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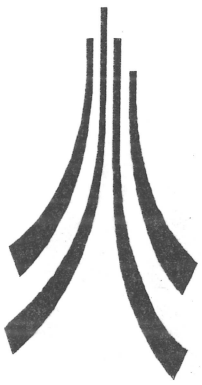

April 1995

VALE ROYAL GREAT HOUSE
CHESHIRE

INTERIM REPORT

Commissioned and funded by:

DHC (Bradford) Ltd

Vale Royal Great House
Cheshire

Interim Report

by Rebecca Smith

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey of Vale Royal House, Cheshire (Grid Reference SJ 6390 6985) was undertaken from the 13th March to the 13th. April 1995 by staff of Lancaster University Archaeological Unit. The survey was conducted in advance of repair and conversion works on the behalf of DHC (Bradford) Ltd.

The intention of the survey was to record the fabric and structure of the building in order to augment previous surveys and to provide a basis for analysis and interpretation of the structural sequence. Architectural details, including structural elements, were annotated onto plans produced by TACP Design and monochrome prints and scale photographs were taken of selective features. A pro-forma recording system was used to organise room-by-room descriptions. An instrument survey was conducted of the exterior of the building, to provide accurate co-ordinates which will facilitate the plotting to scale of the rectified photographs.

The survey has provided an invaluable opportunity to examine the fabric of Vale Royal House, at a time when the majority of the structure has been exposed, being free from plaster and render. However, some areas of the building were inaccessible at the time of the survey, in particular the Douglas Wing and the West Range roof; these areas have been only briefly mentioned in the report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey was undertaken by Rebecca Smith, Project Supervisor and Chris Wild, Project Assistant. The rectified photographic survey was carried out by Dennis Thompson. The interim report was edited by Jeremy Ashbee who also contributed to the conclusion. The project was under the management of Robert Hill ARICS.

Thanks are due to Jennifer Lewis for advice and assistance throughout the project and to Mick King of TACP Design for providing copies of plans and existing detail drawings and to Richard Evans, the caretaker of the building.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historical Background

Vale Royal Great House, a Grade II* Listed Building, was formerly the site of a Cistercian abbey which was founded in 1277 and extensively altered in the sixteenth, eighteenth and nineteenth. centuries. The abbey was founded by Edward I and the foundations of the abbey church, which stood to the north-east of the present house, show it to have been 420 feet long, the longest Cistercian church in the country and unusual in having a chevet of thirteen chapels at its east end.

At the Dissolution the site was sold to Thomas Holcroft who demolished the abbey church; the south and west claustral ranges may have been altered and extended to form a new house. In 1616 this house became the property of Mary Cholmondeley, whose family owned it until 1947. Substantial eighteenth and nineteenth century alterations were undertaken, including the rebuilding of the North-West and South-West Wings, the construction of the Blore Wing in the 1830s and the refacing in brick of the South Range and the construction of the Douglas Wing in the 1860s.

In the early twentieth century the house was leased to the Hopkirks and then to Mr. and Mrs. Dempster. In 1939 Vale Royal was requisitioned as a sanatorium and subsequently became the Imperial Chemical Industry Salt Division headquarters, which it remained until 1961. The more recent history of the house has been marked by attempts to find a suitable use for the building, which until recently has been increasingly neglected and in a rapidly decaying state.

Vale Royal may therefore be an unusual product of seven centuries of building activity. This survey has provided an invaluable opportunity to look for evidence of Post-Dissolution development on a monastic site and to trace the subsequent evolution of the building, which is a product of four centuries of changing architectural styles and traditions.

1.2 The Report

The objective of this interim report is to collate historical data, including that from previous investigations, and to set out the methodology for the recording works. A provisional summary is given of the interpretation of the structure arising from the survey; this will be refined as the job proceeds and more of the structure is exposed by the works.

2. PREVIOUS WORK

In 1911-1912 Basil Pendleton excavated most of the north aisle and transept of the abbey church.

In 1958 Hugh Thompson was asked by the editors of the *History of the Kings Works* to locate both the original and later east ends of the abbey church. He uncovered the apsidal plan of the earlier east end and determined the unique plan of its successor, in which seven polygonal chapels alternated with six quadrilateral ones.

In 1977 Graham Holland was asked to provide a feasibility report for the Michaelmas Trust, a charity which had purchased Vale Royal House. He produced preliminary notes on the history and development of the building.

