

Heritage Asset Assessment

Old Haven, Itchenor, West Sussex



AHP Architectural
History
Practice

Old Haven, Itchenor, West Sussex

Heritage Asset Assessment

Prepared for

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by

The Architectural History Practice Limited

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Old Haven is an attractive historic building dating from the turn of the twentieth century, built on a prominent and pivotal site in the West Itchenor conservation area. Both the site and the setting are protected by local, national and international designations. The house was built by Joseph Harker, a notable figure in the theatrical world at that time, and is perhaps the earliest and most visible manifestation of Itchenor's early twentieth century development as a holiday retreat for bohemians, marine painters and sailing enthusiasts. Regular visitors to Old Haven included Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, and Charles Dixon, the renowned marine artist. Dixon married Harker's daughter and built a house in the village; he painted several views of Old Haven and The Street. The house is a building of considerable historical, aesthetic and communal value. The scale of the loss that would be represented by its demolition would be substantial. This loss would not be offset by the quality of the proposed replacement house, which would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. There would need to be a very powerful argument in favour of site redevelopment for the presumption in favour of retention to be set aside, and no such argument has been made.

1.0 Introduction

In July 2012 the Architectural History Practice Ltd (AHP) was commissioned by Robert and Sally MacGregor of Gordon Cottage, 3 The Street, Itchenor, and by Ward and Natalie McKimm of 4 The Street, Itchenor, to prepare a Heritage Asset Assessment for Old Haven, The Street, Itchenor.

Old Haven (NGR SU 79989 01407) dates from the turn of the twentieth century, and occupies a prominent position in the West Itchenor conservation area. It is identified in the Council's Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2010) as a 'positive building of townscape merit' and 'focal building', and as such is considered to be an important undesignated heritage asset within the designated conservation area. The site is also within a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation, and is a Ramsar site.

A current planning application proposes the demolition of Old Haven and its replacement with a larger house on a different footprint. Paragraph 28 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that where appropriate 'local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting'. The applicants have submitted a Heritage Statement with the planning application, but this contains very little information about the house and its history, and much of what it does include is of questionable accuracy, for reasons

set out below. This report offers a more complete assessment of the building, in order to allow the local authority to gain a fuller understanding of its significance. It includes an architectural description of the exterior, but does not describe the interior, which has not been inspected.

The assessment has been written by Andrew Derrick BA Hons, AA Dipl Cons, IHBC, a director of AHP.

