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WARDINGTON MANOR, WARDINGTON:
HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING

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WARDINGTON MANOR, OXFORDSHIRE

HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION AND RECORD

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) has carried out a preliminary historic building investigation and recording of the fire-damaged Wardington Manor on behalf of the architects Rodney Melville and Partners. A stud wall on the ground floor of the south west wing and floor joists on the first floor were examined with a view to identifying the nature of the surviving timbers and possible associated dates. Examination of the stud wall revealed it to be in a poor state of preservation and dating from the 19th century or later. A preliminary examination of the floor joists on the first floor revealed a number of the timbers to be of 15th century origin with later additions to correct structural defects. A programme of dendrochronological sampling has been put forward by the Oxford Dating Laboratory.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 This preliminary phase of historic building recording was requested by the architects Rodney Melville and Partners (RM&P) on behalf of Lord Wardington as an anticipated condition of Listed Building Consent (LBC) granted retrospectively following fire damage to the building. Under normal circumstances, as a Grade II* listed building, LBC would be required in advance of any work beginning. However, due to the dangerous nature of the structures and the need to assess early on likely methods of conservation and restoration, special dispensation was granted by English Heritage to undertake minimal stabilisation and shoring work. Oxford Archaeology (OA) has been commissioned by RM&P to undertake a preliminary analysis of the remains of a stud wall and two sets of floor joists in the south west wing.

1.2 LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORK

1.2.1 Wardington Manor (SP 493 461) is located on the western side of the village, approximately 1 mile from the A361 Banbury to Daventry road and 6 miles from Banbury to the south west (Figure. 1). The stud wall is located on the ground floor of the south west wing (Figure. 3) and separates the library from the panelled smoking room to the north east. The two sets of floors joists examined are located in the rooms either side of the main plastered staircase at first floor level (Figure. 4). The exposed joists can also be observed from underneath at ground floor level.

1.2.2 The recording was to include a photographic, written and drawn record of all three elements prior to any major restoration or conservation work being undertaken with a view to providing possible information on the phasing and historical significance, if any, of the elements observed. Any features of specific interest were to be recorded and Cherwell District Council, the Local



Planning Authority (LPA), was to be contacted as appropriate. The primary aims and objectives are outlined in further detail below in §2.

1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 Wardington Manor is situated in the Banbury Hundred in the ancient parish of Cropredy (although Wardington was considered a separate civil parish after 1888).¹ The Manor is a substantial gabled house constructed primarily of local ironstone and of an irregular H-shape in plan (Figure 2, Plates 1 - 4). Although the earliest date for the construction of the house is currently open to speculation, it is apparent that the core of the surviving house is medieval in date, with documentary evidence attesting to the presence of a manor house in the mid-16th century.
- 1.3.2 George Chamberlayne drastically remodelled the building in 1665, and then major alterations were undertaken between 1905 and 1914 by Clough Williams-Ellis. Further substantial works were undertaken between 1917 and 1923 for the first Lord Wardington by Randall Wells, restoring the existing original details with a high degree of accuracy and making any alterations in keeping with the Jacobean elements of the house.
- 1.3.3 During April of 2004 the fire destroyed approximately 90% of the roof structure over the south west wing and the attic ceiling below. Much of the burnt debris collapsed onto the floor of the two rooms below that are subject to this preliminary report.
- 1.3.4 Whilst the stud wall at ground floor level was not directly effected by the fire at the house, necessary works on adjacent elements of the building has provided the opportunity to investigate the construction history and structural integrity of the stud wall.
- 1.3.5 As a result of the fire an extensive programme of restoration and conservation work has been proposed by RM&P, details of which are currently being finalised and are likely to run until the latter part of 2006.
- 1.3.6 As referred to in a proposed *Written Scheme of Investigation for Building Recording and Archaeological Works* (prepared for RM&P in September 2004), future research, if commissioned, would include further research detailed research into the general historical context and narrative for the building and its immediate setting.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aims and objectives of the investigation were:

- To investigate and make a preliminary record of the remaining elements of the stud wall as indicated on the ground floor of the south west wing, and of the two sets of floor joists at first floor level. Both will also be looked at with a view to offering provisional dating information.

