

**The Rails**  
**Holyport Green, Bray**  
**Windsor and Maidenhead, Berkshire**  
*Historic Building Assessment*

John Moore Heritage Services

February 2010

# **The Rails, Holyport Green, Bray**

## **Windsor and Maidenhead, Berkshire**

### ***Historic Building Assessment***

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

##### **1.1 Location**

- 1.1.1 The Rails is a Grade II listed building on the south-west side of Holyport Green in Bray, (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Berkshire. It is one of a number of historic buildings around the open green, which is in the Holyport Conservation Area.

##### **1.2 Commission**

- 1.2.1 Julian Munby of Oxford Archaeology has been commissioned by John Moore Heritage Services to carry out the assessment of The Rails that was commenced by Kirsty Rodwell in January 2010, with regard to the architectural and historic interest of the building in relation to current proposals for alterations.
- 1.2.2 This follows a Consultation report from the Conservation Officer for the Royal Borough, dated 13 November 2009, requesting an 'Interpretive Historical Building Survey' to inform decisions about the building.

#### **2 BACKGROUND**

##### **2.1 Designations**

- 2.1.1 The Rails, Holyport is a Grade II Listed Building, first listed on 25 March 1955, described as a timber-framed 'Cottage now small house', dating from the 'Mid C16, extended C17, altered C20' (see Appendix below for a copy of the list entry).
- 2.1.2 The listed building is in the centre of Holyport Conservation Area, which was the subject of a Conservation Area Statement (October 1994) that drew attention to the interest of the historic and listed buildings around the Green, and their diversity of age, style and size. There are at least two hall houses of the 14th century, and several timber-framed buildings of the 15th and 16th centuries, including The Rails, as well as later brick cottages.
- 2.1.3 The 'Group Value' of the listing is an important matter, and the 1994 CA Statement states at para. 4.6:

*The buildings that front onto the central core of the Green are of many different styles and periods but they combine to form a well established group of buildings...*

## 2.2 History of Development

- 2.2.1 The buildings around Holyport Green are part of the hamlet of Holyport in the historic Berkshire parish of Bray (that included Maidenhead). Bray was a royal manor, but the hamlet of Holyport, or some part of it, was in the manor of Cresswell of Philberds (*VCH Berks iii*, 1923, 93ff), whose manor house was at the north end of Holyport Street. The larger area was in the Binfield Walk of the Fines Bailiwick in the Forest of Windsor (Norden's map of 1607). The forest setting is relevant for the landscape history, since the geology and soils meant that there were many scattered settlements around greens and dispersed woodland, favouring peripheral building of cottages rather than compact villages.
- 2.2.2 Holyport Green is L-shaped with classic funnelled entrances and a large rectangular area onto which The Rails faces. No further historical research has been undertaken for the purposes of the present report, or a map regression, but with a house of this age it should appear on all historic maps in something like its present form, and there may be little additional information to be gained.

## 2.3 The Rails

- 2.3.1 The Rails has recently been sold, and was acquired in a state of poor repair with badly deteriorated areas of timber framing and brick infill, especially in the NW and SE gables at the sides of the main block. They have been or will be repaired, and in addition there are proposals for re-ordering the interior and adding a garden room at the rear and an additional bedroom over a study at the side.

# 3 THE RAILS

## 3.1 Introduction and general description

- 3.1.1 The Rails faces north-east onto the green, and consists of a main two-bay block with its gable end facing the green, and two side extensions, that to the front on the right side facing north-west, and one to the rear on the left side facing south-east.

## 3.2 Exterior

- 3.2.1 *The (NE) front* is timber-framed and brick filled, with a central gable and a 19th-century brick stack built outside the frame, shouldered on the left side. The sill beam (visible inside) is covered externally by an offset plinth. The corner posts and intermediate studs are visible, as are the first-floor plate and tie beam. There are subsidiary rails visible at first-floor level making large square panels. In the roof there are posts below the collar and a modern barge-board. The modern casement windows have six lights and the roof has peg tiles. The lower window on the right of the stack has a sloping board above it to deflect rain.
- 3.2.2 *The Northern (right) side extension* with a lateral gable roof is timber-framed in two bays, slumped down at the outer end, with a mid post and rails forming large square panels in the framing. There are bolted iron ties holding the extension to the main frame. It has casement windows on ground and first floor, which may be older than the others in the front elevation, but are unlikely to be original. That on the ground floor would seem (with the brickwork beneath it) to be filling a blocked door that once cut through the timber rail.
- 3.2.3 The side (NW) gable wall of this extension has exposed timber framing (partly damaged by the failure of the brick filling). There is a sill beam running between the corner posts,

a plate at first-floor level, and a tie beam at eaves level. The gable wall does not have the rails giving the proportions seen in the front wall, and there is a low ground floor (with four intermediate posts), and a tall first floor (with two visible posts and a brace). The roof has a collar clasping the protruding purlins, held on two queen struts.

