

Primrose Hill, Merthyr Tydfil
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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I.0 UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HISTORIC ASSET – ‘STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE’

I.1 An Assessment of Significance

One of the real strengths of any historic building assessment is that it focuses attentions on what is of high importance about a cultural or national asset, whilst similarly defining aspects which are of little or no importance. Thus, in planning what or how to conserve, or develop, areas around it, it is possible to make decisions based on the best possible analytical process rather than on individual preference, or some other arbitrary method.

This section of the report seeks to set out, albeit briefly, what makes the heritage assets, Primrose Hill, of value and should therefore be protected.

The assessment of significance has been provided to give an initial guidance on the proposals for the development.

Significance can be defined as the sum of the cultural, social and/or natural heritage values that make a building or place important to this and future generations. The aim of conservation is to sensitively manage change to a place to ensure that its significance is not only protected, but also revealed, reinforced and enhanced at every possible opportunity. It should also ensure that decisions regarding both day-today and long term use and management of the site take into account all of the values that contribute to a place's significance.

The purpose of a Statement of Significance is to identify the areas and aspects of Primrose Hill which have cultural significance. Cultural significance is a concept which helps us in estimating the value of a place and which:

- Helps us understand the past;
- Enrich our present lives;
- Will be of value to future generations.

Most historic sites or buildings are significant for a range of reasons, and it is important to understand all of its values in order that informed, balanced decisions can be made.

Many heritage values are recognised by the statutory designation and regulation of significant places. In statutory terms, the significance of Primrose Hill is formally recognised by its Listing. As a grade II Listed Building, Primrose Hill is a building 'of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve' it, as appraised by Cadw.

However, while these designations provide baseline guidance to the significance of Primrose Hill, it is useful to go beyond this view to arrive at a deeper understanding of their values and significance.

Cadw's '*Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales*' (March 2011), expands on how one can analyse the public's interest in heritage assets by sub-dividing it into evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values. These values can be used to inform the structured and consistent assessment of buildings.

Evidential Value is deemed to derive from those elements of a historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, and especially its historic fabric, supported in some cases by documentation. These may be visible and relatively easy to assess, or they may be buried below ground, under water or be hidden by later fabric. These remains provide the primary evidence for when and how an historic asset was made or built, what it was used for and how it has changed over time. The unrecorded loss of historic fabric represents the destruction of the primary evidence. Additional evidential values can be gained from documentary sources, pictorial records and archaeological archives or museum collections.

All buildings — domestic, commercial, religious, industrial etc — have the capacity to provide evidence of specific past human activity from one or perhaps several periods. The extent to which they do so depends on coherence and integrity, or an intelligible development sequence. The extent of survival of original or clearly phased fabric and layout, or of detail relating to use (including internal detail) are particularly important.

Context may also be relevant: the evidential value of a single industrial or agricultural building for example will be diminished if other associated buildings have already been lost or damaged.

Historical Value is deemed to be the associative or illustrative ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

An historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement. These illustrative or associative values of an historic asset may be less tangible than its evidential value but will often connect past people, events and aspects of life with the present. Of course the functions of an historic asset are likely to change over time and so the full range of changing historical values might not become clear until all the evidential values have been gathered together. Historical values are not so easily diminished by change as evidential values and are harmed only to the extent that adaptation has obliterated them or concealed them.

In practice, much of the historical value of an asset is inseparable from its evidential value — a well-preserved building can illustrate an aspect of past life much better than can a damaged or heavily altered building. But historical value may also reside in the less tangible — in associations with notable people events or movements of proven regional or national significance. As in the criteria for listing, however, these associations will be more powerful if the building as it survives directly confirms the association (i.e. is recognisably the building with which connection is claimed).

The difference between evidential value and illustrative historical value may seem difficult to define, but in general, evidential value relates to the material evidence about how a particular building or site functioned, and historical value to the capacity of that site to illustrate broader historical themes — its contribution to our understanding of aspects of past life, be they for example the organisation of society, developments in agriculture or industry, or in religious observance.

Understanding historical value therefore requires a broader understanding of the asset in context, whereas a good understanding of evidential value can be reached by close physical analysis on site.

Aesthetic Value relates to the external appearance and form of an asset and its relationship to its context and setting, be it a designed landscape, a working agricultural or industrial landscape, or a townscape. Aesthetic Value derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset. It may relate to conscious design or style or it may be a seemingly fortuitous outcome of the way in which an historic asset has evolved and been used over time, or a combination of both. It may relate to adherence to tradition, to quality of craftsmanship or technology of construction, or it may reflect the results of development over time.

High-quality conscious design — so-called ‘polite architecture’ often associated with named architects — and vernacular building according to clear regional traditions (and perhaps unconscious design), have their own aesthetic codes. But for both, composition, plan, method of construction, materials, finish and detail — including interior detail — are the essential elements of design.

The form of an asset normally changes over time. Sometimes earlier pictorial records and written descriptions will be more powerful in many people’s minds than what survives today. Some important viewpoints may be lost or screened, or access to them may be temporarily denied. To assess this aspect of an asset, again the evidence of the present and past form must be gathered systematically. This needs to be complemented by a thorough appreciation on site of the external appearance of an asset in its setting. Inevitably understanding the aesthetic value of an historic asset will be more subjective than the study of its evidential and historical values. Much of it will involve trying to express the aesthetic qualities or the relative value of different parts of its form or design.

Communal Value derives from the meanings that an asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It includes social and economic value, as well as commemorative, spiritual or symbolic value.

It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects. Communal value might be commemorative or symbolic. For example, people might draw part of their identity or collective memory from an historic asset, or have emotional links to it. Such values often change over time and they may be important for remembering both positive and uncomfortable events, attitudes or periods in Wales’ history. Historic assets can also have social value, acting as a source of social interaction, distinctiveness or coherence; economic value, providing a valuable source of income or employment; or they may have spiritual value, emanating from religious beliefs or modern perceptions of the spirit of a place.