2.0 Historical Background

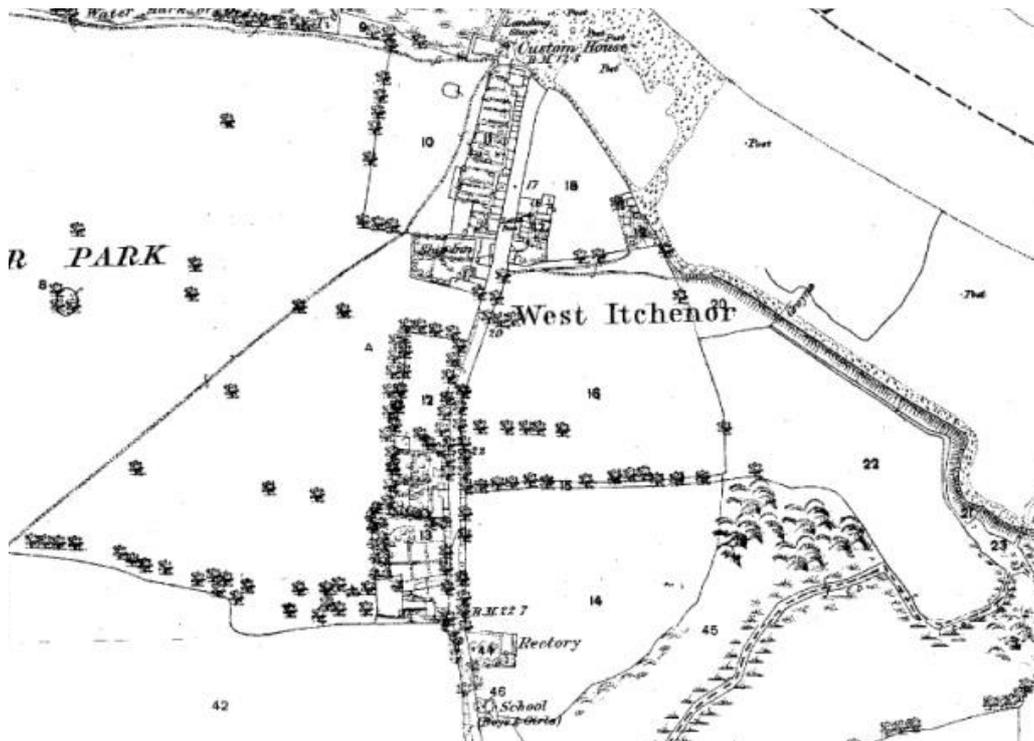


Figure 1: Detail from first edition Ordnance Survey map, 1875

2.1 Brief historical overview to c1900

West Itchenor is a small village on the Manhood Peninsula, which faces northwards across the Chichester Channel. There was a settlement here in Saxon times, and the village was recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086. In the late twelfth century a little Norman chapel was built on the site of the present parish church of St Nicholas. This and the medieval house now known as the Old Rectory are the oldest buildings in the village.

In the eighteenth century the village economy depended on farming and shipbuilding, the latter established on the Hard. In the 1780s Itchenor Park was built to the west by the third Duke of Richmond (whose main residence was at Goodwood). The Duke built Jetty House (later the Customs House) on the Hard as a 'hot sea bath'. This was perhaps the first manifestation of the development of

the village as a 'seaside' retreat. Houses and cottages were built along the west side of The Street for those employed on the harbour and there was a pub, the Ship Inn (rebuilt in the 1920s).

The Itchenor Park estate was sold in 1876. The extent of development in the village about this time is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (figure 1); the site of Old Haven is shown as farmland.



Figure 2: Detail from Second edition Ordnance Survey map, 1912

2.2 *The building of Old Haven*

The decline of ship building, the expansion of the railway system and the arrival of the motor car led to the 'discovery' of Itchenor by Londoners and others, drawn by the unspoilt nature of the village and the sailing pleasures it afforded. One such Londoner was Joseph Harker. His granddaughter Mrs Joan Adams later recollected:

My mother first saw Itchenor in 1899. She cycled down from London with her father, my grandfather, Joseph Harker [...] When they came to Itchenor, she thought it was one of the loveliest places she had ever seen.

The sleepy village street, with nobody in sight - just a few hens strutting about - the charming old thatched Ship Inn, on the left as you entered the village, and on the right a stile leading to a meadow full of buttercups. She loved the way the village street just disappeared into the sea at the far end, and across the water opposite, the beautiful undulating downs.

On that very first visit, my grandfather decided he would like to build a house there, and he looked about for a suitable site. Eventually, after a year or two, he found one. It was at the sea end of the village, a long narrow field, bounded by the village street at one end, and stretching as far as where the sailing club now stands at the other end, running along by the sea for its whole length. The field he bought for the sum of £100! – and he built his house ‘The Haven’, now known as the ‘Old Haven’ on this delectable site.¹

The house was therefore built in about 1901, and is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1912 (figure 2). As originally designed it was smaller than today, with a steep catslide roof with gabled dormer on the south side and a hipped roof on the east side (figure 3). The house was enlarged (and a garage added) at a later date, possibly 1949. The date of the name change from The Haven to Old Haven has not been established.



Figure 3: Early twentieth century postcard view of the village street looking north, with The Haven in its original unextended form

2.3 *Joseph Harker and his circle*

As its name implies, The Haven was built as a place of retreat from busy London life. Its builder Joseph Harker (1855-1927, figure 4) was one of the foremost theatrical scene painters and set builders of his day². He established his reputation through his designs for Sir Henry Irving's productions at the Lyceum. Here he met and befriended Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula* (1897) and at that time Irving's house and business manager. The hero of the novel, Jonathan Harker, was named after Stoker's friend. According to Harker's great-granddaughter Mrs Polly Adams, who still lives in the village, Stoker stayed regularly at The Haven.

□

¹ Typed manuscript, 1975, in the ownership of Mrs Polly Adams

² A film of Harker at work can be seen at

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/forty-foot-art-a-camera-interview-with-mr-joseph>

