

Heritage Asset Appraisal

**The Becconsall Hotel, Station Road
Hesketh Bank, Lancashire
PR4 6SP**

NGR 44650 22950

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SUMMARY

The Becconsall Hotel was built on open rural land in the Parish of Hesketh with Becconsall in the second half of the C19th, to coincide with the arrival of the West Lancashire Railway and completion of the adjacent Hesketh Bank Railway Station in 1878. Throughout the C20th, the Hotel became engulfed by the expansion of Hesketh Bank village, and by the time passenger travel ceased on the railway in 1964 the Becconsall or the 'Becc', as it is now commonly called, was a well-established village pub.

In recent years the Becconsall Hotel has struggled to maintain financial viability at a time when many public houses across the country are closing for economic reasons. In 2009 the pub closed and was subsequently sold, a sale which included adjacent land (including the site of a former bowling green) to the south. Proposals have recently been submitted to West Lancashire District Council for demolition of the pub and clearance of the site to make way for a new housing. Although the pub is not formally recognised as a heritage asset in planning terms (either nationally or locally listed), the Local Planning Authority is aware of the potential for architectural and historic interest, and has thus requested a heritage appraisal be conducted in conjunction with the planning application for redevelopment of the site. This document represents that appraisal: it establishes the nature and extent of any heritage significance held in the site and confirms that, whilst the Becconsall Hotel possesses some aesthetic and community merit, these are of very low significance in terms of their heritage value and thus place the building outside the general scope of the local and national planning policies aimed at identifying and protecting heritage assets.

August 2011

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Format

This appraisal has been conducted in connection with proposals to demolish and redevelop the site of the Beconsall Hotel, Hesketh Bank, with the specific intention of assessing the heritage significance of the site and possible impact the proposals will have upon that significance. The appraisal has been conducted in accordance with the general guidelines set out in the English Heritage publications 'Informed Conservation'¹ and 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance'² and in particular responds to policies outlined in Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS 5)³. Given the nature of the site, reference has also been made to the English Heritage draft consultation document 'Good Practice Guide for Local Listing: Identifying and Managing Significant Local Heritage Assets' published in February 2011⁴ and the 'Commercial Buildings Selection Guide' dated 2007⁵.

1.2 The Author

Chris O'Flaherty, the author, is a Chartered Building Surveyor and professional member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (MRICS). With a background in the recording, analysis and conservation of historic buildings, the author is a Senior Lecturer in architectural conservation at the University of Central Lancashire and holds a Masters Degree in Building Heritage and Conservation. The author is currently studying for a PhD, researching the topic area of public participation in the listing of heritage assets.

1.3 Methods of Research and Investigation

Visual inspections of the property were carried out in August 2011. Background research was conducted with reference to planning policy documents and through discussions Sedgwick Associates, Chartered Town Planners. Historical research was conducted with reference to a range of texts/publications and other archive material.

¹ Clarke, K, *Informed Conservation*, English Heritage 2003

² English Heritage, *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance: Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*, 2008

³ CLG, *PPS 5: Planning for the Historic Environment*, HM Government 2010

⁴ English Heritage, *Good Practice Guide for Local Listing: Identifying and Managing Significant Local Heritage Assets (consultation draft)*, 2011

⁵ English Heritage, *Commercial Buildings Selection Guide*, 2007

2.0 GENERAL DESCRIPTION

2.1 Site Location

The building is located on the western side of Station Road and to the north of Cherry Vale (road) and east of Sidney Avenue in the centre of Hesketh Bank, Lancashire. The building's National Grid Reference is SD 44650 22950.

2.2 Site Description

The Becconsall Hotel is a large detached building primarily of two storey construction but with some single storeys annexes to the rear. The building is of brick construction with stone banding, beneath a part hipped and gabled slated roof with decorative gutter brackets. The front elevation is roughly symmetrical with bow windows either side of a central entry. The ground floor fenestration and entry to the front are topped by a projecting bow fronted canopy. A representative picture of the front elevation is given below.



