Coombe Farm Buildings  
Brinklow Road  
Coombe Fields  
Rugby

Record of the historic building fabric that is likely to be altered, damaged or obscured by the proposed conversion work

Planning permission has been granted by Rugby Borough Council for the conversion of these redundant farm buildings to three residential units.

“The Grade II Listed Buildings to be converted ... date to c 1778 and were built to serve the Menagerie designed by Lancelot (Capability) Brown. These buildings are considered to be extremely rare, having been built to store food and bedding for the animals in the Menagerie and also provided space for sheltered winter accommodation for the Menagerie beasts (LB 409225 designation text). The proposed alterations are likely to alter, damage or obscure elements of the historic building fabric which are important in understanding the nature, extent and function of the structures.”

Note: there are two spellings of Combe/Coombe and the more traditional one, Combe, will be used in this report.
Location
Combe Farm Buildings, Brinklow Road, Combe Fields, Rugby, Warwickshire
OS grid reference: SP 3887 7905
The Menagerie farm buildings lie about 1.6 km south-west of the Abbey in the
Coombe Abbey Country Park.
The group of farm buildings are set close to the Menagerie Lodge (later called
'The Woodlands') at Combe Abbey and some of them form part of the wall of the
Menagerie garden.

Purpose of this report
The history of the Menagerie, the Lodge and surrounding buildings is documented
in various reports listed at the end. A summary of the history of the Combe
Abbey estate is provided as background context and extracts from reports
included. The purpose of this report is to provide a record of the building fabric of
the farm buildings before work commences to convert them into three residential
units. The record includes all fixtures and fittings still existing in the buildings.
The farm buildings have been purchased from Coventry City Council by John and
Rosemary Goodman and Dr John and Jennifer Middleton.
The farm buildings are between 160 and 188 years old and of different heights
and scales, grouped around a central courtyard. They will be sympathetically
converted into three residential dwellings and restored as faithfully as possible to
their original appearance, subject to unavoidable modern needs and
requirements. Careful and sensitive landscaping will respect the setting and
historic purpose of the farm buildings.

Report prepared by
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2009
This report refers to the farm buildings referred to in the Department of National Heritage schedule below.

**Department of National Heritage Schedule**

Department of National Heritage  
Combefields, Combe Abbey  
22 November 1993

**Menagerie farmbuildings to NW of The Woodlands**

SP 37 NE  
1641-5/10018

"Menagerie farmbuildings. c1778. Built to serve the Menagerie designed by Lancelot (Capability) Brown. Red brick with plain tile roofs. Two L-plan ranges linked by a gate.

The larger northern range has a 2 storey wing to the west, with 4 segment-headed carriage arches, that to the right with double plank doors. Beyond to the right a stable door flanked by a single 2-light glazing bar casements all with segment heads. Above 3 tall 2-light glazing bar casements to the eaves. Beyond to the right a slightly set back lower range with a single stable door. This range continues at right angles with a further stable door and becomes single storey with two stable doors and a shuttered opening between. The smaller southern range, single storey, with the 2 cart entrances to the north range, and 2 bricked-up cart shed entrances to the south range that to the left with a 3-light glazing bar casement. Beyond a single plank door flanked by single light glazing bar casements.

These buildings are extremely rare, they were built to store food and bedding for the animals in the Menagerie, and they also provided space for sheltered winter accommodation for these exotic beasts."

SP 37 NE  
5/10004

**Wall to N of The Woodlands, Combe Abbey and attached farm buildings**

Extract relating to outbuildings forming part of the wall:

"Attached to the western side of this wall a range of single storey outbuildings. Red brick with plain tile roofs and a single ridge stack. Central range has to right 2 doorways with plank doors flanked by single 2-light glazing bar casements.

Set back to right a remodelled C19 wing. Set back to left an original wing with 2 plank doors and two 2-light casements.