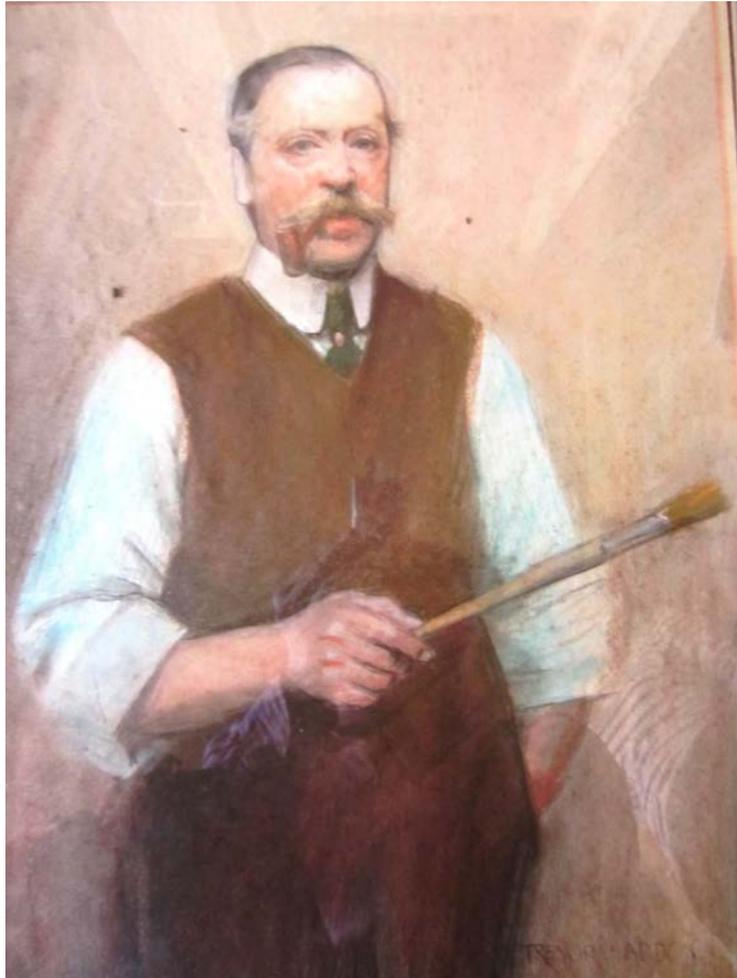


Figure 4: Portrait of Joseph Harker by Trevor Haddon (1864-1941), private collection

In 1904 Harker built a large studio at Bermondsey, now a grade II listed building (see appendix 1). Harker came from a theatrical background; his father William Pierpoint Harker was an actor, and his descendants remain in the theatrical profession to this day.³ One of his daughters married the artist Charles Dixon, described by his biographer Stuart Boyd as ‘one of the world’s most gifted maritime artists’.⁴ Boyd also writes of ‘the “Harker Clan”, with its bohemian mix of actors and painters’, which would ‘descend from London to the beautiful Sussex coast to enjoy the eternal summer of Edwardian England’.⁵ From the long wooden piers in the harbour Dixon recorded the village in a series of delightful watercolours (figures 5 and 6) and in 1929 he built a house called Pierpoint (a neat concatenation of homage to Harker’s father and reference to siting) by the sailing club. About the same time the Haven was sold by the Harker family to

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³ see <http://www.tvrage.com/person/id-93120/Susannah+Harker>

⁴ Boyd, S., *Charles Dixon and the Golden Age of Marine Painting*, 2009

⁵ *ibid*

Hubert Quick (information from Mrs Adams). At a later date the house was extended and the present garage built (the Heritage Statement gives a date of 1949 for the latter, while the Village Design Statement records 'extensive' additions to the property by A. W. Stearn for a Mr Allison).



Figure 5: Detail from 'Three minutes to go', watercolour of 1926 by Charles Dixon (private collection). The western gable end of Old Haven is at the centre of the picture



Figure 6: Undated watercolour by Dixon (private collection), showing Old Haven at the centre, viewed from the east. The house is shown in its unextended form; there appears to have been a first floor verandah or balcony on this elevation

3.0 Architectural description



Figure 7: View from northwest

The identity of Harker's architect has not been established, if indeed there was one; Harker may have contrived the design himself, and used a local builder, possibly the long-established Stearn family firm, who built widely in the village (and who later extended the house). Old Haven is carefully designed and located, both to address the village street and take advantage of views across the harbour and up the harbour towards Birdham. It is of two storeys and an attic, and consists of three bays on the north elevation (figure 7). There is a single storey enclosed verandah on the ground floor of the north elevation, with a tile roof. The first floor is faced with roughcast render, typical of its period. There is an off-centre brick stack and the roof is covered with plain tiles; to the left of the stack there is a change in the tiles, denoting the later extension of the roof. The first floor windows (which, along with all the other windows, were boarded up at the time of the inspection) are believed to be softwood small-pane casements. The west elevation faces towards the street and is more elaborately treated. On the ground floor it has a lean-to running along the whole length of the elevation, of timber framed construction with brick nogging in the infill panels, plain tile roof, and with a central boarded door. This appears to incorporate reused timbers (note the infilled mortices on the vertical face of the sole plate) and has carpenter's marks from the time of the rebuilding (figure 8). The gable has timber

bargeboards and decorative pargeting with strapwork and floral swags (figure 9), framing a central oculus.