Each of these elements will be dealt with below.

The significance of a place is the sum of these values, brought together and expressed in a statement of significance. This statement forms the foundation upon which any proposals for change and enhancement of a place can be considered and carried forward.

In order to identify the relative contributions that these values make to the significance of a place and therefore the capacity for these values to be revealed and/or enhanced, a range of classifications are used.

For the purpose of this study we have adopted a fairly standard classification using five levels of significance, which are sufficient to measure each aspect of significance and to compare it to others consistently.

High: An aspect of value that strongly contributes to the significance of a place, forming a key piece of its history and cultural value which may be of national or international importance. In material terms, these aspects will best contribute towards the heritage values. Conservation will be a priority, and alteration is likely to be resisted unless it is demonstrated that significance will be greatly enhanced, reinforced or revealed as a result.

Medium: An aspect of value that will have some cultural importance (perhaps on a regional scale) and will make a moderate contribution to the significance of a place. In material terms they will play an important role in conveying the heritage values. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance these aspects, though a greater degree of flexibility is possible than with aspects of high value.

Low: An aspect of value that will make a slight (yet still noteworthy) contribution to the significance of a place, but perhaps only on a local scale. In material terms it will still add something to the heritage values (such as helping to maintain plan form and historic character), although this contribution may have been compromised by loss or uninformed intervention. A greater capacity for enhancement exists than for items of medium or high value, although a low designation does not necessarily mean that the feature is expendable.

Neutral: An aspect that has no discernible value that neither adds to nor detracts from the significance of the place. Informed change will be acceptable.

Detrimental: An aspect of the place that detracts from its values and therefore its significance. In material terms, removal or reversal of these aspects should be strongly encouraged.

1.2 Historical Value

Historical Value is deemed to be the associative or illustrative ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

A historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life, or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement. These illustrative or associative values of a historic asset may be less tangible than its evidential value but will often connect past people, events and aspects of life with the present. Of course, the functions of an historic asset are likely to change over time and so the full range of changing historical values might not become clear until all the evidential values have been gathered together. Historical values are not so easily diminished by change as evidential values and are harmed only to the extent that adaptation has obliterated them or concealed them.

Historic character lies at the heart of local distinctiveness and sense of place. No two places share a history, so every place has a unique historic character, which is a powerful asset in regeneration; sustaining it can bring social, economic and environmental benefits.

Primrose Hill was built between 1850 and early 1852. Historic map research showed that the building did not exist on the 1850 Tithe Map, with a reference to Primrose Hill first being found in the *‘Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian – Saturday 06 March 1852’*. The newspaper featured an advert for “**MERTHYR GRAMMAR SCHOOL, PRIMROSE HILL, CONDUCTED BY MR. JAS. KERNICK.**”. The advert was for a fee-paying establishment for “Young Gentlemen” where they would receive “a good Practical Education” and where boarders were accepted. A build date of 1850 to early 1852 makes sense given the spate of construction work taking place in that part of Thomastown during that period.

Until the mid-18th century, Merthyr Tydfil had been sparsely populated with farming and livestock forming the main economy. Then abundant deposits of iron ore, coal and limestone were discovered, making it an ideal location for the relatively new iron industry that was leading Britain’s Industrial Revolution. In 1759, the first major ironworks, Dowlais, was founded. Other works, including Plymouth, Cyfarthfa and Penydarren followed in quick succession and Merthyr Tydfil changed beyond recognition. It became the largest town in Wales and the centre of the world’s iron making industry. By the 1870s the iron industry was under threat from Henry Bessemer’s revolutionary steel-making process, with some of the ironworks converting to making steel. However, in the late 19th century the exploitation of coal came to the fore and dominated the local industrial economy into the 20th century.

The industrial explosion in Merthyr Tydfil created pockets of wealth amongst the higher classes of society. This was reflected in the development of middle-class residential areas such as Thomastown; named after local magistrate Dr William Thomas, who originally owned the land. Thomastown is believed to contain one of the largest groups of late Georgian and early Victorian style buildings in Wales and to be one of the first purpose-built residential suburbs in Merthyr Tydfil.

As the town grew, the Thomastown area grew eastwards and uphill. Firstly, worker’s cottages were built nearest the town, by the side of the tramroad, creating Tramroadside around 1805. Then, further east, middle-class housing was added from the 1840s with terraced streets such as Thomas Street - “most elegant in architecture and most pleasant in situation”. Then further east and uphill, several spacious villas were built, The Rectory (originally known as Courtland House) was the first to be built in 1851 for Mr. Rice Lewis, followed by Springfield Villa built for Mr. George Lyndon, Bryntirion (since demolished), Brynheulog and Sunnybank Villa. Further development included religious buildings. Thomastown being designated a Conservation Area in 1978.

Primrose Hill can be seen on the *‘1873 Ordnance Survey Town Plan (published 1875)’* and *‘1868-75 Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch (published 1885)’* under the name **‘Primrosehill House’**. The detail on the 1873 Town Plan shows us that the building was L-shaped and consisted of 3 attached rectangular buildings, one building to the front running east to west, with two attached buildings at right angles to this front building. To the north of these rear buildings were several smaller outbuildings, some connected to these main buildings. Further north was a large garden, and beyond that, two additional attached buildings marked up as Primrose Cottage.

Newspaper research tells us that Primrose Hill started life as “**MERTHYR GRAMMAR SCHOOL, PRIMROSE HILL**, PRINCIPAL MR. JAS. KERNICK. In this Establishment Young Gentlemen receive a very superior Education, and are prepared for the University.” It was a fee-paying private school which also took in boarders. It is unclear whether Primrose Hill was purpose built as a school or originally intended as a private Villa. The sale by auction details in the *‘Merthyr Telegraph – Saturday 28 May 1859’* for **‘Primrose Hill Academy’** as it was then known stating:

“All that newly built and well arranged Leasehold Detached MESSAGE or DWELLING-HOUSE, SCHOOLROOM, and PLAYGROUND, known by the name of ‘Primrose Hill Academy,’ in the occupation of Mr. James Kernick, the Proprietor, containing Parlour, Drawing Room, Library, Kitchen, Back Kitchen, China Pantry, and several Bedrooms.

