

**Case Name:** Larkbeare House

**Case Number:** 1489043

### **Background**

Historic England has been asked to assess Larkbeare House in Exeter, Devon for listing. The application has been prompted by the proposed sale of the site.

### **Asset(s) under Assessment**

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	Name	Heritage Category
1	Larkbeare House	Listing

### **Visits**

Date	Visit Type
22 February 2024	Full inspection

## Annex 1

The Draft List Entry are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

### Draft List Entry

**Name:** Larkbeare House

#### Location

Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon,

County	District	District Type	Parish
Devon	Exeter	District Authority	Non Civil Parish

#### History

Larkbeare House, a small estate of about 6 acres, was built for John Charles Bowring (1821-1893) in about 1862. It was built on the site of Little Larkbeare which, since about 1824, had been owned by his grandfather Charles Bowring (1769-1856), a successful fuller in the woollen trade. The land had previously formed the southern part of the early C16 Great Larkbeare House estate; the house survives as 38 Holloway Street (List entry number 1306002).

John Charles Bowring was the son of Sir John Bowring (1792-1872), a government adviser and diplomat, who became the 4<sup>th</sup> Governor of Hong Kong. John Charles accompanied his father on his travels to the Far East and became a keen amateur botanist and entomologist, specifically a coleopterist (the study of beetles), leaving a large collection to the British Museum. On his return to England he is understood to have brought with him ferns, mosses and flowering plants from Hong Kong.

Bowring commissioned the local Exeter architect Ambrose Westlake to design Larkbeare House. The house was positioned on a newly-created platform in the north of the estate and the gardens were landscaped to slope down towards the River Exe, covering the then redundant lime kilns at St Leonard's Quay. The coach house and stables, and an hexagonal brick folly, both buildings from the earlier estates on the site, were retained. The gardens were laid out by Veitch Nurseries and featured a formal garden to the south of the house, two kitchen gardens, walks, and extensive tree planting. Veitch's also provided a range of outbuildings including a summer house, tool house, orchid house, fern house, peach house, strawberry house, melon and cucumber house, and vinery, all heated with a hot water system. The estate was bounded by a wall of Heavitree stone and limestone, parts of the wall may relate to the earlier estates on the site.

Larkbeare House was purchased by the City of Exeter in 1877 to be used as judge's lodgings for the Devon County Assizes. Since then there have been minor alterations to the layout of the house, and some features referred to in the 1875 sales particulars including stained glass to the porch, sculpted mantelpieces in the drawing room, the conservatory with its Minton tile floor, and wooden panelling to the dining room, have been removed. The finials to the gables have also been removed, as have the chimney pots to the chimneystacks. The formal garden to the south of the house and the two kitchen gardens no longer survive, and the glasshouses, along with the coach house and stables, were demolished to allow for a later housing development. A car park, a single-storey stone building to the north-west, and a single-storey building to the north and south of the estate have been added. The gardens continue to retain a collection of mature specimen trees including a line of Holm oaks along the eastern boundary.

#### Details

House, built in about 1862 for John Charles Bowring. It was designed by Exeter architect Ambrose Westlake, and constructed by the builders Messrs Stafford of Bartholomew Street.

STYLE: designed in an Elizabethan style.

MATERIALS: built of grey Torbay limestone, with the walls and chimneys laid as sneaked stone, and relieving arches above the ground and first-floor windows. The stone window surrounds, the parapets and the porch are of Bath stone ashlar. The principal windows to the ground and first floors also have Bath stone hoodmoulds. The roofs are covered in slate tiles. The chimney pots have been removed.

PLAN: an L-shaped plan, with the principal rooms to the south range, and the service range to the north. The south range has a narrow axial corridor with the drawing room to the south, the library to the west, and the dining room and staircase to the north. The corridor turns at a right angle to access the service range, with the service rooms to the west and the single-storey billiard room to the east. There has been some alteration to the division of spaces.

