

# ASHDOWN HOUSE AND ITS LANDSCAPE SETTING

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BENJAMIN HENRY LATROBE, 1793–95

CASE FOR GRADE I LISTING

DECEMBER 2022



LATROBE HERITAGE TRUST



LATROBE HERITAGE TRUST  
upholding the legacy of benjamin henry latrobe.

## ABOUT THE LATROBE HERITAGE TRUST

The LHT was established in 1987 to:

- **improve public appreciation** of Britain's architectural heritage;
- **support the restoration of the buildings and landscapes of Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764–1820)**, and to make them available to the public where possible;
- **encourage academic research** into his work;
- **promote high standards** of building and landscape conservation, and to **save them from destruction or disfigurement**.

### Secretariat:

296 Kilburn High Road  
London  
NW6 2DB

Website: [latrobeheritage.org.uk](http://latrobeheritage.org.uk)

Email: [hello@latrobeheritage.org.uk](mailto:hello@latrobeheritage.org.uk)

**Former Patron:** Sir Hugh Casson CH KCV0 PRA RDI    **Chairman of the Trustees:** Mr Richard Wright

The Latrobe Heritage Trust (LHT) is a registered charity in England and Wales no. 327409.

*Fig. 1. (overleaf, cover) Pilaster capital within Ashdown portico rotunda based on Erectheum anta order, from Le Roy, *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (1758) (LHT collection).*

*Fig. 2. (overleaf, inset) Ashdown House, principal building, c. 2005 (LHT collection).*

# FACTSHEET

## Location

1 mile E of Forest Row, East Sussex, off B2110. 2 miles south of Hammerwood.

## PRINCIPAL BUILDING AND REAR STABLE/SERVICE BLOCK

### Design and construction

Built c. April 1793 – c. July 1795. Built by Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764–1820), his second independent work in Britain.

### Clients

John Trayton Fuller (c. 1743–1814) and Anne Fuller (c. 1754–1835; née Eliott).

### Builders and suppliers

C. Sandys, supervisor; John Stricker, construction foreman; Mr. Russel, carpenter; Stephen Hobbs, stonemason for portions of the portico; John Waddilove, stonecutter or mason; James Messenger, London, ironsmith for the stair and balcony railings.

Eleanor Coade/Coade Manufactory, London (column and pilaster capitals and bases; dome); A. & T. Spencer, H. T. Boorman (brick); Joshua Drummond Smith (lumber); J. Molineaux (hardware); Seddon, Sons and Shackleton, George Phileaux, Willi Stephens, all London (cabinet-makers); George Vornall (wallpaper); Esther Tonkins & Turner, London (carpets, drapery, upholstery).

### Subsequent ownership

Passed to Anne Fuller on John Trayton's death in 1814. Inherited by their son, Augustus (1777–1857), on her death in 1835. Leased to William Randall Lee from Clara Tapps Gervis (1831–1910), granddaughter of Augustus Fuller, in 1886. Estate broken up upon Clara's

death in 1910. Passed through a succession of private owner-headmasters to a registered charity, Ashdown House School Trust Limited, in July 1975 (wound up August 2010). Passed to the Cothill Educational Trust, subsequently renamed the Prep Schools Trust, in 2009. School closed June 2020. Sold to Even Ashdown Ltd, a development firm beneficially owned by Nicholas Lebetkin, Olivier Levenfiche and Alon Hershkorn, for £5.95m in November 2021.

### National Heritage List for England listing

1286907, Grade II\*. Listed 26 November 1953; amended 31 December 1982.

## TUDOR PARTS

c. late C15th, erected under the ownership of Sir Thomas Sackville, K.G., Lord Buckhurst. Extant and well-developed by 1597. Attached pre-1948, therefore listed as curtilage. Owned by the Newnham family from January 1690 to late 1792.

## CHAPEL

c. 1920s. Built as a war memorial by Norman Evill (1873–1958), a cousin of Arthur Evill, a longstanding C20th headmaster and owner of Ashdown (1910–39), in memory of the latter's son(s). Potentially listed as curtilage; requires clarification.

## SUBSEQUENT ADDITIONS

Wing adjoining the principal building to the east by Norman Evill and Aidan Wallis, c. 1933. A perspective drawing ('New Class Rooms-N. Evill, FRIBA') survives. Attached pre-1948, therefore listed as curtilage.

Various unlisted houses, cottages and ancillary buildings, 1970s–90s, by Edward Hill and Chris Mitchell.

# INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764–1820) built only two buildings independently in Britain before his emigration to America. The architectural historian James Stevens Curl describes them as “two of the most remarkable buildings for their date in the British Isles” (*Oxford Dictionary of Architecture*).

The first, at Hammerwood, was very nearly lost to dereliction in the decades after the Second World War. It was saved only by the colossal efforts of its custodians, volunteers and supporters over many years hence, a project which continues today.

The second is Ashdown. It is almost unbelievable that it now faces the same fate – of dilapidation, carving up, and consequent grave loss of heritage. There has never been a timelier moment to reconsider its importance and statutory protection. That a building of Ashdown’s beauty and significance should be in the state it is now, facing the threats it faces now, is a sad indictment of the callousness with which Britain continues to treat its built heritage.

Ashdown matters. It is a place of profound refinement and elegance, yet it is deeply unconventional and entirely unique. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, a rare user of superlatives, wrote that it was ‘very perfect indeed’ – yet this comment is not even as old as its listing, which dates from 1952, before any substantive academic research into the history of Ashdown or its architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe. In recent years, scholarship on these subjects has blossomed, bringing to light a wealth of new evidence, and auguring a critical re-assessment of the significance of Latrobe and his work.

It is somewhat ironic that Ashdown should face the greatest threat in its history now – decades after the veil of ignorance began at last to be lifted as to the importance of conserving our heritage, and the significance of Benjamin Henry Latrobe. But it is now therefore particularly vital that its statutory protection reflects its exceptional special interest and architectural merit. That is why the Latrobe Heritage Trust is seeking to ensure that this is recorded as comprehensively as possible in its NHLE listing description, which is currently inaccurate and incomplete.

Only three of Latrobe’s 70+ domestic houses now survive in the United States, and much of his most recognisable public architecture has been altered. In the words of Prof. Snadon, “America has realized too late Latrobe’s extraordinary genius and his architectural contributions to his new country.” In his letter, accompanying this application, he implores us not to make the same mistake.

The Latrobe Heritage Trust submits that Ashdown should be a priority candidate for Listing Enhancement, and that the exceptional special interest and architectural significance renders Grade I the only suitable level of statutory classification for the building. We consider that the house was intimately connected with its landscape, which has previously been overlooked but which shows extensive evidence of 1790s design, and accordingly that the Georgian landscape should also be considered for Listing in its own right. Although the Chapel is already listed as curtilage, we also suggest that it, and potentially other buildings relating to the site’s educational use, be considered for Listing in their own right.



To this end, this document is a brief précis of evidence and research presented in more detail elsewhere (see Bibliography), although it does contain some original research. It seeks to convey:

- the nature of the threat now facing Ashdown;
- essential background as to the principal building, other buildings and wider landscape setting,
- an overview of their history;
- the basis of Ashdown's exceptional architectural merit;
- the buildings, and innovations in architecture, which Ashdown influenced, and with which it shares things in common, in Britain and America.

Extensive use has been made herein of Fazio & Snadon (2006)'s work, *The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, usually abbreviated hereafter as 'F&S', which contains fifty pages of the most detailed research and analysis on Ashdown thus attempted in scholarship. The Trust is particularly grateful to Prof. Snadon for his support in this endeavour.

The Trust is also grateful to Historic England for its careful consideration of this application. We look forward to supporting you in considering it, and wider proposals for Ashdown's preservation and future, however we may.

Edward Pinnegar

**Trustee, Latrobe Heritage Trust**

*Figs. 3 and 4.* (opposite, above and below) Ashdown House (Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1793), principal building, c. 2005; Hammerwood Park (Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1792, 2 miles north of Ashdown; listed at Grade I), July 2019 (LHT collection).



# CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERATION

Ashdown House, an exceptional and unique example of a Georgian villa as noted in Historic England's Listing Selection Guide *Domestic 3: Suburban and Country Houses*, is now **demonstrably under threat** of major alteration, dereliction, vandalism and adverse development.

The estate was first leased for use as a school since 1886, and continued as such until June 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a loss of financial support and the decision by the Prep Schools Trust to close the school. The site was subsequently put up for sale, and was sold to a housing developer, *Even Ashdown Ltd*, in November 2021, for £5,995,000. The developer has limited apparent experience in the conservation or development of historic sites.

The site is now unused and unoccupied. There has been no substantive maintenance since the sale. The main building is now entirely unheated. Historic England's 2018 guidance note *Vacant Historic Building* states that: "When historic buildings are left vacant they are at a greatly increased risk of damage and decay..."

Site visits by the Trustees accompanied by a historic building surveyor indicate that Ashdown is now experiencing these effects. Although we have been able only to assess the site from some distance due to current security arrangements, it is clear that a significant backlog of necessary works has built up. Particularly concerning degradation is evident to windows, shutters and rooves. Continuing decline in their condition will lead to damp ingress and, subsequent to that, dry and wet rot within the structure of the building – from which damage is likely to interiors of unique and global significance.

Current fencing and security arrangements are inadequate. There is poor CCTV coverage around several areas of the site. The experience of substantial vandalism and vast consequential damage at Hammerwood (Grade I, 1191730; Latrobe's only other independent work in Europe) while unoccupied, is one which is now at risk of being repeated at Ashdown.

The owner has informed the Latrobe Heritage Trust will that he intends to convert the site to 47 units of housing, reduced from an initial proposal for 77, carving the principal building into separate apartments. He has said that he is not willing to make available sufficient funds for basic maintenance or background heating until a planning application for development is approved, instead enquiring as to whether the Trust was able to fund such maintenance. Our modest resources, and the lack of any tangible public benefit besides the immediate preservation of the building, mean that we are not. We have therefore sign-posted the owner to several alternate sources of grant funding.

The Trust is therefore also pursuing Ashdown's inclusion on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register, and other independent registers of buildings at risk.

Additionally, Ashdown's **significance is evident, but it is not recognised by the current listing**, which is inaccurate and incomplete. The Trust does not consider that this can be adequately remedied by updating the wording of the NLHE listing; listing at Grade II\* appears materially to underestimate the exceptional architectural and historic significance of the building, and of the group of buildings of which it forms part. The reasons for this are explained in further detail in the following sections.





*Figs. 5 and 6.* Ashdown House, October 2022. A visual inspection of the principal building shows historic timber window-frames rotting, permitting water ingress into the upper parts of the building.

Non-functioning rainwater goods are allowing rainwater to run down the face of the external masonry. Vegetation growing up the façade traps damp and will cause further damage to the historic shutters, windows, and the masonry itself.

Elsewhere, a large number of slipped slates and uncapped chimneys are allowing further water ingress (LHT collection).



# ARCHITECTURAL & HISTORIC INTEREST

## Early history

The environs of both Ashdown and Hammerwood have hosted human activity since Roman times, in particular in connection with ironworking. Between the two estates, Cansiron, is a Romano-British bloomery ('Far Blacklands'), which is registered as a Scheduled Monument. Aerial photography of the fields in dry conditions indicates unexcavated remains, and in the fields directly east of Ashdown, similar markings are visible. Ironworking continued in the Tudor period, with land called 'the Weke' a mile east, now at Lower Parrock, hosting a forge for the manufacture of munitions, owned by Sir Thomas Bullen, the father of Anne Boleyn. Three hundred yards west of Ashdown is a wood called Minepit Shaw.

The land on which the present house sits previously comprised the Manor of Lavertye, first recorded in 1285. A collection of papers detailing the possessions of Sir Thomas Sackville, K.G., Lord Buckhurst, show that in 1597 it formed part of his estate:

John Brooker, yeoman, holds by indenture dated the last of Nov., 40 Eliz. [1597-98] for 21 years, First the said manor house of Lavertie, being built with brick, covered with Horsham stone and Shingle, with a brick wall enclosed, and the several court yards, gardens, orchards, closes, rooms, two old dwelling houses, a great barn, a stall stable, hayhouse, dove house...

The Tudor house, dating from the late sixteenth century and extant as part of a well-developed site by 1597, survives today as an integral part of the rear of the present building. Whilst of

considerable architectural significance in its own right, subsequent work at Ashdown exists as 'layered history' of which the Tudor building comprises a fundamental part. Latrobe integrated it carefully with his additions, as the service wing to his villa, containing kitchens, storerooms, a laundry and servants' rooms. Its existence is omitted entirely in the current listing.

In conversation with the Trust, the developer was unaware of its existence. It is vital that its provenance and significance be taken account of in proposals for its future use.

The Newnham family, of Maresfield, acquired the Manor of Lavertye in January 1690, with five hundred acres of land. It was sold by John Newnham to John Trayton Fuller in 1792, and was conveyance thus by Act of Parliament in April 1793.

## The commissioners

The principal present building at Ashdown was commissioned by John Trayton Fuller – known as Trayton, perhaps to distinguish himself from his better-known cousin – and Anne Fuller, members of a prominent Sussex family which included John Fuller (known as 'Mad Jack'), of Rosehill, Brightling. Rudolf Ackermann's 1821 obituary of Latrobe suggests that his work on Hammerwood brought him to the attention of the Fullers, who commissioned him late in 1792.

The Fullers rose to prominence as an iron-founding family. John Trayton was the son of Thomas Fuller, who was described as a West India merchant, and owner of Hermon Hill, a slave plantation in Jamaica.



There is, however, no evidence that John Trayton Fuller owned slaves. Rather, Ashdown appears to have been funded by an inheritance of Anne's from her father's, George Augustus Fuller (1717–90), formerly an aide-de-camp to King George II and governor of Gibraltar, awarded a peerage as Lord Heathfield, Baron of Gibraltar, for holding out against a three-year siege there. Fazio & Snadon (2006) argue that Ashdown's refined modesty and elegance reflects the middle course which the Fullers charted as wealthy members of Sussex society, but also as relatively less prominent members of their families.

One of the couple's sons, Augustus Fuller, who would inherit the house upon his mother's death in 1835, served as Conservative M.P. for East Sussex from 1841 to 1857. Augustus inherited much of 'Mad Jack's' estate upon his death in 1834; its total value was £160,000 (c. £20 million in 2022). It included 270 enslaved people.

There is an intriguing connection through the Fullers which has not previously been identified between Ashdown and Nutwell Court, Devon (Grade II\*, 1333302). Nutwell was built in c. 1802 by Samuel Pepys (S.P.) Cockerell, in whose office Latrobe had trained and worked, and is described by Bradbury (2017) as being 'as tautly Soanean' as Ashdown. Cockerell built the house for Francis Eliott, the second Lord Heathfield. Eliott's sister, Anne, was married to John Trayton Fuller. It is therefore possible that the Nutwell commission arose from Anne's knowledge of Cockerell through Latrobe; this could provide some explanation for the similarity of these buildings.

*Fig. 7. (opposite) Portrait of Benjamin Henry Latrobe by Charles Wilson Peale (1741–1827), c. 1804 (White House Collection).*



## The architect

### BIOGRAPHY

Benjamin Henry Latrobe was born at Fulneck, Yorkshire, on 1 May 1764. His father, Revd. Benjamin Latrobe, led the congregation of the Moravian community at Fulneck, and was the headmaster of its boys' school. Benjamin Henry's mother, Anna Antes, had been born in America, the daughter of a Pennsylvania landowner, but was educated in England. In 1776, he went on to the Moravian school at Niesky, in Saxony, and then to another at Gnadenfrey in Silesia (now Piława Górna, Poland). He subsequently left Moravianism and returned to London in 1783, although he continued to travel widely in Europe, including to Paris, Rome and Naples, cultivating an interest in architecture, and undertaking extensive drawings of their buildings.

