

# The Landmark Trust

## **WOLVETON GATEHOUSE, NEAR DORCHESTER, DORSET**

Although now only a fragment of what was once a much larger house, Wolveton remains one of Dorset's finest manors, with rich 16<sup>th</sup>-century interiors of the highest quality. The manor was inherited in 1480 by John Trenchard at the death of his maternal grandfather, John Mohun, who had married the Wolveton heiress, Joanna Jourdain. Soon afterwards he began to build a new house. His son, Sir Thomas, continued the work, building a courtyard house which was later extended by Sir George Trenchard. The Gatehouse was completed by Sir Thomas in 1534.

Sir Thomas Trenchard inherited Wolveton at his father's death in 1495 when he was a boy of sixteen. There had almost certainly been a fortified house belonging to the Jourdains on the site and indeed the Gatehouse towers appear to be earlier. The shields on its west elevation bear the letters 'T' and 'E', which probably refer to Thomas and his third wife, Edith Hyndford or Hymerford. Sir Thomas achieved preferment at Court, when offered he refuge to Archduke Philip of Austria, King of Castile, and his wife, Joanna of Aragon after they were blown ashore at Portland. This unexpected event laid the foundations of the rise of the ducal family of Bedford. , happened after a storm at sea blew the royal couple ashore at Portland. Sir Thomas was called to meet the storm-tossed party and he took them to his house where he waited for instructions from his King. All went well except that the two parties shared no common language. Sir Thomas had a stroke of brilliance; realising that his royal visitors could be with him for some days, he sent for his relation John Russell of Berwick, who had lived in Spain some years in Spain to come and entertain the Archduke. In due course, Philip recommended Russell to the favour of King Henry VII, who appointed him to be one of the Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber; and so the great Russell dynasty began.

Sir Thomas Trenchard died in 1550 aged 71 and was succeeded in 1557 by his great grandson, George, who was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. Along with a magnificent stone staircase, he built a grand south range with fine windows and plasterwork ceilings. In 1594, when Sir George was a Justice of the Peace, an Irish Roman Catholic priest called Cornelius was arrested at Chideock and taken to Wolveton where he was detained in the south room on the first floor of the gatehouse. He seems to have got on well with the Trenchard family and their circle, especially Sir Walter Raleigh, who was then living at Sherborne and was almost certainly a frequent visitor to Wolveton. Cornelius was not however, prepared to forswear his religion and after imprisonment in London, he was returned to Dorchester where he was hung, drawn and quartered.

In the 18th century, the Trenchards lived mainly at their other house, Lytchett Matravers, and Wolveton began to be overlooked. Its magnificent collection of armorial stained glass was removed to Lytchett, most of it being broken on the way. Many of the rooms were subdivided and let as lodgings. In a secret transaction, William Trenchard sold Wolveton in 1807, to his cousin and solicitor, Robert Henning. Most of Sir Thomas's house was soon demolished, leaving Sir George's wing and the Gatehouse.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW  
*Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205*

*Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)*

Wolveton was bought in 1862 by Mr Weston who, whilst saving the house from ruin, made some rather heavy-handed additions. In 1874 he sold it to Mr Bankes, a younger son of the Kingston Lacy family. When Mrs Bankes died in 1947, it was taken over by her granddaughter, the Countess Zamoyska, who divided up the house. In due course, the Thimblebys stepped in. They restored Wolveton and its Gatehouse to their former appearance, and since 1994 the Landmark Trust has let the Gatehouse for holidays on their behalf.

Captain Thimbleby lived in the Gatehouse in the 1960s whilst on leave from serving in the army overseas. After being invalided out of the army, he returned to Wolveton and decided to move into the main part of the house, after the flats there had become vacant. The Gatehouse had been subdivided; both the sitting room and double bedroom. Breeze block partitions were dismantled and the splendid fireplace in the sitting room, which had been removed in 1945, was replaced. Ceilings and doors were restored to their original heights.

After a fire in the guardroom on the ground floor of the gatehouse, later wall coverings were removed revealing the original fireplace and much original plaster and stonework. The shutters have been made from elms on the estate which fell down in the great gale of 1987. Captain Thimbleby provided most of the furniture and pictures in the Gatehouse, aiming to follow Landmark's distinctive style.

The Gatehouse is thus once in use for guests as it was intended. The Stables again house the family hunters and the House itself been returned to a single home once more. Nearby stands Wolveton's Riding House, an incredibly rare survival of an early-17<sup>th</sup> century arena for ménage (or dressage) that eventually passed into agricultural use. There have been various initiatives to restore it to equine use in recent years, but none has come to fruition. Whilst Dorchester is doing its best to encroach, in this small sanctuary there are badgers, foxes and roe deer, and after many years, other most welcome species have returned to Wolveton: trout, salmon, water rats, kingfishers and swans.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Wolveton Gatehouse sleeps up to 6 people. To book this or any other Landmark building for a holiday, please visit [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)*