These buildings were built to serve the Menagerie, to provide feed storage and winter quarters for the exotic animals kept here."
Method
A photographic and written description of the buildings following the advice contained in English Heritage 2006(b) *Understanding Historic Buildings, A guide to Good Recording Practice*, specifically photography components 1-8 and written account components 1-7.

Digital photographs have been inserted into this report and archive quality photographs with negatives have been submitted separately to the Warwickshire County Archaeologist.

History
A brief history of the Menagerie and its farm buildings is included to provide the historical background and to set the context.

The new owners hope to trace and interview people who worked on the estate in order to capture some more recent oral history, adding interest to the existing scholarly historical records of the farm buildings.
A brief history of Combe Abbey

Combe Abbey was founded in 1150 as a Cistercian House within Richard de Camvill’s manor of Smite. By the 13th century it was one of the richest monasteries in Warwickshire. The Abbey was dissolved in 1539 and the main monastic buildings used as a private residence.

The estate was settled on Sir Robert Kelway in 1557. After his death in 1581, his daughter Anne, who was married to John Harington of Exton, inherited the property. In 1603, the guardianship of Elizabeth, the young daughter of James I of England (VI of Scotland), was bestowed upon John Harington and Elizabeth moved to Combe Abbey.

Lord Harington apparently spent a fortune supporting the princess’s household during the 5 years she lived at Combe. An earlier Menagerie was built for Princess Elizabeth but its location on the estate is not known.

In 1622, Lucy (Duchess of Bedford), the late John Harington’s daughter sold the estate to Elizabeth Craven for £36,000. Elizabeth was the widow of Sir William Craven, a very rich man and who was Lord Mayor of London in 1610-11. The Craven family continued to own Combe Abbey until 1923.

In 1633-4, her son, Baron Craven of Hampstead Marshall in Berkshire, was granted a licence by Charles I to enclose 650 acres to create a park to the south of Combe Abbey. This is thought to be the origin of Combe Country Park.

He employed Lancelot Brown, known as Capability Brown, to create a naturalistic park. Brown designed a great lake of 77 acres, fed by the Smite brook. Menageries were popular features of gardens at that time and the Menagerie and Lodge created at Combe were of a rather grand design:

“The Menagerie is an outstandingly significant grade II* listed building which was constructed in c 1770-78 to the design of ‘Capability’ Brown, who followed as his model the Royal Menagerie at the Palace of Versailles. The Menagerie and its enclosure is a very rare, if not unique, intact survival of a group of late 18th century structures associated with the keeping of exotic animals as part of a designed landscape.”

There are no records of the exotic animals that the walled garden had presumably been designed to enclose and it is possible that it was never fully stocked or used as originally intended. Considerable expenditure is recorded on the maintenance of the Menagerie but the accounts do not indicate whether the workmen were employed as gardeners or animal keepers.

In the early 1920s the Combe Abbey estate was divided into several lots for sale and the purchaser of the Menagerie Lodge renamed it ‘The Woodlands’.
The Farm Buildings – extract from RCHME Report

"Most of the farm buildings are grouped around a yard to the north-east of the Lodge. Map evidence indicates they were probably constructed between 1821 and 1849 (see below). There are three ranges with cart sheds, shelter sheds and a small pig stye. All are built in brick with tile roofs. The openings generally have shallow arched heads constructed with double rows of headers.

The main range of buildings are across the north side of the yard with four cart sheds at the west end, opening on to the yard, a two box stable, with central doorway flanked by windows in line to the east and, at the east end, a lower and narrower building which is L-shaped and open for the full height around the angle. This was probably a small hay barn. A large opening in the east wall and a pitching eye above have single lines of brick headers forming the arch which implies that the openings are secondary.

