

John Smith

Born 1923. Banker and founder of the Landmark Trust.
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Contents

1. Introduction to the Landmark Trust
2. Obituary by Martin Drury
3. Interview with Anna Keay
4. Lifelong Collectors

1. Introduction to the Landmark Trust



This staff photo was taken at the Landmark Trust head office in Shottesbrooke in 1987. Sir John Smith and Lady Christian are in the centre, behind the bench.

The Landmark Trust had its genesis in the Smith's dismay at the rate at which places were being damaged or destroyed in the early 1960s. Historic buildings were falling faster than at any other moment in peacetime. The Euston Arch came down in 1961, British Railways called for the closure of a third of the country's 7,000 railways in 1963 and widespread slum clearance saw thousands of vernacular houses crumpled by the wrecking ball.

The demolition of Thomas Telford's Junction House on the Ellesmere Canal in the early 1960s was a turning point. "I began to realise," John Smith later recalled, "that there were certain buildings that fell through the holes in the net."

The Landmark Trust had two goals: "the preservation of small buildings or structures of historic interest, architectural merit or amenity value, and where possible finding suitable uses for them" and "protecting and promoting the enjoyment of places of historic of natural beauty."

John concentrated on the architectural aspects of the buildings' rescue, while Christian determined their interior appearance, choosing colour schemes and overseeing the printing of specially-designed textiles to designs by the artist Jennifer Packer.

The first Landmark Trust building to open was Church Cottage in Llandywydd and in the five decades since then the Trust has rescued everything from Victorian forts to 16th-century castles.



Church Cottage in Llandywydd, Wales.

2. Obituary by Martin Drury

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Guardian. This obituary of Sir John Smith was written by Martin Drury, and was published on 10th March 2007.

Sir John Smith, who has died aged 83, was a financier, landowner and philanthropist who played a unique and highly effective role in saving Britain's historic buildings from demolition, and in stimulating appreciation of their potential in the contemporary world. He was one of the first to value the surviving evidence of years of industrial pre-eminence, and he both pioneered and funded the restoration of derelict canals for recreation. A man of vision, he had the drive, practicality and financial acumen to convert his ideas into action.

While serving on the executive committee of the National Trust in the 1960s, Smith wrote of the many "minor but handsome buildings of all kinds, into whose construction went much thought and care, which are part of our history and which contribute greatly to the scene; but whose original use has disappeared and which cannot be preserved from vandals, demolition or decay unless a new use and a source of income can be found for them". Characteristically, he produced his own solution, and in 1965 founded the Landmark Trust.

It was based on the simple but new idea that people would pay for the privilege of becoming temporary owners of an interesting old building, and that the income generated would fund the maintenance. The idea caught on.



The Grange, Ramsgate, designed by Pugin for himself.

Today, the trust owns 184 buildings in Britain (including 23 on Lundy), four in Italy and four in New England, among them forts, mills, follies, towers, gatehouses, disused railway stations, medieval farmhouses, lock-keepers' cottages and the great, surreal, stone pineapple folly at Dunmore, near Falkirk.

Some, such as the Grange, Ramsgate, designed by Pugin for himself, were grander than anything Smith had in mind at the beginning, but all were under threat when they were acquired, and it is the glorious variety of the buildings now listed in the Landmark handbook that rejoices the hearts of those who do no more than thumb its pages and dream. (John Smith is shown right exploring a neglected property).



John Smith was born in London and grew up in Sussex, the eldest son of a banker and landowner. The Smiths are one of England's oldest banking dynasties and his father, Captain Eric Smith, had become chairman of the National Provincial Bank when it merged with his family business after the first world war.

Smith was educated at Eton. In 1942 he joined the Fleet Air Arm and served in almost every theatre of war, taking part, and almost being brought down, in the aerial attack on the German battleship Tirpitz as it lay in a Norwegian fjord in July 1944. He retained an enduring affection for the Royal Navy and in years to come was to play a leading part in the rescue and restoration of the second world war cruiser, HMS Belfast, and of Brunel's SS Great Britain, and in the most quixotic of all his many enterprises, to undertake and fund the restoration of England's first steam-powered, iron-clad warship, HMS Warrior.

After Oxford, where he read history at New College, rowed for the college and met his future wife, Christian Carnegy, he joined Coutts & Co, part of the consortium of banks into which his family business had merged, and in 1950 became a director. In due course he was on the board of several companies, including Rolls-Royce and the Financial Times. From 1965 to 1970 he was Conservative MP for the Cities of London and Westminster. He was a fellow of Eton for many years and briefly, Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire.

