

Heritage Statement

Ref: Proposed Greenhouse at Mansion Farm, Knowle Hill, ME17 1ES

Introduction

This Heritage Statement accompanies the submission of an application for planning permission for a proposed free-standing greenhouse at Mansion Farm, Knowle Hill, ME17 1ES.

Significance of the Heritage Assests

Mansion Farm is a Grade II* listed farmhouse whose origins lie in the 17th century. The farmhouse underwent various remodellings and alterations over the centuries, with the current owners having carried out a major restoration in 2017 under permission granted by applications 16/503778/FULL and 16/503779/LBC.

The full listing of the property is included at the end of this statement. The summary of the listing and reasons for the designation are provided below:

Summary

A C17 farmhouse, extended and remodelled in the C18, and with further, more minor, alterations in the C19, C20, and C21.

Several ancillary buildings and structures, associated with the site's historic use and occupation, survive in the grounds and are included in this listing. These contribute to the special interest of the house, but do not each possess its same high level of special interest. The varied age, function and level of survival of these structures is such that they are not all of equal interest to one another. Some later C20 outbuildings, noted below, have been expressly excluded from this listing.

Reasons for Designation

Mansion Farmhouse, a late C17 house, extended and remodelled in the C18, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Architectural interest: the house reveals the architectural fashions and constructional character of its key phases, as well as the changing hierarchy of spaces within its rearranged plan, expressed through the date and quality of historic joinery and finishes; * Level of survival: for the quantity and quality of surviving C17, C18 and C19 fabric, including extensive early, and, or, high quality, interior joinery and fittings; * Use of materials: the use of mathematical tiles to clad this large rural house, is particularly unusual; * Ancillary buildings and structures: the survival of buildings such as the small oast house, the stable and the run of kennels, reflects various aspects of rural domestic life in a large farmhouse in the C19; * Historic interest: reflecting a typical tendency for C18 gentrification of vernacular buildings, in its plan-form, fabric and scale, this is a particularly legible, impressive and well-surviving example.*

Reason for Works

The proposed greenhouse will be used by the owners of Mansion Farm for the propagation and overwintering of a variety of fruits, vegetables and flowers for the family table.

Impact of the proposed works

Historically, there are no precedents for domestic greenhouses before the mid-nineteenth century until the glass tax was repealed in 1845. However, elements of the earliest domestic greenhouses have been incorporated into the design of the greenhouse to give the appearance of a traditional timber structure typical of those of the latter part of the C19 and early C20. These include a low eaves height combined with a steep pitch of roof, and slender glazing bars.

The appearance of the greenhouse is also sympathetic to that of the existing oast house, which lies to the west of the farmhouse and to the south-west of the greenhouse location. Built between 1838 and 1875, it is included in the official listing of the property, and was restored and converted to living accommodation by the applicant in 2017.

The proposed greenhouse is 2.577 metres wide and 4.077 metres long, fitted with an entrance in the southerly elevation. The greenhouse is to be made of polyester powder-coated aluminium, coated off-white (BS10B15) to give the appearance of a painted timber structure. The colour has been chosen to be in keeping with the paintwork of the windows on the main dwelling to provide a sense of harmony.

The greenhouse is sensitively located to the north-west of the dwelling house, creating a sense of containment with existing buildings in this area. The proposed greenhouse will sit adjacent to the courtyard garden and will fill the space

between the garden and the existing garage that was built with permission granted under 16/503778/FULL and 16/503779/LBC. An existing concrete pad will be utilised as far as possible to provide a raft foundation for the greenhouse, thus minimising the need for excavation during the building works.

The greenhouse is designed to sit on brick plinth walls and the bricks to be used will match those of the north elevation of Mansion Farm and the existing orangery. The aluminium sections are to be coloured off-white which, as well as matching the windows on the dwelling, will also match the existing gate to the courtyard garden.

The north and west elevations of the dwelling are the more recent in terms of the historical significance of the farmhouse, the listing for this building stating:

The W elevation is also hung in mathematical tiles; many of these believed to be later replacements because this side of the house was most badly damaged by the wartime bomb. The elevation is irregular: the early C18 part, blind, and the later kitchen extension with a window each at ground and first floors. An off-centre external stack is a C19 addition. The rear elevation, to the N, is an irregular arrangement of roofs, windows and doors, generally of C19 or earlier date, with an informality typical of service areas, and reflecting the various phases of expansion in this part of the house. Because of the rise in ground level between the front and back, to the immediate rear of the house is a small area, contained by a ragstone retaining wall, approximately four-feet high.

Positioning the greenhouse towards the north-west of the farmhouse minimises the impact of the greenhouse on the overall setting of the farmhouse. The visual impact of it on the surrounding area is further reduced, as, being made of glass, daylight can pass through the majority of it.

