

# Crowe Hall

# Bath

Heritage Impact Assessment

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## **I. Introduction**

Crowe Hall is a largely 20<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of a Victorianized Georgian Classical house set in beautiful hillside grounds with views towards Prior Park and Widcombe to the South and over Bath to the West. Its impact derives from the inter-relationship between the buildings and its setting, rather like an Anglicised version of the Classical villas around Florence or other Italian towns.

It is listed Grade II, as is the coach house, Gothic Cottage and main gateway. The property has recently been acquired by a new owner who intends to restore it, and keep it as a single family residence. The main part of the proposed works affect the 'behind the green baize door' areas, to bring the somewhat old-fashioned domestic side up to modern standards, and to create a more spacious family kitchen. The exterior and main rooms will be retained much as they are, but it is proposed to insert a larger chimneypiece in the hall, more in scale with the one that was formerly there, and to stone-pave the hall floor. Features like the Victorian Orangery are also in need of substantial repair, with renewal of rotted joinery.

In general the proposed works will secure the future of the building as a family home, its original purpose, and thus are in line with guidance in PPS5.

## II. Brief History

An historical report on the house and grounds was prepared for the previous owner, Mr John Barratt, by Alison Borthwick in 1993. That explained the history and development of the site in some detail. A copy is being submitted as part of this application, so it is not necessary to repeat all that history here, just to give a resumé. The core structure of the present house (and the layout of the gardens) dates largely from the mid-/late-19<sup>th</sup> century (retaining a Regency bow window on the South) but perpetuating the Classical style which had been so strongly established in the Bath area in the Georgian period and whose continuation throughout the Victorian age and even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century is responsible for the remarkable architectural homogeneity of Bath and its surroundings. The visual appearance of Crowe Hall in its present form is Neo-Georgian, resulting from a reconstruction *circa* 1930 by the architect A. Blomfield Jackson.

The date of an original small house on the site is uncertain but was before 1742. It was replaced *circa* 1760 by a new one called after its owner, Brigadier Crowe, or his widow. It seems to have been a plain rectangular building and is shown in late-18<sup>th</sup> century maps and sketches of Widcombe.

This house was acquired by the Tugwells (bankers) in 1804, who owned it until 1919, George Hayward Tugwell (Mayor of Bath) completely reconstructed the house *circa* 1810 on a grander scale as a Regency Villa with plain ashlar exteriors and bow windows. The great period of remodelling, however, was the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century

when the house was enlarged once more by Henry Tugwell who added the Ionic *porte cochere* to the entrance front, which remains the principal architectural element of the house today, and remodelled the interior in 1870. The gardens were also substantially remodelled in Italophile taste at the same time, with terraces and statuary, and an orangery or conservatory added to the South front.

There was a serious fire in 1926 which destroyed a large portion of the house, including all the three storeyed main block, and all the West side and servants' quarters. It was subsequently rebuilt *circa* 1930 on a reduced scale in Neo-Georgian style with 'Adamesque' interiors to the design of A. Blomfield Jackson with Axford & Smith of Bath as builder.

Sir Sydney Barrett, the inventor and industrialist, bought Crowe Hall in 1961 and it descended to his son, the late John Barratt (a school master at Clifton) who continued to maintain the house. On his death it was sold to the present owner. Sir Sydney Barrett greatly embellished the gardens and redecorated the interior as a setting for his fine art collection, sold after his son's death.

### III. Architectural Description

As it exists today Crowe Hall is largely the product of the post-1926 reconstruction, designed by A. Blomfield Jackson, though retaining certain features from the Victorian period, notably the Ionic portico on the East front, the fabric of the central Regency segmental bow window in the centre of the South front, the Victorian orangery, and – internally – the two-storeyed central hall with coved ceiling. The symmetrical South front, however, all the West side, and the interiors – including the imperial plan main staircase – all date from *circa* 1930, and today Crowe Hall is largely a 20<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Georgian creation.

The house before the 1926 fire is recorded in old photographs and the Sales Particulars of 1919, prepared by Powell & Powell, estate agents in Bath which describe the accommodation and extensive servants' quarters at that time. The Victorian house was much more inchoate with a large three-storeyed central block, all destroyed in the 1926 fire.

Today the house is more coherent and compact, and is of only two storeys. There are two principal fronts: the entrance front on the East side with monumental projecting Victorian Ionic tetrastyle portico and 1930 flanking bays with blind arches and oculi. The South front is two-storeyed, symmetrical and more domestic, designed around the central bow of *circa* 1810, the shell of which survived the fire. The right hand side incorporates three 19<sup>th</sup> century arches on the ground floor, converted to French windows post 1926 and reflected exactly to the left of the bow, which also has three

arched windows on the ground floor. This all dates from post-1926. The upstairs windows have small paned sashes and French louvered shutters. This is a handsome Neo-Georgian design. The Orangery at the East end dates from the 1880s and has a slight Chinese aura. The West elevation is the back of the house and is plain and asymmetrical with sash windows. It all dates from after the 1926 fire when the rear portion and central block of the old house were all destroyed. The mighty terrace wall below indicates the original line of the rear of the house.

Internally, the principal room is the central hall in which the high coved ceiling and Doric colonnades are Victorian and survived the 1926 fire. The main staircase at the rear was designed by A. Blomfield Jackson and has a wrought iron balustrade; it was inserted post the 1926 fire. (The previous main staircase was in the destroyed area of the house). The present, rather small, marble fireplace was inserted by Sir Sydney Barratt to replace a larger and more flamboyant Victorian chimneypiece. The parquet floor is also modern.

The principal rooms form an enfilade of three on the South side of the hall facing over the garden terraces and Prior Park. They have delicate neo-Georgian decoration, *ex situ* marble chimneypieces, and mahogany doors, partly of *circa* 1930 and partly 1960s. To the North of the hall a large square room which survived the fire was remodelled by Sir Sydney Barratt as a library, but the bookcases inserted by him were removed and sold following John Barratt's death, as part of the disposal of the furnishing of the house.

The rooms along the West side of the house are all service rooms dating from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and retain no features of historic interest. There is a house-keeper's sitting room, simple backstairs, back entrance, kitchen, utility, and two larders. Much of the furnishing and fitting in this area dates from the Barratt period and is utilitarian of the painted cupboard and formica variety, though the larders retain pre-War tiling on the walls.

The present arrangement here contrasts with the pre-fire amplitude of service rooms described in the 1918 Sales Particulars as a 'large light kitchen', scullery etc., servants' hall, butlers' pantry and all the Victorian trimmings.

The bedrooms upstairs are all plain and date from the 1930 reconstruction, as does all the roof.



#### **IV. Proposals**

The scheme now submitted is for the modernisation of the house, especially the 1930s back areas. The designs have been modified in the light of comments from the Senior Conservation Officer, Caroline Waldron. The key elements are the reconstruction of the back stairs, the enlargement of the kitchen and addition of a simple bow window on its West side to catch the evening light, and a new back porch. Apart from this the layout of the service wing has been left much as it is. (A proposal for a lift is now omitted.)

It is also intended to make more use of the basement area, introducing a gym and garden room down there opening on to the lower West terrace, with new casement windows and glazed door.

On the first floor there are some minor alterations to create new bathrooms. Little change is proposed to the principal rooms apart from introducing stone paving into the hall, and a new more appropriately scaled chimneypiece, similar to that which formerly existed here but was replaced by Sir Sydney Barratt in the 1960s. Wide board floors will also be laid in the main rooms in place of modern parquet.

It is also proposed to restore the Orangery which is in poor condition, including the renewal of rotted window joinery with new sliding sashes of similar design, and the insertion of matching French doors in the rear elevation to give access to the West

terrace. A new door will be inserted in the wall between the dining room and the Orangery to give access.

## V. Impact of Proposals

Most of the proposed works have little impact on the special interest of the historic building. The alterations at bedroom level involve adjusting small sections of subsidiary partitions to create new bathrooms. These spaces are plain, and the adjustments have no impact on the overall plan-form at this level where the proportions of the bedrooms themselves and the access passages are not affected by the works.

The work to the principal rooms chiefly comprises redecoration and enhancement. The proposal to replace the modern parquet floors with wide oak boards will introduce a more authentic treatment, appropriate to the 'Georgian' character of the rooms, and enhance the building. The new door from the dining room to the Orangery will repeat the design of the other doors in the room, and will continue the existing enfilade through the principal rooms. The wall affected dates from 1930, so no historic fabric is removed, and the design is considered to be appropriate. The stone paving of the Great Hall and insertion of a new fireplace are appropriate to its character and, again, do not affect historic fabric. The chimneypiece to be replaced was inserted by Sir Sydney Barratt in the 1960s replacing the previous larger Victorian design. The new chimneypiece will be to a similar scale to the latter and more appropriate to the dimensions of the room. The present parquet floor covering is modern and of no interest. Stone paving is more appropriate, from the historical point of view, in a Great Hall of this kind, and will enhance the dignity of the architecture.

The principal changes affect the back of the house, an area which was totally rebuilt from the ground upwards c1930 following the fire in 1926. The fire totally destroyed the principal West part of the house and all the Victorian service areas (Cf contemporary photographs). This part of the house is plain and relatively modern. Neither in plan nor fittings does it give an idea of the Victorian service accommodation. The kitchen was modernised in the 1960s and its appearance remains of that date. The enlargement of the kitchen by removing one wall to incorporate the adjoining space does not involve the loss of any historic fabric or fittings. The two larders (with tiled walls) are retained as existing.

The main change is the insertion of a segmental bow window in the West wall of the kitchen. It is appropriately designed in a simple style reflecting the low-key character of the 1930 back of the house. It pays tribute to the larger grander Regency bow in the centre of the West front. The house had another bow window, on the North elevation, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So there is a precedent for a subsidiary bow window at Crowe Hall. The re-alignment of the back stairs likewise affects only utilitarian 1930 work of no historic interest.

The new fenestration of the West basement in the terrace supporting wall, is formed of casements, not sashes, in harmony with the rustic quality of this area of the listed building, and is considered to be appropriately subsidiary.

Altogether the works proposed in this application are well-considered and suitably designed. They do not affect any major historic features, plan-form or details, but are restricted to updating and repairing 1930 work. In my opinion they will enhance the building while adapting less important areas to enable it to function in continuing residential use and thus securing the future of this handsome listed building. The works are fully in accordance with guidance in PPS5.