

# MICA



## **BLAKE'S COTTAGE – THATCH ROOF WORKS**

LISTED BUILDING CONSENT APPLICATION

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

MICA Architects – February 2024



## **MICA REPORT**

638-MICA-XX-XX-RE-A-70002

Revision:

P1 Preliminary for comment: 08/02/24

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## **REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:**

**(Not forming part of application)**

MICA:	Blake's Cottage - Conservation Plan (2022)
ASE:	Blake's Cottage - Historic Building Assessment (2017)
HE:	Blake's Cottage – A Botanical Report on the Thatch (2022)





Blake's Cottage, aerial view from southwest (c. 2015)



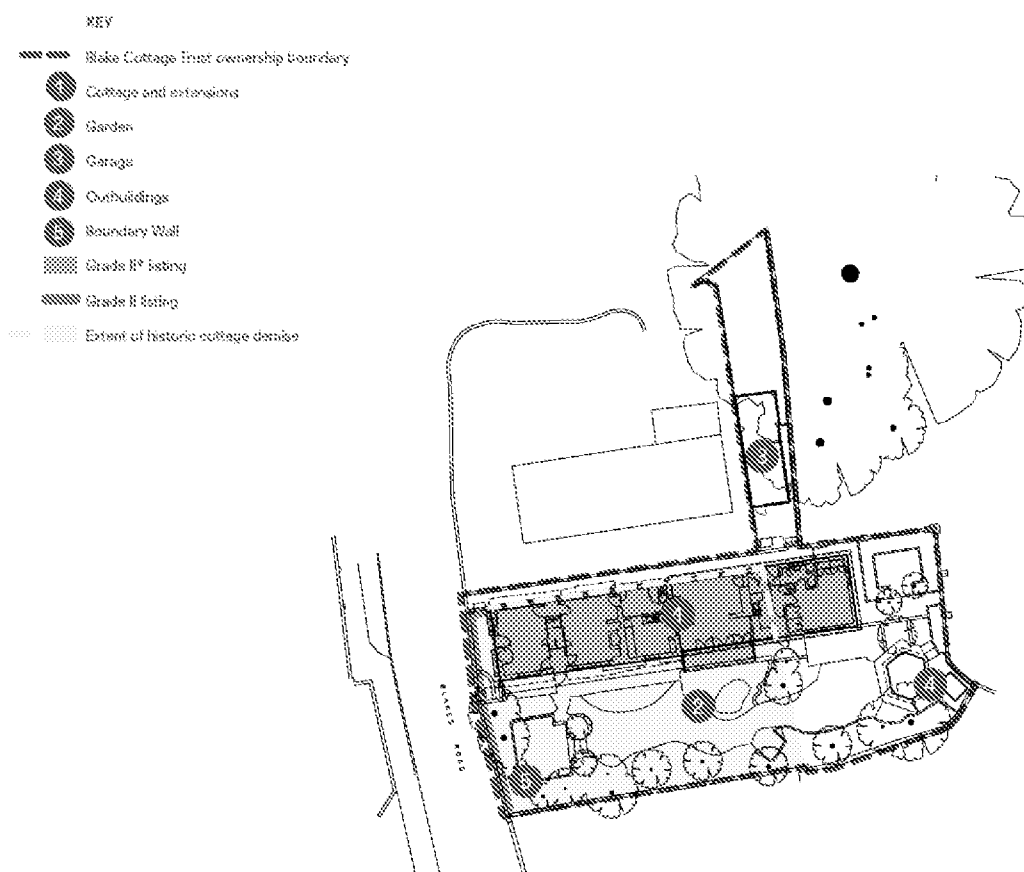
## Blake's Cottage – Thatch Roof Works Statement of Significance:

### Intent:

This document supports the application to Arun District Council for listed building consent to enable urgent repair or replacement of structural roof timbers and carry out the rethatching of the roof, towards removing the cottage from the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. The statement of significance for this work is described in the context of the cottage and its setting as a whole.

The proposed work to the roof is described on accompanying drawings and specification / schedule of works, (Appendix 3).

### Blake's Cottage: Context and Principal Elements:



### Heritage Details: Listing and Significance Overview

Blake's Cottage is situated within the Felpham Conservation Area of Arun District Council.

The Cottage is included on the National Heritage List for England with the following classification:-

Blake's Cottage, Blake's Road, Felpham

- Grade: II\* [*particularly important building of more than special interest*].  
List entry number: 1353792 Date first listed: 22 July 1949

#### Details:

C17, altered. 2 storeys. 3 windows. Now fronted with roughcast, whitewashed. Back and side walls Bognor stone and flint cobbles and red brick. Thatched roof with pentice behind. Sash windows on 1st floor, glazing bars missing. Modern windows on ground floor. William Blake lived here from 1800-1803.

The garden wall that encloses the cottage plot as it borders Blake's Road is also listed.

