



High Cross House

Modernist Icon

High Cross House is one of *the* most loved buildings on the Dartington estate. It is the pre-eminent 1930s Modernist building in Devon and one of the earliest International Style buildings in the UK. Sadly, despite a successful renovation in the 1990s, High Cross House has fallen into disrepair and we are keen to put this right.

Its architect, William Lescaze, was ahead of his time and construction technology had not yet evolved sufficiently to make the building work properly. Huge progress in this field means that the building can now be restored in a way that fully realises Lescaze's vision.

We are committed to raising the funds necessary to bring it back to life so that it is once again buzzing with people and ideas.

Once restored, it will become the home of our new Learning Lab, a trans-disciplinary think-tank for new ideas about the future of education and other important issues. As High Cross House was originally built to be a house (and in fact is one of the most intact pieces of domestic architecture from this period in the UK), our aim is to also ensure that it will be accessible to visit and/or stay in at certain times.

As you walk around this exhibition, you will learn more about the history of the building, its radical and controversial nature, and understand more about the next phase of its life.

How High Cross House Came To Be

When William B Curry was offered the role of headmaster at the newly created Dartington Hall School, he suggested William Lescaze as the architect to design the new headmaster's residence. Lescaze and Curry had already worked together and shared a passion for architectural and educational experimentation. Curry later said:

"[Lescaze]'s freedom from conventional prejudice, and his method of working from function outwards rather than from façade inwards, appealed to me very greatly.

Many people were outraged by it at the time, and dismissed it contemptuously as a typical aberration of the whole Dartington experiment. It is difficult nowadays to recapture the mood of derisive hostility when factionalism has been absorbed into the spirit of architecture, now feeling its way towards forms which express logical design without the limitations of austerity."

International Style buildings were extremely rare at the time and High Cross House was one of the most 'modern' in Europe. As well as appearing in *Country Life*, in April 1934 the building was selected to represent the latest development of domestic architecture in *Architectural Review's* 'Progress of Architecture in England for the Twentieth Century.' In May 1934 it was the front cover story of *Design for To-Day*.

The house stands as a testament to William Curry's belief in a modern society and to the Elmhirsts' readiness to be experimental.



Oak Lane Country Day School
designed by William Lescaze



William Curry
Headmaster of Dartington Hall School
High Cross House was built as his residence



High Cross House on the cover of
Design For To-Day magazine, March 1934



The William Lescaze House
designed by William Lescaze



The construction of High Cross House, 1932

More About William Lescaze

William Lescaze (1896-1969) was one of the leading architects of the Modern Movement. Born in Switzerland, he studied in Zurich under Paul Moser between 1915 and 1919, and subsequently worked in France on rebuilding projects after the First World War. Discouraged by the slow economic recovery in Europe, he soon seized the opportunity to move to the USA which he saw as a place of possibility.

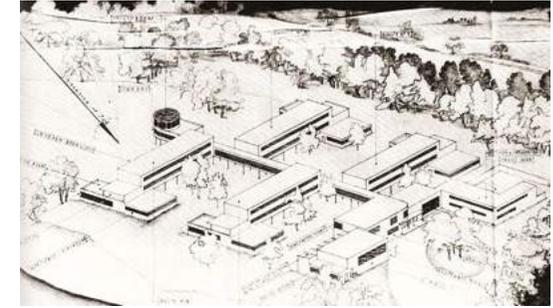
His earliest buildings were amongst the first significant statements of the International Style architecture in the USA including the Capital Bus terminal in New York (1927), and the Oak Lane Country Day School's nursery school near Philadelphia (1929). The renowned Philadelphia Saving Fund Society Building (1929-1932), designed in partnership with George Howe, was the first modernist skyscraper in America.

By the time Lescaze designed High Cross House, he was already an internationally recognised architect. As soon as they saw High Cross House, the Elmhursts were converted to modernism and they commissioned Lescaze to design further buildings at Dartington – the three boarding houses at Aller Park, the cottages on Warren Lane for workers, Warren House for Kurt Jooss, the Gymnasium at Foxhole and the Central Offices in Dartington village.

Around the same time, he designed the Churston Estate housing development on the outskirts of Paignton (1932-36) of which around six residential dwellings were actually built. The remainder of this development, along with an alternative design for the school at Foxhole, were never actually realised.



