

Mitton Hall

Mitton, Lancashire

Proposed New Porch and Replacement Conservatory

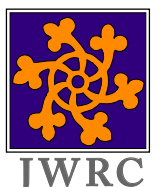


Heritage Statement

October 2012

JWRC
Chartered Building Surveyors & Historic Building Consultants
23 West Street
Morecambe
Lancashire LA3 1RB

01524 833371
www.jwrc.co.uk
enquiries@jwrc.co.uk



1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

This Heritage Statement has been commissioned by Stanton Andrews Architects on behalf of Emporia Leisure Ltd. It is an updated and amended version of an appraisal prepared by JWRC in 2007 when works were carried out at the north end of the main building. Section 2, which outlines the development of the house, remains almost unchanged but gives more detail of the late 20th century alterations.

1.2 The Building

The Mitton Hall Hotel, previously known as Little Mitton Hall, lies on the south-east side of the River Ribble, close to Mitton Bridge, north of Whalley and south-west of Clitheroe. Since the 1960s it has been in various commercial uses as a country club, hotel, public house and restaurant. It is now a country house hotel and wedding venue.

At the core of the building, and the reason for its Grade II* Listing, is one of a small number of 15th century timber-framed open halls surviving in Lancashire, built by a branch of the Catterall family and later passing to the Shireburns by marriage. The later history of partial rebuilding in stone, 19th century restoration and extension, and 20th century alteration for hotel use, is complex, and almost no fabric dating from before the 19th century is visible externally. However, although the details are sometimes difficult to interpret, the main outlines of the development of the building are reasonably clear and are set out in Section 2, below.

1.3 The Proposals

The current proposals involve building a porch at the entrance to a wing that dates from the late 1980s, and rebuilding a conservatory and kitchen at the rear that dates from a similar period. Neither would affect historically significant fabric.

2.0 The Main Phases of Building

2.1 The Medieval Timber-Framed Hall

Buckler's undated early 19th century drawing (Figures 1 & 5) shows the high end of the late 15th century timber-framed open hall before the 19th century alterations. It shows the bay window to the left, and a recess for the high end table flanked by moulded arched doorways leading to private accommodation in a wing (or a separate range to the south) that appears not to have survived. The open fire would probably been between the spere truss (described below) and the truss in the foreground of Buckler's drawing, which has timbers in a latticework pattern above the tie beam. The conventional arrangement would be for there to be a louvre on the ridge of the roof in this position, allowing the smoke to escape.

The engraving in Whittaker's History of Whalley (first published in 1801) shows a view looking towards the low end of the hall. The arrangement is one common in northern timber-framed halls, with a spere truss separating the hall itself from a cross-passage between the front and rear external doors. This truss has large moulded posts to each side of a central opening, rising to tie-beam level. This central opening probably had a movable timber screen originally, shielding the fire and hall from draughts.

In the illustration the wall on the far side of the cross-passage is obscured by the later screen and staircase. It still survives today with relatively little alteration and has decorative quatrefoil panels at the upper level and four arched moulded doorways at ground-floor level. The conventional arrangement would be for the smaller doorway towards the rear to lead to a staircase and for the middle doorway of the central group of three to open into a passageway leading to a kitchen in a separate building to the north of the main house.

The cross-wing at this end of the building has been drastically altered, but the survival of the wall dividing it from the hall and its general proportions suggest that it is possible that some timbers from the medieval frame may survive, embedded in the later walls or incorporated in the floors and ceilings. Some of the panelling that remains in the hall, and possible the stone fireplace uncovered in 1874, may be 16th century. The intricately carved screen illustrated by John Weld (Figure 3) seems to have been of this period. We understand that this disappeared from the house as recently as the early 1980s. If this is the case its whereabouts should be investigated, as it is a significant loss.

Figure 2. An engraving in Whitaker's History of Whalley, originally published in 1801, showing the spere truss and screen at the low end of the hall.

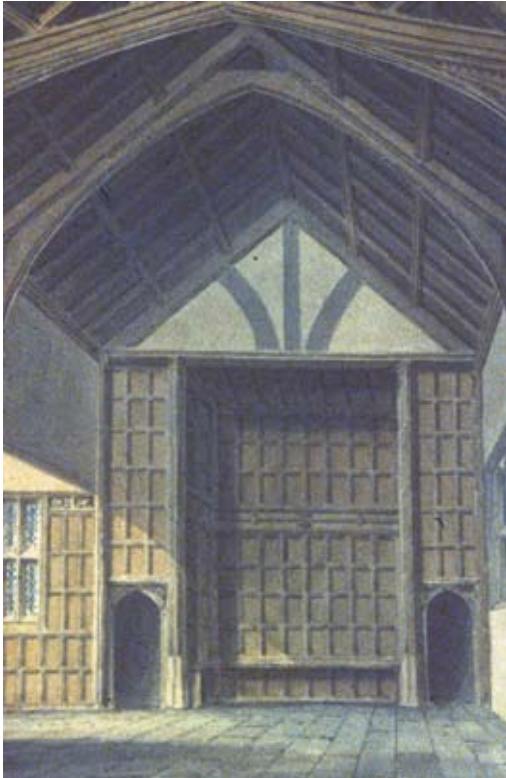


Figure 1. Buckler's drawing of the high end of the hall before the 1844 alterations

