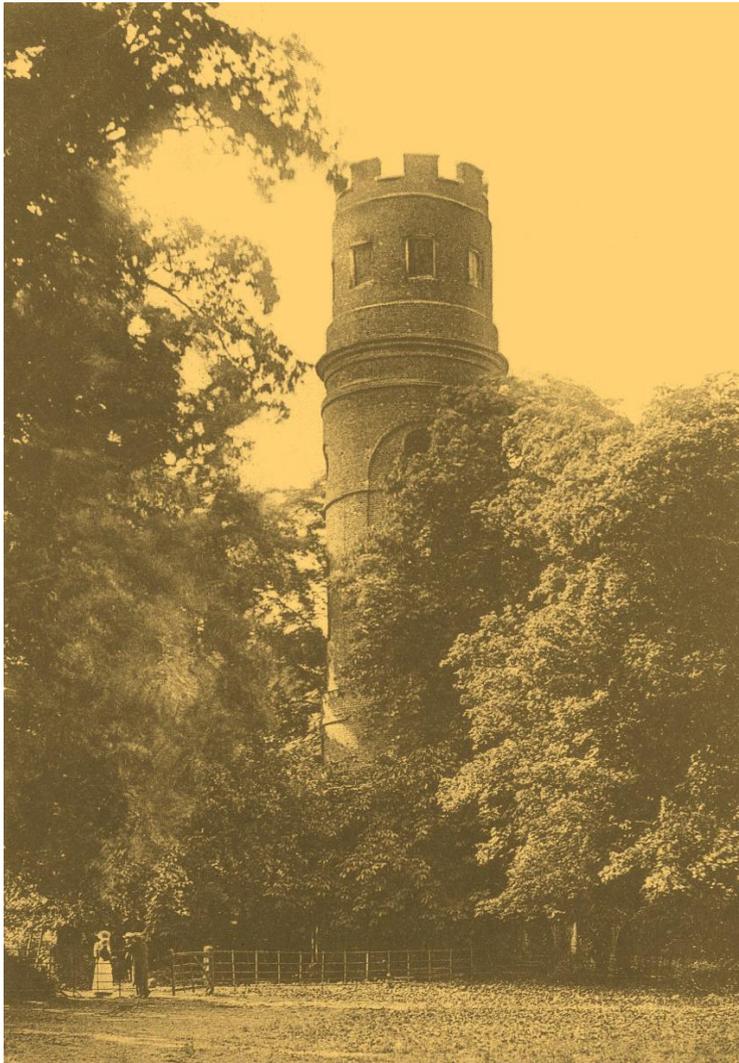


# Stratton's Tower

## *The Monument - Little Berkhamsted*



Built c1789 by

*John Stratton*

John Stratton, Gentleman

Restored after it had been derelict for more than 100 years  
and converted to basic living accommodation in 1971 by  
William Tatton Brown, CB, MA, ARIBA, AA Dip.

## Facts Sheet

### LOCATION

#### Map Reference

TL 296/082 (29566/08238)

London Bridge is therefore about 17¼ miles a little to the East of due South

**DIMENSIONS** - the Dimensions are all based on multiples of the number four:

#### Height - to top of castellation

96 feet - 4 times the width of the Base (24 feet)

#### Height - above sea level

The Bench Mark on the front wall is shown on the 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey 1881-1883 (surveyed 1873-1879) as:

Monument B(en)ch M(ark) 361.0 (feet)

The Bench Mark is 1 foot 9 inches above the level of the terrace, which makes the level of the terrace about 359 feet above sea level (as at 1873-9)

At the top of the castellations, the Tower is therefore about 455 feet above sea level.

The highest ground between the Tower and London Bridge is Epping Green, which is due south of the Tower and lies between the 400 feet and 425 feet contours on the Ordnance Survey maps: from the top of the Tower, on a clear day, it is therefore possible to look over Epping Green directly to the City of London.

#### Width at the Base of the Tower - front to back and side to side

24 feet - a quarter of the Height (96 feet)

The interior space is circular and consistent at all levels, at around 16 feet, whereas the exterior width reduces at the higher levels.

### CONSTRUCTION

The construction is essentially a series of four boxes, an octagon at the base, surmounted by three circular sections, each being narrower, and therefore lighter, than the one immediately below. This gives the structure great strength, while retaining sufficient flexibility to withstand high winds: when the wind is particularly strong there can be significant movement in the upper two storeys and, in extreme conditions, some movement has been felt even in the Library.

However, although the base is literally an octagon, it is not a regular octagon - the four wider sides are approx. 160 inches wide, while the others are only approx. 88 inches wide. Although the base does have eight sides, those eight sides being of two different lengths means that the base is really a square, with the four corners cut off. The narrower sides are aligned to the four points of the compass, with the front facing south-east.

