

The Landmark Trust

ST EDWARD'S PRESBYTERY, ST AUGUSTINE'S ROAD, RAMSGATE

St Edward's Presbytery (listed Grade I) was built by Augustus Welby Pugin, part of this great architect's original conception for his site on the West Cliff in Ramsgate. As its name suggests, the Presbytery was built to provide lodging for a secular priest, symbolically straddling the boundary between The Grange and St Augustine's church with associated monastery, playing its part within the medieval community Pugin craved to recreate. Its use of unknapped flint equally expresses this straddling of the secular and divine: the church is built of knapped flint and with Whitby stone, The Grange of London stocks with Caen stone dressings.

Despite the AD 1849 datestone at the front entrance of The Presbytery, it was not begun until late 1850 or early 1851: building had reached first floor level by 7th March 1851. As originally built, The Presbytery was a pretty, compact little house from the rear. A front door gave onto the street, but it was originally built with no ground or first floor windows on the street side. Like the walls around The Grange, it presented a defensive face to the world - there were anti-Papist disturbances in Ramsgate in 1850 in reaction to the Restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in Britain and it was still not an entirely comfortable time to be a Catholic. The ground floor was given over to a kitchen and service rooms, and these backed onto the single storey service range that connected The Presbytery to The Grange. On the first floor was a suite of rooms for the priest: a sitting room, bedroom and a closet, with further rooms tucked under the twin gabled roof on the second floor. The sitting room has a fine stone fireplace with the motto 'Orare et Orate' – pray and watch, or bear witness.

A W Pugin's original design was later significantly altered. In the 1860s, his son Edward Pugin (1834-75), also a renowned architect, added the projecting bay window on the first floor of the front elevation and the large room whose many mullioned windows overlook the north courtyard of The Grange, which he used as his drawing office or studio. Later, another architect son, Cuthbert Pugin, added a second storey over the service range as additional bedroom space, now removed. In the 20th century, when The Presbytery became part of St Augustine's School, flat roofed extensions were added and the originally well-conceived little house became swallowed up.

As for The Presbytery's function, at its completion in 1851 it seems first to have been lived in by Pugin's servants but A. W. Pugin's descent into madness soon followed. When he died in September 1852, his widow Jane and the family moved to Birmingham. Alfred Luck, a friend of the Pugins, wealthy merchant and devout Catholic, rented The Grange, and with it The Presbytery. In 1856, Luck put The Presbytery at the disposal of Wilfred Alcock, later to be the first abbot of the new community of Benedictine monks that were to be the next step in realising A. W. Pugin's vision.

Fr. Alcock and a handful of other brothers remained in St Edward's until May 1861, when they were able to move into the completed monastery across the road, designed by E. W. Pugin on land which he sold cheaply to the monks. In 1863, the two sites were linked by an underground tunnel that still runs beneath the road. The whole endeavour was largely funded by Alfred Luck, who also built himself a large Gothic house alongside the monastery, St Gregory's (demolished in 1973).

Also in 1861, Jane, Edward Pugin and his younger siblings moved back to The Grange. Edward ran his architectural practice from the first floor studio. He cut quite a figure in Ramsgate in the 1860s, both as an architect, and as an eligible bachelor determined to play his part in Ramsgate circles. In 1865 he started construction of the Granville Hotel on the East Cliff, a project that led him to bankruptcy and neurosis in 1872. Increasingly irascible and litigious, he died in 1875 aged just 41.

This was the beginning of hard times for the remaining Pugins: most of the younger generation married and moved away, but Jane and Cuthbert moved into The Presbytery, usually renting out The Grange for extra income. When The Grange suffered a serious fire in 1904, newspaper reports reveal that Jane, by now in her late 70s, was resident in The Presbytery. We believe the datestones 1827 and 1909 at the rear entrance record her lifespan (she was actually born in 1825). Cuthbert also lived out his life here, dying in 1928. Both Presbytery and Grange were then bought by the Benedictine monks, as ancillary classrooms and accommodation to their now flourishing St Augustine's boarding school, until the school closed in 1995.

When the Landmark Trust acquired The Grange from private owners in 1997, St Edward's Presbytery still belonged to the Benedictine monks of St Augustine's Abbey. It was sheltering a dwindling community of elderly nuns, the 20th-century classrooms used for church and parish meetings. In 2010, the monks put The Presbytery up for sale and later the rest of the monastic buildings (excluding St Augustine's Church, which belongs to the Catholic Diocese of Southwark). The Presbytery is so integral to The Grange's own site that Landmark decided we could not risk the house passing into private or commercial ownership, and we took the rare step of purchasing The Presbytery. Appropriately, the monastery itself has now been bought as a retreat centre by Vincentians from the Marymatha Province of Angamaly, India, and thus Augustus Pugin's vision survives and continues to evolve.

After deliberation and building analysis, Landmark has made The Presbytery an additional holiday let for four people, separate from but complimentary to The Grange. The unsympathetic 20th-century and Cuthbert Pugin's 1880s additions have been removed, but Edward Pugin's drawing office and additions remain. In an extensive restoration, the original floorplan, its partition walls altered while the nuns were in residence, has been reinstated, as has the primary staircase. Primary joinery and fireplaces have also been conserved. The service range to the rear has been reconstructed to its original form, but is left unoccupied for now. This conservation approach is entirely consistent with that followed for the restoration of The Grange, and The Presbytery has returned to a form in which it existed during the early part of Edward Pugin's tenure, whose core would also be recognisable to his father, Augustus.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. St Edward's Presbytery sleeps up to 4 people. To book it or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk.

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