

Strawberry Hill Trust

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STRAWBERRY HILL HOUSE
Restoration of Walpole's Villa
as a heritage site

SUPPORTING INFORMATION
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1. SUMMARY

Walpole's villa is of exceptional cultural significance both architecturally and historically. It is an iconic building of the Gothic Revival and important in relation to social and political history as well as the development of literature. Much of the eighteenth-century house and its setting survives largely intact, in parallel with clear evidence of the later occupation, particularly from the times of Lady Waldegrave and the Vincentian Fathers.

Walpole's eighteenth-century villa is now redundant to the needs of a modern university because of the scale and fragility of its accommodation. The buildings are also recognised as posing a significant health and safety risk that need to be carefully managed both in terms of corporate liability as well as the protection of the heritage asset. The Board of Governors considered selling this part of the complex as a private house. However, it was felt that this option would destroy the long-term relationship of the college with the historic site that has been established since 1923, an aspect that is very significant to St Mary's. In addition, English Heritage discouraged this solution as it would separate elements of the Grade I listed fabric under different, not necessarily sympathetic, management. The College fully appreciates its responsibilities in looking after the heritage asset in its care and has offered a long lease of Walpole's villa and garden to the Strawberry Hill Trust in order that the house may be restored and continue to be available for the benefit of the public. The maintenance of public access is of great importance.

Arrangements for the occasional joint use of the Waldegrave Wing with Walpole's villa would not only allow Lady Waldegrave's house to be understood, but also give regulated access by the College to Walpole villa at other times such as graduation.

The tower, extended by Lady Waldegrave would be used as a vacation flat that generates income. This together with revenues from occasional filming or corporate use will support the opening of the house. A Business Plan has been prepared and demonstrates the proposed use as a heritage site is viable and has a sustainable future.

The scheme is as a result of an informal partnership for the preservation of Strawberry Hill between St. Mary's University College and the Strawberry Hill Trust and reflects the various interests of the different yet complementary constituents. It follows the study of a series of options and is seen to be in the best interest of the heritage asset.

Extensive research of primary and secondary sources has taken place to establish the detail history of the building fabric. The results are tabulated in the Analysis of Fabric. From this information the Conservation Statement has been prepared and a full Management Plan is now being developed. Sections 3-6 of this document provide a summary of the Conservation Statement and section 10 sets out the policies of the Strawberry Hill Trust for Walpole's villa and garden, and it is on these that the submitted scheme is based.

2. THE PROPERTY

The property is the principal section of Horace Walpole's original estate known as Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. The freeholders are the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols and the Most Reverend Vincent Malone as trustees and occupied by St Mary's University College, a college of the University of Surrey.

An Agreement to Lease is currently being finalised between the freeholder and the Strawberry Hill Trust under which the Trust will take a long lease of Walpole's together with the associated area of the historic garden. Space for an additional education room is also included in the Waldegrave Wing. The Trust will open the house and garden as a heritage site and education resource, supported by income from a vacation flat on the top floors of the villa. The remainder of the site remains in academic use by St Mary's University College.

Walpole's original villa and the New Offices, now the centre of the college's administrative activities, were constructed as two freestanding buildings and formed Walpole's idyllic sub-urban retreat and domestic offices with stable (the New Offices built under the direction of James Wyatt, 1796) on his Strawberry Hill estate. The Waldegrave Wing (1857 – 1861) joined Walpole's two buildings into one 'L'-shaped house with a large drawing room in the new wing and converted Horace Walpole's domestic offices into additional bedrooms. The three sections (Walpole's villa, the New Offices and the Waldegrave Wing) that form the enlarged house ("Strawberry Hill House") are included as one entity in the Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest; Grade 1.

The Strawberry Hill estate was purchased in 1923 by the Catholic Education Council. Over the next three years, the firm Pugin & Pugin designed and built a series of new academic buildings and a chapel to the south of the eighteenth & nineteenth century buildings to accommodate St Mary's Training College. From 1926 until 1993 Walpole's Villa was carefully and sensitively used as accommodation for the Vincentian fathers, who were responsible for the administration and teaching at the college. Further extension southwards was carried out in the 1950s under Sir Albert Richardson, focussing on a new, larger chapel that was located on the south boundary of Walpole's garden. Alterations to Walpole's villa were carried out by both Pugin & Pugin and Richardson. The campus has since expanded with additional academic buildings and now stretches beyond the boundary of Walpole's original estate.

It is the original eighteenth and nineteenth-century buildings at the north end of the site that are the subject of this application. It does not include the 20C College buildings or the remote historic buildings (i.e. The Chapel in the Woods, the Summerhouse, or the Dairy) or the new stable building constructed by Lady Waldegrave when she incorporated Walpole's New Offices into the house. These all lie securely embedded within the College site and are listed separately.

