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Dear Sirs / Madams:

It is my pleasure to write this letter in support of upgrading the Listing of architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe's Ashdown House, in Sussex, from Grade II\* to Grade I.

Ashdown House richly deserves a Grade I Listing. It is one of only two complete building projects known to survive by Latrobe in England. Although Latrobe left Britain for the United States in 1795, he was one of the most creative young architects of his generation in England. In his two surviving English country houses, Hammerwood Park and Ashdown House, he introduced architectural ideas that were avant-garde for their time and which were to have an enormous impact on his later American work.

Hammerwood Park, which I note is listed at Grade I, is important for its striking exterior composition and precocious revival of Greek Doric architecture—among the earliest and most complete examples in Britain for its time. Hammerwood predicted the architect's introduction of the Greek Revival to the United States, which became an American 'national style' during the first half of the 19th-century.

Ashdown House, by comparison, is most important to Latrobe's legacy for its interiors and spatial sequencing. Many of Ashdown's interiors and their details survive with only minor alterations and they predicted the best of Latrobe's later interior architecture and spaces, particularly those in his major American public buildings.

At Ashdown, Latrobe introduced visitors through a circular temple 'embedded' in the facade of the house; its dome employs one of the largest surviving Coade Stone installations of the late 18th-century—and Latrobe custom-designed the Coade pieces with structural and space-making capabilities as well as the decorative details more common to the material. From this unique, circular 'antique' temple, visitors entered the central hall, which Latrobe divided into multiple spatial units, a theme that he developed continuously in his American houses for the

next 30 years. But the real importance of the Ashdown sequence is in its two-story route and 'picturesque' visual events. From the front compartment of the Ashdown hall, a bifurcated, or 'Imperial' staircase rose from the first to the second floor (in American terms; in British terms from the ground to the first story; the central flight of this stair was later altered but its surrounding interior architecture is largely intact). Due to the existence of the old manor house of 'Lavortye,' behind Latrobe's new villa—which the architect repurposed as the service wing for his new house—Latrobe's Ashdown staircase gains light from a high, clerestory window over the roofs of the older house behind, while the stair doubles back toward the front of the house and deposits visitors on an extraordinary upper landing, with basilica-form, column-screened apses giving access to lateral bedchambers and, at the front of the house in the second story, which opened into a room with a curved, vaulted ceiling that probably functioned as an upstairs sitting room for Mrs. Fuller and her company, with views out to the landscape approach and a balcony over the embedded temple-entry below.

This extraordinary Ashdown route, full of what Latrobe later termed 'interior scenery' (adapted by him from the exterior compositional principles of British picturesque landscape parks) and containing neoclassical spaces such as domed temples, column-screened, half-domed basilica-apses, and vaulted rooms. It reappeared in various combinations in Latrobe's later American houses. More importantly, however, Latrobe's interior sequence at Ashdown was the 'trial run' for his similar routes in the U. S. Capitol Building at Washington, D.C. There, Latrobe grappled with pre-existing construction by earlier architects and a '*piano nobile*' composition that brought visitors into a darkened basement story. Like the two-story Ashdown sequence, Latrobe's entry routes in the Capitol Building included movement through events such as circular rotundas, half-domed basilicas and column screens, rising into dramatically lighted upper spaces.

It is hard to believe, but Latrobe's brilliant sequence at Ashdown House is the best-preserved example of his picturesque interior scenery. Later 19th-century architects of the U. S. Capitol Building, while they preserved several of Latrobe's upper-level spaces (such as the half-domed old House of Representatives and old Senate chamber) altered or obliterated the preliminary spaces and circulation sequences that led to them. And of the 60+ houses that Latrobe designed in the United States, all but three have been demolished. Of those three, the Pope Villa (1810-13) in Lexington, Kentucky had the most developed two-story sequence—very similar to that at Ashdown—but a conversion of 1912 into apartments largely destroyed that sequence at the Pope Villa, and the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation has been struggling for the past 30+ years to restore and reconstruct that lost 'scenic route.'

In addition to the important spaces of Ashdown's dramatic circulation sequence, other interiors in the house contain many exquisite details, such as Grecian-style plasterwork, marble mantelpieces, and several half-domed bedchambers in the attic story.

Scholarship and writing on Latrobe has increased. Since Michael Fazio and I published our study of Latrobe's houses in 2006 (*The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press) books and essays have proliferated on

Latrobe's buildings, his engineering practice, his landscape paintings, and his furnishings and interiors, along with a new biography of him. While his papers and drawings survive in considerable quantities—and show him to be a key figure in housing the new institutions of American democracy—Latrobe's U. S. buildings are mostly gone and those that survive are often in considerably altered condition.

America has realized too late Latrobe's extraordinary genius and his architectural contributions to his new country. I hope that Historic England can assist in the preservation of Ashdown—his most complete surviving house and its important interiors; interiors that predicted much of the architect's best later work.

Should I be able to help in any way to further the preservation of Ashdown House, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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