¹ See manorial history in *VCH Oxon x*.



- To identify any elements of historical significance with a view to offering advice on how this might effect the programme of conservation and restoration.
- To record any features of archaeological interest (such as different material and construction) to the Local Planning Authority during the course of work as deemed appropriate.
- To produce a brief report detailing the findings of the work.
- To deposit the site archive with the LPA and the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record Office (SMR).

3 **METHODOLOGY**

3.1 **FIELDWORK METHODS AND RECORDING**

3.1.1 The fieldwork for the watching brief was completed intermittently over August - October 2004. This included:

3.1.2 *The Base Survey*

3.1.3 The base survey for the programme of restoration and conservation work was commissioned by RM&P and undertaken by On Centre Surveys. Access to this data was kindly granted by Andrew Brookes of RM&P and this survey forms the base plans for Figures 3 and 4.

3.1.4 *The Investigation*

3.1.5 Both the stud wall and the floor joists were examined *in situ* on several occasions.

3.1.6 The oak panelling on the stud wall had been removed as part of the programme of repair and restoration allowing a more complete inspection of the structure of the stud wall to be made. It was not possible to view the structure of the stud wall from the north east side due to the presence of panelling in the smoking room, and due to the presence of scaffolding supporting the joists above.

3.1.7 The floor joists in the south west first floor room were observed from both first floor and ground floor level. Due to safety issues access was slightly limited in terms of making a close inspection.

3.1.8 The floor joists in the north east first floor room were also observed from above and below. The room had been boarded over for safety reasons, although it was possible to gain access to most of the floor.

3.1.9 Several small test holes were also made into the walls either side of the joists in the north west room. This was to allow structural engineers an insight into the degree of decay of the ends of the timbers, and to assess any likely problems with the potential removal of the timbers if subsequently required.



3.1.10 *The Drawn Record*

3.1.11 The stud wall on the ground floor was drawn at a scale of 1:25 (Figure. 5). The two sets of floor joists were drawn at 1:50 (Figures. 6 & 7), although the level of detail recorded was restricted due to accessibility and time constraints.

3.1.12 *The Photographic Record*

3.1.13 A full black and white negative and colour slide photographic record was made by OA of all three areas of the wing, with the charred timbers also being photographed individually. A wide selection of digital images were also taken through out the recording process at a resolution of 4000 DPI. Andrew Brookes of RM&P also kindly made available a selection of digital images taken shortly after the fire. Digital images were also supplied on an *ad hoc* basis by the building Contractors, William Sapcote and Sons Ltd.

3.1.14 *The Written Record*

3.1.15 Notes were made of all three areas as part of the annotated drawings. Additional notes were taken as appropriate on site visits and further details, including measurements, were taken of the surviving timbers from the south west roof structure.

3.1.16 *Dendrochronology*

3.1.17 Daniel Miles (DM) from Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory visited the site on Friday 22nd October. DM inspected the two medieval floors on the first floor and the stud wall on the ground floor with a view to identifying potential areas for dendrochronological sampling. On this visit he also inspected the main stair case and hallway along with the remains of the former Butler's accommodation with a view to identifying useful areas for further dendrochronological work, if so desired.

4 DESCRIPTION

4.1 SOUTH WEST WING - STUD WALL AND FIRST FLOOR JOISTS

4.1.1 The fire of April 2004 destroyed approximately 90% of the roof covering and timber structure below in the south west wing. The area of the house covered by this section of the roof extended to approximately 100 m².

4.1.2 As a result of the intense heat of the fire much of the timber roof structure was reduced to ashes, with very few charred timbers remaining *in situ*. Those timbers that did survive the initial fire collapsed onto the two medieval timber floors below on the first floor. The weight of this collapsed debris has contributed considerably to the ongoing structural problems associated with the floor in the south east room that have been examined as a part of this preliminary analysis (Plates 5 - 12).