In the late 1780s, Latrobe worked in the office of John Smeaton, among the most celebrated engineers of his age, working on projects at Rye Harbour and Basingstoke Canal. In 1789, he entered the office of S.P. Cockerell, working there until c. 1792, on designs and re-modellings of several country houses, including at Daylesford, Gloucestershire. The extent of his contribution on these projects has been researched, in particular by F&S, but is not fully known.

Latrobe's only independent works in Europe followed shortly thereafter. In 1792, he was commissioned by John and Harriet Sperling to build a country house ('Hammerwood Lodge'), near East Grinstead. A further commission followed in 1793 from John Trayton and Anne Fuller, for a house ('Ashdown') near Forest Row, 2 miles south of Hammerwood, which is the subject of this document. Both houses entailed a pioneering and elemental Greek Revival style, respectively Doric and Ionic.

Latrobe's wife, Lydia Sellon, died in childbirth in November 1793, and his mother died four months later. His brother, Christian Ignatius Latrobe, wrote that these events 'quite deranged his affairs, and almost his mind'. Facing mental, financial and legal difficulties, he set sail for America on 25 November 1795.

Arriving in Virginia in March 1796, Latrobe worked there on a number of engineering projects, domestic houses, and the Virginia State Penitentiary. His talents and charm led to easy association with prominent families in American society, and he formed an enduring and fruitful friendship with Thomas Jefferson, whose design for the University of Virginia he would influence substantially. In Virginia he also befriended George Washington, after calling on him at his home at Mount Vernon.

Moving to Philadelphia, Latrobe built the Bank of Pennsylvania, the first Greek Revival building in the United States, and constructed the city's municipal water supply system (including a functioning steam engine), while continuing to undertake private commissions for domestic homes.

In 1803, Jefferson appointed him Surveyor of the Public Buildings of the United States, in Washington, D.C. In this capacity Latrobe oversaw the construction of the United States Capitol from 1803–17, where, particularly after the War of 1812, he was responsible for the design of extensive aspects of the building, including the old Senate, House and Supreme Court chambers. He also worked on aspects of the White House, including its porticos. In these works, it has been argued that Latrobe's employment of Greek Revival architecture was politicised, in its allusions to Athenian democracy, in a way which it was not in his earlier work in England. In Washington, he also undertook an extensive number of domestic works; one (Decatur House) survives today.

Latrobe was also responsible for Baltimore Cathedral (later renamed Basilica), and for the Merchants' Exchange in Baltimore, then the largest built structure in America.

Seeing potential for growth in New Orleans, Latrobe designed a waterworks and many public buildings for the new city, including a steam-powered desalination system. He died of yellow fever in Louisiana, while supervising his works, on 3 September 1820. Latrobe married Mary Hazlehurst in 1800. They were survived by four children. His son from his first marriage, Henry, also died of yellow fever while supervising the building of his father's waterworks at New Orleans in 1817.

The breadth of Latrobe's work in the United States was immense, earning him the moniker of 'America's first architect'. Baker (2019) summarised it thus:

During his quarter century in the United States, Latrobe engaged in almost every form of nation-building, designing the US Capitol, a national university, a marine hospital, a naval station, water systems for two cities, commemorative monuments, lighthouses, libraries, courthouses, jails, an army arsenal, a theater, a Catholic cathedral and several Protestant churches, banks, and the only barn in the United States with a classical portico supported by Ionic columns. He designed the major spaces for public life in early America.

Latrobe therefore occupied a seminal role in the construction of the new republic, and in the development of its aesthetic. He made a greater contribution than probably anyone else to the iconography of American democracy. Yet his significance was for a long time undervalued in both Europe and America.

#### HISTORICAL RECEPTION

Latrobe's role in the development of Neoclassicism, the Greek Revival and American architecture was, for a long time, relatively overlooked. C19th assessments of his work were often inaccurate and incomplete. Talbot Hamlin's biography, published in 1955, was the first independent publication as such, winning a Pulitzer prize. However, it was limited by its dependence on contemporary art history research methodologies, with heavy use of photographs rather than primary interrogation of building fabric.

Significantly, nearly all the substantive work on Latrobe dates from after Ashdown's NHLE Listing in November 1952, and much of it from after amendments (whose nature is unknown) to the

Listing in 1982. There has been a flourishing of scholarship since. The Maryland Historical Society's *Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe* project conserved and published almost all known Latrobe materials between 1976 and 1994. Fazio & Snadon (2006)'s 771-page work on Latrobe's domestic architecture represents the most extensive study yet undertaken.

As Prof. Snadon notes in his letter accompanying this paper, since publication of his book in 2006, "books and essays have proliferated on Latrobe's buildings, his engineering practice, his landscape paintings, and his furnishings and interiors, along with a new biography of him [in 2019]". The last two decades have seen Latrobe at last properly situated within the canon and genealogy of late C18th/early C19th architecture, and the early history of the United States; see Bibliography.

Yet, regrettably, only three Latrobe houses now survive in America, albeit considerably altered, and the Capitol was also considerably reconfigured such that the context of Latrobe's work there is less evident. Ashdown's survival, largely unaltered, is therefore even the rarer.

Reception of Latrobe's work in England has been particularly hampered by the loss of nearly all his papers relating to his life and work in England. They may have been left in England and been seized in bankruptcy proceedings, or otherwise lost. Or they may have been lost at sea as part of his library, which he wrote had travelled to America on another ship which was captured by a French privateer. Further papers were lost in the course of his life in the United States.

The absence of a cogent body of primary written evidence relating to Latrobe's intentions and work at Ashdown enhances the importance of preserving the building itself.



## The principal building

Latrobe's new, or south, block at Ashdown is constructed of cut sandstone; the portico columns are made of white limestone.

The most conspicuous element of its façade is the half-circular Ionic portico temple that fills the central bay at the first-floor level. Latrobe used this device on no other project until his re-design of the President's House in Washington, D.C.; F&S find reason to consider that he may have conceived it as a one storey version of S.P. Cockerell's two-story Ionic centrepiece at Daylesford, on which Latrobe also worked.

### SIMILARITIES

The use of pilasters at first-floor level at Ashdown, contiguous with the columns below, to maintain a consistency between the floors and in favour of the integration of the portico with the wider elevation, is also evident within Latrobe's President's House re-designs. This entailed pilasters (presently extant) spanning two floors, to the same dimension as the columns within its porticos.

Hamlin (1955) observed that Ashdown was 'closely related to Markoe house which Latrobe designed fifteen years later [built for John and Mehitabel Markoe, 1810-11, in Philadelphia, PA, United States]'; F&S and others also note similarities. Markoe House, which has also been noted for its own distinctive similarities to the US Capitol, was demolished in the 1880s; extensive drawings survive, held at the Library of Congress.

The form of Ashdown's main hall is echoed by Latrobe's design for the William Pennock House (1796), in Norfolk, VA, United States. This was to be his first American commission, and his first after

Ashdown. It was demolished, perhaps after a fire in the early nineteenth century.

Ashdown's closest relative is Hammerwood (1792), two miles north, referred to above, with which from a Listing point of view it both adds and enjoys an exceptional degree of group value. Latrobe supervised works at both sites at the same time, and designed Ashdown early during the former's construction. Hamlin observed that Ashdown was 'more polished and more completely achieved' than Hammerwood; Pevsner, who called Ashdown 'very perfect indeed', saw the former as feminine and the latter masculine.

