

OCCOMBE HOUSE PRESTON DOWN ROAD PAIGNTON DEVON

Historic Building Assessment



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**Occombe House
Preston Down Road
Paignton
Devon**

Historic Building Assessment

For

Steve Honeywill
of
Torbay & South Devon Health and Care NHS Trust

By



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Summary

South West Archaeology Ltd. were asked to undertake an initial historic building assessment of Occombe House, Preston Down Road, Paignton, Devon, prior to the potential change of use and or conversion of the building. The desk-based appraisal and historic building assessment suggest that the house was constructed in the mid-19th century as a gentry residence and has undergone significant 20th century alterations. There are a number of architectural details of merit including 19th century panelling, fireplaces and a re-used 17th century stair and panels. There is potential for further work both in ascertaining the documentary history of the property and in further historic elements which could be revealed during works.

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Barbara Knee and the staff of Occombe House
Steve Honeywill of Torbay & South Devon Health and Care NHS Trust

1.0 Introduction

Location: Occombe House, Preston Down Road, Paignton
Parish: Marldon
County: Devon

1.1 Project Background

South West Archaeology Ltd. was asked by Steve Honeywill of Torbay & South Devon Health and Care NHS Trust (the Client) to undertake an initial historic building assessment of Occombe House, Preston Down Road, Paignton, Devon, prior to the potential change of use or conversion of the building. This report covers a first phase of archaeological work: a desk-based study and historic building assessment, to initially establish the age of the building and surviving elements within it. The results of any further work will be the subject of a subsequent report, if undertaken.

Occombe House is currently a residential care home set just off Preston Down Road, to the east of the A380, between Torquay and Paignton. The building was formerly a private residence, but housed a school during the early 20th century and became a residential care home in the latter half of the century.

1.2 Topographical and Geological Background

Occombe House is north facing, positioned on a south facing slope and partially set into the slope to the south. With a tarmaced turning and parking area to the north, a modern extension (*Fairwinds*) to the west, linked to the main building via a corridor on the north elevation, and with former gardens and access to the rear of the building to the east. The majority of the main building is now rendered and painted on the exterior and has a slate roof.

The underlying geology at the site is the sedimentary mudstone, siltstone and sandstone of the Meadfoot Group Formation (BGS 2013), overlain by the well-drained gritty reddish loamy soils of the Crediton Association (SSEW 1983).

1.3 Methodology

The building assessment was undertaken by D. Laing-Trengove on 18th December 2013, and was carried out in accordance with English Heritage and IfA guidelines on the recording of standing buildings and structures. The majority of the rooms were viewed, excepting *Fairwinds*; the modern block to the north-west of Occombe House, and the basement of the main building. However, sufficient of the building was viewed for the purpose of this initial assessment.

The desk-based assessment utilised cartographic and documentary sources held by the Devon Record Office, as well as relevant online sources.

