

The Landmark Trust

TOWER HILL History Album



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KEY FACTS

Last owner of earlier buildings	Mrs Anne David
Acquired by Landmark	1965
Present building construction	1969-1973
Present building designed by	Leonard Beddall Smith
Contractors	Evans Brothers of St David's
Mason	Maurice Riley
Furnished	July 1973

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Summary

Tower Hill is an anomaly as a Landmark, its site acquired in 1965 purely for its grandstand view of St David's, and the current house new build completed by John Smith in 1973. It stands on the rim of the hill close to the mediaeval gatehouse overlooking the ancient city with its Cathedral, and the Bishop's Palace beyond. John Smith also deemed the site an integral and important part of the view of the Cathedral precinct when looking upwards from the Cathedral itself, which presumably explains why he bought it. (He was also doing the then owner a favour, although the history file is silent on this).

St David's Cathedral is one of Britain's oldest Cathedrals. St David and his monks built a monastery on the spot where the present building stands. When David died, in the year 589, the monastery is said to have been *'filled with angels as Christ received his soul'*. It has long been considered the holiest site in Wales due to its relics of St David. In the Middle Ages, the Cathedral was a major pilgrimage destination and it remains a thriving church today.

In 1965, the future Landmark site, above the Cathedral, was occupied by two tiny cottages in *'an extreme state of dilapidation'*, which architect Leonard Beddell-Smith considered beyond saving. It was considered *'that the only appropriate way to preserve the integrity of the site was to demolish them and to rebuild.'* The rebuild was carried out as a single property, raised some five feet higher than the old in order to exploit fully the view from the front windows. The new building was designed to blend in with the older stone buildings of the city, following John Smith's instructions that *'the job must look like ordinary local work of the old type'* and specifying to the builder that the masonry was to be *'equal in quality to the general walling of the Cathedral'*.

The design provided for grey stone rubblestone facings with dressings in a contrasting colour. Many of the older St David's buildings were built of sea-washed stone, but this was no longer available. The grey limestone chosen is not native to the district but came from some old stables that had recently been demolished at Beddell-Smith's home, Pantgwyn Mansion, Llangoedmor together with the remains of a cottage on his neighbour's land, which had been built of the same stone.

The purple stone for the window dressings and quoins is of a type seen in many of the older buildings in the city, although where it had been used for an entire building the effect is thought to be somewhat grim. It formed part of the Caerbwdy Sandstone, which forms a layer up to 500 feet thick beneath the peninsula and outcrops in the cliffs at Caerbwdy Bay about two miles south-east of the city: it is an unusually hard stone and difficult to cut, and was only

obtained with some difficulty, having to be levered out from the cliff face on a rope and then collected from sea level at low tide. Until the National Trust gave the Landmark Trust permission to carry out a limited amount of quarrying, none had been extracted within living memory. The same stone appears in Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's west front of the Cathedral, built in 1863, which was probably the last time it had been used. The roof slates were specially quarried at Precelly Quarry, Clynderwen, Pembrokeshire. The building was completed in 1973.



Short History of the Cathedral

In 1965, the Landmark Trust recognised the significance of the site where 15 Tower Hill now stands, on the rim of the hill close to the mediaeval gatehouse and overlooking the ancient city with its Cathedral, and the Bishop's Palace beyond. A building in this position not only possesses an unrivalled view, and also forms an integral and important part of the view of the Cathedral precinct obtained when looking upwards from the Cathedral itself.

David was born in the year 500, the son of St Non and a prince of Ceredigion. Legend states that Non gave birth to him on a cliff top during a violent storm. The present cathedral stands on the site of the monastery he founded in the inhospitable area known as 'Glyn Rhosyn.' David and his followers lived a simple life; they refrained from eating meat or drinking beer. David rose to become a bishop in the church and made several pilgrimages including one to Jerusalem during which, tradition states, he brought back with him a stone which now sits in an altar in the south transept of the cathedral. The best known miracle associated with David is said to have taken place when he was preaching in the middle of a large crowd at the Synod of Llanddewi Brefi. When those at the back complained that they could not hear him, the ground on which he stood is reputed to have risen up to form a small hill so that everyone had a good view. A white dove settled on his shoulder, a sign of God's grace and blessing.

