



# Conservation Rooflights in The Old Court House Renovation

**T**he privately owned Old Court House is located on a large West Midlands farm. The farm had been purchased with a number of outline consents for the conversion of the various farm buildings into habitable dwellings and staff accommodation, but these consents were all linked to the repair of one particular building on the site, known as The Old Court House.

In the words of Harrison Brookes Architects, The Old Court House was more ecosystem than building when they first encountered it. The house, which had been derelict for more than 30 years, was close to collapse and on the Buildings at Risk Register. It was home to bats, newts, slow worms and badgers and its location on the edge of several Sites of Special Scientific Interest presented further challenges.

The Local Planning Authority had negotiated a Section 106 agreement on the property detailing its rescue from dereliction and was preparing to increase its listing status to Grade I as it was rumoured to be a hunting lodge gifted by Queen Elizabeth I to Robert Dudley,

1st Earl of Leicester. Dating carried out during the course of the works confirmed that the building had been constructed in phases between 1526 and 1613.

Consisting at the outset of a central brick chimney stack, a stone base and a badly deteriorated oak frame, which was unstable on one side of the house and completely gone from the other; there were only limited clues as to the structure's original design and features. The timber and lath frame had survived, but showed signs of distress. The architects undertook a complex archaeological investigation to try to establish what had been there and put together a plan of works that would recover as many elements of the original structure as could be safely put back together.

A team that included, among others, the private owner, the architects, Speller Metcalfe Contractors and specialist engineers, geologists, archaeologists and ecologists, worked closely to bring the house back to life using a range of conservation skills. The objective was always to preserve the character of the building by working with the structure rather than against it. Specially made components were employed, such as bricks and tiles and Hempcrete, a hemp-lime material that can be used to add thermal performance to medieval timber-frame buildings.



**The Old Court House was described as more ecosystem than building before the works commenced**

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Often the team involved had to learn ancient techniques such as how to mix and apply wattle and daub to the internal walls. These skills were combined with state-of-the-art technologies needed to construct the 2km road, 1.7km water pipe and new reed beds for filtration that were also required for the site.

Clement Windows Group were approached to supply roof windows from the Clement 3 range of Conservation Rooflights because of their adherence to these traditional values. Modern replicas of Victorian originals, Clement Conservation Rooflights are particularly suitable for listed buildings and heritage projects. Available in two profiles for tile (used here) or slate roofs, each rooflight is silicone-fronted, which gives the appearance of conventional putty glazing, but offers many of the advantages of a 21st-century building product.

When tested for air, wind and rain performance they achieved a BFRC Window Energy Rating of A+. As Rhys Brookes from Harrison Brookes Architects commented:

"This Grade II listed building was in a dilapidated state and required meticulous and painstaking reconstruction. The inclusion of Clement's Conservation Rooflights helped us to stay true to the original character of the property whilst also meeting the demands of building regulations."

Today, The Old Court House has been remodelled into a stunning four-to-five-bedroom house and is a wonderful balance of the old and the new. The restored wing pays tribute to the original materials while the new wing provides an opportunity for contemporary interior design.

The project has won numerous awards, including the RIBA Conservation Award, and was shortlisted for Grand Designs' House of the Year in 2018.

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**A stone base and central chimney stack supported a badly degraded oak frame, with distressed timber and lath**

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**Interior of The Old Court House prior to restoration.**

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