Conclusion

The application proposes a free-standing greenhouse for use by the owners of Mansion Farm. The greenhouse is a small scale domestic development, sensitively located within the residential curtilage. It will have no impact on the fabric or form of any of the listed buildings.

The site for the greenhouse has been deliberately chosen to provide a sense of containment with the dwelling and existing outbuildings to minimise the visual impact on the historical setting of the farm. There is a small contained rear garden to the north-east of the dwelling and this provides context for the site chosen for the greenhouse, which is adjacent to this garden. The greenhouse also gives a much-needed sense of purpose to the vacant concrete slab which otherwise has a negative impact on the heritage asset.

The proposed greenhouse will provide a space for the propagation of a variety of plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables for private use by the owners. The use of the greenhouse will contribute to the maintenance of the garden and therefore play a positive role in sustaining and enhancing the heritage asset and its immediate setting, in line with local policy.

In summary, the owners of the property have deliberately chosen a high-quality structure, which has been designed to the highest standards to give the appearance of a traditional painted timber structure, sympathetic to the surrounding buildings. We believe the proposed structure will serve to enhance the heritage asset in both purpose and appearance and as such it can be considered acceptable and appropriate development which will make a positive contribution to the history of Mansion Farm.

Photos



Proposed greenhouse location looking east, showing existing concrete slab and courtyard garden beyond



Proposed greenhouse location between courtyard garden and existing garage, looking north

Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II***

List Entry Number: **1060889**

Date first listed: **26-Apr-1968**

Date of most recent amendment: **21-Feb-2017**

List Entry Name: **Mansion Farmhouse including ancillary buildings and structures**

Statutory Address 1: **Mansion Farmhouse, Knowle Hill, Ulcombe, Maidstone, Kent, ME17 1ES**

Location

Statutory Address 1: **Mansion Farmhouse, Knowle Hill, Ulcombe, Maidstone, Kent, ME17 1ES**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: **Kent**

District: **Maidstone (District Authority)**

Parish: **Ulcombe**

National Grid Reference: **TQ8585048954**

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Reasons for Designation

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History

Mansion Farmhouse originated as a timber-framed lobby-entry plan house, probably of the late C17. The house was extended and remodelled in the C18, and underwent phases of alteration into the C19. It saw a programme of repairs after a bomb narrowly missed a direct hit during the Second World War, but the house remained largely unmodernised into the C21. It is currently (2017) undergoing a major restoration. Previous occupants of the house include a Mr Thomas Woolley and his sons in the early C19. Woolley was a Guardian of the Parish, and let part of the house to the curate, Mr Sadler. In 2016 the house had only recently been sold by the Tassell family, owners for almost 200 years.

It is believed that the original farmhouse had its principal range facing E onto Knowle Hill, with a S range running W, away from the road. The S range was extended in the early C18, and the building's orientation was then changed to make the S elevation the principal entrance front. The S and E elevations were remodelled, so the building appeared as a small polite country house of the period. Particularly notable is the cladding of the building with mathematical tiles to give the appearance of brick. Although not uncommon in Kent, mathematical tiles are more typically found on the front elevations of tightly-packed town and village housing; their use on such a large building and in this type of rural context, is very unusual. Over the later C18 and probably into the C19 the L plan became in-filled to form a solid rectangular footprint,

some of this later fabric seeming to stand over earlier footings, possibly belonging to the C17 house.

There are several ancillary buildings within the grounds of Mansion Farmhouse dating from the C19. Based on historic mapping, the earliest of these would seem to be the run of kennels (their function presumed on the basis of their appearance and proximity to the stable) to the SE of the house. The distinctive linear footprint of this building is visible on the 1838 Tithe map, but the building's construction does appear fairly crude and may be at least partially rebuilt. A building in the position of the stable, to the S of the kennels, also appears on the Tithe map, although it is not clear if the footprint accords with that of the present building, which is in place by 1875 according to the Ordnance Survey map of this date. The date and function of the currently ruinous (2017) buildings to the S of the stable is not clear, but the brickwork suggests a C19 date, and they are likely to have had a semi-agricultural use associated with small-scale animal husbandry. Also built between 1838 and 1875, is the oast house to the W of the farmhouse. To the immediate rear of the house is what was probably a privy. This can just about be made out on the 1838 Tithe map. By 1908 an adjoining range can be seen on the Ordnance Survey maps, and from what survives, this appears to be some form of store and, or, coop.

Details

C17 farmhouse, remodelled in the C18 and gradually extended in the C18 and C19. C19 ancillary buildings and structures to the E, S and W.

