

Carnbooth House, 80 Busby Road, Glasgow

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Architectural assessment following comprehensive fire damage.

1 Introduction

This document is submitted in support of a listed building application to Glasgow City Council for the demolition of Carnbooth House following its destruction by fire on the night of 17th August 2023.

Carnbooth House is a Grade B listed property located within substantial open and wooded policies and lying between Busby and Carmunnock within the Glasgow local authority area. The fire completely destroyed the interior and roof of the property leaving only masonry walls standing. Initial inspection by Zia-UI Huq structural engineer of Nixon immediately following the fire concluded that the building structure was unsafe and required temporary propping and roofing. As elements of the building continued to collapse following the fire being extinguished, this was not considered to be safe and a protective cordon was erected around the building. A second inspection by the same engineer on 5th November 2023 observed that the structure has continued to decay due to the effect of weather and that the risk of further uncontrolled collapse has increased.

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“Due to the extensive damage to the structural engineering integrity of the property, this is now a full take down operation. I am now of the considered professional opinion that the existing perimeter random rubble walls and internal brick partitions cannot be temporarily propped and salvaged for reintegration into the remediation works even if comprehensive repairs are carried out. It would not be possibly to justify the existing structural engineering elements that remain standing against accepted codes of practice or British Standards that must be adhered to in order to prove a structural reinstatement is safe and the load paths are functional.”

Mr Huq also confirmed that the extreme heat of the fire has caused thermal stress cracking of existing load bearing masonry and that the masonry walls that remain standing are so unstable that he now recommends full demolition of the remaining structure.

The purpose of this paper is to assess whether the remains of the building are of sufficient architectural importance to merit a more forensic/archival approach to dismantle the building by hand in preference to a destructive mechanical demolition.

2 Historic Context

Carnbooth House was originally constructed circa 1900 as a private house. The original design by architect Alexander Cullen is in the Scots baronial style with some arts and crafts detailing.

The property was listed on 12 October 1989. The Historic Environment Scotland listing states:

*“Alexander Cullen Dated 1900. Country house; arts and crafts movement, with Scots 17th century revival detailing - 2 storeys, and essentially 2 ranges in a T-plan. White-harled with contrasting red ashlar dressings, broad-eaved red-tile roofs, crow-stepped gables. Single and mullioned windows, some ground floor windows canted, these also with distinctive projecting transomes; 1st floor glazing mainly multi-paned. Main entrance on E front in gabled range, near-centre porch continued to left as balustraded projecting window; round-arched, roll-moulded and key-blocked renaissance-style doorway (2 leaf doors), recessed lower service range to right, its roof swept down to single storey to service court and with green copper conical-roofed angle turret; advanced bay left treated like dummy tower house, parapet enclosing gable head; projecting chimney breast, rooms at both levels with ingle-neuks within. S (garden) elevation has advanced outer gables, the left gable with bartizans, 2-storey curved window to right, bay corbelled to square above ground. Corniced end and axial stacks. Modern extension to W.
INTERIOR: entrance hall contains large red ashlar chimney piece, timber stair on axis of ranges with ornamented newel posts, arcade above now glazed in; some art nouveau detail. Some rooms now sub-divided, several with modest ornament; rooms with ingle-neuks both have elaborate cornice plasterwork.”*

Changes of Use

The property was converted to a Special Needs School by Glasgow City Council in 1986 and an extension added to the north west elevation. The building continued in Council ownership until 2006 when a replacement school was opened at Dumbreck and Carnbooth House was sold to the current owner. During the latter period under Council ownership the house fell into a poorer state of repair.

Conversion to Hotel Use

A planning application (reference 07/00384/DC) was granted approval in December 2007 for conversion of the building from a school to a boutique hotel. The conversion involved the removal of internal partitions that had been erected to subdivide larger rooms and the installation of new ensuite bathrooms, an additional escape stair was added, a new extension for a commercial kitchen, a new decked terrace and a large marquee. Whilst the conversion to the hotel reinstated much of the original internal layout it also necessitated the subdivision of rooms to form ensuite bathrooms, WCs and other ancillary spaces necessary for the function of a boutique hotel.

Loss of Marquee Licence

In 2014 Glasgow City Council intimated to the hotel operator that a permanent alcohol license would be required for the marquee that was used on occasion for weddings and events. The process of obtaining a permanent alcohol license required the owners to demonstrate that the marquee met the relevant parts of the Scottish Building Standards. Following a lengthy process including expert opinion the operator was unable to satisfy the Building Control division and, as a consequence of the licensing board's action, the operator was required in 2018 to cancel booked weddings and events in the marquee. This had a significant detrimental impact on the operation of the hotel.

Closure

As a consequence of the loss of wedding and event business the hotel was forced to close in 2019 in anticipation of commencing work for the construction of the new extension and function suite. In early 2020 the worldwide coronavirus pandemic halted all construction work and closed the hospitality and tourism industry. Carnbooth Hotel did not re-open following the pandemic.

Planning Consents

In response to the action of the Licensing Board an application to construct a permanent new function suite with additional hotel rooms was submitted in May 2018 and granted conditional Planning and Listed Building Consent in October 2018. Conditions were discharged in March 2023 and work commenced April 2023 comprising initial trenches for drainage and foundations. Planning consent is therefore extant.

3 Extent of Damage

The extent of damage to the hotel is comprehensive and has been fully documented in the structural engineer's report. The extent of destruction includes:

- all internal finishes
- the majority of internal floors, upper floors and partitions
- central staircase
- roof in entirety
- windows and doors including leaded windows and original baronial storm doors
- bay window structure to conference room

The structural engineer has concluded that the surviving masonry walls are badly damaged and at imminent risk of collapse.

A fenced safety cordon has been erected around the building to limit access however, since the fire, ongoing incursions by vandals and thieves are evident.

4 Historic Significance

Carnbooth House is listed category B.

Category B buildings are those of regional or more than local importance that may have been altered and are significant of a particular architectural style, period or building type.

As a Category B listing Carnbooth House is not considered to merit the higher status of national or international importance of Category A buildings.

5 Assessment and Methodology

In assessing the appropriate approach to the safe demolition of Carnbooth House it is necessary to first establish whether reconstruction of the building is viable and has sufficient merit to justify the substantial additional cost involved. The structural engineer's report of (date) has already established that retention of the existing structure is not viable due to its' instability and thermal damage to the masonry rendering it unusable. The question therefore remains as to the most appropriate method of dismantling or demolition of the structure that should apply in this case.

The Riga Charter provides a useful methodology for assessing the merit of the reconstruction of buildings lost through disaster. In the report following the Brighton West Pier fire of 2003 English Heritage noted that:

"Article 6 of the Riga Charter advises that in exceptional circumstances, reconstruction of cultural heritage lost through disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may be acceptable when the monument concerned has outstanding artistic, symbolic or environmental (whether urban or rural) significance for regional history and cultures [or] when used as an administrative measure to fight against purposeful destruction of cultural heritage provided that

(a) appropriate survey and historical documentation is available (including iconographic, archival or material evidence);

(b) the reconstruction does not falsify the overall urban or landscape context; and

(c) existing significant historic fabric will not be damaged; and providing always that the need for reconstruction has been established through full and open consultations among national and local authorities and the community concerned.”

The first test is therefore whether Carnbooth House can be considered to be of “*outstanding artistic, symbolic or environmental (whether urban or rural) significance for regional history and cultures*”.

Whilst the Grade B listing establishes that Carnbooth House is not to be considered of outstanding national or international significance, nevertheless, there may be merit in establishing whether the house is unique in other aspects - such as being the only surviving example of a large domestic property by the original architect or if it has remained in its original state and largely unaltered or if the building is considered to be an essential component in a larger designed landscape.

A review of the Canmore online archive identifies that the practice of Alexander Cullern (Cullen Lochhead and Brown) designed several large domestic buildings in the west of Scotland during the same period. Of these most notable are:

- Raheen, 7 Chesters Road, Bearsden (unlisted)
- Chapelton House, Stewarton, Ayrshire (Grade C listed) that exhibits many features similar to those found at Carnbooth including the projecting stone porch with carved heraldic shield.
- Ross House, Hamilton (Grade B listed)
“At the core is a classical house of 1783, which may have been given a light Baronial dress about 1830. In 1875 Alexander Cullen (1856-1911) designed a new Renaissance-style fireplace for Hugh Henry Robertson-Aikman (1819-82), but in 1888-96 the house was much more extensively remodelled and expanded by Cullen in the full-blooded Scots Baronial manner of David Bryce for Lt-Col. Thomas Stokes George Hugh Robertson-Aikman. It was Cullen's first major work, and a remarkable achievement for a young man who had been trained only as a builder. The house was widely published and admired and established Cullen's reputation: for his plans and elevations see [here](#). The design also incorporates elements that derive from the style of John James Burnet, and Cullen may have used as an assistant Andrew Robb Scott, who had worked for both Bryce and Burnet, and was then hiring himself out to whoever had need of him. The house was seriously damaged by a fire in November 1910, that destroyed the roof and the top floor, but was subsequently restored”
- Lauder Hall, Strathaven (Grade B listed) and former home of Sir Harry Lauder (entertainer)

Originality

Carnbooth House has been significantly altered during its history. Initially this was a result of the change of use to a school, then again in 2006 when it was converted to a hotel and wedding venue. During the hotel conversion a new kitchen wing was added and many internal details needed to be 're-imagined' where the original features had been lost - this included internal joinery, plaster work and internal finishes.

6 Conclusion

From this first Rega test it can be concluded that Carnbooth House is neither of '*outstanding artistic, symbolic or environmental (whether urban or rural) significance*' nor is it a unique work of Alexander Cullen. In this respect it is questionable if there is adequate cultural justification for reconstruction.

The remaining structures have been established by the structural engineer as being unstable and at risk of imminent collapse. In this context any forensic/archival approach to duntaking of the fire damaged structure is not considered to be safe or practical without first erecting temporary shoring. However, the erection of temporary shores and a roof is also neither practical, safe or financially justifiable. Access for erection of temporary shores would require operatives working inside the safety cordon in a way that did not disturb unsafe structures. Given that the structural engineer has already established that the surviving masonry structure is at risk of imminent collapse and cannot be re-used, there is little material or conservation value in the careful by-hand duntaking of the structure. It is therefore concluded that the substantially higher cost of archival hand duntaking compared to destructive demolition cannot be justified.

The potential for imminent uncontrolled collapse also needs to be considered in the context of continued incursions by vandals and salvaging thieves with the associated significant risk to life. It is recommended that permission is sought for the immediate demolition of the remaining structures and clearance of the site in order to render it safe.

Cameron Webster Architects
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