

The Landmark Trust

LYNCH LODGE, ALWALTON, NR. PETERBOROUGH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Lynch Lodge was built in around 1807, to stand at the entrance to the Lynch drive to Milton Park, which belonged to the Fitzwilliam family. The family used Alwalton Hall as a dower house at that time, so it must have been convenient to be able to drive there without going round on the public roads. The drive, which takes its name from a spinney called the Lynch, is no longer passable, part of it having been flooded to make a lake.

The main, taller part of the Lodge had already been in existence for nearly two centuries before that. In its original form, it was the porch of Chesterton, a Jacobean house in the neighbouring village built (according to Pevsner) in about 1625. In the mid-17th century Chesterton was the home of the Dryden family, and was visited by John Dryden the poet, cousin and namesake of the then owner. He is said to have inscribed the first line of his Aeneid on one of the window panes at Chesterton with a diamond; if so, the inscription vanished with the house when it was demolished in 1807. It then seems, in part at least, to have been in a ruinous condition but the porch was rescued and re-assembled here to form the Lodge; other bits of the house were built into the Lynch farmhouse and into other houses in the area as well. The library window in Elton Hall, for example, is one that was salvaged from Chesterton.

Lodges are rarely very large, and Lynch Lodge was no exception. At first there was only one room with a loft over it, in addition to the rooms in the porch itself. In an attempt to provide more space the original two storeys of the Chesterton porch were replaced by three, and a small stone lean-to containing a kitchen was added at the north end of the cottage in the 19th century. The ground floor of the porch cannot have been of much use, however, since the entrance arch was blocked with big wooden double doors, which remained in place at least until 1936. Either just before the Second World War, or soon after it, these were replaced by a window, and at about the same time a flat-roofed extension was added at the back of the building.

The families who lived in the Lodge would have had the duty of opening the gate to people coming and going from Milton Park. Often it was the wife who did this, or one of the older children, while the husband had some other job on the estate. This was apparently the case in the second half of the 19th century, when a family called Samworth lived here. Mr Samworth was employed by the Fitzwilliams, and also served as the village undertaker. He had a large family, all of whom grew up in the tiny house. The youngest daughter married another estate workman, Mr Harris, who worked in the estate limekiln; he later rose to be Clerk of the Works, although by this time the family had moved to another village on the estate. One of their descendants, a Marjorie Harris, was the last person to live in the Lodge, which she did until she was well into her nineties.

After her death the Lodge, which needed further modernisation if it was to be lived in permanently, remained empty for a time. Then in 1981 a neighbour living in the early 17th-century Manor House nearby (it is now a farmhouse) suggested that the building might, as a distinguished architectural fragment, be of interest to the Landmark Trust. The Fitzwilliams were willing to sell, and the Lodge passed into the Trust's hands in 1983.

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RESTORATION BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

The Landmark Trust entrusted the restoration of Lynch Lodge to the architect Philip Jebb, one of Landmark's most experienced and successful architects, together with the builders C. Bowman and Sons.

The main aim of the restoration was to return the porch itself as closely as possible to its 17th-century form. The two inserted floors were therefore taken out and only one was reinstated, at what seemed to be the original height. The arched front opening was unblocked, leaving the ground floor open to the outside, as would have been the case when it stood at Chesterton. The cottage addition of 1807 was restored externally to its original form, without the lean-to addition at the northern end. Some sort of additional space was going to be necessary, however, and since there was no 17th-century architectural detail visible at the back of the porch, that was the best place for it. The rather unsympathetic concrete extension of the 1940s was replaced with a more compact structure, containing a staircase and a bathroom. This new addition was designed both to be different from what was there already (and so was built of brick rather than stone, and roofed with tiles rather than stone slates) and at the same time to have a strongly architectural character that would make it a fitting partner to the porch.

Apart from the new building, the main structural work consisted of renewing the roof structures on both the cottage and the porch. The existing stone slates were then relaid on the cottage. The chimney on the south-east corner of the porch was taken down, and the one at the north end of the cottage rebuilt; an oven that had been built against the latter was removed. The door that had led into the kitchen addition was blocked up, and all the cottage walls, together with the south wall of the porch, were repointed. Some new stone was needed in the parapets of the porch, and the copings were repointed. The stone finial at the south-west corner had worked loose and needed to be secured by the insertion of a new dowel. One of the mullions of the first-floor front window needed to be partly renewed, as did the cill of the big cottage window. Clipsham stone was used in all these repairs.

The ground was re-levelled at the front of the building, and a new wall was built on the south side of the porch to balance the front wall of the cottage. Two small areas of stone-on-edge paving were discovered: one forming a threshold to the arch and one outside the back door. These were both retained, although that at the back had to be relaid at a higher level.

Inside the Lodge nearly all the detail is new. The original glass in the existing windows was retained, but re-set in new lead. New metal casements with leaded lights were made for the new windows. A new wall was built between the cottage and the porch, creating an alcove into which a kitchen could be fitted, a new staircase was built, and a new wall and entrance door were added at the back of the porch. New floors were laid throughout, mainly using Mansfield stone flags, with Colombian pine for the sitting room and bedroom, and all the internal walls were lime-plastered and distempered. The Lodge, renewed, warm and friendly, now stands ready in its quiet village backwater to welcome you to stay for a few weeks or days, as you will.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Lynch Lodge sleeps up to 2 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.