

# The Landmark Trust

## ST MARY'S LANE, TEWKESBURY

These stocking knitter's cottages date from the 18th century, an era when industrial housing still retained a measure of dignity. As such, they are relatively rare survivals. Tewkesbury had been known for its stockings since the 17th century: in 1724, Daniel Defoe described the town as 'famous for a great manufacture of stockings.' Stocking knitting was one of the earliest manufacturing processes to be mechanised – as early as 1589, Rev. William Lee had patented a knitting frame (traditionally, inspiration struck through frustration at his sweetheart's preoccupation with her hand knitting). Tewkesbury developed as an early centre of expertise for cotton stockings (cheaper than silk) because spinners in the west country were used to working with the local short staple wool, which enabled them to twist two threads of cotton together to produce a regular cotton yarn suitable for use on the knitting frame. Framework knitting became the chief occupation for inhabitants of Tewkesbury, and the domestic pieceworkers would have spent their days at the long first floor windows where their knitting frames were installed.

As a direct result of Richard Arkwright's success in factory cotton spinning, by the 1780s the Nottingham knitting industry, which had previously concentrated on silk, had transferred its focus to cotton, using machine-spun thread superior in quality to that produced by the west country spinners. The inevitable outcome was depression for the more domestically scaled Tewkesbury knitters, further too from the source of mechanically spun thread. The Tewkesbury industry gradually declined through the 19th century, workers creatively turning their skills instead to outer footwear, as the town became known instead for shoe and boot manufacture.

Landmark became involved in St Mary's Lane in 1970, when Nos. 28 and 30 had been acquired in a parlous state by Gem Town Ltd., a preservation group that was an offshoot of Tewkesbury Civic Society and named after this area of the town. The company had drawn up plans for St Mary's Lane but found themselves unable to raise the funds to carry them out. Landmark stepped in and, retaining Gem Town's architect H G Raggett, paid for the restoration of both cottages, in return for the freehold on No. 30. (Gem Town Ltd kept the freehold of No. 28, which they have since sold).

No.28 was the most dilapidated, having suffered from the removal of its neighbour at the end of the row. Its roof had fallen in and its side gable wall had to be rebuilt. Both cottages were retiled with original and second hand tiles, new dormers were installed and first and second floor floorboards replaced. The yards were tiled with old blue Staffordshire bricks, whose strange size (12" x 6½") made them impossible to lay herringbone fashion. The first Landmarkers stayed at No. 30 in 1972.

In 1982, Landmark acquired No. 32, which had also been allowed to decline, and Mr Raggett again drew up plans for its restoration. Equivalent repairs were required to this cottage too, including the rebuilding of its dormer window. During the building work, a blocked window was discovered in the side wall and re-opened to reveal the magnificent view of the Abbey tower. Nos. 30 and 32 were both let for holidays by Landmark until 2006, when No. 32 was instead made available for residential letting to the local community, while remaining in Landmark's care.

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

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)