- Grade: II [*building of special interest*].  
List entry number: 1375729 Date first listed: 23 July 1998



Details:

*Roadside garden wall with archway linking it to Blake's Cottage GV II Garden wall. C18 or early C19. Coursed flint cobblestones with orangey-red brick quoins. Approx 1.5 metres high with rounded top. Quoins at ends and flanking near-central pedestrian entrance. At left end, later flint-cobblestone wall, rising over round archway, links roadside wall to house. A characteristic flint and brick wall to a grade II\* listed cottage.*

The particular importance and more than special interest of Blake's Cottage is set out in the “*Conservation Plan*” (MICA Architects 2022), which can be briefly summarised as arising from:

- its strong associative link to William Blake (1757-1827), the Romantic visionary poet, painter and printmaker.
- its survival as an adapted example of modest rural domestic architecture of local vernacular materials; the buildings, and their evolving relationship to their garden plot setting, represent a continuous thread to the present day with adaptations to changing standards of living and subsistence.

The building was added to the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register in 2021 due to the deteriorating condition of the fabric, in particular the thatched roof. The HAR Register describes the cottage thus:

*Thatched brick and flint cottage dating from C17 with later alterations and extensions. It was the home of the poet, artist and visionary William Blake and his wife Catherine from 1800-1803, and where he wrote the words to the hymn 'Jerusalem'. Purchased by a trust in 2015 since when the building has remained vacant. At risk due to decay and failure of part of the roof structure and thatch, and structural problems to the masonry.*

An update to the Register in 2023 raised the category of priority from C to A, with the note “*Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed*”.

The primary purpose of this current application for listed building consent is to agree a solution to enable urgent repair or replacement of structural roof timbers and to carry out the rethatching of the roof.

## **Statement of Significance:**

### **1.1 Introduction:**

[This section is reproduced from “*Blake's Cottage - Conservation Plan*” (MICA Architects, March 2022), which was produced in 2020-2022 with extensive input from senior conservation officers at Historic England (Alma Howell and Robert Williams) and Arun District Council (Martyn White). Updates to the Plan are shown in “[ ]” brackets].

The approach adopted for this statement of significance is that set out in Historic England's “*Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance*” (2008), using heritage values to articulate significance. The heritage values are Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal, and are reviewed separately for the Cottage only.

This section includes extracts from the Historic Building Assessment (HBA) produced for the cottage in 2017 by Archaeology South East.

### **1.2 The Cottage:**

#### **Evidential Value:**

As a surviving 17C Sussex cottage with alterations, the cottage building as a whole, evidences changes in domestic life and architecture since that time.

From the HBA para. 7.2:

*'The building itself is also of significance in its own right, as an example of a modest 18th or possibly late 17th century dwelling built of materials which are characteristic of the local vernacular.*

While ground floor internal partitions in the earliest part of the building have been lost, they, and the separate spaces in the outshot that they created, are evidenced in the retained structural beams and lofted ceiling above. 19C infills to the cottage structure have partially closed off the void above the outshot, creating a storage area off the bedroom spaces above. While the infilling of the ceiling can be argued to



obscure evidence of the original cottage form, the infill can perhaps be seen to evidence domestic developments such as an increase in material possessions.

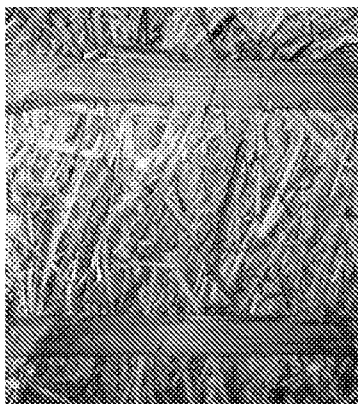


Blake's Cottage at Felpham etching by Herbert H Gilchrist  
1880

There is potential for the building to yield further evidential value as described under para. 7.5 of the HBA:

*'Although many aspects of the building's form during its various phases of development are traceable within the visible fabric, there is the potential that future alteration or repair works, particularly those that involve the stripping or removal of historic or later finishes, might reveal details of the underlying construction that would increase understanding of the building and may allow for more detailed interpretation. Any future work which enables inspection of the presently obscured ceiling joists, tiled floor, and roof structure towards the western end of the Phase 1 range, might provide further evidence for ascertaining the nature and location of the original chimneystack at this end. Any work involving the removal of the internal partition within the east ground floor room and the central Phase 1 stair, could provide additional support and information about the nature of the original staircase. Additionally, works which involve the stripping of the Phase 2a east extension walls and roof, have the potential to confirm the extent to which the 19th century structure survives behind later finishes.'*

As well as the historical value described below, the thatched roof has evidential value, following the outcome of archaeobotanical research carried out by Historic England that reveals a history of thatching materials for the cottage. "Blake's Cottage, West Sussex: A Botanical Report on the Thatch" by Dr Ruth Pelling, (Historic England 2022) confirms that the base-layer of thatch includes threshed bread wheat straw dating from the early C19th. This evidences the use of straw waste for thatching as a by-product of flour production for the bread-baking industry in Sussex during that period. This has high significance value and as such, Dr Pelling recommends that the existing base layer is retained to ensure that historic integrity is maintained. Retention in place of the base layer may be dependent on the repair work which is necessary to the existing timber roof framing, but the possible reuse of removed historic material as a new base layer should be investigated].