Abutting the barn to the south is a narrow single storey block completing the L. This appears to have been stalls or calving boxes. The first floor above the cart sheds was probably used for hay storage. The first-floor windows have horizontal sliding sashes. The original roof trusses survive: the roof over the main cart shed is of three bays, the fourth cart shed and the stable are a further three bays and the corner barn has two trusses; one in each direction springing from the internal angle. All the trusses are of the same form with king posts with expanded head and foot and with struts that rise up to the principals from the feet of the posts. In the barn both tie beams are reused timbers with redundant mortices from previous use. There are single purlins on each slope of the roof which are set on blocks on the backs of the principals.

A low, single-storey, L-shaped range to the south forms the south-east corner of the yard. This has shelter sheds with the openings towards the yard, though some of the openings have been infilled, and in the south range, at the west end, there is a pig stye with a sunken area for a boiler for processing pig food.

The two L-shaped ranges are Grade II listed buildings (DoE 1986, Serial number of list entry SP 37 NE 1641/-5/10018). Although listed as part of the 1770s Menagerie complex, map evidence indicates they were constructed sometime between 1821 and 1849 (anon 1821; Bland, Hood and Galland 1849).

The west range is built against the enclosure wall of the Menagerie. There are seven rooms or units, most have fireplaces and appear to have been workshops. At the south end of the west range there are stalls, possibly, because of their proximity to the house, for trap ponies. Ash closets at the north end of the range would, presumably, have been for the men working in the yard. This range appears to be the one listed Grade II (DoE 1986, Serial number of list entry SP 37 NE 5/10004) although there is some confusion in the list description, as the range is described as being ‘attached to the western side of this [the Menagerie] wall...’. There are no other buildings matching the description.”
Present condition of the buildings
The buildings are in a fairly dilapidated state but the walls are sound with only minor cracks and movement apparent. In spite of the years of neglect, the roofs are in a reasonable state but have been damaged by weather and encroachment of ivy and other vegetation. Some windows still have glass and most of the doors survive.

In recent years, the farm buildings appear to have been used as a plant nursery or as a depository for rubbish associated with the management of the country park e.g. sections of metal fencing, sand, old bricks. A large quantity of plastic plant pots and trays has been found in the soil on the north-western side of the farm buildings and two large sewer pipes have been stored there.

The new owners have had most the ivy removed from the walls and roofs and have cleared brambles, rhododendrons and other vegetation from the courtyard and from some of the adjacent land. The clearing exercise has revealed a row of Field Maples, possibly cultivated for fencing poles.

A plan of the farm buildings, greenhouse, cold frames and apple trees can be found on the following page. Each unit is identified by a letter for ease of relating comments and photographs to specific buildings in the range.
Plan of farm buildings
Each unit is identified by a letter for ease of relating comments and photographs to specific buildings in the range.
First floor and roof plan
Main range across the north side of the yard
A two storey range consisting of 3 units marked A, B and C

At ground level, there are 3 units.
Floor construction:
Unit A – earth
Unit B – brick
Unit C – cobbles/setts
The three windows at first floor level were horizontal sliding sashes (RCHME report). The double plank doors for Unit B no longer exist.

At first floor level, the space is divided at b-b and a doorway links the floor above A to the roof space in B-C.

An unglazed window is let into the gable end overlooking the Menagerie garden.
A similar size opening links C (above the box stable) to D – the L shaped corner building.
Note the pulley wheel. This is positioned above the hatch to hoist sacks from the ground floor.
More photographs of the roof timbers in A and the pulley wheel
Units B and C

Photograph from the yard. The lower roof is for the adjoining corner unit marked D. One end of the low wall which crosses the courtyard can be seen.

Unit B ground floor
This cart shed has a brick floor. Doors no longer exist.

Unit C ground floor
Described as a two box stable in RCHME Report.

Top section of door from inside stable
Unit D

An L shaped building, open to the roof, with doors opening onto the track, two into the courtyard and a door (marked D1) which is set 40 cm above the floor opening on to land on north west side.