Approximately half of the enlarged St Mary's College site is included in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and is registered Grade II. The land to the east that formed water meadows stretching down to the Thames, and that to the north of Waldegrave Road, where Walpole had a garden surrounding his separate cottage, were developed as housing between the Wars and do not form part of the Registered Landscape.

Strawberry Hill House was included in English Heritage's 'Buildings at Risk Register' because there was no clear future use for the Grade I listed structure. It was included on the World Monuments Fund Watch List of the World's 100 Most Endangered Sites for 2004-2006.

3. HISTORY

Eighteenth century

Strawberry Hill in Twickenham is the most important Gothic revival building of the eighteenth century. Within the present visible structure lies a modest building of the 1690s, enlarged in the 1720s. In 1747 the building and a few acres were rented by the politician, collector, author and dilettante Horace Walpole, the youngest son of Britain's first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. Within two years of his acquisition of the lease, Walpole set out to create at Strawberry Hill (a name he linked with the Domes Day survey) a villa to join the many others built along the fashionable stretch of the Thames between Chiswick and Hampton. But Walpole's villa would be different, for it was to be 'a little Gothic castle'. This was both a reaction to the Palladian style of the other villas and a suitable setting for his continuously growing collection of art and antiquities. Serious building began in 1748 and did not cease until 1790. At the same time the property grew to 46 acres and Walpole created one of the earliest informal landscape gardens and pleasure ground. The house was enlarged from its original square block to form an asymmetrical plan with a Long Gallery terminating in a round tower. The garden was given a number of gothic follies and other built features including the Chapel in the Wood and the New Offices, a detached, plainer pavilion designed by Horace Walpole and built under the direction of James Wyatt and James Essex to house the services for the house.

The Gothic revival style was not new when Walpole began work, but at Strawberry Hill it became unprecedentedly serious. The innovations lay in two areas: the conscious asymmetry of plan and the use of accurate Gothic sources in the creation of internal features. Although Walpole used a number of architects, from talented amateurs like John Chute of The Vine to professionals like Robert Adam, James Wyatt and James Essex, these two highly influential innovations were Walpole's own contribution. A third innovation was also his own, namely the creation of atmospheric historicist interiors that were calculated to reflect the nature of the collections shown in the house. The power of these interiors on Walpole himself became evident in his Castle of Otranto, the first Gothic novel in English.

Walpole's Strawberry Hill was a famous sight in Walpole's own lifetime. In terms of architecture and contents, it is one of the most thoroughly documented British houses. The house not only forms the background of much of Walpole's celebrated correspondence, and is extensively shown in prints and paintings, but it was the subject of the first illustrated account of any British house. The Description of Strawberry Hill (second ed. 1784) allows us to reconstruct the house and its collections with very great accuracy. Following a sale in 1842, the contents were scattered. One of the biggest concentrations of objects, books, letters, Mss and house documentation is at the Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington Connecticut. Many others are found throughout collections in the UK, Europe and North America.

Nineteenth century

At Walpole's death in 1797 the house passed within his family to the sculptress Anne Seymour Damer, and later to the Earls Waldegrave and through marriage to Frances Braham, later Countess Waldegrave, who became the house's chatelaine and was responsible for its rescue after the great 1842 Christies sale. From 1856 to 1873 she turned Walpole's villa and service building into a suitable setting for her activities as political hostess. Lady Waldegrave continued Walpole's tradition by designing her own addition, but her building, described as in the style of Barry's Palace of Westminster, features substantially built rooms of grander proportions. A great new drawing room, dining room and billiard room were housed in a new wing, which extended Walpole's house and joined it to the New Offices which were converted to guest accommodation. Lady Waldegrave's alterations within Walpole's villa were generally modest; her aim was to turn the Walpole rooms into a seamless preamble to the grandeur of her own addition. The exception is the tented Turkish Boudoir, created out of Walpole's Breakfast Parlour. At the same time much of the exterior was refaced in Roman Cement, its scale and detailing Victorianised, and Elizabethan style chimneypots in an attempt to unify the two principal wings. The circular tower at the junction between the two was raised an additional storey to provide a suitable link between the two buildings. To replace the New Offices, Lady Waidegrave built a utilitarian stable block to the west of her new wing.

After Lady Waidegrave's death in 1879, Strawberry Hill passed to her husband, Chichester Fortescue, Lord Carlingford, but the house and its contents were sold in 1883 to Baron H. de Stern after abortive proposals for converting it to an hotel. Although some decoration was carried out, the house remained with very little change.