In 1984 R. McNeil and B. Howes of Archaeological Services Liverpool and R. C. Turner of Cheshire County Council conducted an architectural and topographical survey of Vale Royal House. Dendrochronological work was undertaken by Dr. Pat Leggett and the resistivity survey by Steve Hyatt. The main focus of the survey was the roof timbers, with occasional reference to masonry and features such as windows and fireplaces. The project team concluded that substantial monastic fabric was incorporated into the later house in the sixteenth century and survived intact in later phases.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Level of Recording

Prior to repair and conversion works at Vale Royal, recording was required to augment previous surveys and studies that had been undertaken and to provide a provisional interpretation of the phasing and development of the building.

The extent of the survey was to level 3 as specified in *Recording Historic Buildings: A descriptive specification* (RCHM(E) 1991). This was used as a minimum standard and ensured that the work was produced to a consistent level.

The building survey was undertaken primarily by photographic techniques, supplemented by hand-measured survey and written descriptions. This was to ensure that recording was undertaken at an economical level. Existing drawings were located and checked so that there was no unnecessary duplication of detail.

3.2 Photographic Survey

A combination of rectified and oblique monochrome photography was employed. Rectified photographs were taken of the external elevations, along with selected internal views. These were subsequently annotated with structural information, such as evidence of inserted windows. The external photographs were produced at a scale of 1:50 and the internal photographs at 1:20.

35mm. photography, using both flash and natural light, was employed for the exterior of the building to indicate the building's situation in the landscape. The internal views were taken to record the overall appearance of the principal rooms and selected internal details, (structural and decorative) that are relevant to the building's design, development and use. All photographs were given a context number, and direction and location in the building was indicated.

3.3 Survey Control and Detail

A total station, linked to a portable data logger, was used to establish the survey control around the building by means of a closed traverse. The external plan of the building was surveyed, in order to provide a check on the orientation of the existing plans, and co-ordinates were established for the rectified photograph targets, to facilitate the subsequent plotting of the photographs.

3.4 Drawn Information

Architectural floor plans supplied by TACP Design at a scale of 1:100 were annotated with the required detail, including building alterations; (the accuracy of this aspect will only be as good as the original drawings). Individual context numbers were appended to these details for recording and cross-referencing purposes.

Measured drawings were made of details inappropriate to photographic recording, such as mason's marks and sections through floors, at scales of 1:1, 1:5 and 1:10 .

3.5 Written Record

For the purposes of the survey the house has been sub-divided into the South Range, with the Blore Wing to the east and the Douglas Wing to the south-west. The main core of the building is referred to as the West Range with projecting North-West and South-West Wings. The numbering scheme for the rooms, compiled by TACP Design, has been used, but a separate continuous numbering scheme was used for structural and architectural details; any new context numbers have been cross-referenced with the architect's numbers if they exist.

A pro-forma recording sheet was completed for each room with the location, form and fabric of individual contexts described, which laid emphasis on the relative phasing of building alterations.

4. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

4.1 Documentary Sources

The main sources of both primary and secondary documentary information are held at Chester Records Office. Four pictures dated to 1616, 1774, 1775 and 1816 are valuable sources which give an indication of the full extent of the building and show some external detail now lost. Omerod's *History of Cheshire* includes an asymmetrical drawing of the west front of the house dated to 1616, which he states to have been copied from a picture in the possession of Thomas Cholmondeley (Figure 1). In the same volume, there is a reproduction of an engraving of the house viewed from the south-west (dated to 1775) (Figure 3) and also an engraving of the building viewed from the south-west and dated to 1816 (Figure 4). A 1774 picture of the house from the north-east is reproduced in *Chester Archaeological Society* Volume XIX (Figure 2).

Henrietta Cholmondoley's account of alterations to the building (CRO 2309/1/11) is an invaluable source regarding 19th. century building works and Mary Hopkirk's memoirs reprinted in Latham's *Vale Royal* (Hopkirk 1993) provide internal information of the house in the early 20th. century.

The monastic phase is well documented by Brown *et al* in the *History of the Kings Works* and by Kettle in *Victoria History of the County of Cheshire*. Holland (1977) and Mcneil and Turner (1987) collate some of this information and relate it to existing structural evidence.

4.2 The Monastic period 1277-1539

Vale Royal Abbey was founded to honour a vow that Edward I had made during a perilous sea crossing in 1263-4 (Brown *et al* 1963, 248). The original intention was to establish an abbey at Darnhall in Delamere Forest. A colony of Cistercian monks lived there for several years before a more favourable location was found four miles to the north at a place to which Edward gave the name `Vale Royal'. On 13th August 1277, Edward laid the foundation stone of the new abbey (*ibid*).

