

# The Landmark Trust

## THE CHÂTEAU, GATE BURTON, LINCOLNSHIRE

The Château was built in 1747–8 for a prosperous lawyer from Gainsborough named Thomas Hutton. Mr Hutton and his father before him had looked after the local business affairs of the Earl of Abingdon, who owned two small estates nearby - Gate Burton and Knaith - which had come into his family through an earlier marriage and were some distance from the rest of his very large property. In 1744 the Earl was advised to sell the two estates and Hutton, seeing the chance of a bargain, purchased that of Gate Burton. (The neighbouring Knaith estate was sold to a Mr Dalton, and in the early 19th century Hutton's grandson bought it and brought it back to the Hutton family.) Gate Burton at that time had no hall or manor house, and rather than go to the expense of providing one Mr Hutton built the little Château on its wooded knoll above the river, with its garden and plantations around it, as a weekend cottage. There, according to his son, "he could retire from the Business of his office at Gainsborough, from a Saturday evening until the Monday Morning". He would have had his rooms on the first floor, with a kitchen and servant's room below.

The architect of the Château was John Platt, and it must have been almost his first work, designed when he was only 19. Platt came from a family of mason architects and for 50 years and more he practised as a builder and statuary mason as well as an architect, all with equal success. He worked almost exclusively in Yorkshire; the Château is almost his only building outside the county. His many works include Mount Pleasant, near Sheffield; Thundercliffe Grange, Ecclefield; and Page Hall, Eccleshall. He added a wing to Tong Hall; designed a fireplace for Renishaw; and staircases, made of marble from his own quarries, for Aston Hall and Clifton Hall.

Thomas Hutton finally began to build Gate Burton Hall in about 1765, and it was mostly complete by 1768. The Château came to be used simply as a summer house, an agreeable destination for picnics or the odd night "in rural seclusion". Towards the end of the century, however, alterations were carried out, including the addition of balconies at either end of the building. In the 19th century new windows were inserted, but they were on the wrong scale, being two panes wide instead of three; the exterior, above the rustication, was rendered and the roof was renewed.

In 1907 the Hutton family sold both Gate Burton and Knaith to the Sandars family, wealthy maltsters from Gainsborough. In the sale particulars the Château is described as a shooting box, so the upper floor had probably been kept for the use of the family for shooting lunches and other such entertainments. After the War it was not lived in again, and it was left stranded without natural users. Gate Burton Hall, with its park, was sold again in 1974, but the strip of land along the river, where the Château stands, was retained and became part of the Knaith Hall estate, which had been inherited by a connection of the Sandars family.

The work of neglect and natural decay inevitably continued, accelerated as so often by the activities of vandals, until the building was approaching the point of collapse. In 1982 the owner, concerned for its survival but unable to afford the cost of repair himself, therefore offered it to the Landmark Trust.

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## RESTORATION BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

When the Landmark Trust took on the Château in 1982, there was little of the building that did not need extensive repair. Under architect Philip Jebb the builders Simons of Lincoln began work by dismantling anything that was unsafe or past repair, and securing what remained. The small balconies at either end, and the steps leading up to that on the west, were taken down. The urns on the parapet, together with some fragments found lying around the building, were sent away for restoration. The parapet itself had also to be taken down, since the brickwork was unsafe. Beneath this, the entablature was also fairly insecure above the openings between the main block and the side wings, and had to be propped up from inside the building. The slates were taken off the roof, so that the condition of the timbers could be judged, and the decayed render hacked off the walls. Inside, what little remained was very rotten; after recording the mouldings, this too was hacked out.

At this point reconstruction could begin. Under the render, fair face pointing was found to the brickwork, indicating that the building had originally been plain brick above the rustication. So after the repair of structural weaknesses (in the niches on the end walls, for example), the brickwork was simply washed and repointed using lime putty. The stone rustication was treated similarly. Elsewhere, stone was renewed only where it was badly weathered, or where a section was missing, as in the balustrade of the central window. All the new work was carried out in Ancaster stone, which matched the original.

The roof timbers were nearly all unsound, so that a new roof structure was necessary. Enough of the original slates survived intact to cover the back and inner slopes of the side wings; elsewhere a new slate called Corunna Grey was used. The parapets were rebuilt, incorporating lead water chutes, with new coping stones where necessary. The chimney was also rebuilt as closely as possible to the original in John Platt's drawing, which is in the Sheffield City Library. The balconies were not replaced, however; they were almost certainly later additions, and since an internal staircase would have to be built anyway they were not needed for access. The two doorways leading to them have therefore become windows.

All the windows needed replacing, which has given the opportunity to return to the original proportions of three panes, which suits the scale of the building much better. The work to the exterior was completed by the return of the urns to the corners of the parapets. Only two had proved to be beyond repair, and to replace these matching new urns were carved.

Inside the building, just about everything is new work. Only the first-floor fireplace and some paving stones on the ground are from the building as it was. Since the plasterwork had seemed to be later than 1747, however, it was not replaced with an exact copy but with mouldings more typical of the mid-18th century. A staircase was fitted into one wing, bedrooms into the other, and the kitchen and bathroom on the ground floor. The Château was ready once more for its original purpose as a place of retirement from business, for a weekend or longer.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The Chateau sleeps up to 3 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*