Visible ears of wheat and crushed straw laid in random fashion.  
Blake's Cottage: Botanical Report on the Thatch, Dr Ruth Pelling, HE, 2022.

Although evidence of Roman and medieval activity has been found in the surrounding area, potential for below ground archaeology at the site has not yet been formally assessed. A formal desk-based archaeological assessment is a recommended study.



## Historical Value:

The cottage holds high illustrative historical value similar to its evidential value as a surviving and adapted example of rural domestic architecture - the buildings represent a continuous thread to the present day with adaptations to changing standards of living.

[The historic development of the cottage is summarised on the Dating Plans in Appendix 1].

The [later] 20C additions at the site to the east (the enclosure of the single storey 19C building by a sunroom, and the addition of a kitchen, bathroom and bedroom) represent an adaptation of the site to its expanded footprint and seemingly to the changing needs of an aging resident. This is of some social interest, however, the materials and form of the building are not particularly unique, there being numerous examples of such single storey 1960s-70s building across the county and country. These parts of the building therefore have limited historical value and are of negligible heritage significance.



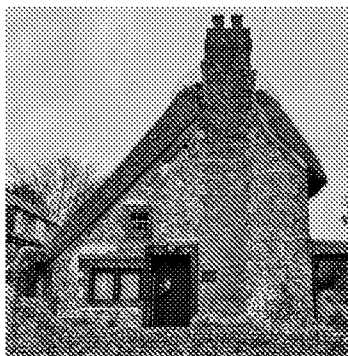
C20th extension to original C17th-C19th cottage.

[The external walls of the 17C – 19C cottage have high historical value (as well as aesthetic value as below), comprising composite wall construction in the local vernacular style using stone cobbles collected from the nearby beach and split chalk flint nodules found on the beach or randomly dispersed in local fields. Stones are laid in neat courses in the 17C part of the building and random courses on the early-19C extension, facing each side of a roughly-built core, filled with lime or earth mortar and stone rubble. Lime mortar joints in the original 17C building have small flint gallets inserted between the cobblestones, but not used in later 19C extensions. Also, three courses of neatly knapped flint nodules run as a feature band between the bottom of first floor windows on the south facing front elevation of the original cottage. This stonework is combined with red brickwork forming piers of quoins at each corner, chimney stacks and rough segmental arches, jambs and cills to door and window openings. Brickworks are historically common to Sussex and neighbouring Hampshire. Within the flintwork walls, particularly the south elevation, there are remnants of brick quoins and flat-arches bearing visible traces of earlier window positions. Mortar for bedding and fill material is lime, originally based on non-hydraulic lime-putty and pozzolans of ash and crushed brick or tile. Cement based mortar has been used for late-20C repointing. At some point in its history, the south elevation of the cottage facing the sea, was rendered with a lime-roughcast render as protection from wind and rain. This is visible in the early photographs of the late-19C, but Blake's own sketch of the cottage from 1803 (as page 6 below) suggests that it may have been rendered even at that time, when the cottage was totally exposed with no protection between it and the sea shore. More recent photographs show it still rendered in the mid-20C. The render would have been overpainted with white limewash].

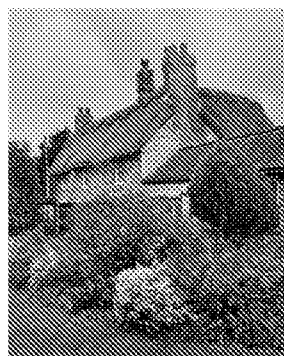


External walls of local beach cobbles and flintwork with red brick.  
South wall

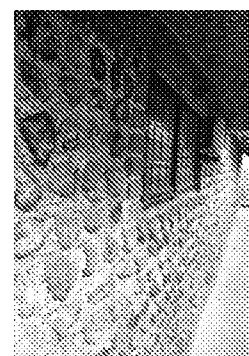




West wall

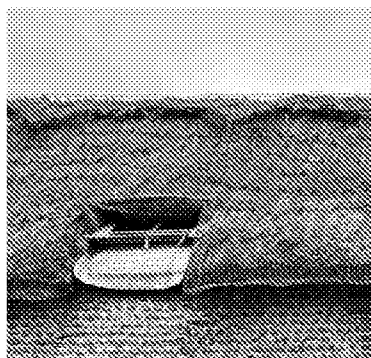
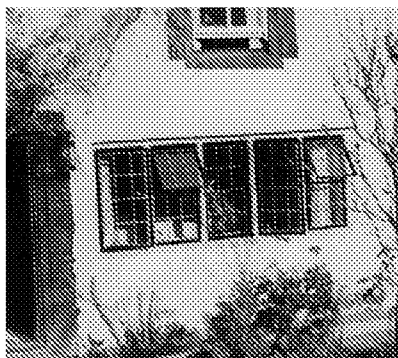