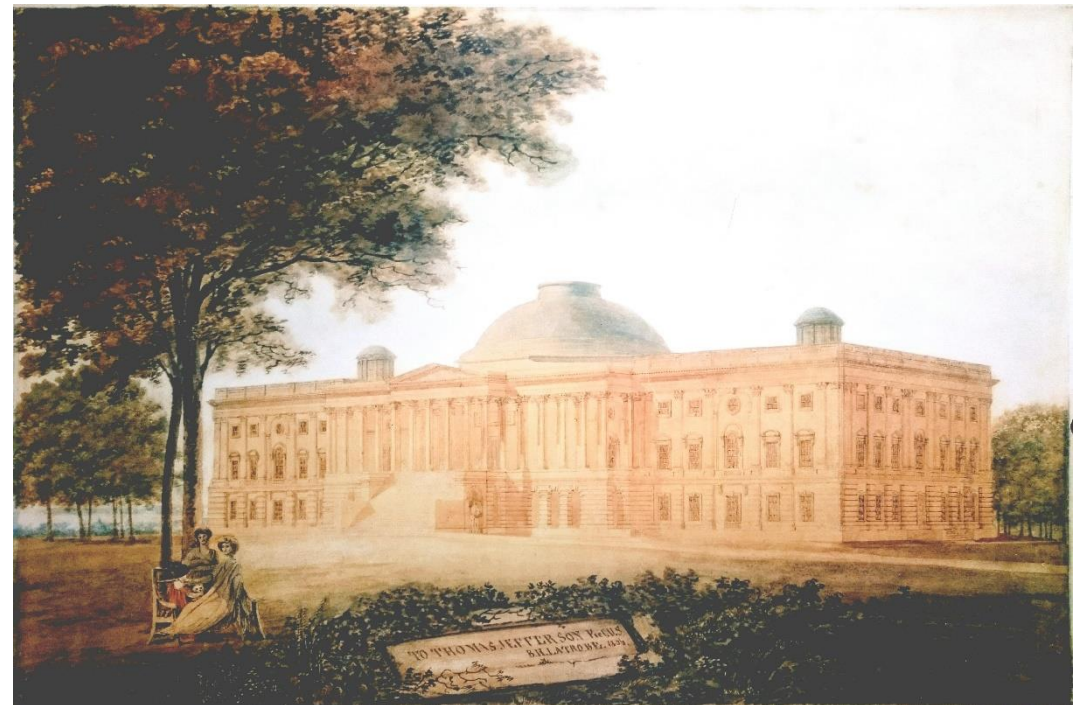
Both houses are distinguished by their precocious use of the Greek Revival, and by their bold, geometric compositions. Ashdown's Grecian details and planning are more restrained than at Hammerwood, where an early, Paestum-inspired Doric order is instead employed. Both houses 'synthesise multiple building types to create new formal and functional typologies' (F&S, p. 181):

At Ashdown [Latrobe] fused the twin-towered and bow-fronted villa types and inserted a circular garden temple that itself synthesised the functions of portico, entrance vestibule, and summer saloon or garden room. Given the design innovations of Hammerwood and Ashdown, it is clear that at an early stage in his career Latrobe evolved a significant body of design theory and practice and invented entirely new approaches to British domestic architecture. His emigration from England in 1795 meant that the United States gained one of the most promising and progressive architects of the neoclassical period and a designer capable of evaluating the American context and inventing new domestic forms for it.



*Figs. 8 and 9.* Perspective drawings for Hammerwood Lodge, Sussex (1792; Latrobe Heritage Trust, held at the RIBA Collections, RIBA13248) and the US Capitol Building, Washington, D.C. (1806; Library of Congress, 2001697195) show their similarities. Latrobe drew considerably on unrealised elements of his design for Hammerwood at Ashdown, including the central Ionic portico.

In fig. 8, John Sperling's wife, Harriet, and their children, sit to the left, and he poses raffishly in the central portico with gun and hunting dog. The women depicted in the bottom left of fig. 9 may be members of Thomas Jefferson's family.







*Fig. 10.* (left) Interior of Ashdown's circular temple-portico with Latrobe's innovative dome, made of interlocking Coade stone panels. This portico served several purposes and was open to landscape views south of the house.

*Fig. 11.* (below) Exterior of the portico (wood and glass sash not original).





## PORTICO, DOMES AND USE OF COADE STONE

Ashdown's most exceptionally architecturally significant aspects are probably its Ionic temple-portico and its domes, the latter described by F&S as 'miniature prototypes for his eventual House and Senate chambers in the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.'

The coherent integration of a circular portico into a façade was one of the enduring challenges of late eighteenth century domestic architecture. Soane, Wyatt and Adam had all engaged with the problem to varying degrees of success; the challenge being to maintain the composition of an elevation, without losing the proportions of the temple. At Ashdown, Latrobe resolved this by creating a circular Ionic temple, one storey in height, leaving it open to the exterior (the current glazing is not original) and interior through the use of window-and-shutter mechanisms for its inner wall. This maintained an illusion of a freestanding temple, and integrated it more obviously in its landscape setting. Finally, Latrobe eliminated the exterior profile of the dome, so that it did not spoil the composition of the elevation at first-floor level.

This was only made possible by an extremely innovative use of materials; in particular, Coade stone. Latrobe's use of this was 'technically and stylistically unique' (F&S). The dome is a very shallow segment of a circle, composed of 100 coffers, diminishing to a scalloped circular centrepiece; each coffer is an individual Coade stone piece, all interlocking by a tongue-and-groove system of assembly. It is a self-supporting structure of pre-cast modular pieces. In a manner consistent with his engineering training, Latrobe pushed the capabilities and application of the material further than any other neoclassical architect.

The capitals and bases of the Ionic capitals of the portico are also cast in Coade stone (as were the Doric capitals at Hammerwood). A record of his study of this order (the *Erechtheum anta*), which he took from the Erechtheum in Athens via Julien-David Le Roy's *Les Ruines des Plus Beaux Monuments de la Grèce* (Paris, 1758), is preserved in his English notebook.

In 1705, a decade after Ashdown's completion, an unnamed Englishman recalled his visit to the house in a letter to an American acquaintance who then sent the letter to the editor of a newspaper, noting that the sender was 'a man of great taste and information ... well known in Europe for his knowledge of such things' (reproduced in F&S, p. 180). The visitor had seen, on his American travels, Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania, designed in 1798, and on his return to England had visited Ashdown through the acquaintance of Christian Ignatius Latrobe:

Mr Fuller's house is ... an exquisite morsel, and forcibly called forth all those sensations of delight with which I have so often gazed at your Pennsylvania Bank ... I can, indeed, see nothing in Mr Fuller's house which is not right; the arrangement is judicious and perfectly convenient; no room is lost; everything is where it should be; and the staircase and landing place above, is a picture worthy of Malton's pencil – but this may be found elsewhere; but the circular portico is not to be found elsewhere, excepting, perhaps, in Greece. I think, however, the thing is original, for its taste is to me original. The dome is made of Coade's artificial stone and is covered with Italian marble. It is, by far, the prettiest thing of that manufactory, which has produced so many pretty things. It seems to be of one piece, but consists of more than one hundred stones, each is enriched with a sculptured pannel of beautiful design.

The other domes are within the apsidal-ended upper bedrooms. Three of the four upper rooms have apsidal ends with shallow plaster dome-and-vaults. These F&S describe as 'miniature prototypes for [Latrobe's] eventual House and Senate chambers in the US Capitol... which have similar, low half domes resting against shallow, segmental-arched vaults'.

Coade stone is also used decoratively and structurally in the upper hall; see below.

### INTERIOR DECORATION AND FORM

Ashdown's interior is of exceptional quality, unique, and largely unaltered. It pioneers the concept of 'interior scenery', with the pioneering portico leading into a succession of spaces which meld and overlap both with one another, and the house's landscape setting. It incorporates extensive use of iconography from the Tower of the Winds, drawn from Latrobe's study of Le Roy, and evinces an experimental instinct in applying and adapting the neoclassical to new contexts.

Along the sidewalls of the main hall are six full pilasters, with two quarter-pilasters embedded in the angles of the front corners; all are of the same *Erechtheum anta* order as those on the interior of the domed, entrance rotunda. Two are original; those on the sidewalls flush with the foot of the stair. The room is largely asymmetrical. The staircase has been moved to the right-hand (east) wall from the centre, and would originally have separated the hall into a public 'lobby' in front of it, and the rear portion a more private space, perhaps for serving the dining room during large meals and banquets.

To the left (west) of the main hall is a moderately large room, probably the original drawing room, which is decorated with pairs of pilasters with modified Tower of the Winds capitals, flanking the front window and carrying an elegant plaster frieze of alternating anthemions and palmettos, adapted from the frieze of the Erechtheum.

