

DESIGN, ACCESS AND HERITAGE STATEMENT FOR PROPOSED NEW INTERNAL OPENING AT THE OLD RECTORY, ELFORD.

Introduction

1. The writer was commissioned by Mr. R. and Mrs. J. Sanders to prepare an application for a new doorway between two existing rooms at the Old Rectory.
2. This statement is submitted in line with paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) which says:

“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.”

The Heritage Asset (the Old Rectory).

3. The heritage asset affected is the Grade II listed old Rectory, which was first listed on 13/3/1991. The list description is as follows:

“House, formerly rectory. Circa early C18, probably recasting of earlier building, extended or partly rebuilt in circa mid C19. Red brick in various bonds. Plain tile roof, hipped at centre and with parapeted gable-ended cross wings and brick coggled eaves. Brick axial and gable-end stacks with square yellow clay pots.

“H-shaped on plan, the central range and the left (west) cross-wing appear to be the original house, the cross wing extended by another outer range parallel to it on the west side, and the right (east) cross-wing, circa mid C19, but possibly a rebuilding of an earlier wing.

“2 storeys. A symmetrical 1:5:1 window south front, with projecting gabled cross wings to right and left, that to right with C19 polygonal conservatory enclosing panelled double doors and with canted bay window above; gabled wing on left has 3-light casement on ground floor, and canted ariel above. Centre 5-window range has brick platband at first floor level, cambered brick arch window openings, with tall casements on right and tall 12-pane ground floor sashed on left with small casements above; central pedimented doorcase with glazed and panelled double doors. Right hand (east) return 3-windows, tall sashed on ground floor, smaller above. Left hand (west) return, outer cross wing, has various casements, the first

floor with leaded panes. At rear, gabled cross wings to right and left, that on right with casement windows and panelled door on inner (east) side and covered walk from panelled back door to outbuildings.

“Interior: not inspected but some panelled window shutters observed.

“Note: Salvin restored the Church of St Peter in 1848-9 and this may be the date of the mid C19 work at the rectory.”

4. The house is also included on the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record (MST10435), but the entry adds no further detail.
5. A partial historic building survey was conducted by Bob Meeson in connection with earlier proposals¹. Mr. Meeson points out that there was a rectory house at Elford in the 14th century, and it is reasonable to propose that it was on the present site in the absence of any evidence to the contrary. The central part of the house (rooms G6 and G7 on Drawings 1 and 2), with a passage width on the north side) are interpreted as possibly occupying the site of a mediaeval open hall, similar in size to one at the Old Rectory, Clifton Campville. Nothing is left of such a hall at Elford, but the footprint of the central part of the house may represent its “ghost”. The timber framed service wing, of which the present kitchen G8 is part, is tentatively dated by Mr. Meeson to the mid 15th century. The best survivals of its original framing are visible upstairs.
6. Staffordshire historian Stebbing Shaw noted in 1801 that the rector, the Rev. John Sneyd, had “lately repaired and enlarged the parsonage house in a very handsome manner”.
7. The Rev. Sneyd’s improvements appear to have been focused on the reception rooms at the east end of the house, perhaps also including the present staircase. The central part of the house, as it now stands, is earlier, being mid 18th century in the present writer’s opinion. This is suggested by the details of the elevation to the river, and also by the roof which includes pairs of rafters pegged together at the apex with neither ridgebeam nor ridgeboard, which is a typical 18th century detail. Rev. Sneyd may also have been responsible for the addition of further service rooms at the west end of the house.

The Proposal and its Impact.

8. The proposals are modest, and are confined to the creation of a doorway between rooms G7 (reception hall) and G8 (kitchen) as shown on Drawings 1 and 2. G7 is a room of Georgian character belonging to the mid 18th century central part of the house. It has two sash windows, a flat ceiling with a small cornice, and a dado of re-used oak panelling, painted and not altogether well-fitted.
9. Room G8 has an exposed ceiling structure comprising a beam and joists, and is in the older part of the house, which was formerly timber-framed but now much altered and rebuilt.
10. In the house as it stands, room G7 has little purpose and as a result is little used by the family, having no “flow” and poor connectivity with any adjacent space. The proposal,

therefore, is to make a small opening through the wall to connect it to the kitchen, without affecting the overall ambiance and character of the room as a Georgian part of the house. As such it would make the house more comfortable and liveable for the benefit of present and future occupants.

11. A preliminary site visit was made on 15th March 2021, when Mrs. Sanders explained the aim of the proposal. The writer asked to inspect the upper storey of wall concerned, to see whether it was timber-framed, because evidence of timber framing on the upper storey could indicate that the lower storey of the same wall was also timber framed. The upper storey of the wall is indeed timber framed (see Drawing no. 3).

12. It was apparent that the present surface finish to the west side of room G7 was of modern plasterboard, so it was advised that a limited amount be removed, sufficient to reveal the nature of the underlying fabric without destroying anything historic. Then it could be seen whether there was any timber framing that could present a constraint to the proposed new doorway. Drawing 3 is the result. On the kitchen side the wall appears to be plastered direct to the underlying wall and much of the surface is covered by kitchen fitments.



East face of wall between rooms G7 and G8, where it is proposed to make an opening.

13. It can be seen that the east face of the wall as now visible in G7 was originally limewashed before being plastered direct over the timber frame and infill panels. This plaster, evidenced only by the keying marks, was then removed and a new plastered lining installed over vertical battens and horizontal laths, some of which remains in place on

unexposed areas of the wall. In turn, much of the lath and plaster has also been removed, and replaced with new plasterboard on new battens.

14. The proposed doorway involves the removal of one plain plastered panel and does not interfere with any remaining timber framing. The builder who removed the plasterboard dropped a camera behind the dado panelling and established that there were no other horizontal members of framing behind it. It is proposed that the exposed frame be plasterboarded over again, as it was before, as it is unsuitable for display in room G7 which now has a Georgian character.

15. The dado panelling would be affected. It is composed of cut-up portions that are older than Room G7 in its current guise, and have been seamed together again with new pieces of timber, and re-used. Close examination suggests that the panelling is in three main sections, which from south to north are of six, six and eight panels, seamed together with more recent outer framing. As the panelling is painted, the nature of the timber cannot be seen, but the texture of the grain suggests that the panels are of oak with the exception of the two at the south end, which may be softwood like the outer framing. Much of the panelling has moulded muntins (marked "M" on Drawings 3 and 4), but they are not present on the southernmost six panels, which appear to be a "mash-up" compared to the rest.

16. In creating the new doorway, it is proposed to removed panels 1 to 6, which are of little interest. The pieces of panelling comprising panels 7 to 12 and 13 to 20 would then be adjusted to fit the walls each side of the new opening, making use of all the moulded muntins. Four of the panels would be narrowed down, but these portions of panelling would otherwise remain complete.

17. If desired, panels 1 to 6 could be adjusted to fit the south face of the small wall that separates room G7 and the adjacent passage G4, but in my view the quality of these panels is inferior and there is no imperative to reuse them.

Philip E. Heath, April 2021.

ⁱ The Old Rectory Elford: Historic Building Assessment by Bob Meeson MA FSA MIFA Report No. 07/21 (2008)