

THE RITZ

203-223 LEURA MALL, LEURA, NSW

STONE WALLS – SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT



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Prepared for:

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Frontispiece The Ritz in 1898

Source: *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 26 November 1898, p.30

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE BRIEF

The following report has been prepared in response to a request from Blue Mountains City Council requesting confirmation of the treatment of the stone walls in the gardens of the proposed Ritz Aged Care Facility at 203-223 Leura Mall, Leura, NSW. The study has been prepared on behalf of Skermanic Pty Ltd, the owners of the property.

1.2 THE STUDY AREA

The study area is lot 20 in DP 1076123 in the Municipality of Katoomba, Parish of Megalong and County of Cook. The site is bounded by Leura Mall, Megalong Street, Wascoe Street and the residential properties to the south.

(Figures 1.1)



Figure 1.1 The Study Area shaded

Source: Six Maps

1.3 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

A Conservation Management Plan has been prepared for the site by this office:

John Oultram Heritage & Design, *The Ritz, 203-223 Leura Mall, Leura, NSW, Conservation Management Plan*, dated January 2020 (updated May 2021) (CMP).

The CMP contained a detailed history of the place, a physical description of the site and its built and landscape elements, an assessment of significance, rankings of significance and conservation guidelines for the place.

1.4 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STUDY

A Cultural Landscape Study has been prepared for the site by this office:

John Oultram Heritage & Design, *The Ritz, 203-223 Leura Mall, Leura, NSW, Cultural Landscape Study*, dated August 2021 (CLS).

The CLS contained a detailed assessment of the development of the landscape and its elements.

1.5 LIMITATIONS AND TERMS

The report only addresses the European significance of the place. The terms *fabric, conservation, maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation, compatible use and cultural significance* used in this report are as defined in the Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter*.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

This report follows the general guidelines and structure outlined in J. S. Kerr's *The Conservation Plan* (National Trust of Australia (NSW) - Seventh Edition 2013) and the guidelines to the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance*. – *The Burra Charter* 2013.

1.7 AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report, including all diagrams and photographs, was prepared by John Oultram of John Oultram Heritage & Design. Historical research was prepared by Nicholas Jackson.

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 THE COFFEE PALACE, LEURA – DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUNDS

The stone walls on the site are a fairly discrete component of the place and appear to have been used to level the areas around the croquet lawn to the northeast of the Hotel and the tennis court to the west.

There are also stone walls to the gardens to the Manager's Residence to address level changes to the drive and provide an entry point to its more private garden

The architect engaged by the company to design the Palace was Ernest August Bonney (1854-1914), who called tenders in April 1891.¹ The tender of builder Henry James Weine (1863-1938) was accepted in May.² It is not clear if any designer was engaged to layout the grounds.

The Palace was completed by September 1892. The earliest photograph shows the building at grounds at that time (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1 The earliest known visual record of The Ritz as built is this photograph published in 1896. Note the well-treed backdrop. The building to the right of the Coffee Palace is outside of the site

Source: *Sydney Mail*, 12 December 1896, p.1246

Early photographs of the place are generally taken from Leura Mall and the detail of landscaping to the rear and west are not known. The site slopes in a radius about the main building and there are embankments along Megalong Street to the north and Wascoe Street to the west. The early treatment of these is not known but a fair amount of site work was likely required.

The building was orientated to the northwest with grounds all round and the aim seems to have been to provide an entry arrival sequence from Leura Mall and the station, a setting to the new building, gardens for recreation and exercise, a pleasing view from the dining room and lounge that were in the bay windowed wing at the front of the Coffee Palace and the verandahs to the east and north.

