

BROOKFIELD
HORTON, BERKSHIRE

History and assessment of significance

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1. General

- 1.1 I am an architectural and building historian with over 40 years experience of working with historic buildings. I have an honours degree in History from Cambridge University (BA 1957, MA 1961).
- 1.2 From 1965 to 1986 I worked for the Greater London Council. During most of that time I was an Assistant Editor of the *Survey of London*, a detailed architectural and building history of London district by district. In my work for the *Survey* I researched, wrote and edited 6 volumes on Kensington and Mayfair.
- 1.3 From 1986 to 1993 I was a Principal Officer with English Heritage as head of the branch of London Region responsible for building research and analysis and advice on listing.
- 1.4 Since 1993 I have been a freelance writer, lecturer and consultant on matters relating to the history of buildings. In the course of this work I have advised on several cases involving listed buildings and conservation areas, and I have given evidence at a number of Public Inquiries. I have also provided expert evidence in the High Court and other courts and tribunals in cases involving the history of buildings.
- 1.5 In addition to collaborating in the compilation of volumes of the *Survey of London*, I have published books and articles on various aspects of the history of London, especially its building history. I have also contributed to *The London Encyclopaedia*, the *Dictionary of Business Biography* and the London volume of *The British Atlas of Historic Towns*, and most recently was co-author of *Sutton House: a Tudor Courtier's House in Hackney* (2004). I was also an Associate Editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) with responsibility for writing and commissioning biographies of persons in the fields of engineering, construction and property development.

2. Sources

- 2.1 An account of the history of Brookfield is hampered by the lack of any information about the building of the house, and equally the lack of information about landholding in the parish of Horton prior to the earliest land tax returns in 1781.
- 2.2 Thereafter, it has been possible to glean information about the Derby family who owned the house from the late 18th century until at least the second half of the 19th century from genealogical sources, registers of electors, directories and wills, mostly in the Buckinghamshire Record Office, and some biographical sources.

- 2.3 Various maps have been consulted, and an enclosure map of Horton in 1799 and editions of the large-scale Ordnance Survey maps from 1875 onwards are particularly useful in showing the footprint of the house.
- 2.4 Nevertheless, very little documentary evidence about the evolution of the building's fabric has been found, and much has to be deduced from an examination of the fabric. A building survey report compiled in 2000 by Stephen Boniface is useful in this respect.
- 2.5 The lack of evidence about the fabric of the house may have been compounded by the fact that the parish of Horton in which Brookfield stands was historically in the county of Buckinghamshire but has been transferred to the county of Berkshire.

3. History of Brookfield

- 3.1 The external appearance, plan form and what survives of internal features all suggest that Brookfield is a typical mid to late Georgian house with ancillary structures of various dates attached, standing in its own grounds.
- 3.2 However, the building survey report of 2000 referred to above says that, 'The principal building is understood to have been constructed in about 1713 (or thereabouts).' No source is given for the statement, but the author of the report had been familiar with the building for several years. No independent confirmation of that date has been found, and nothing in the fabric of the house would appear to warrant the attribution of such an early date. It is possible that the house had been built on the site of an earlier building.
- 3.3 The earliest map of Buckinghamshire on a scale to be useful, that by Jefferys, surveyed in 1766-8 and published in 1770, rather compounds the problem. The name 'Corbert Esq' is written across the land on which the house now stands, presumably indicating that he was the owner of the land, but the map does not show any structure which could be identified as a house. Nevertheless, the scale is so small that the map cannot be relied on as indicating with any certainty that there was no house on the site by that date.
- 3.4 The large-scale enclosure map of Horton, dating from 1799, on the other hand shows the house clearly as a substantial rectangular shaped structure with a slight projection in the north-east corner. While too much stress should not be placed on the accuracy of the depiction of buildings on the map, the shape shown is recognizably similar to at least the main house as it exists today.
- 3.5 The map identifies the owner of the land around the house as Booker Derby Esq, and the enclosure award itself contains the information that he was allotted four plots of land totalling about three and a half acres in lieu of his share of the common fields. These plots appear to have been along

the edges of the highways nearest to the house, and the map shows that Derby already owned several large fields south of, and adjacent to, the house.

