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PROPOSED PRIVATE DWELLING

Land Adjacent to Woodfold Park, Blackburn

Observations on Reason for Refusal #4

By Jan Maciag

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About the Author

I have written this statement in support of the proposed new dwelling, known as Woodfold Villa.

I am an architect, qualified for 35 years with 46 years' architectural experience. I studied architecture at the University of Westminster and the University of Toronto, Canada.

I worked as an assistant to the renowned classical architects Leon Krier (working on the Spitalfields Market redevelopment) and John Simpson, before spending three years as an assistant architect to Quinlan Terry (working on the New Classical RC Cathedral in Brentwood and at Regent Park Villas, Regent's Park London) and a further three years with Sir William Whitfield (working on the Mappa Mundi building Hereford Cathedral and Juxon House at Paternoster Square, London).

I set up my own practice, Jan Maciag Architects, in 1994 in Peterborough, carrying out project work throughout England.

The practice moved to the village of Great Gidding near Huntingdon in 2018 and became Folium Architects in 2019.

As a traditionalist, or classical architect, I first exhibited work at the 1987 exhibition 'Real Architecture.' In 1989, I received an honourable mention for my entry in the Rue de Laeken, Brussels, design competition. I won 2nd Prize in the 1996 Marsham Street Urban Design Competition and I am a contributing architect for the proposed reconstruction of the Neumarkt in Dresden.

I have worked as a tutor at the Prince's Foundation in London and have been Chairman, and Secretary of the Traditional Architecture Group at the RIBA.

I now act as a panel member for the Traditional Architecture Group.

The Proposal of Woodfold Villa
Reason for Refusal: 4

"The proposal would result in an incongruous form of development which would be harmful to the visual amenity of the local area by virtue of the scale and design of the proposed dwellinghouse and the urbanising impact of the totality of built development proposed.

This would be contrary to Policies DMG1 and DMG2 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy 2008 - 2028 as well as the design principles outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework."

Reason 4 hinges on the term "incongruous". It is a relative (compared to what?) term and to assess the veracity of this description it is crucial to state, in some detail, what is the subject of the alleged incongruity. Reason 4 only suggests that this is the cloud of "the visual amenity of the local area."

The applicants have applied for a specific development on a specific site. They have provided drawings, reports and descriptions and are now being challenged to prove that their proposals are not incongruous to something…something nearby.

The scope of this observation is to take in the most prominent features of the local area and prove that the proposal is entirely consistent with the Genius Loci and that it would significantly enhance the area and its historic chronicle.

Introduction

Henry Sudell, born in 1764, was from a prosperous and well-established yeoman family in Blackburn. His life and family resources placed him in a perfect position to reap the commercial opportunities of the industrial revolution to acquire further wealth in the cotton trade and prestige as a grand landowner and, crucially, builder of a new mansion on the Woodfold Estate.

To understand the impetus of Henry Sudell and to assess the significance of Woodfold Hall we need to understand the character and concept of the English Country House as a drawn out narrative over many centuries. To properly assess proposed changes and additions we need to understand how the English Country House retains an identity and how it is also mutable and responsive to the passing conditions of culture and economy.

The Origins of the English Country House

It is possible to regard the elite Roman practice of having a Domus in the town (the focus of civic and political life) and a Villa in the country as the earliest example of what later became the English Country House tradition. The Roman economy was, in essence, agricultural and the country Villa was a development of a farm complex. The villa was usually much larger and grander than the domus but, nevertheless, was a place of bucolic retreat and a display of simple Roman virtus.

With the end of the Roman Empire the Villas either fell into ruin or resumed a previous manifestation as farms, forts and places of local control. The glory and elegance of the Roman Villa was to be resurrected through literature and the rediscovery of the ancient “virtuous life” during the renaissance.

Prior to 1066, in an England of scant population living off a subsistence agricultural economy, dispersed homesteads were an efficient and defensive solution. The arrival of the Normans upended the indigenous hierarchy and introduced the medieval feudal system of military obligations and primogeniture. Norman homesteads became larger and started to acquire things like deer parks and other key components of our understanding of what constitutes an English Country House.

In post 1066 England, land ownership was a reward from the king for loyalty and service. It was not a hereditary right but a generational grant for certain individuals and renewed only at the discretion of the ruler.

Gradually, with the conquest secured, land ownership did become hereditary and became customary. The concept of the local Manor emerged as a place for middling members of the landowning class. The Manor took on the administration of local courts and laws (a useful source of additional funding) but was fundamentally associated with homesteads that had become villages and small towns. The Manor was not an isolated house in the countryside but it was the grandest house in the village. Behind the Manor was the home farm, which had a role in providing the Manor with food and other communal facilities such as a church and school. This arrangement can still be seen in the village of Ewelme in Oxfordshire.

Great estates were, in essence, larger versions of the Manorial Estate. They were frequently anchored on a castle (such as at Framingham, Norfolk) and were attached to a market town rather than a village. They often retained a Park as an ancient area of open forest. It was a place of rural beauty and of relaxation and, as defensive needs subsided during the renaissance, it became the preferred location of a fine new country house. There are few medieval Parks left but “The Park” entered the lexicon of the English Country House by incorporating the venerable character of the old utilitarian landscape. It should be noted that the Park was always a place of buildings “in the landscape.”

A surviving example is Lyne (Park) in Cheshire where a medieval Park was enhanced by a fine new Jacobean House. This was, in turn, replaced with a classical Country House.

By 1485, landowners were of three groups – The Peerage of great landed magnates, the Squirarchy and the lesser landed gentry who could enter this class through outside earnings (chiefly lawyers and merchants) and the purchase of land. The great estates grew through primogeniture and intermarriage and became, in effect, super Estates and family networks. These families – Percy, Neville, Stafford, Beauchamp and Mowbray continue to the modern era. An even greater landowning class in the early 16th century was the church and its monastic network. This was dismantled by King Henry VIII and the years from 1530 to 1630 represent the largest redistribution of land ownership since 1066. The Crown confiscation of monastic assets and the subsequent sale of those assets to private individuals fuelled state spending for a century. All monastic life ended and was replaced by an entire new raft of English Country Houses such as Woburn Abbey, Beaulieu Abbey and Hatfield.

The new owners took to building new country houses. But, in replacing often isolated monasteries, the new country houses expanded the repertoire of the English Country House with the quality of isolation. These establishments, by functional needs alone, needed the usual accompaniment of secondary structures for food production and accommodation. The Park was ubiquitous but the layout of these buildings in the Park took on a more ordered monastic quality.

There was also great commercial development in urban areas of estate land such as the creation by Robert Cecil of Covent Garden (Convent Garden pre-1530) in London. These developments were continued by the Earl of Bedford in Bloomsbury and St James's Square. Later still in the 18th century saw the creation of the Berkeley Square and Grosvenor Square in the West End.

But, even with the very early stirrings of the industrial revolution many estates looked to take advantage of mineral deposits with their grounds. In the 16th century, soon after purchasing Rievaulx Abbey, the Earl of Rutland created an ironworks within the old monastic buildings, which would have been incongruous in its time.

In the 17th century, the Earl of Shrewsbury's land agent was guarding Mary, Queen of Scots at their landholdings at Sheffield Manor. In his spare time, he developed new techniques for iron smelting and knife production that, in time, led to the establishment of the Sheffield metalwork industry.

The English Civil War wrought much destruction and loss of civic control but the country estates escaped largely intact. The preceding years had seen much reform in tenancy arrangements and new ideas in doing business. Many old estates changed hands to allow greater access into the landed gentry by successful businessmen such as Sir Henry Hobart in Blickling, Norfolk and, famously, Sir Edward Coke who started a new dynasty at Holkham, also in Norfolk.

The great landowner became the author of the English landscape from the early 17th to the early 19th century. Open countryside was enclosed, Parks were replanted and augmented by new woodland. New farmhouses were built, lodges and dower houses created, follies and temples erected. Estates were comprehensively improved for food and timber production. Agriculture became a science and the chief land agent became the right-hand man of the progressive landowner.

The 18th century's passion for Italy for adventurous aristocrats in the early 18th century reinforced the conquest of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) on what was the English ideal. The Palladian style of classicism spread with the British Empire but in England it produced some exquisite buildings, all built by the landed gentry and the Estates. Two stand out because they are relatively small (compared with an actual country residence) but also because they embody that drive for Roman/Palladian perfection of form and decoration. Chiswick House and Marble Hill House were both constructed in the 1720's as exquisite standalone entertainment pavilions. Chiswick House (or Villa) was built alongside the Old

Chiswick House, a great Jacobean Country House. This was demolished in 1788 when the wings were added to Lord Burlington's Villa. Little Marble Hill was added to the Estate of Marble Hill House in the 1770s. The house was built for another family member and was a similar size to the proposed Woodfold Villa. Little Marble Hill was demolished in the late 19th century.

