

The Landmark Trust

QUEEN ANNE'S SUMMERHOUSE & KEEPER'S COTTAGE, OLD WARDEN, BEDS

Brief History of the Shuttleworth Estate

Queen Anne's Summerhouse and Keeper's Cottage stand in an area called the Warren on the Shuttleworth Estate. Before 1872, the Estate was known as Old Warden Park and was once part of the lands owned by Warden Abbey, which stood to the west of today's Old Warden. After the Dissolution of Warden Abbey in 1537 by Henry VIII, part of the abbey became a mansion house. (This only surviving fragment of the abbey was restored in the 1970s, also by the Landmark Trust and is now let for holidays.) The lands of Old Warden manor passed at first into royal hands, and then in the 1690s, various portions of land were consolidated as Old Warden Park by a rich linen draper called Samuel Ongley. It was almost certainly Samuel Ongley who built Queen Anne's Summerhouse, in around 1713.

The Ongley family owned the Old Warden estate until 1872. In the late 18th century, Robert Henley, inheriting through his mother, became 1st Baron Ongley of Old Warden. It was his grandson, the 3rd Lord Ongley, who created the picturesque Swiss Garden on the other side of the estate (now restored and open to the public) and began to build the model village at Old Warden in the 1830s. However, by the 1870s the family's wealth was failing and their line exhausted. In 1872, the estate was sold to another self-made man, Joseph Shuttleworth.

Joseph Shuttleworth was the son of a Lincolnshire shipwright who spotted the potential of steam. With Nathaniel Clayton, in 1842 he formed The Clayton & Shuttleworth Co., an iron foundry and engineering business that made mobile steam and traction engines. By 1872, when Joseph Shuttleworth came to Old Warden, the firm had branches throughout Europe and exported their engines all over the world. Shuttleworth employed architect Henry Clutton to demolish the old brick mansion and build him a new one. Shuttleworth took as his model Gawthorpe Hall in Lancashire, an early Jacobean seat of Shuttleworth namesakes but not, it seems, his ancestors. Clutton transformed its design into the 'Jacobethan' mansion that stands at Old Warden today.

Working with Clutton was a local architect called John Usher. Estate accounts show that it was Usher, rather than Clutton, who in 1877-8 designed and built Keeper's Cottage, a short distance from the summerhouse on the warren and today also a Landmark. Both Joseph Shuttleworth and his son Colonel Frank Shuttleworth (who inherited the estate in 1883) loved to shoot, and Old Warden became renowned for its pheasant and partridge shooting. Queen Anne's Summerhouse perhaps provided the shooting party with a suitable setting for refreshments.

In 1940, Frank's only son and heir, Richard Shuttleworth, died in a flying accident. His mother Dorothy decided to make the estate over to an educational trust in his memory and the mansion became a college for countryside-based studies. Both Queen Anne's Summerhouse and Keeper's Cottage became derelict, their repair beyond the resources of a trust devoted to other aims. Knowing about Landmark's restoration of Warden Abbey on the neighbouring Whitbread Estate in the 1970s, in 2001 the Shuttleworth Trust approached the Landmark Trust to take on both Keeper's Cottage and Queen Anne's Summerhouse, offering generous donations towards their restoration costs.

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History of Queen Anne's Summerhouse

In 1712, Samuel Ongley was knighted by Queen Anne (who died in 1714) and it was almost certainly Ongley who built Queen Anne's Summerhouse. The first documentary evidence of the building's existence comes from a 1736 map and its fine brickwork also suggests an early 18th-century date. The summerhouse was built as a folly, a destination for picnics and walks, and to beautify the estate. It seems to have been built as a miniature mock-military redoubt, on an artificially created platform to enhance its views. Even in miniature, its scale seems somehow oversized, an effect typical of the English Baroque architecture of the early eighteenth century and of contemporary architects like John Vanburgh and Nicholas Hawksmoor. Local tradition attributes the design to Thomas Archer, a leading exponent of the English Baroque. This is largely on the basis of his involvement at Wrest Park at nearby Silsoe, but no reliable evidence for this has yet come to light.

The summerhouse is built of exceptionally fine 'gauged' brickwork, a technique in which each brick is rubbed to shape. The mortar joints between the bricks are also incredibly fine, carefully lined-out in near pure lime putty and no more than 1-2 mm wide. It is exceptionally fine craftsmanship.

The large main chamber was probably used for elegant refreshments, prepared by servants in the brick vaulted basement below. Two of the turret alcoves in this chamber held 'buffets,' sets of shelves on which china could be displayed. There was always a fireplace in the main chamber, a third turret being used for the flue. The fourth turret held a spiral staircase that led up to the roof terrace, where views could be enjoyed of the mansion and surrounding countryside. The rooftop sections of two turrets were tiny pavilions in their own right, the inside of their domes plastered. In planting the woods on his estate, Ongley set out a series of avenues radiating from the summerhouse and most remain today even though much of the coniferous planting now apparent was planted later. The railings which surround the summerhouse date from the late 18th century, as they are made of dry 'puddle' iron, a forging technique not developed until the 1780s.