4.1.3 RM&P and William Sapcotes and Sons Ltd. were able to photographically record the two sets of floor joists, (both from the ground floor and at first floor level) in the aftermath of the fire in this area of the south wing. These images have been made available to OA.



- 4.1.4 The stud wall at ground floor level was not directly effected by the fire at the house. However, during the initial course of stabilisation works it has become apparent that there might be a question over the structural integrity of the wall in its current state of repair (Plates 13 & 14).
- 4.1.5 Whilst both sets of floor joists and the stud wall currently reside *in situ* it has been proposed that the joists be carefully removed off site so they can undergo professional repair and restoration in a controlled environment. The future of the ground floor stud wall is currently still under consideration.
- 4.2 **STUD WALL**
- 4.2.1 The stud wall examined is located on the ground floor of the south west wing and separates the library from the panelled smoking room directly to the north east. The elevation is 7.09m wide and rises upwards to first floor level (Figures 3 & 5, Plates 13 & 14).
- 4.2.2 The stud wall was until recently covered with oak panelling that was present on all the walls throughout the library. Although mostly undamaged by the fire in April 2004 a large proportion of the panelling from the room has been removed to safe storage during the course of restoration works, and to allow easier observation of the structure of the elevation.
- 4.2.3 The wall was observed on several occasions both before and after removal of the panelling and was photographed manually. A measured sketch was made noting the main structural details and subsequently drawn at 1:25.
- 4.2.4 With the panelling removed it was observed that the wall had several layers of plaster applied to the structure below. The colour and thickness of plaster varied across the wall and appeared to be commensurate with several phases of repair and renewal.
- 4.2.5 The plaster render had become detached from the stud wall in several places, presumably as a result of the general degradation of the fabric, which allowed a closer examination of the structure beneath. Several smaller areas of plaster were also carefully removed by William Sapcote and Sons Ltd, again to allow a fuller observation of the structure beneath.
- 4.2.6 The stud wall was of a relatively simple design with machined laths and plaster interspersed between a predominantly oak timber structure. The underlying timber framework had six uprights (approximately 8 - 10cm wide), rising from floor level to a height of 1.66m. At least two horizontal timbers measuring 1.60m x 8 x 7cm and 1.84m x 8 x 7cm were set horizontally across the frame. At this level a further horizontal timber 3.35m x 9 x 8cm was set on the uprights. This timber was in an extremely poor state of repair, rotten along most of its length. There was a noticeable dip in the middle of the timber and two thin wooden boards 2cm wide had at some stage been placed either side to support the failing timber. Above this rotten timber there were a further seven upright observable and two further horizontal timbers (rails).
- 4.2.7 Part of the common joists of the first-floor frame at the southern end of the panelled smoking room was also partially observable on the north west side of the stud wall. The end of the bridging joist was also attached to the stud wall



but it was not possible to ascertain how without further removal of panelling on the north west side, or further removal of lath and plaster on the south east side.

4.2.8 Although a programme of dendrochronological dating has been suggested for the stud wall this has yet to be implemented. On the basis of current analysis it is thought that the stud wall is likely to be predominantly 19th century in date with later additions to correct structural problems.

4.2.9 The stud wall, which is generally in a poor state of repair and appears structurally compromised, also currently bears much of the weight of the southern end of the first-floor frame in the room to the north.

4.3 FIRST-FLOOR JOISTS

4.3.1 The two sets of floors joists examined are located in the south west wing at first floor level either side of the main plastered staircase. The exposed joists can also be observed from underneath at ground floor level in both the panelled smoking room and the ground floor bedroom / bathroom.

4.3.2 As a result of long term deterioration of elements of the fabric, the onset of structural failure and further structural damage caused by the fire in April a decision has been made to remove both sets of joists for repair and restoration off site.

4.3.3 The two sets of floor joists were examined on several occasions from both above and below. Digital and SLR photographic records were made and plans were drawn of both floors at a scale of 1:50. Several small test holes were made into the north east and south west elevations of the rooms at floor level. This was undertaken with a view to providing RM&P and Gifford & Partners Ltd. (consulting structural engineers), with information on how far the joists extended into wall, the degree of deterioration of the fabric at their ends and the way by which, if any, the joists were secured to the walls (Plates 23 & 24). Access and time limited the degree of preliminary detail recorded although it is hoped that on removal of the joists for repair that further information concerning their date and form of construction can be gathered.

