

The Landmark Trust

THE FOWL HOUSE & POULTRY COTTAGE, LEIGHTON, POWYS

The Fowl House, or Poultry House as it is often known, was built in 1861 as recorded above the door. It is said to have been a birthday present for Georgina, one of the daughters of John Naylor of Leighton Hall, and was probably designed by the Liverpool architect W.H. Gee, who also designed Leighton Hall and the church.

A fashion for keeping ornamental fowl had been set by Queen Victoria, who built an elaborate Poultry House at Windsor in the 1840s. The arrival of new and exotic breeds from abroad, such as Cochins, and the growth of experience in breeding new varieties at home, led to its becoming a popular hobby among all classes of society. Few people went into poultry-keeping on such a grand scale as John Naylor, but everything he did is of similar magnificence. He came from a family of wealthy Liverpool bankers, the Leylands, and spent large sums on the development of Leighton as a model estate in the 1850s. The Fowl House must have gone some way towards fulfilling the ideal of making the country house self-sufficient in produce, even if the chief purpose of the birds kept here was for decoration and amusement.

The Fowl House was divided into compartments for the different breeds and types of birds. Several of the nesting boxes survive, showing that large birds such as turkeys and geese were kept here, as well as hens and ducks. Each was carefully segregated from the other, even when let out into the yard to scratch, or onto the pond to swim. A storm shed was provided for wet days, and the whole complex was surrounded by a fence.

The everyday care of the birds was under the supervision of a Poultry-keeper, who lived in the cottage just beside the yard, today's Landmark. It is in fact an earlier building, dating from about 1800, but was smartened up in 1861 to match its neighbours.

The Leighton estate was sold in separate lots by John Naylor's grandson in 1931. The Fowl House was included with the Forestry plantations, and remained in the same ownership until it was sold to the Landmark Trust in 1988, which now cares for both the Fowl House and the cottage, which is let for holidays.

Restoration

It is unlikely that exotic fowl have pecked and scratched here since 1914, and the Fowl House had inevitably fallen into disrepair, its surroundings overgrown. The cottage had remained inhabited however and needed only minor repairs and alterations, including the reinstatement of the chimneypots and of the original lime render on the walls, to prevent damp.

Considerable work was needed on the exterior of the Fowl House itself. Some areas of the timber framing had decayed, and new wood had to be pieced in, using Douglas fir to match the original. The finials on the gables had also to be renewed, and then the whole frame repainted with red lead paint. The roof was stripped and re-laid in sections, reusing the old slates. Damaged stained glass windows were repaired. Outside, the yard, the pond, the storm shed and the perimeter fence all look much as they did in the days of Georgiana Naylor.

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

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