



PLANNING HERITAGE

Conservation Planning Consultancy



HERITAGE STATEMENT

Project: Walnut Tree House, Blagdon, North Somerset

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Planning Heritage Ltd.
Rengen House, 4 Argyle Street, Bath BA2 4BA
email: greg@planningheritage.co.uk
tel: 0779 226 4297

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1 INTRODUCTION

This statement has been prepared to accompany the planning and listed application submissions for internal and external alterations to Walnut Tree House, Blagdon which seeks to increase, improve and enhance the accommodation including the rearrangement of the internal plan, converting a secondary attic space and reinstating the accommodation in the main attic.

The report sets out a proportionate assessment of the heritage significance of the building and demonstrates the scheme has been considered in light of the heritage designation of the property. The conclusion of this assessment is that the works, although advocating change, will affect areas that do not hold what is of historic significance and the scheme will not result in compromise, loss of or harm to the historic fabric and interest.

To date the proposals have been informed by a robust and considered assessment of the property including the fabric, structure and form of the relevant features. This statement is based upon the visual assessment of the building.

The house is listed at Grade II and was first included upon the statutory list in April 1995. The site is within the Blagdon Conservation Area which was designated in July 1978. The conservation area has not been reviewed since that time.

This assessment considers the historic nature of the existing property and demonstrates the proposed works are appropriate and without harm.

2 THE PROPOSAL

The proposal seeks to reconfigure and modify the accommodation within the property, to facilitate:

- Move the present kitchen and utility to the southern end of the house;
- Reconfiguration of the first floor room plan to increase and improve light and space on the landing;
- Form new bedroom, family bathroom and study in rear extension;
- Convert secondary reroofed attic space with ensuite facilities;
- Reinstating accommodation in main attic and install two dormer windows in rear roof slope; and
- Install PV Panels to SE facing roof slopes.

The proposals will adapt the existing internal plan within the property to provide a new kitchen with utility in the southern end, improved bedrooms with some having ensuite facilities. The works will achieve these changes by removing modern plasterboard partitions and studwork to form new bedrooms/bathrooms on each floor and the installation of a new staircase in the proposed games room to give access to at the converted roof space.

3 THE APPLICATION SITE

The house is believed to have C14 origins, however the listing describes the building as one dating from the C17. The property underwent extensive works in the 1970s and the building has had little done since that time other than installing the kitchen in its present location overlooking the garden.

The application site is listed at Grade II and was first included upon the statutory list in April 1995. The list description states: **House. C17, possibly with earlier origins. Roughcast over local rubble, exposed to front, with stone coping to Roman tile roof with brick stacks. Original 2-unit plan with left-end stack to heated room and originally unheated small service room to right, rear central stairs and left-hand stair to rear of open fireplace. 2 storeys. 2-window front with timber lintels over blocked doorway to left, late C20 door to right, 2- and 3-light C19 and C20 casements and 8/8-pane sash to right; probable C18 pegged wooden flame to 3-light window on ground-floor left. C19 gabled addition parallel to rear, and single-storey additions to right in similar materials.**

Interior noted as having retained all original stop-chamfered beams and roof trusses with dove-tailed collars and morticing for in-line purlins. Open fireplace to left with wooden bressummer and 2 recesses to rear (one with cockshead hinges to door); solid-tread stairs rise from first-floor to attic above. Another solid-tread wooden stairs to rear wall, set into slight recess. C17 plank and batten doors with scribed edging and original wrought-iron fittings. Reset C17 pegged wooden doorframes. A well-preserved example of the 2-unit plan which became increasingly common from the later C17 in this area: many original interior features, the solid-tread stairs being particularly rare and notable survivals of a formerly common vernacular type.



1. Walnut Tree House

4 HISTORIC CONTEXT

Given the heritage sensitive nature of the scheme (being a listed building and within the conservation area), the scheme has been informed by the assessment of the context in which it is located and the on-line archives held in the County Record Offices, which are minimal.

The application site sits to the north side of the village on the junction of Station Road which leads down to Blagdon Lake and Garston Lane, which serves an area of housing within the village.

The Pevsner Architectural Guide to North Somerset and Bristol (Foyle A. and Pevsner N 2011) describes the village as containing number of vernacular houses but does not specifically describe Walnut Tree House.