Buildings had intrigued Smith since boyhood, and as a young man he had thoughts of becoming an architect. But in founding the Landmark Trust, he had a wider purpose. He wanted to open people's eyes to their surroundings, to kindle new interests, to win support for his conviction that conservation is not a reactionary force but essential to mankind's survival, and to provide time and space for contemplation of "what is being done to this planet and its occupants". In this, as in much else, he was ahead of his time.



Shottesbrooke Park, Berkshire. The home of Sir John and Lady Smith.

The money was provided by the Manifold Trust, set up by Smith and his wife in 1962. While the Landmark Trust reflected the romantic side of his complex personality, the Manifold Trust was the product of his head for business. As deputy governor of Royal Exchange Assurance, he noticed that by buying long leases a few years before expiry, a substantial income could be generated for a charitable trust. The result was what he described as "a cataract of gold" for the Landmark and other charitable causes, including churches, church bells, museums, ships, canals, sea cadets and libraries.

Smith liked to help local enterprises where small sums go a long way. A well-phrased application which caught his imagination would be rewarded with a cheque and a courteous and encouraging letter, often in his own hand. He delighted in projects which appealed to his sense of history and his interest in its byways. When Captain Oates's polar medal came up for sale, he bought it and presented it to his regiment. And when he learned that Westminster school had discontinued its annual Greek play because

the canvas backdrop - painted in the 1850s with a panoramic view of Athens - had rotted, he volunteered to pay for its repair.

He had a quick and probing mind, acute powers of observation and a sardonic wit. He relished the odd and the absurd. His wide interests and formidable memory made him an engaging companion. He was intensely loyal to those who served him, but there was also an obsessive quality in his make-up, a highly tuned sense of justice, which could make him an unforgiving and relentless opponent. His interest in history, buildings and landscape drew him naturally to the National Trust, and at the age of 29 he joined its executive committee. He was a young man bursting with ideas and energy, and ruffled many feathers. With hindsight, however, he is seen as one of the handful of people to whose vision and drive the National Trust owes its transformation from the small, inward-looking society it had become after the war into the great movement it is today.

He recognised the potential of the crumbling network of canals ("a source of pleasure and a manifestation of the English genius") and persuaded the trust to take on and repair the Stratford-upon-Avon canal. He promoted Enterprise Neptune, the trust's campaign for the protection of Britain's coastline, and as part of that campaign, joined forces with Sir Jack Hayward to acquire Lundy. And, in later years, he arranged for the Landmark and National trusts to collaborate in many joint projects, involving good buildings and fine landscape.

Smith served on numerous bodies concerned with historic buildings, the arts and the environment. He was appointed CBE in 1975 and knighted in 1988. In 1994 he was appointed a Companion of Honour. He and Christian, whom he married in 1952, had two sons and three daughters, one of whom predeceased him.



Sir John Smith.

3. Interview with Anna Keay

The following interview with Sara Keay, Director of the Landmark Trust, by Laura Battle was published in the Financial Times on April 2nd 2015. It was archived here, with acknowledgement and thanks, in 2021.



The West Banqueting House in the Cotswolds.

One of several fragments that remain of Old Campden House, which was built by the wealthy merchant Baptist Hicks in about 1615 and destroyed in 1645 during the civil war, the West Banqueting House is an almost fantasy creation in rich golden limestone, adorned with decorative parapets and barley-sugar chimneys. It was built as an open-sided pavilion where Hicks and his guests could retire after meals to enjoy wine and sweetmeats, and views over the formal gardens, but by the late 20th century the structure's only use was as a sheep shelter. Today it offers the ideal setting for a weekend spent wallowing in the past.

West Banqueting House is one of almost 240 historic buildings that are in the Landmark Trust's care. Founded in 1965 by Sir John Smith, a Conservative politician born into the Abel Smith banking family, Landmark was designed to serve two purposes. Smith noticed that if organisations such as the National Trust (a British conservation charity founded in 1895) preserved only the most prominent historic buildings these would in time stick out "as a diamond ring in the spaghetti", so he focused his attention on small but significant structures and realised he could spread his enthusiasm by inviting the public to rent and enjoy these buildings.

“[Smith] witnessed what anybody in the mid-1960s witnessed, which was the unstoppable locomotive of destruction going through historic buildings — 400 listed buildings were knocked down in 1965 — and he was desperate about it,” says Anna Keay, director of the Landmark Trust. “Lots of things that in 1965 other people would have thought laughable in terms of heritage, 19th-century military fortifications, or old prisons . . . he absolutely got that these places were every bit as interesting and as precious as a Vanbrugh country house.”