David died in the year 589 and the monastery is said to have been *'filled with angels as Christ received his soul'*. His final words to his followers were: *'Be Joyful. Keep the Faith. Do the little things that you have heard and seen me do.'*

St David and his monks built a monastery on the spot where the present Cathedral stands. It was burnt down in 645. The Danes invaded and sacked the

buildings in 1078, killing Bishop Abraham, and the Church was again burnt down in 1088.

In the twelfth century Pope Calixtus II declared St David's Cathedral to be a place of pilgrimage. It was at this time that the medieval shrine was constructed and situated in the presbytery, close to the High Altar. Pope Calixtus II also stated that the shrine was so important that two pilgrimages to St David's were equivalent to one to Rome, three were equivalent to one to Jerusalem. Since then the path of pilgrimage has been trodden by hundreds of thousands of individuals. The destruction of the Shrine during the reformation caused a steep decline in this important religious practice; however, throughout the periods of religious and political turmoil pilgrims have continued to visit the site.

The first Norman Bishop was enthroned in 1115, when the Cathedral organisation was converted from the Celtic and monastic, to the ordinary diocesan type. Peter de Leia (1176-1198), the third Norman Bishop, a Florentine monk, who had been Prior of Wenlock Abbey, Shropshire, was the first of the great Bishop builders. An old writer states, "*St David's had beene often destroyed in former times by Danes and other pyrats, and in his time was almost quite ruined.*" He started re-building in 1180, and left the Cathedral, ending at the wall of the High Altar, substantially as we see it now, as he built the nave, choir, transepts and aisles. The stone used was Cambrian sandstone taken from the cliff quarries at Caerfai and Caerbwdy. But the tower fell in 1220, crushing choir and transepts, and an earthquake in 1248 did still more damage. The tower was not rebuilt from the foundations, as the old western arch was retained. His successor dedicated the Cathedral to St Andrew and St David.

Bishop Gower (1328-1347) added the South Porch, remodelled the aisles, inserted the decorated windows on the north and south, built the rood screen between the nave and choir, added a storey to the tower, and two upper floors to

the chapel in the north transept. He founded a chantry in the Lady Chapel where the sedilia and Bishop Martin's tomb are also attributed to him.

In the late 15th and early 16th centuries the roofs were entirely renovated; Owen Pole, Treasurer (1472-1509), built the roof of the nave, and possibly that of the choir.

Bishop Vaughan (1508-1522), was the last of the great building Bishops. The Holy Trinity chapel was his work; he roofed in the open space on its east side, and vaulted the Lady chapel in stone. The tower received a third storey, raising it to its present height.

The Cathedral suffered greatly during the Civil Wars (1642-1651). Lead was stripped from the Lady Chapel and aisles, the latter being left open to the weather. In consequence the presbytery arches were blocked in with stone. Bishop Watson urged his Chapter to repair the damage, and he re-leaded the transepts in 1696. £1,500 is said to have been spent a few years later, and Chapter orders of the period show that the Canons curtailed their own incomes to carry the repairs out effectually.