¹ Advertising, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/4/1892, p10

² Advertising, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30/5/1891

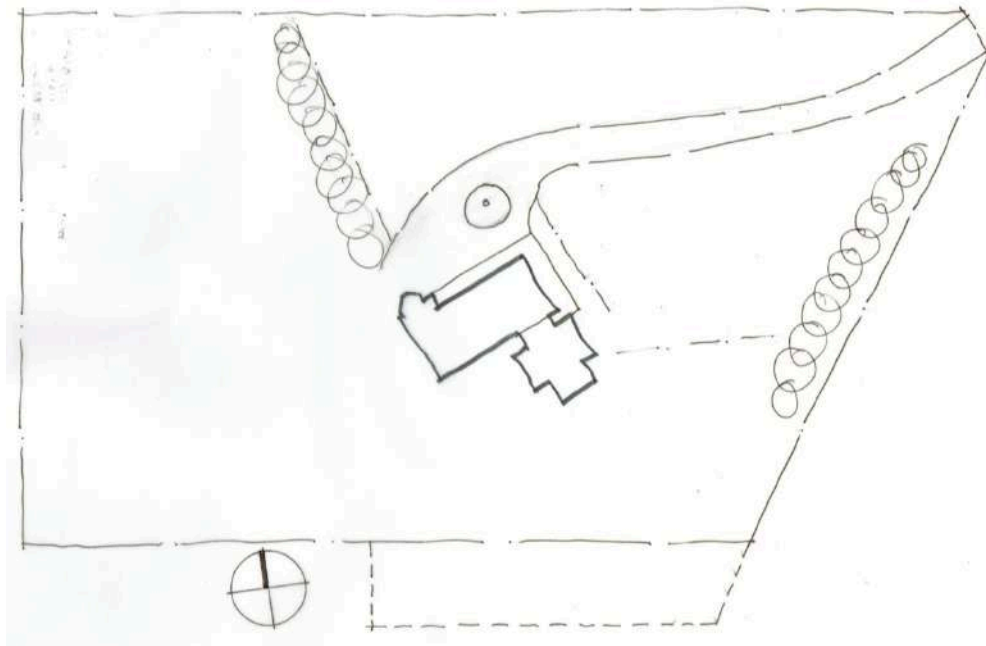


Figure 2.2 Conjectured plan of the site based on the early plan (Figure 2.7) and the photograph of 1896 (Figure 2.3)

The building was set within cleared ground, and with landscaping having commenced; there were a carriage drive from Leura Mall with a turning circle at the Coffee Palace and ambulatory walks. The recreational facilities at this time included a lawn tennis court and probably a croquet lawn. Tree and shrub plantings are shown at this time but not the Monterey Pines that are a distinctive feature of the current site.

The development of the site during its early period is not known but presumably the gardens develop under their own steam providing mature plantings to the landscape elements and recreational walks and facilities.

2.2 THE PALACE, LEURA

The early 1890s was a period of severe economic hardship in Australia that affected all aspects of life. This downturn was the cause for the collapse of The Leura Hotel and Coffee Palace Limited witnessed by the forced transfer of its assets in July 1893.

The registered lessee of The Palace by the mid 1890s was Alfred James Craig, and in 1901 the freehold of The Palace was conveyed to Craig.³ However, it was Craig's mother, Elizabeth (1842-1924), who was running The Palace in partnership with her sister Mrs Margaret Shiels.⁴

A description at the time noted that the Palace commands *one of the most magnificent sights in the Blue Mountains District* and the views from the grounds and Hotel would have been far more expansive than currently seen as the tree plantings would have been lower and presumably adjoining areas had also been cleared.

The description also noted that 150 pounds had been spent on the *making and repairing roads and paths to the various beautiful scenes for which the area abounds*. It is not clear if this included paths or walls within the Hotel grounds.

³ Torrens Title Dealing 324294

⁴ SANSW Index to registered business names

2.3 THE RITZ, LEURA - THE BLOOME YEARS

There was a change in ownership in 1914 with the conveyance of the freehold to Mrs Ellen Sarah Bloome (1856-1932), wife of James Henry Bloome.⁵ With the coming of the Bloomes, the name of the establishment changed in 1913 from The Palace to The Ritz.⁶

Extensive alterations and additions were undertaken during the last half of 1913. In May 1913 a detailed article was published in the *Blue Mountain Echo* reporting on a new hotel proposed by Bloome.⁷ However, the details provided indicated an entirely new hotel development at Leura was being discussed. The relationship between this proposal and what eventuated at The Ritz has not been determined, but possibly aspects of the proposal were incorporated.

In June 1913 it was reported the then named Palace was to be remodeled. It is likely that the two additional wings were built at this time.