MATERIALS: the house is primarily of timber-framed construction on a low ragstone plinth, clad in mathematical tiles. Rear elevations are clad in hung clay tiles. Roofs are clay tile and windows and doors are timber.

PLAN: two storeys, plus attic and cellar; roofs are hipped, with sprocketed eaves. Its footprint is now rectangular, but the principal ranges form an L-shaped plan. An E range (running N-S) faces E onto Knowle Hill. Thought to have been the entrance range of the C17 farmhouse, this has a central entrance, opening onto a lobby and stair, with a room to either side (one N, one S). Behind the S room, a second C17 range extends W, away from the road; this has a substantial brick stack positioned between the front room, and that behind. This S range was subsequently extended by another bay to the W probably in the early to mid-C18. The building's orientation was at some point changed, making the extended S range the principal entrance front. This was possibly in the later C18, when the house underwent a major remodelling: the S elevation was reordered to form a near-symmetrical arrangement with a central entrance hall (C17), and a room each to E (C17) and W (early C18). To the rear was added a stair hall, with a grand open-well stair. Between this stair and the back of the E range of the C17 house, a stack was added and the back wall of the C17 N room (in the E range) was removed, opening it onto the new hearth. To the N and W of the grand stair, a kitchen and rear hall were added; these in-filling the remainder of the L-shaped plan. A single-storey, brick-built extension to the N end of the C17 house may be of C18 or C19 date.

The first-floor plan largely mirrors that on the ground floor, although here the rear wall of the C17 N room remains. The S and E ranges have attic rooms, accessed from the stair in its original C17 position in the E range. There is a two-room cellar beneath part of the S range, believed to have been dug in the C18.

EXTERIOR: the E elevation, facing Knowle Hill (and probably the C17 entrance front), has a near-symmetrical three-bay arrangement with central door. The mathematical tiles are hung in stretcher bond, and there is a moulded wooden eaves cornice. The door is slightly recessed, and is panelled, with two top-lights. The architrave has a pair of plain pilasters, supporting a frieze and dentilled pediment. The windows are six-over-six-pane sliding sashes with exposed sash boxes. There are two hipped roof-dormers with casement windows.

The impressive S elevation is of a similar character to the E elevation, but is a wider, six-window, front, with a slightly less regular arrangement. The door is off-centre to the W and has an architrave matching that to the E. The windows are also six-over-six-pane sliding sashes with exposed sash boxes, but are unevenly spaced, with three each at ground and first floors to either side of the door. The large ridge-stack of the C17 house is off-centre to the E.

The W elevation is also hung in mathematical tiles; many of these believed to be later replacements because this side of the house was most badly damaged by the wartime bomb. The elevation is irregular: the early C18 part, blind, and the later kitchen extension with a window each at ground and first floors. An off-centre external stack is a C19 addition. The rear elevation, to the N, is an irregular arrangement of roofs, windows and doors, generally of C19 or earlier date, with an informality typical of service areas, and reflecting the various phases of expansion in this part of the house. Because of the rise in ground level between the front and back, to the immediate rear of the house is a small area, contained by a

ragstone retaining wall, approximately four-feet high. Against the retaining wall is a small, brick-built, pitched-roof building, which was probably a privy, and adjoining this is a timber-built structure with a mono-pitched roof covered in corrugated sheet material; this is thought to be an early C20 coop, and, or, store.

INTERIOR: the building's interior retains fittings, as well as some visible structural fabric, relating to its various phases of development and evolution. The small central bay of the C17 E wing, which contains the lobby and stair, is particularly evocative of this primary phase, retaining its distinctive layout and some early fittings. The lower part of the stair, and its enclosing well, has undergone some renewal, although it is still of some age, but the upper parts which lead into the attic appear to be early, and quite possibly original, including a built-in storage cupboard with oak lid. At first floor the jowling of the bay posts is visible, and within the attic space at the top of the stair, square-sectioned newel posts, with primitive carved finials, are part of an early balustrade, although the balusters themselves are later. A wide planked door with timber latch gives access to the N attic room; this is possibly an original C17 door. Within the other attic rooms there are further early planked doors and the staggered butt-purlin roof structure is partly visible. One of the rooms has a crude wooden hanging peg, perhaps for a lamp or clothing.