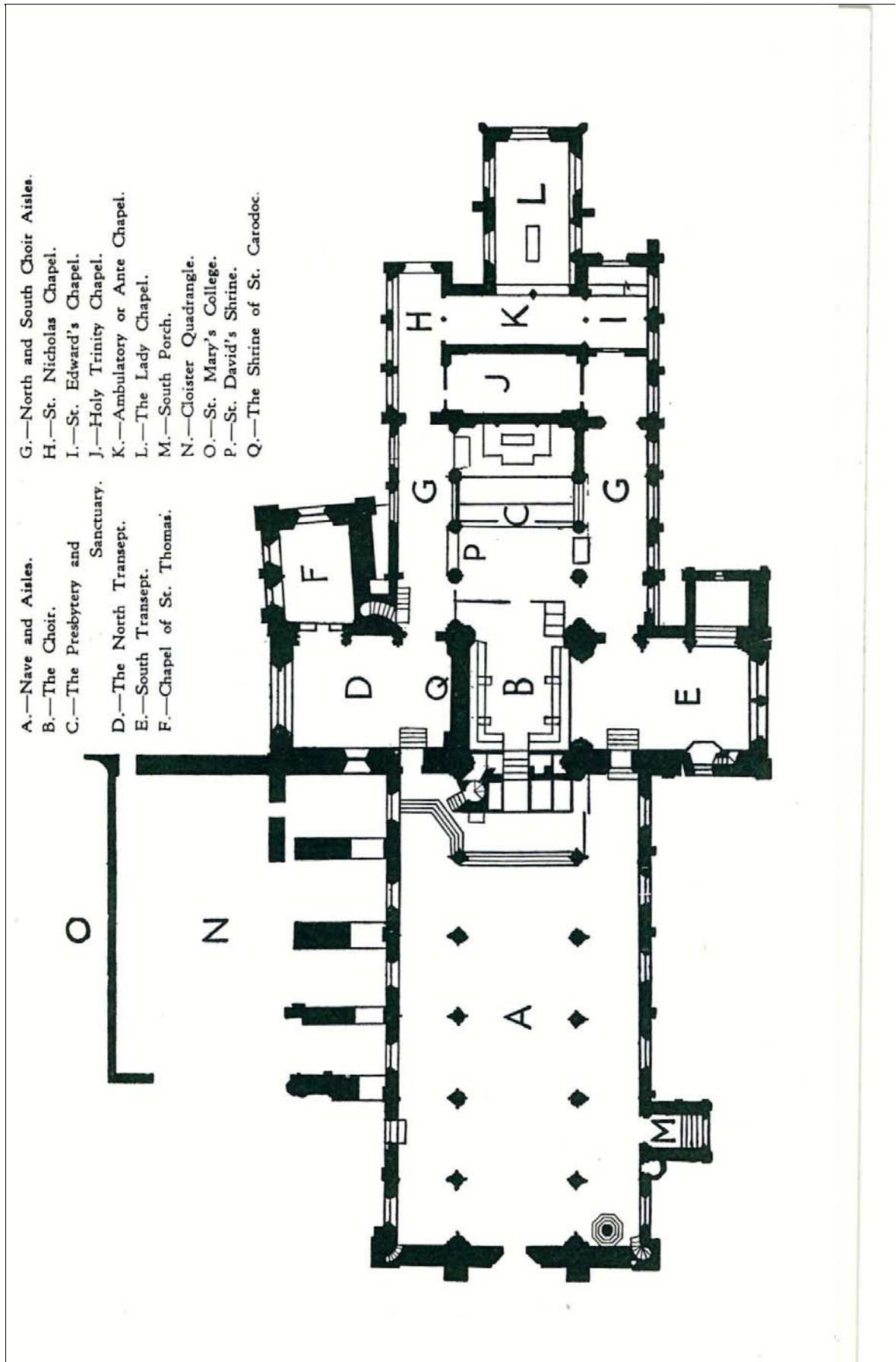
In 1789 a subscription was organised, and Mr Nash was directed to plan rebuilding the west front. His work proved to be substandard however and the west front was declared unstable.

In 1863 a general restoration was begun by Sir Gilbert Scott. The west front, spoilt by Nash, was rebuilt from a drawing of the old design. Most important of all, the central tower, which was in a most precarious condition, was made secure, the hollows in the masonry being filled with liquid cement. The foundations were drained for the first time in the history of the building and made secure, and certain relics, thought to be those of St David and St Justinian, were discovered.