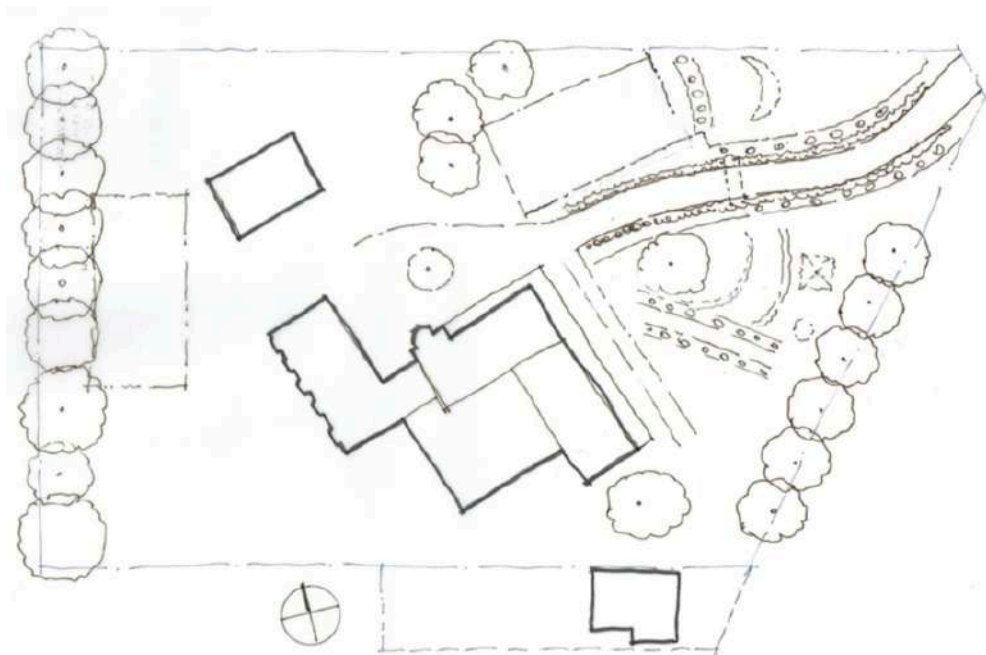


Figure 2.3 Conjectured plan of the site c 1915 after completion of the east and west wings and manager's residence

The drive has been re-aligned and the tennis courts, croquet lawn formalized. The Monterey Pines are in evidence in photographs of the time and are mature forming a strong visual edge to the site. The site and cottage to the south had been incorporated into the site

⁵ Torrens Title Dealing A119306

⁶ 'The Ritz', *Blue Mountain Echo*, 20/10/1913, p.6

⁷ 'A New Hotel', *Blue Mountain Echo*, 23/5/1913, p.6

In September 1913 it was report the now renamed Ritz was in the process of being renovated.⁸

In May 1914 it was reported:⁹

The grounds are being newly laid out and in the near future the visitor will approach the entrance by a drive of graceful sweep, fringed on either side by a privet hedge. ... In the middle of the grounds, breaking the foreground, is being erected a rock garden from the centre of which will rise a fountain whose scintillating iridescent feathery spray will fall back into a limpid pool in which golden and silvern carp will have their aqueous home. Mr Bloome himself is responsible for this work (and) in this art Mr Bloome is no novice ...as the rock garden at the head of Gordon Falls is another of his masterpieces.

The description gives considerable insight into the direction that the landscape layout was taking suggesting that the grounds were remodelled at this time. It suggests that the drive from Leura Mall had not been formed by this time though it is shown on earlier photographs. The rock garden was likely in the position (or close to) the turning circle to the front of the Hotel. The designer of the work is not known but Mr Bloome would seem a likely candidate.

Other landscaping changes undertaken over late 1913 and into 1914 were:¹⁰

- The croquet lawn on the Megalong Street frontage was enlarged
- The tennis court facing Wascoe Street was built
- The circular drive and garages erected on the north-west

The stone walls likely date from the time of occupation by the Bloomes as the croquet lawn, tennis court and Manager's residence were built at this time.



Figure 2.4 This panoramic photograph by Albert G Fowler probably dated 1910.

The image recorded new the landscaping reported in an account published in May 1914. At right is the croquet lawn. No retaining walls visible though the ground has been leveled

Source: Blue Mountains City Library from the local historical society (LS004/004039)