4.4 SOUTHERN ROOM

4.4.1 The south room is located at first floor level in the south west wing, to the south of the main plastered staircase. It is also accessible via the stairs to the balcony via the north west corner of the library at ground floor level. The approximate room size was 6.52 x 4.05m. As a result of historical structural failure of the principal joist and the weight of debris from the recent fire the central area of the floor is approximately 5 - 12cm lower than the floor where it meets the walls. The floor dips noticeably from both sides towards the centre and is currently supported by scaffolding from underneath (Figures 4 & 6, Plates 15 - 18).

4.4.2 Each joist within the floor was also covered with many strips of softwood packing cut so as to reduce the degree of dip in the floor when placing a floor covering over it. The strips of softwood, although photographed, were not recorded as part of the floor analysis.



- 4.4.3 The floor has a principal joist measuring 4.05m x 24 x 25cm running north west - south east and two bridging joists, 3.05m x 24 x 25cm, tenoned into it. A total of 28 common joists were observed with average dimensions of 72 x 15 - 20 x 8 - 10cm. On the north eastern side of the principal joist repairs had been undertaken with two of the common joists shortened to a length of 75cm tenoned to a timber at right angles to them measuring 1.28m x 30cm. Tenoned to the other side of cross timber repair were three further common joists measuring 9 x 75cm.
- 4.4.4 Soffit tenons were observed in the joists with no diminished haunches, which could potentially date the major part of the surviving floor as 15th Century. The predominant type of timber used in the construction of the floor appeared to be a mixture of oak, elm and possibly ash.
- 4.4.5 It was observable that the fabric of the principal joist had failed at some point in its history, around the central point, and four iron brackets had been attached to each right angle formed by the principal joists and bridging joists. As noted however, this remedial work has not stopped the floor from dropping further from its original position.
- 4.4.6 When observed from the ground floor the principal joist and binding joists had a chamfered underside and appeared to have been designed to be on show rather than hidden beneath a lath and plaster ceiling of any form.
- 4.5 **NORTHERN ROOM**
- 4.5.1 The north room is located at first floor level in the south west wing, to the north of the main plastered staircase. It is also accessible on its north eastern side via a secondary staircase in the south west wing. The approximate room size was 7.7 x 4.1m and photographs provided immediately after the show that this area was previously divided by lath and plastered stud walls into a room to the north east, a smaller room in the south west corner with a corridor to the east (Figures 4 & 7, Plates 19 - 22).
- 4.5.2 Although the floor was covered with boarding for safety reasons it was possible to obtain access to most of the joists both from above and below. It is hoped that a closer inspection of the joists will be possible on their removal for repair and restoration.
- 4.5.3 The floor has two principal joists measuring 4.12m x 24 x 26cm and 4.12m x 24 x 26cm respectively running north west - south east and three bridging joists measuring 1.18m x 24 x 26cm, 4.20m x 24 x 26cm and 1.75m x 24 x 26cm tenoned into them. A total of 24 common joists were tenoned into the primary joists with average dimensions of 2.05m x 15 - 20 x 8 - 10cm and a selection of smaller common joists in the eastern corner measuring on average 1.30m x 7cm. The smaller of the two primary joists in the north east corner of the room is offset by approximately 25cm to the east of the longer southern primary joist. The four common joists tenoned to the eastern side of the smaller principal joist appear to represent a relatively modern repair to the floor structure in this area. Approximately 3m from the south west end of the room the slot for the stud wall could be observed in the common joists running north west - south east.



4.5.4 As with the joists in the southern room, soffit tenons were also observed in some of the joists with no diminished haunches, which again could potentially date the major part of the surviving floor to the 15th century. The predominant timber used in the construction of the floor appeared to be a mixture of oak, elm and possibly ash.