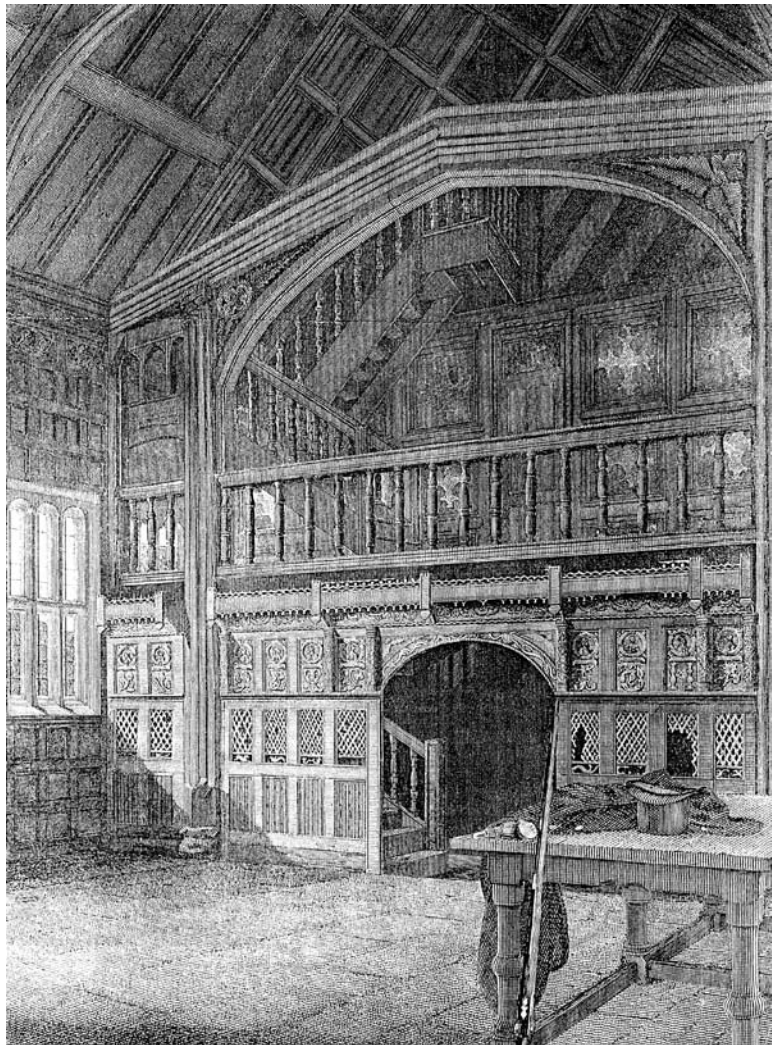
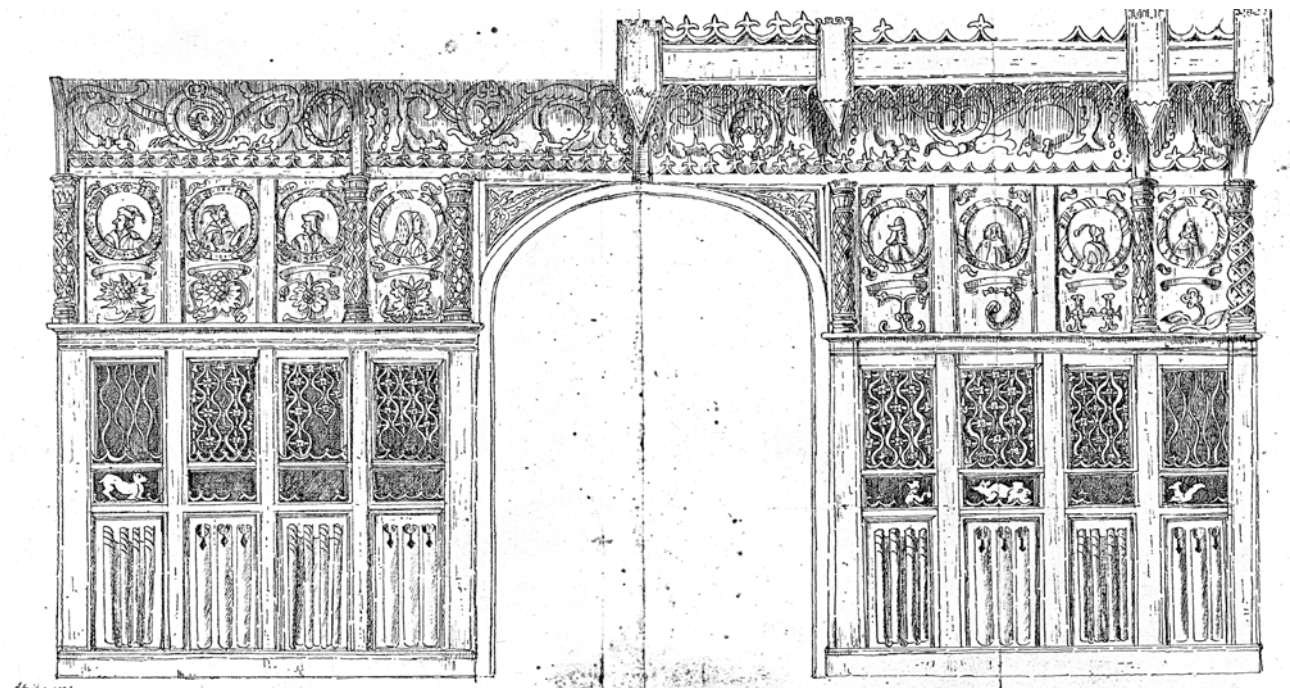