Twentieth Century

In 1923 the Strawberry Hill estate was purchased for the Vincentian Community. In 1925 St Mary's College occupied the buildings, the oldest part of the Walpole building becoming the residence of the Principal and the rest of the Vincentian Fathers. The ground landlord was (and remains) the Catholic Education Council (now Service). Until the early 1950s Walpole's house remained in much the same state as in the 1870s, but for the addition of College buildings to the south. At that date Sir Albert Richardson, the College architect, returned to their eighteenth century state a number of external features altered by Lady Waldegrave. In the early 1960s a number of the smaller rooms and the hall were redecorated in a manner more sympathetic to the eighteenth century. In the early 1980s dry-rot necessitated the complete rebuilding (with financial support from English Heritage) of the Holbein Chamber and dismantling and reconstruction of the Library and parts of the Hall (as well as a complete reroofing). In the course of these works many discoveries were made about the construction of the house. In 1991 and 1992 the College commissioned reports on accommodation strategy and on the use of the Walpole building for corporate hospitality. In 1993 the Vincentian Fathers vacated Walpole's villa. It remains the property of the Catholic Education Service and part of St. Mary's University College.

Lady Waldegrave's enlarged villa was further extended in a sympathetic gothic style by the College, in the second, fifth and ninth decades of the 20th century. However, the college's extensions had little impact on Walpole's villa which remained, located at the north end of the property as the private residence of the Vincentian Fathers who ran St Mary's. The retention of domestic use thus meant that the house changed comparatively little in the 20th century.

Site

A similar pattern of development can be seen with the site itself. The structure of the gardens to the south of the house survives very much as left by Walpole, but with subsequent embellishment by Lady Waldegrave. The area of change is to the north where, to provide a fitting entrance for Lady Waldegrave's guests, and in order to provide greater privacy, a new forecourt was created and consequent relocation of the road further to the north, destroyed Walpole's flower garden and isolated his cottage. Well established planting now screens the early 20th-century extensions and the latter development of the College is on land to the south of the original property, beyond Walpole's original boundary plantation that survives. The use by the fathers placed the north end of the site largely 'out of bounds' and secured its survival.

Beyond the site boundaries, the setting has changed with development of housing in the late nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century and to the east in the 1930s. The river Thames is near by and many of the west London fashionable villas of the seventeenth and eighteenth century survive, several which are opened by public bodies and private owners. The eighteenth century Thames Arcadia defined by villas and pleasure grounds bordering the river still a defining characteristic of the region.

Current Ownership

The estate has been occupied by St Mary's University College and its forebears through the Catholic Education Service since 1923. The College (Registered Charity 312935) has recently been brought within the University of Surrey, and provides undergraduate and post graduate courses in a variety of subjects.

The College, has worked hard over the past 70 years to maintain the historic fabric of Walpole's house. Without the Catholic Education Council purchase of the site in 1923 it is questionable that Walpole's architectural legacy would be ours today. The use of Walpole's villa by St Mary's College is without question the reason for the house's survival. However, with the removal of accommodation and the college's changed education programme, its only consistent use over the past thirteen years has been corporate entertainment and rental to film production companies. Without a clear conservation-minded use of Walpole's fragile house it will not survive for future generations

4. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Strawberry Hill is a property of outstanding importance. Its statutory listing as Grade I places it within the top 4% of listed properties in this country and its inclusion in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens adds to the importance of the entity of Walpole's house and garden. It is remarkable to note that the core of Walpole's estate remains intact even if the water meadows to the east have been built over. The listing of the house covers the original house (Walpole's villa), and the wing added by Lady Waldegrave, but also extends to the New Offices built by Walpole (now the college's administrative offices). The Chapel in the Woods is listed in its own right. All the other buildings on the site constructed before 1947 would also be protected as curtilage buildings even if not specifically referred to in the listing. That would cover the boundary wall, Lady Waldegrave's stables and the buildings designed by Pugin and Pugin that extend south of the New Offices which were constructed for the College after its acquisition of the site. Buildings beyond the boundary with the sports field are outside the historic site and one would argue are not curtilage buildings.

The significance of Strawberry Hill, however, is greater than its statutory listing. The house is one of the most significant monuments of eighteenth century architecture and culture. Its significance derives from its association with the social and political commentator, historian, antiquary and collector Horace Walpole (1717-1797), who with the help of a succession of amateur and professional architects turned it into the most important and influential building of the early Gothic revival. Strawberry Hill is to the Gothic Revival what Chiswick House is to the Palladian movement, not just an example but an iconic structure. The Gothic Revival had its foundations in a literary movement and Walpole's own writings were a focus of this. Strawberry Hill was pioneering in its use of antiquarian and archaeological design sources and picturesque planning. Its Gothic interiors, created to display Walpole's famous collection of art and antiquities, established a type of antiquarian interior that is still current. The same rooms inspired Walpole to write The Castle of Otranto (1764), the first Gothic novel. The gardens and grounds, early examples of Picturesque planning in the manner of William Kent, were essential to the effect of the house. The fame of the house, grounds and collections was established by the Description of Strawberry Hill (1784), the earliest fully-illustrated account of any British house. The house also has broader cultural significance as the setting for much of Walpole's social life, recorded in his famous letters, as well as being the location of his library, manuscript and print collection, which formed the working material for his pioneering historical research and writing.