“The House stands in a most healthy situation; the Rooms are lofty and spacious, replete with every convenience and finished in a very substantial manner, both internally and externally, the proprietor having spared no pains in making these premises well adapted for a superior Boarding School.

“Also, TWO COTTAGES in the rear of the above, and at the extreme end of the Playground, in a forward state of completion, and nearly ready for occupation.

“This Property is held under a lease for 99 years from the 1st day of November, 1851, at the moderate Ground Rent of £10 19s. per annum.”

At the end of 1860 James Kernick was to retire from the school and be succeeded by Thomas Lloyd, this being announced in the newspapers. It is unclear whether Thomas Lloyd took over the school at Primrose Hill as planned, as by mid-1862 adverts were appearing for Tydfil School, Merthyr with Evan Williams as Head Master saying: “The School is now held at Primrose Hill, lately occupied by Mr. Kernick”.

An advert on **‘Tydfil School, Merthyr’** in the *‘Merthyr Telegraph – 28 June 1862’* & *‘Merthyr Telegraph – 05 July 1862’* said:

“The School is now held at Primrose Hill, lately occupied by Mr. Kernick, where there is a commodious, well-ventilated school-room with a playground (100ft. by 30) attached, a sitting-room for the entire use of the Boarders, and all the requisites for such an establishment.”

The school was taken over by a new Principal, and given a new name, in April 1867. An advert in the *‘Merthyr Telegraph – 13 April 1867’* said: “**MERTHYR TYDFIL GRAMMAR AND MIDDLE CLASS SCHOOLS, WILL BE OPENED APRIL 15th, 1867. PRINCIPAL JOHN SMITH, M.A., M.E.I.S.**”. John Smith had previously been Head Master of a school in London.

In 1874, the school was known as **Primrose Hill School**, Thomas Town. An advert in the *‘Merthyr Telegraph - 31 July 1874’* said that Principal Mr T. Lloyd had relocated his school to “healthy and convenient premises” and renamed it “Primrose Hill School, Thomas Town”.

An article from the *‘Merthyr Telegraph – 06 August 1875’* described the school as “built specifically for the purpose, and has a large enclosed Playground attached”. It seems reasonable to assume that these new premises were our site at Primrose Hill. Newspaper adverts as early as 1862 were found on Mr. T. Lloyd’s school, under the name ‘Mathematical and Commercial School’, at other premises in Thomas Town.

In 1879, John Beavis took over the school, with newspaper adverts still referring to it as **Primrose Hill School**, Merthyr Tydfil. By 1880, the school’s name had changed to **Primrose Hill Grammar and Science School**, Merthyr Tydfil with an advert in the *‘Merthyr Express – 23 October 1880’* saying that the school would offer “Evening classes in General Subjects, Science and Short-hand during Winter.”

Things changed by the Autumn Term of 1887 with an advert for **Primrose Hill School**, Merthyr Tydfil in the ‘*Merthyr Express – 03 September 1887*’ showing it was under new ownership “now occupied by the Misses GOODFELLOW” and starting life as a private school for girls “as a **Seminary for Young Ladies**” after having been a school for boys since it was first built in 1850-52.

By February 1889 the “**Seminary for Young Ladies**” at Primrose Hill was gone and adverts appeared for a different school at Primrose Hill: **Merthyr High School** which would open after Easter, a school for boys with Harry Dewdney as Headmaster. The last advert for this school appearing late 1898.

We know that the property operated as a school from early-1852 through to late-1898. We also know that several of the headmasters did not live on the school premises. Therefore, it is possible that the front dwelling-house was either used for boarding pupils or rented out separately from the school as a private residence. This theory is supported by newspaper articles referring to various families residing at Primrose Hill.

Mr Bert Marshall and family lived at Primrose Hill in the 1890s and M R. T. Jones and family (of Messrs. R.T. Jones & Co., drapers, outfitters and furnisiers) lived there from the early 1900s until the 1930s. An advert appeared in the ‘*Merthyr Express – 09 December 1922*’ for the “Court Estate Sale No. 10 – Important sale by private treaty of Freehold Ground Rents” which included both **Primrose Hill Villa** and Primrose Cottages. It must be assumed that Primrose Hill was bought by Mr R.T. Jones as the family continued to live there well after this date, with Mr. R.T. Thomas dying there in 1931.

In 1939, an advert appeared in the ‘*Merthyr Express – 02 September 1939*’ on the “Important Sale of Freehold and Leasehold Premises” which included “Merthyr Tydfil: ‘Primrose Hill.’ Thomastown. Residential House (Freehold) and Land.” Following this sale advert, the ‘*Merthyr Express – 06 April 1940*’ advertised that “A Modern Guest House will shortly be opened at Primrose Hill (Top of Church St Merthyr) ... Under the personal care of Miss Farmer and Miss Grant.”

In 1946, **Primrose Hill Guest House** was offered for sale by public auction, with a preliminary announcement placed in the ‘*Merthyr Express – 16 March 1946*’. This was followed by a full advert in the ‘*Merthyr Express – 23 March 1946*’. The sale advert for the Guest House in the ‘*Merthyr Express – 23 March 1946*’ said “the property could also be used as a Residence, a Social Centre or converted Into Flats”. The property seems to have continued as a Guest House until around 1950.

However, it has not yet been possible to identify when the property transitioned from a Guest House into Flats, or, when the L-shaped building, which consisted of three attached rectangular buildings, was broken up into separate ownerships. Our site, Primrose Hill, is the front rectangular building with entrance facade facing south onto Church Street. Behind it are two attached rectangular buildings at right angles to this front building, which are not part of our site. Primrose Hill is now divided into five flats.