The cartographic evidence shows the footprint of the property remained unchanged until the mid part of the C20. The form of the historic building

can still be understood when seen from the gardens and although less noticeable when inside, it is still traceable. Today the house is surrounded by a mix of both historic and modern housing.

The property was owned in the 1920s by Bill and Flourie Lyons who let rooms to Lady Constance Malleon (aka the actress, Colette O'Neil) where she lodged permanently from June 1925 for nearly 10 years. Lady Constance was a writer, actress and pacifist but is perhaps best known for her relationship with Bertrand Russell, 3rd Earl Russell, OM, FRS (18 May 1872 – 2 February 1970) mathematician, philosopher, logical and public intellectual.

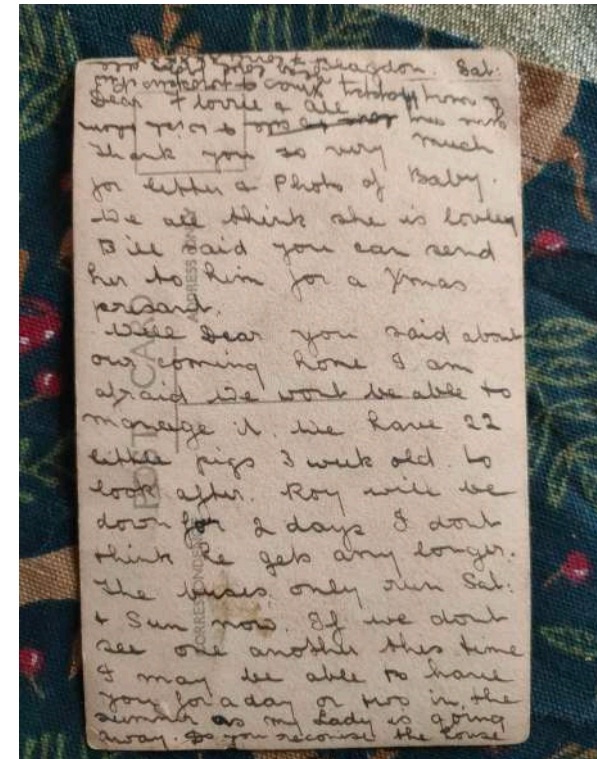
Lady Constance Malleon (1895–1975) was the daughter of Hugh Annesley, 5th Earl Annesley and his second wife, Priscilla. "Colette" (as she was known to Bertrand Russell, 3rd Earl Russell), was raised at the family home, Castlewellan Castle, County Down. She became an actress and studied at Tree's (later the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art), debuting in 1914 with the stage name of Colette O'Neil at the Duke of York's Theatre, in a student production. She met and married fellow actor Miles Malleon (1888–1969) in 1915 and it was year later that she met Russell through the No-Conscription Fellowship which she had joined because of her pacifist beliefs. She and Russell began a love affair that lasted until 1920. The affair was rekindled twice, in 1929 and 1948; they remained friends for the rest of his life.

Colette acted in London and toured South Africa in 1928–29 and the Middle East, Greece and Italy in 1932 in Lewis Casson and Sybil Thorndike's company. She acted in two films, both in 1918, *Hindle Wakes* and *The Admirable Crichton*. She was widely travelled including frequent trips to the Nordic countries where she lived for a short time in Sweden.

It was with Russell's support that she started her writing career, publishing a short story in *The English Review* in 1919. She published other short stories as well as hundreds of articles and book reviews. Colette wrote two novels; *The Coming Back* (1933) and *Fear in the Heart* (1936), as well as two autobiographies titled *After Ten Years* (1931) in which she documented her time in Blagdon and *In the North: Autobiographical Fragments in Norway, Sweden, Finland* (1946).

She became a was a fierce defender of Finland having volunteered during the Russian invasion (1939). She escaped from Finland in 1941 after the Germans had taken control of the country to fight Russian forces. She escaped by rowing 25 miles to Helsinki in a boat, where she was held for several days, before securing passage to Stockholm aboard a Swedish warship. Letters from her appeared in *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian*.

She was a familiar figure in the village and would often be seen in tweed suits walking in the Mendips and around the village and lake.