4.5.5 As with the room to the south, when observed from the ground floor the principal joists and binding joists had a chamfered underside and appeared to have been designed to be on show rather than hidden beneath a lath and plaster ceiling of any form. When observed from the ground floor in the bathroom area, the most northerly principal joist and two associated bridging joists could be seen to have been covered with several layers of white paint, probably 20th century, but it was still possible to see the chamfered underside as observed in the room to the south.

4.6 DENDROCHRONOLOGY

4.6.1 Dan Miles (DM) from the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory visited the site on 22nd October to advise on a possible programme of dendrochronological dating for various timbers thought Wardington Manor. DM inspected the medieval floor joists on the first floor (and from the ground floor), advising that the joists in the south east room was currently too damp to take samples from and would need to be dried extensively before this would be at all possible. He also advised that the joists from the north west room were also too wet to sample, although it would be possible to sample the ends of the joists if they were to be cut to in the near future to remove the joists for repair and restoration.

4.6.2 DM also advised that care should be taken over the protection of the floor joists currently *in situ* and during their removal with a view to protecting any sapwood still present for dating purposes.

4.6.3 DM advised that it would be possible to take samples from the stud wall on the ground floor for dating, but believed that the date range ascribed through physical observation of the structure was acceptable for the requirements of the report.

4.7 CONCLUSIONS

4.7.1 Observation and initial analysis of the structure of the stud wall between the library and smoking room has shown that it is likely to be predominantly 19th century or later in date, with perhaps some elements surviving that date from the 18th century. The stud wall appears to be of relatively low historical significance in the context of Wardington Manor. It is also very apparent that the stud wall has undergone numerous repairs throughout its history, some more effective than others are, and is currently in a poor state of repair. It was not possible to observe how the binding joists from the smoking room to the north west had been keyed into the stud wall. However, it appears that the wall is currently bearing a load beyond its structural capability.

4.7.2 As a result of this preliminary phase of recording and analysis it could be observed that in both the south and north rooms the principal and bridging joists can potentially be dated to the 15th century. It is also likely that a large proportion of the common joists in both rooms also date from this period. Several phases of repair and renewal could also be observed, particularly in



the north room, where a selection of common joists dating from the mid -18th century and later were present. Both floors are of relatively high significance for Wardington Manor in terms of its architectural history.

- 4.7.3 The design of the underside of the principal and bridging joists in both rooms is of a nature that suggests they were certainly meant to be observed by the users of the rooms and provided a noticeable focal point. The survival of these elements provides an interesting insight into the early architectural history of this part of the south west wing of Wardington Manor.
- 4.7.4 In terms of the structural integrity of both sets of floor joists, the ends of a number of the common joists in the north room were rotten and would require repair in the near future. Although the ends of the joists within the walls in the south room were not available for inspection by OA it is reasonable to suggest they are likely to be in a similar condition. It was also very apparent by both the presence of the many packing strips on the surface, the extreme dip of the floor and the observation of the failed principal joist at ground floor level that there are serious ongoing problems with the structural capability of the floor in this room which are to be addressed as part of proposed repair and restoration works

A.Miller Esq.

Oxford Archaeology
December 2004

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6 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Wardington Manor, Wardington, Oxfordshire

Site code: WAMA04

Type of evaluation: Historic Building Analysis and Recording

Date and duration of project: Work undertaken August - October 2004

Summary of results: Recording and analysis were undertaken of the remains of the medieval and later joists from two rooms on the first floor and a stud wall at ground floor level between the library and the panelled smoking room.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES.