The restoration of the Lady Chapel with the surrounding chapels, a few years later, completed St David's Cathedral as we see it today.



Interior from the West, the nave is the oldest surviving part of St David's Cathedral, dating from the 12th C.



Adjacent to the cathedral stand the ruins of the medieval Bishops Palace. Dating from the 14th century but derelict from the 18th, this medieval ruin still conveys the affluence and power of the medieval church. Unlike the frugal founding saint, the bishops of St David's in the Middle Ages enjoyed all the trapping of wealth and influence. The Palace was largely the work of Bishop Henry de Gower (1328-47) who built the great hall.



The Bishop's Palace

Historical background of the current Landmark



Considering the strategic position of the site with its views and access to the cathedral, the Trust acquired the land and began to consider how best to protect the treasure that it represented.

At that time the present building did not exist, and the site was occupied by two tiny cottages in an extreme state of dilapidation. Even though the Trust's policy has always emphasised the pre-eminent importance of conservation, in this case no restoration was possible. The architect Leonard Beddell-Smith reported that the cottages were hopelessly decayed, and so ruinous as to be beyond saving; he gave his opinion that the only appropriate way to preserve the integrity of the site was to demolish them and to rebuild. 15 Tower Hill is thus unique among Landmark Trust properties for its relative youth.

Two decisions were taken at this point: first, to rebuild as a single property, not two, and secondly to raise the new buildings some five feet higher than the old in order to exploit fully the view from the front windows. Mr Beddell-Smith designed the new building to blend in with the older stone buildings of the city in its style, following John Smith's instructions that *'the job must look like ordinary local work of the old type'* and specifying to the builder that the masonry was to be *'equal in quality to the general walling of the Cathedral'*. Leslie and Idris Evans of St David's, trading as Evans Brothers, were awarded the contract and Mr Maurice Riley, a local mason and an outstandingly fine craftsman, took on the preparation and laying of the stonework. The restoration was hindered by an extreme shortage of local labour, due at least in part to the simultaneous construction of the new oil refinery at Milford: workmen were unenthusiastic about taking a few weeks' employment on one small contract when two or three years of continuous employment were available within a short drive.

Materials

Mr Beddell-Smith specified that should any materials from the demolished cottages prove appropriate for re-use they should be set aside for that purpose, but in fact relatively little seems to have been found suitable.

The design provided for grey stone rubblestone facings with dressings in a contrasting colour. Many of the older St David's buildings were built of sea-washed stone, but this was no longer available. The grey limestone chosen is not native to the district but came from some old stables that had recently been demolished at Mr Beddell-Smith's home, Pantgwyn Mansion, Llangoedmor together with the remains of a cottage on his neighbour's land, which had been built of the same stone.

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The roof slates were specially quarried at Precelly Quarry, Clynderwen, Pembrokeshire.

The enormous stone slab on the terrace was a gift to the Trust from the owners of the site of the long-gone Pentre Manor, near Blaenpant, of which it once formed a part: it required a JCB to lift it on to the lorry that brought it to Tower Hill.

The pebble paving was laid by preparing a bed of mixed sand and dry cement powder, into which fist-sized stones (obtained from Caerbwdy beach) were pressed by hand. The whole was then well watered with an ordinary watering-can, a process that left the stones clean and free from adhering cement.



St David's

A poem written by E.C.R Fawcett in 1993 while staying at Tower Hill, St David's.

- St David's

We have come, after a sad Easter,
To this quiet end of the land
Where sun and moon dissolve into the sea,
And for millennia men have come
To hope, to praise, propitiate and pray.
Today the sea is calm, the sky is still
And birds are busy with their nests.
Surely this well between the hills
Must hold the balm for which we crave.
The world we flee is mad with killing,
Child destroys child, no mercy, no love.
Now black crows wheel above cathedral towers,
Come dawn, come sun, change crow by miracle to dove.

- Ted Fawcett