Vale Royal was probably an ideal location, suiting the Cistercian preference for isolated sites and was also logistically favourable due to the proximity of the River Weaver, good agricultural land and the profusion of woodland. Lodges of wood, and wood and wattle were constructed in 1278-81, and it is to this temporary accommodation that the monks from Darnhall moved in 1281 (Knoop and Jones 1967, 53).

Most materials necessary for the construction of the abbey could be obtained locally, such as red sandstone quarried from Eddisbury, four to five miles away. Between 1278 and 1280 fifteen quarrymen and thirty one carters were required (*ibid*:2). Other materials were imported, such as Purbeck marble, a supply of which was contracted by the abbot in 1287 and cloister columns, capitals and bases were sent

to Cheshire by sea (Brown *et al* 1963, 250).

The construction process was soon hampered by financial difficulties. In 1290 the King ordered all payments to the abbey to be stopped, due to the redirection of royal funds to the war with Wales. However, the work must have continued at a reduced pace, for in 1330 the monks were finally able to leave their temporary accommodation and take possession of the new abbey. The buildings were not yet finished, as a memorandum by the abbot in 1336 indicates that "a roof and glass were needed in the church and that the cloister, chapter house, dormitory, refectory and other monastic buildings still remained to be built in proportion to the church." (*ibid*, 253).

In 1340 a new patron, Edward the Black Prince, was found and under this new patronage, elaborate building plans were made. In 1359 a contract was issued by the Black Prince to engage a master mason, William de Hepleston, to build twelve chapels around the east end of the quire (Thompson 1962, 186). The excavations by Thompson in 1958 confirmed the existence of this chevet. He discovered seven polygonal chapels alternating with six quadrilateral ones which were constructed with at least ten re-used stones, presumably derived from the original apsidal east end during its demolition. This new eastern end was unusual for Cistercian churches: the only known English parallels are at Croxden and Hailes (*ibid*, 187, 189).

The new chevet, along with the great length of the church, 420' long, 10' (longer than Fountains Abbey:- LCAS 1912) must have created an imposing building. It would have been an advertisement of power and in accordance with the original decree by Edward I "that there should be no monastery more royal than this one, in liberties, wealth and honour, through the whole world." (Cooke 1912, 19).

On the 19th October 1360, a gale blew down the nave from the wall at the west end to the bell tower before the gates of the choir and the great stone columns "fell like trees uprooted in the wind" (Brown *et al* 1963, 256). A plan was formulated to rebuild the nave on a reduced scale, but whether this was actually carried out is not known. There is no evidence of a reduction in size of the nave, as Pendleton concentrated his excavations on the north aisle and the north transept (LCAS 1912).

Construction work did continue, as in 1422 an aisle was apparently added to the church and between 1486 and 1534 regular grants of timber from Delamere forest were received for repairs (Kettle 1980, 162). However it is doubtful whether the abbey was ever realised in its original conception. It is also probable that the original plan to maintain one hundred monks never materialised, for in the late fourteenth century there were only eighteen monks including the abbot (*ibid*). The ideology of a peaceful monastery distanced from the lay populace, was also probably never realised. As Kettle points out, the history of the monastery was marked by frequent legal disputes and violent feuds with gentry tenants and there are cases of unruly behaviour by members of the house (*ibid*, 161).

In summary, the location of Vale Royal was in many ways ideal for the

establishment of a Cistercian monastery and royal patronage promised the necessary support. However, it seems probable that the original building programme was never realised, neither the size of the community, nor their ideals. As Brown *et al* state "[Vale Royal Abbey] is an object lesson in the unreliability of princes and the folly of monks who had allowed themselves to be drawn into grandiose building schemes inconsistent with the architectural simplicity which had once been the most cherished principles of their order." (1963, 248).

4.3 The Post- Dissolution House 1538 - 1616

On the 7th. Sept. 1538 the abbot, prior and thirteen monks surrendered the house to the Royal Commissioner, Thomas Holcroft (Kettle 1980, 163). The site of the abbey and most of the associated property was leased and in 1542 sold to Thomas Holcroft for the sum of £45 10s. 6d.. Holcroft apparently "plucked down" the church in 1539 and use was probably made of some of the stone and timber in altering and rebuilding his own house (Brown *et al* 1963, 257).

The 1616 drawing of Vale Royal's west front indicates that Holcroft's rebuilding was on a massive scale. The house plan consisted of south and west ranges (possibly making use of the refectory, kitchen, and lay brothers' dormitory), with two additional wings built to the north-west and south-west. According to Ormerod, it appears to have been Holcroft's intention to build an enormous H-plan house (1882:155); however this plan was probably never realised and the North-West wing was not extended eastwards to parallel the south range.

The 1616 drawing indicates that the hall was accessible by external steps which led up to a castellated porch with an arched entrance. The windows were three-light casements with lattice leaded glazing. The dais end of the hall was lit by a two storey bay window and by a lantern in the roof.

The North-West Wing was nine bays long with a central two storey castellated bay window of a similar style to the dais window. A castellated tower is depicted on the north side of the North-West end and three lateral chimney stacks imply at least five heated rooms. The function of this wing is not clear, but it is possible that it housed the parlour and private apartments of the Holcrofts; the guest apartments were probably located in the South Range.

The South-West Wing is depicted in 1616 as a four-bay building of two storeys, with plain mullioned windows on the first floor and louvered openings and three doors on the ground floor. No chimneys are apparent, suggesting that this building was probably the stables with storage above.

The earliest view of the rear of the building is from 1774; the walls in the foreground are reported in a footnote to be those of the monastery. The evidence of robbing of the facing stone and its generally ruinous state suggest that this may be so and that Holcroft did not completely clear the site. The South Range is depicted as a half-timbered building comprising herring-bone panelling above a mid-rail with close

studding below. This is in accordance with the western tradition of timber framing as outlined by Smith, and apparently was rare before 1570 (Smith 1965, 145). It may therefore date to the Holcrofts' building programme. Just above the east wall are depicted the tops of four broad pointed windows in the West Range. These could possibly date from the monastic period. The mullioned window flanked by two buttresses could possibly date to the sixteenth century; it may have lit the screens passage.

In summary, it appears that the Holcrofts created a substantial and impressive building suitable for a large and complex household. The plan suggests that he may have retained elements of the fabric of the west and south Ranges of the medieval claustral complex. The great hall in the West Range became the main ceremonial focus for reception and display and it is probable that the head of the household ate in a separate chamber in accordance with the sixteenth century tradition (Girouard 1978, 30). This chamber may have been located in the south end of the West Range or alternatively in the North-West Wing. The two wings constructed at the front of the house indicate a concern for symmetry and it is possible that the rear South Range accommodated individual guest suites.

4.4 The Cholmondeleys 1616-1947

In 1616 the Holcrofts sold Vale Royal to Mary, widow of Sir Hugh Cholmondeley, a later descendent of whom was created Baron Delamere of Vale Royal in 1821 (Thompson 1962, 185). During the next three centuries the house was remodelled along Gothick and Neo-Classical lines, but the sixteenth. century house plan was essentially retained. Eighteenth and Nineteenth century alterations to the building can be ascertained from the 1775 and 1816 drawings and from Henrietta Cholmondeley's diary.

The main alterations to the South Range appear to have been at the east end. In February 1833, demolition of the old house began and was completed in August of the same year (Cholmondeley 1844, 258, 259). The architect was Edward Blore and the new building was constructed of brick with stone detailing. The remainder of the south range was encased in brick by John Douglas in 1860, who built the clock tower to the south-west of this range a year later (Holland 1977, 32). In 1832 a new kitchen range was inserted with a hot hearth which blew hot air into the saloon (Cholmondeley 1844, 258).

The west face of the West Range is indicated on an engraving of 1775. The castellated porch remains at first floor level, but the louvre has gone. McNeil and Turner also suggest that the bay windows depicted in 1616 have been replaced by sash-windows with architraves and keystones (1987, 69). However, due to the oblique angle of the view, this cannot be proven with any certainty. It is clear that by 1816, as the picture of this date indicates, sash-windows and pilasters had been inserted. Thus it seems plausible that they were inserted at the same time as the rebuild of the North-West and South-West Wings in 1796.

The main alterations to the West Range occurred in the early nineteenth century and are related to the conversion of the great hall into a saloon and library, with an armoury located in the south end. In 1811 the outside steps leading up to the hall were removed and a new porch was built to form a buttress for the support of the old walls which were "cracked and shaken by the storm in the Spring" (Cholmondeley 1844, 251). This new porch is depicted in 1816 with its arched doorway and balcony window, above which is a battlemented parapet. A corresponding bay was built on the east side in 1823 and also acted as a buttress (Holland 1977, 29).

The new saloon was accessible from below via a new staircase inserted in 1811 in a seventeenth century style (Cholmondeley 1844, 351). New grates and a chimney-piece to the fireplace were removed to the centre of the room in 1811 following which the internal decoration of the saloon was remodelled. In 1824 it was painted chrome yellow in oils (instead of orange water colour) and gilt mouldings and coats of arms were put up, followed by the addition of cornices in 1827. The saloon was entirely re-roofed in 1828 and in 1830 new sash-windows were inserted with oak casements and armorial glass from Utkinton Hall (*ibid*, 254-258).