⁸ 'The Hotel Ritz', *Blue Mountain Echo*, 19/9/1913, p.7

⁹ Leura Letter, *Blue Mountain Echo*, 15/5/1915, p.6

¹⁰ Leura Letter, *Blue Mountain Echo*, 15/5/1915, p.6

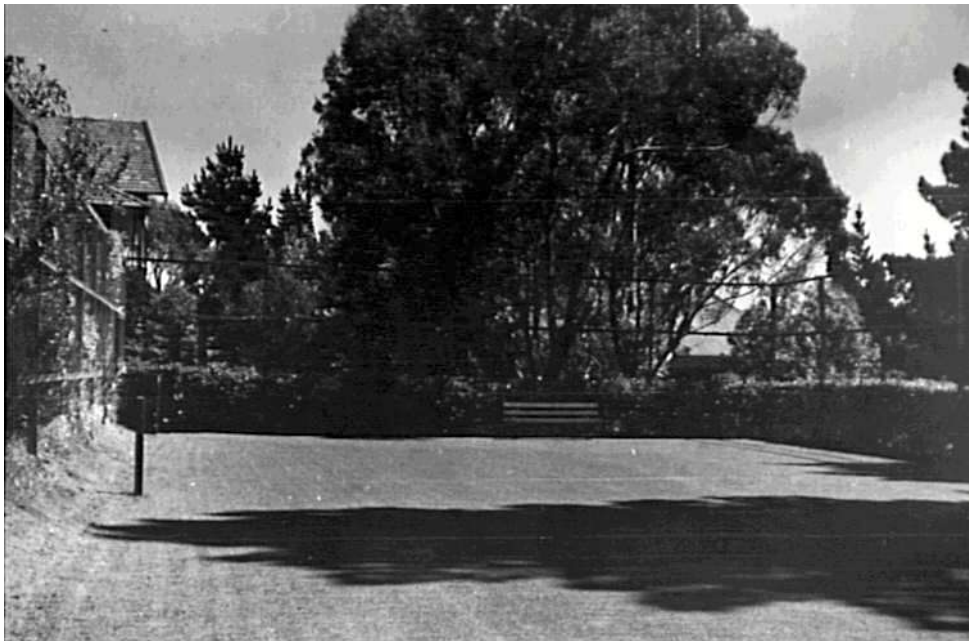


Figure 2.5 Undated photograph dating from about 1940 depicting the tennis court. The retaining wall is out of picture behind the photographer

Source: Blue Mountains City Library (LS001\001437A)

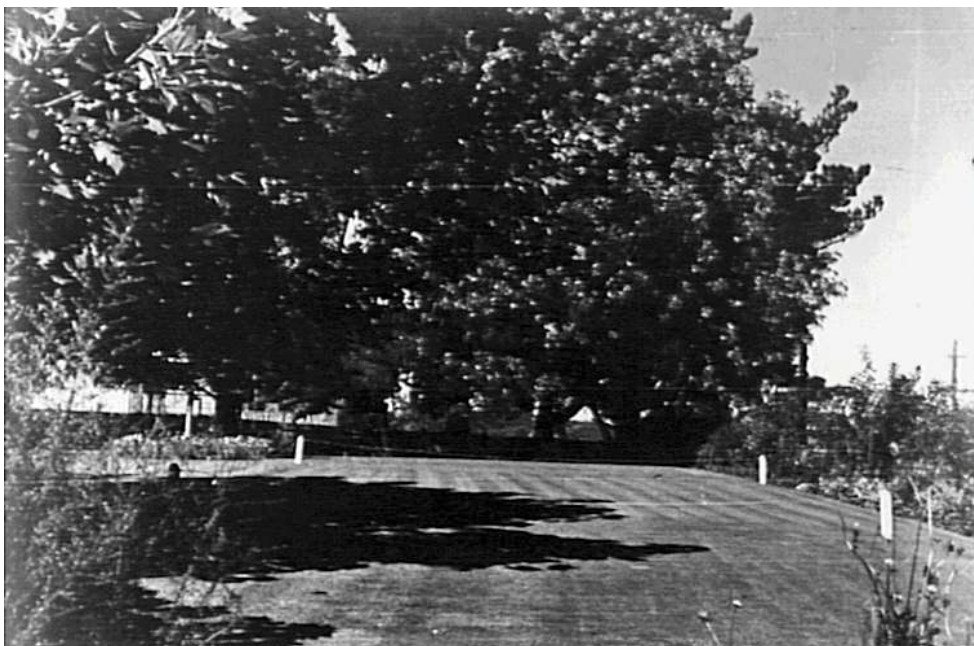


Figure 2.6 Undated photograph dating from about 1940 depicting the putting green that was to the west of the Hotel. The area was later converted to a tennis court

Source: Blue Mountains City Library (LS001\001437H)

