

## PAXTON'S TOWER LODGE

Paxton's Tower Lodge was probably built to house a caretaker for Paxton's Tower, possibly by Sir William Paxton who built the tower, else or by his successor at Middleton Hall, Edwin Adams. It no doubt went with a small tenant farm or smallholding, but continued to house the custodian as well, as by the following letter from Dorothy Stroud to *Country Life* shows, drawing attention to Paxton's Tower in 1954 on the bicentenary of the birth of its architect, S. P. Cockerell. She describes the approach to it thus:

*'After climbing a steep lane the visitor stops just short of a farmhouse by a notice which reads 'To Trespass 3d.' Having settled this little matter at the farm, or by perching coins on the gate-post, a further climb of a hundred yards or so brings him to the tower and the magnificent views by which it truly earns its original title (The Prospect House).'*

Paxton's Tower Lodge is typical of the kind of housing that was built in the counties of West Wales in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century to accommodate the rapid rise of the rural population. The popularity of Classical architecture for gentry houses meant a taste for symmetry filtered down to humbler dwellings. Windows were now placed on either side of central doorways and chimney stacks at the end, rather than centrally. After the Industrial Revolution, new materials such as finely worked slates and iron bolts replaced oak pegs in the construction of roofs and these were both used at Paxton's Tower Lodge, built in the first half of the 19th century. However, some late 18th-century fashions persisted in more rural areas of West Wales.

Paxton's Tower itself was designed by Samuel Pepys Cockerell, probably before 1805. It was still incomplete by 1822. There has been some speculation whether Cockerell's son could have been the designer of the tower, after the discovery among C.R. Cockerell's drawings of a faint, unsigned pencil drawing dated 1803, together with another sketch and a plan. It might therefore be the work of Cockerell the son and not the father. This seems unlikely, however, if only because the younger Cockerell did not enter his father's office until 1805.

Theories on Paxton's motives for building the Tower range from a reported obsession with watching a favourite pair of greys drive all the way to Tenby, to proving his honour to the neighbours, having failed to win a seat in Parliament on the promise of building a much-needed bridge across the Tywi between Carmarthen and Clandeilo. Or he may have wished simply to 'improve' the scenery with the addition of a tower from which one could view an ideal Picturesque landscape. It was also suggested at the time that he did so in memory of Admiral Nelson.

Contemporary writers saw the point at once. *Carlisle's Topographical Dictionary* (1811) gives this description:

*'To heighten the natural Views of this delightful Vale, Sir William is now erecting on a conspicuous Eminence, within his Domain, a grand Castellated Edifice, designed to honour the Memory of the Immortal Nelson: And from which the Prospect will be most extensive and rich.'*

Sadly, by the 1960s the tower had become badly dilapidated, and it was just in time that Lord Cawdor bought it and gave it to the National Trust, since almost immediately afterwards it was struck by lightning and extensive damage done. A lengthy programme of repair restored it to its original state, however, so that the view could once again be enjoyed from its summit 'to the greatest advantage.'

### **Restoration of Paxton's Tower Lodge**

The Landmark Trust bought Paxton's Tower Lodge in 1966 as part of a scheme with the National Trust to preserve the Tower and its surroundings. It was then in a very dilapidated state, with a corrugated-iron lean-to against one end and a tatty porch. These were taken down, so that only the original structure was left. This was probably much as it had always been, at least in the 20th century, with two rooms on the ground floor (kitchen/living room and parlour) divided by a central passage with board partitions. Above was the single loft bedroom, reached by a ladder-like stair and lit by one small window which, as can be seen on the plan, we enlarged. The wing running out behind was added by Landmark to increase accommodation and incorporate services.

The walls of the cottage are built of rubble masonry with a lot of clay, which is easily washed away in bad weather. To prevent this happening, and in accordance with local tradition, the exterior has to be limewashed. In spite of this the west gable still let in the wet, and a solution was only found in another local practice, that of slate-hanging which, although it had not actually been done on the Lodge before, we felt to be in sympathy with it.

The fireplace originally had a wide opening under an oak lintel with an oven tucked in one side, as one would expect to find in an old cottage or farmhouse. Later a range had been inserted, and the intention was to remove this and have once again a large open fire. Unfortunately this turned out to smoke so badly that it could not be left; instead the small fireplace there now was fitted, and this has proved more successful. The slate flagstones making up the hearth are also new, but are similar to what might originally have been there. The new floorboards in the sitting room are of Cilgerran oak, replacing the tiles that were there before.

The most endearing characteristic of Paxton's Tower Lodge is its straightforwardness, its no-nonsense, Industrial Revolution lack of fuss. We have tried to honour this quality in the methods and materials used for its repair and ongoing maintenance.

*The Landmark Trust is a charity that rescues historic buildings and lets them for self-catering holidays. Paxton's Tower Lodge sleeps up to 5 people. To book or find out more, visit [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk) or call 01628 825925.*