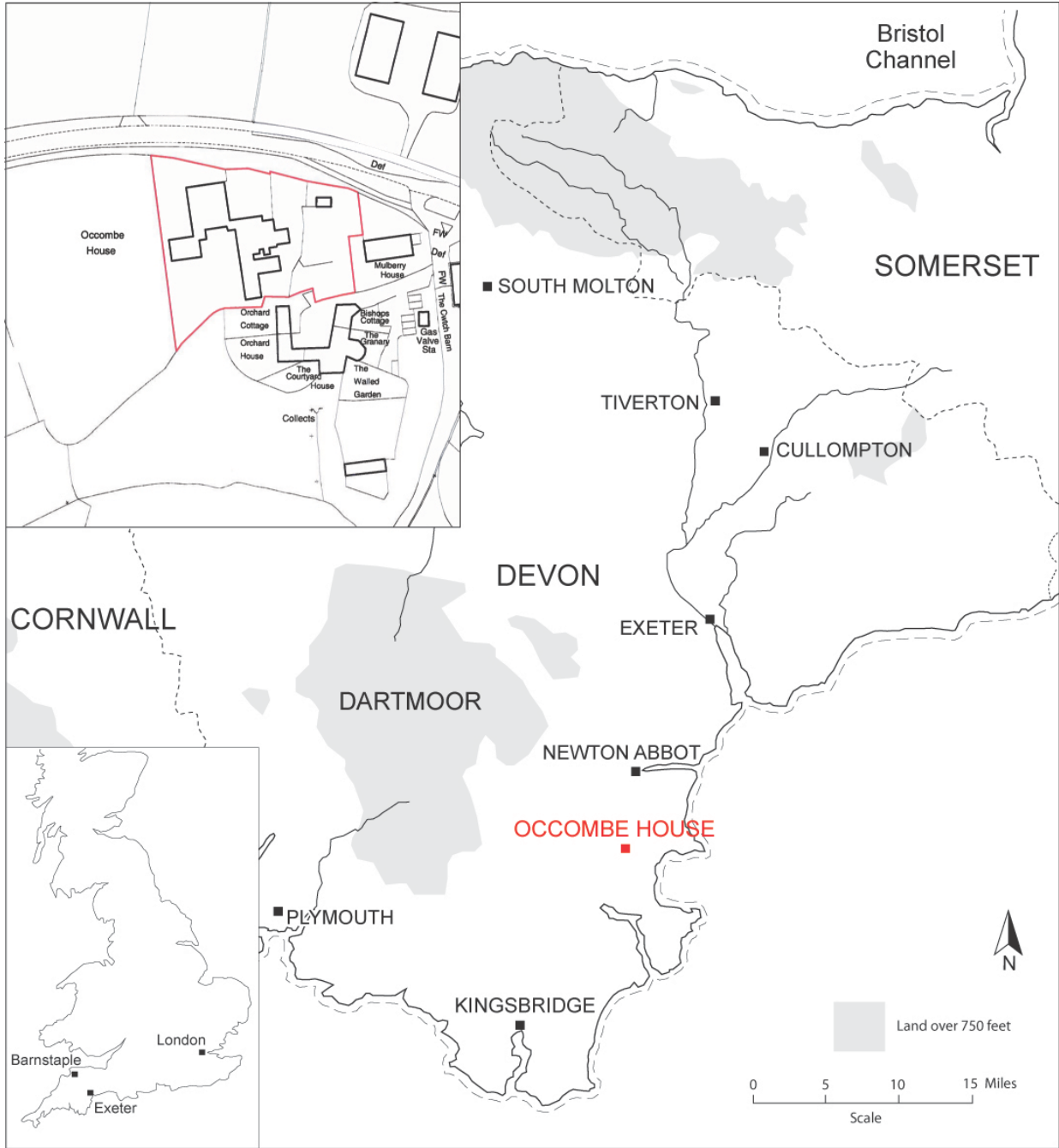


Figure 1: Site location (the site is indicated).

2.0 Historic Building Assessment

2.1 Summary

Occombe House appears to have been constructed between 1840 and 1880. The house originally comprised of the main large square building which functioned as a domestic residence with a service end to the east at ground floor level with the grander domestic reception rooms to the west of the central stair hall to the north. The presentation face appears to have originally been the western elevation, but this was altered in the early 20th century with additions made to the north face. To the south of the house was a stable block, now converted to residential use, and possibly other small service buildings. The extant building has several surviving decorative historic elements including reused 17th century timber panelling and stair, as well as a mid-late 19th century plaster ceiling, panelling and fireplaces. The building is thought to have been constructed as a summer house/temporary residence by the Singer family who were prominent residents in the Paignton area (Oldway Mansion) during the late 19th century. No definitive evidence of this link was found during this initial assessment.

2.2 Significance of the Buildings

The building clearly originated as a high status mid-19th century house with contemporary detached service buildings. Much of the architectural detail from this date has been lost, although several of the rooms particularly on the ground floor retain cohesive schemes of 19th century elements. Occombe House also includes a re-used 17th century stair and panelling, which could have originated from one of the nearby farms shown on the tithe map in 1840 and largely demolished by the time the present house had been constructed.

2.3 Historical Background

2.3.1 Tithe map

The earliest known source available to this study is the 1840 tithe map for Marldon. Figure 2 is an extract from the map, showing that at this time there is no building in the position of the current Occombe House. The small settlement of *Occombe* at this time appears to comprise two domestic buildings (coloured pink on the map) both with associated ranges of outbuildings located within plots numbered 633 and 636. These two houses reflect two separate Holdings (both named Occombe in the apportionment). Number 633 is listed in the apportionment as a *house, yard & outhouses* occupied by a Thomas Northcott and owned by Montague Edmund Newcombe Parker (1807-1858). M.E.N. Parker who lived at Whiteway House, Chudleigh, was M.P. for South Devon between 1835 and 1841 and High Sherriff of Devon in 1849. Number 636 (*house, yard & outhouses*) was leased by a Charles Pook from a Robert Butland (of Preston) who was one of the largest landowners in Paignton at this time.

The area in which the present Occombe House is located is shown as a single large enclosure at this time, and although the number is illegible, it is likely to have been numbered 629 (Orchard Park) given the surrounding fields. part of the land owned by M.E.N. Parker. The only feature of

note within this enclosure is the access route off the south-east corner which enters the yard between the house and large east-west range of *outhouses*.



Figure 2: Extract from the Marlton tithe map of circa. 1840. The approximate location of Occombe House is indicated.

On M.E.N. Parker's death his estate passed to his sister Harriet who was married to her 2nd cousin, Edmund Parker, 2nd Earl of Morley. The family had significant debts, which had led to the leasing of Saltram House (Johnson 2005: 56), so the land may have changed ownership around this time.

2.3.2 1st Edition Map

By the time of the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1887 (the next available cartographic source), there is a very different settlement layout at Occombe (Figure 3). Many of the earlier buildings that made up the two separate farmsteads in the early 19th century have been removed. The former domestic building located to the south of the current Occombe House appears to have been truncated to the west and the long non domestic range to the east has gone. The other farmstead further to the south appears to have been almost completely removed, with just a single building remaining of the former range of buildings in this location. There is also some amalgamation of smaller enclosures (orchards) primarily to the south of the settlement.



Figure 3: Extract from the Ordnance Survey First Edition Map of 1887.

These developments are almost certainly associated with the building of Occombe House which by this time had been constructed on the high ground to the north of the two former farms, within a rectangular enclosure taken in from the former field to the north-west. The house appears to comprise a square main range with a very small projecting element on the east elevation and possibly two projecting elements on the west elevation (coloured black?). To the south are what appear to be a number of small outbuildings and a large north-south orientated range to the south-west with a small compartment linking this with the main house. The house appears to be accessed at this time from a lane to the west of the house, which may suggest that the front elevation and entrance into the building was located on the west side of the building originally.

2.3.3 2nd Edition Map

The next available source is the 1907 2nd Edition Map (Figure 4), which shows few notable changes in the layout of Occombe House. The exception being that a small projection from the eastern elevation of the main square house appears to have been removed.

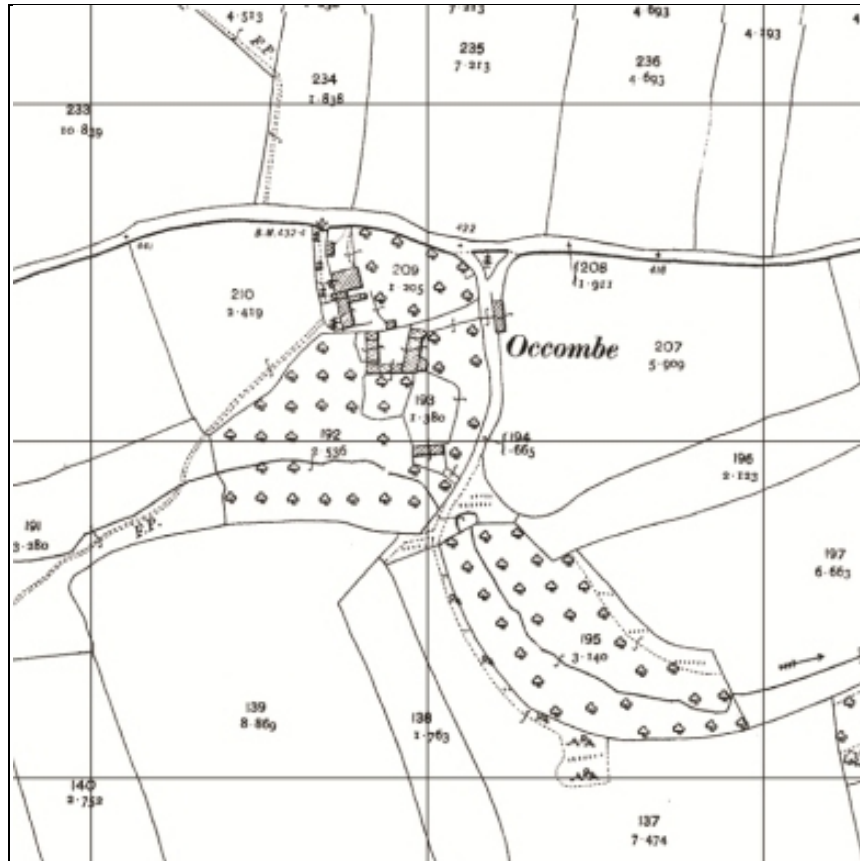


Figure 4: Extract from the Ordnance Survey Second Edition Map of 1907.

Later maps confirm the change in focus with the north elevation seemingly extended in the early 20th century. In the late 20th century Fairwinds House was added to the west of Occombe.

2.4 Building Assessment

The current triple pile building (Figure 5) comprises three floors; ground, basement and first floors, which are illustrated in Figures 6-8. Each interior room is numbered accordingly (e.g. room 1 on the first floor is marked F1, on the ground floor G1, at basement level B1).



Figure 5: The north front of Occombe House, viewed from the north.

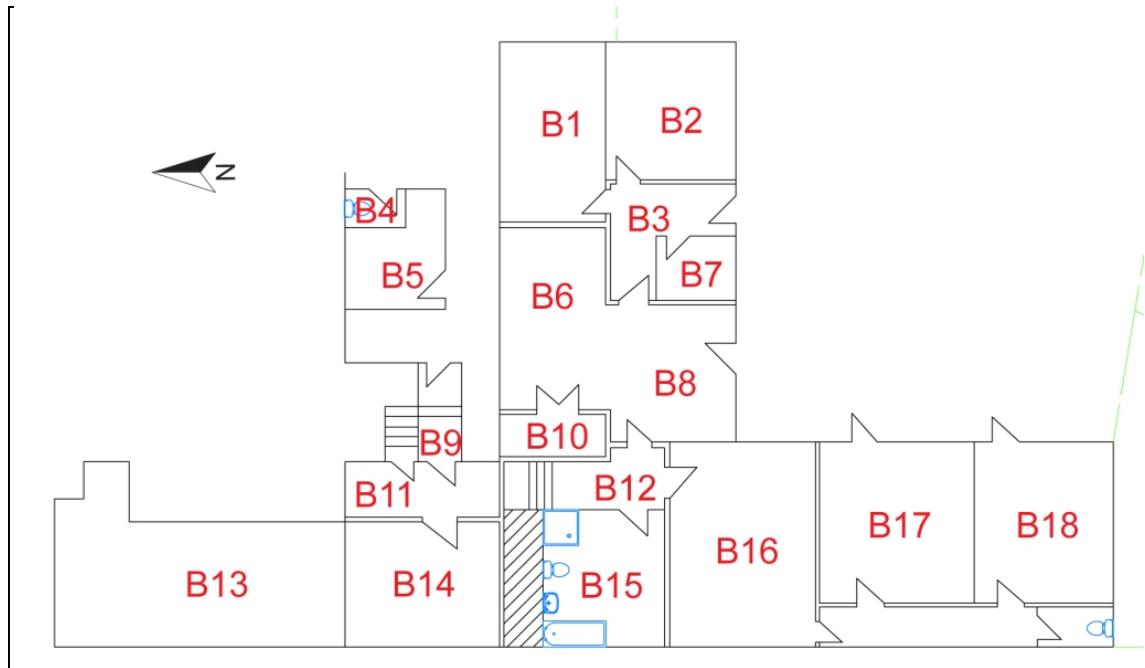


Figure 6: Plan of the basement floorplan with room numbers (not to scale).

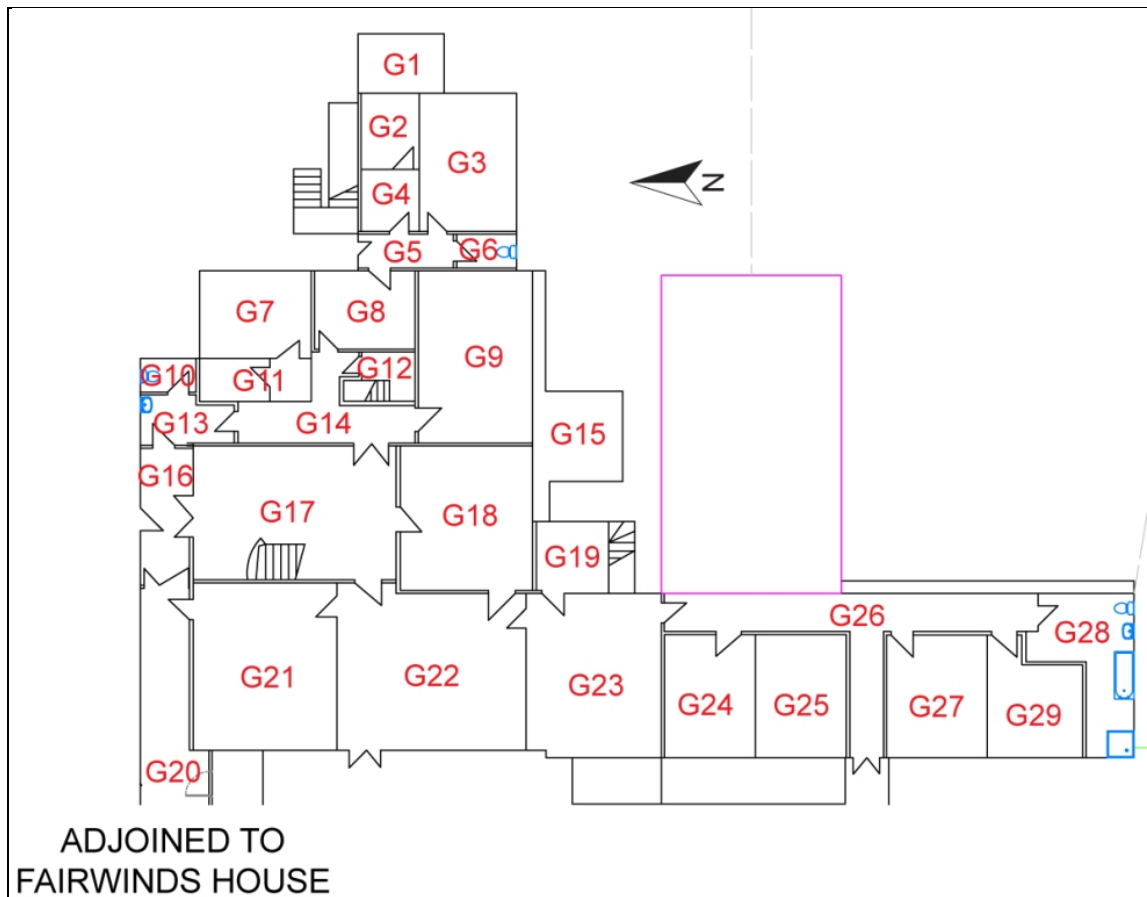


Figure 7: Plan of the ground floorplan with room numbers (not to scale).