- 3.2.4 *The Southern (left) extension* is set back behind a lean-to porch, with a parallel roof of similar size to the right extension and one corner post visible. Again the framing is in large panelling, and there are modern windows on ground and first floor. The front door in the porch has a beaded frame (tongue-and-groove boarding, with 19th-cent. door furniture). The porch is of brick below and cross latticed above and is not recent.
- 3.2.5 The side (SE) wall of this extension has exposed timber framing which was very badly damaged by the failure and collapse of the brick filling. There is a sill beam running between the corner posts with three intermediate posts rising to the horizontal plate at storey height. In the gable the tie beam and collar are visible, with brick infilling between them. This area of damaged framing and infill (most of the infill had gone) had a temporary repair consisting of black polythene and timber; this has now been removed and the timber framing replaced with oak, including a new sill, and what was left of the infill has been replaced, with make up of hand-made Michelmersh bricks, the windows have been replaced with painted softwood windows of the same pattern.
- 3.2.6 Behind the south extension is an added lean-to built of brick with a long catslide roof towards the rear elevation descending almost to ground level. The side wall has a single timber above the door running to the purlin (and also iron-strapped to the extension frame); the door is a 19th-cent. boarded door with strap hinges and a two-light casement beside it. The rear wall has a low brick wall (c.1.20 m high) below the catslide and a tall (and outward-leaning) brick chimney that may once have served a washhouse. The ends of regular softwood rafters are seen in the eaves. The other return wall is largely brick, with a two-light casement window.
- 3.2.7 *The (SW) front* is timber-framed and brick filled. The lower part of the wall and the sill beam has been entirely rebuilt in brick, and the central post is sawn off above ground level; there is a pair of modern six-light casements on either side of it.
- 3.2.8 The posts and mid-rail divide the wall into four large panels, with two windows on the ground and one window on the first floor. On the first floor there is a central and three other posts, and a straight brace across the upper right corner from the post towards the tie beam, though the tie does not survive for the full width. At attic level the collar is an externally applied plank.
- 3.2.9 In the west re-entrant angle between the gabled range and the (NW) extension is a weather-boarded shed built against the lateral stack of the gable range. The return wall of the extension range is underbuilt in brick at ground floor level, with framing posts surviving above this.

### **3.3 Interior Ground Floor**

- 3.3.1 There are two principal rooms (front and back) in the main gabled range.
- 3.3.2 The *Front Room* is entered from the hall through a square-headed door, with an early 19<sup>th</sup>-cent panelled door. The boarded floor is slightly lower than the hall and the ceiling is lath and plaster, the walls are panelled in matchboarding to a dado line, the fireplace has a late 19<sup>th</sup>-cent brick surround. The remainder of the walls are lath and plaster except for

the chimney which is brickwork, and there is a ceiling beam running to the front wall where it is carried on a visible post in the external wall

- 3.3.3 The *Back Room* is entered from the hall through square-headed door with a chamfered (stopped) frame below the storey plate and a large post between this and the front room. The door is early 19th-cent tongue-and-groove boarded (with a cut out sliding spy hole). The boarded floor is slightly raised and there is a low textured finish (Artex) ceiling, and there is a matchboard dado around the whole room.
- 3.3.4 The *partition* between front and back has five visible posts, the most substantial supporting the ceiling beam which is chamfered and stopped (the stops are not matching) running to the back wall where it is carried on the post between the windows.
- 3.3.5 In the NW wall is a fireplace with an area of exposed stone and a timber lintel, and a small Georgian fireplace surround probably of c.1800, and a 20th-cent. brick centre.
- 3.3.6 The N *extension* is reached through a low corner doorway with a boarded door; it is a narrow room all lined with matchboarding and shelves (was it once a shop?). The low ceiling (1.7 m high) is also boarded, and in the wall to the main house there is some exposed framing. This consists of a sill beam on a brick plinth (and front corner post), a plate at ceiling level plate and in the wall posts and infill studs.
- 3.3.7 The *entrance hall* has a tiled floor, the stair and door to the scullery. There is an exposed beamed ceiling but the walls are mostly boarded.
- 3.3.8 The *Scullery* at the back is in the lean-to portion; it has visible framing of the main house, with posts, studs and rails. There are remnants of a removed feature next the chimney. Its most recent use has been a kitchen and it has a 19th-cent. boarded door.