The doors for the 3 openings marked D1, D2 and D3 on the diagram no longer exist. The large wooden doors (D2) which opened onto the track have disappeared although one was still hanging from its hinges last year.

The barn is fully open to the roof but may once have been at least partially floored. This is suggested by:

- An opening at first floor level linking unit D to unit C
- The holes in the walls which may have supported joists
- White paint on lower parts of walls
- The large shuttered opening on the eastern wall of D.
Unit D roof detail

Interior of Unit D

Doors marked D1 (set 40 cm above floor level) and D4. Floor is mainly of brick plus an area of flagstones.

Door marked D4
Unit E
The north-east facing roof of the stalls/calving boxes (marked E) has been replaced at some time in the past with corrugated sheets to preserve the building in its dilapidated state.

Unit E from courtyard

Unit E photographs of interior
Door detail (marked E2)

One course of a double brick wall runs the whole length of rear N-E wall – probably the remains of a manger

Doors E1 and E2 and unglazed window in S-W wall of E, looking into courtyard
- Corrugated metal roof on N-E facing side
- Unglazed window (shutter missing) in far wall overlooks main entrance to the courtyard

Drain channel and post in brick floor
Units F, G and H

A low, single-storey, L-shaped range of 3 buildings form the south-east corner of the yard.

Units G and F,
(Units E and D can be seen on the other side of the entrance to the courtyard from the track.)

Two of the buildings in this range (F and H) appear to have been neglected for a longer period than the others evidenced by the greater quantity of thick, dirty cobwebs hanging from the beams and the ivy growing through the doors and windows. Units G and H seem to be the only ones of the whole group to have had electricity supplied to them.
**Unit F - cart sheds**

A rough hewn beam runs from f-f, close to the wall. Some symbols/letters have been scratched into it but it has not been possible to decipher them.

A single brick wall rises at f-f creating a double brick wall from floor to beam height.

The floor was covered with a deep layer of sand, dirt and debris. Cleaning has so far revealed a brick floor, partly collapsed towards the rear of the shed.

Unit F from courtyard

Unit F – beam and double wall rising to just below the beam
**Unit G**

The doors opening on to the track are still in place. The original openings onto the yard have been filled at some time in the past, one with a low wall and windows and the other entirely bricked up.

Inside Unit G looking out towards the track and country park

Units F and G showing one of the infill sections in G

Unit G looking towards wall which separates G from H.
A vertical pipe at the far end appears to have once fed a radiator and to be linked to the boiler in the pigsty.
Floor is concrete.

Roof timbers – hip where G meets F

Roof timbers – eastern corner of G
Unit H - The pigsty

A low wall (1.1m high), with two chutes built in, creates an inner area in the pigsty

Back section of one of the chutes

The pigsty has had a floor inserted at the level of the beam. The beam, which is in very poor condition, has 2 lengths of timber running each side of it presumably to provide support for the floor above. The floor appears to have been made out of scrap timber and with little thought for its appearance. Its purpose is unclear although the attic space created has been commonly described as a pigeon loft.

A brick floor with blue brick drainage channel.
There is no access, nor any sign that an access hatch has existed, to the roof space from the ground floor. The only entry is through an opening (its shutter is missing) above the door in the south wall.

Since removing the ivy, several openings in the brickwork around the window have been revealed which may be access holes for pigeons or doves or merely for ventilation.

**Loft space in pigsty**

According to the 1993 survey by Harold Sillifant the strut in the roof space had been removed. The photograph appears to confirm this.

**The boiler**

A boiler is housed in a lower area access via 4 brick steps. According to the RCHME report the boiler was used for processing pig food.

The manufacturer/model name is undecipherable because of rust damage but one letter A is clear and a second letter looks like X.

Photographs show the pipes running from the boiler to left towards the greenhouse and to right to the pigsty and then onwards to unit marked G. There is some relatively modern pipework in units H and G suggesting that radiators were installed in each building. The source of water for the boiler has not yet been discovered.
Greenhouse

There is a handsome but dilapidated greenhouse in the yard, next to the pigsty. It is a Messenger & Co. greenhouse and will be carefully repaired and brought back into use.

