the Roman citizen.

The first documentary evidence of the summerhouse's existence comes from a 1736 map and its fine brickwork also suggests an early 18th-century date. It was built as a folly, a destination for picnics and walks, and to beautify the estate, standing in an elevated position with views of Shuttleworth Hall. In planting the woods on his estate, Ongley made the summerhouse the hub of radiating avenues through the trees, some of which survive today (although much of the coniferous planting now apparent was planted at a later date).

The folly seems to have been built as a miniature mock-military redoubt, on an artificially created platform to enhance its views. Built as a quatrefoil with four corner turrets set around a single large chamber above a vaulted brick basement, the summerhouse also has a roof terrace. It had a rather grand entrance door beneath a canopy with large scroll brackets, typical of the early 18th century. Even in miniature, the building's scale seems somehow oversized, an effect typical of the English Baroque architecture of the early eighteenth century and of contemporary architects like John Vanburgh and Nicholas Hawksmoor. Local tradition attributes the design to Thomas Archer, a leading exponent of the English Baroque. This is largely on the basis of his involvement at Wrest Park at nearby Silsoe, but no reliable evidence for this attribution has yet come to light.

The summerhouse is built of exceptionally fine 'gauged' brickwork, a technique in which each brick is rubbed to shape. The mortar joints between the bricks are also incredibly fine, carefully lined-out in near pure lime putty and no more than 1-2 mm wide. It is exceptionally fine craftsmanship. The railings which surround the summerhouse date from the late-18th century, as they are made of dry 'puddle' iron, a forging technique not developed until the 1780s. The railings were therefore put up later than the first construction of the folly.

The large main chamber was probably used for elegant refreshments, prepared by servants in the basement below. Two of the turret alcoves in this chamber held 'buffets,' sets of shelves on which china could be displayed. There was always a fireplace in the main chamber, a third turret being used for the flue. The fourth turret held a spiral staircase that led up to the roof terrace, where views could be enjoyed of the mansion and surrounding countryside. The rooftop sections of two of the turrets were built as tiny pavilions in their own right, the inside of their domes plastered.

In the late 18th century, Robert Henley, inheriting through his mother, became Baron Ongley of Old Warden. It was his grandson, the 3rd Lord Ongley, who created the picturesque Swiss Garden on the estate (now restored) and began to build the model village at Old Warden in the 1830s. However, by the 1870s the family's wealth was failing and in 1872, the 3rd Lord Ongley sold up to another self-made man, Joseph Shuttleworth.

Joseph Shuttleworth was the son of a Lincolnshire shipwright, who had spotted the potential of steam. With Nathaniel Clayton, in 1842 he formed The Clayton & Shuttleworth Co., an iron foundry and engineering business that made portable steam engines and traction engines. By 1872, when Joseph Shuttleworth came to Old Warden, the firm had branches throughout Europe and exported their engines all over the world. Shuttleworth employed architect Henry Clutton to demolish the Ongleys' old brick mansion and build him new one.

Shuttleworth took as his model Gawthorpe Hall in Lancashire, an early Jacobean seat of Shuttleworth namesakes but not, it seems, necessarily ancestors. Clutton transformed its design into the 'Jacobethan' mansion that still stands today. It seems the summerhouse had fallen out of polite use by the time the Shuttleworths arrived, since parish records show the estate gamekeeper Richard Aireton and his family were living in it in the summer of 1876, when two little daughters died of scarlet fever. Comprehensive repair of the summerhouse followed in 1878 when Joseph Shuttleworth commissioned Bedford builder John Usher to design its terracotta balustrade and misleading datestone with the mailed fist holding a weaver's shuttle that Shuttleworth adopted as his family crest. The summerhouse then played its part again as a folly through golden years of shooting parties before the Great War, the Aireton's being rehoused at Keeper's Cottage, also designed and built by John Usher.

Joseph's son and heir Frank Shuttleworth married the local vicar's daughter, Dorothy, who was 24 years his junior. They had just one son, Richard, who showed a passion for cars and the new-fangled airplanes from an early age. Sadly in 1940, Richard Shuttleworth, died in a flying accident, training for wartime service. His grieving mother Dorothy decided to make the estate over to an educational trust in his memory and the mansion became a college for countryside-based studies. Queen Anne's Summerhouse fell into disuse, its repair beyond the resources of a trust devoted to other aims, and so in 2001 the estate approached the Landmark Trust to take on both it and Keeper's Cottage, offering a generous donation towards the restoration costs.

When Landmark took out a lease on the summerhouse, its roof had fallen in. Its foursquare design gave it a deceptive appearance of solidity, but the brick skin was crumbling and separating from the inner core of rubblestone. Windows and doors were missing and the building at risk from vandals. It had no water or electricity. It took Landmark several years to raise the funds for the restoration and a temporary roof was erected during this time to allow the building to dry out. The exceptional quality of the brickwork called for conservation skills of the highest order, delicately patching in mortar and slip repairs, and keeping actual replacement to a minimum. A bursary funded by English Heritage allowed two bricklayers to learn some of these conservation skills. Replacement bricks were specially made to match the originals.

The turrets were partially dismantled and rebuilt, and a new, sand-cast lead roof was installed. The staircase was rebuilt and the internal joinery recreated according to fragments found on site. Students from the City & Guilds of London Art School reproduced the decorative carved wooden door brackets, using an old photo as evidence. The internal paint colours are based on the early 18th-century scheme discovered through paint analysis.

Traditional craftsmen and -women contributed throughout: haired lime plaster has been used on the walls; masons replaced the stone plinth which surrounds the building, the steps and the turret copings; the railings were individually repaired by blacksmiths. The building and its water are heated by a ground source heat pump that recovers latent heat from the ground via 90-metre boreholes. Such systems require much less electricity than conventional heating, and it is the first such system in a Landmark. The floor in the main chamber is Ancaster stone and the circular turret kitchen was created by Landmark's furnishing team. Today, Queen Anne's Summerhouse has returned to its purpose as a building for leisure. It is furnished as an elegant bedsit, with a bathroom in the brick vaulted basement, where servants may once have prepared refreshments.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Queen Anne's Summerhouse sleeps 2 people. To book this or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk