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# WARDINGTON MANOR, WARDINGTON: ‘BLUE WINDOW’, LANDING 2.6

## HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING

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## WARDINGTON MANOR, OXON

### THE 'BLUE WINDOW', LANDING 2.6

#### HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION AND RECORDING

##### SUMMARY

*Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out historic building investigation works at Wardington Manor, Oxfordshire, on behalf of Rodney Melville and Partners, Architects for Lord Wardington, as part of a continuing programme of archaeology in response to fire damage at the historic manor house. The works consisted of the recording of an exposed window and associated frame at the top of the Yellow Staircase in the south-west wing of the house. The remains of the window sealed behind panelling had been exposed as part of ongoing restoration works at the property since April 2004. The works were completed as planned, revealing that the window frame was likely to date from the mid to late 17th century. This finding compliments the historical evidence for extensive alterations to the house that were undertaken in the late 17th century by the owner of the time, George Chamberlayne, son of Sir Thomas Chamberlayne.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 The recording and analysis of the 'Blue Window' on the Yellow Staircase in the South west Wing of Wardington Manor has been requested by Rodney Melville and Partners, Architects on behalf of Lord Wardington. This request was made at the suggestion of Dr. Diane Greene of English Heritage who wished the previously hidden window to be fully examined prior to being removed or conserved and re-sealed in situ.

### 1.2 LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORK

1.2.1 Wardington Manor (SP 493 461) is located on the western side of the village (Thorpe Road), approximately one mile from the A361 Banbury to Daventry road and six miles from Banbury to the south west (Figure. 1). The window is located in the south-west wing of the manor house, set in the north-east elevation at the top of the Yellow Staircase.

1.2.2 The recording was to include a photographic, brief written and drawn record of the window prior to its removal or conservation and re-sealing within the wall. Any features of archaeological interest were to be recorded and 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). The Manor is a substantial gabled house constructed primarily of local ironstone and of an irregular H-shape in plan (Figure 2). 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.<sup>1</sup> Ongoing historic building analysis at the house has recently confirmed this.

- 1.3.2 George Chamberlayne drastically remodelled the building in 1665, with major alterations undertaken between 1905 - 1914 by Clough William Ellis. Further substantial works were undertaken between 1917- 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 As a result of the fire in April 2004 (Plates 1 - 4), an extensive programme of restoration and conservation work has been proposed by Rodney Melville and Partners, Architects, details of which are currently being finalised and are likely to run until the latter part of 2005. Alongside this a programme of archaeological investigation and recording is being undertaken to ensure that the works are informed by an understanding of the historic fabric, and that significant information about the history of the Grade II\* building is not lost.

## 2 **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The general aims and objectives were:

- To investigate and record the window frame prior to its removal or re-covering.
- To record any features of archaeological interest (such as different material and construction) to the Local Planning Authority (Cherwell District Council) during the building survey as appropriate.
- To produce a brief report detailing the findings of the survey of the window.
- 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 building recording was completed intermittently in May 2005. This included:
  - 3.1.2 The Base Survey
  - 3.1.3 The base survey for the programme of restoration and conservation work was commissioned Rodney Melville and Partners and undertaken by On Centre Surveys. Access to this data was kindly granted by Andrew Brookes and Stephen Oliver of Rodney Melville and Partners and this survey forms the base plans for Figure 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria County History, Oxfordshire (Vol 3).



- 3.1.4 The Drawn Record
- 3.1.5 An elevation and plan (1:20) was completed of the window and its surround as set in the north east wall at the top of the Yellow Staircase. The mullion was also drawn at a scale of 1:2.
- 3.1.6 The Photographic Record
- 3.1.7 A full black and white and colour slide photographic record was made by OA of the window frame, its surround and its position in the elevation as a whole. A wide selection of digital images were also taken at a resolution of 4000 DPI.
- 3.1.8 The Written Record
- 3.1.9 Brief notes were made of the window frame as part of the annotated drawings. Additional notes were taken as appropriate.

## 4 DESCRIPTION

- 4.1.1 The remains of the window are located in the south-west wing of the manor house. Specifically, the window frame is situated at the top of the Yellow Staircase and is set in the north-east elevation that forms the wall between landing 2.6. and corridor and staircase 2.12 on the other side (Figure.3). The position of the window is not directly opposite the rise from the half landing to the first floor but marginally further north west so the central point of the window appears to line up with the partition between the staircase and bathroom 2.5 (Figure 3 ). It is envisaged that the window and its position will considerably add to our understanding of the history and phases of construction of Wardington Manor, specifically that of the south-west wing.
- 4.1.2 As a result of a substantial episode of burning in the roof space of the south-west wing in April 2004 much of the roof structure collapsed on to the first and ground floors (Plates 1 - 4). The extent of the damage, particularly to the first floor and landing, has necessitated the removal of the floorboards and joists, panelling, and permanent removal of the plasterwork from the ground and first floor rooms of the south west wing. The corridor along the landing on the first floor had been covered with a decorative plaster that was used extensively elsewhere in the house (Plates 4 & 5). This cast fibrous plasterwork decoration was designed by Molly Cochrane (Mrs. Randall Wells) between 1919 - 1923, and was described by Pevsner as "*the most extraordinary decoration in the house ..... the luscious plasterwork by Mrs. Randall Wells*".
- 4.1.3 On removal of the plasterwork a green oak leaf pattern wallpaper was observed covering the frame, indicating that there was likely to have been an intermediate stage between the brick blocking of the window and the installation of the fibrous plasterwork. The style of wallpaper has been identified as being 'Oak Tree', designed by J.H. Dearle (1860 - 1932) for William Morris's company Morris & Co., first produced in 1896. As many Morris & Co. papers continued in production throughout the 20th century, first through Jeffrey and Co., and later through Sanderson, it is not possible to give an exact date for the wallpaper.<sup>2</sup> (Plate 6).

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<sup>2</sup> Pers comm. G. Saunders, Word & Image Dept., V. & A. Museum.

- 4.1.4 The frame was 98 x 122 cm of timber construction with a central mullion (11 cm wide) forming a 2-light window. The depth of the frame was 10 cm. The right hand light had two surviving machine cut laths (42 x 8 cm and 42 x 3 cm) fixed horizontally across it whilst the left hand light had one (40 x 2 cm). These were presumably the remains of fixings for covers over the disused window. The left hand light also retained four iron bars (33 x 1 cm) spread evenly and horizontally between the central mullion and the left hand side of the frame. These are likely to be saddle bars designed for fixing lead glazing, providing additional horizontal strength to hold the glass panes in place. The glass would usually have been attached to the saddle bars using copper wire ties, loops and wedges or in some instances coils of lead. The mullion retained many of the nails down its length that had been used to affix boarding of some description to it on what would have been the inside of the window. The window frame was painted with a thin wash in pale blue. It was not possible at the times of inspection to clearly to identify whether there were any further layers of paint underneath (Figure. 4, Plates 6 - 9).
- 4.1.5 The window frame was generally in a poor state of repair with some of the paint missing on both sides. The base of the frame had approximately 65% of its timber missing and there was further decay visible on the surviving elements of the lower framework and underneath the base of the mullion (Plates 10 & 11).
- 4.1.6 The moulding on the mullion is of an ovolo and hollow form (Figure. 5).
- 4.1.7 The window frame had been set in a stone rebate with all surrounds of local ferrougenous coursed rubble limestone (Hornton Stone). The timber lintel measured 220 x 9 cm with some decay to the left hand side and to the upper edge. The sill as observable was constructed of thinner slabs of Hornton Limestone set horizontally (average 35 x 5 cm) with two timber elements (16 - 18 x 10 cm) also embedded in the matrix and orientated NE - SW.
- 4.1.8 The outer side (NE) of the frame had been bricked up (red brick, 22 x 7 cm) prior to addition to the building to the north east, (currently corridor and staircase 2.12). The brickwork is similar in composition and size to that found in other areas of Wardington Manor where Randall Wells had intervened, notably the brickwork in the north-west wing. This would date the blocking up of the window to the period 1917 - 1923.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 From the investigation undertaken it was observed that the window frame was of timber construction and of a 2-light form with a timber lintel over and limestone sill below. From its setting and design it was possible to tell that the window revealed from behind the fibrous panelling and oak leaf plaster had once served as the outside window of an earlier phase of the building looking north east from the top of the Yellow Staircase. This had been bricked up by a subsequent construction phase to the north east. From analysis of the mullion section (ovolo and hollow), and comparison with both regional and national examples (Figure. 5) it was possible to tentatively date the window frame to the mid to late 17th century.
- 5.1.2 The style and positioning of the frame is of both historical and architectural significance in the development of Wardington Manor and it would be desirable to retain the window in its current position if at all feasible. It would





be possible to make a feature of this in the reinstated corridor although current plans put forward look to re-cover the window as was the case prior to the fire. If the window is not to be removed then it is likely it will need to undergo a degree of restoration and conservation, (specifically the lower section of the frame), prior to being resealed. As referred to in 4.14 the lower structure has partially rotted away and this would need to be addressed. It would be possible to reconstruct and replace this lower element if necessary. Dependent on advice taken on the degree of decay present within the timber frame, it may be deemed appropriate to completely remove it, as originally proposed.

A.Miller Esq.

July 2005

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## 7 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Wardington Manor, Wardington, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** WAMA04

**Type of evaluation:** Building Recording and Analysis

**Date and duration of project:** Work undertaken May 2005

**Summary of results:** Recording and analysis of hidden window at the top of the Yellow Staircase in the south west wing. The window was tentatively dated to the mid 17th century and deemed to be of considerable significance in terms of the properties history.

**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 South east - general location of the decorative plaster bay.



Plate 4: Decorative plaster at the top of the Yellow Staircase.





Plate 5: View north - Fibrous decorative plaster within the bay on Landing 2.6.



Plate 6: View north - Green oak leaf wallpaper revealed under the fibrous plasterwork.

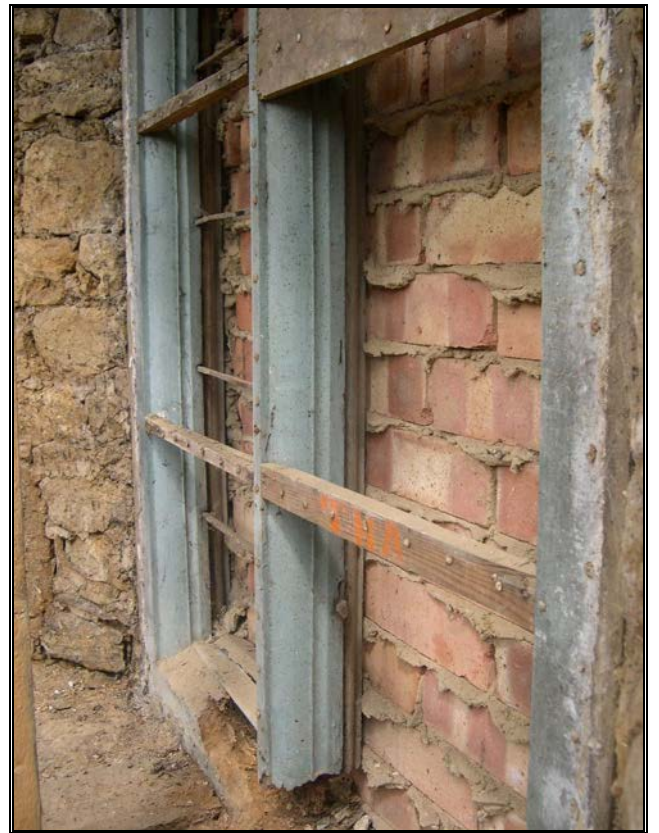


Plate 7: View north west - detail of frame and mullion from the side.



Plate 8: View north east - structure around the hidden window.



Plate 9: Location of window (after stripping) at the top of landing.

Plate 10: View east - detail of decay in lower element of window frame.



Plate 11: Detail of decay in lower element of window frame.

