

Case Name: 2 Polstead Road, Oxford

Case Number: 1434858

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess no.2 Polstead Road in Oxford for listing.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	HE Recommendation
1	1438395	No. 2 Polstead Road	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
02 July 2016	Full inspection

Context

The building stands in the North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area. There are no listed buildings in the immediate vicinity.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The applicant, owners, local planning authority (LPA), interested parties and the Historic Environment Record were consulted on the case details. Only observations on the architectural and historic interest of the case are taken into consideration as part of this assessment.

The LPA responded at notification with the planning history of the site and re-sent the information at consultation.

COMMENT 1: the owners commented that in their view the application was supported by statements or documentation which are either untrue, unauthorised by the owners, dated, incomplete and/or misleading for the purpose of gaining listed status. They agreed that the extent of alterations cited in the details is correct, and further opined that no historic fixtures, fittings, layout or property pertaining to TE Lawrence's family remains from the time they lived there. Although the owners have been committed for the last 48 years to maintaining the memory of TE Lawrence they do not consider that every building where reputed individuals lived should therefore have special interest. With regard to the listing of the cottage at Clouds Hill, they consider that each building should be assessed on its own merits.

HISTORIC ENGLAND RESPONSE: we cannot take into account comments which do not pertain to the architectural and historic interest of the house. The historic interest of the building is considered in the discussion below.

COMMENT 2: the applicant responded with some additional historic details which where relevant have been added to the case details. The applicant considers that our view that the side extension is later in date is incorrect as the brickwork bonds with the rest of the rear elevation and the extension is shown on the OS map of 1841-1952 along with the conservatory and the bungalow. Therefore, the main fabric of the building is little altered. The applicant further considers that an account of a visit to the building in 1994, which states that no. 2 Polstead Road is little altered, is proof that after being sold by Sarah Lawrence the building remained largely intact.

HISTORIC ENGLAND RESPONSE: the map evidence of 1921 does indeed show a structure to the side, but the form of that structure is not clear. Our view that the extension is a later addition is suggested by an inconsistent treatment to the dressings of the extension and house, for example the different treatment to the window surrounds at the façade and lack of decorative panels in the extension. The front pitch of the extension crashes into the rear barge board of the house's gable roof, a rather clumsy intervention, unlikely to be designed as part of Moore's original scheme.

COMMENT 3: with regard to the bungalow, the applicant considers that plans of the bungalow show that only one fireplace existed. They further state that part of the bungalow where Lawrence lived is little altered. They are of the opinion that the bungalow has considerable interest and provide an extract from a letter sent by TE Lawrence to his mother which, they state, refers to the bungalow.

HISTORIC ENGLAND RESPONSE: the inspection of the bungalow's interior in July 2016 showed that a fireplace in the current central room of the bungalow, at the back of that in the left-hand room, had been removed and the aperture blocked. There is no evidence of when this occurred or of the date of the fireplace which was removed. The extract provided refers to Lawrence at home, but does not specifically mention the bungalow, nevertheless this is referred to by Sattin (2014, see below). The architectural and historic interest of the house and bungalow is considered in the discussion section.

A party to whom the consultation report was sent by the applicant responded in support of the listing and stressed the international interest in Lawrence. He corrected the date when the blue plaque was attached to the façade, and by whom it was erected. This has been changed in the history section. This respondent also commented on the east extension, opining that it was part of the original building; our response to this point is above.

COMMENT 4: this party also claims that the front porch dates from the 1890s and not the 1920s or 1930s.

HISTORIC ENGLAND RESPONSE: our case details suggest that the entrance porch may have been erected at the time of the extension but we do not give a definitive date. The porch is an addition to the villa and is of a standard form.

COMMENT 5: this party further claims that the look of the bungalow has not changed as a result of the extension and opines that, contrary to the suggestion in our case details that a replacement roof has been erected over the structure of the old, photographic evidence of before and after the construction of the addition show there is no change to the height of the roof or tiles.

HISTORIC ENGLAND RESPONSE: the site inspection of 2016 showed that the original roof has not been extended over the 1970s extension but that the structure is entirely of one phase, therefore our suggestion that it has been erected over the structure of the old stands. In the report, we acknowledge that the original rafter feet can be observed in the central room.

Another interested party acknowledged the report, but had no comments to make.