East wall



North wall

[Historically the existing window types of the Cottage, particularly on the south elevation represent the evolution of window development over a 150-year period from the end of 18C to the 1950s. The windows of Blake's time, as shown in his sketch of about 1803, were lattice casements with leaded lights in iron frames in a vernacular style typical of humble agricultural workers' dwellings. On the south elevation, these were subsequently replaced in the early 19C, as elsewhere locally, with larger vertical sliding timber framed sashes to let in more daylight. In the 20C, during the 1930s, the central sash window on the ground floor was replaced with Modern architectural style steel framed casement windows arranged within a larger opening formed in the flintwork wall with a concrete lintel over it cutting through the brick flat-arch, (a similar window was fitted in the 1950s into an enlarged opening to replace the western sash window). Also in the 1930s, a steel-framed sloping rooflight of similar Modern-style was fitted at eaves level over the staircase landing above the garden entrance door, creating an incongruous cut-out in the thatch to accommodate it. Although these Modern windows (including the rooflight), are part of the historic development of Blake's Cottage, they demean the historical value of it since they introduce an architectural style which is out of place and does not represent any contemporaneous evolution of form, appearance or material which is characteristic of the local vernacular. Any heritage significance of these windows is because of this incongruity, but in consideration of the Cottage as a whole, they debase its character particularly in the context of the particular importance and more than special interest described above. Therefore these steel-framed windows and rooflight are considered to have low significance].



Modern-style steel-framed casement windows and rooflight inserted: 1930s.

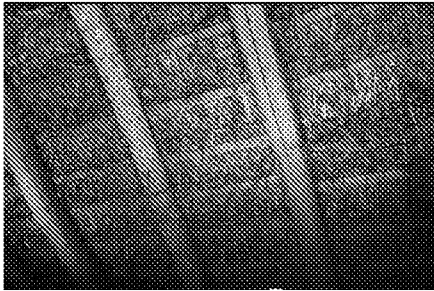


Condition in 2022 showing exposed concrete lintels.

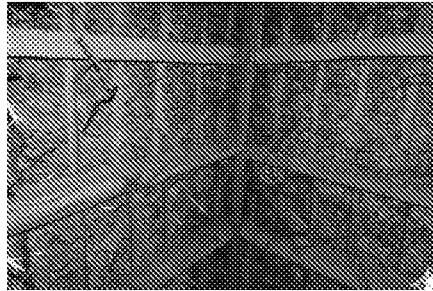
[Roof construction of the Cottage is probably of common English oak (*Quercus robur*). The roof frame of the original cottage (17<sup>th</sup> Century) is based on a traditional collar-beam roof, but this is extended over an outshot with a catslide roof to the rear north side of the cottage which takes the roof down to a single storey. This means that the area of the first floor is smaller than that of the ground floor. The common rafters in the oldest part of the cottage are pole rafters, historically typical to this area, comprising timber in the 'round' being the whole section of the tree trunk or branch stripped of its bark and roughly hewn to shape. The timber therefore contains a high proportion of sapwood and a lower proportion



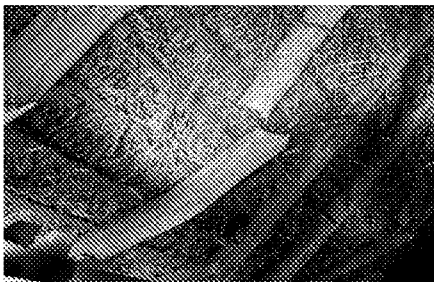
of stronger heartwood. Although weaker and susceptible to insect attack, pole rafters can work with the thatch as a partial structural diaphragm. This construction has significant historical value. A number of the pole rafters have split or fractured as a result of death-watch beetle infestation, causing partial collapse of the roof, therefore any repair or introduction of new rafters should be carried out whilst retaining the original timber in place wherever possible].



Pole rafters in oldest part of roof

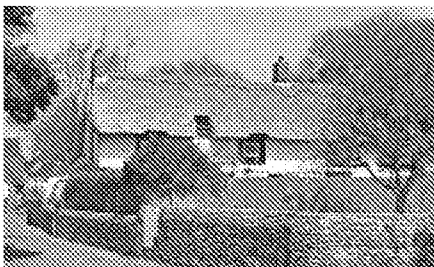


Square cut rafters in later roof extension



Split pole rafters from deathwatch beetle attack

The thatch covering to the cottage has historical value, illustrating the continuation of a once widespread vernacular building tradition. However, while the current form (block ridge, plain eaves and flush verges) and most recent thatching material used are not representative of thatching traditions in Sussex up to the early 20C, they do reflect wider changes in the availability of materials and standardisation of techniques that took place during the 20C. [As with its evidential value discussed above the base layer of thatch has historical value of high significance. The top weathering coat, however, has been replaced many times, the most recent rethatching being 1999-2000, and it is therefore of very low significance This is combed wheat reed thatch with a block ridge, which was first introduced at the Cottage in 1981.