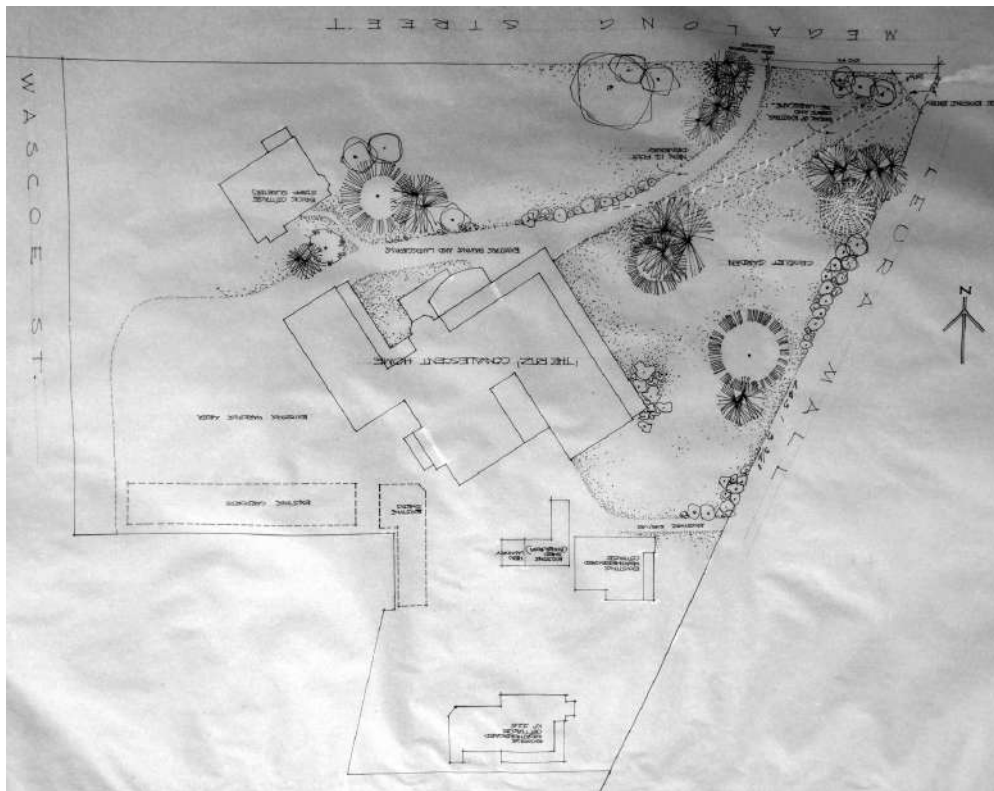


Figure 2.7 Site plan and landscape plan prepared by Hans Buhrich, and dated October 1969. This plan depicted No. 215 Leura Mall as part of the land holding. Re-orientated for reproduction.

The plan shows the main drive re-aligned to an entry point in Megalong Street but this does not seem to have been carried out. The landscape works seem to relate mainly to the eastern garden. The plan does not show many of the trees along the perimeter or plantings around the buildings. No retaining walls are noted

Source: State Library of NSW (PXD 970 Box 13)



Figure 2.8 1943. Note the perimeter trees. The croquet lane /tennis court appears to have planted been with trees



Figure 2.9 1958. The area to the east of the Bloome's cottage seems to have been cleared and the drive relocated off Megalong Street



Figure 2.10 1975. The croquet lawn has been reinstated



Figure 2.11 2020

Aerial views of the site from 1943 to today

Source: NSW Spatial Services

3.0 STONE WALLS

Inspections of the site were carried out by John Oultram in December 2019, February 2020 and August 2022, the latter visit to record the stone walls. The walls were noted in the CMP and the location plans are included below.

The walls were assessed as being of High Significance in the CMP.

E	Exceptional	Rare or outstanding item of State Significance
		High Degree of intactness
		Item can be interpreted relatively easily
H	High	High degree of original fabric
		Demonstrates a key element of the of the item's significance
		Alterations do not detract from significance
M	Moderate	Altered or modified elements
		Elements with heritage value and which contribute to the overall significance of the item
L	Little	Altered or modified elements with little heritage value
		Alterations detract from significance
		Difficult to interpret
I	Intrusive	Damaging to the items heritage significance

3.1 STONE WALLS

The stone walls are largely loose laid ironstone in narrow blocks. Some of the walls appear to have been 'repaired' using mortar between the joints. The walls are in fair to poor repair with some collapsed and material removed in some areas. Part of the wall at the croquet lawn has recently been removed (appears to have been stolen.)

The walls along the embankments to Megalong Street and Wascoe Street may only have been placed at the croquet lawn and tennis court where level areas were required and there is no evidence that they were a continuous feature of the site edge.