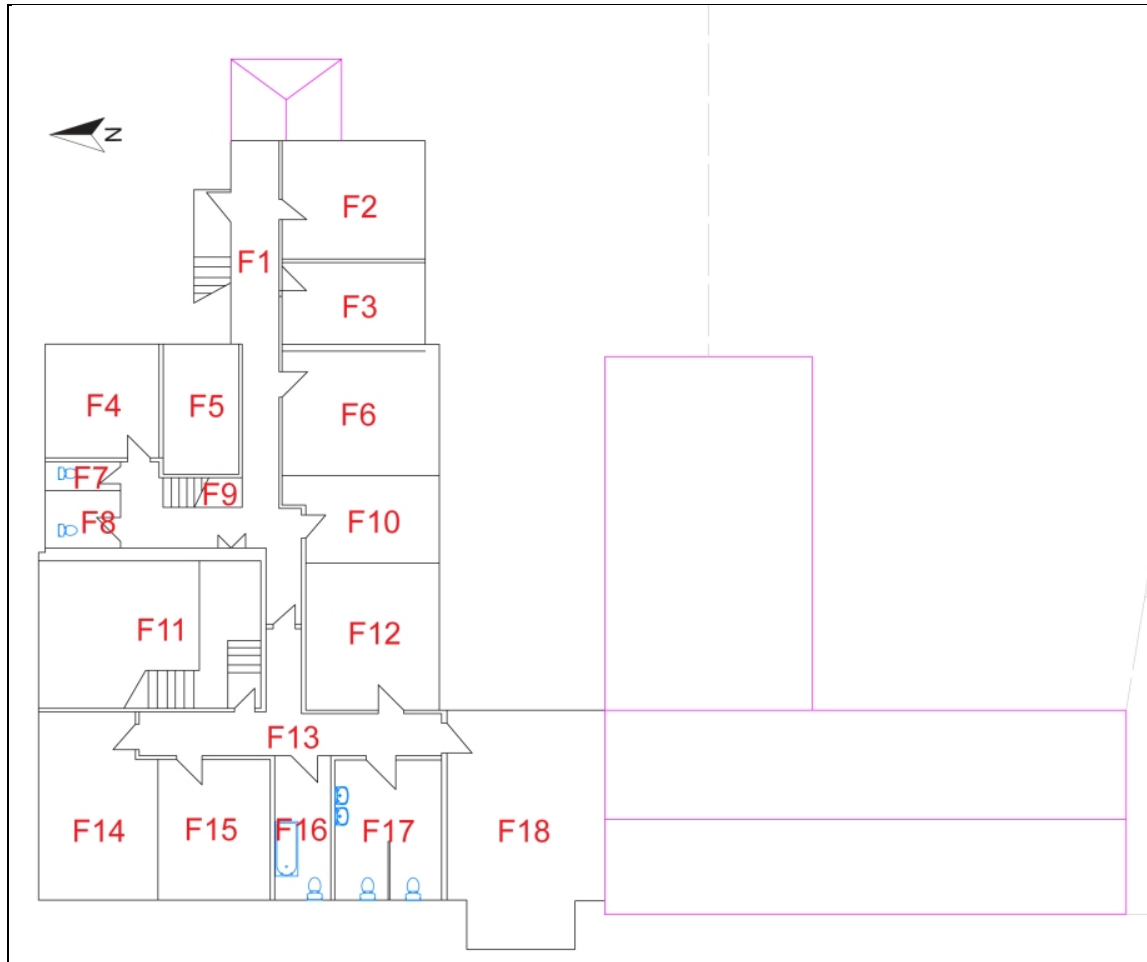


Figure 8: Plan of the first floor plan with room numbers (not to scale).

The majority of the 19th century building was viewed and elements of historical detailing were noted, where they survive, although much of the building has been modernised to suit the current usage. *Fairwinds*, a late 20th century extension to the west of the building was not viewed internally.