Now Landmark is planning a “Golden Weekend” of activities across the country in May to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Over the years it has taken on numerous notable buildings: some, like The Château in Lincolnshire, miniature in scale, others, such as Palladio’s magnificent Villa Saraceno in the Veneto, much larger. It has a handful of properties in Italy and France and 23 properties on Lundy Island, which has been conserved and managed by the trust since 1969. Many of its rentals, including Cawood Castle in Yorkshire, the site of Cardinal Wolsey’s arrest in 1530, remind us of great moments in history, while others, such as Swarkestone Pavilion in Derbyshire, which had a starring role in a 1968 photo shoot of the Rolling Stones, have a more whimsical appeal.

Smith’s ambitious vision was realised with the help of his own private wealth, shrewd business sense and the luck of the moment. He had already established his own charitable trust — the Manifold Trust — in 1962 and raised money for this by purchasing long-lease (non-heritage) properties that were close to their expiry date then letting them out, having spotted, before many others, that as a charity it would not be taxed on this rental income. A director of Coutts bank (he also served as a director of the Financial Times, and chairman of Rolls-Royce) he was also able to secure large loans, and these, together with capital from the Manifold Trust, helped him purchase or secure leases on heritage properties in need of rescue.

So expertly was the Manifold Trust managed that the Landmark Trust could rely on it for funding during the first 25 years. In 1994, however, Landmark was afforded charitable status and struck out on its own while maintaining a somewhat old-fashioned approach to marketing. It has paid for just one advertisement, in 1967, and until 2013 its website was little more than a holding page, with bookings taken by post or over the phone. Still only 7 per cent of visitors come from overseas. But today there is more interest in spreading the word, and the launch of “Landmark Pioneers”, an initiative that will involve donors from the early stages of a building’s rescue through to its restoration, is part of Landmark’s wider revamp.

“In the very early days, Smith went round with a notebook, looking over walls, writing down ‘pigsty — quite interesting’ and things like that,” says

Keay. The pigsty that caught his eye is a late 19th-century neoclassical stable in Yorkshire — a Grand Tourist’s joke — now restored and converted into a one-bedroom holiday cottage with spectacular views over Robin Hood’s Bay. “But within five years of Landmark being set up people were coming to [the trust] and there was more than he could cope with”.

Not surprisingly, Landmark is now inundated with applications about buildings in need of rescue, but in an average year it is able to take on just two new projects. Some of these will be acquisitions, others will be on a long-lease basis and the rest bequeathed.



Belmont, Lyme Regis, Dorset. The family home of Eleanor Coade, 18th century businesswoman.

This year sees the opening of two new Landmark properties: St Edward’s Presbytery in Kent, designed by AWN Pugin in 1850, and Belmont, an 18th-century villa in Lyme Regis that was owned by the sculptor and businesswoman Eleanor Coade, and more recently occupied by the novelist John Fowles. Though she is now largely forgotten, Coade was one of the most notable of English architectural pioneers, inventing an artificial and virtually indestructible ceramic stone, known as Coade stone, that from 1769 was mass produced at her factory in Lambeth. Such was Coade’s entrepreneurial spirit that her seaside retreat in Dorset became an advert for these wares, with delicate Coade stone decorations set on to its salmon pink façade.

“What we’ve been doing there is two things. One is to get the house itself largely back to its shape and arrangement and configuration in Mrs Coade’s day,” says Keay. “But the John Fowles part of the story is really interesting too and we’ve gone into a really nice partnership with the creative writing

MA at UEA [University of East Anglia], so they'll be bringing creative writing students twice a year to just inhabit the building and write there.”



Clavell Tower, Kimmeridge, Dorset.

Some people have criticised Landmark for what they consider to be high rental prices, and certainly a number of the properties can seem difficult or expensive to secure. Clavell Tower, for instance, a romantic 1830s folly on a clifftop in Dorset, is booked up until 2017, while 43 Cloth Fair, a one-bedroom flat in London — once home to the poet John Betjeman — costs £887 for three nights in September. Keay argues that in general costs are kept low. “To stay in one of our buildings, averaged out across the year, is £45 per person per night, which is [about] the same as a Travelodge [budget hotel]. About 15 per cent [of properties] you can get at some part of the year for £15 per person.”