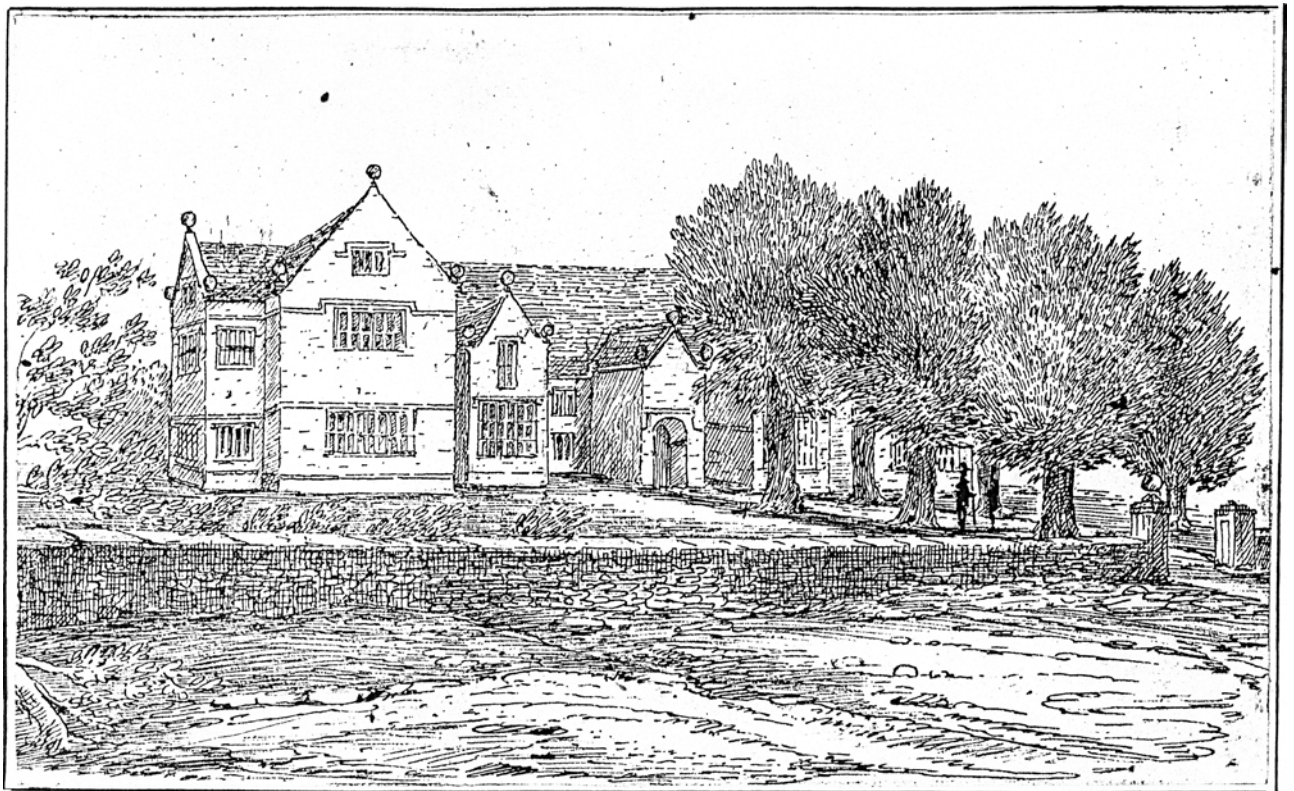
Figure 3. John Weld's drawing, made in 1834, of the 16th century carved screen at the low end of the hall. This appears to have been removed from the house in the early 1980s.



2.2 The Stone House of c1600

The majority of Lancashire gentry families rebuilt their houses in stone during the Elizabethan or Jacobean period, following national fashions by having gabled facades, mullioned windows and additional private apartments. It is not unusual for parts of earlier structures to be incorporated into the rebuilt houses, but it is unusual for the medieval open hall to remain at the centre of the house, apparently without the insertion of a first floor. It may be that the high quality of the woodwork, and the associations of antiquity that it gave to the owners, made them wish to retain the hall. A staircase was inserted into the former cross-passage at this period, and a stone porch opening directly into the hall was added.