### 3.4 Interior First Floor and Stair

- 3.4.1 The *stair* is a tight winder with a framed back wall and the main range framing; the treads look 19th-cent. Under the stairs a small cupboard with a three-panel section of 17th-cent. panelling (as mentioned in the List) with scratch mouldings and painted cream. Stairs wind back at the head but probably went straight on as can be seen in the landing where there are timber sockets for continuing balusters that went on. The change was for the bathroom that is a modern creation (with modern tongue-and-groove boarding.)
- 3.4.2 The open part of the roof space has straight wind-braces at the end, but the plastered attic space in the outshot is not very informative in this respect. The two doors to front and back rooms look as if their openings were made as a pair to open into the stair, suggesting that the hall/stair may well be contemporary with the main part of building.
- 3.4.3 The *front bedroom* has a 19th-cent. wooden floor and a 20th-cent. washbasin, and two modern casement windows. The ceiling is at collar level so the lower roof slope is visible in the room. The framing in the front wall has a cambered tie beam with a central and two side posts; the side framing is partly visible where not plastered (e.g. the main wallplate at eaves level) and there are straight wind-braces in the lower part of the roof.
- 3.4.4 The old *partition* between the front and back rooms is braced in the corners from post to tie beam, and a pair of posts in the centre may be a former doorway. The tie beam has two queenposts and three studs above it, and there is a mortice in both tie beams for an axial timber, suggesting that the room was ceiled over once at a lower level. The door to the landing is a fine old pair of wide elm boards with face mounted strap hinges and on

reverse an unusual large rotating bar that hooks into sockets at each end (one up and one down - complete with pin to hold it in place).

- 3.4.5 The door to the (N) *extension* is 3-panel 3- board tongue-and-groove with loop hinges (late 18th/early 19th-cent.); the floor level is two steps down. Timber framing is visible on inner and outside walls. The cupboard in the corner is made from a panelled door of uncertain age, part repaired. The floor is of narrow plain-edged softwood boards.
- 3.4.6 The *back room* has a floor of old and mended wide boards. The framing of the partition is visible as on the other side; the door wall is plastered, and the external (SW) wall has visible framing: a cambered tie beam and three posts on side with diagonal corner braces (as outside). The fireplace wall has a wallplate, and a possible former door to the (N) extension where a new door is planned. There is a fireplace (in the main stack), with brick reveals (with older plaster inside) and a dark wood surround with a cornice moulding, possibly 18th-cent. The 19th-cent. door to the stairs has three pine boards, braces on the back and L-hinges.

## 4 ASSESSMENT

### 4.1 Date and Phasing

- 4.1.1 The oldest part is the main gabled range, which may be contemporary with the hall/stair tower, while the (N) extension was added later (though perhaps not much later), and the rear lean-to last of all.
- 4.1.2 Apart from the general character of the framing there is not much dating evidence to be seen, though there is no reason to doubt the listing dates of 16th and 17th centuries, given the size and quality of some of the framing, the large square panels of the framing, and the use of straight wind-braces and clasped purlins.

### 4.2 Listed status

- 4.2.1 The Rails is properly listed at Grade II as a building of special architectural and historic interest, and makes a positive contribution to the Holyport Conservation Area in the group aspect of its relationship to the Green and other houses on the Green.

### 4.3 Historic and Architectural Assessment

- 4.3.1 The Rails is a good example of a common-edge property, originating as a modest framed cottage or house of the 16th/17th century and expanded in stages. The timber-framing is well-preserved in parts but has no outstanding features. Doors and fireplaces seem to be later, but some are decent vernacular examples.
- 4.3.2 The damage to the brickwork and historic diminution of the frame has somewhat lessened the interest of the building but its character as a framed building is easily apparent, especially from the Green.
- 4.3.3 The rear view of the house is a lesser aspect, but the lean-to roof is a marked vernacular feature that is an important part of the character of the building, although this is a more recent part.
- 4.3.4 Change and growth has been part of the history of this property, and it is not unreasonable to expect that it can continue to change, in the given context of a modest-sized house of traditional appearance and character.

