



Pembroke College New Library Project Oxford

Historic Building Investigation and Recording

March 2019

Client: Pembroke College, Oxford

Issue No: 1

OA Reference No: 7272

NGR: SP 51350 05950



Client Name: Pembroke College, Oxford
Document Title: Pembroke College, Oxford: New Library Project
Document Type: Historic Building Investigation and Recording
Grid Reference: SP 51350 05950

Site Code: OXPEML18
Invoice Code: OXPEMLBS

OA Document File Location: <\\10.0.10.86\buildings\Projects Ongoing\Oxford Golden Cross>

OA Graphics File Location:

Issue No: Issue 1
Date: March 2019
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Pembroke College, Oxford: New Library Project

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Pembroke College, Oxford are considering options for expanding their McGowin Library and as part of the initial design stage a number of exploratory openings have been made in the existing modern structure to improve understanding of the survival of the older fabric behind. Oxford City Council requested that a professional archaeological company should produce a record of the areas exposed and Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned to do this.
- 1.1.2 An initial set of openings was made in December 2018 and a short summary of OA's findings was produced in response to this. Then a further investigative opening was made in February 2019 and the current short document provides a summary of the observations from this, as well as the earlier holes.

1.2 Historical Background

- 1.2.1 Pembroke College was founded in 1624 and incorporated the surviving remains of the medieval Broadgates Hall. The focus of the current investigation is the East Range of the Old Quadrangle and in particular historic fabric from the formerly external east elevation of this range which was enclosed by (and hidden behind) the construction of the adjoining McGowin Library in the 1970s. The historic East Range is reported to have been built between 1626 to c.1670 although it is reported that it incorporated some earlier building fabric (RCHME, 1949).
- 1.2.2 Unfortunately the elevation relevant to the current study is not shown on either David Loggan's view in *Oxonia Illustrata* (1675) or on the view of Pembroke College by Michael Burghers from c.1700.
- 1.2.3 Both Hoggar's map of 1850 and the 1:500 Ordnance Survey Town Plan of 1878 (surveyed 1873-4) show a structure (or structures) to the east of the south range, on part of the footprint of where the 1970s library now stands. The Pembroke College website refers to the McGowin Library being on the site of a former bath house so possibly this was the function of the structure shown on the 19th-century maps.
- 1.2.4 The East Range is two storeys tall with an attic. The RCHME's Survey of Oxford reports that the upper part of east elevation was refaced in 1838 'but the two lower storeys have some original rubble-facing and windows with square heads and moulded labels'.

2 DECEMBER 2018 INVESTIGATIONS

2.1.1 The investigative work in 2018 was concentrated into three distinct areas:

- The west wall of the 1970s staircase of the McGowin Library;
- A small store room within the historic East Range, on the opposite side of the wall from the 1970s library staircase;
- The west wall of the small store room in the library (immediately north of the 1970s staircase).

2.1.2 Five trial openings were made in the concrete blockwork on the east side of the wall and each of these was given an identifying letter (A-E) to help in this description. A number of windows were exposed in these trial holes and each has been given an identifying number (1-7).

2.1.3 *Openings around staircase*

2.1.4 The stair well in the library is lined in single-skin 1970s concrete blockwork and four small groups of blocks were removed from the west wall to allow some visual access to the void immediately behind (c.20-30 cm) and the older wall of the East Range. One of these holes was in the wall of the mid-height landing between ground floor and basement while the other three holes were opened in the wall of the mid-height landing between ground floor and first floor.

2.1.5 The lower opening [Hole A] exposed the concrete slab of the range behind at ground floor level and uncoursed stonework (generally rubble) below this although parts of the face were obscured by a lime mortar skim. Above the concrete slab the stonework was more regular, generally coursed non-dressed stone (various sized stones c.8-10 cm tall x c.30 cm tall) which could be seen to extend up to the sills of a pair of windows [Windows 1 & 2].

2.1.6 These ground floor windows were more clearly visible from the three holes [Holes B-D] opened adjacent to the landing above ground floor level and from here it could be seen that they comprised a pair of windows sharing a single hood mould and ashlar surround. The northern casement [Window 1] was largely covered over while the southern one [Window 2] had been removed. The mouldings and stonework was crisp and it seemed unlikely that they survived from the original 17th century construction of the range. As outlined above substantial works were undertaken in 1838 including refacing various ranges and it may well be that the window dates from this phase (or possibly even later repairs).

2.1.7 From these small openings it was just possible to look along the void and another ground floor window [Window 3] could be seen some distance to the south (several metres). It was not possible to inspect this closely or photograph it but the mouldings around this stone window were different to those around the more clearly visible window and they appeared older. This window, which would probably have been at the north-eastern corner of the south range, may have survived from the original 17th century phase.

2.1.8 The highest of the three openings at the landing between ground and first floor exposed a first floor, 6-over-6 sash window [Window 4] with stone surround but no

hood mould. This is likely to be of 19th century date and a further two first floor windows could also be seen in the void towards the left (south). One of these was a 2-light mullion window [Window 5] without a hood (but with mouldings to jambs) while the more distant one had a [Window 6] hood mould but it was not possible to examine it closely.

2.1.9 Store Room in library

2.1.10 Immediately to the west of the main entrance lobby into the library, and to the north of the staircase, is a small storeroom and a further small opening was made in the west wall of this room. This opening was high in the wall, above a set of fixed shelves and it exposed a single-light (6 pane) window [Window 7] in the formerly external east wall of the east range. This would have been a short distance to the north of the other windows exposed in the stairwell and again it strongly appears to have been from a secondary phase (either 1838 re-facing or possibly later). The hood mould has been truncated and the glazing broken where a duct has been directed through.

2.1.11 Western side of wall in East Range

2.1.12 Several investigations were also undertaken on the west side of this historic wall within the East Range, largely within a narrow store room.

2.1.13 At the eastern end of this narrow room a simple boarded panel was removed from the wall to uncover Window 2 which had been partially exposed on the opposite side of the wall. As referred to above the casement from this opening had been removed recently but was still in the store room. Cavetto mouldings were visible surrounding the opening, plastered and painted light blue but no other features of significance were exposed. The opening was 1.1 m x 0.45 m.

2.1.14 Immediately to the south of the window a c.50 x 50 cm hole was opened in the lath and plaster which covers the main wall and this exposed uncoursed stonework with the studs and plaster forming a type of dry lining on the stone. A core was also taken through the full wall within this area which confirmed that the wall was formed with very thick solid stone.

2.1.15 The east-to-west wall which formed the south side of the store room was clad in modern plasterboard and a section of this at the east end was removed in December 2018 to expose more plasterboard behind as well as a recess that may have been a former doorway towards the centre of this wall. This area has subsequently been investigated more fully (discussed further below).

2.1.16 A small opening was made at the top of the north wall of this room, at the east end, and also from an adjacent section of the ceiling. These openings exposed an historic east-west principal joist (c.30 cm tall) at the top of this wall, with a modern steel joist below this and then modern studwork forming the main partition. There were also a series of common joists (c. 14 cm x 8 cm) tenoned into the principal. The principal joist had traces of old paint below the current ceiling.

2.1.17 A 50 cm² hole was also made in the floor, adjacent to the window, by removing a section of the modern floorboards. No features of significance were exposed and the boarding was supported by modern joists.

3 FEBRUARY 2019 INVESTIGATIONS

- 3.1.1 In February 2019 a further opening was made in the south wall of the narrow store room within the East Range, particularly to investigate the recess towards the centre of this wall which could be seen from the hole previously opened (referred to above). A recess is shown in this central location on the plan in the RCHME volume and its form is suggestive of a blocked former doorway although it is important to note that on the plan the wall to the rear of the recess is shown as being of 17th-century date, the same as the rest of the wall.
- 3.1.2 The opening created in the modern face of the wall was c.0.7 x 1 m and c.1.25 m above ground level. It showed that the face comprised hardboard on softwood studs and it exposed part of the western jamb of the older recess. The fact that the recess appears to have been visible when the RCHME plan was produced (volume published 1939) presumably means that this hardboard face, which continues straight over the recess, must post-date the 1930s and the character of the fabric supports this (possibly 1950s).
- 3.1.3 Behind the c.1950s hardboard was another hardboard surface but this one incorporated the alcove as shown on the RCHME plan, with squared edges, and it probably dates from the early 20th century (say c.1900). There was a simple softwood moulding around the inner edge of this recess, securing the hardboard.
- 3.1.4 Behind the early 20th-century hardboard was an older lath and plastered surface which also followed the line of the square-edged alcove and indeed formed the rear wall of the alcove. The laths were not machine made and the plaster had a daub-like quality with much straw within it. Some of the plaster had come away to expose the rear face of a further lath and plaster surface from the adjacent room. The soft plaster was painted white but this was overlain by a later floral wall paper probably of 19th-century date.
- 3.1.5 At the western edge of the alcove it could be seen that the original stone jamb had a splayed profile but in this area the floral wallpaper and daub-like plaster was set on a later set of laths which did not respect the splay and instead altered the recess to have squared edges.
- 3.1.6 The painted plaster on the splayed stone jambs and the stone walls to either side of the recess incorporated a lot of dark hair but apparently no straw and it appeared to be different from the daub-like plaster which filled the main recess.
- 3.1.7 The table below summarises the different layers exposed within the opening.
- 3.1.8 Table summarising layers exposed in opening

Table summarising layers exposed in opening		
Possible date	Main fabric	Relationship to recess
c.1950s?	Hardboard on studs	Flat surface. No recess

c.1900	Hardboard	Squared jambs
Later C17th or early C18th?	Two skins of lath and plaster – to each side of wall. White painted plaster surface on cruder main ‘daub’ plaster incorporating lots of straw. Wall paper (C19 th ?) over earlier painted plaster	Squared jambs
Mid C17 th ?	Soft plaster incorporating dark hair set on stone jambs and walls to either side of recess. NB this appears different to the daub-like plaster mentioned above.	Splayed jambs

3.1.9 Interpretation of February 2019 Investigations

- 3.1.10 The recess at the centre of the southern wall clearly originally had splayed jambs and it seems highly likely that it was a doorway. The daub-like plaster which infills the recess is old (possibly 17th century) but it seems highly unlikely that the mid 17th-century stone wall was originally built with this arrangement, incorporating a lath-and-plaster recess at its centre with splayed jambs.
- 3.1.11 The daub-like plaster suggests that the doorway was probably blocked up at a relatively early date (possibly later 17th or early 18th century) and the jambs altered to take a squared profile. Floral wall paper was added and then there were two later phases of hardboard covering over this.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 The exploratory investigations at Pembroke College have confirmed that at least seven windows from the formerly external east wall of the East Range survive hidden by the McGowin Library which was constructed in the 1970s immediately adjacent. Most of these windows could not be examined closely but they appeared to be from different dates. The most clearly visible windows probably either dated from a phase of re-facing in the 1830s or from a later phase but some of the less visible windows are probably older. Their condition, and that of the historic wall, is generally good.
- 4.1.2 The works also suggest that there was originally a central internal doorway between the corner area where the south range meets the east range, and the room immediately to the north, but that this was infilled in the later 17th or early 18th century to leave an alcove on the north side.

APPENDIX A **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Plate 1: East elevation of East Range, McGowin Library to left

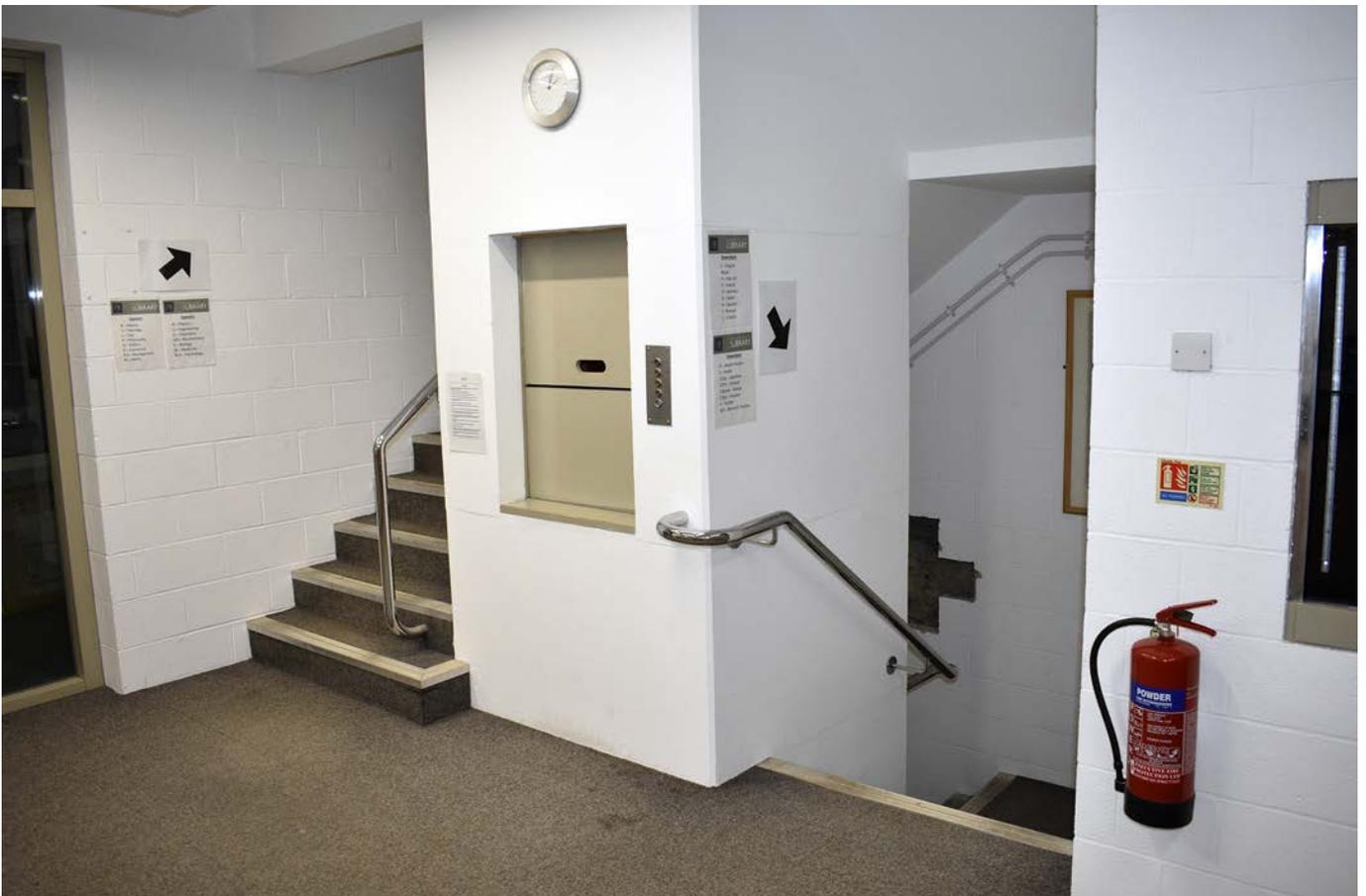


Plate 2: Stairs in library at Ground Floor, lower hole [A] in wall visible to lower landing



Plate 3: View in lower hole [A] in stairs, immediately below ground floor level

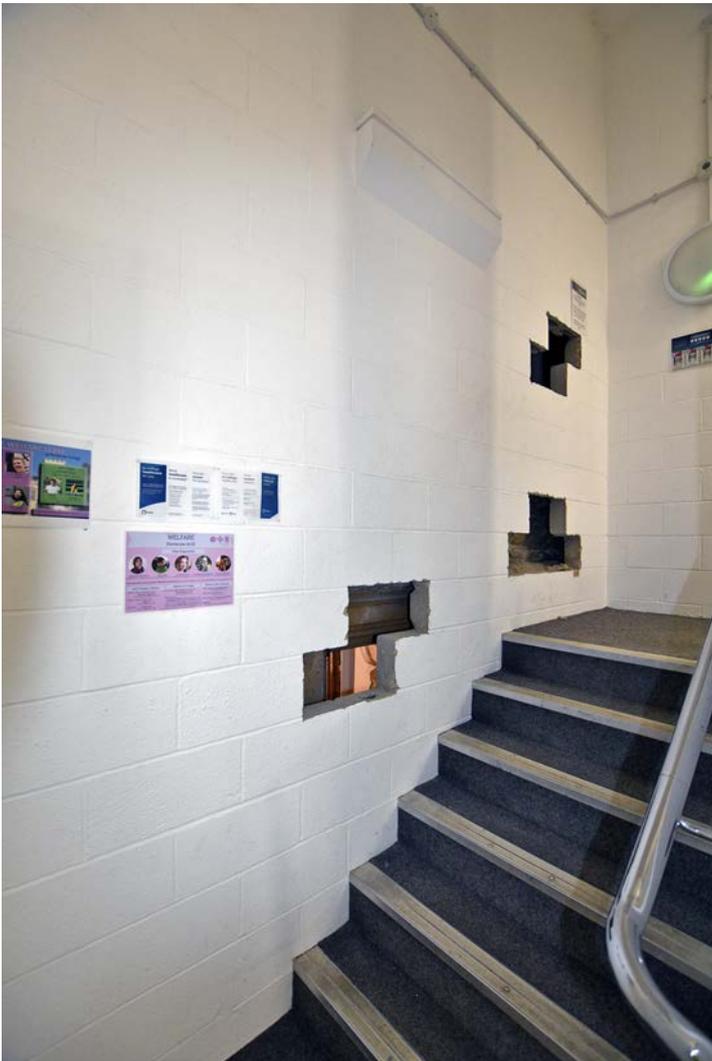


Plate 4: Stairs at landing above ground floor with 3 trial holes in wall [B, C, D]



Plate 5: Window 2, exposed in trial hole [B] between ground and first floor



Plate 6: Lintel and wall above Window 1 exposed in hole C between ground and 1st floor



Plate 7: Detail of Window 4 exposed in Hole D between ground and first floor



Plate 8: Detail of Window 4 exposed in Hole D between ground and first floor

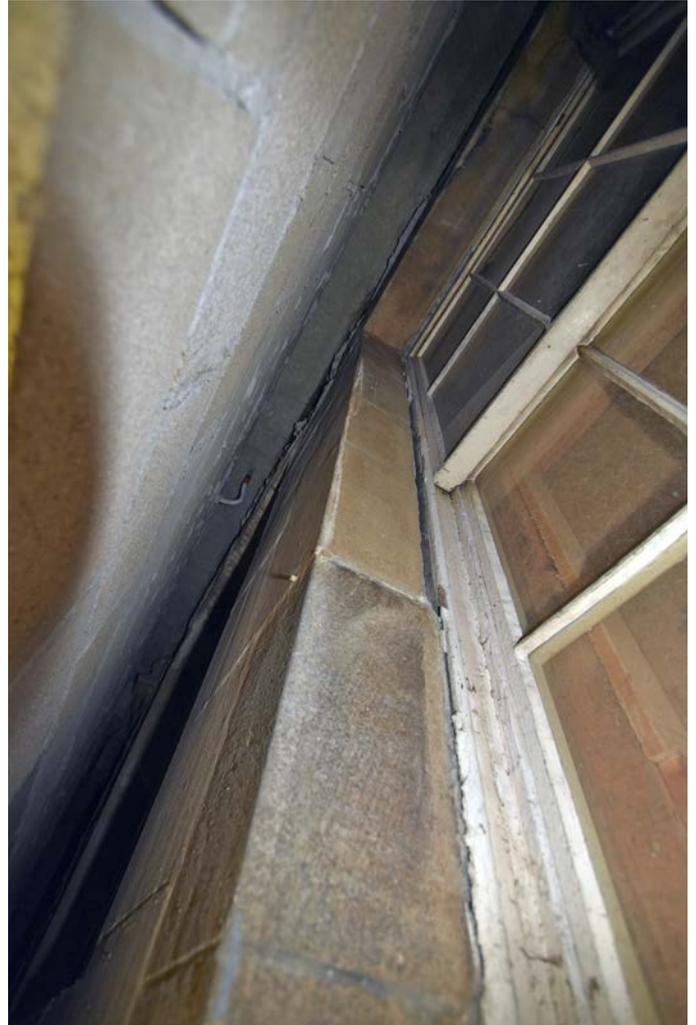


Plate 9: Detail of Window 4 exposed in Hole D between ground and first floor



Plate 10: View into store room by library lobby with Hole E just visible above shelves



Plate 11: Window 7 visible in Hole E with hood mouldings cut off



Plate 12: Narrow room to west of wall with various openings

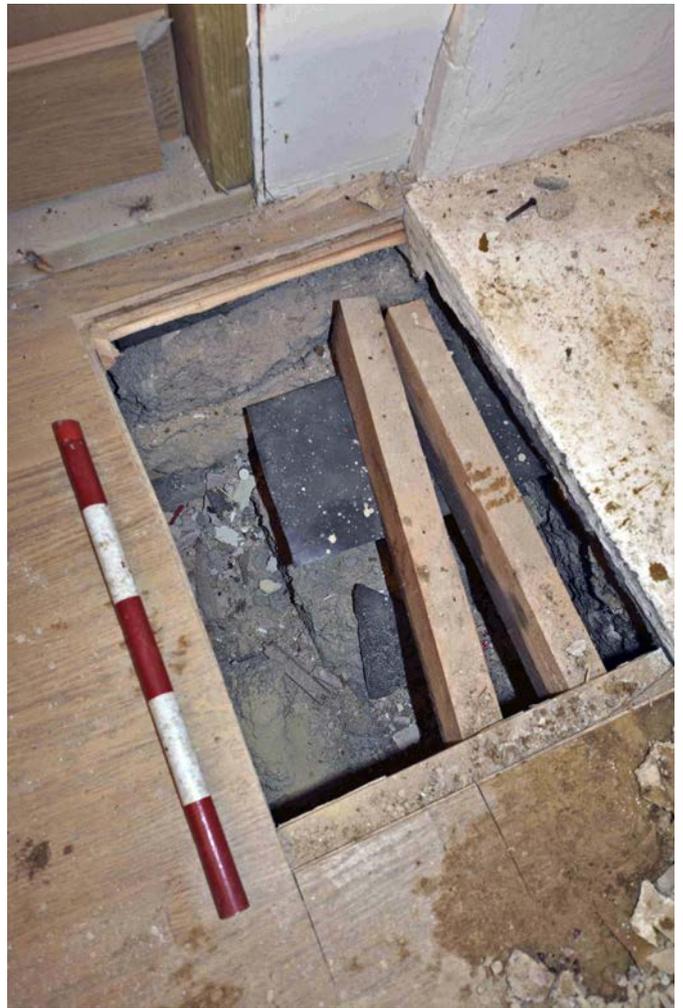


Plate 13: Hole in floor to west side of wall



Plate 14: Hole in lath and plaster on west side of wall



Plate 15: Section of plasterboard removed from E-W wall on south side of narrow store



Plate 16: Exposed section of E-W wall on north side of narrow store room



Plate 17: Exposed junction at top of E-W wall on north side of store with old principal joist and modern RSJ beneath



Plate 18: Ex-situ casement from Window 2