We are fortunate that there are several early 19th century accounts and illustrations of the house before the 1844 restoration, and these suggest that the front of the building and the hall had not been significantly altered since around 1600. The drawing made by John Weld in 1834 (Figure 4) shows an H-plan house with mullioned and transomed windows, of similar general appearance to the house surviving today. The plan in Whitaker's History of Whalley (Figure 7) also pre-dates the restoration. It shows a bay window on the south side of the south cross-wing, visible in the Weld drawing, and additional rooms on the north side of the north cross-wing, including a porch. These rooms were replaced by larger service wings in 1844 and the wings were significantly altered several times in the 20th century. A moulded archway survives and was probably the outer doorway of the porch: its arch is moulded on both sides and there is no rebate or hinges for a door.



Little Milton Hall.

Figure 4. John Weld's drawing of the front of the house in 1834.

Figure 5. Buckler's drawing of the high end of the hall before the 1844 alterations, as reproduced in the 'English Medieval House' by Margaret Wood.

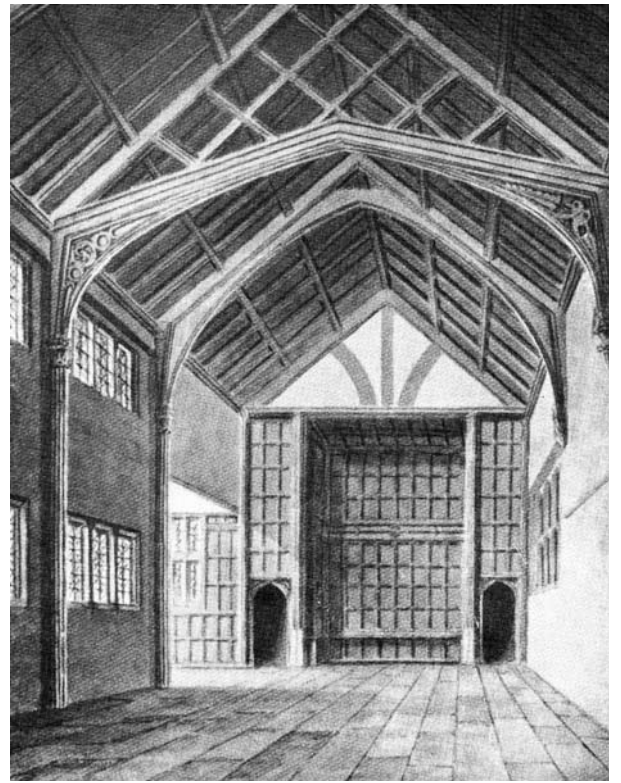
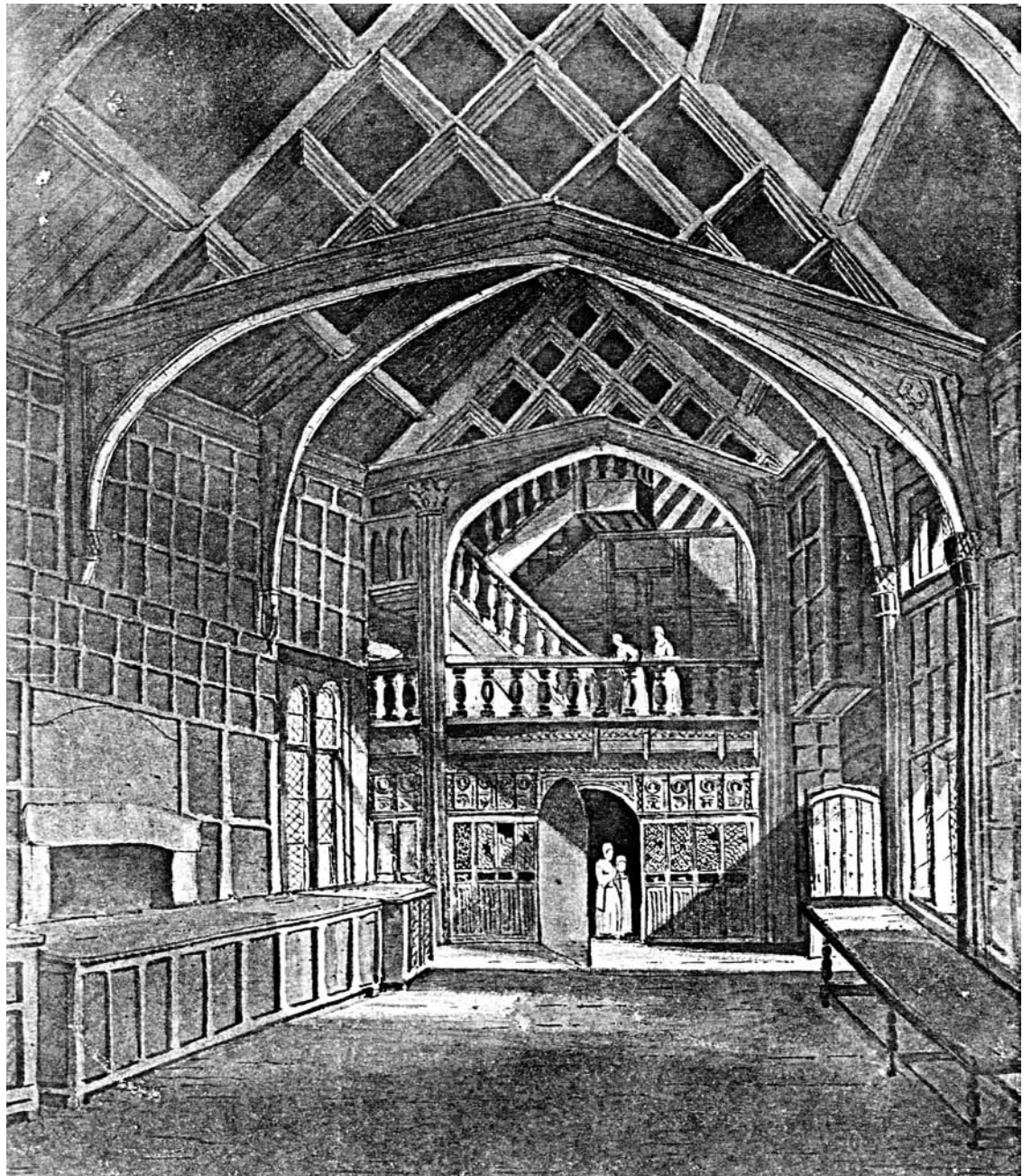