2.4.1 Brief Exterior Description

The north front, triple gabled elevation of Ocombe House retains a symmetrical façade with an early 20th century ground floor porch or vestibule with short flanking corridors. The western (right) corridor has been extended to the west in the late 20th century. The decorative metal windows flanking the arched door opening appear correct with the single storey entrance but the windows above at first floor level in the gables are inconsistent with the apparent symmetry of this facade. The western gable is un-rendered and projects northward in comparison with that to east. To the north-west and south-east of the primary building modern single storey ranges have been added and to the west the projecting bays in the west walls of rooms G23 and F18 above have been constructed in the late 20th – early 20th century. The rendered and painted rear south and east elevations of the building retain little of historic interest (see Appendix 1).

To the rear (south) of the main range, down slope to the south-west, is a stone-rubble built range un-rendered to the east, which retains some evidence of former use, with a blocked opening in the east elevation of a former first floor loading door which suggests that this range

probably functioned as stables/carriage house/garages. The south elevation of this element was not viewed (unable to access) and the west elevation is modern.

2.4.2 Basement

The interior basement of the south range (rooms B12-B18) has been thoroughly modernised, but to the north, and located beneath the western portion of the main domestic range, the two (un-accessed) basement or cellar compartments may retain evidence of early use (rooms B13-B14). Room B11 at the bottom of the stair from F23 is stone built with brick to the openings. The door through from B11 into B12 is probably forced and formerly probably only accessed the cellars of the main building with the stables accessed externally. The single storey eastern wing now projecting from the northern end of the east elevation of the former stables is entirely modern.

2.4.3 Ground Floor

The interior ground floor retains a significant amount of historic detailing, although large parts of the earlier building have been altered and adapted for use other than as a private house. The main entrance/stair hall (G17), along with the south wall of the entrance porch (G16), is completely panelled at ground floor level, including the doors and underside of the stair (Figure 9).



Figure 9: The panelled entrance and stair hall (G17), viewed from the north.

This panelling appears to be older than the building and of 17th century date; worn, with simple moulding and plain panels and with decorated carved and reeded pillasters. The panelling

appears well set but some elements appear uncomfortable and the timberwork is clearly reused here. The stair is also of a late 17th century style; a closed string with chunky balusters. The course of the stair has been altered just below first floor level, now with a modern flight rising to the west from the intermediate landing to first floor level. There is a 19th century neo-gothic fireplace in the centre of the east wall with a large decorative cast iron fireback cemented into the back of the opening.

Accessed via a panelled door in the south-west corner of the entrance hall, the current dining room (G22) retains unremarkable panelled window cases but an apparently intact decorative plaster ceiling above the lower modern ceiling panels (Figure 10).



Figure 10: A small portion of the moulded plaster ceiling, above the modern ceiling in G22.

The room to the south (G23) is also panelled and has an elaborate fireplace with integral overmantle (Figure 11). The panelling is linen fold to the lower portion and with a vine relief to the upper panels. These elements appear to form a cohesive whole and are in the late 19th century neo-gothic style. One of the panels on the north wall is carved with a monogram that apparently includes an 'S' denoting a Singer family connection (Occombe House care assistant *pers. com*), although this is not very decipherable (Figure 12). It is possible that this scheme has been reset as some of the jointing is untidy. The stair to the basement (G19) is accessed via a panelled door in the north-east corner of the room; this is probably a later development as the stair is predominantly constructed of modern cement and concrete block.

Room G21, to the north, unfortunately retains no detailing at all as it has been converted to a kitchen. Rooms G24-G29, accessed from G23, and formerly the first floor of the stable block has been completely modernized and the current office G18 only retains an early 20th century horned sash window, no further detailing.



Figure 11: The elaborate fireplace and panelling on the south wall of room G23, from the north-east.



Figure 12: Detail of the panelling on the north wall of G23 with central monogram, from the south.