DISCUSSION

No. 2 Polstead Road is assessed for listing against the criteria laid down in the Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, March 2010) which states that for buildings post-dating 1840 progressively greater election is necessary reflecting the increased numbers of buildings constructed and surviving, and standardisation. The Principles explain that to be of special architectural interest a building must be of importance in its architectural design, decoration or craftsmanship. To be of special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural, or military history and/ or have close historical associations with nationally important people. There should normally be some quality of interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing.

Our Domestic 3 Selection Guide on Suburban and Country Houses (October 2011) explains that the Victorian villa began to set the pattern for the suburban house – detached or semi-detached – of the Edwardian and inter-war period. New architectural styles in their pure form continued to be used by the architect to try and keep one step ahead of the general builder and the pattern-book but the prevailing orthodoxy from the mid-C19 onwards became an eclectic historicism where house style ranged from the sophisticated re-interpretations of previous established styles to a desperate search for the novel and the bizarre in the name of fashion. From the 1840s onwards, good quality substantial detached villas designed by established local architects proliferated on villa estates located on the edge of flourishing cities.

No. 2 Polstead Road is an example of a suburban semi-detached villa of the late-C19. The development of the St John's College estate north of Oxford has long been recognised as a good example of such

development, and is reflected in its conservation area status. Indeed, it was the subject of a thematic survey by English Heritage in 2005, which sought to identify buildings which met the test of special architectural and historic interest within the suburb. The buildings on Polstead Road were considered as part of this survey, but none were identified as possessing the requisite quality for statutory listing here. No. 2's association with TE Lawrence was acknowledged, and thought to justify local listing. Some suburban houses were recommended for listing at the time of the survey including: 105 Banbury Road (NHLE 1392907, 1886, Grade II) listed as a particularly successful example of Wilkinson and Moore's work in the Domestic Revival style: no.13 Bradmoor Road of 1870 by Frederick Codd (NHLE 1392926, Grade II) in Gothic style, one of the more successful commissions by this prolific architect listed by virtue of its overall success as a varied composition and the relative richness of the masonry detailing; and 2-4 Charlbury Road, a pair of semi-detached houses of 1908-9 designed by Stephen Salter (NHLE 1392928, Grade II) in the Domestic revival style, listed for the overall quality of composition, massing, and sheer exuberance.

In contrast, no. 2 Polstead Road, although competent in design and execution, is one of many similarly designed buildings on this street. Externally, it is a good building, with a dignified and well-proportioned façade and competently executed brickwork and dressings, but its bay front and eclectic ornamentation are typical features for buildings of this type and date, which survive in large numbers nationally. As a villa its appeal to the professional classes it was designed to attract is clear, but it is not special in the national context. Internally, its plan-form is unremarkable and its fixtures and fittings, where original, are standard for the time. Some consultees believe that the later additions to the house are in fact part of the original design and that the replacement of some interior features is not significant. While we do not agree with these statements, even if the house remained entirely unaltered it would not have special architectural interest. The architectural and historic interest of the bungalow is discussed below.

The principal consideration in this case is the historic association with TE Lawrence. A controversial character, it is the overwhelming view that Lawrence has national historic interest for his military service during the First World War and diplomatic career thereafter; he was also a noted archaeologist and author. The principal buildings associated with him are already listed. The house of his birth, Snowdon Lodge (a villa known as Gophwysfa in the late-C19) in Tremadog, Gwyneth, Wales is listed at Grade II by CADW, the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Service (constructed 1870-1880, CADW reference 4437) because it marks the place of his birth. Clouds Hill in Dorset (NHLE 1120423, Grade II*), was his only adult home; here he entertained fellow artists of national repute including Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Gilbert Spencer and Augustus John. He restored the largely derelict early-C19 cottage in 1922, designing and sometimes constructing the fixtures and fittings himself. It is where he wrote much of his published works, and lived at the time of his death. Lawrence's character is indelibly weaved into the fabric of Clouds Hill. The cottage manifests his abiding association with it and, as an early-C19 building, it has quality of interest in its physical fabric; this importance is recognised by its Grade II* listing.