Figure 6. John Weld's drawing of the interior of the hall in 1834.



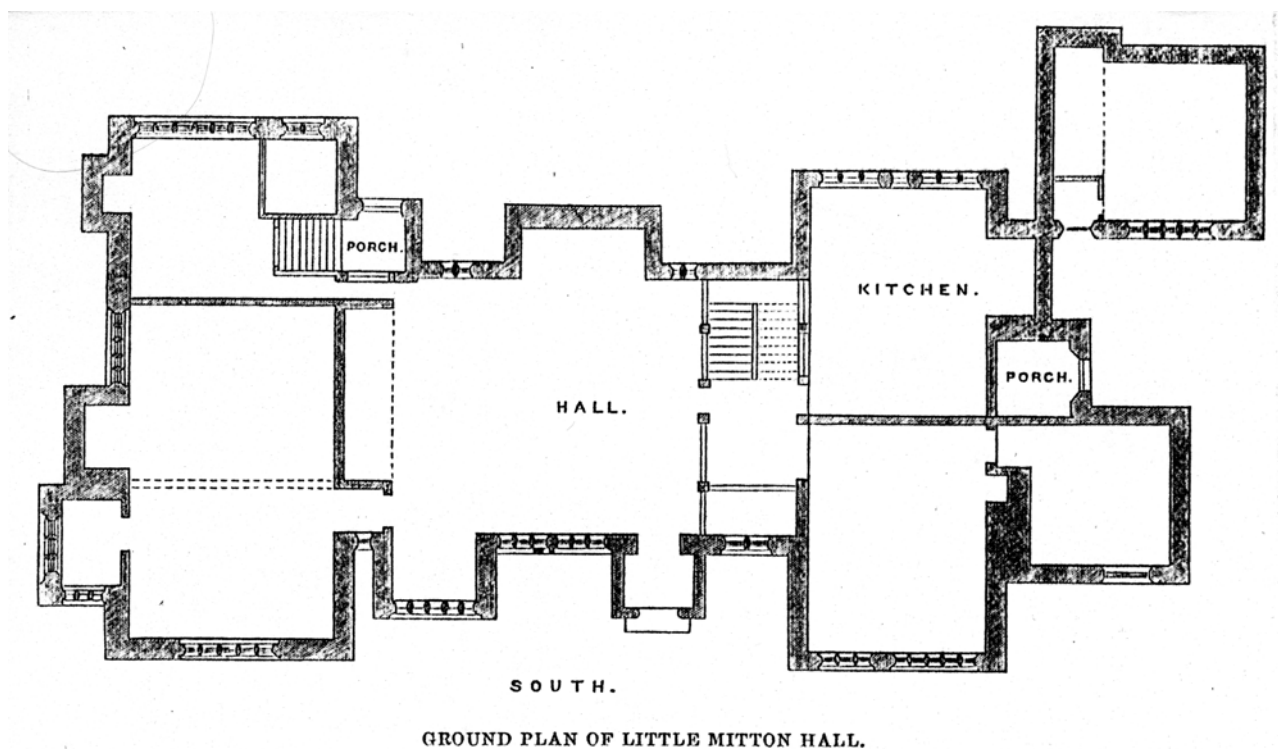


Figure 7. The plan of the house included in Whitaker's History of Whalley.

