

STEDCOMBE HOUSE

Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment



Prepared by
Stuart Martin, Architect
November 2021

1. Author

Stuart Martin is a chartered architect with more than 25 years experience in dealing with historic and Listed Buildings. He has worked on several Grade I listed houses across England, including Wayford Manor in Somerset, Longford Castle in Wiltshire, Holkham Hall in Norfolk and Ixworth Abbey in Suffolk, together with many other listed buildings. Stuart Martin Architects are corporate members of the SPAB and the Georgian Group, and have won awards for our work from the Georgian Group and houzz.com. Stuart is also a Committee member and volunteer casework advisor for the Lutyens Trust.

2. Purpose of this statement

This statement has been prepared to support the current Listed Building Consent application, in accordance with NPPF guidance. The NPPF states that "The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance & no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance." Consequently this statement is not intended to form a complete history of Stedcombe House, and is limited to those areas that would be affected by the current proposals, although these are put into a wider context where relevant.

Significance is assessed according to 4 different values:

- Evidential value - relates primarily to the capacity of the heritage asset in question to yield evidence about past human activity, but is generally more applicable to archaeology than buildings; although it can arguably also relate to the fragmentary remains of a building's earlier form.
- Historical value - is generally illustrative of past people, events & aspects of life. Thus the design of a window, by directly reflecting both the aesthetic trends & the industrial innovations of the time, can also be of historical value.
- Aesthetic value - relates to the sensory and intellectual stimulation that is drawn from the asset, & as such includes both intellectually designed architectural or artistic value, & unplanned, but fortuitous aesthetic appeal.
- Communal value - derives from the meanings, collective experience or memories that people and communities derive from a place; and thus by definition is usually less applicable to heritage assets that are of a more private nature.

The criteria that can be used to determine these values include:

- Age - The older an asset, or a part of an asset is, the more likely it is, all other things being equal, that it will be considered to be of value & significance. This is to a degree related to but not always synonymous with rarity value
- Rarity - The rarer an asset or a part of an asset is (e.g. if it is one of the last surviving examples of its type), proportionally the more important any inherent significance that it may have becomes.
- Intrinsic quality - The significance that rests in the asset or the part of an asset in question itself, without regard to other assets or parts of the asset (e.g. an exceptionally finely carved piece of joinery may have great artistic value, regardless of its context).
- Extrinsic relevance - The significance that rests in the asset or the part of the asset in question's relationship to other assets or parts of the asset (e.g. a nineteenth-century fireplace may be of little intrinsic value, but as an integral part of an important wider internal decorative scheme, may nonetheless have considerable significance).
- Typicality - The significance of an asset can increase if it is seen as absolutely representative or characteristic of its type (such as an eighteenth-century terraced house having an intact & quintessential plan-form).
- Exceptionality - Conversely, the significance of an asset can also increase if it is seen as being unusual & uncharacteristic of its type (such as an Elizabethan building that has hidden Catholic iconography, & thus represents a curious or important counter-trend).

Taking all these factors into account I will ascribe 3 levels of significance:

- High - the most sensitive and important fabric, which should be treated with the utmost care
- Medium - Medium significance constitutes fabric that is still of significance, but which may be capable of limited change that is philosophically justified.
- Low significance constitutes fabric whose significance is low or non-existent, & where sympathetic change would not harm, and may even enhance or further reveal the significance of the wider heritage asset.

3. Current status

Stedcombe House is listed Grade I, and by definition of High Significance. The list entry is as follows:



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SY 29 SE AXMOUTH MUSBURY ROAD

14/29 Stedcombe House

11.9.51

GV I

The description shall be amended to read as follows:

Large house overlooking the Axe valley. Built c1697 by Richard Hallett; restored 1988-90 by C Rae-Scott. Red brick in Flemish bond with Beer and Portland stone dressings. Slate hipped roof with modillion eaves cornice and leaded flat around the belvedere. PLAN: square double-depth plan with opposed entries in W and E elevations, of 2 rooms wide with main and service stairs between rooms on E and N sides. EXTERIOR: 2 storeys, basement and attic. Five by five bays. Moulded stone plinth, channelled quoins and moulded band at first-floor level. Moulded stone window architraves with small keyblocks. 2-light stone-mullioned basement windows to E, N and S elevations, 2/2 lights to W elevation. West door, doorcase and steps of 1989 (a reproduction of the original) with similar moulded architrave and canopy on scrolled consoles with carved acanthus ornament. To east elevation is semi-circular arch over half-glazed doors of 1989 (doors and fanlight conjectural reconstruction of the original). Original 9/9 pane sashes with thick glazing bars to north elevation and one 11/6 radius headed sash to belvedere; another to belvedere is an early C18 repair; other sashes, after the original, were installed 1989, incorporating glass from decayed early C19 sashes. Lead rainwater furniture of 1989; 3 triangular-pedimented dormers to each facade, reproductions of 1989. Belvedere to centre of roof, a square brick structure with moulded stone cornice, quoins and semi-circular arched window on each side with stone voussoirs and small chimneystacks at the corners, these having Portland stone caps of 1989. Stone-mullioned basement windows, some leaded lights being restorations after the original, and original panelled basement door to west elevation. Basement surrounded by path enclosed by brick walls surmounted by iron railings of 1989. INTERIOR: restored to an exceptionally high standard by Mr Rae-Scott in 1988-90, 14/45 doors, 27% of the panelling and almost all fireplaces being careful reproductions after the original. Basement has original features including keyed arched timber door architrave to wine cellar, plank doors with bolts and Norfolk latches and C18 panelled cupboard doors (one to NE dated 1742). Main floors panelled throughout with straight-cut, ovolo-mould or bolection-moulded panelling. c.1730 egg and dart surround to fireplace in west first-floor room; c.1690 red marble bolection surround in NE ground-floor room and c.1695 stone flat bolection surround to NE first-floor room.

Main first-floor rooms each open into two closets. Main stair hall has cyma-moulded cornice of 1989 (after the original) to ground floor and enriched cornice to first floor (a quarter of which is restored) with corner shells and foliate-floral motifs: open-well stair with 2 twisted balusters per tread and panelled dado. Back stairs positioned to north rise from basement to attic, with turned balusters on closed string rising around open well. Cornice and balustrade to belvedere gallery installed in 1989.

History: Stedcombe House was built by Richard Hallett, who with his brother John Hallett, a Barbados planter, made a fortune from trade with the West Indies. It was built near the site of an older house which was garrisoned by Parliamentarians and destroyed by Royalists in 1644. Reference: Country Life 26.XII, 1963.

The Halletts had bought the estate in 1691 from Sir Walter Yonge of Escot. According to Cherry (1988) "In size Stedcombe stands between the larger country houses and a number of smaller brick houses" such as Pinbrook, which were built around Exeter as villas for wealthy merchants in the late 17th century. An exceptionally fine and complete example of this type of small late 17th Century country house, the compact and decentralised plan being an early example.

N Pevsner and B Cherry, The Buildings of England: Devon, 1989, pp. 759-60; B Cherry, "The Devon Country House in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries", Devon Archaeological Society Proceedings, Vol 46 (1988) pp. 123-5; C Rae-Scott, "The Restoration of Stedcombe House", Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings, Vol 15 (1991) pp. 31-8.

Listing NGR: SY2641991982

4. History and analysis of phasing

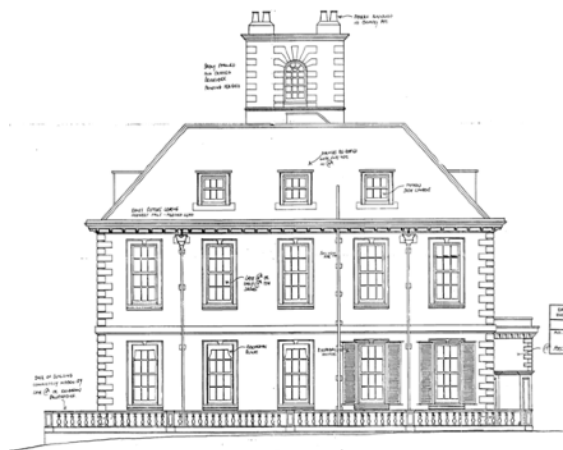
As noted in the Listing, the current Stedcombe House is not the first to have been built on the site. Owned in the middle ages by the Courtenays, it was granted by Henry VIII to the Carews of Mohuns Ottery, who almost immediately sold it to Walter Yonge. In the Civil War it was held for the Parliamentarians and was 'burned to the ground' on 22nd March 1644. It has traditionally been assumed that the Yonges never rebuilt, but there are some unproved theories to the contrary. What is certain is that from 1691 to 1890 the Stedcombe estate was owned by the Hallets, a merchant family from Lyme Regis, who had grown rich from trade with the West Indies. It is most likely that the present building was substantially built by Richard Hallet and complete by 1697.

In 1890 the estate was bought by Mr and Mrs Samuel Sanders Stephens (owner of Stephens' Ink) and the house modernised, including the replanning of the main stairs, blocking of some windows and replacement of others, and the addition of a porch on the east side.