F&S observe that the upper hall appears to have been designed by Latrobe with an awareness of the entrance hall at Carlton House, the London palace of the Prince of Wales (later Prince Regent and George IV), rebuilt by Henry Holland from 1783 through the 1790s. Horizontal entablatures float across the half-domed apses, supported on pairs of freestanding columns with Tower of the Winds capitals of Coade stone. These bear a striking resemblance to Latrobe's 'American order' columns and pilasters at the US Capitol, which incorporate tobacco leaves and cornucobs, designed for Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to advance the neoclassical into the new American age.

There are also potential Egyptian-esque references, referenced among Latrobe's work elsewhere in scholarship (see Brownell & Cohen, 1995) but which require further research, and which may reflect Latrobe's father's contemporaneous work in transcribing the traveller James Bruce's diaries of his search for the source of the Blue Nile in the 1760s-70s.

The ceiling above the stair is articulated with a central circle, like a flat dome, surrounded by square coffers, while that portion over the upper landing is long, coffered, and panelled rectangle on the same transverse axis as the hall.



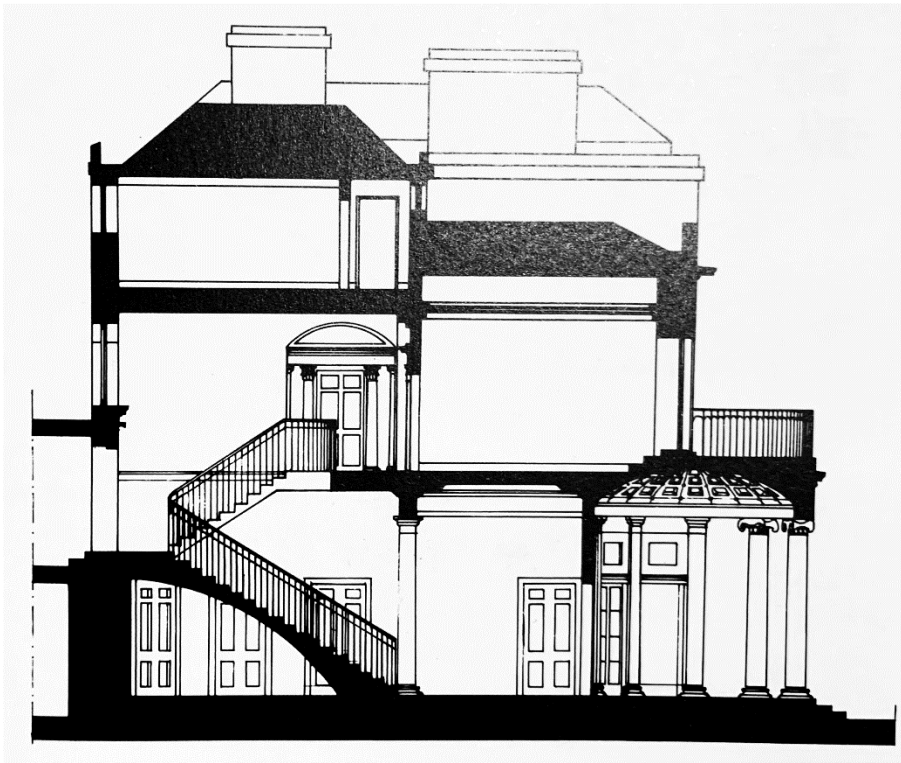
*Fig. 12 (above).* The upper landing of the main staircase, showing Latrobe's original stair treads and flooring, wrought-iron railing, and his column-screened niches with Tower of the Winds/palmette Coade stone capitals (LHT collection).

*Fig. 13 (left).* The ground floor hall and stair; the latter was rebuilt in the early C20th and moved from the centre to the right. The form and decoration of the room is otherwise largely unaltered from 1795 (LHT collection).



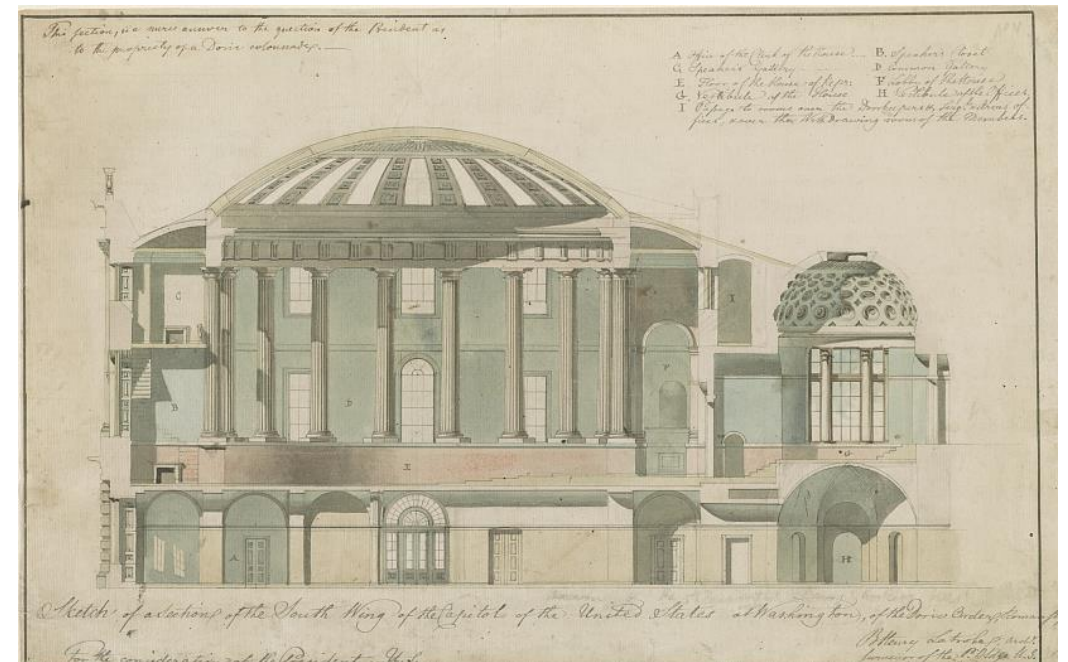


*Fig. 14 (left).* The stairs, looking up to a central circle/flat dome, surrounded by square coffers (LHT collection).



*Fig. 15 (left). Hypothetical restoration of Ashdown north-south section (excluding cellars). (Patrick Snadon / Iulia Ionesco; adapted from record drawings by C. Edward W. Hill, RIBA, and Zoe Tarrant, of C. Edward Hill Architects, London). The temple-portico dome is evident; the upper bedrooms domes are not shown.*

*Fig. 16 (below). Latrobe's perspective drawing for the South Wing of the US Capitol (1803-14) (Library of Congress, 2001697196). F&S described Ashdown's apsidal-ended upper bedrooms as 'miniature prototypes' for the Old Senate and House chambers at the Capitol.*



In his arrangement of Ashdown's interior, F&S argue that Latrobe went further than any other architect of his generation in the creation of 'interior scenery', echoing the compositional principles of eighteenth-century landscape design. This entailed the removal of standard walls and doors between spaces so that views and circulation could flow, unimpeded, from one space to the next (an *enfilade*), particularly within an entry sequence. Latrobe advanced this principle at Ashdown, by 'crowding, overlapping, and interpenetrating spatial units and architectural events in a dynamic, compacted, and even disturbing way' (F&S, p. 174):

The entrance temple and its rotunda penetrate the front façade of the house and displace the square "lobby" of the lower hall back against the Imperial stair. Latrobe deleted what would have been the north "wall" of this square lobby, opening it to the stair, which itself rises to return off the rear wall. Its twin, reverse flights to the second-floor landing met to create the concave void of the half-circular balcony, which interpenetrates the space of the little basilica in the upper hall ... this dynamic and unstable sequence of overlapping and interpenetrating special zones moves from the exterior landscape, through an interior scenery of architectural events, returning finally to landscape views. It is a vertical reinterpretation by Latrobe of the traditional, horizontal circulation path found in most eighteenth-century English country houses...

As at Hammerwood, Ashdown's cellars have matching vaulted stone and brick ceilings, with square central pillars. Details of fireplaces at Ashdown match mouldings for instance of *patré* on the doorframe of the Library at Hammerwood, while original doors at Hammerwood match the design of those at Ashdown; those at Ashdown are solid polished wood in contrast to trompe l'œil paint finish at Hammerwood.