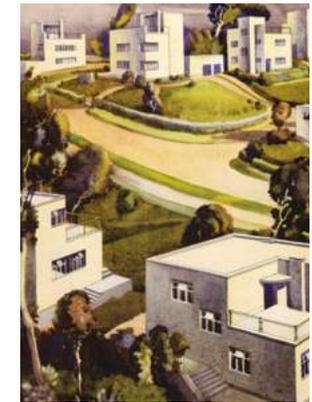
William Lescaze
High Cross House architect



An early drawing for Foxhole by William Lescaze



Warren House designed by William Lescaze



Churston Estate designed by William Lescaze



Philadelphia Saving Fund Society Building
designed by William Lescaze



Country Club at Churston
designed by William Lescaze



Blacklers Chimmets Orchards
designed by William Lescaze

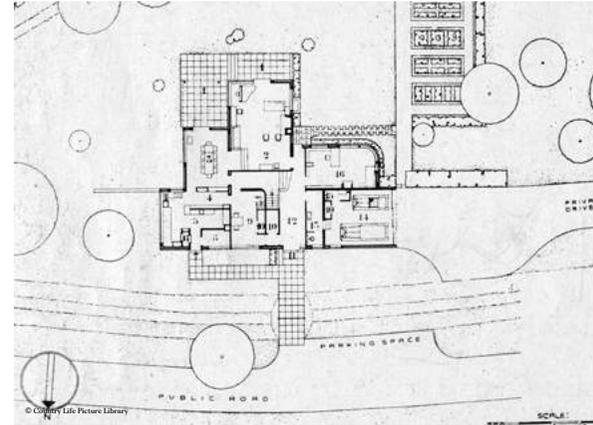


Central Offices
designed by William Lescaze

About High Cross House



The house is of traditional brick and block structure with roof terraces of concrete beam and slab construction.



The building displays the architectural vocabulary typical of Lescaze - two rectilinear blocks joined by a curved form. The bold use of colour inside and out shows how Lescaze was influenced by the De Stijl movement.



True to Modernist ideals of a house as a 'machine for living in', all aspects of the house - including furniture and furnishings - were designed as an integrated whole.



Colour, for instance, had symbolic as well as decorative purpose; the walls of the servants' quarters were painted dark blue, while the rest of the interior was white, grey or yellow.

About High Cross House (continued)



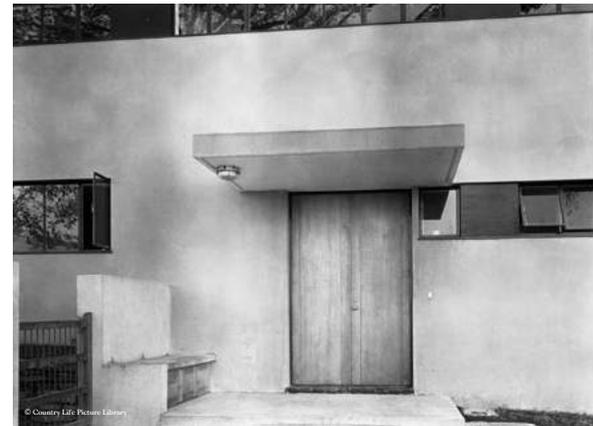
The hall, sitting room and study floors were of wood block and terrazzo tiles and rubber floors connected rooms elsewhere.



The doors were pressed steel framed with no-dust-gathering mouldings. The frames were imported from the USA and, as well as other fittings, the chromium door handles were designed by Lescaze.



The principal rooms and bedrooms, including the guest wing, were designed with terraces and a sleeping balcony, and the roof terrace was designed with wire balconies to keep it safe for children.



In addition to the front entrance door, the original intention was that children of Dartington Hall School could come and see their headmaster, entering the house from a garden door. That doorway was replaced by a glass panel in the 1990s.

About High Cross House – Outside Space



The house is set in extensive gardens laid mainly with lawn, shrubs and mature trees to the east and south. There is a small parking area to the west of the house.



The original design for the garden was developed by Beatrix Farrand, an American landscape architect, who was invited by Dorothy Elmhurst to Dartington in the 1930s. The majority of her work can be seen in the main Dartington Hall Gardens and, in particular, in the Courtyard but her work extends to High Cross House and some of the other Modernist buildings on the estate and is characterised by dry-stone walls. In Modernist architecture, the setting of the house in the landscape is important together with how the building connects with the outside space and High Cross House is no exception.



When the house was first completed, it sat proudly in the landscape but over the years the trees and vegetation surrounding the house have become overgrown – making it seem overly enclosed.