Plate 1: View north west - general view of house



Plate 2: View south east - general view of house

Plate 3: View north east - fire damage to roof on south west wing



Plate 4: View north west - general view





Plate 5: View west - collapsed roof above 1st floor

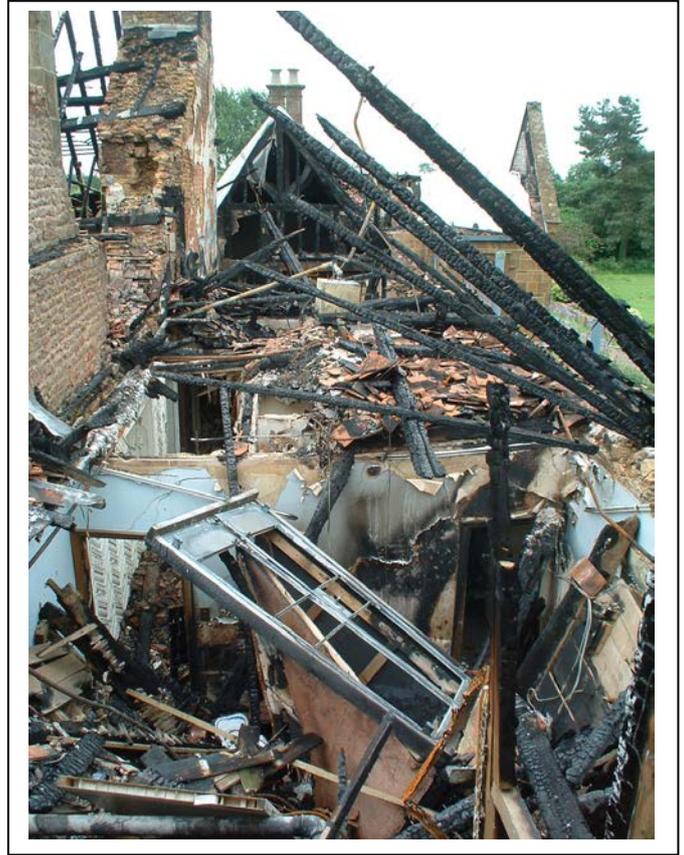


Plate 6: View south east - collapsed roof

Plate 7: View east - fire damage to roof structure



Plate 8: View east - fire damage to roof structure

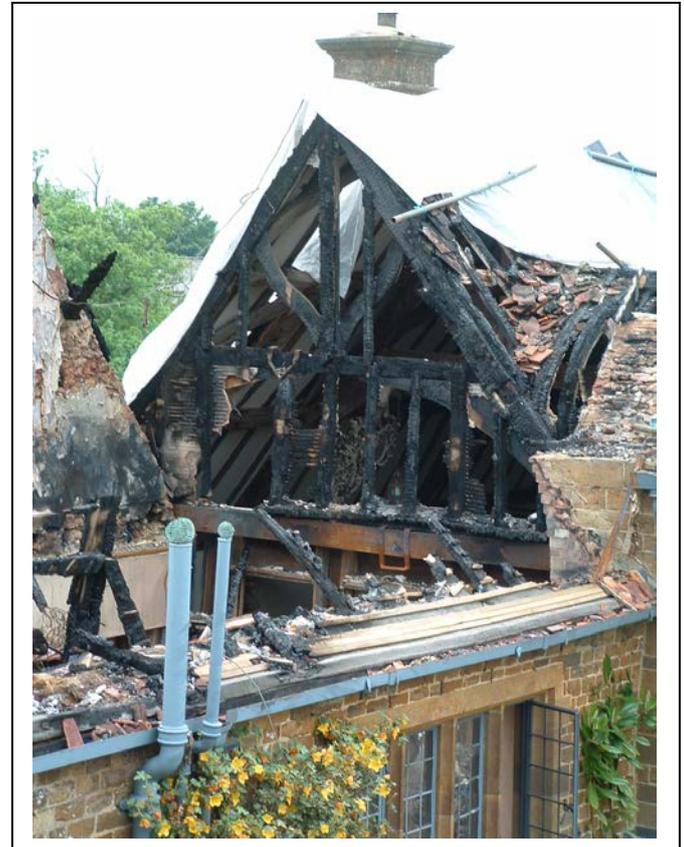




Plate 9: View north west - location of north room, south west wing



Plate 10: View south east - stud walls prior to removal in north room

Plate 11: View north west - southern room , south west wing



Plate 12: View north - general view of joists in southern room





Plate 13: View north west - stud wall between library and smoking room

Plate 14: View north west - stud wall between library and smoking room, detail





Plate 15: Underside of floor joists - southern room, south west wing

Plate 16: Underside detail of failed principal joist - southern room, south west wing