Primrose Hill consists of three full storeys plus a half lower ground floor / basement. Its principal front elevation is an attractive, pale, smooth rendered, symmetrical, Classical-style facade with large timber sash windows and simplified pilastered doorcase. The building has an enclosed front forecourt with right hand gate piers and benefits from a backdrop of mature trees.

Primrose Hill has undoubtedly undergone many changes throughout its life. The building started out as a school for boys with many changes of name and headmaster between 1852-98, into a private residence, becoming a Guest House in 1940 and finally being subdivided into flats. These changes of use will have involved many internal adaptations. However, its front elevation onto Church Street still retains a Classical façade in keeping with the Villa housing of the original area.

A historic asset might be associated with a notable event or movement. The Industrial Revolution had a significant impact on Wales, with Wales often described as the world’s first industrial nation, as by 1850 more people were employed in industry than in agriculture. The economy and society of Wales was transformed, and the evolution of Merthyr Tydfil in the 19th century epitomises this. Merthyr Tydfil’s industrial expansion and resultant wealth would have been the catalyst for the development of Thomastown with its cross-section of Georgian and early Victorian style housing. The richest residents commissioned individually designed detached and semi-detached Villas in the spacious and wooded surroundings of eastern Thomastown.

Primrose Hill is grade II listed and located within the ‘*Thomastown Villas*’ character area of the *Thomastown Conservation Area*. Primrose Hill is referred to as a “key building” within that character area.

Primrose Hill has survived through a period of immense social and economic change; the Industrial Revolution, the resultant development of industrial and suburban Merthyr Tydfil, two World Wars, and the decline of heavy industries in the South Wales Valleys. Primrose Hill has remained standing throughout all of this, with changes in use over time.

Its exterior has not changed significantly although the timber sash windows are now double glazed, and the front door is not original. Although no longer functioning as a school, private Villa or Guest House, it is not hard to imagine how the building would have looked to arriving schoolchildren or residents. Sadly, its interior has not fared so well with most if not all original features lost.

In practice, much of the historical value of an asset is inseparable from its evidential value — a well-preserved building can illustrate an aspect of past life much better than can a damaged or heavily altered building. But historical value may also reside in the less tangible — in associations with notable people events or movements of proven regional or national significance.

As in the criteria for listing, however, these associations will be more powerful if the building as it survives directly confirms the association (i.e. is recognisably the building with which connection is claimed). As stated above, Primrose Hill survives and still looks much as it did externally when first built, especially when viewed from the front. We can easily envisage how the building would have looked in 1852, when it opened as a school. We can imagine what it would have looked like to a schoolchild walking up Church Street to school or the wider population of Merthyr Tydfil. The views from the Primrose Hill towards the synagogue, the surrounding spacious villas, down to the town below or up to the greenery of Thomastown Park still survive.

Whilst Primrose Hill has changed use over the years, and many original internal features have been lost, these changes have not destroyed its history. Like the proverbial onion, it has built up layers of history; and whilst the building might need some repairs, it still holds considerable historic value for the cultural importance of the lives it has influenced through education in Merthyr Tydfil. Also, for its role in illustrating life in a fashionable residential suburb during the Victorian and Edwardian eras in industrial Wales; how industrialisation brought dramatic changes to small Welsh towns like Merthyr Tydfil; and how a previously smart and prosperous neighbourhood declined along with their industries. All of which make a moderate contribution to the significance of the place and are deemed to have some cultural importance (perhaps on a regional scale), suggesting that Primrose Hill has **Medium Historical Value**.

In material terms these aspects play an important role in conveying the heritage values of the building. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance these aspects - and any project should encourage the telling of these stories – however, a greater degree of flexibility is possible with changes to the fabric than with aspects of higher value.



Historic view of Synagogue with Primrose Hill garden wall & gate piers to left and Villa Housing to right (source: ‘alangeorge.co.uk’ website)

I.3 Evidential Value

Evidential Value is deemed to derive from those elements of a historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, and especially its historic fabric, supported in some cases by documentation. These may be visible and relatively easy to assess, or they may be buried below ground, under water or be hidden by later fabric. These remains provide the primary evidence for when and how an historic asset was made or built, what it was used for and how it has changed over time. The unrecorded loss of historic fabric represents the destruction of the primary evidence. Additional evidential values can be gained from documentary sources, pictorial records and archaeological archives or museum collections.

Primrose Hill is an excellent source of evidential value, from the Industrial Revolution, the Victorian and Edwardian era, the transformation of Merthyr Tydfil from a sparsely populated agricultural area into the largest town in Wales and 'the Iron Capital of the World', the wartime years and into the modern time. It has seen change, loss, and deterioration in its 173 years.

The considerable remains of Primrose Hill with its original Classical-style façade provide the primary evidence for when and how the historic asset was built, and what it was used for. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find any old photos of Primrose Hill and its front southern elevation, showing how it looked when first built. However, its appearance is consistent with Villas from that period in the Thomastown area.

Through the 1610 John Speed Map of Glamorgan Shyre, 1830 Parish Map, 1850 Tithe Map, Ordnance Survey Maps and historic newspaper records, we can see how Primrose Hill has developed and changed over time. Built at the top of Church Street, between 1850-52, on land leased from the Court Estate; it was built in a Classical style, popular for Villa housing at that time.

Newspaper articles from 1859 tell us that the property was a “newly built and well arranged Leasehold Detached MESSUAGE or DWELLING-HOUSE, SCHOOLROOM, and PLAYGROUND, known by the name of ‘Primrose Hill Academy,’ in the occupation of Mr. James Kernick, the Proprietor, containing Parlour, Drawing Room, Library, Kitchen, Back Kitchen, China Pantry, and several Bedrooms. ... Also, TWO COTTAGES in the rear of the above, and at the extreme end of the Playground, in a forward state of completion, and nearly ready for occupation.”