- 3.6 Derby's ownership of the house and land can be traced back to at least 1781 from the land tax assessments which begin in that year. These show that he had substantial landholdings in Horton, and was also the occupier of land which belonged to others.
- 3.7 The Buckinghamshire Posse Comitatus of 1798 was an inventory of the number of draught horses, wagons or carts in the county which could be impressed into service in the event of an invasion by the French. This shows that Booker Derby had seven horses, one wagon and two carts.
- 3.8 Together with other evidence such as the land tax returns, this suggests that Derby was not simply a country gentleman living in Brookfield but also actively worked the land. Some ancillary buildings, now demolished, are shown on the enclosure map a short distance to the south-east of the house and these may have been barns and such like. If there was a working farm surrounding the house (something in the manner, although without the grandeur, of a Palladian villa) this may explain certain features of the house.
- 3.9 Even if he was a working farmer, Derby was a man of sufficient consequence for his death, on 9 January 1810, to be reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The entry, among the deaths, reads 'Brooker [sic] Derby, esq. of Horton, near Colnbrook'.
- 3.10 Little biographical information about Booker Derby has come to light. He appears to have lived for much of his life in Westminster, where six of his children were born between 1758 and 1774. What he did there is not known. Nor is it known when he moved to Brookfield, whether it was initially a country retreat while his main residence was in Westminster, or indeed whether he built Brookfield.
- 3.11 By his will, Booker Derby left his property in a complex manner to his descendants. He had six surviving children and left the property in equal parts to his four sons and the heirs of his two daughters.
- 3.12 Thereafter, for some fifty to sixty years, Brookfield appears to have been used as an occasional home, sometimes a second home, for various members of the Derby family. The house and its complex of buildings may even have been divided at times.
- 3.13 The son of Booker Derby who was most associated with Brookfield and certainly lived there for many years towards the end of his life was Cobbett Derby who was born in 1768 and died, aged 91, in 1860. He was an attorney who practised in Guilford Street, Holborn, and had a London residence in George Street, St Marylebone.

- 3.14 In the register of electors for Horton in 1832, following the Reform Act of that year, Cobbett Derby was listed as a qualifying voter even though his place of residence was George Street, because he owned 5/18th of a freehold house (presumably Brookfield), buildings, garden and orchard, and the entirety of freehold land elsewhere in Horton. His tenants were William Wilson Yeates and James Holderness, who was apparently his brother-in-law.
- 3.15 In some subsequent registers of electors he was joined by his brother John Derby. When John Derby died in 1843, his will described him as of Horton, formerly of the Bank of England and late of Stoke Newington. He left his 5/18th part of a freehold house, buildings, land and premises in Horton, formerly the property of his late father, to his nephew, Cobbett Derby junior, the son of Cobbett Derby.
- 3.16 In 1838 a valuation of property in Horton was undertaken for the purposes of the poor rate. A map accompanied the valuation and taken together they identify 'Derby Cobb Esq' [*sic*] as the owner and occupier of Brookfield and a little under five acres of land around the house.
- 3.17 The valuation described the plots as a 'house, garden and orchard' totalling just over two and a half acres and another 'orchard' totalling just under two and a half acres. The latter occupied a large field to the south-west of the house which is still part of the grounds today, although parts of the property along the Park Lane frontage have since been sold.
- 3.18 The map itself poses a puzzle. It appears to show field boundaries accurately, and it shows two driveways into the property from Park Lane with bridges over the stream that runs through the property approximately as shown on later maps. It also shows some of the ancillary farm buildings shown on the enclosure map.
- 3.19 But the map shows the house itself as reverse-L shaped with the long arm running east-west and a formal garden to the west of the house with one side along Datchett Road. There is perhaps the vestiges of such a garden shown on the first large-scale edition of the Ordnance Survey in 1875 (the first map whose accuracy can be entirely relied on), but the footprint of the house shown on the Ordnance Survey, which is very similar to the footprint today, corresponds more closely with that shown on the enclosure map than the reverse-L shape shown on the 1838 survey.
- 3.20 In the register of electors for 1845 both Cobbett Derby and his son Cobbett Derby junior were listed as eligible to vote in Horton, the former because he now owned 13/18th of a freehold house and buildings in the occupation of himself and James Holderness, and the latter because he owned the other 5/18th share (bequeathed to him by his uncle, John Derby).
- 3.21 Cobbett Derby died at his George Street home on 21 May 1860 (suggesting that Brookfield was never more than a country retreat for