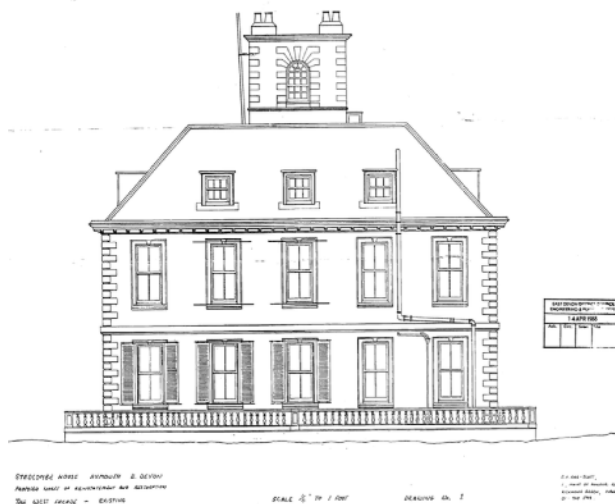
In 1960 the executors of Stephens' daughter Maud sold it to Mr and Mrs Robert Mathew, who subsequently sold it to Mr and Mrs J W Loveridge, who owned it until 1987. It was purchased by Kit Rae-Scott, who carried out an extensive restoration of the by-then semi-derelict house.

As the current application concerns only minor alterations in the main house, this Heritage Statement confines itself to the house, excluding the various other listed structures on the estate.

As it stands today, Stedcombe has been returned to something very like its 1690s design. This was the express intent of the works carried out in 1988-1990. As a result it bears very few of the accumulated alterations of later dates that one would normally expect in a building of this age, but the as-existing drawings that were submitted in 1988 record its condition at that time:



The south elevation of Stedcombe in 1988. This shows the later flat-roofed dormer windows, external drainage pipes, later 18th/19th century 6-over-6 sashes, 19th century shutters, and the porch added on the east side, as well as the encircling stone balustrade. The shape below the belvedere window may be a boxing that enclosed the former roof access staircase



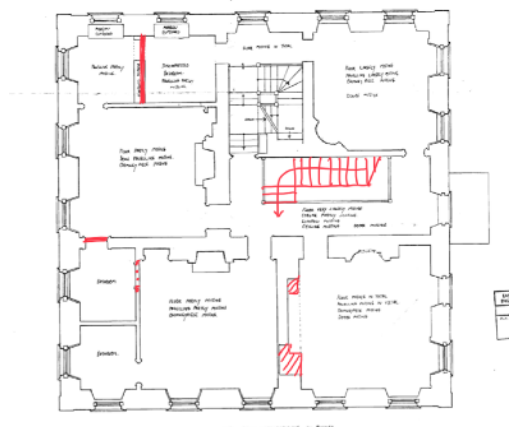
The west elevation of Stedcombe in 1988. This also shows the flat-roofed dormers, later sashes and external drainage, as well as what is presumably a vent pipe attached to the belvedere. At this time the fact that this was the original entrance front was not apparent



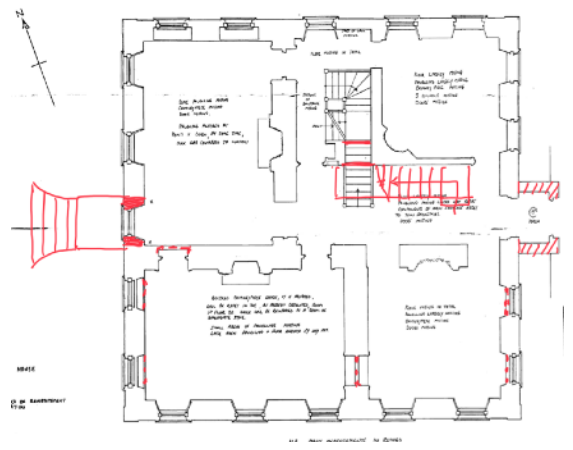
The north elevation of Stedcombe in 1988. This shows the surviving original 9 over 9 sashes, as well as the other later features described above. These sashes were used as the pattern for the replacement of all the later sash windows on the main floors.