The 1873 Ordnance Survey Town Plan (published 1875) shows us that the original building was L-shaped, made up of three attached rectangular buildings. In the mid-20th century, ownership of these buildings must have been broken up. Our site, Primrose Hill, is only the front rectangular building with entrance facade facing south onto Church Street.

Primrose Hill consists of three full storeys plus a half lower ground floor / basement. Its principal front elevation is an attractive, pale, smooth rendered, symmetrical, Classical-style facade with large timber sash windows and simplified pilastered doorcase.

Few, if any, original internal features remain within Primrose Hill as a result of the many changes of use over the time; the most recent being the division into five individual flats. It is possible that the lobby and entrance corridor, accessed via the front door, retain their original layout. It is also possible that the staircase is the original front staircase, the 1946 sales details referring to “2 staircases (main) one at front of house and servants’ staircase at rear”. Primrose Hill received its Grade II listing in 1975, its listing details making no reference to its internal features.

Insofar as Evidential Value is deemed to derive from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, and especially its historic fabric, Primrose Hill provides considerable evidence from its many generations of human activity and, unusually, considerable evidence from the time of its original construction. The external elevations, remain much as they would have been back in Victorian times. Despite the loss of original features internally, you can still imagine how the original building would have been laid out. This is helped by newspaper articles over the years, in particular details provided when the building was put up for sale in 1859 and 1946.

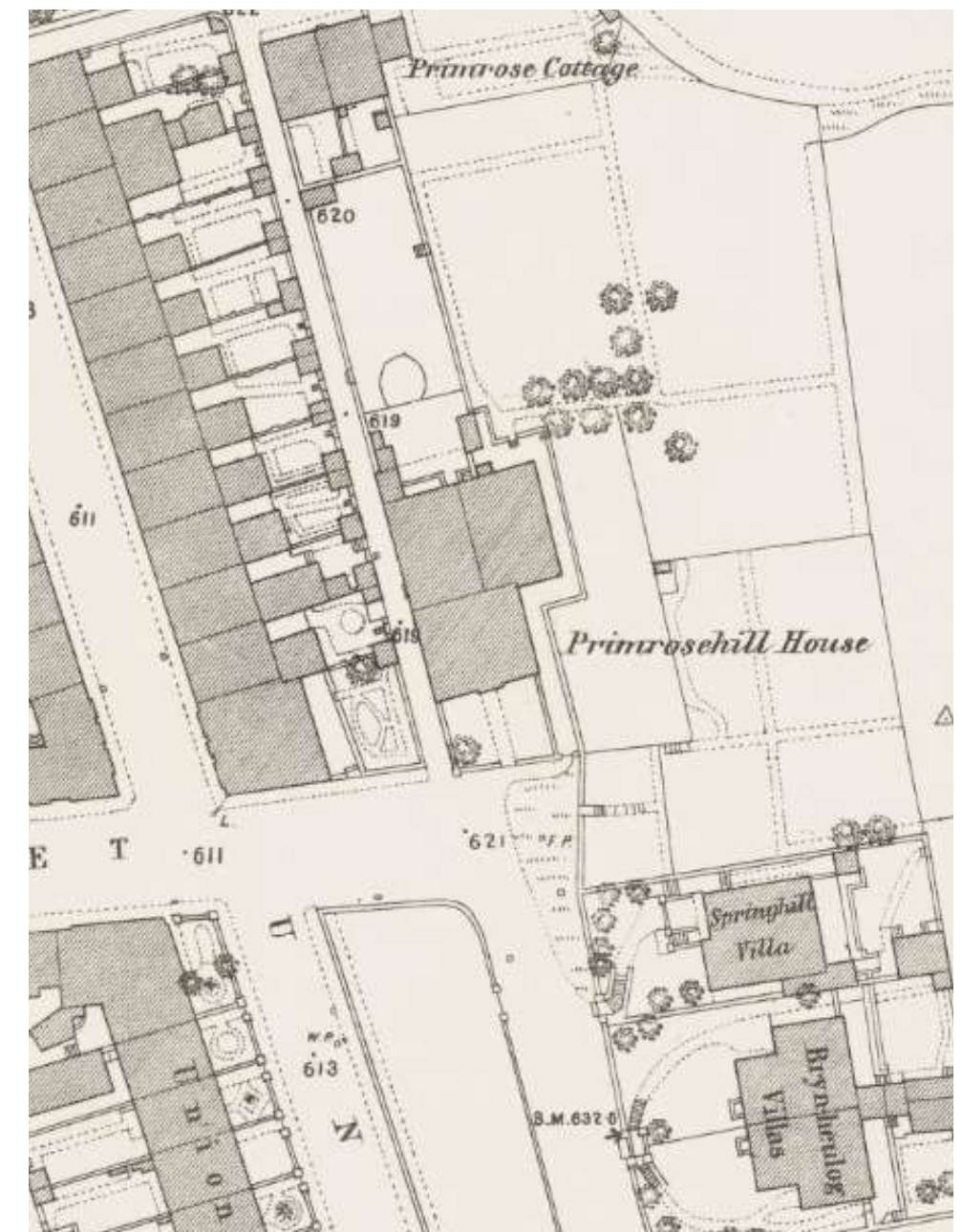
Insofar as evidential value may be buried below ground, under water or be hidden by later fabric, it is uncertain what might be hidden below ground as Primrose Hill had been part of a primarily rural area, and any farming or rural archaeological evidence is likely to have been disrupted when the site and wider area were developed in the 1850s onwards.

Insofar as context is relevant to evidential value, Primrose Hill still stands at the north-east end of Church Street, at the point where the road turns southwards and becomes Brynteg Terrace, much as it would have done when first built in 1850-52. Primrose Hill is still accessed from a front garden path in the same location as the one shown on the 1873 Town Plan. The surrounding landscape is relatively unchanged, with Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue and Union Street as immediate neighbours. The area to the east still remains the green and undeveloped Thomastown Park which opened in 1903. The external appearance of the house, from the road, unchanged by time.