Combed wheat reed thatch with block ridge;1981 ....and 2000

Research has found photographs from the late 19C onwards and engravings from the mid-1800s, which show a shaggier appearance that suggests long straw thatch, with a flush wrapover ridge. In a historical context it may be appropriate to revert to this style of thatch for the new rethatching work].



Blake's Cottage at Felpham, William James Linton, 1863





Long straw thatch with flush ridge: 1890...



...and 1900

The associative link to William Blake has particular and high historic resonance.

- William Blake (1757-1827) poet, painter, artist-printmaker and visionary, and his wife and steadfast helpmate, Catherine (1762-1831) lived in the Cottage on a three year lease between September 1800 and September 1803, at what was the critical turning point in Blake's life.

The Cottage has been synonymous with Blake since Alexander Gilchrist's biography of him was published in 1863.

- As described in The Blake Cottage Trust Business Plan:-

*"The Cottage is significant as it is one of only two houses to survive of the nine residences that William Blake occupied during his lifetime, the other being a Georgian townhouse in London. It was here that he wrote the words to the hymn Jerusalem, was where he was accused of treason, and the Blakes' stay here marked the beginning of the most important period in his creative life. The words of Jerusalem were put to music by Hubert Parry in 1916 and are sometimes sung as an unofficial English national anthem".*

- Philip Pullman (author, quoted in the Guardian newspaper 23 September 2015):-

*"This is one of just two houses that still exist that we know that Blake lived in. It's the only place outside of London where we know he lived and it is where he wrote a number of his most famous poems. It has an undeniably important place in English literary history."*



William Blake, a possible self-portrait from 1802 (when he was living at the cottage)  
Private collection

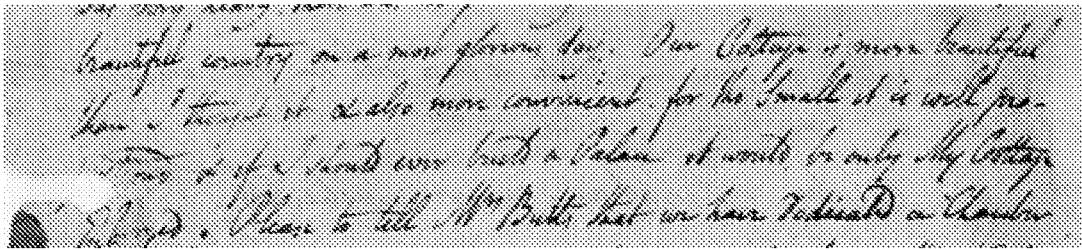
[The Cottage is specifically referred to by Blake in letters written from there after he arrived in 1800 until he left in 1803, not always in a positive light.

(Source of letters: City of Westminster Archive Centre / The William Blake Archive, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA).

- Letter to Thomas Butts: 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1800 (in joyful mood):

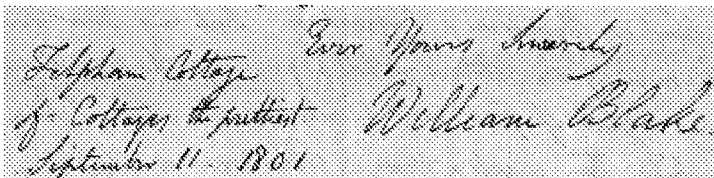
*"Our cottage is more beautiful than I thought it & also more convenient, for tho small it is well proportioned & if I should ever build a Palace it would be only My Cottage Enlarged".*





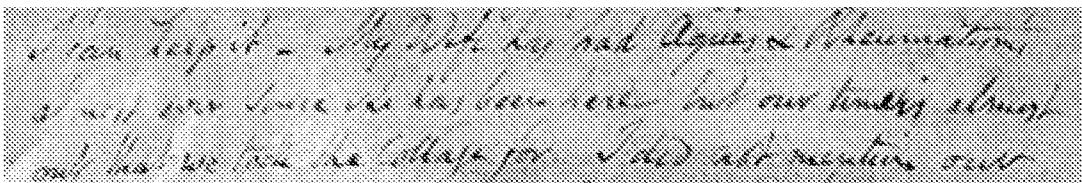
- Letter to Thomas Butts: 11<sup>th</sup> September 1801 (in happy mood):

*"Felpham Cottage - of Cottages the prettiest"*



- Letter to James Blake: 30<sup>th</sup> January 1803 (in more despondent mood):

*"My Wife has had agues and rheumatisms almost ever since she has been here but our times almost out that we took the Cottage for".*



The Cottage and its garden are referenced by Blake in his epic poem "Milton: A Poem in Two Books", which he began writing while living there, and a sketch by him of the cottage - described as "Blake's Cottage at Felpham" - appears on a page of the final publication].