In the nineteenth century the house and its later extensions were significant as the setting for the political activities of Frances, Lady Waldegrave.

There is also significance in the occupation by St Mary's College that has extended over a period of seventy-five years, a third of the time that the building has existed. Through the adoption of the building as a College, the Fathers without doubt saved Strawberry Hill from commercial development in the 1920s in a period when the building was particularly undervalued. Wilmarth Lewis had fantasies of moving the building to reconstruct it in America, but it is the College that has to be recognised

for preserving the building and its setting *in situ* and without doubt the College has been conscientious in its care for Strawberry Hill.

The development of the College by Pugin and Pugin in the 1920s and Sir Albert Richardson, Houfe and Partners in the 1950s carefully respected the historic buildings, skilfully combining the new with the old so that the image of St. Mary's University College is that of Walpole's Strawberry Hill. However, over the last eighty years there has been progressive erosion of quality as architectural details were lost in a series of campaigns of repair or minor alteration.

The setting of Strawberry Hill was developed by Walpole as one of the most important gardens of the second half of the 18th century and its planting and layout in certain areas anticipated that of Repton in the next generation. As with the house, under Lady Waldegrave the site was further developed within the context of respect for what Walpole had achieved. Whilst the outlying areas have been built over for housing, the core of the historic garden remains remarkably intact. A rare survival in an area rich in villas of the 18th century.

The area surrounding Strawberry Hill House which will be taken over by the Strawberry Hill Trust is a major green space in a suburban built-up area. It is rich in bird life and, once restored, will become a haven for nature lovers, historic garden enthusiasts and plant lovers.

5. STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Without doubt the villa and garden as developed by Walpole over a period of fifty years are the most significant elements of Strawberry Hill as an innovatory example of Gothick Revival Architecture and can be considered as having exceptional significance.

The degree that Walpole's house and garden survives intact adds to the significance of the site as a rare survival.

The alterations carried out by Lady Waldegrave have some significance. Her (comparatively) respectful remodelling of Walpole's villa transformed it to focus on the new wing she constructed, to house the great political soirees that she held. The presence of the Waldegrave Wing and the degree with which the exterior of Walpole's villa was remodelled to complement it cannot be ignored, but the significance of her work rests in the house being a site of political activity rather than in the inherent quality of the design.

The alterations carried out by St Mary's College, have no significance. Outside, the removal of the finials and the extension of the south bay to increase the size of a bedroom sometime before 1950 interfere with the architectural legibility of the two towers with which Walpole bounded the original villa. Inside, the introduction of service space was generally through the modification of existing utilitarian areas, but in some cases, such as the conversion of Walpole's China Closet to a cloakroom, it has to be seen as intrusive. The majority of the decoration dates from the 1960s and reflects the current popular taste for period interiors. Professor Pevsner lamented that the fathers had made the house 'Victorian' when he visited at that time.

Alterations by other owners had little impact on the house, neither detracting from nor enhancing its significance.

The site is important as an historic garden as well as an open space within a built-up suburban area.

The significance is also enhanced by further associations:

Horace Walpole

Strawberry Hill was the focus of Walpole's life for half a century, his collections, his work as an author, and his printing press.

Hon Mrs Damer

Walpole left the house to his niece, Ann Damer, the sculptor, who worked at the house.

Lady Waldegrave

Lady Waldegrave's soirees were at the centre of British politics in the mid 19th century.

St Mary's University College

St Mary's University College is affiliated to the University of Surrey. It is a major university for teacher training and part of the Catholic Education Service who bought the site in 1923. For many years the Vincentian fathers, who were the teaching staff for the college, used Walpole's Villa as their residence.

Strawberry Hill House is recognised as the image for St Mary's University College, and it adds greatly to the prestige of the College to have a Grade One listed building on its site. The Waldegrave Wing is, and will continue to be, used for degree ceremonies and other prestigious meetings. The literature department is keen to work with the new management at Strawberry Hill and to set up courses using Walpole's Villa as an inspiration. Conversely the Strawberry Hill Trust will use accommodation at St Mary's College for summer vacation courses for Open University students or others in connection with courses held in Walpole's Villa. On occasion, Walpole's villa and the Waldegrave Wing will be shown together to the public so that the enhancement of the cultural significance of the site through its association with Lady Waldegrave's political soirees can be understood.