him). Cobbett Derby junior appears to have been his only son, and by his will Cobbett Derby left all his real estate to his son but in trust for his three granddaughters, Caroline, Eliza and Mary Henrietta, who must have been the daughters of his son.

- 3.22 Cobbett Derby junior was also an attorney, and of sufficient prominence to warrant an entry in Frederick Boase's *Modern English Biography*. He was born in 1798 and died in 1867.
- 3.23 In a valuation of the parish of Horton in 1866 a Miss Derby was listed as owning a house and garden consisting of just under five acres of land, of which the occupier was a Peter Davey.
- 3.24 In 1870 there was a sale of household furniture from Brookfield. The catalogue is in the Buckinghamshire Record Office. There is no indication of the identity of the seller, but the catalogue is useful because it divides the furniture by the rooms in which it stood, and it is possible to compare those rooms with the ones today.
- 3.25 The existence and comprehensiveness of this sale suggests that a major change in the occupancy and possibly the ownership of the house took place at that time, and it may be that the Derby family's association with the house ended at that time, three years after the death of Cobbett Derby junior.
- 3.26 Directories after that date indicate that there was a succession of occupiers, each for relatively short periods, and it has not been possible to trace the descent of ownership.
- 3.27 There is though just a possibility that the wider Derby family retained some interest in the ownership into the 20th century. The valuation of 1910, undertaken after Lloyd George's introduction of land tax, indicates that in that year the occupier of the house was a C W Legros and the owner was an H H or K H Leach, who had an address in Woking.
- 3.28 In the valuation of Horton parish in 1866 a 'Miss Derby and Leach' are identified as the owners of several parcels of land in the parish, and it may be that one of Cobbett Derby's granddaughters married a Leach.

4. Assessment of significance

- 4.1 Earlier this year *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5) replaced PPG15 as the government's guidance on historic buildings and conservation areas.
- 4.2 PPS5 states that policies and decisions concerning the historic environment should [*inter alia*] 'recognise that intelligently managed change may sometimes be necessary if heritage assets are to be maintained for the long term.'

- 4.3 In managing that change, PPS5 urges the local planning authority to ‘*seek to identify and assess the particular significance of any element of the historic environment that may be affected by the relevant proposal*’ (Policy HE7.1), and that ‘*In considering the impact of a proposal on any heritage asset, local planning authorities should take into account the particular nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value that it holds for this and future generations* (Policy HE7.2).
- 4.4 To summarise, as expressed in these and other policies PPS5 places considerable emphasis on an understanding of the particular significance of the heritage asset in question.
- 4.5 The *Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide*, which is designed to assist in interpreting the policies in PPS5, states that ‘*Applications will have a greater likelihood of success and better decisions will be made when applicants and local planning authorities assess and understand the particular nature of the significance of an asset, the extent of the asset’s fabric to which the significance relates and the level of importance of that significance*’ (3 (17)).
- 4.6 It is clear from this statement and implicit in the emphasis given to significance in PPS5 that significance can be relative, and that it is important to seek to understand the extent and degree of significance that can be attached to any particular part of the fabric of an historic building.
- 4.7 This report seeks to identify the particular significance of Brookfield, and assess the relative significance of various parts of the fabric of the building.
- 4.8 For this purpose the building will be divided into its various component parts, viz. the main house, the former stable building and stores, the link building, the attached cottage, the garage and other ancillary structures, and the grounds.