2. Postcard note with reference to 'my Lady' staying at the house.



3. Lady Constance Malleson outside Walnut Tree House c.1930s



Fig.i: Extract from the 1840 Tithe map

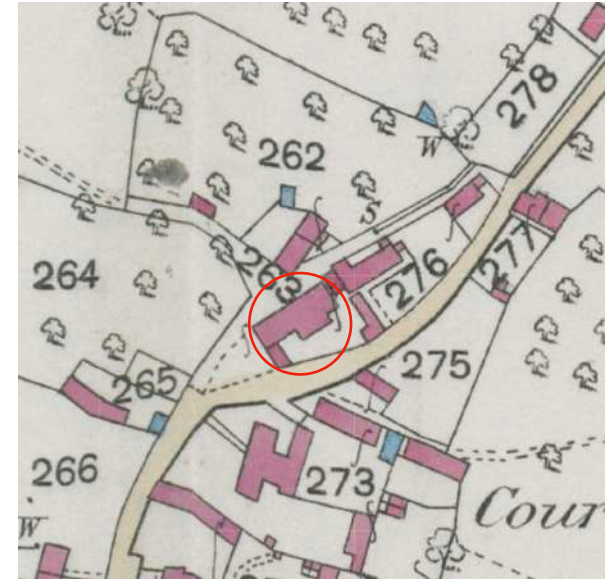


Fig.ii: Extract from the 1886 1st edition OS map

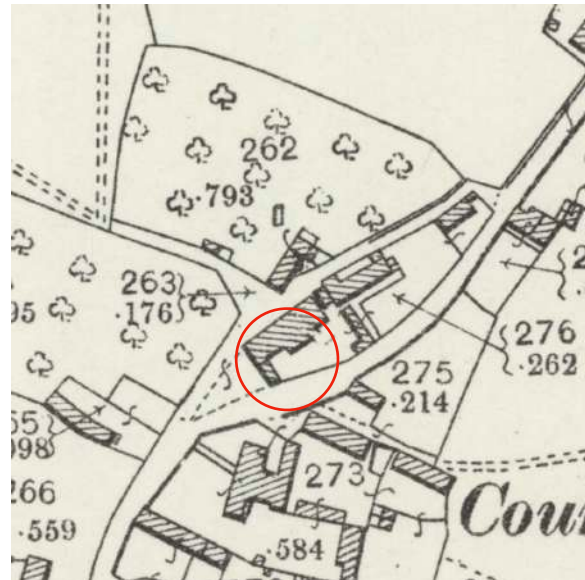


Fig.iii: Extract from the 1903 2nd edition OS map

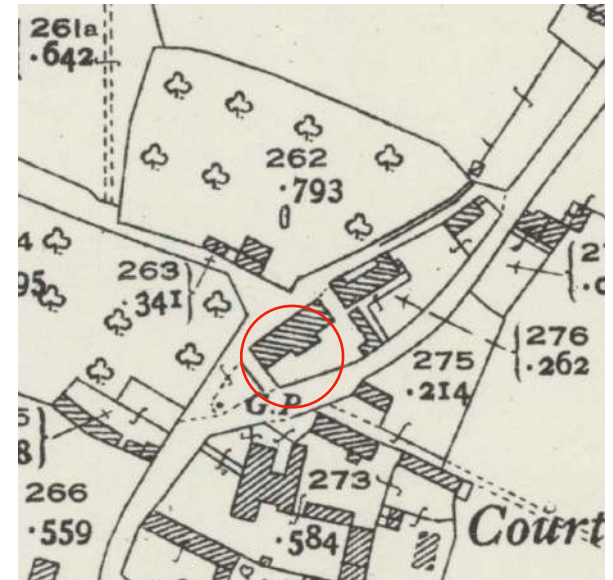


Fig.iv: Extract from 1931 OS map

5 THE BUILDING

The site comprises a modest 2 storey with attic accommodation, stone built cottage which has been extended to the rear with a parallel range providing a kitchen and bootroom space on the ground floor with bedroom and bathroom on the first floor. There are two large and distinctive cross patress tie plates set into the front elevation. The roof has clay double roman tiles and the property has flush framed, timber casement windows. The design of the rear extension is similar to that of a chalet style property; steep pitch, two box dormers and extended overhang to the eaves. The rear extension replaced an earlier lean-to in this location. The cartographic evidence shows the southern end of the property originally had a long wing attached but that this had been demolished by the 1930s.