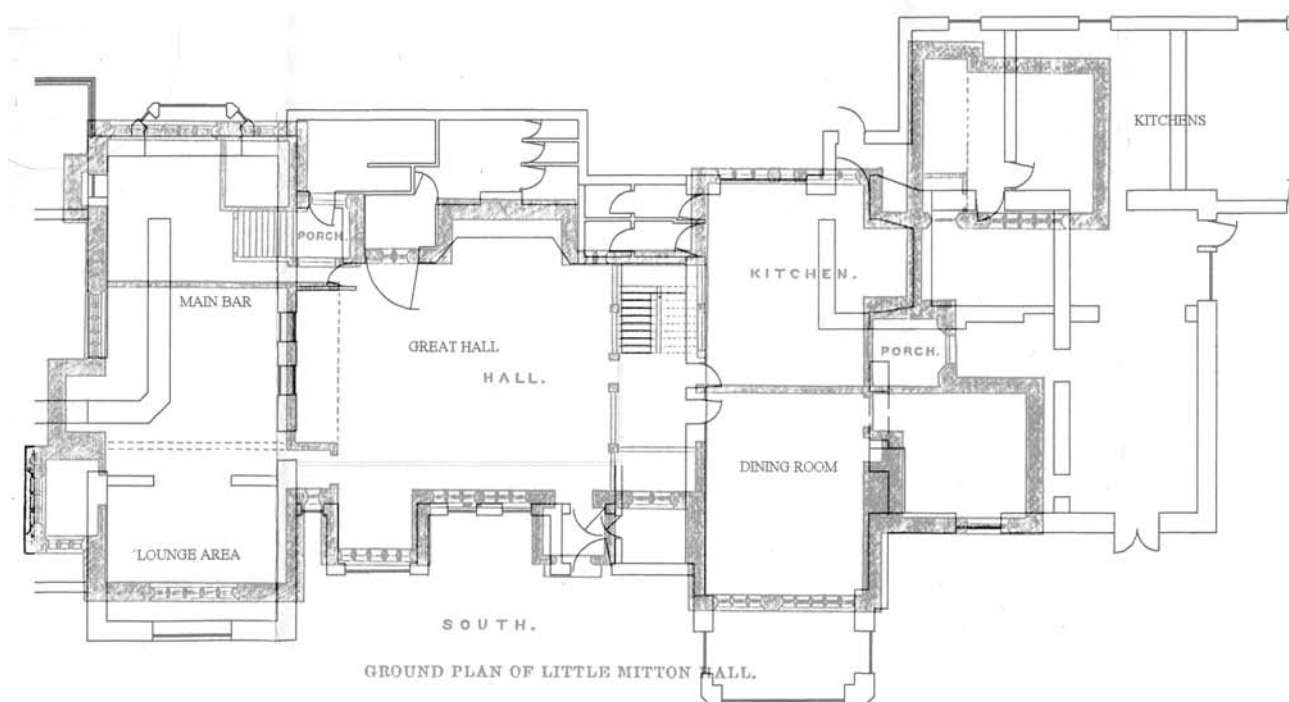


Figure 8. A modern plan overlaid on the Whitaker plan.

2.4 The 'Webster' Alterations

Alterations were carried out in 1844, shortly after the house was bought by John Aspinall of Standen. They have been attributed to George Webster of Kendal by Angus Taylor, author of a biography of the architect, probably because Webster carried out other works in the Whalley and Clitheroe areas and built several H-plan houses in the Tudorbethan style.

Comparison of John Weld's drawing of 1834 (Figure 4) with Twycross's view published in 1847 (Figure 9) suggests that the exterior of the house was not significantly altered. However, a more detailed examination shows differences in the windows and chimneys depicted in the two views. Although a 20th century cement pebbledash covers the external faces of most of the walls, nearly all the exposed stone dressings appear to date from the 1844 restoration. Where the walling stone is exposed in the south cross-wing, rebuilding of the outer face at least can be seen to have been comprehensive: the stonework shows no evidence of earlier openings and the quoins are 19th century, roughly punched to take a render. The way in which the sandstone window surrounds are set forward of the wall strongly suggests that the whole house had a rendered finish.

The two wings projecting from the north cross-wing appear to have been rebuilt at this time to provide service accommodation, the north-west wing being a plain 2-storey range perhaps incorporating some earlier window surrounds in its southern gable.

A few windows survive from the 1844 restoration: they are timber casements with margin panes. On the ground floor internally the extensive later alterations in the cross-wings mean that only a few items of joinery and plasterwork are recognisably from this period.



Figure 9. A view of the house shortly after the 1844 alterations. Taken from 'Mansions of England and Wales' by Edward Twycross, published in 1847.

2.5 Later Victorian Additions and Alterations

A newspaper extract in Clitheroe Library, dated 1935, records that from 1874 onwards Little Mitton Hall was leased to John Hick, a partner in Hick & Hargreaves, Engineers, of Bolton. It states that he spent a lot of money on the house, revealing the fireplace in the hall and, around 1880, adding a 'recreation block' to the south linked to the main house by a large conservatory. This conservatory can be seen in an undated photograph in Clitheroe library (Figure 14) and in an 'As Existing' elevation submitted as part of a planning application in 1986 (Figure 16). The Victoria County History also records that he added a second storey to the north-west wing. After his death his daughter continued to live at the hall.