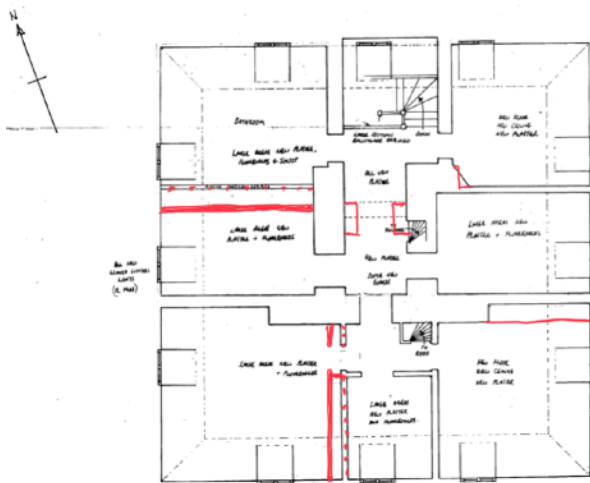
The east elevation of Stedcombe in 1988. This shows missing sashes, as well as the other later features described above. It can be seen that the stone balustrade was damaged and incomplete. In addition this elevation shows the late 19th century porch that was removed in 1988-90.



The first floor plan of Stedcombe in 1988, with the alterations shown in red. This shows the main stairs reinstated, partitions altered between the closets, and the wall between the south-facing bedrooms altered.

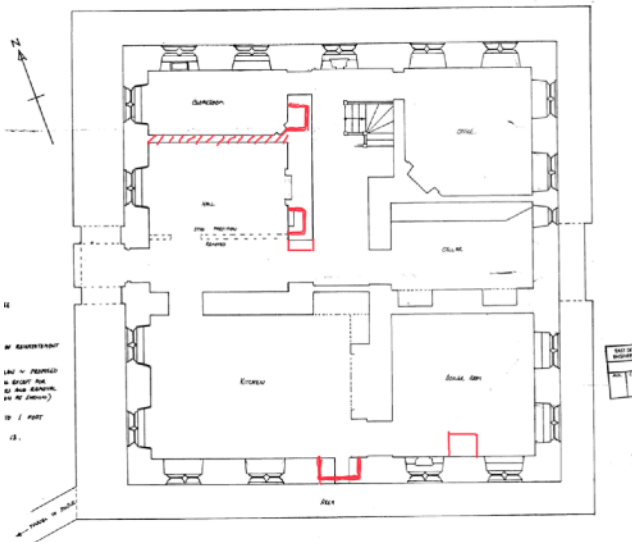


The ground floor plan of Stedcombe in 1988, with the major alterations shown in red. This shows the east porch removed, the west entrance and external steps reinstated, and the main stairs reinstated. Minor alterations included the unblocking of several windows and 2 internal doors. A fine rococo chimney piece in the drawing room was also removed, and a modern one inserted



The second floor plan of Stedcombe in 1988, with the alterations shown in red. This shows the partitions altered. The big change on this floor was the replacement of the flat-roofed sash-windowed dormers with pedimented dormers fitted with leaded light casements

STEDCOMBE HOUSE



The basement floor plan of Stedcombe in 1988, with the alterations shown in red. This shows the partitions removed in the basement hall, and cupboards formed in recesses. Also apparent is the blocked doorway in the south wall, and the later (thinner) wall blocking the central corridor from the kitchen.

We can see that the 1988-90 work stripped away almost all the later accretions, including all the later sashes, the shutters, the 1890 porch, stone balustrade, and the flat-roofed dormers. The house we see today appears to be a near-perfect example of an unaltered house of the 1690s, although of course a lot has come and gone, and a fair amount reinstated. Architecturally this is unquestionably successful, and the building is much more unified and harmonious now than it was for most of the 20th century.

The main changes to the internal layout were centred around the reinstatement of the front door to the west elevation and the reinstatement of the main staircase.

The internal changes had the same goal as the external alterations - i.e. to return the building to a state much closer to the 1690s layout and design. The resulting building is an interesting combination of scholarly reinstatement and informed guesswork, and very coherent. It is certain that this investment and the informed and enlightened approach saved the house from much worse damage or indeed total loss due to rot and decay.

Once this initial period of work had taken place however, not much seems to have been done beyond occasional maintenance for the ensuing years, up to the point in 2021 when Stedcombe was sold to the current owners/applicants.

Their wish is to repair and refurbish the house as sensitively as possible, making minor changes to later or modern fabric in order to reinstate further lost features for which there is evidence and render it more suitable for them, whilst respecting and retaining its unique identity and historic character.