Additional evidential value was restricted to historic newspapers and listing details. The initial web-based search undertaken did not identify any other sources or any historic photographs. Further searching may indeed throw up even more interesting information.

There has been permanent loss of some original evidential value, particularly internally. However, the general appreciation from both documentary and physical appraisal is that much of the original evidential fabric remains and that it can provide good evidence of past human activity and construction methods. It is also apparent that, where newer layers of construction have been applied over older, it is possible to determine what is old and what is newer.

As a result, Primrose Hill is considered to have **Medium Evidential Value**. The exterior of the building still retains its original appearance albeit the front door and windows are modern insertions. Internally it has lost most of its original features. What remains still has cultural importance and makes a moderate contribution to the significance of a place. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance these aspects, though a greater degree of flexibility is possible than with aspects of high value.



1873 Surveyed 1875 Published - Town Plan showing Primrose Hill (source: 'maps.nls.uk')

I.4 Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic Value relates to the external appearance and form of an asset and its relationship to its context and setting. Aesthetic Value also derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a historic asset. In this respect, Primrose Hill has moderate aesthetic value.

The principal front elevation has an attractive, symmetrical, Classical-style façade of the Georgian era, albeit built in the early Victorian period. It has been applied with a cementitious render, sometimes known as ‘stucco’ painted in a pale off-white colour. To the upper two floors, the render has been incised to emulate coursed finished stone. Below the flat deep band underneath the first-floor window cills, the render has been rusticated. The windows are 6-over-6 timber sashes, painted off-white. The central front door sits within a simplified pilastered doorcase with 6-paned glazed over-panel.

Primrose Hill is located just within the ‘**Thomastown Villas**’ character area, on the border with the ‘**Georgian Thomastown**’ character area. The front elevation of Primrose Hill sits comfortably alongside the Georgian-style terraced houses of Church Street, Thomas Street and Union Street to the west, as well as the elegant detached and semi-detached Villas to the south-east.

Historic newspapers from 1859 described the property as “newly built and well arranged” saying “the House stands in a most healthy situation; the Rooms are lofty and spacious, replete with every convenience and finished in a very substantial manner, both internally and externally”. Whilst in 1946 it was described as “a large double-fronted house with lawn in front”.

In 1951 newspapers reported that “A list of buildings and other property in the county borough of Merthyr considered to be of special architectural or historic interest, has been issued by the Ministry of Local Government and Planning ... Buildings on the supplementary list are ... Primrose Hill. Spring Hill. Brynheulog and Sunny Bank, Springfield House, the Rectory, ...”. Primrose Hill is now protected by a grade II listing which was designated on 22 August 1975 and was last amended on 13 January 1988.

The architect of Primrose Hill is not known; however, the Thomastown Conservation Area appraisal (2014) tells us that the Thomastown Villas character area “has less of a sense of uniformity than the other character areas thanks to the individually designed buildings constructed at different times”. One must assume that Primrose Hill was individually designed, the appearance of its front elevation consistent with the other Classical-style Villas nearby.

Classical architecture originated in ancient Greece and Rome and is characterised by symmetry and proportions. The main features include the use of columns, rectangular and evenly spaced windows, and a door positioned at the centre of the house. All of this is reflected in the front façade of Primrose Hill.

The front elevation of Primrose Hill is very much in the public eye, with its roadside setting at the top (north-east end) of Church Street, at the point that the road turns southwards and becomes Brynteg Terrace. Its attractive front elevation set back from the road by an enclosed garden with right-hand gate piers.

Few original features can be found inside; although it is possible that the lobby and entrance corridor retain their original layout, and that the staircase is the original front staircase. Despite the passage of time and change of uses that the house has undergone, the bones of the building remain much as they were when first built.

With all this in mind, Primrose Hill is deemed to possess **Medium Aesthetic Value**, insofar as the exterior is concerned, and **Medium to Low Aesthetic Value** insofar as the interior is concerned. Those areas with a greater aesthetic value, which contribute more strongly to the significance of the place and form a piece of its history and cultural value, would be of greater importance. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance these aspects, though a greater degree of flexibility is possible in the way it, or its setting, may be adapted; not least, if any such adaptation were focussed on areas of lesser significance to the asset.



I.5 Communal Value

Communal Value derives from the meanings that an asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It includes social and economic value, as well as commemorative, spiritual or symbolic value.

It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects. Communal value might be commemorative or symbolic. For example, people might draw part of their identity or collective memory from an historic asset or have emotional links to it. Such values often change over time, and they may be important for remembering both positive and uncomfortable events, attitudes or periods in Wales’ history. Historic assets can also have social value, acting as a source of social interaction, distinctiveness or coherence; economic value, providing a valuable source of income or employment; or they may have spiritual value, emanating from religious beliefs or modern perceptions of the spirit of a place.

Primrose Hill would have been a source of social, economic and spiritual value as well as emotional links during its time as a school, private residence, guest house and flats; borne by its pupils, headmaster, teachers, parents, residents, servants and visitors. Also, to the community who lived nearby and experienced the building as part of their day-to-day life, maybe walking past on their way home or to Thomastown Park. Almost all of them will sadly no longer survive.

As a school, Primrose Hill would have made a significant contribution to the education, aspirations and sporting prowess of its pupils; influencing their knowledge, behaviour and values. Due to the increase in the population and explosion of industry in the area, many schools sprung up in Merthyr Tydfil to prepare its future workforce. Primrose Hill was a private fee-paying boarding and day school where “Young Gentlemen receive a very superior Education” (*Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian* – 10 Jul 1852), where “Pupils are prepared for Commercial Pursuits, the Learned Professions, the Civil Service, and the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations” (*Merthyr Telegraph* – 13 Apr 1867), “for Certificates of Competency as Colliery Managers” (*Merthyr Express* – 17 February 1877), and “Pupils prepared for the preliminary examinations in Law and Medicine, the College of Preceptors, and also for the Oxford and Cambridge Middle Class Examinations” (*Merthyr Express* – 11 December 1880).