Figure 1. Front elevation

The building is situated at the northern end of a large rectangular plot of land fronting Station Road to the east, and facing the rear gardens of houses on Cherry Vale (south)

and Sidney Avenue (north and west). The central and southern parts of the plot are occupied by a former bowling green. To the rear (west) of the building there is a large car park and to the front (east) there is a further area of hardstanding with twin vehicle entry points either side of the pub.

2.3 Heritage Assets

In accordance with PPS5 (Planning for the Historic Environment), an investigation has been carried out to determine whether the site is recognised as, or related in any way to, a designated heritage asset (such as a listed building or conservation area etc.). No designated heritage assets were identified, nor was any evidence to suggest the site has any association with what may be considered a ‘non-designated asset’. It is however understood that community interest in the proposals to demolish the building has alerted the Local Planning Authority to the possible heritage value of the site. The purpose of this appraisal is to explore this issue further.

3.0 HERITAGE APPRAISAL

3.1 Historic Background

Historic map research reveals the arrival of the Beconsall Hotel at some point between 1840 and 1890, as deduced through comparison of the first edition (six inch and twenty five inch scales) Ordnance Survey maps published around these dates. Figure 2 is an extract of the 1893 OS map which first depicts the Hotel.

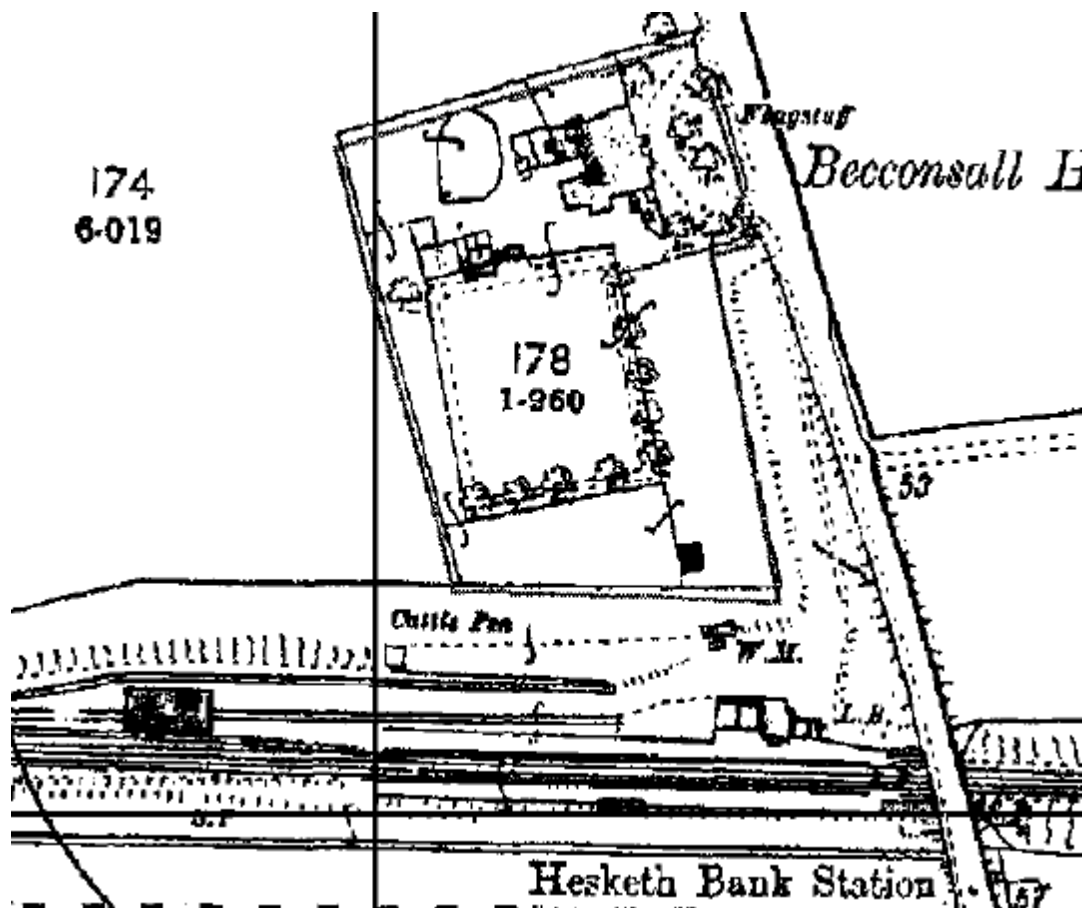


Figure 2. Extract of 1893 OS map showing the Hotel to the northern end of the plot. Note also the bowling green to the south of the Hotel and Hesketh Bank Railway Station (dated c.1878).

Although the exact date of construction is not known, it seems likely that the Hotel was built to coincide with the arrival of the adjacent West Lancashire Railway and Hesketh Bank Station, the former having been completed c.1878 connecting Preston with Southport. When built the Hotel was set amidst a fairly large expanse of open rural land to the south of Hesketh Bank village and adjacent to the hamlet of Beconsall, in the Parish of Hesketh with Beconsall. Later maps from the early to mid C20th show the rapid growth of what became better known as Hesketh Bank, and

this growth in local population served to establish the Beconsall Hotel as a popular public house. By the time of the closure of the adjacent railway in 1964, it seems likely that the key association between the Hotel and travellers upon the line had long since faded. Maps shown in figures 3-5 suggest that the overall footprint of the Hotel changed little through the C20th, however the appearance of the pub did change as discussed later.