EXTERIOR: of two storeys with attic and cellars. The garden (south) elevation is of two symmetrical gabled bays, with 10-light canted-bay mullion and transom windows to the ground floor, six-light mullion and transom windows to the first floor and two-light mullion windows to the attic. To the right is the two-bay entrance block. The parapet has a pierced-quatrefoil motif and extends to the east elevation. To the ground floor are two cross windows, with a single mullion window to the first floor.

The entrance (east) elevation comprises the two-storey, two-bay entrance block and a two-storey gabled bay to the right. The single-storey porch has a Tudor arch with deeply chamfered spandrels beneath the hoodmould, angled buttresses with offsets and leaded lights to the side windows. The parapet above has a pierced diamond-quatrefoil motif and a blind shield to the centre. The porch floor is laid with Minton tiles, leading to the recessed Tudor arch doorway with a bell push, and a door with decorative iron hinges and door handle. To the right of the porch is a cross window, with two, two-light mullion windows to the first floor. The gabled bay to the right has a 12-light, canted-bay mullion and transom window, with a six-light mullion and transom window above and a two-light mullion window to the gable.

The north elevation of the principal range has a gable-end stack, a first-floor mullion window and two gabled roof dormers to the attic. To the right is a six-light mullion and transom window to the principal staircase and a cross window, with a two-light mullion window above that lights the service staircase. The space between this north wall and the single-storey billiard room has been enclosed. The single-storey billiard room projects from the gabled bay of the service range and includes a two-light mullion window to the first floor and attic. The billiard room has a plain parapet and a six-light mullion and transom window to each elevation. To the north side of the billiard room, steps lead down to a passage that lights the east, north and west elevations of the cellar. There is a square-headed doorway to the right with a C20 door and a plain transom light; it is accessed via a set of steps forming a bridge over the passage. Above is a two-light mullion window, and to the right a gable-end stack.

The gabled bay of the north elevation of the service range has a six-light mullion and transom window to the ground and first floors and a two-light mullion window to the attic.

The west elevation is of eight uneven bays with mullion and transom windows to the ground floor and to the first floor of the gabled bays. The first-floor window of the right hand-bay is also mullioned and transomed. The rest of the first-floor windows and that to the right-hand attic gable are two-light mullion windows. The window to the left-hand gable has a C20 surround and window. Between the gabled bays are two roof dormers. To the sixth bay is a Tudor-arched doorway. The conservatory to the left-hand bay has been removed, apart from stone-panelled balustrade that appears to have formed part of its base.

INTERIOR: the vestibule has a Minton tiled floor. The dogleg staircase is to the north of the corridor and is of stone with an ornamental wrought-iron balustrade with a mahogany handrail and curtail step. Adjacent to the principal staircase is the dogleg service stair with stick balusters, turned newel posts and a ramped wooden handrail. The dining room to the right of

the principal staircase has a coffered ceiling and a slate, round-arched fireplace. The drawing room to the south is divided in half by a panelled basket-arch opening supported on paired square columns. The east and west end of the drawing room have highly decorative cornices and ceiling roses, panelling to the bay windows, and marble, round-arched fireplaces. There are matching marble fireplaces to three of the bedrooms. None of the fireplaces retain their grates. Throughout the interior are decorative plaster cornices, ceiling roses, deep skirting boards, and other joinery including doorcases, four-panelled doors, and window architrave. The fixtures and fittings from the service range, apart from two wooden fireplaces, have been removed. The attic, which provided the servant's accommodation, has been opened up and the fixtures and fittings have been removed. The cellars have brick, barrel-vaulted ceilings and comprise a series of rooms with round-arched brick doorways; most of the doors have been removed. Some of the rooms have been subdivided. The floor retains sections of stone flagstones; most of the floor has been covered in concrete.

**SUBSIDIARY FEATURES:** to the north are a pair of gate piers and a pedestrian doorway. Built from dressed, red sandstone blocks, the gate piers have chamfered corners with run-out stops to the plinths, and astragal moulding beneath the chamfered caps. Plain dressed stone blocks frame the square doorway. To the lintel is 'LARKBEARE' in incised lettering and painted gold.

### **Selected Sources**

#### **Books and journals**

Pevsner, N, Cherry, B, *The Buildings of England: Devon*, (2004), 425

#### **Other**

'The New Mansion at Larkbeare', *The Western Times*, Exeter, Friday 6th February 1863, p6.