5. Current Proposals

Internally - throughout

5.1. Install updated heating and electrical systems - drawing 1233-03

- **Discussion:** The existing heating system is based on an oil-fired boiler located in the utility room in the basement. There are very few radiators in the house, inadequate to heat the rooms. The proposal is to install underfloor heating in the basement and cast iron radiators (matching those existing) generally on the upper floors, as shown on the plans, removing the 1980s window seats and boxings where necessary. The existing electrical system is similarly sparse and coming to the end of its service life. The intention is to replace and update the wiring, taking the opportunity to install some extra electrical points.
- Following consultation with an independent M&E engineer, it has been decided that the new heating system will be based on hydrogen-ready modern high-efficiency LPG boilers, with gas storage in an underground tank as shown on the site plan, located in the Brewhouse outbuilding in the stable yard. From this location, underground heating mains will run through the tunnel to the utility room in the basement, where the buffer tanks and hot water cylinders will be located. From here the pipework will distribute through the house, using the existing pipework riser positions and routes to avoid disruption to the fabric as far as possible. There are some radiators which can be overhauled and re-used, and several fan-coil heaters located in pockets in the floor which will be removed and the floor made good.
- **Assessment:** All the fittings to be replaced are modern and date from the 1988-90 work. The boiler is out-dated and inefficient. Many of the electrical sockets and switches will be replaced in their existing positions, in order to minimise the impact on the historic fabric. The main impact will be the builder's work in connection with installing the systems, where care will be taken in lifting floors according to SPAB techniques, and to re-use the current service routes as far as possible. As mass-produced modern fittings, the significance of the elements to be removed is deemed to be **low-zero**, with equivalent impact on the building. Installation of up-to-date systems that will be more effective and less hazardous is deemed to be a **positive** impact.

5.2. Reinstate door between bedroom F8 and dressing room F9 on first floor - drawing 1233-10

- **Discussion:** This area is shown on the 1988 plan as having a thinner wall than the rest of the first floor, and with what is clearly a doorway (we are unable to say whether this was blocked or not) at its southern end, near the outside wall. The plan also notes that the floor, panelling, chimneypiece and doors were all missing from the south eastern room, and partly missing from the room adjacent. Therefore, what is extant is almost all modern work. The proposal is to reinstate a door in this location, for which there is historic evidence.
- **Assessment:** There is a door frame and architrave on the main bedroom side, but no sign in the south east room, where the panelling is known to be new and seems to have been somewhat reconfigured in execution, making the recess on the west wall symmetrical. We therefore propose to make the new door in the form of a jib door, aligned with the existing door in F8 and disguised in the modern panelling on the F9 side to avoid disrupting the design of this room. As alteration of modern fabric we believe the impact is **low**, and as a reinstatement of a door which was present historically, the impact on the building is **positive**.

5.3. Remove modern architraves simulating false blocked doorway on landing - drawing 1233 -16

- **Discussion:** These architraves were added by Kit Rae-Scott in the course of the 1988-90 works. We cannot see the justification for them and wish to remove them, reinstating the blank wall that was presumably here before
- **Assessment:** As modern interventions, the architraves carry little or no heritage significance. There was no apparent evidence for their inclusion, being based purely on Kit Rae-Scott's preference for symmetry. There is a fireplace and flue on the other side of the wall at this location, so there could never have been a door here. The impact of removing these architraves and reinstating the uninterrupted wall is deemed to be **low** and **positive**.

5.4. Bathrooms on first floor - drawing 1233-03

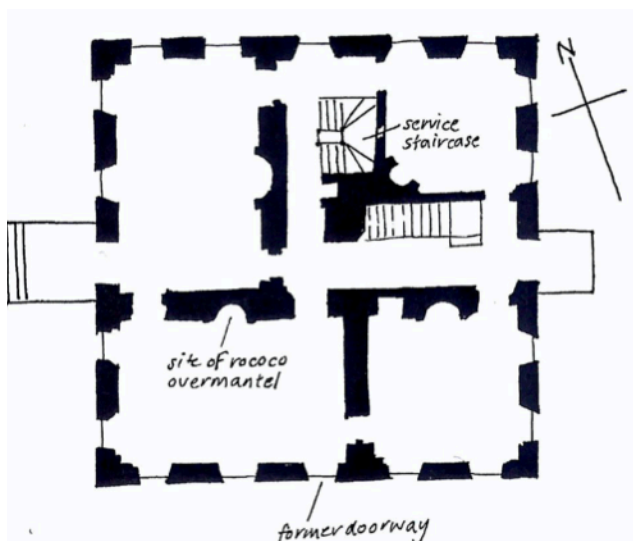
- **Discussion** - the applicants wish to install showers in the bathrooms on the first floor and modify the planning of these rooms, as shown on drawing 1233-03. The configuration of the rooms will not be altered, nor will the panelling be modified. A new bathroom is to be created in room F7. All work will be reversible, using existing soil vent pipes
- **Assessment** - This work is necessary as part of the mechanical systems upgrade. The designs allow the character of the rooms to be appreciated and as noted all work is non-destructive to the old fabric and reversible. The impact is believed to be **low**.