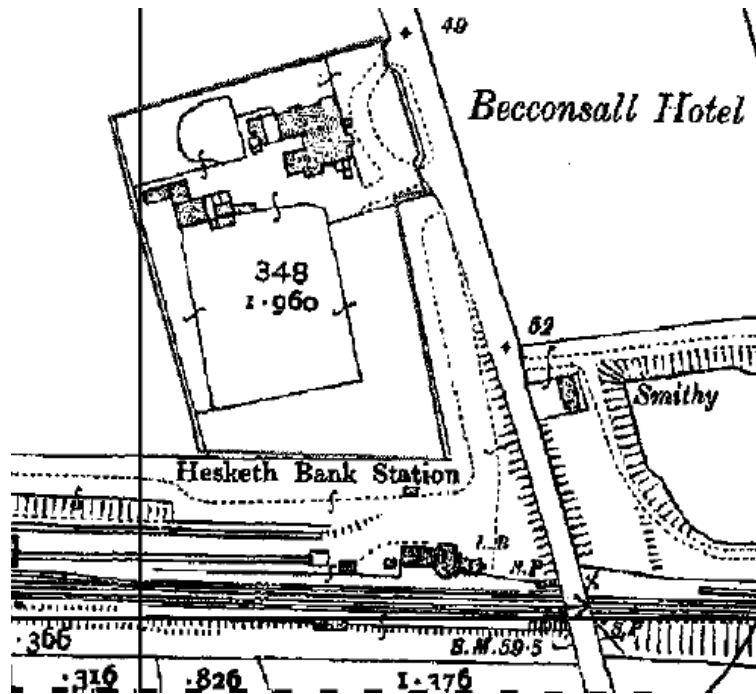


Figure 3. Map of c.1913

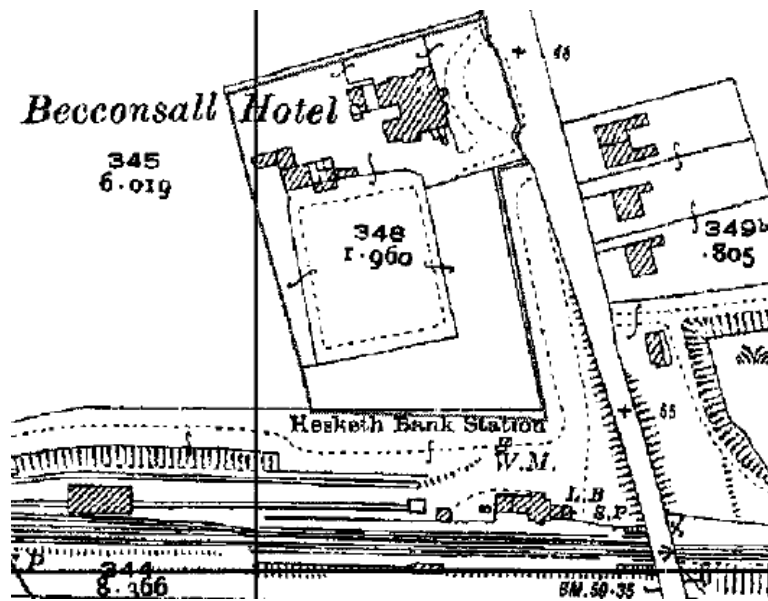


