

THE PINEAPPLE, DUNMORE, CENTRAL SCOTLAND

The Pineapple, perhaps the best known of all the Landmark Trust's buildings, was built by John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore. It seems that at first he built the garden with a small central pavilion of only one storey (up to the line of the string course below the existing windows) on its central axis in 1761, the date that appears on the keystone. It has been suggested that it may have been a somewhat belated wedding present to his wife after their marriage in 1759. We do not know who the architect was for this pavilion, but a likely contender is Robert Mylne, who had family connections with the Dunmores and who came from a family of master masons near Edinburgh. The walls are of double construction with a cavity through which hot air could be circulated to encourage the ripening of the fruit - the garden sits over a coal outcrop.

The Pineapple itself is now thought to be a later addition to this earlier pavilion. There are various physical clues that support this - the walls have been heightened and there are differences in the masonry; and it fits in with the sequence of events in Lord Dunmore's life. He left for America in 1770 and became Governor of Virginia. Pinecones had had an ancient association with hospitality since the Classical era, when Dionysius, god of wine, was often depicted with a pinecone on the end of his staff. The pinecone became a popular architectural embellishment for gateposts and finials, helped by the prolific Coade stone manufactory in London that produced its own version. This association seems to have been appropriated by the pineapple in the New World - the story goes that sailors returning home would stick a pineapple or two on their gateposts to tell the community they were back and would welcome visitors. From this time on, the fruit had become very popular as architectural decoration.

It seems likely that on his return to Scotland Lord Dunmore decided to build his fruity extravaganza. No doubt he had developed a taste for pineapples and wished to grow them in his walled garden, and determined to outdo anything that he had seen in America, he built a pineapple 37 feet high! The walls containing the six windows were raised and the heating system made more sophisticated with the chimney pots disguised as decorative urns. Gardeners would then have been housed comfortably in the bothies on either side.

Frustratingly, the architect of this triumph of folly remains unknown despite numerous candidates being put forward. The Pineapple was never engraved or described in letters, diaries or travel logs of the period. The estate was not on any major tourist route, and perhaps the Georgians found it over the top and avoided it. There is a local tradition that it was built by Italian workmen because the standard of craftsmanship is so high. The drainage is ingenious - the stones are graded in such a way that water cannot collect anywhere. The base of each leaf is in fact higher than it appears when viewed from below, so that the rain water drains away easily from these higher parts. At one time it seems that the Pineapple was painted.

The 5th Earl's second son, Charles Murray, recalled how "hothouse fruit ... was sent [to their home at Glenfinart on Loch Long] every fortnight from Dunmore Park, where my father had no house, but an excellent garden". This situation changed when the 5th Earl commissioned William Wilkins to design him a new house in 1820. It was built in the Tudor Gothic style. Wilkins went on to design such buildings as the National Gallery and the old St George's Hospital on Hyde Park Corner - now the Lanesborough Hotel. The 8th Lord Dunmore was the last member of the family to live in the house, which he sold in 1911. It ended up as a girls' school and today the house is an empty shell.

The Earl and Countess of Perth purchased the Pineapple and the walled garden in the late 1960s with plans to turn it into a house. They decided not to go ahead with this and instead it passed to the National Trust for Scotland from whom the Landmark Trust, as a charity which specialises in the rescue of unusual historic buildings giving them a future by letting them for holidays, took a lease in 1973.

RESTORATION BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

The site had been severely neglected and the buildings on either side of the Pineapple were deteriorating fast and had almost disappeared behind vegetation - so one of the first jobs was to clear all this away. The three remaining urn shaped chimney pots were removed and all doors, window frames and the carved wood entablature behind the portico were removed and stored for later use. Both wings required extensive repair - new joists and flooring were required; the roofs were replaced using the best of the old slates with new ones to match; all timber lintels were replaced and the walls were made good up to the eaves with the coping stones carefully reset. The fourth decorative chimney pot was found broken into many fragments, but these were all carefully gathered and stuck back together to join the other three.

The portico roof was likewise reslated with a mix of old and new slates and the cornice was carefully taken down, rebbed and reset because it had become displaced. Stonework to the north entrance and the steps was reset and the metal railings repaired and refixed. The walls and vault were treated for damp and waterproofed and replastered. The two panelled doors and frames leading into the original hothouses were repaired. The wooden Ionic columns and the broken entablature were restored and the stone slab floor was overhauled with paving from the Natural Stone Quarries.

For the Pineapple itself, a scaffolding was erected to give access to all parts and to facilitate the removal of plants. In fact the stonework, considering its neglect, was in remarkably good condition - a testimony to its good design and drainage system. All the joints were raked out and repointed and the whole fruit was cleaned by hand with just water and a churn brush. Inside, the existing windows were repaired and others were replaced to match exactly. The stonework and plasterwork was cleaned and redecorated and window seats were supplied and fitted. Finally all the work was done to form the Landmark accommodation - bedrooms, bathroom, sitting room and kitchen - in the two wings. Since completion, the Pineapple has been available to rent for up to four people.

The garden was a jungle, covered with rosebay willowherb. The Scottish Tourist Board gave a grant towards its restoration, and the area was cleaned and prepared for the trimming and grading of the slopes. It was seeded in the autumn of 1974 with the first cut the next spring. The South Pond was cleared and put in order and the perimeter railing re-erected. The stone doorway in the east garden wall was also rebuilt and the walls were repaired where necessary with 14,000 bricks made to match by the Swanage Brick and Tile Company. A tree planting scheme was carried out based on a formal orchard layout.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The Pineapple sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.