It is our intention to reduce the amount of vegetation around the house and re-create some of the lost views as part of the restoration works so that the house is once again more visible in the landscape.

2016–2018

New management and a new strategy for Dartington has brought a new vision for the future of High Cross House.

2014–2016

As the years went on, High Cross House struggled for an identity and a sustainable use. It fell into disrepair without regular and sustained upkeep and has recently been used for ad hoc meetings and events by The Dartington Hall Trust.

2012–2014

The National Trust occupied the house when it was open to the public as part of their offer. But in 2014 they withdrew having been unable to make the house sustainable as a visitor attraction only.

1995–2011

The house opened to the public between April and October. Dartington's Archive & Collection department was based at High Cross House until 2011.

The archive is now held at the Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter and the Collection is either displayed in buildings around the estate or held in secure storage, with some pieces loaned to exhibitions both at home and abroad from time to time, including ceramics at the Leach Pottery in St Ives.

1995

The restored building was officially opened by David Ross, Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York which was founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Dorothy Elmhirst's sister-in-law.

1994

John Winter and Associates were commissioned to renovate the house to provide access to the public to include exhibition spaces and to be a home to the Trust's archive. He worked in close collaboration with the Trust's archivist Maggie Giraud at the time.

1987–1994

Hostel for students at the Dartington Hall Forestry Training Centre.

1985–1987

Hostel for children at the School.

1983–1985

Home to Dr Lyn Blackshaw (headmaster).

1973–1983

Home to John Wightwick (headmaster).

1968–1973

Home to headmaster, Dr Royston Lambert, and the Dartington Social Research Unit which relocated with Lambert from Cambridge to operate on the estate.

1956–1968

Divided into flats for teachers and their families.

1932–1956

Home to William B Curry, first Headmaster of Dartington Hall School.

1932

High Cross House completed.

Finding The Right Architects For The Job

Four leading firms of architects were invited to tender for the restoration of High Cross House. Following the tender process, Purcell was appointed as project architect due to their proven track record in dealing with historic buildings as well as their ability to solve the technical issues apparent in the fabric of the building.

About Purcell

Purcell started life in the 1940s as an architectural practice founded by conservation expert Donovan Purcell. After many years restoring churches and army buildings in East Anglia, Purcell was appointed as surveyor to the fabric of Ely Cathedral in 1950. The practice continues to work at Ely to this day, but now take the ethos of their founder for excellent conservation architecture all over the world. As an award winning architectural and heritage consultancy practice, Purcell employs a talented workforce of 250 people across the UK and around the world. The practice has now grown to have UK studios in Bristol, Cambridge, Canterbury, Cardiff, Colchester, Edinburgh, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Norwich, Oxford and York, and overseas in Hong Kong, Melbourne and Sydney.

Today, Purcell is one of the world's leading design practices with over 70 years of experience, proudly creating sustainable places for tomorrow.



Clifton Cathedral



Battersea Power Station



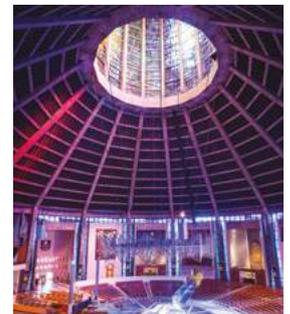
Hornsey Town Hall



St Fagans National Museum of History



Clifton Cathedral



Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral



The De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill

The Challenges

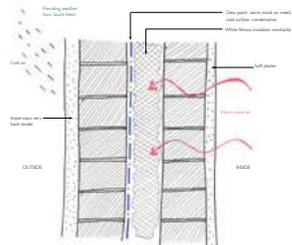
The restoration of High Cross House is not without its challenges and the design of the house would be better suited to the hot, dry climate of California than the often wet climate of South Devon.

We are working closely with Purcell to understand the fundamental issues with the fabric of the building which has resulted in damp walls, Crittall windows in need of refurbishment, leaking flat roofs and so on. Excitingly, the technology has now finally caught up with the vision of innovators like Lescaze which means that the restored High Cross House will be even better than when it was first built.

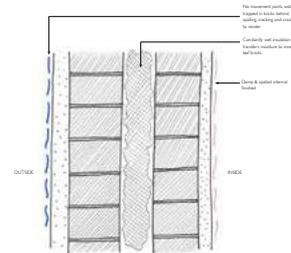
The Grade II* listed status of the house means that any alterations will require Listed Building Consent and we are in close consultation with the relevant statutory bodies, including South Hams District Council, Historic England and the Twentieth Century Society.