Figure 4. Map of c.1931

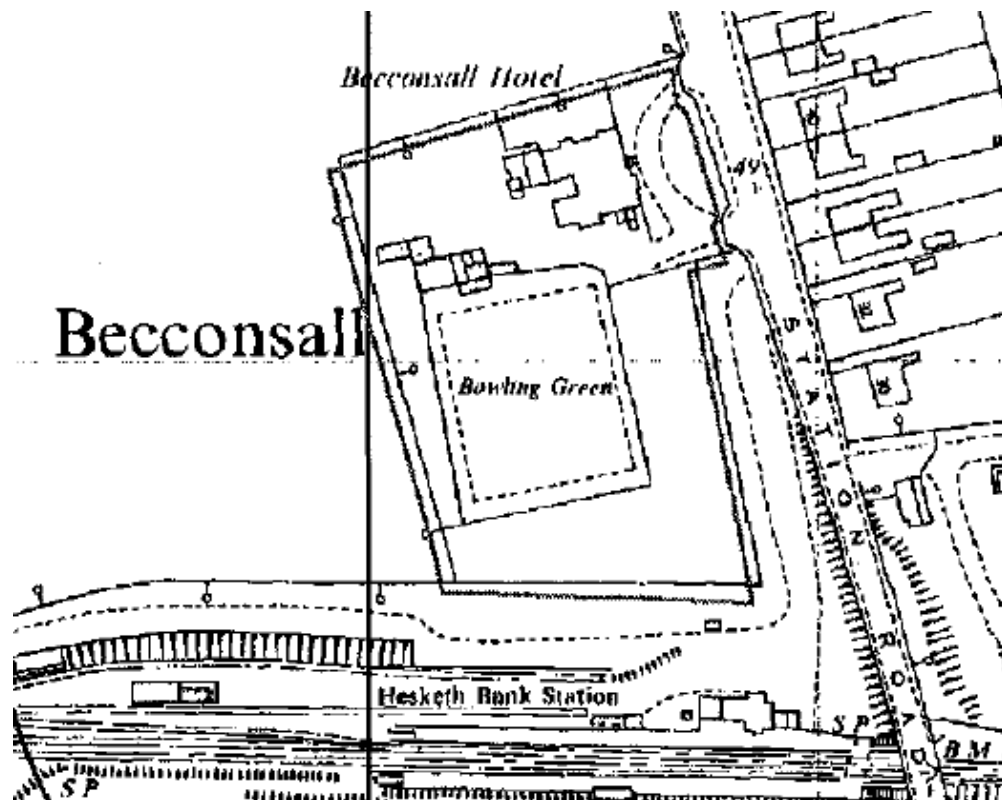


Figure 5. Map of c.1964. Note the arrival of housing to the east.