#### **Aesthetic Value:**

- Paragraph 7.4 of the HBA sets out:

*"The outward appearance of the [17C-19C] ranges of the building ... on account of their form and construction in materials typical of the local vernacular ... is considered to be aesthetically pleasing. However, the construction materials employed for the [mid-20C] extension, together with its scale, has had a negative influence on the building's aesthetic value."*

- The cottage and garden have high aesthetic value, however, there are a number of elements which detract from this. The main elements are:
  - scale, form and materiality of the 20C single storey extension (as HBA extract above)



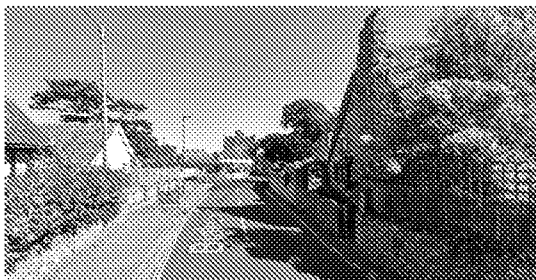
- poor condition of the thatched roof
  - panel fencing above road side wall
  - panel fencing obscuring southern flint boundary wall
  - 20C sheds & garage
- There is potential for the high aesthetic value of the cottage and gardens to be better revealed through repair works to the roof and considered proposals for alterations at the site, such as removal of modern panel fencing and 20C outbuildings.

### Communal Value:

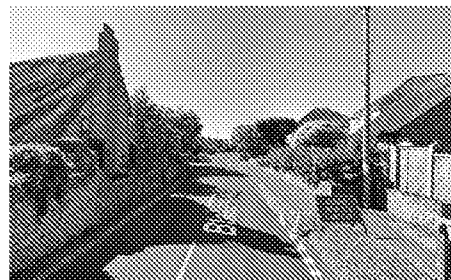
The cottage and its garden have moderate to high communal value as evidence of the extent of the village of Felpham up to the early 20C, as the building is distinct in architectural style from its 20C neighbours to the south.



Blake's Road with cottage, looking north towards Felpham village, 1923



Blake's Road with cottage, looking north (2022)....  
Google streetview



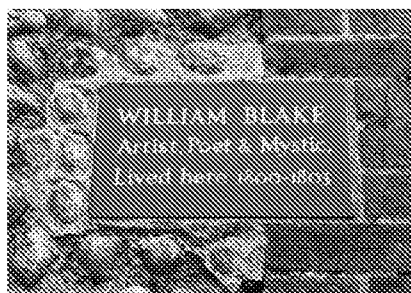
....looking south (2022)

The cottage and garden have high communal value through the association with Blake:-

- From the HBA para 7.1:

*'The cottage is where Blake wrote 'Milton: A Poem in Two Books'. The poem contains the poet's famous words about 'England's green and pleasant land', today known as the anthem 'Jerusalem', which were inspired by Blake's pleasure of the Felpham countryside'.*

[Although barely acknowledged in his lifetime, Blake's popularity as a visionary artist and poet has greatly increased in the 196 years since his death. A hugely popular exhibition of his work which opened at Tate Britain, London in 2019 has been touring major galleries and museums around the world to critical acclaim, notably the recent show at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles (October 2023 – January 2024), introducing Blake to a new generation of national and international admirers.



Plaque on west wall of the cottage



As one of only two extant places where William Blake and his wife lived, the provision of improved public access to Blake's Cottage could yield considerable communal value, not just to the Cottage itself but to the neighbouring and broader community as a whole].

### **1.3 Boundary Wall:**

The wall defines the cottage plot to the south and west, and its extent towards the north and east provides a record of the historic demise of the cottage. For this reason, the wall has historic and evidential value in the context of the cottage.

The strip of wall that obscures the southern boundary is not explicitly listed and is currently largely obscured to the south by the high landscaping levels of the neighbouring property, and within the garden it is totally obscured by full height fencing. This obscures its aesthetic value, and from the cottage garden the historic and evidential value relating to it are completely lost.

The wall is built of local materials, with flint cobbles set attractively in regular courses. The wall therefore has high aesthetic value.

The wall has communal value as it creates a sense of place and locality, alongside further examples of cobbled flint walls in the vicinity.

### **1.4 The Site and Setting:**

The layout of the existing garden is that of a typical 20C domestic outdoor space, and the current layout is of neutral significance except as illustrative of changing domestic demands on external space. However, the open space as the setting of the cottage, particularly with reference to the original cottage plot, has high significance as a continuation of its historic form, both at the time of Blake's occupation, and up to the early 20C when the occupation of the cottage shifted from tenancy to occupier ownership. Given that the cottage has become enclosed by surrounding 20C development, this open space as the setting of the cottage holds particularly high value.

Therefore, the garden has high significance as it makes a vital contribution to our understanding of the building as a former agricultural worker's cottage.

The house and garden have high historical value as evidence of the previous extent of the village (distinct in architectural style from its 20C neighbours to the south), and its typical architecture.

Equally, the survival of early buildings within Felpham, and of the historic street pattern of the village enhance the historic and communal significance of the Cottage.

For this site, the link between the cottage and its surrounding ecology has high significance, with the modes of occupation of the cottage linked to the use of the garden, and by association to the agricultural past of Felpham.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

The notable survival of the recognisable form of the 17C-19C cottage with the garden demise that supported it, and the strong association with William Blake are the most significant elements of the cottage and site's historic value. The authenticity of the place rests with these aspects of its historic value, which also offer high levels of communal and aesthetic value.