5.5. Modify plan on second floor to create new bath/shower rooms and store rooms - drawing 1233-03

- **Discussion** - this whole floor was clearly in a dire state in 1988. The 'As Existing' plan notes that the north east and south east corner rooms will need 'new floor, new ceiling, new plaster' and that all the other rooms need 'large areas of new plaster and floorboards'. New studwork was constructed in at least 5 locations, as shown on the annotated plans above. This area retains the spirit but not the exact detail of its original layout, commensurate with its use as secondary accommodation.
- The proposal here is to insert 3 sections of stud partition in order to create 2 store rooms and bathrooms, and to divide the large southern bathroom into 2 en-suite shower rooms for the adjacent bedrooms
- This will require 4 new doors through the partitions - 2 through modern partitions (1988-90) and 2 through older partitions whose date is uncertain.
- **Assessment** - The overall layout of this floor - large, roughly square rooms at the corners, with smaller secondary spaces between - will not be altered, although the nature of the secondary spaces will be changed. The alterations proposed will leave the essential character of this area the same, as established by the approach taken in the 1988-90 restoration. That is of simple secondary areas providing secondary accommodation. The height and generosity of these rooms makes it questionable whether they were originally servants rooms or not, but now they are to serve as guest bedrooms and bathrooms, all the main rooms on the first floor being used for family members. Given the reversibility of the changes, the fact that the use and detail of the rooms will not be changed, and secondary and simple nature of the spaces concerned, the impact here is considered to be **low**

5.6. Basement - Kitchen B4: Reinstate external door in existing partly-blocked archway - drawings 1233-03 and 1233-09

- **Discussion** - this room is believed to have always been the kitchen, and is annotated as such on the 1988 'as existing' drawings. There is a reference to a former door in centre of the south elevation in the plan on page 947 of Hugh Mellor's 'The Country Houses of Devon'. We have



Plan from 'The Country Houses of Devon', showing the 'former doorway' in the centre of the south side of the house. This plan shows the ground floor, but the note can only apply to the basement; there is absolutely no sign or evidence for a central door at ground floor level, either internally or externally

carried out limited removal of modern plaster finishes in this area, which have confirmed that the brickwork infill below the existing arched window is later - probably late 19th/early 20th century - and which has straight joints to the adjacent older brickwork. The extant arched window joinery dates from the 1988-90 works, apparently being introduced during the course of the project, as it is shown neither on the 'as existing', nor on the 'as proposed' drawings. Nonetheless it is fitted within a pre-existing and obviously much older archway in the brickwork which by the evidence of the straight joints in the brickwork below was originally a doorway. Externally it can be seen that the render has been altered around the arched window, further evidence for a recent change here. The reinstatement of this door would be very useful to the owners, providing a means of direct outside access to the kitchen without passing through another room, and adding ventilation to the kitchen, which currently lacks any openable windows.



Looking towards the utility room door in the kitchen. The arched window visible at right was reinstated c.1990 within an original archway, below which straight joints and a change in the brickwork suggest was originally an external doorway. Removal of the infilling later brickwork and reinstatement of a door is proposed here, to improve circulation from the kitchen and aid with ventilation.

- **Assessment** - There is evidence for a door in this position, in the form of the historic plan and the alterations in the fabric. The much later infilling brickwork is of no great importance, and this alteration will have practically no effect on the appearance of the house from ground level views, being set below ground and behind the area railings - see the elevation drawings as proposed - drawing 1233-04. The impact is considered to be **low** in terms of fabric intervention and **positive** in that a missing feature, for which there is evidence, will be reinstated, replacing a modern window of little intrinsic merit, and improving the environment in the kitchen without detracting from its character or significance.
- 5.7. Basement kitchen B4: Reinstatement of arched opening between kitchen and basement corridor, as shown on drawing 1233-03. Fit glazed screen to detail as shown on drawings 1233-08 & 09**
- **Discussion** - The basement is accessed via the back stairs only, naturally enough for an area devoted to service and supporting uses. As presently configured, the access to the kitchen is possible only through the basement hall/dining room, which was reinstated as a single space in the 1988-90 works. Before then, that area seems to have been an entrance passage from the external door and 2 store rooms (see the 'as existing' 1988 plan). Originally there was direct access from the foot of the back stairs to the kitchen via the central basement corridor, B2. This