### ACCOMMODATION

#### Storeys

There are six levels, excluding the Ground Floor and the Roof - originally four, before the 1971 Restoration - and 147 steps:

*Ground Floor*: Kitchen/Breakfast Room and entrance to Modern Living Room

*16 steps* to Mezzanine Floor with Gallery, Washroom/Toilet and Shower Room

*15 steps* (31 from the ground floor) to the First Bedroom

*26 steps* (57 from the ground floor) to the Library

*30 steps* (87 from the ground floor) to the Second Bedroom

*26 steps* (113 from the ground floor) to the Third Bedroom, Shower Room and Toilet

*13 steps* (126 from the ground floor) to the Observation Room

*21 steps* (147 from the ground floor) to the Roof (Open Observation Level)

## **The Stratton Family at Little Berkhamsted**

The Georgian Tower at Little Berkhamsted, listed Grade II\*, currently known as Stratton's Folly - although it is a Prospect Tower, not a Folly - was probably built in 1789, by John Stratton, Gentleman.

Despite stories to the contrary, which appear to have originated as recently as 1953, in the book "*Follies & Grottoes*" by Barbara Jones, John Stratton was **most certainly not an Admiral**, retired or otherwise, and he was still only in his thirties when the Tower was built.

It is not known precisely when or where he was born, although he was probably born in the first Quarter of 1751, but it is known that he was the eldest son of Samuel Stratton, a prosperous Linen Draper of Leadenhall Street in the City of London, and his first wife, Deborah, the daughter of William Collier, Tallow Chandler, of Bethnal Green.

When Samuel Stratton died, aged eighty, in 1794, he was sufficiently well-known for his death to be reported in both the Times and the Gentleman's Magazine: he was buried in the Stratton Family Vault in Bunhill Fields, the non-conformist graveyard in the City of London.

Samuel Stratton acquired the estate in Little Berkhamsted, then known as "Gay's" or "Gay's Place", most likely named after a former owner, Samuel Gay, probably in 1780 (*the house is now known as "The Gage"*). 1780 is the year mentioned by John Heathfield Stratton, John Stratton's grandson, in a letter to the antiquarian, William Gerish, and the Accounts of the Hertford musician Thomas Green show that, on 5th August 1780, he tuned Mrs Stratton's Harpsichord "at Barkhamsted". The harpsichord was a "*Joannes Crang 2 Unisons, Octave and Lute*" and the charge was half a guinea (52½p) but Mr Green had to wait almost nine months, until 30th April the following year, before he received payment.

Samuel Stratton had previously lived in Hackney House, a very substantial house some two or three miles to the north-east of the City of London. The house stood in walled grounds of 18 acres to the east of Lower Clapton Road in East London, the whole estate comprising about 200 acres of farmland, stretching as far as Homerton, Millfields Road and the Lea Cut, and the house was the fore-runner of the present Homerton College in Cambridge University. Samuel Stratton also owned some 22 acres of land on the Isle of Dogs, traditionally known as "*The Nineteen Acres*", situated just to the south of where Canary Wharf is situated now. This land, which was then pasture, was inherited by John Stratton and, in the 1850's and 1860's, his descendants granted building leases for the development of the area, which became known as Cubitt Town. John Stratton succeeded to the property in Little Berkhamsted on the death of his father, in 1794, but he does not appear to have spent very much time there: the Birth Certificates of his nine children registered at Dr. Williams' Library, show eight different addresses within a period of less than seventeen years, between his marriage in November 1794 and his death, aged sixty, in 1811. He was buried, as had been his father, in the Stratton Family Vault in Bunhill Fields.

The property was in the ownership of the Stratton family for some 168 years, until after the death of Albinia Stratton, who died, at the Gage, in June 1940. She was the widow of John Stratton's grandson, Col. John Heathfield Stratton, RA, and she left the property to her nephew, Edmund Ross. However, after Mrs Stratton's death, the estate remained unoccupied until after Edmund Ross sold it, in 1948, to Adolfo Gentilli, for the sum of £10,500.

Adolfo Gentilli then resold it, with 2 cottages and 73 acres of land in all, and including the derelict tower, for £11,000, on 22nd April 1949, just five months later, to William Tatton Brown.

In James Thorne's "*Handbook to the Environs of London*", published in 1876, the Tower was described as "*being in a neglected condition*" and it continued to deteriorate until 1968, when, after a protracted battle with the Planning authorities, William Tatton Brown, then Chief Architect to the Ministry of Health, was granted permission to restore and convert it to living accommodation.

Having sold off the rest of the estate piecemeal over the previous 26 years, by March 1975 William Tatton Brown was left with only the Tower and just 1¼ acres of garden, copse and paddock, which he let, on a weekend basis, to Marion and David Cooper in June 1975.