Rooms G7-G14 appear to comprise the original service end of the building. Most of the interior however has been modernized to create ground floor accommodation and little detail remains besides the architrave around some of the door openings which matches that of rooms F14-F16 (see Figure 13). Room G9 has this type of architrave to the interior and a 1930s cupboard door in the north-east corner.

2.4.4 First Floor

At first floor level the remaining detailing consists primarily of moulded door frames, architrave and skirting. There appear to be two distinct types of moulded architrave used, with the most elaborate being the most common. The less common moulding is present around the door openings into F14, F15 & F16 (Figure 13), all within the north-west corner of the building, whereas the other is present throughout the rest of the first floor (Figure 13) excluding the east end of corridor F1, rooms F2 & F3 and F18, all of which are modern.



Figure 13: Left – The architrave type of door frames to rooms F14, F16 and F17 (interior). Right - The architrave type of door frames to rooms F01, F04, F07, F08, F10, F12 & F17 (exterior).

Other 19th century elements found include hornless sash windows, with 2x3 panes per sash, in the west wall of rooms F14 & F15. G14 has a decorative cast iron fire surround, with a blocked arched opening, in the centre of the north wall. F12 is a former dressing room with surviving 19th century built-in cupboards and wardrobes (Figure 14).

Access to and from the main stair (F11) appears to have been altered, with the current door into corridor F13 having been forced and an earlier arrangement formerly accessing the first floor to the east (F1) via a larger opening, now functioning as a cupboard.



Figure 14: The north-east corner of former dressing room F12, from the south-west.

Room F13, in the south-east corner of the main building, retains a (probably local) marble fire surround (Figure 16), with a blocked opening, in the east wall.



Figure 15: Fireplace in the east wall of room F13, from the west.

3.0 Conclusion

Occombe House is a mid-19th century gentry residence which has seen significant alterations and additions since its original construction. This appraisal has highlighted that there are a number of architectural features of 19th century origin which should, where possible be retained. Further elements of historic detail may be revealed during any future building works. The re-used 17th century staircase and panelling is also worthy of retention. There is potential for a more detailed documentary study to be carried out to ascertain who first constructed and resided at Occombe, especially given the possible Singer family links.

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Appendix 1

Photographic Record



Figure 16: The fireplace in the north wall of Room F14, from the south-east.

Figure 17: The hornless sash window in the west wall of F14, from the east.



Figure 18: The door into F14, with moulded architrave as to rooms F15 & F16, from the south.

Figure 19: Opening in corridor F01 to the east of F13, from the west.



Figure 20: Window in toilet F08, from the south.

Figure 21: Window in toilet F07, from the south.



Figure 22: Fireplace in the east wall of the ground floor entrance/stair hall G17, from the west.

Figure 23: Elaborate cast iron fireback cemented into the fireplace in G17, from the west.



Figure 24: Upper portion of timber pilaster to west of the entrance door in north wall of G17, from the south.

Figure 25: Detail of the lower portion of pilaster as above.



Figure 26: The western door leading from the entrance porch G16, with panelled cupboard to north, from the north-east.



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Figure 29: Detail of ionic capital of pilaster beneath the stair and landing on the west wall of G17, from the east.
Figure 30: Detail of ionic capital of pilaster below the landing rail on the east wall of G17, from the west.



Figure 31: The current kitchen, G21, from the modern opening in the north wall of G22.



Figure 32: The south wall of G22, with framed, panelled alcove to the west and door opening into G23 to the east, from the north.



Figure 33: Corridor G26, from the north.

Figure 34: B11, with doors from stair B09 & corridor B12, from the north.



Figure 35: The east elevation of the former stable block to the south of the house, from the east.



Figure 36: The east elevations of the southern elements of Occombe House, from the east.



Figure 37: The north-eastern end of Occombe House, from the north-east.



Figure 38: The north and east elevations of *Fairwinds*, from the north-east.



Figure 39: The south elevation of *Fairwinds* adjoining the north-west corner of Occombe House, from the south.



Figure 40: The west elevation of Occombe House, from the west.



Figure 41: The west elevation of Occombe House, with modernized former stable block to south, from the north-west.



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