With the National Trust having taken on a broader range of properties over the past 15 years, including back-to-back terraces in Birmingham and a Modernist property in Surrey, and the arrival of new organisations such as Alain de Botton’s Living Architecture, which offers houses designed by leading contemporary architects for holiday rental, many believe the Landmark Trust should take on more 20th-century buildings. To date, it has just one Modernist building on its books — Anderton House in Devon — although its restoration of Astley Castle in Warwickshire, which combined new-build with existing ruins, won the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2013. So is Landmark looking to take on more modern buildings?



Anderton House, Goodleigh, Devon.

“We’d love to,” says Keay, “but we’ve got to make sure that it actually meets our criteria because it’s no good just doing it because you think it’s quite fun and it would look nice, and with a lot of 20th-century domestic buildings of architectural merit, there’s quite a good market for them so they’re not necessarily the ones that are falling through the gaps.” She talks excitedly about a recent approach regarding an early 19th-century semaphore communications tower. “We’re interested in buildings that have something particular to say about British history that isn’t properly appreciated or thought about at the moment.”

Maud Goodhart writes:

Sixteen years after the launch of Landmark Trust, John Smith began to take on properties outside of the UK. Landmark now manages six places for rent in Italy, three in France and, from June, one in Belgium.

The appeal of these overseas properties is aimed squarely at a British audience and most of the properties have a British link in their past. In two cases the history is a morbid one: a new Landmark property has been created within Hougoumont farm in Belgium, one of the most notable sites in the Battle of Waterloo, while the oldest overseas Landmark (taken on in 1981) is a flat off the Piazza di Spagna in Rome that offers a romantic hideaway for two in the same building where the poet John Keats died of tuberculosis in 1821. For those with an interest in 19th-century literature, there is also an apartment in Florence’s Piazza San Felice where Elizabeth and Robert Browning once lived.



Villa Saraceno, Vicenza, Italy.

The second overseas Landmark — a villa in northern Italy designed by Andrea Palladio — was found in 1989 and added to the collection because of the influence of the Palladian style on British architecture. Huge in scale, the property sleeps 16 and costs £3,716 for four nights in high season. The trio of Landmarks in France (in Gif-sur-Yvette near Paris) are part of an 18th-century mill complex where the Duke of Windsor fled with Wallis Simpson following his abdication in 1936.

In Vermont, the Landmark Trust US (which grew out of the UK charity but is now a separate organisation) manages five properties, two of which were previously owned by Rudyard Kipling and his family. For now, there are no further plans to expand the international operation, according to Simon Verdon, head of business operations at the Landmark Trust, unless, of course, something irresistible comes along.



Fort Clonque is the most remarkable of the great mid-Victorian harbour works off Alderney, built to protect the Channel Islands from capture by the French. Perched on a group of large rocks surrounded by the waves, you reach the Fort by a spectacular causeway leading to a drawbridge.

4. Lifelong Collectors

The following description of the 2019 sale of items from the collection of Sir John and Lady Smith was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Sothebys website. Sir John Smith had died in 2007 and Lady Smith had died in 2018.

Featuring Old Master Paintings, Impressionist and Modern British art, fine furniture and jewelry, *Recollections of Places Past*, an auction of Sir John and Lady Smith's collection, will be offered in London on 9 July 2019. The auction will showcase the breadth of history surrounding this significant collection, with works by Matisse, Christian Dior and a superb painting by Lowry.

The philanthropist, banker and politician, Sir John Smith met his future wife, Christian Carnegy, at Oxford, in the late 1940s. He was reading *History*; she was reading *English*. This combination of intellects, one fascinated by the past, the other absorbed in the poetic, would create one of the great success stories in British philanthropy and – as detailed in these pages – shape a distinctly personal collection.

When Sir John and Christian founded The Landmark Trust in 1965 it was the culmination of their approach to conservation. Previously they had seen important vernacular buildings slipping through the preservation net. While heritage organisations were defending the grand country houses, the Smiths recognised that little was being done for the historically and architecturally significant but less appreciated buildings of Britain.

The Trust set about purchasing such buildings and after a programme of research and restoration let them pay for themselves as holiday boltholes. Landmark today manages some two hundred properties ranging from eccentricities such as a Grade II listed pigsty in Yorkshire and a pineapple-inspired folly in Scotland to sites of immense importance, including Pugin's neo-Gothic house in Ramsgate and the island of Lundy in the Bristol Channel.

"We have no favourite period or style," Smith noted, "Although we lean towards the functional." In the possessions of Sir John and Lady Smith we can see the flashes of everyday gems. Witness the naïve charm of a pair of 18th century slipware dishes, a Victorian excursion captured in George Leslie's Thames-side *Conversation* and a domed model of the knapped-flint church on their estate.