While there is historic value in 20C adaptations at the site, these are of lesser significance than those described above.

[The levels of significance of the cottage are summarised on the Significance Plans in Appendix 2].

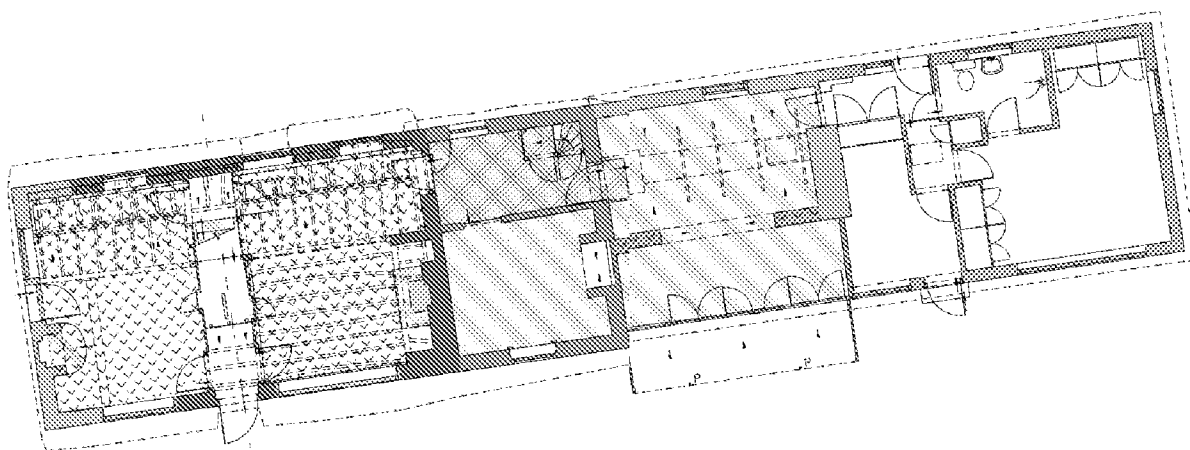


## APPENDIX 1

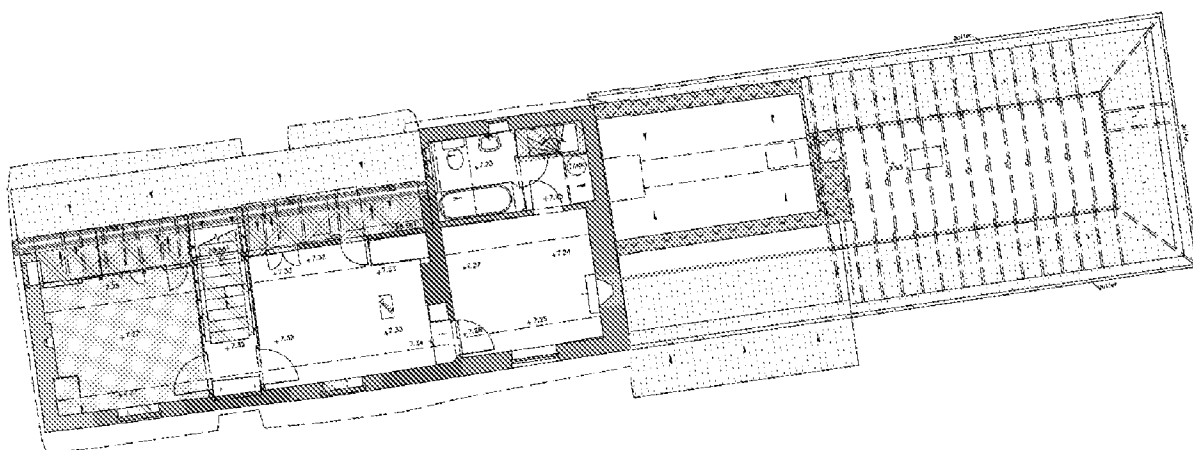
Dating Summary Plans:



## Dating Summary Plans:



### Ground Floor



### First Floor

### Dating Key

	Phase 1: late 17-early 18C
	Phase 1a: late 17-early 18C
	Phase 2: 19C pre-1876
	Phase 2a: 19C
	Phase 3a: 1900-1933
	Phase 3b: 1936-1950
	Phase 3c: 1951-1960
	Phase 3d: 1960-2015

