

REPAIR OF THE LANTERN AT RAINSCOMBE HOUSE, OARE, WILTSHIRE

Heritage Statement



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January 2026

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Heritage Statement

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rainscombe House, is a Grade II listed building located within parkland to the north-east of the village of Oare, Wiltshire. The owner of the property is seeking to undertake repairs to the lantern over the principal staircase following a previous pre-application submission including the replacement of the lantern on a like-for-like basis (although with a changed orientation) met with objections from the Conservation Officer at Wiltshire Council (19/05769/PREAPP).

1.2 Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to make an assessment of the heritage significance of the house with particular focus on the lantern, and the potential impact of the proposals upon that significance and to prepare a Heritage Statement in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Bob Edwards BSc (Hons) PG Dip. IHBC MCIfA, Director of Forum Heritage Services, visited the property in October 2025 and subsequently prepared this report.

1.3 This report will present:

- A brief background history to the site
- A description of the lantern and its position on the house
- Policy and guidance background
- An assessment of the significance of the lantern as an element of the listed building following Historic England's *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019)
- An assessment of the potential impact of the proposals upon the significance of the listed building
- Conclusions

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Rainscombe House dates from around 1810, built by Thomas Baldwin of Bath probably on or close to the site of an earlier house for the Rogers family who occupied the house into the early 20th century. During WWII the house was used for blind veterans. After the war the house was owned by Sir Geoffrey Fry, of Fry's Chocolate.

2.2 Rainscombe House was added to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade II in 1952. The building is described in the *List* as:

House. c1810, by T. Baldwin of Bath. Roman cement on brick, with slate roof. Two storeys, attic and cellars, 5 x 3 bays. Garden front has portico with paired Ionic columns and wide glazed entrance. Central bay has flanking niches and is raised with a cornice. Facade also has slightly raised ends also with niches. Basement rusticated below ground floor windows. Twelve-paned sashes, but 8-paned to centre of first floor which has fascia and cornice. Moulded eaves and double hipped roofs with flat roofed dormers. Side elevation has central entrance with flanking pilasters from C20 portico; now removed. Interior has large hall leading to stair at rear, and flanking reception rooms.

3.0 DESCRIPTION

- 3.1 Rainscombe House faces south-west across its parkland, this elevation being adequately described by the list entry (Figure 1). The house has a double -pile plan but the rear part of the main block of the house is slightly diminished through having its side elevations stepped back from the end sections of the front range. The front and rear elements of this main block of the house have tall, hipped slate roofs, the front roof running the length of the building, but the roofs to the rear are broken into two parts to allow for the lantern over the main staircase, the roofs being gabled towards the lantern (Figure 2).
- 3.2 Along the rear of the main block of the house is a lower two-storey range with a shallow pitched slate roof (Figure 2). The finial of the lantern to the main staircase can just be seen above the ridge of this roof.
- 3.3 Internally, the lantern presents as a roundel with a moulded timber frame and glazing to eight pointed 'petals' and having a small pendant to the centre (Figure 3).



Figure 1 The front elevation of Rainscombe House



Figure 2 The rear elevation of Rainscombe House. The finial of the lantern can just be seen above the ridge of the rear range (arrowed).



Figure 3 The lantern above the principal stair.

- 3.4 Externally, the lantern is an octagonal timber structure with vertical glazed lights of four panes to the sides, and a ribbed glazed roof surmounted by a finial which has been clad in lead (Figure 4). The timber ribs of the roof have also been covered with lead strips. Lifting

of some of these strips reveals painted timbers (Figure 4) that are showing signs of decay through an evident loss of density when tapped.

- 3.5 Within the lantern space, the structure can be seen to have been constructed with painted timbers that are jointed together with iron brackets (Figures 5 and 6). The ribs of the roof structure are chamfered internally. All the timbers appear to be relatively modern, probably dating from the mid-20th century.



Figure 4 The exterior of the lantern.



Figure 4
Exposure of one of
the ribs to the roof
of the lantern.



Figure 5 Interior of the lantern showing the timbers to the glazing at the base of the lantern.



Figure 6 The interior of the lantern showing the underside of the roof structure.

4.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

4.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the statutory approach to the management of historic buildings and areas and requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses, and its setting, under Section 66 – a matter the Courts have held should be afforded considerable importance and weight.