In addition to the map evidence, archival research reveals that Hotel was formerly part of the Hesketh Bank Estate (in 1915) and in 1891 it was described as part of ‘Becconsall Hotel, Pavilion and Pleasure Grounds Ltd’ which was later liquidated in 1894⁶. The description here proves the connection of the Hotel with the bowling green and pavilion on land to the south. Archival photographs of the building also exist as shown in figures 6 and 7, one of which is dated 1912. Descriptive text accompanying these photographs⁷ indicates that a fire caused damage sufficient enough to warrant the removal of what was an original third storey, and comparison of the archive photos with the extant building (see figure 1) show that in addition the front elevation of the building (perhaps more) was also significantly remodelled some time after 1912. The style of this remodelling, with shallow profile bow windows echoed in a bow fronted canopy over the central entrance doors, suggest that the work probably dated from the inter-war years. The remodelling certainly made for a plainer façade than that of the original building, which as shown in figure 6 comprised an eclectic style of architecture, including a richly ornamental pointed arch entrance

⁶ National Archives ref: BT/34/796/34671

⁷ www.heskethbank.com (accessed 15/8/2011)

surmounted by an oriel window on brackets beneath a gabled dormer. The entrance has a canted bay to the right and bow window to the left, above which there are segmental arch headed first floor windows with second storey windows topped by hipped dormers. The name 'Beaconsall Hotel' is included in an ornate stone band beneath the oriel cill: to the extreme left of the elevation there appears to be a separate entrance with pointed arch. This blending of styles was characteristic of later C19th architecture, during a period of architectural history often referred to as the 'battle of the styles'. The archival photographs also show a building that was much grander in scale than the remodelled version, the provision of sleeping accommodation being fundamental to its original purpose. The ornamental nature of the building was also typical of railway hotel architecture of the later C19th, the Hotel becoming a desirable destination rather than merely a stop off point. Perhaps the best example of this is the huge Midland Hotel at St Pancras Station, London, dated 1868. In respect to the much humbler Beaconsall Hotel, the relatively close proximity of the coast was also possibly of importance in this context.



Figure 6. Photograph dated 1912, showing the front elevation from the north east ([://www.heskethbank.com/history/photos/pubs.html](http://www.heskethbank.com/history/photos/pubs.html))



Figure 7. Longer view from the north east off Station Road. This shows the relatively isolated nature of the Hotel in its earlier years.

3.2 Heritage Values

An appraisal of the heritage values associated with the building has been carried out. This process relates to the range of heritage values as outlined by English Heritage (2008), which are distilled under the following headings: evidential value; historic value; communal value; aesthetic value. The purpose of assessing these values is to enable an assessment of the site's significance - whether physically manifest (e.g. architectural features) or in some other less tangible form (e.g. historical associations) - so as to enhance the objective appraisal of proposals for changing the site. In essence this follows the approach generally advocated by English Heritage, whereby necessary change in the historic environment is intelligently managed.

A summary of the heritage values associated with the site is given below, together with an indication on how these contribute to the appraisal of significance.

Evidential Value

As shown earlier, the building differs significantly from its original form and is thus of limited evidential value in respect to the Victorian development. Some aspects do remain, such as the general plan footprint (the interior is changed), but overall the building exists as the physical product of change rather than the original conception.

That said, the building provides evidence of phased historical development in Hesketh Bank and survives as a reminder of the arrival of the railway in the late C19th. Overall, however, the comparable level of evidential value in heritage terms is low.

Historical Value

Bearing close association to the evidential value, the historical value of the building (and the wider site) is mostly linked to the historical development of the local area, including the railway and the villages of Becconsall and Hesketh Bank. This value is also interpretable from historic maps as shown earlier. That the building has changed significantly limits the level of this value, as does the closure and lifting of the railway in the immediate vicinity (the track formerly ran along the line of what is now the road called Cherry Vale). The historical connection of the railway and hotel is thus evident through inspection of archival material rather than any retained collection of authentic historic structures. Accordingly, the historical value of the subject building is low.

