

# Historic Timber Building Conservation

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GL4 0UB.

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Mail Room Services

## Heritage Statement

17<sup>th</sup> January 2022  
Richard H Fox MSc., IHBC, APS

28 FEB 2022

Received

Site Name: Yew Tree Farmhouse

Address of Site: Stroud Road, Whaddon, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, GL4 0UB

Grid Reference: 51.82403°N 2.24479°W

Land Registry Reference: GR184445

### Schedule of Works:

Internal alterations to a Listed Building comprising the removal of one inserted staircase (GBRG 6/1996) and recombination of remaining sound parts, together with those of a second inserted staircase (treads and risers), to preserve overall historic fabric.

### Works Proposed:

Labelling, disassembly, and evaluation of two inserted staircases. Assessment of remaining parts to ascertain extent of decay, erosion and damage and the assess the possibility of reuse in a rebuilt staircase.

### Pre-application Advice:

Conducted in person and on site with Mr Christopher Blaydon, Conservation Officer, Planning Department, Stroud District Council.

### Heritage Asset Potentially Affected by the Proposal:

Grade II Listed Building. List Entry Number: 1304395

### Knowledge of Affected Heritage Asset:

Yew Tree farm stands on the side of the green in the village of Whaddon. It is mainly a timber framed building and has dressed stone gable ends. The roof is covered by clay pantiles. Prior to 1996 the building had lain empty for 20+ years and was in a very poor condition. Emergency repairs had been carried out by Stroud District Council to keep it wind and weatherproof. This measure was ineffectual. In 1996 the building was open and subject to vandalism. A Closure Order was in place.

Appendix I provides an insight into the pitiful condition of the structure at its worst (September 1996)

### Research Undertaken to Understand the Significance of the Heritage Asset Affected:

Specialists: Mr Christopher Miners RIBA, Historic Timber Building Conservation  
Mr Lionel Walrond, Author

Sources: Gloucester Building Recording Group Report June 1996  
Gloucestershire County Record Office

### Importance of the Affected Heritage Asset:

Yew Tree Farmhouse is the oldest non-religious building in the village of Whaddon. Based on construction detail and fabric the structure dates from the period 1495 – 1525AD. Originally an 'open hall' dwelling of a yeoman farmer, it has undergone many changes over its lifetime including:

1. The replacement of gable end timber framing with dressed stone with chimney to the north and dressed stone and brick to the south.
2. The insertion of a masonry chimney stack
3. The insertion of first floor framing and boarding and associated staircase.
4. The insertion of timber partitions to ground and first floor
5. The corruption of major roof structural elements to permit doorways
6. The removal of timber mullions to permit modern glazing
7. The construction of Victorian outshut
8. The modern addition of a conservatory

Impact of the Proposal on the Significance of the Affected Heritage Asset and its Setting:

Work to the second inserted staircase is internal and therefore has no impact on the setting of the heritage asset.

Examination of the two staircase structures revealed the following observations:

1. The elements of the staircases (treads, risers, stringers and newel posts) were made of English Elm. As elsewhere in the building and generally the case at this time, oak heartwood was reserved for elements of framing facing the full force of the weather: sole plates, external posts, rails and braces. Elsewhere, in areas deemed less susceptible to decay (roof trusses, braces, rafters, partitions, stairs, floor-boards and joists), other woods, more readily available and therefore cheaper, were deployed. These included elm, ash and chestnut. This approach assumed an effective roof covering to keep less durable timber elements dry and so free from fungal and insect decay. The prolonged period of neglect this building experienced resulted in a substantial ingress of rainwater over a great many years and the widespread decay and loss of non-oak components. The impact of the proposal on the asset was considered carefully and carefully balanced against the prospect of a full repair of both elements: central and northern staircases. Repairing the staircases to an acceptable structural standard would involve the loss of all of the historic fabric in both stairs.

2. Some parts of both staircases were missing, presumed broken in use, and lost.

3. Significant quantities of moisture trapping detritus had accumulated in heaps on the treads: see Appendix III. This had led to ideal conditions for fungal decay (moist, warm and dark) and insect attack of the timber. Given that the material was the less durable elm, the components had deteriorated rapidly beyond repair or reuse.