View in the kitchen showing the arched recess in the north east corner. The back wall of this recess is brick, of later date than the original fabric. The proposal is to remove this infill and insert a painted timber half-glazed screen with a door, reinstating the plan-form, improving the circulation and giving to the central basement hall a proper function, as well as improving daylighting and ventilation in both spaces



Detail of arched surround to wine cellar door, showing how the later wall has obscured the architrave and impost detail

was blocked later on, for reasons which are hard to fathom, as it makes the circulation much more circuitous and difficult from the kitchen to the back stairs. That this blocking took place later can be confirmed by looking at the brickwork which we have exposed in several places by removing small areas of the modern plaster. The brick has a different character, and lacks proper bonding in to the earlier work. Blocking the archway has made the central corridor very dark at its southern end, where originally it would have benefited from borrowed light from the kitchen through the archway. We consider that the re-opening of this archway will be beneficial in terms of reinstatement of the original plan form, and by making movement through the basement much more practical and convenient, as well as improving the daylighting of the central corridor, reinstating its original function as a main circulation route at basement level, rather than as a low-use and gloomy dead end. We propose to fit the re-opened archway with a half-glazed screen of painted timber, as shown in drawings 1233-08 and 09, in order to form the necessary fire separation for the kitchen from the circulation spaces and stairs, whilst maintaining the daylighting of the corridor and the connection between the various spaces.

- **Assessment** - as can be seen from the plan, the blocking of this corridor has disrupted the flow of the basement circulation and made the central area very dark. The arched detail of the wine cellar door has been partly obscured by the later infilling brickwork, as shown in the photograph above. The brickwork is later than the original build phase, but does carry some

evidential and historic value, and is as such of some significance. However, the brickwork is of little intrinsic quality, it is a later modification which disrupts the original plan flow (which it is now desired to reinstate) and as a feature in and of itself it is not unusual, being only a section of brickwork. Judged by the criteria used for assessing significance, it can be seen to have little significance:

- It is of some age, but not original
 - As a brickwork wall it is not rare in itself
 - Its intrinsic quality is not unusual nor particularly high
 - It has no extrinsic relevance, not being part of any larger scheme still surviving, as far as can be determined
 - It has no value due to being a typical example of a given feature
 - Nor has it any value as an exceptional feature, and in fact is currently obscuring such a feature
- We therefore believe that the removal of this wall section does **little to no** harm to the significance of the house, and that this step towards reinstatement of the original plan form is **positive** and allows two original features - the archway between the kitchen and the corridor, and the detail to the wine cellar door - to be better viewed and appreciated. Additionally the function of the central corridor will be restored and enhanced.

5.8. Kitchen B4: Modify the lower lights of windows WB3 and WB4 to become opening casements, detailed to match existing opening casements in the house in B1, as shown on drawing 1233-08



Window in basement room B1, with opening casement. We propose to replicate this detail for the opening lights in the kitchen



West wall of kitchen, showing the windows in question (WB3 and WB4). One casement in each window will open

- **Discussion:** As noted above, this room has always been the kitchen. It is therefore puzzling that it currently lacks any opening windows, essential for ventilation. Windows WB3 and 4, which are 4-light transomed windows which have lower sills than the others, are easier to reach, and have been selected for this reason. They are also less visible from ground level. There is a pattern we can use for openable windows: WB13, 14 and 16 in room B1.
 - **Assessment** - The evidence for the form of the openable windows exists, and it can be seen that the presence of these other openable windows has no effect on the significance or quality of the external elevation as a whole. The very fact that the current arrangement offers no means of ventilation to the kitchen suggests in itself that it is non-original. The necessity for ventilation to the kitchen is self-evident, and this is a very simple, non-invasive way of introducing it. The impact is deemed to be **low-zero**.
- 5.9. Front steps outside West Elevation: Remove modern Portland Stone treads and risers. Replace with new treads and risers to a longer going and reduced rise. Re-form sloping grass bank at a shallower gradient to suit. Drawing 1233-07**
- **Discussion** - The existing front steps were installed as part of the 1988-90 repairs and refurbishment, following discovery of the original west entrance door. They are now in poor condition, with spalling and pitting to the top surface, loose bedding and consequent safety issues due to the stones rocking when walked on. The existing uncomfortably tall rise and short going for an external stair makes these problems worse, as the stairs are unusually steep and difficult to use.
 - **Assessment** - All the external arrangements immediately around the house at Stedcombe date from the 1988-90 works. Whilst the design as a whole is more or less appropriate in the setting, the materials used for the steps have been shown to be inadequate, and the design lacking in its ergonomic quality. Being only 30 or so years old, the steps have no heritage significance in and of themselves. Their replacement in Portland or Purbeck stone, to similar but more robust and generous details, will improve the function and appearance of the setting to Stedcombe. The impact is considered to be **low** and **positive**.
- 5.10. Externally, to the south of the house, modify the steps and adjacent wall from the terrace around the house to the upper walled garden, as drawing 1233-06**