The folly was repaired on several occasions through its life, most visibly in 1878 when Joseph Shuttleworth commissioned John Usher to design its terracotta balustrade and gave it its misleading datestone. After 1945, however, the building fell out of use and into dereliction. When Landmark took out a lease on it, the folly's roof had fallen in. Its foursquare design gave it a deceptive appearance of solidity, but the brick skin was crumbling and separating from the inner core. Windows and doors were missing and the building at risk from vandals. It had no water or electricity.

Restoration of Queen Anne's Summerhouse

It took Landmark several years to raise the funds for the restoration and a temporary roof was erected during this time to allow the building to dry out. It was then wrapped against the elements once work began on site. The exceptional quality of the brickwork called for conservation skills of the highest order, delicately patching in mortar and slip repairs, and keeping actual replacement to a minimum. A bursary funded by English Heritage allowed two bricklayers to learn some of these conservation skills. Replacement bricks were specially made to match the originals. The turrets were partially dismantled and rebuilt, and a new, sand-cast lead roof was installed. The staircase was rebuilt and the internal joinery recreated according to fragments found on site. Students from the City & Guilds of London Art School reproduced the decorative carved wooden door brackets, using old photos as evidence. The internal paint colours are based on the early 18th-century scheme discovered through paint analysis.

Traditional craftsmen contributed throughout: haired lime plaster has been used on the walls; masons replaced the stone plinth which surrounds the building, the steps and the turret copings; the railings were individually repaired by blacksmiths. The building and its water are heated by a ground source heat pump which recovers latent heat from the ground via 90 metre boreholes. Such systems require much less electricity than conventional heating, and it is the first such system in a Landmark. The floor in the main chamber is Ancaster stone and the circular turret kitchen was created by Landmark's furnishing team.

Today, Queen Anne's Summerhouse has returned to its purpose as a building for leisure. It is furnished as an elegant bedsit, with a bathroom in the brick vaulted basement where servants may once have prepared refreshments. In Landmark's care, the building will never again fall into disrepair.

Keeper's Cottage

Keeper's Cottage is a model gamekeeper's establishment provided in 1878 by Joseph Shuttleworth. Cottage, outbuildings and kennels together form a handsome example of Victorian model estate architecture, based on the pattern books published to help architects, builders and clients design ideal homes for people from all levels of society. The fashion for such dwellings (and there are many in Old Warden village) was driven partly by benevolent landowners' desire to improve the living conditions of their estate workers and partly by the same landowners' wish to create a picturesque landscape in which to exist and demonstrate their position in local society.

Estate accounts show that it was John Usher, rather than Henry Clutton, who designed and built Keeper's Cottage in 1877-8. Usher's designs for the cottage and its outbuildings are now at the Bedford & Luton Archive Service. The gamekeeper was a crucial member of the estate team in building up the pheasant and partridge shooting for which it became well-known. The preparation for the shoots and their management would have been masterminded from Keeper's Cottage, where pheasant chicks were hatched in the sitting house and working dogs housed in the kennels.

Keeper Richard Aireton and his family were the first of several such estate families to live at Keeper's Cottage. However, despite being such a model establishment in the 1870s, the cottage failed to keep up with the times. Left without water or electricity, it became first a weekend cottage and was finally left deserted. By the time the Landmark Trust was approached for help, the cottage's outbuildings had mostly fallen down, its roof had holes in it, the windows were boarded up and floorboards were rotten and dangerous. The roof of the detached kennel block had collapsed.

Restoration of Keeper's Cottage

The cottage was repaired according to the evidence found, using traditional crafts and techniques. The roof had to be almost completely rebuilt. Many of the roof tiles were salvaged, but there were not enough for the cottage roof so new ones had to be sourced, the original being re-used on the outbuildings. Lime mortar, coloured by crushed charcoal like the original, was used for the repointing and repair of the brickwork. Some of the external stonework, plasterwork and timber framing had to be replaced. The metal window frames had almost all survived but had to be reglazed and each diamond frame repainted – a laborious task. Much of the internal woodwork had to be replaced and a partition wall was taken down to make room to install a modern kitchen. Upstairs, the smallest of the original bedrooms was made into a bathroom.

At first, it was not planned to reinstate the outbuildings (coal house, washhouse, WC and sitting house, where the pheasant chicks were hatched) but the discovery that John Usher's plans survived allowed the outbuildings to be reconstructed without speculation. The later, detached kennel block was also repaired, complete with cauldron for boiling up the bones and mash for the dogs' feed – another of the Head Keeper's responsibilities. This recreation of a model gamekeeper's establishment provides a fascinating glimpse into another, earlier world of Edwardian shoots, a sport made possible only by the skill and dedication of keepers like those who lived here.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Queen Anne's Summerhouse sleeps up to 2 people and Keeper's Cottage sleeps up to 4. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.