The property faces directly on to the street with a flagstone 'pavement' separating to form the lane at the front. There is an enclosed garden to the rear and south side. The traditional appearance of the building is apparent when seen from the east and although it is no longer limewashed, it continues to make a strong and positive contribution to the character of the village as one off the vernacular properties referred to by Pevsner.

Internally, the property retains elements of its C17 origins, although the 1970s alterations have clearly removed significant proportions of historic fabric. The result of the 'modifications' from that period has been the building is largely devoid of features. In the sitting room is a framed section of reed & daub plaster work which is noted as being a '*portion of original 14th century studding consisting of cow hair, mud and reeds, removed during the 1970 renovation. Signed RW Lyons*'.

The 1970s renovation work was presumably to alleviate the damp, which was referred to in Lady Constance's description of the cottage; ***in the cottage there was a lot of old oak... the rooms were very damp - because the earth in the back garden was on a level with the back windows. The stone-flagged floors used to sweat and heave when the weather was wet. But in the evenings, when the oil lamps were lit, the rooms grew warm and cosy. There wasn't a single drain of any kind in the place - but it was heaven in spite of***

that (After ten years : a personal record; Lady Malleson, C (aka Colette O'Niel)1931).

Today the interior feature include the main fireplace and winder staircases from ground to first and second flight from first to attic, the main stairs are enclosed with an attractive timber door. There is some evidence to suggest the ground floor partitions would have been elm plank and mullion partitions. The attic space includes elm collar trusses with yoked ridge beam and dove-tailed collars at the mid-point. The original purlins were replaced in relatively recent times. The underside of the roof between the common rafters has been torched, although the common rafters do not appear to be great age.

The roof over the proposed games room has been extensively replaced in the 1970s. A blockwork wall has been built above the ceiling level in this area to form the rear extension.

The first floor bedroom partitions date from the 1970s and have heritage value or no significance. The staircase was originally lit by a window, which has been blocked by the addition of the rear extension. The utility room has a service staircase which has been created to allow for access to the first floor. The staircase leads up to the main bedroom, however it is unclear as to the purpose of this secondary flight was inserted as the historic floorpan has been lost. There is a significant slope to the utility room floor, which is made up of flagstones and concrete. The lean-to roof structure is exposed although it is not of significant merit and the roof has been boarded with plasterboard to give limited insulation.

The inspection has revealed the character of the interior retains elements of the C17 origins, albeit it has undergone extensive 'renovation' in the 1970, which retained only those features which were considered to be important at that time. Today, the few historic fittings which survive are noted in the list description.



4. Walnut Tree House c.1920s with whitewashed elevations



5. View of the property from the lane to the south



6. The cottage c.1970s, prior to the renovations



7. The southern gable end with rear extension



8. The rear extension



9. Walnut Tree House from the garden



10. The main staircase



11. The sitting room with main stairs and fireplace



12. The northern room in which new stairs to attic will be created



13. The attic space above north room showing block walls and C20 roof structure



14. The main attic with historic principles and replacement common rafters



15. The attic staircase timber treads

6 SIGNIFICANCE

Significance can be defined as the 'value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest'. Significance is unique to a place and it is vital to identify this, as the aim of conservation is to sensitively manage change to a place to ensure that its significance is protected, and also revealed, reinforced and enhanced at every possible opportunity.

There are occasions when the significance of a building or place may be regarded simply as intrinsic. However, since significance is evaluated as a result of how a building or place is interpreted or perceived at a given moment, there are instances where significance can be regarded as a fluid concept that can either be eroded or enhanced, depending on the consequences of change. Significance can be eroded through, for example, partial demolition or inappropriate alterations. Alternatively, it can be enhanced through informed, considered change which can bring positive benefits. These benefits can include the revealing of heritage values, the re-assertion of historic integrity, facilitating greater public appreciation and the strengthening of communal values and uses – all of which may ultimately raise the level of significance. Thus the aims of managed change to protect, reveal, reinforce or enhance significance can be achieved through a variety of means including conservation, improved interpretation, understanding and/or presentation.

