Statement of Significance for Old Parsonage (PPS5)

Surrounding Area

The building is situated within the Didsbury Park and St James Conservation Area. It is sited within the Parsonage Gardens, which is itself of significant arboreal and horticultural interest.

The Building

PLANNING AND
BUILDING CONTROL
01 MAR 2012

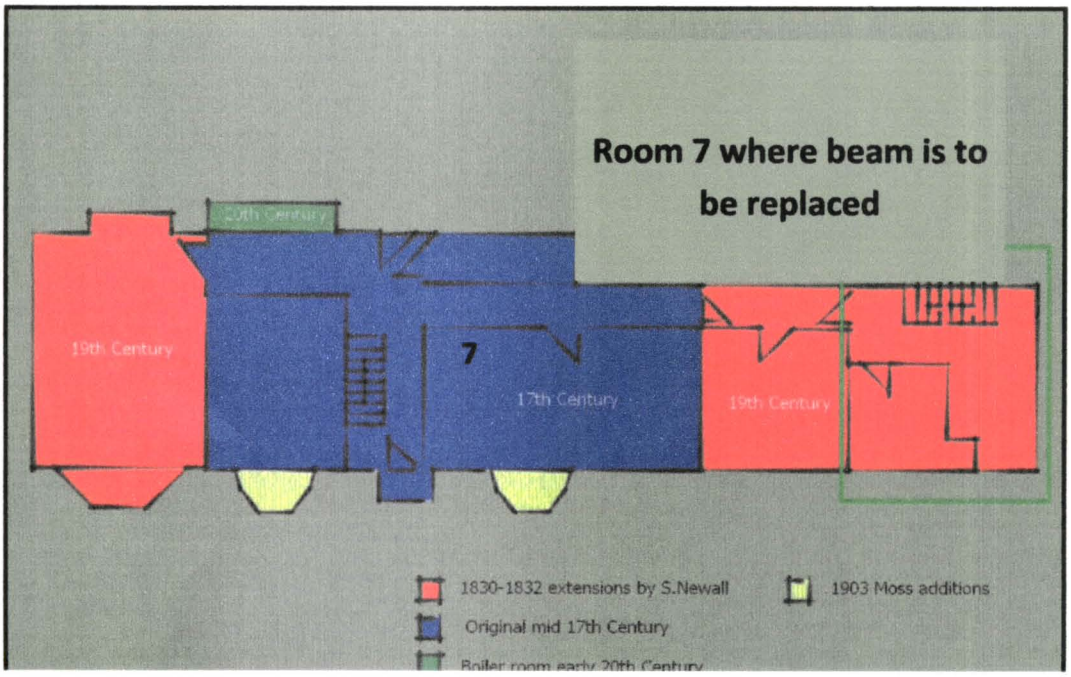
The Old Parsonage is grade II listed:

- Placed on the Statutory List of buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. Grade II Listed on the 3rd October 1974 Ref: 698-1/25/651 (West side).
- Placed on the Sites and Monuments Record, SMR number: 8626.1.0

Exterior

The Old Parsonage is a building of mixed architectural styles with a low pitched slate roof on three levels and roughcast. Its long and low proportions give a predominantly Regency character, enhanced further by its typical wrought iron porch. The added and raised end bays comprise hipped slate roofs with restored modillion eaves. The three 19th Century canted ground storey bay windows (some stained glass, all different) with internal shutters and sash windows (some with gothic glazing bars) give the plain façade some decorative charm.

The central part of the building is generally thought to be mid seventeenth century in origin, with the two 'wings' early nineteenth century.



Interior

Most recently the Parsonage has functioned as an office building and contains all the necessary routed services a potential tenant would require in the form of trunked cabling, which adds little to its aesthetic appeal. Unfortunately, during previous conversions and alterations there has been significant loss of internal historic fabric. The walls are emulsioned lining paper and where the floorboards are uncovered they are finished with gloss varnish. There remains some evidence of its seventeenth century origins in the form of purlins in the ground floor passageway and one upper room. There is also a small section of stone flagging in the same passageway.

The central staircase was installed in the late nineteenth century together with the remaining oak panelling in the main hallway.