## Rear service/stable block

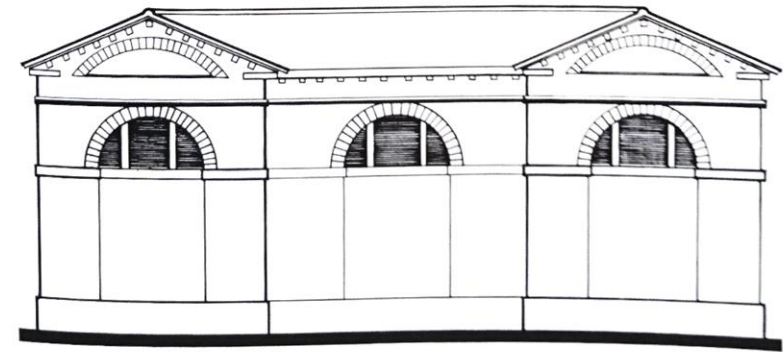


Fig. 17. Hypothetical restoration of Ashdown north service / stable façade (Patrick Snadon/Iulia Ionesco).

To the rear of the Ashdown site, approximately 110 feet from the back wall of Latrobe's new house, survives a portion of a monumental façade with the same stone and workmanship as the main house. Two thirds remain; the right-hand (western) third was demolished in a late nineteenth or early twentieth century re-modeling. If restored, it would create a façade of approximately 65 feet in width, slightly more than the width of the main house but aligned almost exactly. It is of the Tuscan order associated by Palladio with farm architecture; F&S (p. 178-79) consider it probable that this rustic wall originally screen the stable or other service buildings:

This rear, or north wall at Ashdown can confidently be attributed to Latrobe and forms an integral part of his planning for the Ashdown complex. Its importance and survival leads to the hope that it might someday be restored to its original appearance.



As it was attached to the main building prior to July 1948, it is consequently likely to be listed as curtilage, but an enhanced listing should mention it explicitly.

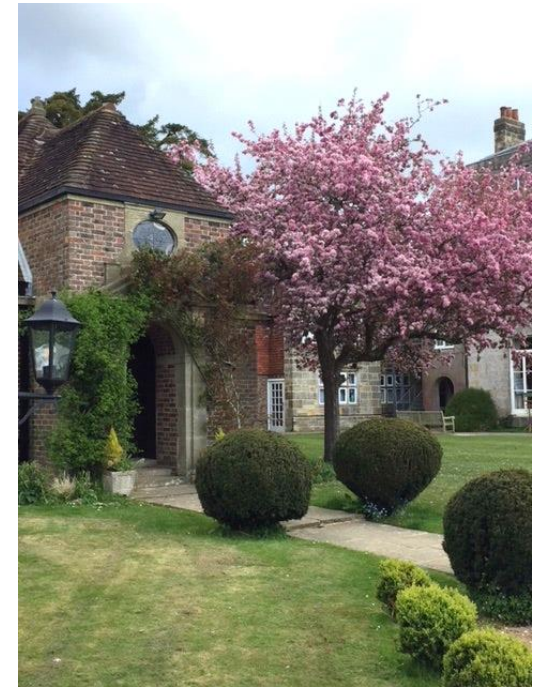
*Fig. 19* (opposite, left of the image). The south front of the Chapel at Ashdown, built c. 1920s by Norman Evill (1873–1958) as a war memorial to his cousin, Arthur Evill's (Ashdown's owner-headmaster, c. 1910–39) son(s) who died in the First World War. No other photograph is known of in the public domain (LHT collection).

*Fig. 18* (below). Ashdown's north service / stable façade as it currently exists (Patrick Snadon).



## Chapel and subsequent additions

Ashdown was leased from the Tapps-Gervis family by a prep school run by William Randall Lee, formerly known as Connaught House, in 1886. When the estate was broken up after death of Clara Tapps Gervis (1831–1910), Ashdown came into the ownership of Arthur Evill. Evill was headmaster and owner of the school from c. 1910 to c. 1939.



A cousin of Arthur's was Norman Evill (1873–1958). Norman had been an apprentice of Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944), working in his office for three years. His most notable work was in extensive rebuilding and extension works to Nymans (Grade II, 1025612; now owned by the National Trust), near Handcross, West Sussex, creating a neo-medieval house in the style of a Cotswold manor.

As evinced by a plaque within, the Chapel at Ashdown was built as a war memorial, and in memory of Arthur Evill's son or sons, who died in the First World War. Little further information is available in the public domain as to the Chapel, and it is not currently publicly accessible. The Latrobe Heritage Trust has registered the Chapel as a war memorial with the War Memorials Trust and it is hoped that further research and documentation can now be undertaken.

The Chapel is connected by an early C20th cloister structure, likely built by Evill contemporaneously, to the Tudor parts of the building, and thus to the principal house at Ashdown. It is consequently likely to be listed as curtilage, but this would benefit from clarification.

Little other of Evill's work survives, and the Trust considers that the Chapel is clearly worthy of a level of statutory protection in its own right. Nevertheless, the developer's present intention is to convert it into a one bed house. We do not believe that this will be possible without considerable attendant conservation harms to the building. We submit that converting a war memorial into a dwelling would clearly be profoundly distasteful, and that it can be understood to meet the criteria for consideration for listing.

A wing immediately to the east of the principal building was also added, c. 1933, seemingly by Evill and Aidan Wallis (mentioned in Richmond's 1991 history of the School but of whom the Trust has so far found no other record). As this was attached prior to July 1948, it is clearly included under the current listing as curtilage; see *Historic England Advice Note 10: Listed Buildings and Curtilage*.

### Subsequent history

Ashdown possesses historical significance in its own right as a prep school which educated a long list of notable alumni, and an archetypal example of C19th-C20th educational architecture. These have included prominent actors, members of the royal family and politicians, including Boris Johnson (Prime Minister, 2019-22).

The former Science Block, c. early 1990s by Chris Mitchell, is one intriguing and innovative such example, carefully and subtly situated such as not to harm the setting of the principal building. In



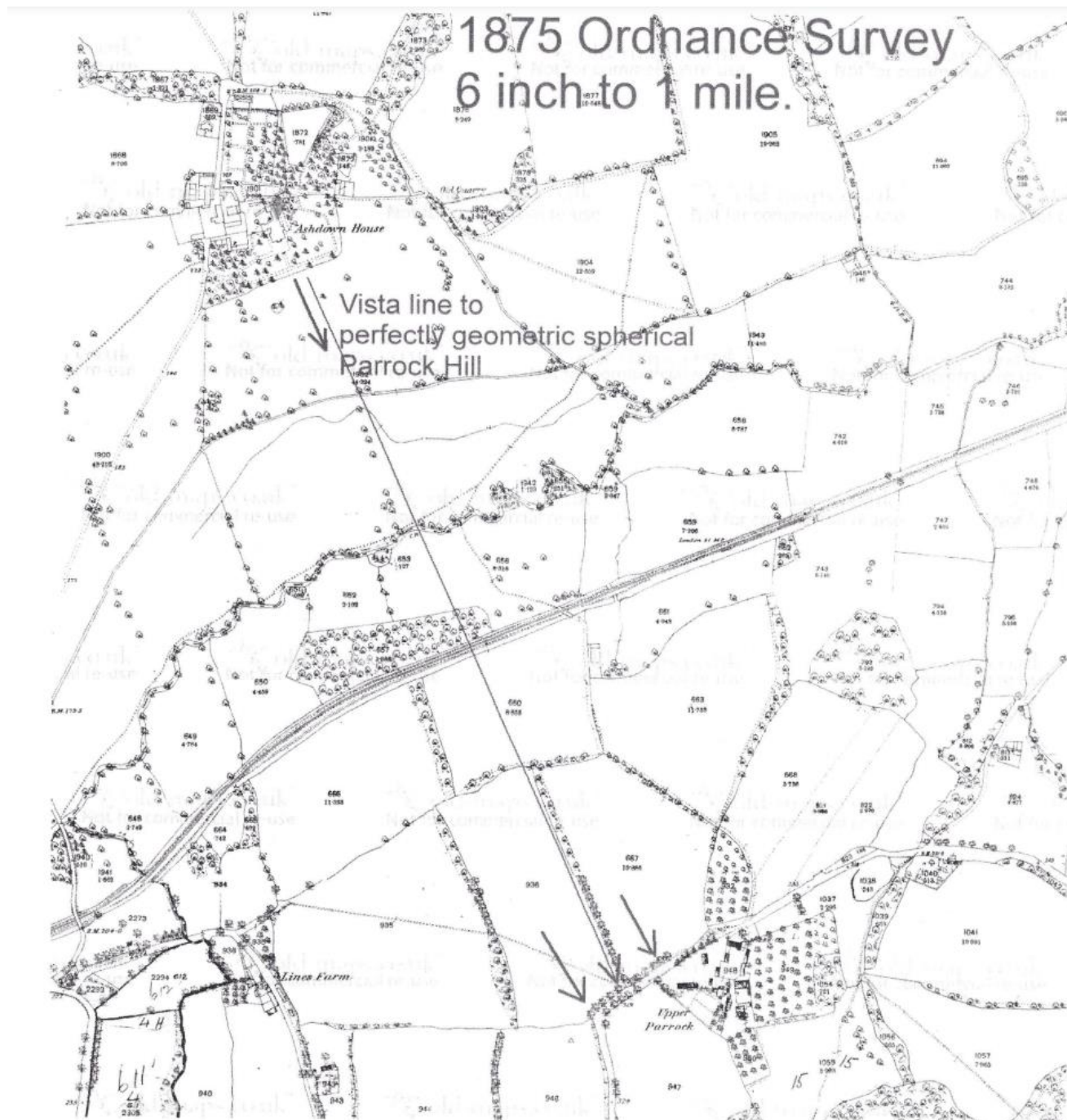
regard to the longstanding educational function of these buildings, it adds distinct group value in its own right. The Trust intends to liaise with the Twentieth Century Society on this matter and would encourage Historic England to consider the value of this building carefully and in consultation with the architect, with whom we are in touch.