Primrose Hill would have been a source of significant social value and social interaction; with shared experiences, collective memories, and emotional bonds. It would have witnessed lessons, examinations, playtimes, parties, wedding receptions, births and deaths. It would have been somewhere that friendships and memories were made.

Such values often change over time and can be important for remembering both positive and uncomfortable events, attitudes or periods in Wales’ history. Primrose Hill will have experienced both the economic highs and lows of Industrial Wales during its lifetime.

Communal Value is also closely linked to aesthetic value and the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from it. It can be argued that Primrose Hill is located on a noticeable site and has an attractive, eye-catching principal front elevation. It’s Classical Georgian-style architecture is in keeping with the area’s early Victorian roots. Its symmetry and pleasing proportions creating sensory stimulation for all who see and enjoy it. Additional intellectual stimulation must also come from the enjoyment of trying to ‘read’ its architecture and its history.

With all this in mind, Primrose Hill is deemed to possess a Medium Communal Value, assigning it value that has some cultural importance. In material terms it will play an important role in conveying the heritage values. Efforts should be made to protect and enhance these aspects, though a greater degree of flexibility is possible than with aspects of high value.

RETURN CRICKET MATCH.

(Between the Pupils of Mr. Fuller, of Newton House Academy, and Mr. Kernick's, Primrose Hill, Merthyr.)

This return match, between Mr. Fuller's pupils and Mr. Kernick's, resulting in a second victory to the latter over the former, came off on the ground of the senior Cricket Club, on Wednesday week; the day being fine, excellent play was exhibited on both sides, each exerting themselves nobly, and displaying skill, both in batting and bowling, which we have seen wanting in older hands. The principals of both schools were present, and acted as umpires; the best of feeling prevailed between them, which contributed to enhance the sports of their pupils. The following is the score:—

MR. KERNICK'S SCHOOL, PRIMROSE HILL.

1st Innings.

Jos. Gabe, run out	9
Morgan Llewellyn, b W. Kyle	0
Wm. Gabe, b Craig.....	2
Morgan John, c Beard	11
Evan John, run out	0
R. M. Evans, not out.....	6
John Lewis, c McCloud	0
Thos. F. Thomas, b Craig	0
Jas. Ferrent, c Beard	13
Byes 4, wides 1	5

Total 46

2nd Innings.

b. Kyle	0
b Craig	1
run out	18
b Kyle	7
b Craig	0
not out	1
b Kyle	7
b Kyle	2
b Craig	0
byes 5	5

Total 41

MR. FULLER'S SCHOOL, NEWTON HOUSE.

1st Innings.

A. Kyle, b Ferrent	7
Jas. Craig, b W. Gabe	1
J. Kyle, run out	2
McCloud, c Llewellyn	6
Quin Forrester, run out.....	15
W. Beard, st. out, W. Gabe ...	2
W. Keppel, not out	14
J. Frederick, run out.....	5
J. Craig, c. Lewis	0
Bye	1

Total 53

2nd Innings.

b Ferrent	1
c Ferrent	1
c W. Gabe	1
not out	15
c. W. Gabe	2
run out	2
st. out W. Gabe	5
b Ferrent	0
b W. Gabe	3
Byes 2, wide 1	3

Total 33

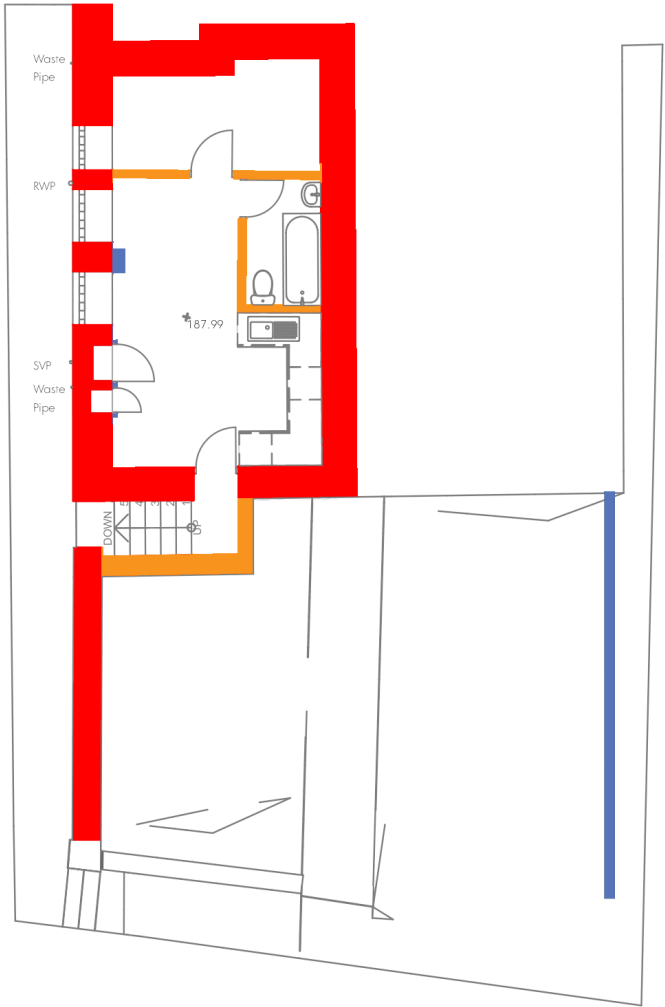
Total of both Innings of Mr. Kernick's pupils ... 87