This assessment of significance has been informed by site investigation combined with archival research. That understanding of its historic evolution has informed the understanding of the significance of and an insight to the evolution of the building. It is apparent that there have been previous adaptations, some of which were less sympathetic than would be permitted today and which witnessed the removal of *a lot of old oak*. The exterior has been equally remodelled with the rear extension and its unusual extended eave detail.

The range of values that may therefore contribute to the significance of a place include the following categories; aesthetic significance, evidential value and historical value. The aesthetic value illustrates the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a heritage asset or

place; the evidential value includes the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity and the historical value includes its associations with people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

Today the architectural significance of Walnut Tree House is derived from the vernacular appearance of the cottage and the surviving timber and other features within that include the flagstone floors and fireplaces. It is accepted that although the works carried out in the 1970s stripped the cottage of much of its C17 fabric in an attempt to make the property habitable, it remains a building in which it is still feasible to understand how it may have looked. Overall, it is a building that retains the external character of its C17 origins and its significance is embodied in the principle architectural features that survive and the exterior of the building which addresses the street.

Of interest to the wider village, is the connection with Lady Constance and her life. Her writings help to understand the living conditions and the simple vernacular appearance of the property.

In assessing the interior the property, it is apparent that change has taken place, of which some changes have led to substantial remodelling of the interior with more notable changes being made to the first floor.

In assessing the property, it is apparent that change has taken place, of which there has been significant remodelling of the interior spaces. It is recognised that these changes form part of the history of the building, however it should also be recognised that the virtue of age and thus history should not be a hindrance to sympathetic change where the previous alteration is not of good quality or significant merit.

7 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This statement of significance has been prepared to inform the understanding of the property with regard to the proposed works to alter the property to rearrange the accommodation and increase and improve the light within the house. The scheme advocates changes, which although may be considered to make an impact initially, they are changes which will not be detrimental to the understanding of the property or its historic significance.

The assessment revealed, as set out above, the external characteristics of the original dwelling are largely present, accepting that it has been extended, whilst the interior character has been reconfigured. Where opportunities to improve the planform and use of the house arise, these should be considered as a positive outcome and one whereby rooms most of which are modern, can be reordered to create a better arrangement, increased light and use within the building.

The proposed works will remove the present clumsy relationship on the first floor, adapt the lower attic which itself is a C20 remodelled roof form, improve the appearance of the rear extension and reinstate the use of the main attic. Likewise the internal changes will affect rooms that are modern ie dating from the 1970s, whilst the main attic can be adopted in a way that does not witness the further loss of historic fabric. The adaptation of the existing utility to connect with a new kitchen will enhance the building by giving it an improved use that will reconnect to the daily use of the house, rather than remaining as an infrequently used cold space.

The significant changes proposed include the introduction of solar panels on the rear, a bulkhead in the lower valley area to achieve headroom for a shower ensuite and the two dormers in the rear roof slope. The dormers will be visible however the new design will reflect the traditional form and the existing box dormers will be replaced with in step same manner, thus enhancing the visual qualities of the property.

Unlike the dormers, the bulkhead will not be visible from public viewpoints and as such it will not compromise the fundamental character of the property nor will it remove any historic fabric as it will knock through an area

of blockwork and modern roof structure. Likewise, the addition of the external posts to the underside of the rear extensions will visually connect it to the ground making a considerable improvement to the appearance.

The historical associations with Lady Constance and the pacifist movements of the early C20, will remain unaffected by these proposals.

As discussed above, the assessment analysed the historic value of the building and site to understand the significance of it, the result being the existing building retains elements of fabric of architectural or historic interest but equally there have been modern changes that are of little merit and it is on the whole, these which this scheme seeks to change.

8 CONCLUSION

This statement demonstrates the proposals affecting the building are based upon an understanding that the areas of work will affect modern/non-original fabric within the property.

This is property that has an interesting historical association with notable historical figures and this will remain unchanged.

The changes show the scheme has been designed to update the building in a way that reflects the historic core but equally ensuring its viable use as a home for the future by improving its environmental credentials as well as enhancing etc interior quality of the spaces by improving the light and ventilation whilst acknowledging that the buildings historical fabric is retained and left unharmed.

In this regard, the proposed scheme is in accordance with national planning policy and is fully compliant with the Development Plan Policy Framework.