Communal Value

Being essentially a public building, the communal value of the building represents arguably the most significant issue in respect to the broader assessment of heritage values. The Becconsall has through its history been a feature in the local community having initially been established for railway passengers rather than residents. In more recent years the extent of this communal value has been tested, at a time when many such public houses have struggled to sustain a viable economic proposition, particularly those of considerable size. But as so often proves the case, whilst a lack of patronage will have a direct bearing upon viability, the threat of loss (through demolition or conversion etc.) resultant from a poor economic outlook tends to mobilise what might otherwise be an ambivalent wider local community in the process of securing some form of protection. In this instance, a web based 'Save the Becconsall' campaign was set up in 2009 following the closure of the pub, when it became clear that the future looked bleak. The campaign's web site includes some heart felt opinions on the erosion of Britain's pub culture, and otherwise demonstrates the value of the pub to some members of the local community for whom the Becconsall holds memories and sparks an array of emotions, whilst doubtless also

providing a facility they would like to retain. For this reason, the building appears to hold communal value for some members of the local community, albeit it is difficult to relate this intangible value, or sense of place, with any individual physical aspects of the building, or indeed to establish whether such value relates primarily to the building *per se* or to its function. The level of value in this respect will doubtless be tested further during the consultation stage of the planning application process.

Aesthetic Value

The Beconsall Hotel has an attractive frontage which, as described earlier, is much altered from its grander original state due to fire damage which occurred sometime after 1912. Despite its aesthetic appeal, however, the building does not represent an example of period architecture deemed of sufficient special interest to warrant protective listing, nor does it provide an authentic historical representation of the hotel built c.1878. Its aesthetic value is thus principally limited to its contribution to the street scene, and in terms of heritage its aesthetic value is considered to be low.

3.3 Discussion

In 2007 English Heritage published its detailed selection guide for the listing of commercial buildings. As with all post-1840 buildings, the guide stressed the need for rigour in the process of selection, not least because of the sheer volume of buildings that exist which are similar to or from the same era as the Beconsall Hotel. Herein the general criteria of age and rarity come to the fore, as does the need to preserve the special interest of our protected heritage by ensuring that the importance of such protection is not diluted by overly zealous listing (etc.).

In terms of local heritage and locally listed buildings, the Beconsall Hotel is not believed to have been previously identified by the Local Planning Authority as a building of particular interest and recent focus upon the building relates more to threat of demolition than it does upon inherent heritage values.

Earlier this year English heritage published a consultation document⁸ advising good practise in the selection of local listed buildings and specific mention of these non-designated heritage assets is made in PPS5. In respect to the former, the role of

⁸ Ibid (4)

the local community and collaboration of the community with the LPA is a common theme, mindful of the premise that:

“Locally listing a heritage asset does not of itself bring any additional consent requirements over and above the requirement for planning permission. However, under PPS5, their status as heritage assets will mean that their conservation and contribution to the area will be a material consideration when making planning decisions that directly affect them or their setting.” (English Heritage, February 2011)

In this context, it should be acknowledged that there is some scope for consideration of the Beconsall Hotel in terms of its heritage values, but such consideration should be set in the context of a proper assessment of significance, as given below, and should reflect the view of English heritage that the building does not warrant special protection.

3.4 Statement of Significance

On the basis of the assessment of the building’s heritage values covered earlier, it can be stated that the Beconsall Hotel represents a non-typical, much altered example of a late Victorian era railway hotel which is of very low significance in terms of its historical and architectural interest. This view is reflected in the fact that the building has not been designated as a heritage asset by English heritage, nor has it been identified as a building of local heritage importance by the Local Planning Authority. A degree of communal value is however attached to the building and the function of the building, as indeed is the case with the majority of public buildings and particularly those associated with leisure and pleasure usage.

4.0 ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT

The proposals currently under consideration briefly involve the demolition of the Becconsall Hotel and redevelopment of the site (including bowling green to the south) with a small new housing estate.

Given the assessment of the site's heritage significance, there would appear no grounds to prevent the proposed redevelopment of the site on the grounds of current heritage protection policies and associated legislation. Any community interest in the building, as referred to within this report, can be tested through the normal planning application and consultation process, and in the opinion of the author it would be inappropriate to dilute the value of heritage protection legally attributed to listed buildings by affording similar protection to the Becconsall Hotel.

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