Messenger & Co. were "horticultural builders and hot water apparatus manufacturers" in 1877. "The firm was famous, particularly in the Victorian and Edwardian period, for making greenhouses, verandahs, summer houses, cucumber frames, melon pits, mushroom beds, orchid stages, vineries and peach houses. As the demand declined from the 1930s, the company began to concentrate more on the manufacture of heating equipment and became an engineering firm." vii

Mechanism for opening and closing windows.

Photograph shows pipes running from the boiler through the wall of pigsty in the direction of the greenhouse.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the boiler in the pigsty provided heat for the greenhouse.

However, the heating system has been modernised - see photographs below of pipework, electrics and thermostat.
**Cold Frames**
Two cold frames are situated near to the greenhouse. These will be repaired and put back into use.

**Units I, J, K and L - Outbuildings or Workshops**
The ‘outbuildings’ are built into the Menagerie Wall with one of them opening into the Menagerie grounds and having no access from the farm buildings courtyard.

Most of them have fireplaces and appear to have been workshops. At the north end of the range are what appear to be ash closets with staging over. The one on the left has a sunken floor.

Some of the outbuildings appear to be older than the rest of the farm buildings which is not surprising as they form part of the Menagerie wall.

“Map evidence indicates they [the farm buildings] were probably constructed between 1821 and 1849” (RCHME report p. 32 – anon 1821; Bland, Hood and Galland 1849). However, a map of The Menagerie Area c. 1780 (Figure 15 of the July 1995 Demidowicz and Fryer Management Plan) shows the outbuildings forming part of the Menagerie wall.
The Yard

Surface of yard
The dense vegetation has made it difficult to confirm the construction of the yard but scraping away of some of the areas has revealed brick paving and stone flags in parts of the area between the low wall that crosses the yard and the units on the north-eastern side of the yard.

Water source
Equipment and pipework to deliver water to the farm buildings has not yet been found. Water would have been required for the livestock, cleaning and for a cart wash. It may have been pumped from the lake or perhaps there are springs within or close to the courtyard.

Trees
There are four old apple trees in the yard. Two have been identified as cooking apple trees: Newton Wonder and Keswick Codlin. The Keswick Codlin can apparently be dated back to 1790 in Lancashire and was one of the most popular early cooking apples in Victorian England (www.keepers-nursery.co.uk). Some careful pruning should help restore the trees to good health for a few more years.

Wall
A low wall crosses the yard. The ivy has been removed and the wall is in good condition.
**References and sources**

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[www.archiveshub.ac.uk](http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk)
Messenger and Co. Collection held at the University of Reading, Museum of English Rural Life, Reference: **GB 0007 TR MSS**.

[www.keepers-nursery.co.uk](http://www.keepers-nursery.co.uk)
Historical information about apple trees
Notes


ii The age of the buildings is uncertain. Page 4 of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) report says they were built “by c.1849 and certainly by 1886” and later, at page 32, “Although listed as part of the 1770s Menagerie complex, map evidence indicates they were constructed sometime between 1821 and 1849 (anon 1821; Bland, Hood and Galland 1849)”.


v pp 31 and 32 RCHME Report

vi Harold Sillifant C.Eng., M.I.C.E., Chartered Civil Engineer & Surveyor, Barn A, The Woodlands, Coombe Abbey

vii Internet search* revealed there is a Messenger and Co. Collection held at the University of Reading, Museum of English Rural Life, Reference: GB 0007 TR MSS. The collection consists of contracts files for glasshouses and heating apparatus erected by Messenger and Co of Loughborough (also known as the Midland Horticultural Company). The collection contains records for properties in many counties including Warwickshire for the period 1880s-1950s.

* www.archiveshub.ac.uk