Top and Left: Lord Burlington's Chiswick Villa & Old Jacobean House, painting c.1750
Bottom and Right: Little Marble Hill & Marble Hill House

At the same time the English Country Park swung towards a picturesque approach and as an evocation of the imagined ancient landscape depictions of Nicholas Poussin (1594 to 1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600 to 1682). Poussin's famous painting includes the tomb inscription – Et in Arcadia Ego – Arcadia, a lost world and idyllic bliss, the renaissance of Rome, was the romantic ideal. The late 17th and 18th century English Country House became a canvas for a poetic essay on classicism (see Stowe of 1683 as a beginning) fuelled by the fine arts and steeped in the Roman/Italian romance of the Grand Tour.

The works undertaken at the Woodfold Estate were undertaken within a zeitgeist of a simple rural life bathed in the sophistication of Rome and the intellectual life of the Renaissance. Henry Sudell would have aspired to demonstrate his understanding of such culture alongside the commercial world.

But there were further ambitions for an aspiring great landowner such as Henry Sudell. He knew that, as landowner, he had a special relationship with his estate. It was the foundation of his (and his descendants') social and economic importance. Effective power had been transferred to the great landowners in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and had grown since. An 18th century landowner would have seen himself as a neo-Roman carrying forward Arcadia's treasures of literature and architecture. They were heirs of Virgil, Horace and Cicero; men of the countryside who planted gardens and built beautiful buildings. The new house at Holkham was seen by its creator, the 1st Earl of Leicester, as a recreation of Pliny's villa in Umbria. Alongside this, model farms and estate lodges, based on Palladio, were created in their thousands.

In this context it must have been a bitter loss for Henry Sudell to have to declare bankruptcy in 1827. His dream would have been as the founder of a great new family of landowners in picturesque grounds and living in an exquisite house. His immense project was left incomplete and eventually fell into a state of dereliction.

The Cultural Substance of the Woodfold Estate

The Woodfold Estate is laid out in the tradition of a Manor House with the principal building elements and its principal elevations facing the arrival route. Secondary or supporting functions are behind the principal element and out of view to visitors.

The rectangular form of the Hall (the principal element) faces towards the arrival route along its shorter elevation to express the virtue of ancient modesty among refinement, power and wealth.

The principal elevation elevates the house behind with a classical temple front; a renaissance device employed by Palladio. It follows the contemporary tradition of emulating the rural Roman Villa and the artistic character it sheltered.

The Park is the expression of Arcadia. Arranged to picturesque effect, the classical buildings are placed for visual pleasure and sophistication.

Any large Estate would have required the hidden support of ancillary buildings. At Woodfold, this was to have been located to the north behind the Hall and a tall ridge of ground. Further Lane was created to accommodate future development.

Incongruous Form of Development?

Woodfold Hall and Estate are the uncompleted remains of a typical classical Roman Villa and Park. The proposed new house, situated at and facing the northern boundary of the park follows the same rules in a smaller manifestation.

The correct scale and classical design of the proposed new house are precisely the virtues that grant the new building its consistent character and fit into its physical, historic and artistic context. The description of these core characteristics as being "incongruous" indicates a disturbing misconception of the character, aims and physical setting of the proposed development.

It is precisely the opposite of incongruous.

The history of the English Country House and Estate demonstrates that it is a highly flexible entity. It can be a multi-generational project, adapting to change and never completed. It can, through the intervention of war or misfortune, also be a tragic loss and humiliation. Woodfold Hall was the great dream of an ambitious man in a sentimental age. Its glory lasting only three decades followed by many more of decay and dereliction, the final degradation coming in 1950 with the opinion of Lancashire County Council that the house was "not considered of a sufficient architectural interest to take any action to preserve it."

It is a sad spectacle with the Hall stripped of its internal splendour and turned into flats. It stands as a façade in an incomplete Park. Demolitions and poor-quality developments in the area give the impression that there is nothing to be done to preserve the Park and Hall for us and future generations.

The applicant and designers are proposing a more radical, hopeful route guided by the age of its inception under Henry Sudell. In emulation of the 18th century the proposal is for a fine new classical house to be built at the northern boundary on Further Lane.

- It would in a refined classical style in a manner congruent with the original nature of the Woodfold Estate.
- It would be a fine building, set in a new Park landscape (to replace rough pasture) with extensive tree planting.
- It is positioned carefully to take advantage of outward views but also to gift its qualities and beauty through equally choreographed views from the outside in an act of genius and meticulous thought.
- The overall design is a conscious endeavour to re-kindle and continue the learned culture of classical architecture and landscaping.
- The proposed new house will be visible from a westerly approach on Further Lane. It is detailed and scaled to signal the presence of Woodfold House behind the ridge to the south as well as addressing the larger context to the north including the sweep of Forest of Bowland on the horizon.

