

HERITAGE APPRAISAL TO INFORM PLANNING PROPOSAL

AT NORCOT, MOORBOTTOM ROAD, HOLCOMBE, RAMSBOTTOM

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This heritage appraisal has been produced to inform design proposals for development at the house known as Norcot and its detached barn, at Holcombe, in Bury Metropolitan Borough. It has been written by Stephen Haigh MA (a buildings archaeologist with over 25 years professional experience of assessing, investigating and recording historic buildings in the region), on the instruction of the owners Mr & Mrs Bottomley, and follows a site visit, made on 10 June 2021.
- 1.2 Norcot and its barn lie within the Holcombe Conservation Area, which is a designated heritage asset within the meaning of the NPPF. The buildings are also included within Bury Council's draft local list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest (where they are identified as "*Norcot and carriage house*"¹), and so are non-designated heritage assets in their own right.
- 1.3 Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (Section 69), conservation areas are defined as "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance", and the local planning authority has a statutory duty to consider this in any relevant application.
- 1.4 Paragraph 189 of the NPPF states (inter alia) that: "*In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected.... The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance*".

2 Location

- 2.1 Norcot and its barn stand within their own grounds in a small fold or cluster of dwellings of which Hey House is the focus, south-west of Holcombe village and about 1.5km south-west of Ramsbottom town centre. The house backs onto the south-east side of Moorbottom Road (a roughly surfaced vehicular track), although the usual access is from the south-east, via a private drive off Branch Road.

¹<https://www.bury.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=14900>

- 2.2 The house is located at NGR: SD 77710 15970, and is a linear building built along the slope, which faces approximately south, downhill. The barn is situated some 20m to the south-west, at a lower level, and with its long axis running down the slope, at NGR: SD 77698 15943.
- 2.3 The barn stands about 20m north-east of Hey House, a grade II* listed building whose origins are thought to have been as a hunting lodge². However, the two properties are separated by a clear boundary and the intervening access track, and this demarcation, together with a lack of intervisibility, means that an assessment of Norcot and its barn need not concern itself with the setting of Hey House.

3 Historic maps

- 3.1 Historic Ordnance Survey maps assist to a small degree in an understanding of the site's development from the mid nineteenth century.
- 3.2 House and barn are both shown on the first edition 1:10560 map of 1850 (figure 1³), but the site is not named, and access at that date seems to have been from Moorbottom Road to the north. The south side of the house faced onto a large enclosure, and the barn was set within its own smaller field. These aspects suggest that the house was then still of modest status, most likely attached to a working farm.



Figure 1: OS 1:10560 map, 1850

- 3.3 The first edition 1:2500 map of 1893 (figure 2⁴) shows some significant changes to have taken place, particularly as regards setting. A new access from the south is shown, sweeping round to the north-east end of the house, and the large field shown in 1850 has been reduced to domestic grounds, containing various outbuildings (one of them a glasshouse), east of the house. Due to the

²National Heritage List, entry 1067269

³Ordnance Survey: Lancashire, sheet 79, surveyed 1844-47

⁴Ordnance Survey: Lancashire, sheet 79.16, surveyed 1891

small scale of the 1850 map, it is not clear whether the outline of the house underwent any changes during this period.

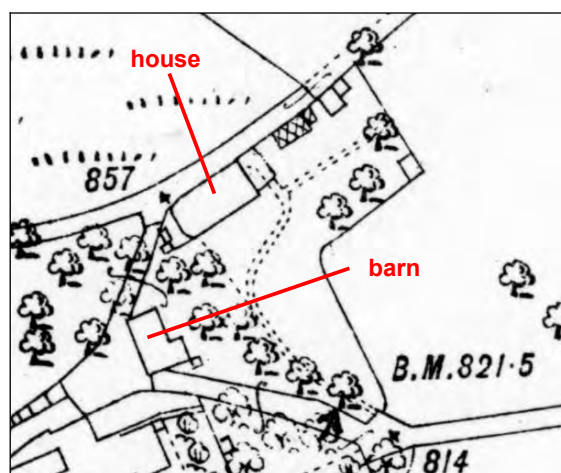


Figure 2: OS 1:2500 map, 1893

- 3.4 The 1910 map is the first to name the house "Norcot" (figure 3⁵). It also shows the house had been extended slightly at its south-west end since 1893, and a number of small new outbuildings erected in the vicinity, while further landscaping of the grounds also took place during those two decades.

