

The Landmark Trust

TOWER HILL, ST DAVID'S

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).

In 1965 the site 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.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Tower Hill sleeps up to 6 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.

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