Devon HER, 'Gazebo in grounds of Larkbeare House, Topsham, Exeter' (MDV127877)

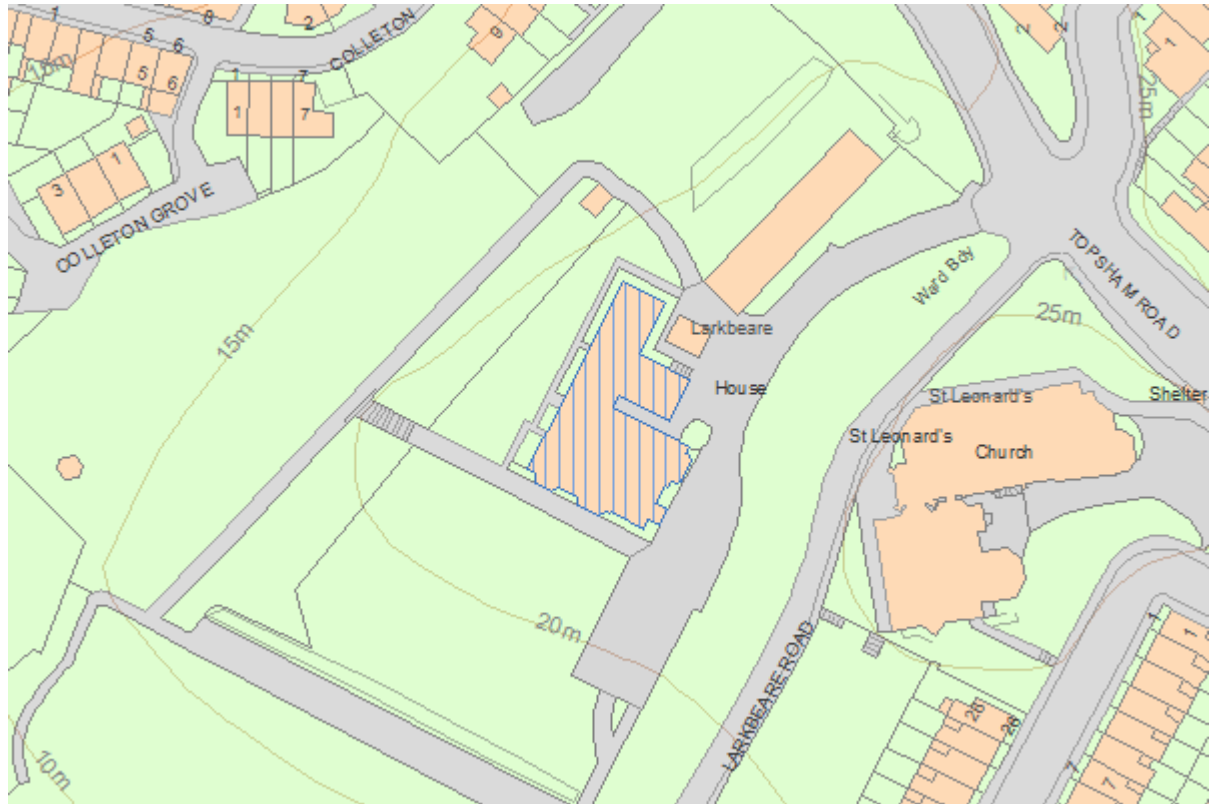
Devon HER, 'Larkbeare House Gardens, Topsham Road, Exeter' (MDV130620)

Devon HER, 'Larkbeare House, Topsham Road, Exeter' (MDV134571)

Devon Heritage Centre, 'Sale Catalogue: Larkbeare in Exteer, with plan, 1875' (2541Z/1)

Exeter City Council, 'Southernhays and The Friars Conservation Area Appraisal'. (2002).

Tithe Map and Apportionment for the Parish of St Leonard, Devon (1839)

**Map****National Grid Reference:** SX9236891919

© Crown Copyright and database right 2015. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF – 1489444\_1.pdf.