They completed the purchase on 15th March 1978 and then, in 2009, completed a single storey extension. This was designed, by David Cooper, to echo the octagonal floorplan and entrance of the original building and is linked to the original building by a barrel-vault roof and a glazed walkway.

## **The Brewhouse - the Mansion House from 1622 to 1703 -**

Sir John Weld, of Arnold's, later Arnos Grove, in Southgate, Middlesex, was Lord of the Manor of Little Berkhamsted from 1610, when he succeeded his father, Sir Humfrey Weld, until his own death in 1623, and, in 1622, he is believed to have purchased a house, known as the Brewhouse, which then became the "Mansion House" for the Manor of Little Berkhamsted.

The earliest known mention of the house is in a document dated 1597 but it is believed to have been much older. It is probable that it was an early Tudor building, built of red brick, standing close to where the Garden Cottage stands now, by the very big old chestnut tree.

In 1655 the Manor was purchased by George Nevill, Gent., of Staple Inn, London, for £3,600 but he is believed to have let the building for some years. The few surviving Hearth Tax Returns show a house with 16 hearths, by far the largest number in the parish, held in 1662 and 1663 by "Jeremiah Elwes Esq." but in 1673 by "Mr Nevill". This "Jeremiah Elwes Esq." is said to have been a descendant of Sir Francis Drake and his father an ancestor of both Diana, the late Princess of Wales, and the present Queen, Elizabeth II.

George Nevill died, aged 58, in 1679, the year his only daughter, Elizabeth, married Cromwell Fleetwood, and it is likely that the couple lived at the Brewhouse after their marriage.

Cromwell Fleetwood was the grandson of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. He was born in 1653, the eldest of three children of Lieutenant-General Charles Fleetwood's second marriage, to Bridget Cromwell, Oliver Cromwell's daughter and therefore a descendant of the sister of Thomas Cromwell, Chief Minister to Henry VIII from 1532 to 1540.

Cromwell Fleetwood died without issue in 1688; his widow died in 1692 and they are both buried in the Chancel in Little Berkhamsted Church. Their grave is covered by a large stone just inside the Communion rails, on the south side of the Church, with an inscription and the arms of Fleetwood quartering Nevill.

Elizabeth Fleetwood left the Manor of Little Berkhamsted to George, the eldest son of her cousin and heir-at-law, John Nevill of Ridgewell, Essex, when he should come of age, and, until such time, the revenue, after meeting the debts and legacies, was to go to John Nevill.

The revenue from the Manor, however, proved insufficient to meet the charges upon it, and in 1703 the trustees obtained a private Act of Parliament to enable them to sell a portion of the estate, which included the Brewhouse, to meet those charges.

The house passed through several owners during the 18th century until it was acquired by John Stratton, probably in 1787: he had it demolished and some of the Tudor hand-made red bricks, timbers and stonework were re-used in the construction of the Tower.

## **The VIEWS**

There has been much speculation as to John Stratton's reason for building the Tower but the earliest known reference to the Tower accompanies a watercolour sketch, captioned "*Prospect Tower at Little Berkhamstead Herts*", which dates from some time before May 1799. The watercolour is accompanied by the following text:

*"At Little Berkhamsted is a very handsome Tower, built with bricks of a circular form with an octagon base, the top is a lead flat with battlements from which are fine prospects, it was built for a pleasure House, and has several apartments in the different stages of altitude ~"*

There have been many published descriptions of the view from the top of the Tower, an example of which is the following, from a cutting in the Gerish Box in the Hertfordshire Record Office, probably from the Journal "*Notes & Queries*". It refers to a "*Query*" dated 2nd June but without giving the year, although the full context would indicate a date between 1884 and 1900.

*"..... the trouble and difficulty of the ascent is well repaid by the magnificent panorama which appears on emerging into the open air at the top.*

*Looking over the trees in the immediate neighbourhood can be seen north, south, east, and west a large tract of country, and on a fine clear day the eye can rest upon towns, villages, hamlets, homesteads, and mansions standing out in the landscape. At a distance of upwards of thirty miles can be seen the boundaries of the county where it adjoins the hills of Cambridgeshire, and with a telescope many places in that county are prominently shown. St. Albans Abbey, with its square grey tower, stands out in the sunlight, and the Great Northern Railway can be traced for many a mile passing over the viaduct at Digswell, with the river flowing in the valley: as also the spires of churches far and near."*

## **The Norman Conquest**

However, the Ordnance Survey maps have consistently shown the Tower as "The Monument" or "The Berkhamsted Monument" and it has been suggested that it may have been built to commemorate the submission of the Anglo-Saxon leaders to the Normans at (Little) Berkhamsted in 1066.

[Note by David Cooper for the Little Berkhamsted Open Gardens Day - 9th May 1999](#)

- updated 1 November 2017