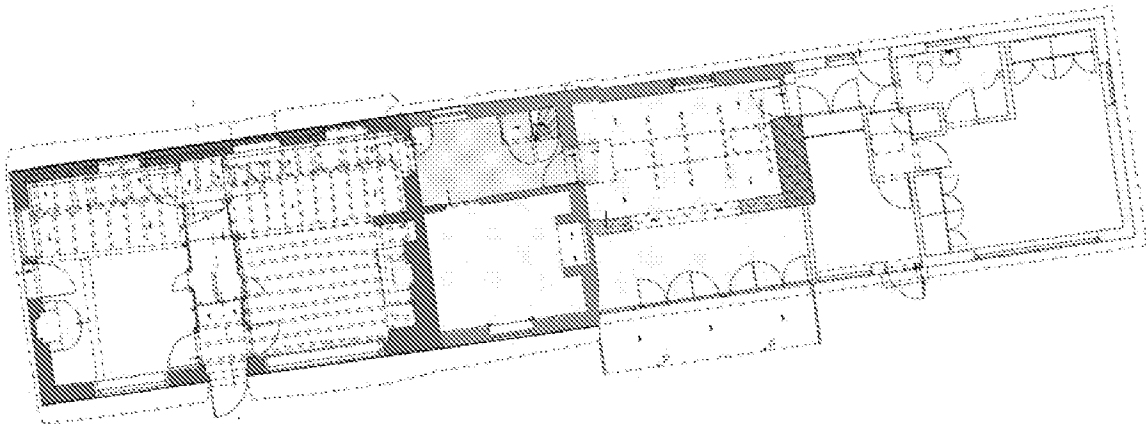


## APPENDIX 2

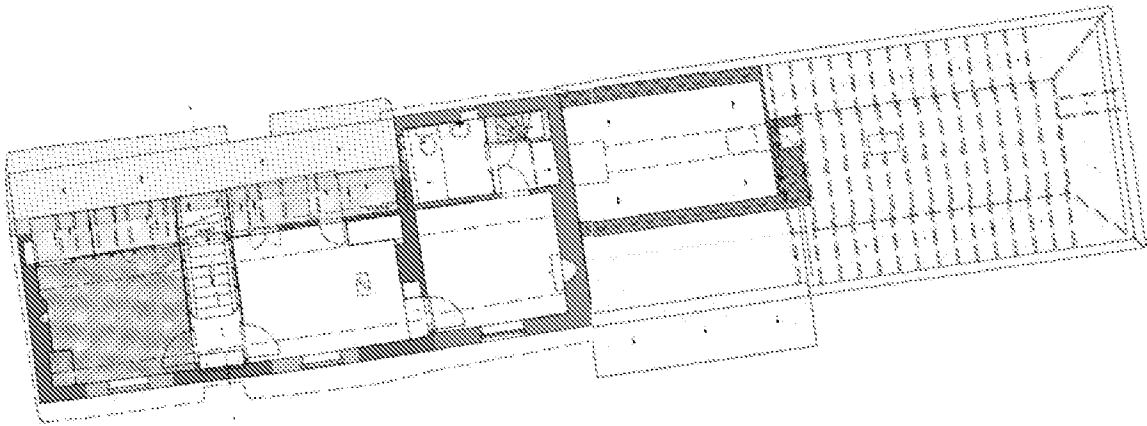
Significance Plans:



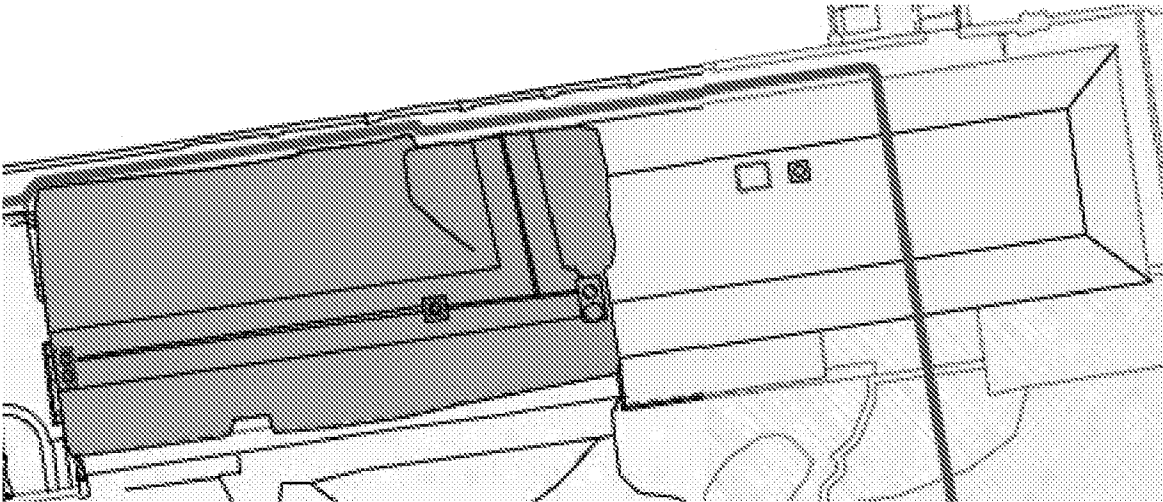
## Significance Plans:



Ground Floor

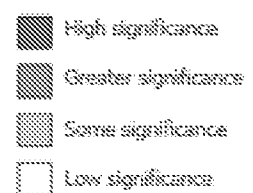


First Floor



Roof

## Significance Key





## **APPENDIX 3**

MICA Specification / Schedule of Works:

MICA Drawings:

ATE Structural Engineering Report: