

THE OLD PARSONAGE

The Old Parsonage dominates the junction of Main Street with the Wells Road presenting an eye catching front elevation of enormous architectural interest, providing a sense of theatre to the thoroughfare.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

THE EXTERIOR

Whilst the C17th Manor, built by the Mogg family in 1637, is of the long established traditional gabled design the Old Parsonage represents a break with the established order in its adoption of the latest Baroque architectural style of the day which turned out to be a relatively short lived fashion thereby intensifying its impact.

The roots of the style lie in the designs of Sir Christopher Wren, whose family home was at nearby East Knoyle on the Wiltshire/Dorset border and who was involved in works at Wells Cathedral, adopted in the rebuilding of London following the fire of 1666 incorporating much French and Dutch influences following the Restoration of King Charles II from exile in France and Holland in 1660.



The country Baroque elevations of the Old Parsonage of the front Wells Road elevation

This Baroque style was representative of a new era reflecting the growing confidence of society brought about by the scientific advances of the day culminating in the establishment of the Royal Society based on the works of Sir Isaac Newton, Boyle and alike, in contrast to the repressive years under the rule of Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth, all heralding in an 'Age of Enlightenment'.

Originally called The Elms the early fabric of the building dates to c1680 and is attributed to Henry and Mary Hole who bequeathed the property to their son John who made an advantageous marriage into the Champney family of Orchardleigh and from c1715 proceeded with a reorientation of the house by adding a new imposing frontage to the West facing elevation.

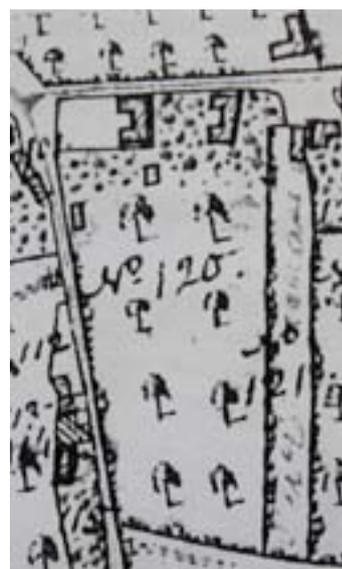
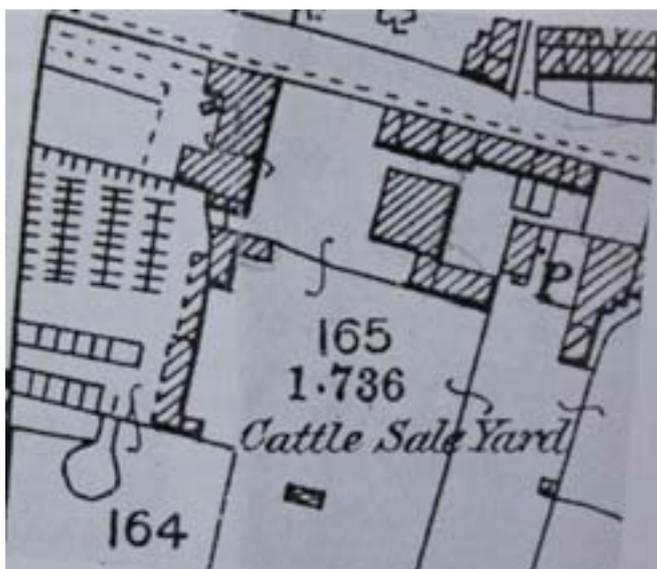
The Hole family had no successors and the property came into the ownership of the Duchy of Cornwall Estate until 1993 by which time the fabric of the building was in need of attention and a decision was made to sell the property on.

The significance of the building was confirmed and amplified by its use to entertain Royalty, on a regular basis, with both the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, visiting in 1934 and King George VI in 1937. They are seen here exiting the rear, courtyard elevation.



The Royal Visits at the Old Parsonage in 1934 and 1937 amplifies the historic significance of the building

It was from the early C19th that the building became known as the Old Parsonage when it was occupied by the Rev. Henry Hodges Mogg, vicar of the neighbouring parish of High Littleton. Continuing as a clergy house up until 1891 at which point the lease was taken over by one Harry Blinman, an auctioneer, who proceeded to establish a cattle market, to the South, on land which had formerly served as an orchard, which remained in existence until 1972.



The cattle market on the site of the former Orchard

From this point the building was turned into a hotel and restaurant up until 1993 when it was privately purchased and run as a bed and breakfast business with ancillary operations in the adjoining stables. The current owners, Mr and Mrs Brian and Charlotte Murray, have owned the building since 2006, running a bed and breakfast with additional self catering accommodation the revenue from which supports the maintenance and upkeep of the house.

THE COURTYARD ELEVATION

The rear elevation of the building, originally the front, is orientated in an Easterly direction towards the Main Street and the Manor beyond.



The original front elevation of the property now part of the rear courtyard

It is possible to detect an earlier build, which predates the early C18th Baroque phase, within the main body of this facade. The lower ground floor level of the elevation is constructed of white Lias rubble stone, laid to course, which has been extended upward in a contrasting red sandstone to form an additional first floor level, in a rugged uncoursed manner. This suggests that the building was originally single storey in construction which has been built up and laterally extended by a single bay to both the North and the South.

Whilst the natural colouring is pleasing to the eye the elevation was originally designed to be rendered over to protect the stone against the weather, a small area of which survives to the left of the entry.



As part of the Baroque phase of early C18th building the facade was built up and extended, punctuated by a single door entry and a series of stylistic conceived Bath stone cross transom mullion windows, incorporating pediment detailing over at ground floor level, in a symmetrical fashion all surmounted by a profile cove cornice detail matching that found on the front elevation to the Wells Road.

This long lateral elevation punctuated by these regularly spaced and symmetrically balanced door and window openings, incorporating cyma moulded classically styled architraves and surrounds, portrays an architecturally mannered piece of some distinction and advancement.



The classical detailing of the door and window openings within the facade

The origins of the design are to be found in the work of Inigo Jones who was responsible for importing the classical style, based on the works of Palladio, from Italy during the early C17th a trend that was interrupted by the turbulent years of the mid C17th when Britain became isolated from continental taste and fashion.



Detailing of the stonework illustrating the build up and classical remodelling of the elevation

It is possible to read the development of the building as a consequence of the loss of the original harling render and ochre limewash finish, however such a finish, as background to the architectural freestone dressings, would have heightened the formal appearance of the facade enhancing this ground breaking architectural composition.

THE FRONT ELEVATION

The Baroque facade, enhanced by bonnet style roofs with swept eaves, represents an architectural fashion that was short lived, covering the latter years of C17th to opening years of C18th, between c1680 and c1730, is often referred to as being Queen Anne in style. It has enormous visual impact and is one of the most architecturally striking buildings to be found on the Bristol to Wells Road stimulating much needed architectural interest and debate from passersby.



The unfolding of the roofscape panorama on the approach from Wells heightens the sense of architectural anticipation

As a young boy in the 1960's the author would often pass the building, on extended journeys between North Dorset and Mid Wales, and be intrigued by its appearance, but there was very little information available at the time other than a rumour that the house had been built by French masons, a reference no doubt to the early de Gournay family era and the Chateau like presence the composition exudes.



The front Baroque facade representing a short lived architectural style of the late C17th to the early C18th

Built of dressed red sandstone blockwork laid to regular courses the design contains a recessed three bay entrance front, incorporating an emphasised central door entry, surmounted by an entablature of decorated freestone frieze, cornice and balustrade framed by a pair of projecting two bayed wings finished with swept eaves and bonnet roofs. Coped gable and freestone quoins define the returns of the building together with symmetrically located chimney stacks.



Fenestration detailing of the front facade incorporating the purer classical Palladian cyma mouldings

Whilst the architrave and pediment cyma mouldings are of a restrained classical form pertaining to the Palladian era in contrast the entry is framed by bolection moulded door jambs with a large flamboyant hood above supported by ornate console brackets containing acanthus leaf detailing. This architectural tension between the flowing Baroque detail and the more disciplined and restrained Palladian influences suggests that the construction is more likely to have been undertaken in the later period of the Baroque period around 1715.



In contrast the the hood canopy, decorative consoles and bulbous bolection mouldings are traditionally Baroque

A very early example of the emerging Baroque style from the third quarter of the C17th, is to be found at Tilley Manor in the nearby parish of West Harptree. Here the window design is of a looser more florid and flowing style incorporating such detailing as broken pediments in contrast to more classically restrained pediment detailing found at the Old Parsonage.



Tilley Manor, West Harptree an example of the emerging Baroque style from the mid C17th

Although the detailing of the window surrounds at the Old Parsonage is considered to be the height of refinement of the day it is interesting to note that the cross transom mullion arrangement was retained in preference to double hung multi pane sashes which was rapidly becoming the fashion, as seen at the Catherine Wheel public house in Marshfield where they are set within bolection moulded architrave surrounds. The second floor sash windows that do appear at the Old Parsonage represent subsequent alteration to the original fabric undertaken in c1820.



The Catherine Wheel, Marshfield c1725 with early sash windows framed in bolection moulded surrounds

At roof level the eaves detailing at the Old Parsonage is of particular interest emphasising the Baroque characteristics of the composition through the adoption of the scroll motif and the bold undercut covered cornice.



Detail of freestone cornice detailing with ornate scroll decoration and residual stone slating above

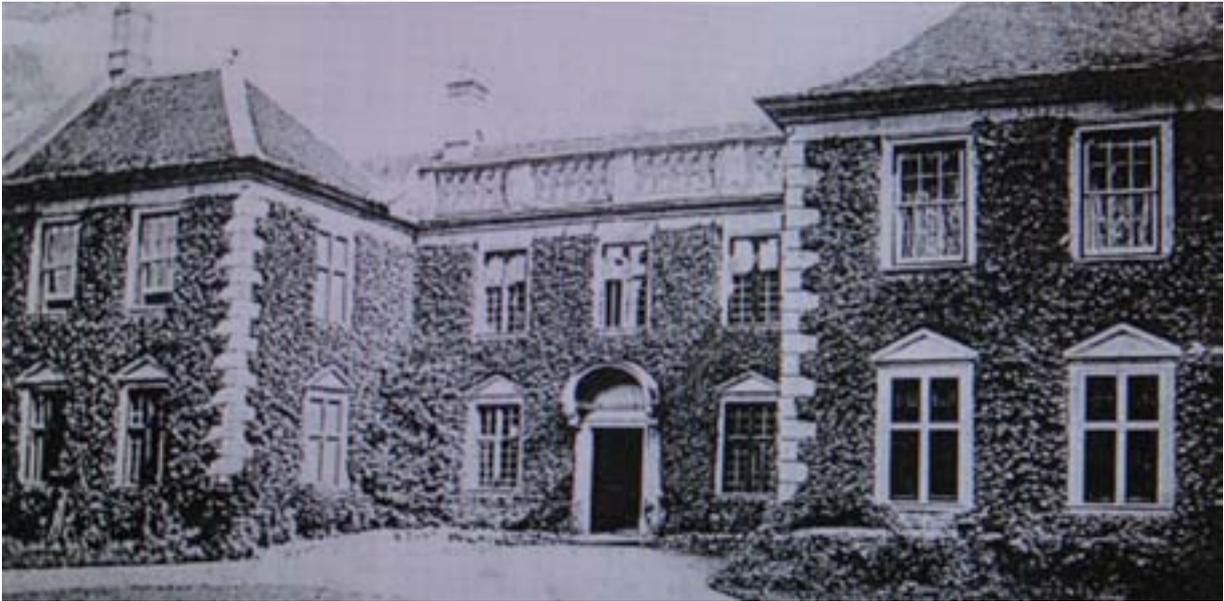


The swept eaves, bonnet style roofing at the Old Parsonage and the highly stylised comparison at Gifford Hall

This detailing in combination with the swept bonnets roofs of the projecting wings and the use of the ball finial decoration are particularly pleasing to the eye and represent typical detailing of the late C17th and early C18th. Although the existing plain clay tile roof covering compliments the composition it is a substitution for original Pennant stone slates of which three courses remain in situ at eaves level.



The ball finial to the roof apex



An early C20th ivy clad Old Parsonage with original balustrading and glazing bars to recessed front elevation

Much work and alteration at the roof level is indicative of the battle occupants have been continually faced with in keeping the elements at bay for generations. The current owners have undertaken extensive repairs to the roof including the upgrading of the flat roof area, to the immediate rear of the balustrading, replacing the inappropriate bitumen and felt covering with a traditional lead finish at enormous expense.



The replacement lead flat roof and detailing of balustrade parapet

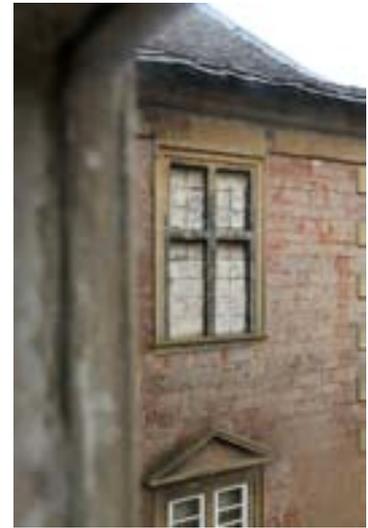
Earlier unsympathetic historic alterations have led to the 're-working' of the balustrade parapet. The reduction in height through the replacement of the original balusters with shortened, square section replacements has compromised the arrangement, however the reuse of the original moulded top rail goes some way to alleviating the impact.



The balustrading historically remodelled and reduced in height with earlier surviving work in proximity

Two original turned balusters survive remounted over the top rail, at the junction with the unaltered supporting end dies, which in turn run into attractively detailed curved upright ramping stone coping sections.

The aspiration to create a fully considered symmetrical and balanced classical composition is further reflected in the provision of blind windows to the return elevations of the projecting wings, at first floor level. This is indicative of the advanced architectural sophistication of the build with such detailing becoming an integral part of the Palladian style that was to flourish in the nearby city of Bath from the late 1720's.



Blind windows let into the facade at first floor level in the interest of balance, symmetry and proportion

The treatment of the window head detail, held in combination with the frieze, emphasised by a shallow projection and refined scrollwork decoration, is refined in both its concept and execution and heightens the Baroque flavour of the composition.

To complete the illusion tromp l'oeil glazing bar detailing has been applied to the ashlar stone panels and mullions.



The projecting window head decorated with Baroque style scrollwork ornament within the architectural frieze

The colour of the stonework, the manner in which it has been dressed and coursed suggests that there was a desire to create an impression of brickwork which was a highly desirable building material very much in fashion at the time. Close inspection of the stonework indicates that the facade has not been rendered, except possibly at plinth level, the existence of pit marks is the result of the building being clad with ivy throughout the C19th.



Red sandstone 'brickwork' polite finish in contrast to the harling render and limewash finish of the rear elevation

In contrast the rear elevation is built of a combination of white Lias and rugged red sandstone that was covered by a harling render and ochre limewash finish, residual patches of which remain in situ.

THE INTERIOR

THE GROUND FLOOR

The courtyard entry leads into an altered, Pennant stone flagged, cross passage blocked up at the far end compromised by the removal of the enclosing walls and the introduction of a lobby at the entry end.



The courtyard entry leads into the original cross passage arrangement which has been successively modified

This two unit single pile plan form centered on the cross passage, contained within gable ends with integral chimney stacks, is thought to represent the original historic core of the building (see appendix one existing ground floor plan)

To the left, South, is located the plainer of the two rooms with a utility hearth and a flag stone floor beneath the herring bone parquet flooring finish. The current owners have undertaken significant enhancement works in this area removing modern applied finishes and infill, which had compromised the character and appearance of this part of the house, thereby introducing much enhancement.



The contrast character of the two rooms which define an older historic core to the building



Cornice with deep corona detailing and superior skirting detail to the drawing room

To the right, North, is located the Drawing Room embellished with an early C18th style cornice as identified by the deep corona moulding, a favourite detail in the work of Wren, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor. Works of embellishment to the door entry, leading to the lateral passageway beyond, reflects the superior architectural status of this end of the building



The architectural hierarchy expressed in the door surrounds



Early C18th cross transom mullioned window and shutters set in plain splayed reveal

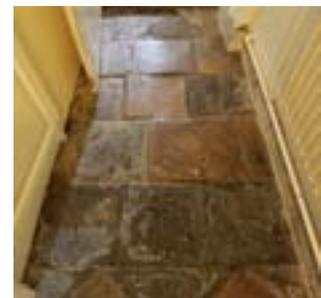
Each room is lit by a single cross transom mullioned window set within a plain splayed reveal containing fine early C18th raised and fielded panelled shutters which are of considerable merit.

Entry through the formal polite entry of the house is protected by the large highly styled Baroque hood canopy set on highly decorated console brackets. Framed by the heavy bulbous bolection moulded door jambs the way leads through the original early C18th, eight panelled, door directly into a lobby entry incorporating a lateral passageway floored with alternate oolite limestone and Pennant flagstones laid to a diamond pattern.



The polite Baroque detailed entry leads directly into a laterally orientated ornate stone flagged passageway

To the right, South, a tight newel service staircase enclosed by a fine example of an increasingly rare two panelled early C18th door designed detailed with a low heavy locking rail in the manner of the evolving classical fashion of the day.



Detail of the passageway flooring and newel service stair enclosure

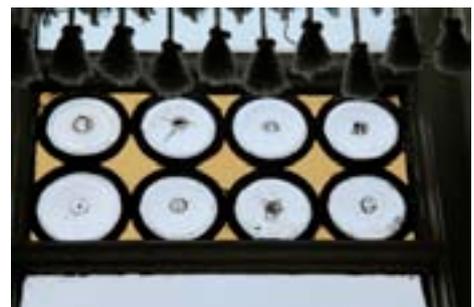
It is interesting to note that the social significance of this arrangement is emphasised by the creation of a threshold in the stone flags, where they change from a diamond style layout to a more standardised square set pattern, denoting the contrast between the polite and service functions of the building.



Historic latches and hinges at the base of the newel service staircase

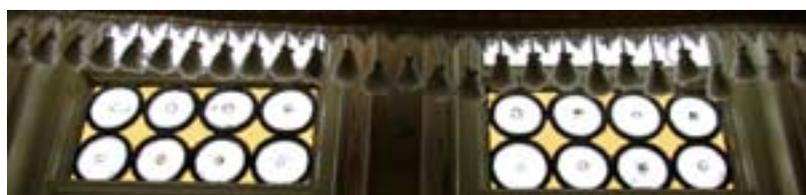
The survival of historic latches and hinge fixtures adds to the perception of the historic space and is further testament to the sensitive approach to the historic fabric adopted by the current owners who appreciate the retention of such detailing and the contribution they make in defining the character and appearance of the building.

This lateral passageway together with the two projecting wings are thought to have been bolted onto an earlier two unit plan single pile building with the reception room located within the ground floor of the projecting wing at this service end of the house being relatively plain in character devoid of architectural embellishment such as cornice and panelling.



The windows within the projecting wing at this end of the house contain reset early glass roundels

Interest has been added through the introduction of early glass roundels, into the window design, possibly from an earlier house, but more likely relocated from the local church which was being rebuilt in 1843-4.



The lateral passageway is punctuated by a series of half round architraved openings incorporating a medley of juxtaposed stylised fluted pilasters surmounted by refined impostes supporting moulded segmental arched openings above.



The lateral passageway punctuated by a series of half round arched openings mounted on fluted pilasters

Whilst original at the point of entry additional joinery has been added as part of the works involving the blocking of the cross passage to heighten the formality of the Baroque entry and in an effort to resolve the intolerable draught and cold conditions that prevailed.

An internal Regency fanlight and door of c1820 origin has been introduced to further improve living conditions and provide additional privacy to the upper more architecturally refined part of the house. Beyond the original early C18th panelled head, containing a dropped keystone, a hallmark of the Baroque style, defines the threshold entry into this upper part of the house reserved for people of consequence.



The drop keystone panel detailing announcing entry into the upper part of the house with the contrasting return face

This further threshold leads initially to the upper parlour which is located within the ground floor of the opposing projecting wing which in contrast to the balancing room at the lower end of the house is highly stylised and panelled throughout in the latest fashion of the day.



Projection of entablature to emphasise window opening



Raised and fielded panelling with bolection mould architraves to door and window openings

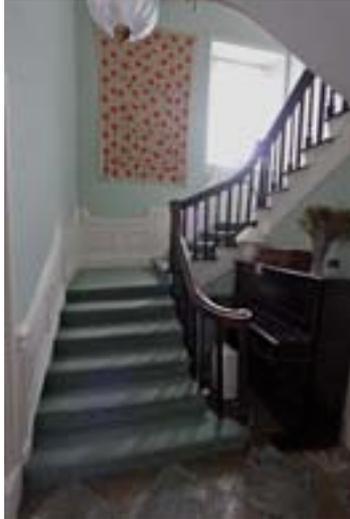
The detailing includes raised and fielded panelling incorporating a low heavily moulded dado rail with the door and principal window opening, to the return wall, framed by bolection moulded surrounds and projections contained within the entablature, in the typical early C18th Baroque manner.



Architectural elements within the panelling which are representative of the early C18th

It is thought that the house originally contained further panelling throughout the ground floor area, which as a consequence of decay much has been lost, particularly in the passageway area, to enhance the sense of arrival and define the progression into the building.

The principal stair of the house is located adjacent to the panelled parlour within the extended bay beyond the earlier build. It is a very fine example of an early classically detailed timber staircase, in the Baroque style, incorporating fluted newel posts and alternate barley twist balusters surmounted by a broad heavily moulded handrail.



The principal staircase of the house incorporating classical detailing in the high Baroque style

Progression up the staircase is enhanced by the provision of a panelled dado to the wall, mirroring the ramping of the handrail and the position of the newel posts, the latter expressed by the use of half engaged fluted pilasters incorporating a capital and plinth detail to match.



Dado panelling to the wall face mirroring the detailing of the handrail and integral newel posts

Set out on a dog leg quarter landing plan arrangement the broad shallow timber treads add to the sophistication of the composition. The sense of progression to the upper floor of the house is further enhanced at its summit by the introduction of a bow front cantilevered projection embellished with reduced florid style pendants in harmony with the exuberant scroll moulding decoration to the return of the treads.



The extent of the dado panelling



Classical detailing present within the early C18th high Baroque staircase



The cantilevered landing incorporating bowed panels and reduced decorous pendants

THE FIRST FLOOR

Access off the stair and bowed landing at first floor level leads towards an ante room located within the North projecting wing which is the subject of the proposals contained within the accompanying listed building consent application



A first floor ante room located within the projection wing accessed off the bowed landing

The room has lost much of its original detailing in the battle to keep the weather out of the room with the original cross transom mullions have been removed and replaced with enlarged, inappropriately detailed, modern double hung sash windows.



The original detailing has been much altered, amplified by the loss of the original cross transom mullions

This work is thought to have been undertaken in the C19th when the chimney piece was altered and a curved headed cast iron fireplace inserted which in turn has been further compromised by the insertion of a raised hearth.





Detailing of en suite bathroom, picture rail and cornice

Much of the original cornice remains in situ and matches the deep corona cornice detailing of the early C18th, found on the ground floor below, but is in need of sensitive repair and redecoration in areas where previous patchwork repair has left significant scarring.

The horizontal emphasis created as a consequence of the introduction of a picture rail moulding, disrupts the vertical proportions of the room and detracts from the appreciation of the cornice.



A program of work is proposed to improve the design of the en suite bathroom and repair of the cornice

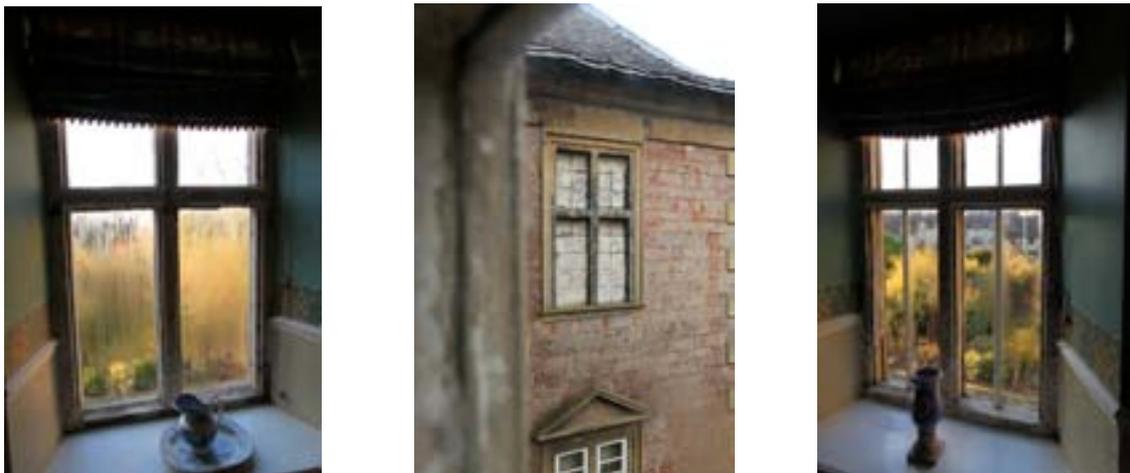
It is therefore proposed to undertake a scheme of works within this room which includes the remodelling of the existing en suite bathroom, the repair of the damaged areas of the cornice and the removal of the inappropriate picture rail moulding all in the interest of enhancing the character and appearance of this lesser room within the building.

A lateral corridor landing, running the length of the building, provides access to the first floor rooms and is located directly over the ground floor passageway beneath (see appendix one existing first floor plan). Containing a barrel vaulted ceiling, visually supported by long linear projecting mouldings, the corridor is highlighted at each end by introduction of architraved openings, left open at the staircase case end and fitted with a door at the service end.



The corridor landing at first floor level

Something of the feeling of the long gallery pertains to this space allowing for the display of paintings and the provision of indoor entertainment on inclement days. The elevated perspective is heightened by a series of three cross transom mullion windows set in deep low reveals encouraging one to take in the long view from the house.



Detailing of corridor windows and evidence of high condensation levels within the building

The square quarry light fenestration pattern was lost during an early C20th refurbishment, however the original pattern is reflected in trompe l'oeil to the blind window and confirmed in late C19th photographs. It is noted that the fixed glazing exasperates condensation levels and demonstrates how the raising of funding is so necessary for the future benefit of the building in resolving such issues.

This issue is just one factor within the continual cycle of upkeep and maintenance that requires attention, on top of the day to day running costs of house, which is both financially and emotionally demanding on the owners who deserve all support and help that can be given.



The replacement sash windows in the balancing ante room to the South projecting wing

The balancing ante room in the South projecting wing is also relatively plain in its detailing. It has been subject to much change and upgrading, in an effort to keep the elements at bay and retain the room in constant use which is essential for the care, maintenance and conservation of the historic fabric.



An en suite bathroom has been introduced, prior to 1993, to address the limited provision

Double hung sash windows have been introduced into plain unadorned reveals, replacing the original cross transom stone mullions and associated timber casements. An en suite bathroom has been introduced, prior to 1993, in order to resolve the issue of limited bathroom provision, decorated out in a manner to minimise the visual impact.

Although the room is entirely devoid of any cornice detail it does contain a further example of an original two panelled early C18th door as well a fine example a Gothick hob grate dating from c1820 set within an open stone surround.



Detailing within the South projecting wing incorporating a Regency Gothick hob grate

The greater proportion of the current layout beyond the West side of the corridor landing, facing out towards the main road, includes three unequally proportioned bedrooms divided by insubstantial partitioning. This arrangement is thought to be relatively modern, which is reflected in the architectural detailing of the space currently devoid of cornice runs and like architectural detailing.

With the provision of an additional lateral bay to the North of the original build, in order to accommodate the grand formal staircase, a residual space became available at first floor level which made possible the provision of a closet, lit by a single cross transom mullion window, facing out onto the rear courtyard (see appendix one the existing first floor plan).

This enclosed room could only be made accessible through the cutting back of the original chimney stack. The provision of such a closet/cabinet arrangement was becoming increasingly fashionable from the later C17th, its roots lying in the open medieval hall and the later Elizabethan country house as a place of withdrawal.



The cutting through of the original chimney stack and view into the stable-yard

Although the space has been historically upgraded to provide modern bathroom facilities by virtue of its location and access is exclusive to the adjoining bedroom. The party wall to the corridor, contains a further early C18th two panelled door, but the walling itself been subject to considerable alteration.



The current bedroom layout and historic alterations within the lateral wall

A substantial timber beam has been inserted at soffit level and the area of walling beneath reduced in depth. Positioned directly below the junction of the wall plate and the flat roof it is most likely that this represents repairs undertaken following the weathering of this weak point within the structure of the building between the flat and pitched roofs.

It is thought that the two adjoining bedrooms formerly made up one single space balancing this neighbouring room. The bunched two door juxtaposition disturbs the balance and symmetry of the composition, and it is thought that the opening to the right, South, is original with that to the left being the later insertion.



A series of fine early C18th doors and associated early C18th ironwork hinges in the corridor landing

A diminutive two panelled linen cupboard set into the chimney breast return, incorporating early 'L' shaped hinges, at the North end of the corridor defines the extent of the build prior to the early C18th.

An additional bay to the South contains a narrow ante room which has been historically converted into a family bathroom with the rising service staircase beyond. The external gable wall of the earlier house has been cut back to allow the introduction of a cross transom mullion window in a symmetrical and balanced position within the external facade, all in the interest of architectural purity. A further indication of the refinement and attention to architectural detailing to be found in the early C18th build is provided by the decorous ironwork casement window latches which have survived.



The original external gable walling has been cut back to accommodate an inserted window



The newel stair and extended roof bay



Contrasting replacement and historic timbers in evidence in the roofing pattern

Newel stair leads up into the extended bay within the roof space which has been historically upgraded. The main body of the roof beyond is of an 'A' frame double purlin construction much of which has been replaced with modern timber, however historic rafters and purlins are in evidence in the separate roofs of the two projecting wings.