

CUDTMHBS



The Mill House Cuddesdon Oxfordshire

Historic Building Analysis



Oxford Archaeology

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The Mill House, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire

HISTORIC BUILDING ANALYSIS

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The Mill House, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire

HISTORIC BUILDING ANALYSIS

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) has carried out a programme of building analysis at the Mill House Cuddesdon. The work was carried out to ascertain the significance of various elements of the building. This was done in order to allow the South Oxfordshire Planning Department to make an informed decision regarding a listed building consent application for internal alterations including demolition of some walls. The main house was found to be a double pile house with typical square plan of four rooms and through passage/hall largely of one phase dating to the early to mid 18th century. The back hall connecting the house to a later former agricultural building was found to be the remnant of a 16th/17th century single storey building which was retained and joined to the new house. A fireplace in the back hall contained a beam with probable ritual protective symbols paralleled by known 16th/17th century examples. The main wall proposed for demolition to create a large opening is part of the central spine wall of the house between the two south-eastern rooms. Two new smaller openings which are proposed will involve demolition of part of the house wall to gain access to the back hall and of part of the earlier gable wall of the back hall to move the opening to the family room (former stable or barn) to the other side of the fireplace.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) has been commissioned by Sarah Freeth of MJCT Architects on behalf of James Garvin to undertake a programme of historic building analysis on Mill House, Cuddesdon (NGR: SP 611 027) (fig. 1). It was undertaken in order to establish the significance of the building and inform the South Oxfordshire Conservation Officer with regard to the current planning application to undertake internal alterations on the property. The building has been listed Grade II for its architectural and historic interest since 1984 (see appendix 2 for list description).

1.2 Aims and objectives

1.2.1 The general aim of this project was to understand the building in terms of its basic construction history and dating and its plan form, function and fabric in order to establish its significance as an historic building. This was done to enable the South Oxfordshire Conservation Officer and planning Department to make an informed decision regarding the current planning application.



1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The fieldwork consisted of an external and internal visual inspection of the building. Particular attention was paid to the areas affected by the proposed alterations, especially where concern had been expressed by the Conservation Officer. Digital photography was used to aid interpretation and to illustrate the report. Site drawings by MJCT Architects were used with permission as a basis for the investigation and for the phased plan produced for the report (fig. 2). The site work was undertaken on the 18th August 2005 before any demolition/construction works were commenced. A search was made at South Oxfordshire District Council in Wallingford to establish the planning history of the property.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 Oxford Archaeology would like to thank MJCT Architects, James Garvin and staff at South Oxfordshire District Council.

2 PLANNING HISTORY

2.1 Summaries of Planning applications

2.1.1 20/04/00. Planning application ref. P00/N0265 and listed building consent application P00/N0271/LB. Extension of dwelling into adjoining barn, new stable block, swimming pool and landscaping. Planning permission and listed building consent granted on 15/06/2000

2.1.2 11/07/00. Planning application ref. P00/N0456. New Swimming Pool. Planning permission on 18/08/2000

2.1.3 20/12/03. Planning application ref. P02/N088/LB. Partial demolition of internal wall to form new door opening. Fitting of doors to new opening. Listed building consent on 04/02/2003

2.1.4 19/04/2005. Current application ref. P05/W0466/LB. Internal alterations comprising:-the formation of two internal doorways, creating an opening between kitchen and breakfast room, taking out modern partitions to dining hall, new floor finishes to back hall, family room, back porch, cloakroom, kitchen, breakfast room and hall. Installation of one new rooflight to back porch, internal alterations to bathroom and wardrobe 1 at first floor, installation of new kitchen and utility fittings.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1.1 The present mill on the River Thame is thought to date from the 18th century and probably stands on the site of the mill which in early times belonged to Abingdon Abbey. The Abbey obtained its estates in Cuddesdon in 956 and retained the Manor until the dissolution (VCH, 101). There was serious



dispute between the Abbey and the Diocese of Lincoln over the ownership of the mill in 1066. The Abbot with a company of monks and the relics of St Vincent the Martyr prevailed, after arbitration, over Bishop Peter and his men-at-arms (Davies 1950).

- 3.1.2 A second mill, on Coombe Brook, is mentioned in 1279 and it is uncertain whether it is this mill or the mill on the Thame which was granted to Robert Browne in 1545. In Elizabeth I's reign Browne's mill passed from George Bartlett to John Barston and his family came to own both mills. From Richard Barston (1613) the mills were inherited by his son Thomas who was dead by 1624. The mills are referred to as 'Down' and 'Overshot' in 1678 and were owned by William Broadwater in 1705 (VCH, 101). The Mill and Mill House are not marked on Davis's map of Oxfordshire of 1797.
- 3.1.3 The tithe map of 1840 shows the 'Corn Water Mill and Stream' and 'Mill House, Garden and Buildings' in the ownership of the Earl of Macclesfield although the VCH states that the Cuddesdon manor was sold to Lord Macclesfield in 1848. The 'Occupier' of this and the many other properties of Lord Macclesfield in Cuddesdon in 1840 is William Chillingworth, in other words he is the main tenant and not the resident, who would in the case of Mill House almost certainly have been the miller.
- 3.1.4 The mill on the Thame was rebuilt about 1800 and was last used in about 1935, it was still in workable order but being used as a store in 1957 (VCH, 101).

4 DESCRIPTION

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The Mill House is situated some distance west of the main village adjacent to the former watermill on the west bank of the river Thame (a tributary of the Thames) where the road from the village crosses the river and the mill leet. The mill is no longer used for its original purpose and has been converted into a dwelling

4.2 The Exterior

- 4.2.1 The house faces north-east onto the road on a slight rise and is reached from road level by a flight of six steps. It is a double pile building with double gable roof. Constructed of roughly squared and coursed limestone rubble with ashlar quoins and dressings and brick gable stacks on the north-west gables. There are two main floors and an attic. The front (north-east) elevation (plate 1) is symmetrical with a central door flanked by two three light windows with segmental heads on the ground floor. There is a modern hood over the door. The first floor has two three light windows with flat heads either side of a central single light window above the door. All the original windows have



been replaced with modern UPVC frames with leaded lights. The roof is clad in plain ceramic tiles and has three gabled dormer windows at the front and two at the rear. There is a central cross ridge joining the two main roof ridges. There is a coved cornice on the front and storey bands and an offset plinth which run around the house. Some traces of rendering with imitation ashlar jointing remains on the exterior walls. The rear gable on the north-west side has a capstone with an inscription of letters and possibly numbers that is hard to decipher it may consist of; S, [?], J, f or J, e or 6. The front gable on the south-east end has what appears to be J G 1764 inscribed on the capstone.

- 4.2.2 From the exterior the main block of the house appears to be of one phase of probable early to mid 18th century date. The date on the gable -1764- may be a little late for the actual date of construction. The datestone does not appear to be reused but the date may have been added later to commemorate a specific event and so if not the actual construction date gives a *terminus ante quem* for the main house.
- 4.2.3 Adjoining the south-east end of the house are two additional structures, a small lean-to (the 'back porch,' plate 2) is built against the front gable, this is of limestone rubble with red brick door and window jambs and may be later 18th century or 19th century in date. The back porch abuts a single-storey, stone, ridge roofed structure (the lobby or 'back hall') which connects the main house and the 'family room' a single-storey stone built former outbuilding which is thought to have been used as a stable or small barn (plate 3).
- 4.2.4 From the rear elevation (plate 4) it can be seen that the 'stable' abuts the south corner quoins of the back hall and is a later addition. The north end of the back hall appears to abut the main house and one stone is shaped to fit around the house plinth (plate 5), this gives the impression that the back hall may be a later addition to the house but as will be seen the internal evidence generally gives a contrasting view.
- 4.2.5 The 'stable' has a large central barn door sized opening, now glazed, in the front elevation with ashlar jambs, that on the west is original, the east jamb is of original blocks but has new mortar and may have been rebuilt to widen the door, but possibly was just repointed when other work was done in 2000 (plate 6). There are original stone jamb windows to either side. An upper window has been inserted in the gable end and modern boiler room built onto the end of the rear elevation (plate 7). There is a large opening in the rear wall, also glazed, with double doors and recently constructed jambs. This opening is either a wholly new insertion or a widening of an existing door (plate 8).



4.3 The Interior: Ground Floor

- 4.3.1 The front door of the main house opens onto an internal porch/lobby which leads onto a central hall-passage across the house to the rear door. Two rooms open off each side of the hall and stairs to the first floor are situated at the rear of the hall. The basement is reached by steps down from the rear of the hall, these enter the cellar through a rounded arch in a massively thick stone wall (plate 9). The cellar is of stone and is below the drawing room at the rear of the house. The cellar arch gives the appearance of possibly being earlier than the house but could equally be contemporary, it is almost impossible to be certain of the date and the cellar is not affected by any proposed structural alterations.
- 4.3.2 The north-west front room (the 'dining room') has a flag stone floor and large stone hearth and fireplace against the north-west end wall. The fireplace has some later brickwork and a small semi-circular brick alcove in one side, above this in the main wall is a square recess with fitted door, possibly a warming cupboard for food or for proving bread.
- 4.3.3 The ceiling is supported by a central bridging beam with plain chamfers. The beam runs from the fireplace to the hall wall where it is supported by a modern timber post on a small modern stone plinth (plate 10). The wall from this post to the inner 'porch' wall and from the other side of the door to the corner of the room appears to be of modern construction. It is proposed to remove this section of wall and leave the room open to the hallway. The section of wall proposed for removal is modern but is almost certainly on the line of an original wall or division of some sort. The beam must have had some other support originally but whether a post or stone wall is uncertain.
- 4.3.4 The rear north-west room (the 'drawing room') has a more formal fireplace with a stone surround and a moulded and shouldered wooden edging on the north-west end wall. The ceiling is supported by central bridging beam with plain chamfer. The room appears to be in fairly original condition and is unaffected by the proposed alterations (plate 11).
- 4.3.5 The front south-east room, the present kitchen, has an original cross beam and a door into the back porch (plate 12). The rear wall of this room appears to be a solid original wall. This is part of the central spine wall of the house which extends up through the first floor to support the inner slopes of the roof. The proposed alterations involve making a large opening in this wall to join the present kitchen to the breakfast room to create one space and reversing the functions of each of the two rooms (plate 13).
- 4.3.6 The present breakfast room behind the kitchen has a later fireplace with a pine surround inserted in the south-east end wall which uses a brick stack built onto the other side of the wall probably in the 19th century. The proposed alterations involve removing this fireplace and installing an Aga oven in front



of opening which will utilise the existing chimney. The room has two cross beams, the original beam with plain chamfer which has been moved south-west when the stack was added and a second beam made from a reused timber added at the same time (plate 14). As mentioned above the wall between this room and the kitchen is proposed to have a large opening made in it. The proposals also involve a new opening being made from this room into the back hall on the north-east side of the fireplace (plate 15). This wall as seen from the back hall appears to be part of the main house wall, the plinth runs across here, however in the position of the proposed opening there is a square area of brickwork above the plinth which may indicate a blocked former opening (plate 16). This was not a doorway as it is above the plinth but may have been a connecting opening between this room and the back hall.

- 4.3.7 The back hall is accessed from the south-west end of the back porch and does not open onto the main house. There is a stone fireplace (plate 17) with timber beam and tapering chimney breast above (plates 18) at the south-east end of the room south-west of the fireplace is an opening into the family room and there is a double door opening in the rear wall modern glazed doors fitted (see plate 4). The north-west wall has a 19th century central gault brick stack built against it to service fireplaces in the house. A modern cupboard and partition to a utility area within the back hall are to be removed as part of the proposed alterations.
- 4.3.8 The roof of the back hall consists of paired common rafters supported by a large purlin on each slope. The purlins are clasped to the principals by a collar which is supported by queen struts rising from a central tie beam (plate 19). At the south-east end the purlins are supported in the gable wall and at the north-west end the purlins butt up to the wall and are supported by a truss which has been modified by the insertion of the later stack. The central portion of the tie beam has been removed and the two inner ends supported on corbelled courses projecting from the stack. The collar has similarly been reduced and the two inner ends picked up by extended queen struts rising from the shortened ties to the principals which have also been shortened (plate 20).
- 4.3.9 The form of the roof and the fireplace indicate a date for the back hall considerably earlier than the main house, possibly later 16th or earlier 17th century. The fireplace beam has marks and letters incised on it some of which have parallels in recorded examples from the 16th and 17th centuries, these are technically called apotropaic symbols and were intended to ward off the influence of the devil or witches. The marks here which fall into this category are repeated W's and M's composed of double V's, these are known as 'Virgin Mary marks', M standing for Mary and the double V's probably standing for Virgo Virginum (Virgin of Virgins), intended to invoke the protection of the Mother of Christ (Easton 1999) (plate 21).



- 4.3.10 It would seem therefore that the back hall is part of an earlier structure which was partially demolished to make way for the house and then had the ends of its walls rebuilt to butt up to the house plinth and wall. The south-east gable wall of the back hall is therefore part of the older structure. The proposed alterations involve creating a new opening in this gable on the other side of the fireplace from the present opening (which is to be blocked up) to give straight through access from the house to the family room via the two new doorways.
- 4.3.11 The former 'stable' was built onto the existing end gable of the back hall. The roof trusses are typical of late 18th century or early 19th century farm buildings, consisting of a tie beam from which raking struts support the principals at the point where the single purlins rest on them. The lower ends of the struts are tensioned by a straining sill and an iron king rod runs from tie beam to ridge (plate 22).
- 4.3.12 There is a modern inserted stone hearth and chimney breast at the south-east end of the family room (plate 23) and behind this the south-east end of the stable has been converted into a 'granny flat' by the insertion of an upper floor and fitting of a shower and kitchenette on the ground floor. The proposed changes within the former 'stable' do not affect any of the old structure apart from blocking the opening to the back hall which will not require any removal of fabric.

4.4 **The Interior: First Floor**

- 4.4.1 The first floor plan largely repeats and confirms as original that of the ground floor with four large square rooms connected by a central landing in the same configuration as the ground floor rooms and hall. The two bedrooms on the south-east side of the house are unaffected by the proposals and are largely in original condition apart from a later inserted fireplace in the rear room. Both rooms have plain chamfered bridging beams as the downstairs rooms. The rear north-west bedroom is also unaffected by the proposals and largely unaltered although a door opening has been made through the central wall to connect this room with the front room at some time. The bridging beam in this room is a reused moulded late-medieval example which has a rebate for a partition or screen in its lower surface (plate 24). The use of this earlier high status beam may indicate this was either the master bedroom or an upstairs drawing room of which other examples are known from double pile houses.
- 4.4.2 The front north-west room has been divided up into bathroom, lavatory and wardrobe space with an open lobby off the central hall. The proposed changes here will close that opening and restore the plan to nearer the original.

4.5 **The Interior: Attic Floor**

- 4.5.1 The attic is reached by stairs at the front end of the landing supported by a timber framed structure which may be a later insert. The four rooms are in the



roof space with sloping walls and a flat ceiling at the collar height of the trusses. The rooms and hall are lit by dormer windows these may be later insertions but were not inspected closely as the proposed changes do not affect this floor.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 5.1.1 The house is of the double pile type with typical square plan consisting of four rooms with stairs at the rear between the two back rooms. In this case the stairs are rising from a through hall/passage crossing the central spine wall of the house and linking the front and rear entrances with all rooms off the hall/passage. Another common type of double pile plan had the front entrance into one of the front rooms which were larger than the subsidiary back rooms (Brunskill 1978, 113 fig. b). The Mill house has all four rooms of equal size and this symmetrical plan is repeated on all floors.
- 5.1.2 The term double pile was first used by Sir Roger Pratt c.1675 (Barley 1979, 253). The double pile plan was introduced as a high status form in the early 17th Century and by the middle of the next century had spread to all areas of the country and all social classes (Brunskill 1978, 112). About 400 examples (in England) two rooms deep with four rooms to a floor, built before about 1750 had been noted by 1979. The plan form varies little but a great variety of roof types are found (Barley 1979, 253).
- 5.1.3 The main block of the Mill house appears to be largely of one phase and the plan as it exists would seem to be the original undisturbed layout. The house probably dates from the early to mid 18th Century, the date of 1764 on the gable might record the date of construction but could quite easily commemorate a later event and is at least a useful *terminus ante quem*.
- 5.1.4 The house is of quite high status in terms of local ranking and must have represented the financial security, success and social ambition of the owner, presumably the miller. As Barley (1979, 259) comments medium size double pile houses of two or two and a half storeys (as here) in the rural midlands were often of manorial status and those in urban settings represented the rising middle class.
- 5.1.5 The original rubblestone gable walls exhibit some remnants of render with imitation ashlar joints which further illustrates social ambition or at least awareness of fashion. The render coating may have been a later addition, it became fashionable to 'stucco' brick dwellings in the early 19th century as brick became unfashionable and stone regained status. Then stucco coating became a sign of fashion and status in itself. As the Mill House is of rubblestone it did not come up to new standards and imitation ashlar may have been an attempt to restore or improve status.



- 5.1.6 Only the two north-western rooms originally had fireplaces with flues in the wall and brick gable stacks and one of the few later alterations was the addition of the gault brick external stack and fireplaces in the rear south-eastern ground and first floor rooms. The front north-western room with large projecting hearth with alcoves and a flagstone floor may have been used as a kitchen although it seems unusual to have the kitchen at the front of the house and one would have expected this to be the front parlour. There are however parallels for double pile houses with services in one of the front rooms eg Stone House Farm, Stareton, Warwickshire of 1716 and Hill Farm, Chicheley, Buckinghamshire of about the same date (Barley 1979, 256).
- 5.1.7 The back hall as described above (sections 3.3.7 to 3.3.9) seems to be the remnant of an earlier structure which has been retained as a service wing to the main house, possibly this was used as a kitchen either in addition to a kitchen in the house or at one time it may have been the main kitchen. As this was a mill house there might have been need for a bakery, mills sometimes had associated bakeries as an addition to the milling business to gain extra revenue from the available stocks of flour. There is a later iron oven set into the back of the fireplace and while this may be a modern reproduction the bricks around it set in the earlier stone show that an earlier recess had been created here at some time. Several double pile houses had attached kitchens or other service rooms usually of the same date as the house but there are examples where the range is older. One such example is Upton Wold Farm, Blockley, Gloucestershire of c.1675 where the kitchen is possibly the earlier farmhouse (Barley 1979, 256).
- 5.1.8 The back hall is significant as evidence of continuity of use of the site. The original form is uncertain, it is a single storey low status structure and may have originally been part of a dwelling or perhaps a workshop of some type. It may have been the attached or detached kitchen of an earlier house but interpretation of its original form and function is necessarily speculative. The apotropaic marks on the chimney beam are significant as examples of ritual practice which mainly dates to the 16th or 17th centuries.

6 IMPACT OF PROPOSED ALTERATIONS

- 6.1.1 **1). Removal of the wall between kitchen and 'breakfast room'.** The proposal is to remove nearly all of this wall to create a modern style larger family eating and dining area but to leave piers about 0.5m wide each side to indicate that the space was originally two rooms. This wall is part of the thick main spine wall of the house and is an integral part of the original plan form. Removal of the wall will change the internal character of the house by connecting these rooms There is existing consent for removal of a smaller portion of this wall for insertion of double doors.



- 6.1.2 **2). The creation of a new opening from the breakfast room into the back hall.** Creation of an opening here will remove part of the 18th century house wall and plinth but should not affect the fabric of the earlier back hall. There is evidence of an earlier opening at plinth height blocked with brick in this section of wall and there is possibly a stone jamb on the east side of this blocking but with a covering of whitewash it is difficult to identify. If this opening is created the wall should probably be further investigated first to record and understand this feature.
- 6.1.3 **3). The creation of a new opening between the back hall and the family room.** Creation of an opening here will remove part of the surviving end gable of the back hall which is believed to be earlier than the house, but should not affect the adjacent historic fireplace with apotropaic marks on the chimney beam. This wall is currently whitewashed on the hall side and plastered on the family room side so its character is not fully understood, if it is to be removed it should be further investigated and recorded and it would probably be advisable to record the fireplace and beam the same time. There is already an opening from the back hall to family room on the other side of the fireplace which is proposed for blocking. The new opening will be in line with the proposed opening from the breakfast room and is designed to create a direct line of access from house through back hall to family room.
- 6.1.4 **4). The opening up of the chimney breast in the breakfast room and loss of the existing fireplace.** This proposal involves opening up a later chimney breast that was not part of the original plan form and removing a later inserted fireplace. The skirting board against this wall was removed for the creation of a fireplace here and the scars are visible. The brick chimney built against the other side of this wall appears to be of 19th century construction and it is likely that the fireplace was created at the same time as part of one phase of improvement. Inspection of the wall and recording of exposed fabric during the work and recording of the fireplace before removal may be advisable.
- 6.1.5 **5). Loss of wall between dining room and hall.** The wall currently in this position appears to be relatively recent and its removal would not result in the loss of historic fabric. The post and stone plinth supporting the original bridging beam is modern and must replace some earlier support probably a solid wall. The proposals require removal of the wall but the post would be left to support the beam. Although the wall is modern its removal would to some extent change what was probably the original plan form. It is not known when or why the original wall was removed from here and it may be that there was a larger opening in this location before the modern walling was constructed.

Simon Underdown
September 2005



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Other Sources

Cuddesdon Tithe Map and Apportionment 1840 (copy on microfilm at Oxford Central Library)



APPENDIX I LIST DESCRIPTION

IoE number: 246403
Location: THE MILL HOUSE AT CUDDSDON MILL
 CUDDSDON AND DENTON, SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE,
 OXFORDSHIRE
Date listed: 25 October 1984
Date of last amendment: 25 October 1984
Grade II

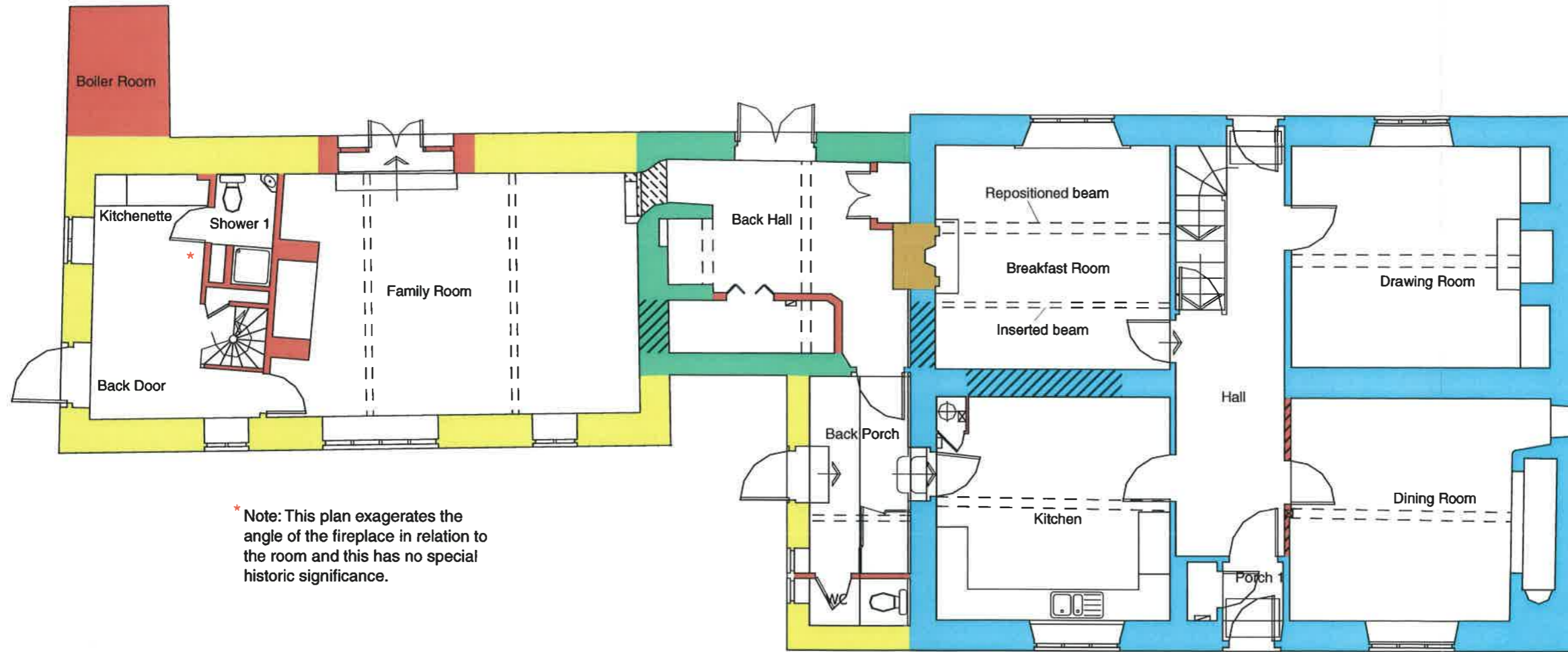
SP 60 SW CUDDSDON AND DENTON CUDDSDON 3/15 The Mill House at Cuddesdon Mill. - II Mill house. B S/176(?) on gable datestone. Coursed limestone rubble with ashlar dressings; plain-tile roof and brick gable stacks. Double-depth plan. 2 storeys plus attics Symmetrical 3-window front with central 6-panel door under C20 hood flanked by 3-light casements under segmental arches. First floor has 3-light casements flanking a single light with flat arches. All casements late C20. Ashlar quoins, plus storey bands and eaves-cove. Double-span roof with three 2-light gabled roof dormers with leaded glazing. Interior not inspected.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



Ground Floor Plan

* Note: This plan exaggerates the angle of the fireplace in relation to the room and this has no special historic significance.

Key:

- Later 16th to earlier 17th Century
- Early to Mid 18th Century
- Later 18th to earlier 19th Century
- 19th Century
- Modern (late 20th Century)
- Proposed removal of walls to create new openings
- Proposed blocking of existing opening



Figure 2: Phased Ground floor plan (Based on Survey Drawing supplied by MJCT Architects)



Plate 1: Mill House, front elevation



Plate 2: Back porch



Plate 3: Former barn or stable, front elevation



Plate 4: Back hall, rear elevation



Plate 5: Junction of back hall and house plinth



Plate 6: Former barn or stable front door opening



Plate 7: Former barn or stable south-east gable



Plate 8: Former barn or stable rear door opening



Plate 9: Cellar arch



Plate 10: Dining room: wall proposed for removal



Plate 11: Drawing room fireplace

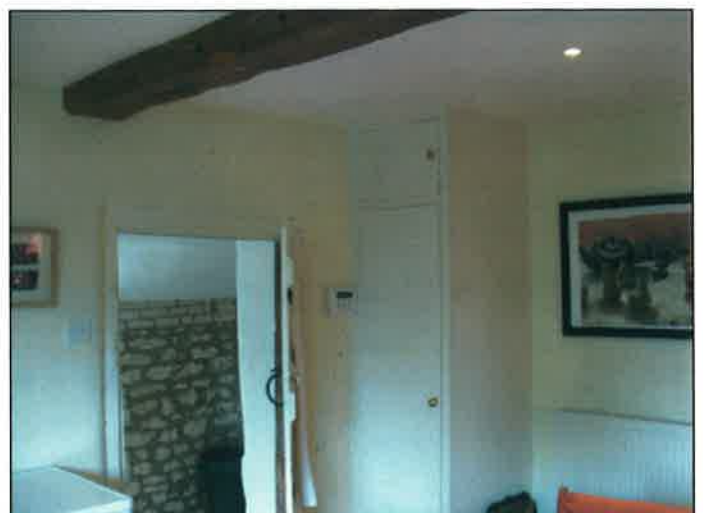


Plate 12: Kitchen looking towards door to back porch



Plate 13: Kitchen, wall proposed for removal



Plate 14: Breakfast room, repositioned and inserted beams



Plate 15: Breakfast room, site of proposed new opening to back hall



Plate 16: Back hall site of proposed opening from breakfast room



Plate 17: Back hall, stone fireplace and beam



Plate 18: Back hall, tapering chimney breast



Plate 19: Back hall, main roof truss



Plate 20: Back hall, later chimney and truncated and altered roof truss



Plate 21: Back hall, fireplace beam with apotropaic symbols



Plate 22: Former barn or stable, roof truss



Plate 23: Former barn or stable, modern hearth



Plate 24: First floor rear north-west bedroom, reused late medieval beam



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