Historical significance

The old Parsonage's main historical significance lies in the fact that it was the former home of Alderman Fletcher Moss. No one can escape the association the site has to Alderman Moss. Amongst other books, he wrote a series of seven volumes called Pilgrimages to Old Homes, which include interesting accounts of local history and historic buildings throughout the country. He led an extremely active public life and carried many positions within the community such as, councillor for Didsbury and later an alderman and justice of the peace; he gave to the citizens of Manchester the Parsonage, which he named, and the botanical gardens and recreation ground, which bear his name.

When the building was given to the city of Manchester in 1919 it became an Art Gallery and was dearly loved by the residents of Didsbury, who still recollect their fond memories of visiting the building as children or in later life.

The following page gives a brief overview of the use of the building and its occupants.

Date	Owner/Occupier	Use	Name of building	Source
Post 1646 *	Thomas Walker	Residential	Ash House	(Million, 1969)
Pre 1761*	Tatton Family	Residential	Ash House	(Million, 1969)
Pre 1761*	John Davenport	Residential	Ash House	(DCS, 2000)
Pre 1761	William Hesketh	Residential	Ash House	(Million, 1969)
1761-1795	Bamford Family	Residential	Ash House	(Moss, 1906)
1795-1804	Sam Bethell	Residential	Ash House	(Phelps, 1976)
1804-1832*	Miss Twyford	Residential	Ash House	(Phelps, 1976)
1832-1844	Mr & Mrs Newall	Residential	Spring Bank	(Frances and Woodall, 1976)
1844-1864	Moss Family	Residential	The Old Parsonage	(DCS, 2009)
1864-1919	F. Moss	Residential	The Old Parsonage	(DCS, 2000)
1919-1978	MCC	Art Gallery	Fletcher Moss Art Gallery	(DCS, 2000)
1978-Date	MCC	Offices/Training Centre	The Old Parsonage/FM Art Gallery	(DCS, 2000)

* Indicates source may not be reliable

The building has been unoccupied since February 2011.

Development Proposals

In April 2011the Didsbury Civic Society approached Manchester City Council with a view to leasing the building and using it as a community hub.

As part of this process of turning the building into a community hub there are a number of refurbishments, general repairs and updating of the building required. This will be carried out by the Didsbury Parsonage Trust (reg. Charity 1144145), whose one share is owned by the Didsbury Civic Society.

It is intended to commercially let some of the first floor rooms and use the rest of the building for community activities such as meetings, exhibitions workshops etc.

Most of the repair work is general decorating, making good damp ingression, updating of toilet facilities etc. The varnished floors and panelling will also be sanded of and re-finished with water borne satin acrylic polish.

In room 7 as per attached plan there are acrow supports, which have been boxed in, supporting the main and cross ceiling beams (see photos 1 to 5). These are to be removed and new RSJ s inserted below them to provide the extra support needed as per engineer's report (AP1) included with application. This report states that if the props are removed the present beam would be unable to bear the load.

Of the proposals considered by the engineer the least disruptive to the decor and mouldings of Room 7 would be the option proposed in the drawing supplied (AP2) and expanded in drawings SI 1. This involves inserting steel beams below the existing beams.

This solution will enable this room to be fully utilised as a working space without affecting any of the decorative ceiling work. This would not be possible by inserting bolts/plates or by replacing the beam.

The beams would have fire rated plasterboard installed to proved 1 hour protection. In the event of any decorative detailing being disturbed by structural works a specialist plaster contractor would provide decorative detail to mimic existing beams and make good or repair

As can be seen from the diagram on page 1 this part of the building was originally seventeenth century. Unfortunately no records exist of what work was carried out by Fletcher Moss or Mr Newall. We do know that Fletcher Moss added the bay window to this room and it is probable that either he or Mr Newall demolished the interior wall which would have originally divided this room into two. Since the oak leaf motif is used in all the rooms which Mr Newall added and room 7's cornices have that pattern repeated, it can be assumed that the beams were inserted in 1830-32.

This room can be regarded as of low to medium significance with regards to the rest of the building since no evidence remains of its original state or design.

The support props were obviously a cheap and temporary solution to a situation whereby the beams were inspected and found to be failing. They have been panelled for purely aesthetic purposes. Removal of the props restores the room to the space which was originally intended by Mr Newall and should be seen as making a permanent solution to a very unsatisfactory and makeshift construction.

Furthermore the work to room 7 will reinstate this room as a more useable space and allow its nineteenth century features to become more discernible.

All this work will considerably enhance the building which is beginning to look tired and is in danger of falling into disrepair.