Fabric Repairs and Improvements – Proposed External Walls

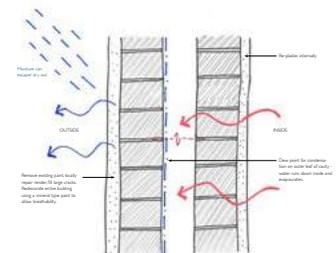
Existing wall build-up



Consequences of existing wall build-up



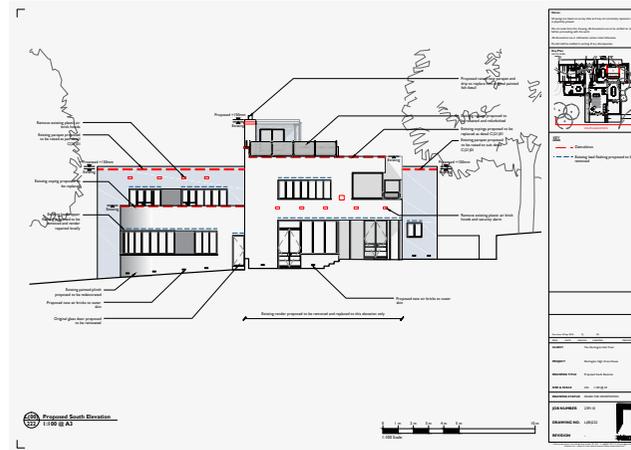
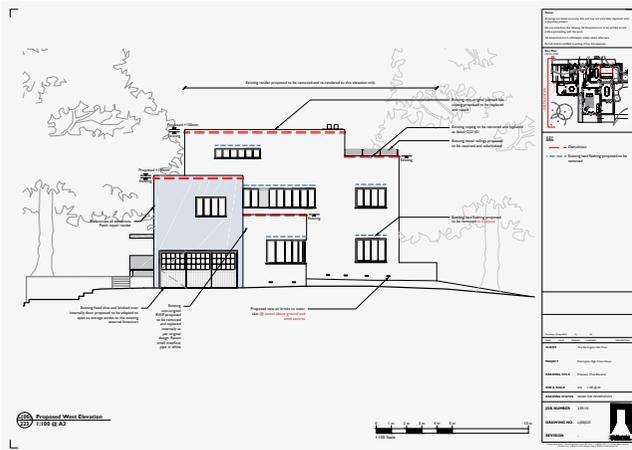
Proposed wall build-up



Existing exterior brickwork showing mortar joints and staining above the window and the chimney breast.



Existing exterior lead window



1.4 PROPOSED EXTERNAL DRAINAGE

The original rainwater gullies were retained and hidden from the main facade. While modern in their approach, it is still not 100% technological and building knowledge would have known that these gullies would need to be replaced to prevent water ingress, in order for the warm interior air to condense upon and allow water into the building fabric.

Using current technology, the proposal is to remove the current metal drainage on the main facade externally. To ensure ongoing access with water to the facade, the rain is proposed to be replaced with new stainless steel rainwater gullies.

As the house is prone to blockages from the adjacent trees, better leaf protection is proposed to be installed in addition to retaining a small number of gullies for the rain water.