Below attic level, the character of the S range is more reflective of the C18 remodelling. At ground floor most of the windows have two-stage, pull-up, panelled timber shutters, and the two westerly rooms have fully-panelled interiors; the date of the panelling is uncertain, but could be early C18. The panelling to the far W is raised and fielded, whereas that in the neighbouring room is not, but has a distinctive cushion moulding over the door heads. Behind this panelling, where the wall is temporarily opened-up in the main stair hall, the substrate can be seen to be lath and daub. The spacious open-well stair has quarter-turn landings and an open string embellished with scrolled brackets. There is a curtail step at the bottom, and a moulded, ramped, handrail supported on closely-spaced turned balusters, three per tread; newels are columnar. The stairs lead to an open landing with matching balustrade. The stair joinery has a heavy dark stain, but is assumed to be hardwood.

Perhaps the most distinctive room on the first floor is in the NW corner (over the kitchen). The ceiling has been 'vaulted' with a deep coving at the head of each wall. There is a dentilled architrave, panelling to dado height, and a late C18 or early C19 hob grate and fire surround. Otherwise, the first-floor rooms are distinguished by their various fire surrounds, door joinery, and in some cases, exposed structural members of the C17 timber frame. Throughout the house there are a number of chimney pieces, mainly thought to date from the late C18 or early C19, some with contemporary or slightly later grates, others having had their openings remodelled with brick in the early C20. The joinery of interior and exterior doors also reflects the evolution of the house, and the relative status of the rooms within it. Later C19 six-panel doors predominate, but a variety of size, construction and ironmongery can be found from earlier periods. Other features such as the kitchen's flagstone floor, chamfered and stopped ceiling beams, and an assortment of cupboards and miscellaneous joinery, underline the house's layered phasing.

Temporary opening-up has revealed that while the principal members of the C17 timber frame remain, a number of the intermediary elements have been replaced with later studwork on which the tiling battens for the mathematical tiles are fixed. Some of the interior walls are finished with lath and plaster, rather than lath and daub, as survives in certain parts of the house. Other areas have lost lath and plaster finishes to C20 plasterboard, and in some cases, asbestos sheet material, which is currently (2017) being replaced. Some evidence for the position of early window openings survives on the first floor within the structural frame.

ANCILLARY BUILDINGS AND SUBSIDIARY FEATURES

To the N and E of the E range of the farmhouse is a ragstone wall with brick dressings which encloses a small 'front' garden facing onto Knowle Hill.

KENNELS AND STABLE: to the SE of the house are the remains of a yard with several outbuildings. The W boundary of this yard is a ragstone rubble wall with red brick piers, approximately four metres high and 20 metres long; at the S end it has deteriorated and falls away to the ground. The line of the E boundary is the boundary of the wider site, and follows Knowle Hill. At the N end is a range of kennels, running E to W under a pitched slate roof. The building has a single storey and is of red brick construction, built in stretcher bond. The first four bays have segmental arched brick openings, approximately five feet high, and are sub-divided into four pens with raised terracotta brick floors; the pens are divided by brick walls built to just below eaves height. At the E end is a larger gable-ended fifth bay with level entrance through a full-height doorway. This has later concrete-block bins – probably feed stores.

S of the kennel there is a stable, rectangular in plan, built of red brick laid in Flemish bond. It has a single door on each of the N, S and W elevations, and a single window opening to the W. The roof is hipped to the N and S and covered in clay tiles with some inset glass tiles. Internally there are the remains of a single stall, with a lead-lined, wall-mounted, timber trough, and timber hay basket. In the NW corner is a brick-built lean-to with the remains of a sheet metal roof, and a timber trough within. Further to the S of the stable there are the ruinous remains of two further C19 buildings.

OAST HOUSE: to the W of the farmhouse is a small, single-kiln, oast house of mid-C19 date. The building is formed of a cylindrical hop kiln to the W, and an attached store to the E. The kiln is constructed of red brick over a ragstone rubble plinth; the brickwork is laid in Flemish bond with blue headers, and there is a cogged eaves course. The roof is clay-tiled with a wooden cowl and fantail. There is a vertically-planked timber door to the S. The store is rectangular in plan, also brick-built in Flemish bond with blue headers, and has two storeys. The roof is pitched and hipped at the E end, and clad with clay tiles. There are two timber casement windows to each of the N and S elevations at first floor. The E elevation has a pair of large timber-plank doors, with iron hinges. Above is a single timber loading door. The N elevation has a first-floor door, originally accessed from an external staircase, now collapsed. Internally, there is a slatted drying floor within the kiln, and doorways connect the kiln and the store at ground and first floors; the ground and first floors of the store are connected by a circular hatch. The conical roof structure of the kiln is a C20 replacement.

Other outbuildings include a small, pitch-roofed, brick store to the immediate SE of the oast house; a timber-clad fruit store; large steel-framed store to the ESE of the farmhouse; and a brick-built garage to the NW of the farmhouse. These buildings are of post-Second World War construction, and pursuant to s.1 (5A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') it is declared that they are not of special architectural or historic interest.