## 5 THE CURRENT PROPOSALS

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 The fabric of The Rails is in reasonable condition with localised areas of failing brick infill that need repair. The rear chimney is not vertical. The current proposals are for modest re-arrangement of living space in the house and with some additions, but all designed to retain the character of the listed building. Repairs to framing and replacement of damaged modern windows can be carried out in a like-for like approach that will minimise change.

### 5.2 Ground Floor Proposals

- 5.2.1 The *Front right* outer wall of the front room would be repaired and rebuilt.  
*Impact of proposal:* The wall is to be rebuilt is the same general character as the existing fabric
- 5.2.2 The *Rear left* room is to be refitted.  
*Impact of proposal:* There will be no changes affecting the historic character of the fabric.
- 5.2.3 In the *Kitchen* a pair of doors is made where the window to give access to the garden room.  
*Impact of proposal:* The windows are modern and the doors can be made without having an impact of original framing.
- 5.2.4 A *Garden Room* will be added outside the kitchen, with a new *Dining area* on the right side next the garage.  
*Impact of proposal:* The additions will have no impact on the historic fabric, but will have a minor impact on the appearance of the rear elevation, mitigated by the formation of a new gabled profile. The precise design of the kitchen room/conservatory may be a matter for further consultation, as it is not always certain whether a 'new' and contrasting design or a more traditional 'matching' design is better suited to making such additions.

### 5.3 First Floor Proposals

- 5.3.1 The *Landing room* will be refitted as a bathroom  
*Impact of proposal:* There will be no changes affecting the character or the historic fabric.
- 5.3.2 The *Rear room* will have a new partition to form a corridor, with a new door formed in the NW end.  
*Impact of proposal:* The change in size of the back room will not be a significant effect on its historic character. The only changes affecting the historic fabric will be the new door, which is not expected to impact on frame posts, but may encounter an intermediate stud.
- 5.3.3 The *Front right* room is to be refitted as two en-suite bath/shower rooms. The SW end of the room is closed off, and access to the new *Bedroom* will be through the old roof. The outer wall is being repaired and rebuilt, and the bathroom floor will be raised.

*Impact of proposal:* The repair of the outer wall will be beneficial, and the raising of the bathroom floor could retain the historic joists if necessary. The removal of the rear roof slope will not have a significant impact on historic fabric (again, any historic rafters could be retained, and the character of a gabled elevation will be preserved).

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1.1 The Rails is of interest as an historic framed building on the edge of a common dating from the 16th/17th century in an area of mixed character and periods.
- 6.1.2 The building is in poor condition locally, and the proposed works will involve repairs to the historic fabric which will be beneficial.
- 6.1.3 The extensions are modest in size and character and will not change the overall character of a small house, except for its changed aspect at the rear.
- 6.1.4 The removal of fabric will be localised, and seems unlikely to have an impact on significant parts of the historic frame, though lesser elements may be encountered in opening up. These areas could be further investigated if required, and should in any case be observed and recorded during works.



## **APPENDIX: The List Description**

*Source:* Listed Buildings Online, 15 February 2010)

*Building Name:* THE RAILS

*Parish:* BRAY

*District:* WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

*County:* BERKSHIRE

*Postcode:* SL6 2JL

*LBS Number:* 41099

*Grade:* II

*Date Listed:* 25/03/1955

*NGR:* SU8916977749

*Listing Text:*

BRAY THE GREEN

SU 8977

(south side)

21/7 Holyport

25.3.55 The Rails

G.V. II

Cottage, now small house. Mid C16, extended C17, altered C20. Timber frame, painted brick infill; old tile gabled roof. T-plan of 2x1 framed bays with additional framed bay on right. 2 storeys. 2 chimneys, one with clay pots. C19 and C20 casement windows with glazing bars. Entrance (north-east) front: facing The Green. Scattered fenestration; left-hand section set back, one 2-light window on first floor, one single-light window on ground floor and lean-to entrance porch in right corner, with plank door and small wooden fence and entrance gate. Gabled section in centre with projecting chimney to left of centre with one offset. Plinth. Two, 2-light windows on both floors. Right-hand section with lower roof ridge; one 2-light window on right of first floor, a similar window on left of ground floor. Interior: fragment of C17 wall panelling brought in from elsewhere.

Listing NGR: SU8916977749