Sir John and Lady Smith considered the Trust and their collection to be joint endeavours and, over the course of half a century, the couple were vital to the preservation of vernacular architecture, not just in Britain but in

Europe and America too. In the process they provided cherished memories for the huge number of people who have stayed in the Trust's properties.



Dame Laura Knight, R.A., R.W.S., The Picnic, 1912 along with other furniture, ceramics and silver highlights from the collection.

John Smith was born in 1923, scion of one of Britain's oldest banking families (founded in the mid-17th century, Smiths Bank remained independent until the early 20th century). He grew up at Ashfold, an Edwardian country house that his father had almost halved in size. John later observed that "buildings are seldom improved by additions but very often by subtraction".

On leaving Eton, John served in the Fleet Air Arm during the Second World War, seeing action in the Mediterranean, Pacific and Norwegian theatres. He took part in the fabled sinking of the German battleship Tirpitz in the Kvaenangen fjord.



A set of four George IV mahogany hall chairs, circa 1830 (detail), decorated in polychrome and parcel-gilt with the Smith crest.

Meanwhile, Christian Carnegie grew up on the family estate near Dundee in Angus. It was a childhood of imaginative theatricals, skating and parties in historic castles. As with the Smiths, a passion for public service was part of the Carnegys' constitution. Christian's father won a DSO and an MC during the First World War. Her older sister Elizabeth became a leading figure in the Girl Guide movement and a respected Conservative peer. Her aunt, Dame Beryl Oliver, was decorated for her services to the Red Cross.

John and Christian married in 1952. Reluctantly giving up the idea of becoming an architect, John joined Coutts Bank and combined his successful career in finance with a series of philanthropic and heritage

pursuits, for which he was recognised with a knighthood in 1988 and subsequently was made Companion of Honour. Their country house, Shottesbrooke Park, was left to John by his cousin, Nancy Oswald Smith. The house had been inherited from a branch of the family – the Vansittarts – who originated in Danzig (now Gdansk) and settled in Britain.



A Victorian mahogany giant carriage timepiece, Vulliamy No.1594, London, dated 1843, along with other furniture, books, silver, vertu and photograph highlights from the collection.

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In Shottesbrooke and their Westminster residence, No 1 Smith Square, Sir John and Lady Smith created homes which displayed elements of the past and present. The result is a fascinating inherited collection that has been further enriched by the couple’s contributions.

There are striking portraits of Smiths and Vansittarts and signs of time spent abroad by various members of the family. But the overwhelming feel is that of a very British country house, albeit one punctuated by pops of colour, courtesy of Impressionist works by Marquet and Matisse and items such as a striking Italian albarello lamp. A love of colour can also be found in the items of couture and the textiles, an area beloved of Lady Smith. Her own hand-blocked materials feature in many of the Landmark buildings.



S.S.Great Britain.

The industrial landscape of Britain is, of course, a notable presence. In their paintings and prints we find the collieries of Durham and the pioneers of locomotion. Elsewhere, a set of marine prints and oils reflect a concern close to Sir John’s heart: the safeguarding of our maritime heritage. This led to his involvement with the restoration of HMS Warrior, SS Great

Britain and HMS Belfast, as well as the conservation of the nation's canal system.

And the collection displays markers of everyday life in the country, elements of the pastoral cycle of work, rest and play: there are Grand Tour sketchbooks; Scottish plaid-design carpet bowls; walking canes with unusual terminals, some shaped like fox and rabbit heads. An affinity for rural calm can also be found in Laura Knight's *The Picnic*, a bucolic scene in Cornwall, one of the highlights of the pictures.



Painting by L.S.Lowry of Lloyd George's birthplace in Manchester.

There are, perhaps, two pieces which particularly reflect the characters of their owners. The first is LS Lowry's study of David Lloyd-George's birthplace in Manchester. In 1958, shortly after the painting's completion, Sir John spotted it in the window of the Lefevre Gallery in Mayfair.

The view of the Liberal Prime Minister's simple corner-terrace house is a quiet exercise in geometry, but it encapsulates the Smiths' love of idiosyncratic architecture with incidental interest. Endearingly, it was the scene's similarity to their corner of Smith Square which caught Sir John's eye that day as he walked along Bruton Street.

And the use of their Anglo-Indian ivory and rosewood desk epitomises how purpose and beauty can be combined: Lady Smith used this fine piece as her dressing table. Here is beauty married to utility. These pieces of furniture, objects and pictures display a keen love of purpose. It is apt, therefore, that they will continue to be valued by other collectors.



Anglo-Indian ivory and rosewood desk.