*Fig. 20 (above). The former Science Block, Chris Mitchell, c. early 1990s (LHT collection).*

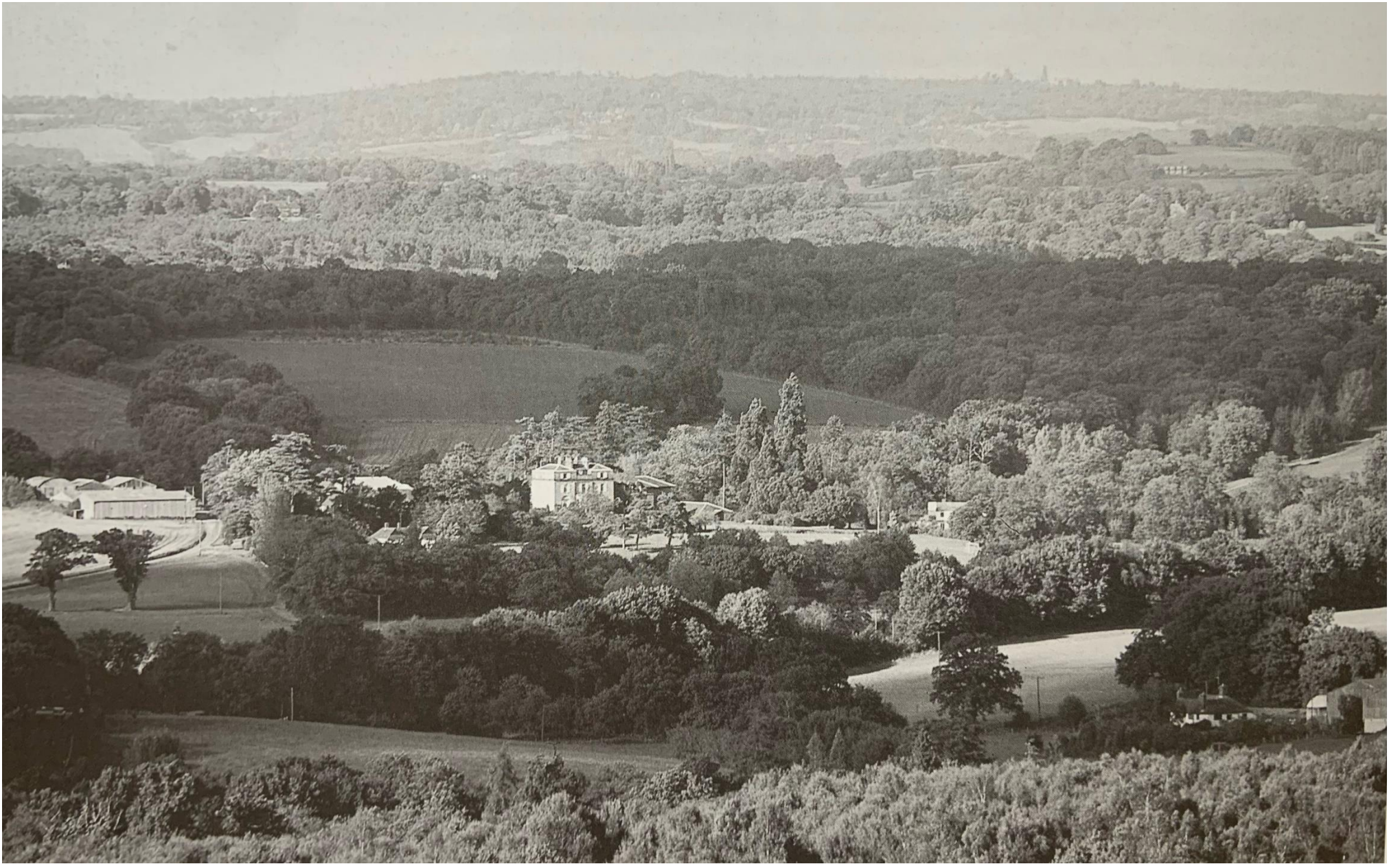
*Fig. 21 (overleaf). 1875 Ordnance Survey map showing tree planting and Ashdown's alignment with Upper Parrock, consistent with earlier landscaping works. Latrobe recorded an 'very intimate friendship' with landscape gardener Humphry Repton.*

*Fig. 22 (p. 24). Ashdown within its landscape setting; looking north-east (LHT collection).*









# LANDSCAPE

In his papers, Latrobe reported a 'very intimate friendship' with Humphry Repton (1752–1818), and they had several overlapping circles of acquaintance, commissions (notably nearby to Ashdown, at John Baker Holroyd's Sheffield Park) and geography. He also reported an acquaintance with Humphry's son, John Adey Repton (1775–1860).

The Tudor house ('Lavertye') which Latrobe was commissioned to extend and re-model was built on a hilltop site, likely without grading or terracing. As evinced in his *Essay on Landscape* (1798–99), Latrobe designed his buildings in Britain and America entirely as part of their landscape settings. F&S were in no doubt that Ashdown's was a designed landscape, and that the interior scenery of the house was intrinsically connected to its exterior landscape. They note that the integration of building and landscape setting was integral to his design philosophy by the time he designed Ashdown:

...the Ashdown landscape is consistent with the theories of Latrobe's friend, landscape gardener Humphry Repton, including the open, parklike treatment of the hillside south of the house (which slopes down to the river Medway) and the appropriation of distant views beyond the estate boundaries ... Ashdown made an equally significant contribution, through its circular temple-portico, to the relating of country houses to their landscape setting.

Aerial photography and LIDAR scans (figs. 24 and 25, on p. 27) which have not been available to earlier researchers show

potential evidence of a water-course moved south, perhaps to be more easily viewed from the house, consistent with Reptonian ideals. This is of particular interest as Latrobe had current and relatively extensive engineering experience in the creation and alteration of water-courses.