Figure 8: Detail of lean-to on west elevation, showing carpenter's marks



Figure 9: Pargeting in gable, west elevation

The east elevation (front cover illustration) has a large bay window on the ground floor and windows at first floor and attic levels. Extending from this is a curved single storey brick range with a tile roof, belonging to Old Haven but linking to the adjacent property, Wake's Way. This would appear to be a later addition.

The rear roof slope continues down as a catslide at the sides and rear, and there is a dormer window at attic level (figure 10). Below this is a recessed lower range with a secondary entrance behind a small courtyard. This lower range links to the garage block. According to the Heritage Statement this was built in 1949, and the VDS refers to 'extensive alterations by W. A. Stearn'. It shares some characteristics with the lean-to structure on the west elevation of the house, which may date from the same time. The reused timber framing and brick nogging are reserved for the 'showpiece' west elevation of the garage building; the side (south) elevation is tile hung, while the roof is plain tiled.



Figure 10: Elevation towards The Street

4.0 Assessment of Significance

A useful basis for the assessment of significance is English Heritage's *Conservation Principles* (2008), which sets out four broad categories for defining heritage values.

4.1 *Evidential value*

'Evidential Value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity'.⁶ This value is concerned primarily with sites of great antiquity, for which all that remains is the physical evidence. It is not particularly relevant in this context.

4.2 *Historical value*

'Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be *illustrative* or *associative* [...] Association with a notable family, person, event or movement gives historical value a particular resonance [...] Many buildings and landscapes are associated with the development of other aspects of cultural heritage, such as literature, art, music or film. Recognition of such associative values tends in turn to inform people's responses to these places'.⁷

The historical value of Old Haven lies above all in its association with Joseph Harker and his milieu. Harker was a notable and well-connected figure in the theatrical world at the turn of the twentieth century, and was part of a dynasty of actors that continues to this day. Amongst Harker's literary friends was Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, in which novel the hero takes Harker's name. With his son-in-law, the renowned maritime artist Charles Dixon, Joseph Harker was in the vanguard of the development of Itchenor as a bohemian retreat and artist's colony, such as were found in many English seaside towns about that time (Walberswick, St Ives, Cullercoats etc)⁸. Dixon was a popular member of the Itchenor community, being described in his obituary in the *Sussex Gazette* of 20 September 1934 as 'a friend to everyone in the village'. Both he and Harker are buried in the churchyard at St Nicholas, Itchenor.

Harker's studio at Bermondsey in South London, built in 1904, is now grade II listed, as 'an important and rare survival of a theatrical scene-painting workshop,

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⁶ English Heritage, *Conservation Principles*, 2008, p.28 para. 35

⁷ *Ibid*, paras 39, 42, 43

⁸ Another artist who was drawn to the village was David Cobb, a past President of the Royal Society of Marine Artists, who lodged in the Street before and after the Second World War.

named after Joseph Harker (1855-1927) who was one of the most important theatrical scene painters of his day' (see appendix 1).

Old Haven is of *considerable* historical value.

4.3 *Aesthetic value*

'Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place'.

The aesthetic value of Old Haven lies both in its inherent design quality and in its position within, and relationship to its setting. Although not listed, the house is an attractive design dating from the turn of the twentieth century, with many typical architectural features of that time, notably a revived interest in vernacular design (characterised by the use of timber framing, brick nogging - possibly later additions - and decorative pargeting) and the use of roughcast for the walls (as practiced by many architects of the time, notably Voysey). The house is illustrated and identified both as a focal building and a positive building of townscape merit in the West Itchenor Conservation Area Appraisal.

Although of inherent architectural interest, the primary aesthetic value of Old Haven lies in its contribution to its wider setting. The village forms part of the Chichester Harbour AONB, an area characterised by open stretches of water, intimate creeks and framed by the rolling Sussex landscape. It is an area which for more than a century has attracted artists and visitors, all drawing 'sensory and intellectual stimulation' from the place. Old Haven is the result of just such an attraction, and is carefully designed and located to respect and take advantage of the character of the place. Thus, the most consciously 'designed' elevation is that towards the village street, facing onto a row of listed Georgian cottages. The house respects and reinforces the linear character of the street, a defining feature of the conservation area. Its north and east elevations are designed to take advantage of the views across the water and up the harbour towards Birdham, with a verandah and a bay window on the ground floor and five first floor windows. As with other properties on the water, the property does not face directly towards the channel, but is placed at an angle to it; this can be appreciated from the aerial photograph on the front cover of the Design and Access Statement that accompanies the application. This informal arrangement of properties both respects and contrasts with the linear character of The Street; the picturesque jumble when viewed from the jetty remains as attractive today as it did to Dixon (figures 4 and 5). *Conservation Principles* makes a distinction between 'formal' and 'fortuitous' design elements; both the conservation area and Old Haven combine these elements delightfully.