4.2 The statutory approach is reflected in Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment which has 'weight' following submission to the Secretary of State in late October 2024.

4.3 Paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) states that:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

4.4 Paragraph 212 advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation whilst para. 208 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

4.5 Historic England's *Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2* (March 2015) states that understanding the nature of significance is important for understanding the need for and best means of conservation. Understanding the extent of that significance leads to a better understanding of how adaptable a heritage asset may be and provides the essential guide

as to how policies should be applied. The following descriptive appraisal will evaluate the building against Historic England's criteria for heritage values set out in *Statements of Heritage Significance Assessing Significance in Heritage Assets* (Historic England Advice Note 12, 2019):

Archaeological interest

There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Architectural and artistic interest

These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can rise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and the creation of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.

Historic interest

An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

- 4.6 The selection of buildings for addition to the statutory *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* is informed by a set of criteria set out in the revised *Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings*, (DCMS, 2018). These criteria have also been considered in this assessment.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designations

- 5.1 Rainscombe House is a Grade II listed building and so is regarded as a building of significance in a national context.

Assessment of Significance

- 5.2 The proposed works relate only to the repair of the lantern over the principal staircase, and so this assessment of significance, whilst recognising that Rainscombe House is a good example of a small country house of early 19th century date, will focus on the importance of the lantern structure.

Archaeological interest

- 5.3 From an examination of the structure of the lantern, it appears to be a relatively modern, probably mid-20th century construction which may use some older ironmongery. There is no evidence to suggest that the lantern is '*a contemporary feature with the staircase below, so a Georgian feature in keeping with the c.1810 remodelling and redesign of the original farmhouse that existed on this site*' as claimed by the Conservation Officer in relation to the pre-application enquiry made in 2019. As such, the lantern structure has no archaeological interest

Architectural interest

- 5.4 The principal aspect of the architectural interest of the lantern in terms of the overall interest of the listed building is the contribution of the lantern to the aesthetics of the principal staircase as seen internally. However, the angular 'petals' do not have a particularly Regency character and it is questioned whether the lantern is in its original form in terms of the glazing pattern to the base.
- 5.5 Externally, the lantern is of relatively typical design but in terms of the overall appearance of the house, the lantern has very little visibility with only the finial rising above the roof line

of the range along the rear of the house. The lantern is also rather awkwardly located, set between two steep-pitched sections of roof which give the appearance of having been truncated to allow for the lantern with gables close to either side which creates a rather unusual and perhaps awkward appearance to the roof of the rear elevation of the house.

- 5.6 It is considered that the architectural interest of the lantern itself is medium, and the principal aspect of its significance to the overall interest of the listed building is its internal appearance.

Historic interest

- 5.7 In terms of illustrative historic interest, the lantern is an example of how a principal staircase in a house of this form, a date could be top-lit but overall the illustrative historic interest is very limited as its structure appears to be of 20th century date, rather than being an original element of the fabric of the listed building.

6.0 PROPOSALS & ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

- 6.1 The current proposal is to repair the lantern as required following a previous submission looking to replace the lantern with a new structure which met objections from the local authority Conservation Officer although the objection was based on the belief that the lantern was original to the early 19th century phase of the house. The lantern is of 20th century date, the fabric itself holds very little value.
- 6.2 A detailed schedule of repair has been prepared, and which will be submitted as part of the application, which illustrates the condition of the various elements of the structure and the need for repair. The repairs are considered to be appropriate and will not result in the loss of important fabric, while the lantern will be preserved as a feature of the building.
- 6.3 The careful repair of this feature will not result in harm to the special architectural of historic interest of the listed building.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Rainscombe House is a fine early 19th century country house which retains some good interiors.
- 7.2 The lantern over the principal staircase, is a probably mid-20th century structure that has little value in its fabric. Its awkward relationship to the two sections of roof over the rear part of the house, and the design of the glazing to the base of the lantern seen from within the staircase raises the question as to whether it is an original feature and whether it reflects the design of the lantern it replaced. It is a feature that is of limited heritage significance.
- 7.3 It is considered that the proposed approach to repairing the lantern will not result in harm to the listed building.
- 7.4 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the proposed development with the statutory duty in Section 66 of the Act, National Policy in the NPPF or Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and conclude that the application should be allowed.