Working within the office of John Smeaton (1724–92), Latrobe had surveyed the Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire Fens; he also worked extensively on the creation of the Basingstoke Canal (1788–89), in Hampshire, under William Jessop (1745–1814), then Britain's foremost canal engineer. Contemporaneously with Ashdown, he also worked on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation (1792–95), a project to canalise those rivers in Essex. Formwalt (1977) notes that, engaged by the Port of Maldon, Latrobe lobbied the House of Commons in favour of two versions of the project in 1793 and 1795, to the extent that he was familiar with its standing orders. These failed, resisted by the Navigation Company, but the extent to which Latrobe's canal experience may have shaped his landscape works in domestic commissions – at Ashdown or elsewhere – has not previously been noted, abetted by the scarcity of his English records as noted above.

Extant mature trees within Ashdown's parkland also appear consistent with landscaping in the 1790s, and the age of those which have fallen and been felled since 1987, where ring-counts dated them to that decade.

Such works would reflect landscaping known to have been undertaken at Hammerwood, reflected in the Grade II listing



(recommended for upgrade to Grade I when the condition is improved) of its parkland within the National Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Ashdown's landscape as yet enjoys no similar protection. At Hammerwood, Latrobe's brother, Christian Ignatius Latrobe, recorded in his diary, on 24 October 1792, that he was taken for a tour of the estate by the owner:

Mr. Sperling took me all round and across the woods to explain his intended plan of improvement. Nature has done a good deal for him. He has low and high woods, hills, vales, runs of water, springs etc. but a little assistance from art is wanting to render this as delicious a Spot as any in the Kingdom.

In *The Protected Vista: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (2019) by Tom Brigden, Latrobe's perspective towards landscape is analysed both in terms of the vista from a house, or 'villa', such is at Ashdown, as well as the stereometry of kinetic and oblique views of the villa from the landscape. This is consistent with Latrobe's approach at Hammerwood and Ashdown. The approach from the south-west is at exactly the same angle with respect to the axis of the house; travelling to the building follows a curve so as to give a stereometric, or three-dimensional view of the house. Trinder (1994) finds that both houses are aligned with their landscapes, and explores the mythological motivations (and their architectural and landscape applications) further.

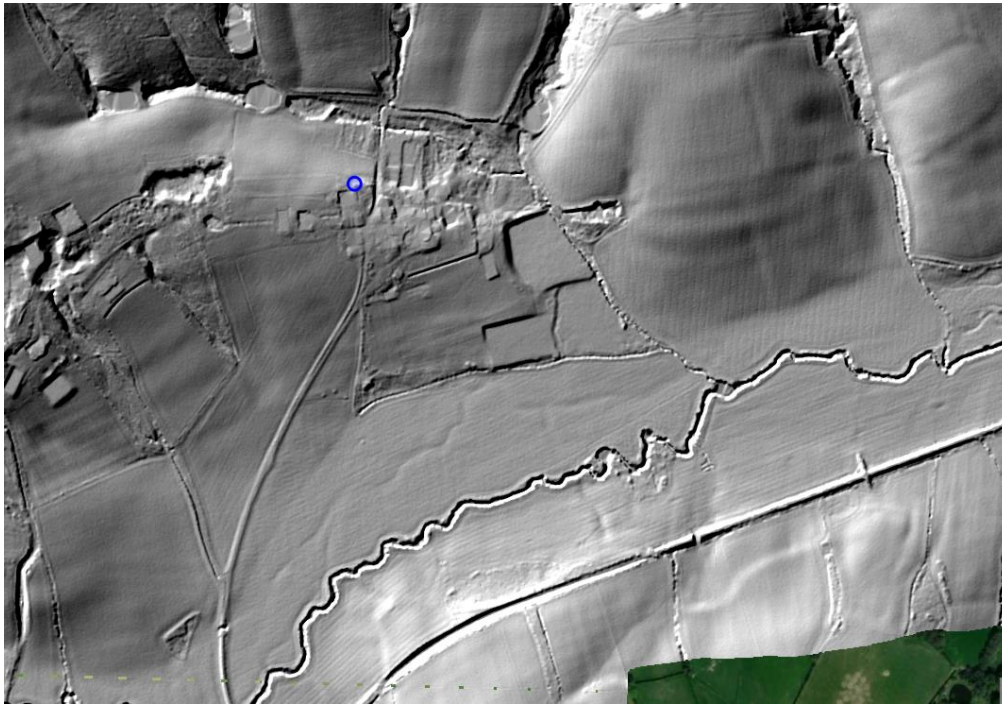
The first available Ordnance Survey map at 1" to 1 mile scale of 1819 identifies "Ashdown Park", indicating parkland, with the implied possibility of the landscape being designed parkland. The 1875 6 inches to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map (see fig. 21) marks individual trees, and shows detailed layout of trees near the house, and in the closest field to the south, giving way beyond to lines of trees

leading to the peak of the hill opposite to which it is aligned. The landscape layout, as well as the house, point unmistakably towards the hill.

Further research is now urgently merited into Ashdown's landscape history, taking into account evidence which new technology has brought to light. The Latrobe Heritage Trust urges Historic England to undertake its own investigation, with a view to a standalone Listing within the National Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. The Latrobe Heritage Trust holds relevant resources and will be very happy to assist Historic England in an investigation of the merits of such a Listing.



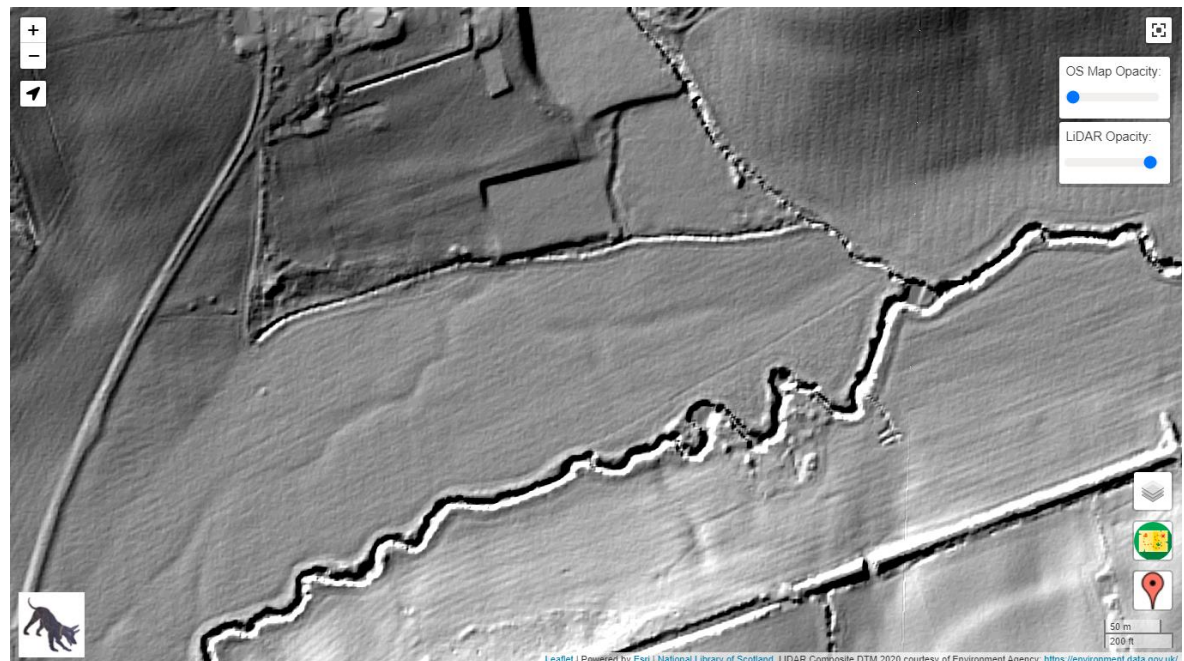




*Fig. 23* (previous page). Ashdown from the south, August 2022. Landscape showing signs of degradation and overgrowth (LHT collection).

*Fig. 24* (left). LIDAR of Ashdown (buildings to the south-east of blue circle, middle/top left), with the drive visible running from the south-west. The River Medway meanders approximately parallel to the former railway line, running north-east in the bottom-right of the image (ARCHI UK Maps).

*Fig. 25* (below). LIDAR detail showing evidence of historic alterations to Ashdown's landscape, and potential re-direction of the water-course. Further expert research is merited into the presence and remains of the Georgian landscape at Ashdown (ARCHI UK Maps).



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