Ditto, ditto, of Mr. Fuller's pupils 86

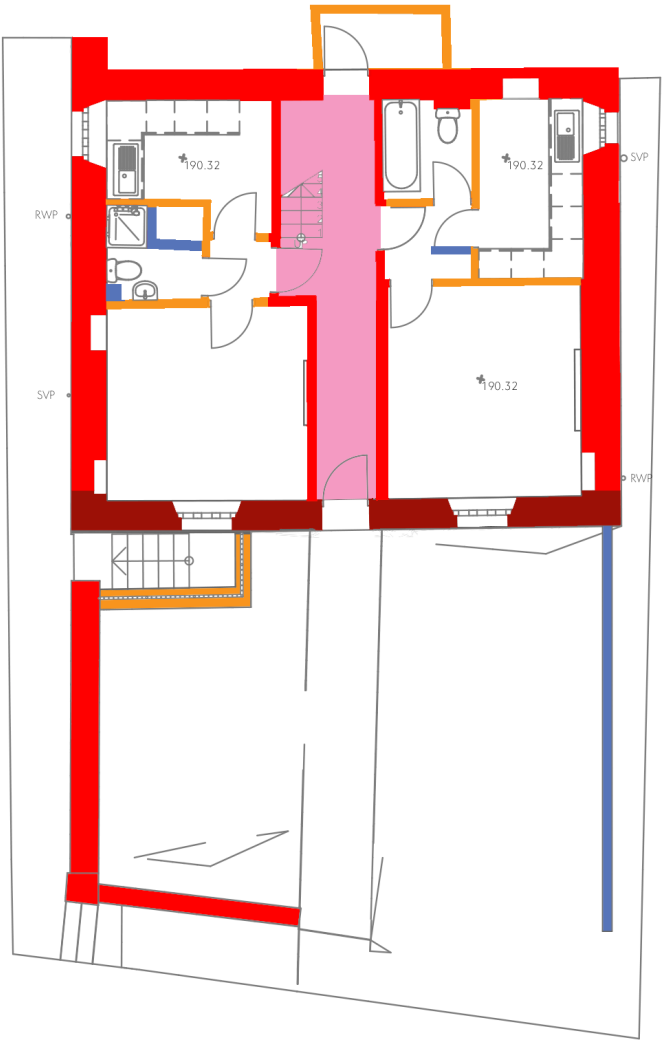
Majority to Mr. Kernick's pupils 1

1856 10.04 - Cricket match
(source: ‘Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian - Saturday 04 October 1856’)

I.6 Significance Plans



LOWER GROUND FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

KEY TO HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Considerable Significance

Notable Significance

Some Significance

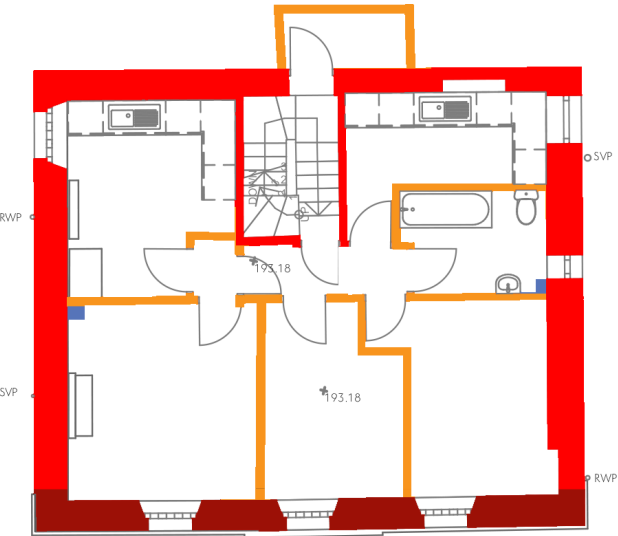
No Significance

Detracts from Significance

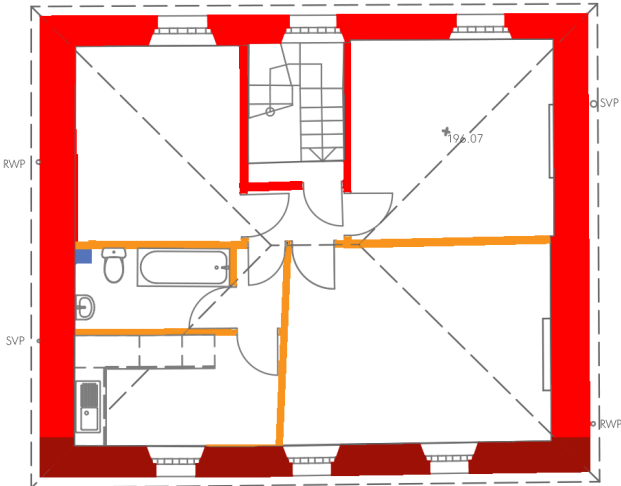
WALLS



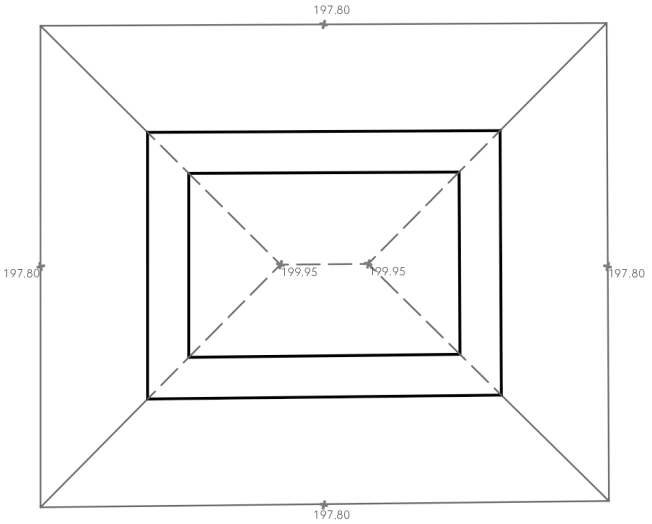
SPACE



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



ROOF