5. The main house

- 5.1 The main house of Brookfield can be readily identified by its appearance and plan form. It is, as the list description describes, a ‘handsome small country house’, three storeys high and three bays wide with a projecting centre bay capped with an open pediment, almost square on plan, with a wide central hallway and imposing open well staircase, and basically four rooms to a floor, with a fifth added on the second floor at the front in place of the hallway.
- 5.2 The main elevations are of red brick flecked with grey overburnt bricks, with red brick dressings and flat gauged arches to the windows, and red brick quoins to the slightly projecting central bay. Most of the windows (except where altered) are double-hung sashes set back into the window

openings with reveals. The roof is hipped and sits back behind a parapet with brick decoration.

- 5.3 The internal plan form of the main house has been little altered, and the present rooms are recognizable from the rooms described in the sale of household furniture in 1870. There are simple egg-and-dart cornices to some of the ground floor rooms and some good surviving fireplaces.
- 5.4 The main staircase represents something of a puzzle. It is a fine open well staircase with twisted balusters and a broad handrail, and looks appropriate for the mid to late Georgian date of the house. And yet the otherwise accurate list description, presumably dating from 1955 when the house was listed, describes it as a 'plain C19 staircase'. Although it cuts across a window at the back, this was a perfectly usual feature such a date, and there is no other evidence that the staircase might have been inserted at a later date than the listing.
- 5.5 This central core of the original house, certainly dating from before 1781, is a good example of a small, essentially detached, Georgian country house. Its early listing at Grade II in 1955 is amply merited, and in significance terms this part of the house is of high significance.
- 5.6 There have been some additions to this central core of the house. A pedimented porch with classical columns at the sides has been added to the front, during the 20th century from the evidence of Ordnance Survey maps, but the list description rightly describes it as 'harmonious'.
- 5.7 A shallow canted bay rising through two storeys has been added to the front half of the west side elevation. This feature may relate to the formal garden shown on the map of 1838, and the room on the first floor with the added bay was described as a morning room in the sales particulars of 1870, which suggests that the bay may have been in place by that date. It is, however, not readily distinguishable on the large-scale Ordnance Survey map of 1875. The upper windows on the bay look to be 19th century in date and the French windows on the ground floor a 20th century alteration.
- 5.8 On the east side of the house there are two added square shaped bays of single storey height with a further linking bay between them. The bay toward the front is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1875. None of these additional structures on the east side of the house are of any architectural merit.
- 5.9 Nevertheless, it is reasonable to say that these additions of various dates are of moderate significance and that there is no argument for removing them.
- 5.10 In general, in view of its significance in historic building terms, any proposals for the main house (including its additions) should be confined to conservative repair and restoration.

5.11 All the other parts of the building apart from the main house are of low significance in historic buildings terms.

6. The former stable building and stores

6.1 An unusual feature of the house is that the former stable (later converted into a garage) with what was presumably originally a coachman's quarters above it are attached to the north-east corner of the main house instead of being separated from it.

6.2 Attached to this structure in turn is a single-storey range of stores with a modern garage at its far (eastern) end.

6.3 Whether this arrangement dates from the building of the house (apart from the modern garage) or whether all or parts of these structures were added later is difficult to say.

6.4 On the enclosure map of 1799 described in paragraph 3.4 above the house is shown with a slight projection in the north-east corner which suggests that at least part of this structure may have existed by that date.

6.5 The Ordnance Survey map of 1875, the first map on a large enough scale to show the form of the house clearly, shows the range extending eastwards from the north-east corner of the house.

6.6 If, as has been surmised above, Brookfield was a working farm as well as functioning as a country house, it might explain why such service quarters were built in close proximity.

6.7 Whatever the origins of this part of the house, it was always utilitarian in function and has been much altered with little of architectural interest remaining. In PPS5 terms it must be considered as of low to negligible significance.

6.8 The former stable (which is still shown as a garage on the undated plan attached to the building survey of 2000) has been converted into a workshop and virtually no original features remain, while the first-floor room above it has been converted into a sitting room accessed from the main house via the link building and is likewise devoid of any features of interest.

6.9 The stores range has been much repaired, including with concrete tiles to the roof, but is currently in very poor structural condition with spalling brickwork and sagging beams.

7. The link building

- 7.1 The two-storeyed link building between the house and the cottage annex to the north presumably dates principally from the building of the cottage, thought to have taken place at some time in the 19th century. Both the cottage and the link are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1875.
- 7.2 There is a possibility, however, that the room at the back of the hallway on the ground floor with a curved wall may have been a projection at the back of the main house, perhaps serving as a larder.
- 7.3 The ground floor of the link building is wider than the first floor, and the wider part looks relatively modern. A modern w.c. has also been built on to this in a corner of the courtyard.
- 7.4 In general this part of the house is of low significance in historic building terms.

8. The cottage annex

- 8.1 The two-storeyed cottage to the north of the house, which is virtually an independent structure although linked to the main house by the link building, was probably built as an annex to the main house at some time in the 19th century. As noted above, it is shown on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map.
- 8.2 It may be that the cottage was added during the period up to about 1860 when the house appears to have been occupied by various members of the extended Derby family and may have been divided up (see paragraph 3.12 above).
- 8.3 Whatever its age, the cottage has been extensively rebuilt internally following a long period when it was empty and became dilapidated.
- 8.4 In 1997 planning and listed building consent applications were approved for the conversion of what was then described as the annex into a self-contained cottage.
- 8.5 There is a note on the planning file from the Council's conservation team which states that they had '*No objection to the separation of this unit which does seem to have started life as a separate building, possibly outhouse, storage to the main house which has subsequently had a mansard type roof added thus making the structure of very little (if any) architectural merit.*'
- 8.6 This adequately sums up the low significance of this largely rebuilt structure.

9. The garage and other ancillary structures

- 9.1 The garage at the eastern end of the stores range is modern and of no architectural significance whatsoever.
- 9.2 At some time in the 19th century a simple brick loggia was built on to the north-west corner of the house as a garden structure. It is shown as a roofed structure on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map. It was subsequently used as store and fell into disrepair. It was never intended to be a structure of any particular architectural interest, and in its present dilapidated state it is of negligible significance.
- 9.3 The loggia also had the effect of transforming the courtyard between the house and the cottage from an open to a closed courtyard.
- 9.4 A swimming pool was added to the north-west of the house near the road in the 20th century but is of no architectural significance.

10. The grounds

- 10.1 The present landscape of the grounds of Brookfield is not particularly historic.
- 10.2 The house was formerly approached by a straight driveway from the angle of the road junction which crossed the stream by a bridge. This dated from after 1799 when the common land along the edges of the road was added to Booker Derby's landholdings. The present curved driveway dates from about 12 years ago when land was sold for the building of the additional house near the corner, and the opportunity was taken to provide a safer access on to Park Lane.
- 10.3 The circular path in front of the house with a grassed area in the middle dates from the middle of the 19th century, and is shown on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map but not on earlier maps.
- 10.4 The large area to the south-west of the house, which now includes a tennis court, was formerly an orchard. It is still shown as a tree-studded area on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map.
- 10.5 Historically, the most interesting feature of the grounds would appear to be the area immediately to the west of the house. On the map of 1838 described in paragraphs 3.16 – 3.19 above, this is shown as a formal rectangular-shaped garden with a path around the perimeter with links in the middle of each side to another circular path in the centre.
- 10.6 The vestiges of this garden, and the path around the perimeter, can be seen on the 1875 Ordnance Survey, but the formal arrangement in the centre had disappeared by that date. Now nothing remains of this garden.

10.7 The 1875 Ordnance Survey map also delineates a much smaller rectangular garden with one side fronting Datchet Road in front of the cottage and stores range.

11. Conclusions

11.1 The main house of Brookfield which is easily identified by its three-storeyed rectangular shape is a fine example of a modest mid to late Georgian country house with its external appearance and internal plan form largely intact. It is not a highly decorated house internally but has good surviving features. This building is of high significance in historic buildings terms.

11.2 On the north side of the house and attached to it in places is a complex of buildings of various dates which are all of low to negligible significance.

11.3 The main house would benefit from a judicious improvement to these secondary buildings, some of which are in a run down state.