No. 2 Polstead Road was Lawrence's family home between the 1896 and 1921, although Lawrence himself left Oxford in 1909, returning on a temporary basis from time to time. Lawrence was doubtless influenced by his family life and his studies at Oxford as a child and young adult, but the house was foremost a family home rather than a building which directly exhibits the national historic interest for which Lawrence is rightly known. By all accounts he spent much of his last year in Oxford in the bungalow built for him in the garden in 1908, before embarking on his archaeological career and travels in the Middle East, which ultimately shaped his military, diplomatic and literary career. Sattin (2014, 1-2) believes that it is in the grate of the bungalow's fireplace that Lawrence burnt the first draft of a book he had been writing on his travels (presumably an early version of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*). The bungalow could therefore have a greater claim to special historic interest than the house. However, the extent to which the bungalow was altered in the 1970s has diminished the interest of the building overall. It has been claimed by some that Lawrence's bungalow is still recognisable in its current form, but in truth the footprint of the bungalow has been expanded by a third completely altering its character, the existing roof structure overlies that of the old, the east elevation is punctuated and the interior layout remodelled to accommodate its use as a self-contained dwelling of the late-C20. It is no longer the same structure that Lawrence inhabited for a year and the physical fabric of 1908 and later does not have quality of interest. Unlike Clouds Hill, the historic associations with Lawrence have been diluted to the point that they do not compensate for the extent of alteration.

Listing is not always the best method of marking significance or conferring protection. The houses the Lawrence family lived in before moving to Oxford are not listed for their historic association with TE Lawrence, but one, Bramerton House in St Helier, has a blue plaque noting the fact. Other structures associated with Lawrence's life are noted in this way, such as Brown's Pie shop in Lincoln where he is said to have lodged on occasion and at Lawrence House in Calshot, which commemorates his time as Aircraftsman Shaw based at Calshot between 1929-1931. No. 2 Polstead Road stands within a conservation area and its association with Lawrence is marked by the blue plaque on the facade. It clearly has local interest for its

association with Lawrence, as indeed may other places within the City, but it does not have special architectural and historic interest and it should not be added to the statutory List.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

No. 2 Polstead Road, a late-C19 villa and the home to the family of TE Lawrence between 1896-1921, is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

- * Architectural interest: the house has a dignified and well-proportioned façade, and is competently executed, but its features are typical for buildings of this type and date, which survive in large numbers nationally;
- * Historic interest: although doubtless of some influence on the young TE Lawrence, the national historic interest of Lawrence is not directly manifest in this house;
- * Alteration: the bungalow in the rear garden, built for TE Lawrence in 1908, has been significantly altered externally and internally, denuding the historic association with him and diluting the interest of the structure overall.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. T E Lawrence was without doubt a leading figure of the C20, but 2 Polstead Road, and particularly the much-altered bungalow, do not have the architectural and historic interest to merit listing. P Trevor
14.10.16

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: No. 2 Polstead Road

Location: 2 Polstead Road, Oxford, OX2 6TN

County	District	District Type	Parish
Oxfordshire	Oxford	District Authority	Non Civil Parish

History

Land owned by St John's College was developed in plots as the North Oxford suburbs from 1853-5, starting with the Park Town Estate, designed by Samuel Lipscomb Seckham, the City Surveyor. From about 1860 William Wilkinson, the Oxford architect, assumed responsibility for laying out the roads and positioning the sites for villas; he was responsible also for approving the design of buildings and ensuring high standards of workmanship. He went into partnership with his nephew Harry Wilkinson Moore (1850-1915) in 1881: Moore assumed the role of design arbiter and it was under his aegis that the roads and villas as far north as Frenchay Road were laid out. From 1886, most of the villas were designed by Moore including those on Polstead Road between 1887 -1896; nos. 2-4 were built in 1888/9. A number of Wilkinson and Moore's buildings are listed in Oxford, including St Edward's School buildings of 1873, St Clement's Mission Hall (1887-91) and Christchurch Cathedral School (1892) all listed at Grade II. One of their villas in the suburbs is listed, no. 105 Banbury Road of 1886, also at Grade II.

Any earlier residents of no. 2 are unknown but between 1896 and 1921 it was the home of the Lawrence family. Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935, also known later as Lawrence of Arabia) was born in Tremadoc, Caernarvonshire, the second of the five sons of Thomas Robert Tighe Chapman (1846-1919), an Anglo-Irish landowner, and his mistress, Sarah Junner (1861-1959). The couple had assumed the name Lawrence after the birth of their first child, Robert, in 1885. The family had a peripatetic existence, living successively at Tremadoc, Kirkcudbright, Dinard in Brittany, Langley in Hampshire, and Oxford, where they settled at 2 Polstead Road when T E Lawrence was nine. In 1914 Chapman inherited the family baronetcy, but never used the title, which became extinct on his death.