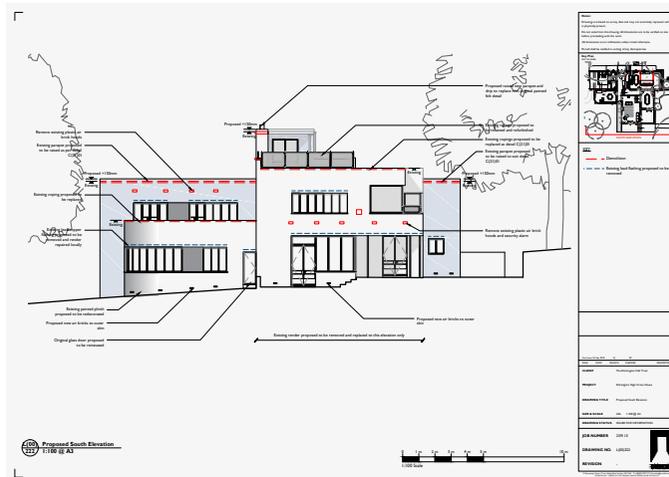
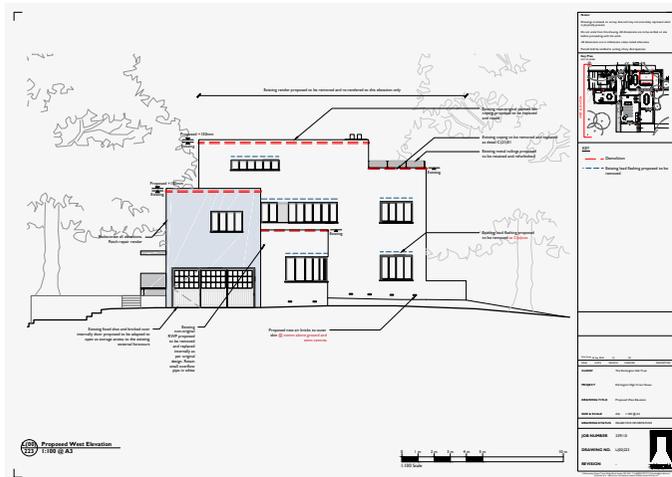
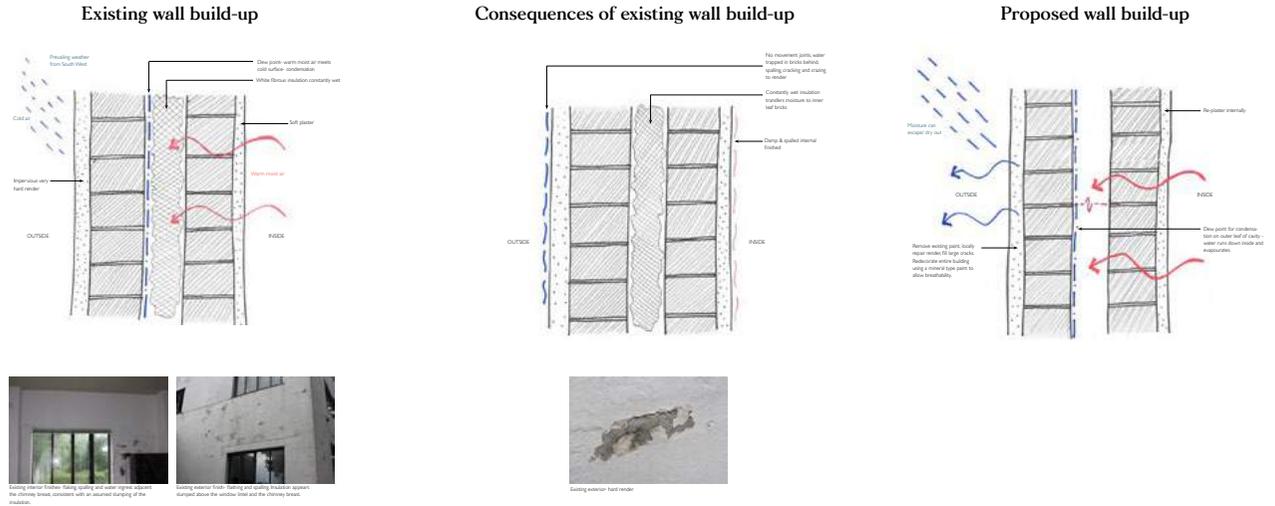
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Fabric Repairs and Improvements – Proposed External Walls



Treasure And Transform

When the Learning Lab is not occupying the house, there will be opportunities for those with an interest in Modernism to view the house as part of architectural tours – or possibly hire the house privately for the full Modernist experience.

We are still exploring all the options.

Making the house as accessible as possible is important to us, including for people with disabilities. This is always challenging in Grade II* listed buildings, but we are keen to find opportunities to innovate and push the boundaries of what is usually possible in historic buildings.

How You Can Get Involved In The Future Of HXH

We are committed to finding funding to begin
the restoration of High Cross House.

If you would like to stay in touch and keep up to date on
progress, please visit our website at dartington.org/future.

We will also update our Twitter and Facebook with pictures
of HXH when work begins.

 @dartington  /dartingtonhall

Fundraising

We aim to fully restore this splendid example of 20th century
Modernist architecture and the surrounding landscape. If you
would like more information on the High Cross House Appeal,
please contact our Director of Philanthropy, Valentine Morby,
on 01803 847078 or email valentine.morby@dartington.org