The external appearance of the 'recreation block' remains relatively unchanged, but it has been altered internally in the 20th century. Stylistically it contrasts with the adjoining 1980s block: it has exposed sandstone walls and a High Victorian half-hipped roof with bargeboards treated as an arch-braced truss. The conservatory linking it to the main house was re-modelled in the 20th century, then completely replaced in the 1980s by the present 2-storey building.

The late 19th century work to the main house seems to have included some of the plaster cornices and woodwork, probably some of the leaded windows, and the bay window projecting from the front of the north cross-wing. The render seems to have been stripped from the south cross-wing at this time, but the photograph in the Victoria County History (reproduced as Figure 13) shows what appears to be a lime roughcast over the remainder of the front of the building. This is confirmed in the text, which states that the walls were 'mostly covered with yellow rough-cast'.



Figure 10. 1848, 1894, 1912 and 1932 Ordnance Survey maps. The recreation block and conservatory can be seen on the three later maps.



Figure 11. A view of the house in 1894, from the Francis Frith collection.

Figure 12. An undated photograph of Mitton Hall in Clitheroe library.



Figure 13. A photograph in the Victoria County History, published in 1911.

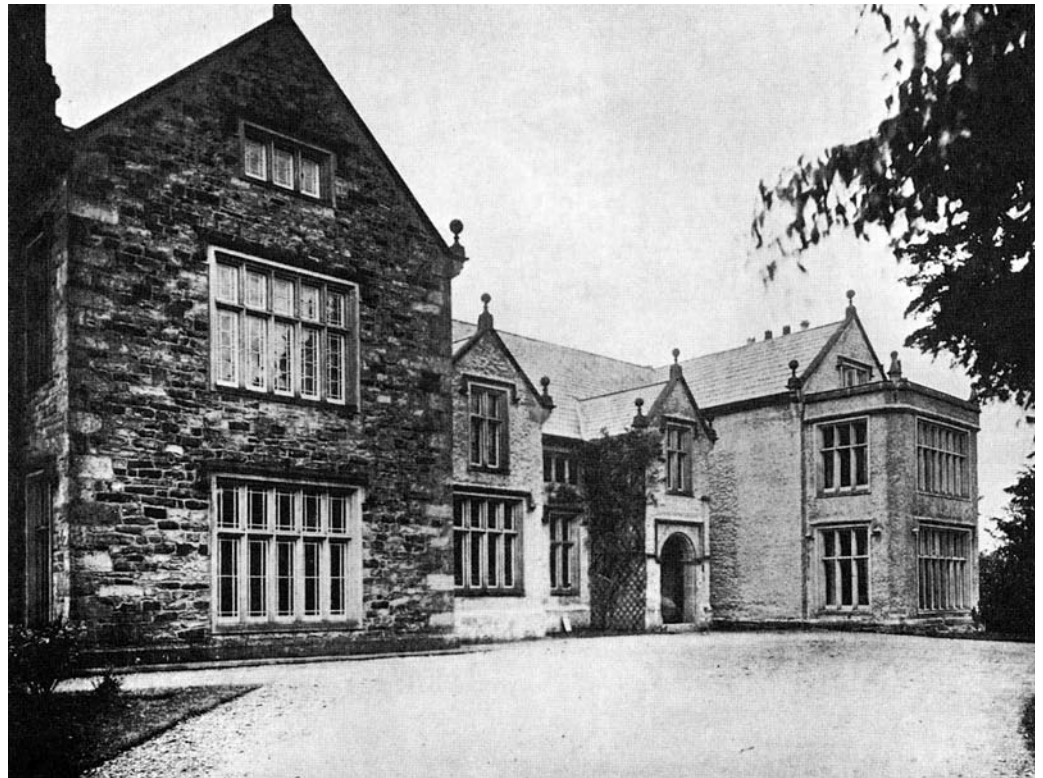


Figure 14. An undated photograph of Mitton Hall in Clitheroe library.

2.6 Twentieth Century Additions and Alterations

Except for a period during the Second World War, Little Mitton Hall appears to have remained as a private house until 1966. A newspaper account records that a new block with four bedrooms, bathrooms, garaging and stores was added in 1956. It seems likely that this was a conversion of the existing north-west wing, dating from the 1840s and 1870s, rather than a completely new building.

In 1968 the Hall opened as a restaurant and country club. A planning application drawing shows that the single-storey toilet block projecting from the north wall of the hall was built at this time. This is finished with a cement pebbledash and it is likely that all the render on the building was renewed at a similar period.

There are numerous planning files in the records of Ribble Valley Borough Council, and the current owner has provided us with copies of some of the documents in them. Without a more detailed examination of the files they are not always easy to interpret, as some of the works shown on application drawings were not executed and other works that are not shown seem to have been carried out. The drawing that seem to be most significant for the current proposals are reproduced below as Figures 15-18.