No. 2 Polstead Road Oxford remained the Lawrence's home until 1921. T E Lawrence and his brothers attended Oxford High School: Lawrence, a noted scholar, later studied at Jesus College pursuing his interests in archaeology, literature and medieval history. In 1908, his father built him a bungalow at the rear of the garden, where he is thought to have mainly lived and studied. Sattin (2014, 25) assumes that tensions between T E Lawrence and his mother emerged following his discovery of his illegitimacy in part led to the construction of the bungalow. With a keen interest in medieval military architecture, he visited Syria and Lebanon recording castles in 1909, and from that period it seems he was an infrequent visitor to Polstead Road (Sattin, 2014, 2). Between 1911 and 1914, he worked on the British Museum's excavations at Carchemish in Syria, where he became immersed in local life, an experience which served useful in his military service in the First World War, serving initially as an intelligence officer, then soldier in the Middle East. From 1916, he was instrumental in the Arab revolt, an uprising against the Turkish, whose ambitions for the Ottoman Empire would have wiped out the traditional way of life which Lawrence so valued. Support for the revolt suited the British, frustrating as it did French imperial ambitions and growing Indian plans for colonisation in the region, and Lawrence successfully persuaded his commanders of the potential and importance of Arab forces to delivering British regional strategy. The revolt reached its most significant point in Lawrence's famed action against 'Aqabah' in 1917, which followed his difficult and dangerous trip to meet with and persuade tribal chiefs to join the Allied cause. His war continued in a flurry of unconventional and dangerous actions with Arab forces, often without the benefit of backing from the Allied military, which nevertheless continued to achieve much in the British and Allied cause. By 1918, Lawrence had earned the DSO, and his action with Arab forces culminated in the race to Damascus, whose possession by the Arabs he saw as an important bargaining point in achieving self-determination after the end of hostilities. His war-time experiences were later recorded in his 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom', first produced as a private edition in 1926.

In 1919, Lawrence took up the post of Fellow at All Souls, and may have lived at Polstead Road during this time, but from 1920 he was part of Winston Churchill's Department of the Middle East, contributing to the permanent settlement in the Middle East which saw the establishment of Iraq, Jordan, Syrian and Palestine.

With a growing national reputation for his heroic actions during the war, Lawrence returned to military service in the RAF between 1922 and 1935 moving into a cottage, Clouds Hill in Dorset (National Heritage List for England 1120423, Grade II*) in 1924 to enable him to devote time to writing. His death following a motorcycle accident in 1935 was met with genuine national grief; although buried locally, a bust by Eric Kennington was placed in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. Lawrence was to be portrayed in film later as a romantic hero espousing the cause of Arab freedom, but by all accounts it seems he was a complex character.

His father Thomas Lawrence died in 1919, and his mother Sarah Lawrence sold no. 2 Polstead Road in 1921. Thereafter the house was owned by an academic who is believed to have constructed the side extension over the drive. The half-timbered porch may also date to this time. In the 1960s the forebears of the current owners created lodgings for students on the basement and third floors of the house, subdividing the rooms and installing bathrooms. Some of the fireplaces in the polite rooms of the ground floor have been replaced with modern reproductions and the balusters of the staircase have been renewed with low-grade pine alternatives. The cupboard door said to have been marked with the heights of the growing Lawrence boys is no longer in place. Externally, a conservatory was added to the rear. The bungalow was converted into a separate dwelling in the 1970s; a large extension was added to the right (east) resulting in the removal of parts of the original east return wall, and a new roof was constructed, partly overlying the original. The interior has been remodelled and new kitchen and bathroom facilities installed.

The owner's family provided a blue plaque attached to the front elevation of the house in 1982.

Details

A semi-detached villa by H W Moore, c 1888-89, on land owned by St John's College developed as part of the North Oxford suburbs. Between 1896-1921, it was the home of the Lawrence family, who moved here when T E Lawrence (later known as Lawrence of Arabia) was nine. A bungalow at the rear of the garden was built in 1908 for T E Lawrence by his father.