4. Staircase parts were numbered in situ then carefully removed for examination.

5. It soon became clear that repairing both flights was impractical. Further research highlighted the possibility of retaining all usable fabric by incorporating the material into a single flight.

6. In this way all of the treads and risers of the existing staircase are from the original flight, albeit configured differently.

7. The remaining staircase survives to tell the story, to those careful enough to listen, of the type of wood, how it was converted, how it was surfaced and jointed into a useful means of first floor access.

Conservation of the Significance of the Heritage Asset and its Setting through the Design Proposal:

Maximising the retention of historic fabric remained the main design driver throughout the project. This approach constituted the best approach for maximising the retention of historic fabric.

As can be seen from the examples in Appendix II, broken, damaged or decayed components were rehabilitated back into the structure after careful analysis and repair planning. Compatible materials and techniques were employed at all times. Reversibility was ensured by avoiding the use of penetrating chemicals, preservatives and adhesives.

Supplementary Background Information:

By the mid-1990s the property had been empty for the 20 years and neglected for 20 years before that. It appeared on the SPAB Buildings at Risk Register and bore a SDC Closure Notice. Neglect, agents of decay, theft (most notably of first floor floorboards) and wanton vandalism (particularly of wattle and daub panels) had all

taken their toll on the building, notwithstanding SCD's emergency roof repairs. Each school holiday resulted in more damage. There had been significant interest in purchasing the property but driven only by the two barns having planning consent for conversion to dwellings – nobody wanted to take on the historic house. I bought Yew Tree Farm and its associated outbuildings in September 1996. Della Harris SDC, to whom I am most grateful for advice and guidance, was in the process of arranging a compulsory purchase of the farmhouse, its buildings and sufficient land to make it attractive to investors but she feared the house would be lost before this action could come into force. My first degree in Quantity Surveying gave me a working knowledge of building theory and with many years of carpentry, joinery and cabinetmaking experience I set about tackling the restoration work myself. This included setting up and running a saw-bench on site for the milling of whole oak trees into usable baulks of timber. At this point I had not undertaken my MSc (Merit) in Timber Building Conservation, Bournemouth nor gained membership of IHBC so I instructed Mr Christopher Miners, RIBA IHBC to survey the building, identify and design repairs. His input was crucial in my adopting best ICOMOS conservation practice and great care was taken to ensure (amongst others): minimum intervention maximum conservation of historic fabric, reversibility of actions, use of compatible materials and methods, and reuse of material wherever possible. The conservation work proceeded during the years 1997 – 1999 following which Mr Miners issued a certificate endorsing the quality of the work. SDC's Conservation Officer, Mr Chris Blaydon, and the Building Regulation department both signed it off and the Closure Order was rescinded. Since 1999, with the exception of the construction of an oak framed sunroom, the only work to the building has been routine maintenance. Now I shall turn to the question of access to the first floor. I have on file a Listed Building/Conservation Area Consent Application dated 14.4.1997 and a Listed Building Consent Notice dated 6.8.1997. The Description of the Development is as follows: 'Alterations to stairs, first floor layout, rooflights, chimney and internal partitions.....' Regarding the stairs, the treads, risers, stringers, handrails and newel posts all showed significant damage and decay. However, sufficient parts could be salvaged and reused to over-clad a structurally sound staircase of modern construction beneath. This approach has worked well – the historic components are not structural, as before, but are preserved, at least in some form, for the future.

**Appendix I**  
**Yew Tree Farmhouse September 1996**



**Yew Tree Farmhouse**  
**From Whaddon Green,**  
**showing large areas of damaged roofing**  
**allowing catastrophic water ingress**



**East facing elevation**



West facing elevation



East facing elevation



South facing elevation

## Appendix II

Retention of Historic Fabric : examples



Repair of timber mullion window



Repair of fractured door head



Door head assessed



Door head preserved

Repair of main frame post



Assessment



Planning



Preparation



Ready to re-install





Central Staircase : A considerable accumulation of moisture trapping detritus lay on each tread



Numerous parts missing, decayed or broken





Carefully numbered for dismantling and assessment

#### Appendix IV The completed flight



Ascending



Descending  
**Appendix V**  
Yew Tree Farmhouse



2000AD



2022AD  
17<sup>th</sup> January 2022  
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