The south side of the house, showing the retaining wall to the upper walled garden, and the flight of steps. It is proposed to widen these steps and adjust the very steep going that was created c.1990, rebuilding the sides walls to the same details and reusing the bricks, whilst replacing the damaged brick and stone steps like-for-like with reduced rise and lengthened going

- **Discussion** - The treatment of the external areas around the house has changed considerably over time. The overall layout of house and walled gardens, along with the triangular stable yard, seems little changed from the 1690s. However, the ground levels around the building were significantly altered after the purchase of Stedcombe by the Stephens family in 1890. They raised the ground level around the house, installed the stone balustrade surrounding the

basement area, and modified the garden walls as well, all of which can be seen in the 1963 Country Life photographs.

These areas were in turn further modified and rationalised quite extensively during the 1988-90 works. These works involved removal of the stone balustrade around the house and its replacement with the now-existing metal railings set into a new concrete coping, all at a reduced ground level. At the same time, the wall between the house and the upper walled garden was modified, removing the various 19th century alterations that had taken place, including altering the wall heights, refurbishing the steps themselves, and repositioning a pier.

Whether these works returned the garden walls to their original configuration is unclear. The steps now existing are very narrow in proportion to the size of the house and garden, and too steep in pitch for external steps. The stone has not performed well and is in need of replacement. The proposal is to widen these steps to 2400mm between the side walls, which will be taken down and rebuilt using the same bricks set in lime mortar (as opposed to the cement mortar which was used in 1988-90) to suit the new width and shallower pitch of the flight. The stone treads will be Purbeck stone, which is traditional, reasonably local, softer in colour and more durable.

- **Assessment:** This area is a combination of original work with late-19th century and 20th century modifications. The proposal modifies a relatively small area of fabric that is known to be mostly modern, and will result in a safer flight of steps more in scale with the setting. The impact is deemed to be **low** and **positive**.

5.11. Modify modern brick archway and rebuilt garden wall to provide access from upper to lower walled garden, via a new flight of steps in brick and stone (drawing 1233-06)



View from the roof of the upper walled garden, looking south. Most of the south wall was rebuilt c.1990, including the piers with urns (relocated from the north side of the garden) and the central elliptical archway.



Looking up at the wall from the lower walled garden. The junction between the old brick and the more recent rebuilt work is clear. The proposal is to modify the upper opening to form an archway through which people will be able to access new steps to the lower garden. The lower archway will not be damaged or removed.

- **Discussion** - The south wall to the upper walled garden was repaired and modified in 1988-90. According to the documents the wall was previously somewhat lower and lacked the central archway. It is believed that Kit Rae-Scott built up the wall between the piers from approximately waist height, and repositioned the urns on the piers, relocating them from their previous position on the north garden wall closer to the house.
- The proposal is to form a new double flight of steps, by making the modern arched 'window' through the wall into a 'doorway'. There is an existing blocked-off elliptical arch in the lower part of the wall, visible from the lower garden. The proposed design echoes this archway with an arched recess beneath the new landing
- **Assessment:** This is a modification of largely modern brickwork, with the new steps providing a much more convenient access to the lower walled garden. This improved access will result in easier access and greater use of this area, which was until recently completely overgrown. The impact is deemed to be **low** and **positive**.

5.12. Modify existing opening in garden wall in lower walled garden to provide access from garden store to lower walled garden (drawing 1233 - 52)

- **Discussion** - The lower walled garden appears to form part of the original late 17th century layout. On the other side of the east wall of this garden is the 19th century former laundry building, now a shell. It is intended that this building will become garden equipment storage. There is currently no access into the lower gardens for ride-on mowers or other motorised equipment. Widening this gate provides this access with minimum intervention to the historic fabric of the wall.



The existing opening and gate in the east wall of the lower garden. The opening is older, the joinery is modern

- **Assessment:** The proposal is to form a new double-gate, matching the details of the existing gate, but within a modified wider opening in the masonry wall. This is a modification of old brickwork, with the wider gate providing a much needed wider access to the lower walled garden. The existing gate in the opening is believed to date from c.1990. This improved access will give access for maintenance where currently there is none. As a result there will be greater use of this area, which was until recently completely overgrown. The impact is deemed to be **low** on historic fabric and significance, and the consequent improved access and greater use of the area is **positive**.