MATERIALS: red brick, laid generally in English bond, with stone dressings and a clay-tile roof.

PLAN: broadly 'L' shaped with the east extension, and internally simply arranged with rooms to the front and rear accessed from central axial corridors on each floor, served by stairs at the party wall to the left.

EXTERIOR: a three storey villa with a basement, extended by a recessed single bay to the right (east). In general all window openings have continuous stone surrounds and contain vertical sash windows; stone dressings to the facade have swag and volute carvings in places. The façade is dominated by a projecting gable, with moulded barge boards supported on arched braces, central to which is a flat-roofed, canted bay window from the basement to the first floor, with stone dressings and copings and one-over-one sash windows. On either side of the bay are brick half-pilasters rising from stone brackets and terminating in low-relief, obelisk-style features. Above the bay is a triple light window with stone surround; each light has four-over-one sash windows. To the right is the entrance porch, half-timbered on a brick plinth with carved spandrels to the opening and stained glass panels, beneath a tiled, pent roof with a decorative tile-hung gable to the front. Steps lead to the main arched entrance, with moulded stone frames to the part-glazed and panelled front door. Above is a small window. The east flank wall has brick segmental arched openings to the basement and windows to each storey above. In the apex of the gable end is an oculus, also with a stone surround. The single-bay extension to the right sails over a pedestrian access with a pedimented door at the ground floor. It has a projecting gable with a squared bay to the first and second floors, with window openings arranged in a similar form to the rest of the house. The tiled roofs have decorative cresting and finials: the brick ridge chimney is centrally placed, shared between the pair of dwellings.

The rear elevation is plain by comparison, and has no stone details. Openings have brick segmental heads. There is a double-height bay to the basement and ground floors, which the conservatory is partly built across.

INTERIOR: in general, simple cornices, skirtings and dado rails remain throughout. The entrance porch has encaustic tile floor coverings, and leads to a small inner hall, beyond which is the axial corridor. On the ground floor, the polite rooms comprising the drawing room to the front, and sitting rooms to the rear remain. The conservatory, most recently used as a kitchen, is accessed from the right-hand room. In the main sitting room is a good marble chimneypiece with tile insets and a cast iron fireplace. The drawing room to the front has a reproduction timber chimneypiece with tile insets. The staircase is at the left, party wall. In the basement, the plan form is similar to the ground floor; here were the kitchen and service rooms of the late-C19 villa. The kitchen to the front retains a large stone chimneypiece, presumably where the range was located. This and the other rooms were used later as lodgings; the coal room was remodelled to form a

bathroom and the floor tiles throughout this floor are modern. On the first floor the layout replicates that of the ground floor. There are marble fireplace surrounds with flora and fauna mouldings, and dentil cornices in the room to the rear. The front room has a marble fireplace surround with simple scrolls to the surround and tile insets; the cornice has foliate decoration. There are five rooms to the third floor, where the main rooms have been partitioned. There are some original doors, but most of the doors and joinery here have been replaced. The rooms of the upper floors of the east extension have cast-iron fireplaces with simple surrounds, plain dado rails and skirting boards.

THE BUNGALOW

EXTERIOR: of red brick, with a projecting bay to the front and a timber veranda with arched bracing and a modern glazed canopy. There is a brick extension of the 1970s to the right (east), enlarging the bungalow by a third; the roof has been replaced. The chimney stack was not observed. The windows, where not replaced with modern alternatives, are timber casements.

INTERIOR: originally a two room plan with back-to-back fireplaces, the tiled surround of one remains in the left-hand room. There are no other historic fixtures and fittings. The plan has been remodelled to form a self-contained dwelling with a late-C20 kitchenette, bathroom and bedroom in the earliest part, and a large living room to the right in the extension. The feet of the rafters of the original hipped roof are exposed in the central room at the rear, suggesting that the replacement roof has been erected above the structure of the old.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Pevsner, N, Sherwood, J, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire*, (1974, 2002), 320-321

Sattin, Anthony, *Young Lawrence: a Portrait of the Legend as a Young Man*, (2014), 1-2, 23, 25

Saint, A, 'Three Oxford Architects' in *Oxoniensia*, (1970), 1-55

Websites

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed 3/8/2016 from www.oxforddnb.com

Map

National Grid Reference: SP5068808017



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