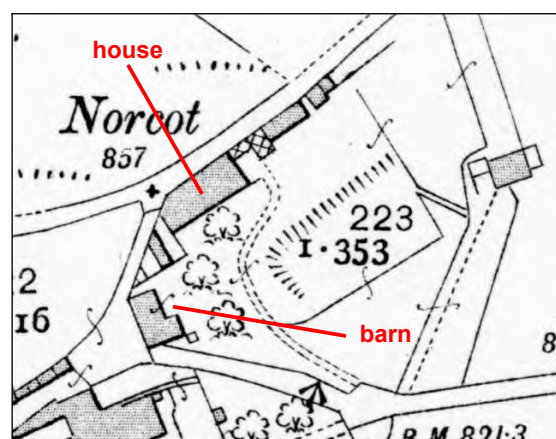


Figure 3: OS 1:2500 map, 1910

- 3.5 No major changes took place between 1910 and 1929, but some small differences in the forms of the outbuildings were recorded (figure 4⁶).
- 3.6 Between 1929 and 1939, the house was extended to the north-east, close to a flight of steps which were perhaps the main access to the entrance at that time (figure 5⁷), but otherwise no changes are apparent in that decade.

⁵Ordnance Survey: Lancashire, sheet 79.16, revised 1908

⁶Ordnance Survey: Lancashire, sheet 79.16, revised 1929

⁷Ordnance Survey: Lancashire, sheet 79.16, revised 1937-8

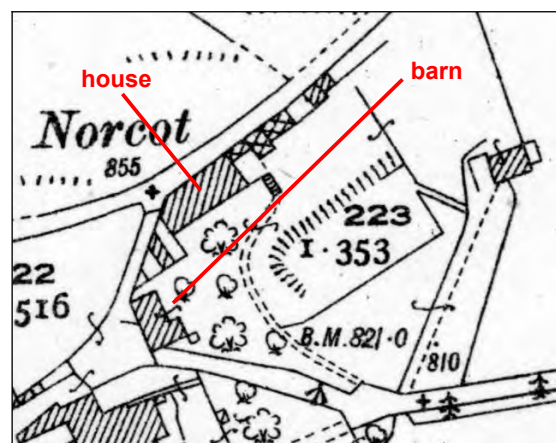


Figure 4: OS 1:2500 map, 1929

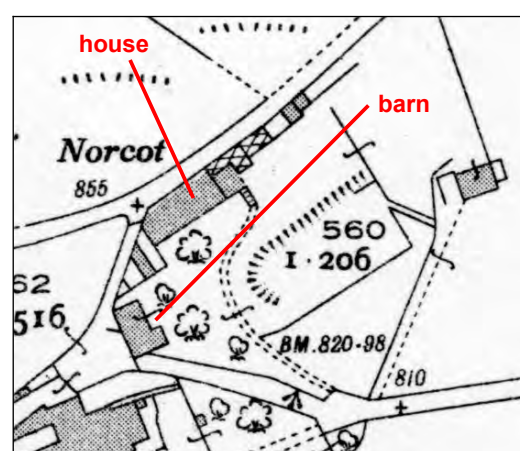


Figure 5: OS 1:2500 map, 1939

4 Other sources

- 4.1 The conservation area appraisal⁸ notes that Moorbottom Road was a pack-horse route between Edgeworth and Holcombe, and that "the building on this site [Norcot] was originally a staging post" on the road, though evidence for that is not provided. It also refers to the barn as "a carriage house", and notes its poor condition. The appraisal suggests that in the 1850s the house was known as Hill End Farm, but this is not the case, and it has confused Norcot with a neighbouring property of that name on that map.
- 4.2 "Action 26" in the conservation area appraisal includes the recommendation that Norcot and its barn form one of a number of sites within the conservation area which should be considered as additions to the Draft Local List.
- 4.3 "Action 27" states that "Opportunities to secure funding for the preservation and enhancement of statutory listed, or draft local listed buildings in the Conservation

⁸Kathryn Sather & Associates 2010 *Holcombe Conservation Area, Ramsbottom, Bury: Conservation Area Appraisal*

Area will be pursued. Particular attention will be given to the following 'heritage at risk': The Carriage House attached to Norcot, Moorbottom Road."

5 Norcot: the house

- 5.1 Norcot appears to have originated as a vernacular farmhouse with historic origins, perhaps associated in some way with the nearby Hey House, but during the later part of the nineteenth century it was gentrified, a process which involved enlargement and rebuilding, albeit to an unknown extent. The overall appearance of Norcot today is that of a villa with a strong arts and crafts theme, dating from around the turn of the twentieth century, but containing a core which may be up to a century earlier, ie of about 1800. It should be noted that the inspection was confined to the exterior only.



Photo 1: Norcot, and its barn (left), viewed from the drive to the south

- 5.2 The house is linear in form and south-facing, and it is built along the slope, so that the lower ground floor is back-to-earth; the ground and first floors back directly onto Moorbottom Road. All parts are built from local coursed or random sandstone, some watershot, and the roof is covered in stone slate.
- 5.3 The earliest part of the house appears to be represented by two bays lying towards its east end, defined by deep, edge-laid quoins at either end, but extended to both east and west. These two bays have a symmetrical fenestration on all three floors, with traditional two-light windows with flush mullions on the lower ground floor, but much larger two-light openings with chamfered surrounds to the main, ground floor. Although these latter appear much later in date, there is nothing within the stonework to suggest that they are not original to it, which suggests that substantial or even wholesale rebuilding took place in the late nineteenth century.



Photo 2: The south front

- 5.4 The additions to these two bays include a single bay to the east, containing cantilevered balcony, and two bays of different date to the west, both with gabled dormers to the first floor. Elaborate bargeboards of Edwardian character are fitted to all the gables. West of the house is a domestic outbuilding block, linked to the main house by the rear boundary wall and now by a glazed porch on the south side.
- 5.5 An unusual aspect of the house is the relegation of the entrances to the gables, and the east doorway is currently the principal one, though it appears to have been inserted in its present position within the extension here, to judge from the surrounding stonework, which raises the question of where the main entrance was previously. This gable faces onto a terrace which has evidently been the site of former outbuildings. Its deep courses of ashlar stonework are a strong element, as are the first floor windows and bargeboards.



Photo 3: Rear of house, looking east along Moorbottom Road



Photo 4: East gable

House: significance

- 5.6 Norcot is certainly of sufficient architectural interest to merit its (currently draft) status as a building of local special architectural and historic interest, and undoubtedly contributes positively towards the Holcombe Conservation Area.
- 5.7 The significance of the house stems from its modest grandeur as a villa on the outskirts of Holcombe, set within a small fold or hamlet, with the former hunting lodge of Hey House at its core. The house's present form very largely dates from around the turn of the twentieth century when it underwent an obvious gentrification, but it incorporates various earlier elements, though it is not clear to what extent these survive unaltered from earlier periods, or whether later rebuilding incorporated them with a high degree of authenticity. The house is built from local materials in a traditional manner, and displays good evidence for having reached its present size in a number of phases. The principal heritage value which confers significance is aesthetic, and this is most apparent in views of the building from the south.

6 The barn

- 6.1 The barn is a three-bay, detached structure, likely to date from the early eighteenth century, and originally of a form very much in keeping with the small combination barns of the west Pennines. However in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, as part of the gentrification of the property, and when its agricultural function was no longer required, it was altered to accommodate stables and the householder's horse-drawn vehicles, which seems to have given rise to its becoming known as the "carriage house".



Photo 5: Barn: east elevation

- 6.2 The building has an L-shaped plan and was constructed down the slope, with its wider south end, originally containing the shippon, at a lower level than the central threshing bay. Its walls are of loosely coursed rubble, with monolithic jambs to the doorways, and the roof is stone slate.



Photo 6: Barn, looking north-west



Photo 7: Barn, viewed from the west

- 6.3 The east side has been altered by the insertion of two steel beams to create a pair of wide entrances for vehicular access, the southern one of which no doubt replaced the original doorway to the threshing bay. A full-height cart doorway under a timber lintel, but now blocked up, can be seen in the west side, although it is largely hidden by vegetation. There are also pedestrian doorways in either end of the former shippon, and a modern, inserted doorway in the north gable.



Photo 8: Arched window in south side of barn

- 6.4 A distinctive feature in the south gable is the window with a simple triangular arch, no doubt inserted when the building was converted to stables. (There is an identical arch on the lower ground floor of the house, in the south front.) Over it is a circular owl hole, cut into an edge-laid flag, and likely to be original to the building.
- 6.5 The barn interior has undergone various alterations through its life. The stable within the former shippon contains a single, ramped stall divider, partly concealed but likely to date from about 1900, and cast iron hay racks fastened to the wall to either side of it suggest that two horses were housed here. More recent work has involved new partitions and the insertion of a modern staircase, creating a domestic character. The wall faces of the barn's two other bays to the north have been plastered and a new ceiling inserted, so that this area, perhaps formerly used for threshing and storing hay, is entirely modern in appearance. However the roof structure is very largely intact, and comprises two principal rafter trusses fashioned from pegged oak. The tie-beam of the south truss is a good example of a re-used, whole-tree cruck, with the characteristic halvings for tie and collar. The north tie-beam is not visible.



Photo 9: Stable (former shippon) in south end of barn



Photo 10: South roof truss in barn. Tie-beam is re-used cruck

Barn: significance

- 6.6 The barn is an example of a traditional farm building very typical of the locality, dating from the early eighteenth century but subject to much alteration both externally and internally. Such barns are relatively common in the west Pennine region as a whole, but rather less so in the Ramsbottom area. The building indicates Norcot's agricultural origins, and may contain the earliest intact fabric at the property, but is also important as evidence for the gentrification of the site

from the late nineteenth century. As is the case for Norcot itself, the barn is of sufficient architectural interest to merit designation as a building of local architectural and historic interest, and contributes positively towards the Holcombe Conservation Area.

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