The walls are illustrated in the tables below with the proposed treatment for each indicated. Generally, the walls will remain as is with repairs or rebuilding only carried out on an 'as needed' basis.



RANKING	KEY	ITEM	Note
HIGH	S12	DRY STONE WALLS	
	S20	DRY STONE WALLS	





RANKING	KEY	ITEM	Note
HIGH	S10	EMBANKMENT	The embankment led to the formation of the tennis court
	S12	DRY STONE WALLS	The dry stone walls to the perimeter embankments may have been a prominent feature of the site but appear to have been largely removed (or never built)
	S15	DRY STONE WALLS	Likely dating from the construction of the manager's cottage now partly mortared
	S16	DRY STONE WALLS	Likely dating for the reformation of the croquet lawn

Figure 3.1 Stone Walls Location Plan – Sub numbers added for clarity


3.1.1 Croquet Lawn Retaining wall

S16	Croquet Lawn Retaining Wall
	
	
Type	Low height, dry stone retaining wall with mortar repairs. Southern section recently removed
Length	13.0 metres
Height	600mm
Condition	Poor
Treatment	Carefully dismantle remaining section and remove mortar
	Rebuild to former detail (loose laid) with new section to the south to match
	New footing if required

3.1.2 Manager's Garden Entry Wall

S15	Manager's Garden Entry Wall
	
	
Type	Low height, dry stone wall with mortar repairs. Appears to have been a raised planter
Length	7.0 metres
Height	750mm
Condition	Moderate
Treatment	Carefully dismantle and remove mortar
	Rebuild to former detail (loose laid) with projecting cap surround
	New footing if required



3.1.3 Manager's Garden Retaining wall

S15	Manager's Garden Retaining Wall
	
Type	Low height, dry stone wall
Length	6.0 metres
Height	1100mm
Condition	Moderate
Treatment	Retain as is

3.1.4 Manager's Garden Walls




S15	Manager's Garden Walls
	
	
	
Type	Low height, dry stone wall with upstand capping
Length	Varies
Height	600 - 800mm
Condition	Moderate
Treatment	Retain as is

3.1.5 Remnant Embankment Wall – Megalong Street

S12A	Remnant Embankment Wall
	
Type	Low height, dry stone retaining wall. May have been built to retain the croquets lawn but part removed for ramp.
Length	400 -1500mm
Height	800mm approx
Condition	Moderate
Treatment	Retain as is and feather in new work to match where ramp removed
S20	Remnant Embankment Wall
	
Type	DRY stone retaining wall (collapsed). May have been built to retain the croquets lawn but part removed for ramp.
Length	3.0mm
Height	800mm approx
Condition	Poor
Treatment	Retain as is

S12C	Remnant Embankment Wall
	
Type	Low height, dry stone retaining wall (collapsed)
Length	3,0m
Height	600-900mm
Condition	Poor
Treatment	Retain as is

3.1.6 Remnant Embankment Walls – Wascoe Street

S12D	Remnant Embankment Wall
	
	
	
Type	Low height, dry stone retaining wall. May have been built to retain the tennis court
Length	30 metres
Height	Varies 700-1200mm
Condition	Moderate
Treatment	Retain as is and piece in new work to match if affected by tree removal

4.0 SUMMARY

4.1 SUMMARY

From the above it can be seen that the stone walls are of high local significance and should be conserved.

4.2 CONSERVATION APPROACH

The CMP contained conservation guidelines for the treatment of the place and these should be implemented in any development at the place.

The treatment of the stone walls is proposed to be a low-key approach that does not attempt to 'modernise' the walls but retains them as is with repairs only carried out on an 'as needed' basis to retain a sense of their age and treat them in some ways as an archaeological relic. The treatment of the walls is summarised below:

REF	WALL	TREATMENT
S16	Croquet Lawn Retaining Wall	Dismantle, remove mortar, rebuild with new section on new footing if required
S15	Manager's Garden Entry Wall	Dismantle, remove mortar, rebuild on new footing if required
S15	Manager's Garden Retaining Wall	Retain as is
S15	Manager's Garden Walls	Retain as is
S12A	Remnant Embankment Wall	Retain as is and repair to suit new layout
S20	Remnant Embankment Wall	Retain as is
S12B	Remnant Embankment Wall	Retain as is
S12C	Remnant Embankment Wall	Retain as is
S12D	Remnant Embankment Wall	Retain as is and piece in new work if affected by tree removal



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