Figures 15, 16 and 17 show the proposals for building what is now the function room with bedrooms above in the late 1980s, and the conservatory that it replaced. Figure 18 shows a plan of a proposed conservatory that was granted consent. The conservatory that was built, and which still exists today, differs in some details and is significantly smaller. The kitchen and boiler room were not built as approved: a kitchen was incorporated into the conservatory, with its windows blanked off and with the roof slated rather than glazed. The kitchen is now disguised externally by a timber pergola, and to its south there is a timber shed, Portacabin and outdoor storage.

3.0 The Impact of the Proposed Works

3.1 The New Porch

The porch would be added to the 1980s function room wing. This wing is treated as subsidiary to the main building: it is lower, is set back from the original building, and uses a simplified 17th century style that echoes that of the main house.

The setting of Mitton Hall, with a curving driveway and trees (Photograph 1) means that the whole facade, which stretches from the former recreation block to the south to the north-west service wing, cannot fully be seen from any one position. This means that the main house and the function room wing are seen as separate but linked parts of a long range of buildings, and the existing and proposed porches are unlikely to send out conflicting messages about the location of the main entrance to the complex.

The approach taken for the design of the new porch is similar to that taken in the 1980s for the design of the wing. It is in the same 17th century style with roughcast walls and sandstone dressings, but is less elaborate than the porch to the main house, which is two storeys with ball finials to its gable coping. The present doorway (Photograph 2) is set in a shallow projection that extends as far forward as the gabled window projections to each side. Visually it is weak, with its symmetrical placement and the size and importance of the function room inside justifying a more emphatic treatment. In this respect the proposed porch would be an improvement.



Figure 19. An illustration of the proposed porch, by Stanton Andrews Architects.

3.2 Replacement Conservatory

The present conservatory dates from the 1980s. Historic photographs (Figures 11 & 14) confirm that the western side of the building, facing the gardens and river, has always been more informal and irregular, but it now includes some elements that detract somewhat from its appearance. These include the 1960s toilet block extension and the conservatory. The latter abuts the corner of the cross-wing of the original house, and obscures views of and out of the mullioned bedroom windows of the 1980s function room block. The proportions of its windows, the top-opening casements, the eaves details and the pyramidal glazed roofs are neither examples of clean modern design nor a good reproduction of an Edwardian or Victorian conservatory.

The kitchen serving the function room is currently incorporated into the southern end of the conservatory. Together with the timber pergola, shed and outdoor storage area it has a somewhat untidy appearance and detracts from the setting of the main building when viewed from the southern end of the terrace (Photographs 5 & 6).

The proposed conservatory would be an improvement, as it would be separated from the cross-wing of the main house and would have a better relationship with the function room wing. The proposed lantern light would interfere less with views from and of the first-floor bedroom windows and would be an attractive feature in its own right. The proposed bay on the entrance axis of the function room, and the continuous ceiling height, would help to integrate the conservatory with the room. The quality of detailing would also be an improvement, with the sill and parapet cornice forming strong horizontal elements and the windows and their glazing having Georgian proportions. The low proportions, simple form and traditional materials used for the proposed replacement kitchen will mean that it too will be an improvement that will not be unduly prominent in distant views or in views from the terrace.



Figure 20. An illustration of the proposed conservatory and kitchen, by Stanton Andrews Architects.

4.0 Conclusions

The continued use and maintenance of the II* Listed Mitton Hall depends upon operating a viable hotel and wedding venue business in a very competitive market. The proposed porch and conservatory will improve the attractiveness of the hotel to clients and will affect only 1980s fabric. The present external entrance to the function room is visually weak, the conservatory is dated and architecturally undistinguished, and the present function room kitchen and associated pergola, sheds and storage detract from the appearance of the building. The proposed designs will be an improvement.

Photograph 1. The front of Mitton Hall, viewed from the entrance drive. The original house is near the centre of the photograph, behind trees. The site of the proposed porch is between the two gables of the 1980s function room block, at the left.



Photograph 2. The front of the function room block. The proposed porch would replace the doorway.



Photograph 3. The internal lobby at the entrance to the function room. This would be replaced by the external porch.



Photograph 4. The present conservatory at the rear of the function room block.



Photograph 5. The timber pergola disguises the kitchen behind.



Photograph 6. The storage area to the south of the conservatory.



5.0 Documentary Sources Used

Photocopies of material in the local history section of Clitheroe Library, provided by Mr Warburton. Where the copies are referenced the references are given in the text of this report.

Photocopies of Planning and Listed Building Consent application files and drawings held by Ribble Valley Borough Council, provided by Mr Warburton.

Pen & wash drawings by John Weld in the Lancashire Record Office.

Farrer, W. & Brownbill, J. *The Victoria History of the County of Lancaster*. Volume 6, published 1911.

Hayes, Cliff. *Francis Frith's Heart of Lancashire*. Frith Book Company Ltd, 2001.

Taylor, Angus. *The Websters of Kendal*. Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society Record Series Volume XVII, 2004.

Whitaker, T.D. *History of Whalley*. 4th Edition, 1872-6 (including text and illustrations reproduced from the 1818 edition.)

Wood, Margaret. *The English Medieval House*. Published by J.M. Dent, 1965.