Old Haven is of *considerable* aesthetic value.

4.4 *Communal value*

‘Communal value derives from the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. Communal values are closely bound up with historical (particularly associative) and aesthetic values’.⁹

Communal value includes *social* value, ‘places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence’.¹⁰ The significance of Old Haven to the local community is recognised in the Village Design Statement, ‘a distillation of the views of residents’, and is reflected in the numerous objections that have been raised to its demolition by local residents and groups. This is not surprising, given the visual prominence of the house in the village scene and its obvious architectural appeal.

Old Haven is of *considerable* communal value.

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⁹ Ibid para. 54

¹⁰ Ibid para. 56

5.0 Discussion

The demolition of Old Haven is proposed, along with that of its ancillary buildings, to allow for replacement with a larger house on a new footprint. It is stated in the Design and Access Statement accompanying the planning application (paragraph 5.14) that ‘it is in the public interest to see investment in the site and given the extent of the repairs that would be necessary to the building balanced with its limited significance as a heritage asset, the applicant considers that the replacement dwelling option represents the most appropriate course of action that will ultimately benefit the character and appearance of the conservation area’.

A condition survey accompanying the application lists various faults, none of them unusual for a house which has been unoccupied and unmaintained for some time, and none of which is incapable of being remedied. It is assumed that the purchase price reflected the condition of the house.

While nobody would dispute that investment in the site would be in the public interest, the statement that the building is of limited heritage significance is not accepted. Old Haven has been identified as a building of positive value, pivotal in the conservation area, in both the Village Design Statement and the Conservation Area Appraisal. New information produced in the preparation of this report has served to reinforce the significance of this local heritage asset.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) states (paragraph 126), that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. At paragraph 135 it states that in the case of non-designated heritage assets (which Old Haven might be classed as, although it is an important structure within an area protected by a plethora of designations) ‘a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset’. In my judgement the local significance of the heritage asset is considerable, and the scale of the loss would be substantial.

The house has been identified as a positive feature in the conservation area, and the local plan has established a presumption in favour of retaining such buildings (policy BE6). That is not to say that Old Haven could not be changed; there is scope for sensitive and imaginative adaptation in a manner appropriate to its significance. There would however need to be a very powerful argument in favour of site redevelopment in order for the presumption in favour of its retention to be set aside.

The argument that rests on the condition of the building is not persuasive since, as stated above, none of the identified repairs are unexpected or incapable of being remedied, and these were presumably taken into account at the time of purchase.

An argument that rests on an assumption of 'limited heritage significance' is also unpersuasive, given the evident heritage significance of the building, as identified in the VDS and conservation area appraisal and enlarged upon in this study.

That leaves only the argument that the proposed new building would 'ultimately' serve to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. Such matters are of course subjective (as against the fact of the identified significance of the existing building), but in the opinion of the writer the submitted design would not constitute an enhancement of the conservation area. It is a conventional brick-built design of three storeys, somewhat over-large for its context, which fails to address the linear character and listed properties in the village street and offers none of the attractive, not to say quirky design characteristics of the existing historic building. Its purported design qualities cannot be regarded as compensation for the substantial loss that the demolition of Old Haven would present.

In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed development would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, and that no persuasive case has been made to justify setting aside the firm policy presumption in favour of the retention of the existing building.

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Appendix 1: List entry for Harker's studio

Name: HARKERS STUDIO

List entry Number: 1385807

Grade: II

Date first listed: 20-Jul-1989

UID: 471219

SOUTHWARK

TQ3277 QUEEN'S ROW 636-1/10/626 (West side) 20/07/89 Harker's Studio

II

Painting rooms for theatrical scenery. 1904, part rebuilt mid C20. For Joseph Harker. English bond brick; gabled roof mostly glazed. Open plan. 2-storey gable end of 3 bays has red brick segmental arches over metal casements flanking double doors to ground and 1st floors; moulded red brick cornice beneath gable with louvred oculus. Rear elevation facing Horsley Street rebuilt in mid C20.

INTERIOR: large room, lit by glazed roof, is occupied by large wooden paint frames with pulleys and counterweights; these occupy the side walls and the centre of the room. Large double doors to ground and 1st floors of rear wall.

An important and rare survival of a theatrical scene-painting workshop, named after Joseph Harker (1855-1927) who was one of the most important theatrical scene painters of his day, having made this reputation through his designs for Henry Irving's productions at the Lyceum.

Listing NGR: TQ325577915