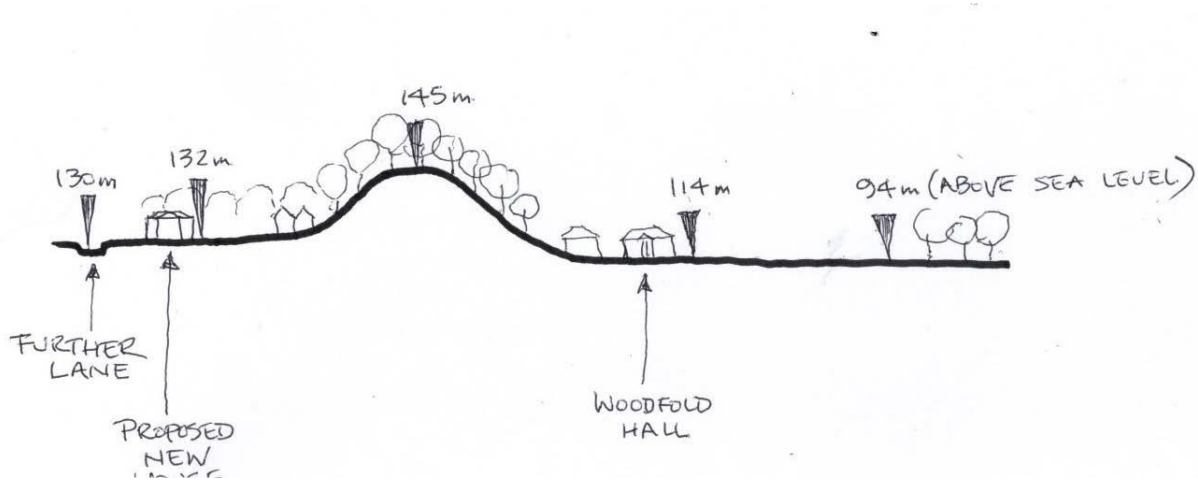
The English Country House probably reached an apogee in the 19th century and it is often thought that it was extinguished by the travails of the 20th century but this is not so. Generations and ownerships may change and adapt but well-run Country Estates continue to evolve along traditional lines but incorporate the contemporary within their traditions. The Holkham Estate, founded by Coke in the early 18th century, is in the process of constructing a new 'Dower House', Creake House, on the edge of its Estate in Norfolk. Like the proposed house at Woodfold, Creake House is built to greatly limit any environmental concerns, incorporate modern insulation and methods of heating and longevity built into its classically designed fabric.

Both buildings will incorporate the needs of modern family life. In the 18th century the picture gallery was the highlight of the house. At Creake and Woodfold it will be the kitchen – the modern heart of a 20th century house. A major coup in the design of the proposed new house is to site the garaging and

domestic paraphernalia in a basement. This ensures that the domestic curtilage is curtailed and the house can be appreciated in its purest form. Both buildings will look nothing like the conventional 'eco-house' but both tackle difficult issues in how our building technology can benefit from an association with long term, classical, beauty.

The Wider Context

The proposed new house is set in a large field of rough pasture at about 132m datum. To the south of the proposed site is a wooded ridge at about 145m datum with the entrance to Woodfold Hall at about 114m datum.



Woodfold Hall is seen from the south approach as a classical building with a backdrop of the ridge and the tree planting on the crest. It was designed this way to present Woodfold Hall as the principal villa in the park. To the east of the Hall is the Orangery, set at a slightly higher level, but still in front of the wooded ridge. All the secondary structures of the 1798 (and onwards) Hall and Park would have been on the north side of the ridge where they would not disturb the (recreated) ancient beauty of the Park. The proposed new house would be located on the plateau behind the ridge and it is hard to argue that any reasonable and carefully designed development in that location could cause any visual harm to the south because that is exactly how the landscape and topography around Woodfold Hall was utilised in 1798.

Beyond Further Lane, to the north, is a wide valley with the raised mass of the Forest of Bowland on the distant horizon. Proposed arial photomontages and the photomontage insertions indicate a landscape with a mixed collection of agriculture, substantial modern barns and, a mile north of Further Lane, is the very large industrial complex of BAE Systems at Samlesbury Aerodrome.

It is a robust and intensively used rural landscape.

The photomontage images (opposite & following) clearly show that the size of the proposed house from north, south, east and west is an insignificant and barely visible addition to the wider area.

Existing aerial view from the north

Proposed aerial view from the north

Existing aerial view from the east

Proposed aerial view from the east

Existing aerial view from the south

Proposed aerial view from the south

Existing aerial view from the west

Proposed aerial view from the west

Proposed photomontage view from the west