Plate17: Detail of dipping floor joists - southern room

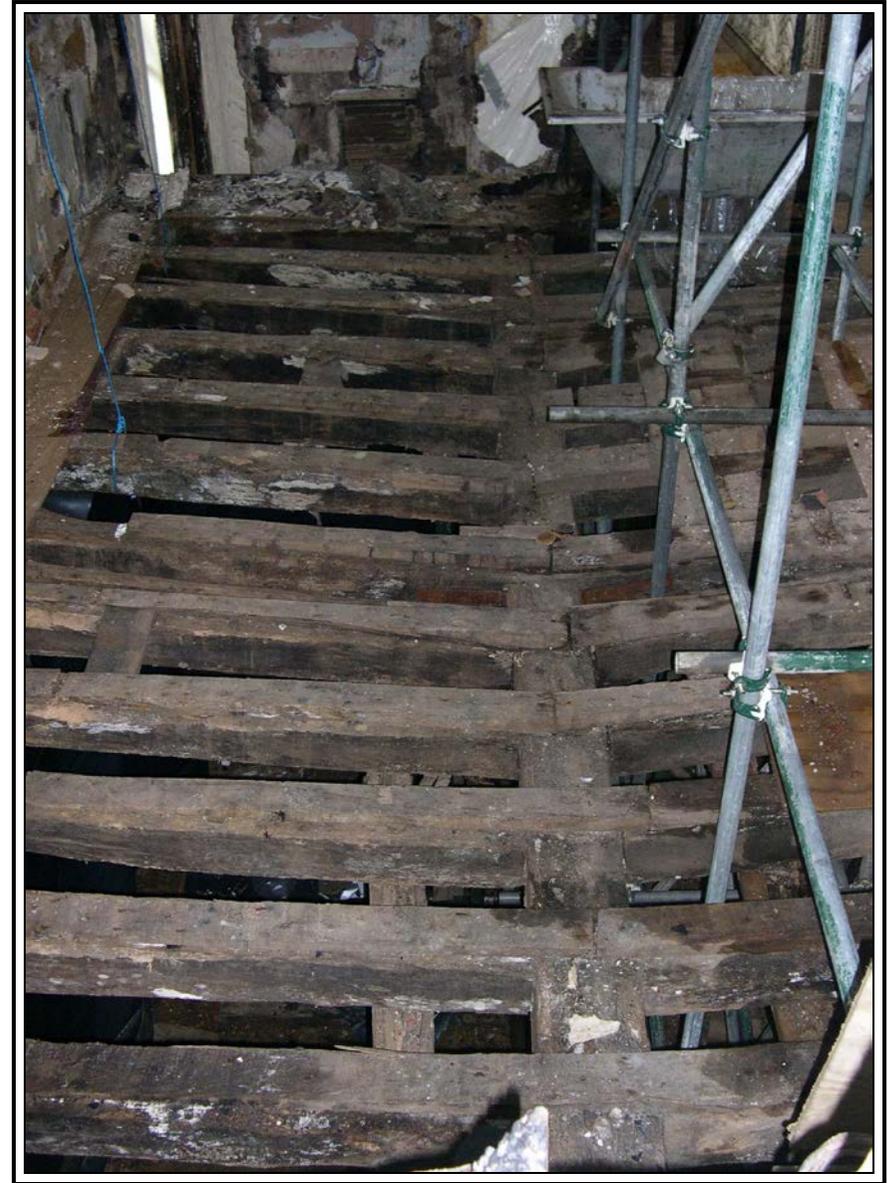


Plate 18: Detail of dipping floor joists - southern room



Plate 19: Underside of floor joists - northern room, south west wing

Plate 20: Underside of floor joists - northern room, south west wing





Plate 21: Detail of floor joists - northern room, south west wing

Plate 22: Detail of floor joists - northern room, south west wing





Plate 23 : Detail of floor joist in north east wall - northern room, south west wing

Plate 24 : Detail of floor joist in south west wall - northern room, south west wing