To the south of the saloon, an armoury was created which apparently received a new floor in 1836. To the north of the saloon was the library, the ceiling of which was pulled down in 1827 to reveal the glazed casement of the earlier lantern. Apparently the old library on the ground floor was made into a bedroom in 1811 and in 1820 the chintz rooms and servants' hall were built in the angle between the West and South Ranges (*ibid*, 253, 256, 257, 251). In 1877 the porch and oriel window on the east side of the library and the bay windows on the north front were added by John Douglas (Holland 1977, 32).

Concerning the North-West Wing, by comparing the picture of 1616 to the later engraving of 1775, it appears to have had a second castellated tower added to the west, but the three-light mullioned and transomed windows appear unchanged. McNeil and Turner are of the opinion that this wing had been shortened by the eighteenth century (1987, 69). However, the number of windows, indicating the number of bays, seems unchanged: the only difference which could possibly be indicative of shortening is that the roof is shown as hipped in 1775, in contrast to the apparently gabled roof of 1616. However, the impression of a gabled roof in 1616 may be due to the angle from which the picture is painted.

Possibly of more interest is the short cross-wing which is depicted at the east end of this wing in 1775. A view from the east in 1774 appears to confirm the existence of an easterly extension of this North-West Wing. A timber end-gable, a stair turret and three chimney stacks are depicted projecting beyond the West Range on the eastern side. It is not absolutely clear whether this projection is genuine or a result of artistic licence with the intention of creating a more symmetrical and pleasing view.

In *Magna Britannia*, Lysons (1810) states that the short wings added to the front of the building were constructed in 1796. The North-West Wing is depicted in 1816

as shorter than the 1775 drawing and in a completely different style. It consists of casement windows with moulded surrounds and triple keystones. The first floor windows are larger and have half-H aprons. A canted bay window is attached to the gable end with a battlemented parapet and nineteenth century finials.

The dining room was probably located in this wing (although the distance from the kitchen makes this a remarkably unsuitable arrangement) and then converted into a bedroom and dressing room in 1821 (Cholmondeley 1844, 253). Omerod in 1882 makes reference to the location of the drawing room beyond the library which therefore could have been situated upstairs in this wing. It is possible that the drawing room was later converted into Lord Delamere's museum of trophies. In 1912 a group from the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society visited an exhibition of African big game in a room situated beyond the library. The exhibition included "a group of fighting lions mounted in a great case constructed in the wall and lighted by means of an aperture in the roof." (LCAS 1912, 254).

According to Holland the South-West Wing was demolished in the Civil War (1977, 30) and it is depicted in 1775 as a garden wall. This wing was rebuilt in 1796 at the same time as the construction of the North-West Wing (Lysons 1810). The two wings are of the same length and have the same architectural detailing. It is probable that the drawing room was originally located in this wing before being converted into a dining room in 1821 with new painted panels and gilt borders added in 1838 (Cholmondeley 1844, 253,262).

The Cholmondeleys had converted Vale Royal into a building with a symmetrical facade and Neo-Classical detailing and this is essentially how the building remained through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although the occupiers were to change. Robert Dempster rented the house from the Cholmondeleys from 1907-1925 and his granddaughter, Mrs. Mary Hopkirk, gives an impression of the interior of the house at this period. "Leading from the saloon was the library-cum-billiard room, which was rarely used because it faced north and east, and unless there was a fire going for days on end, it was like a refrigerator.... A *trompe l'oeil* door in the form of a bogus bookcase led from the library into two very large arctic communicating rooms, which had once been the drawing rooms." These rooms were now used as the skin rooms with Aunt Edith's sitting room downstairs (Hopkirk 1993, 128).

The south range was most frequently used, containing suites of bedrooms, the 'lawn rooms', 'oak rooms' and 'lilac rooms'. The ostentation of the house at this time is illustrated by the dining room where "above the table hung a solid silver chandelier about five feet high and four feet wide which two footmen on ladders had to clean each day." (*ibid*, 129).

The Cholmondeleys left Vale Royal in 1947 when Imperial Chemical Industries bought the house. The subsequent history of the house, up until recently, has been one of aborted efforts to find a suitable use for the building accompanied by an increasingly decaying and damaged structure.

The results of the preliminary survey shall now be discussed, with the intention of correlating this documentary information with the existing structural remains of the building.

5. INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE

An examination of the fabric and structure of Vale Royal house has supported the notion of continued existence of monastic fabric in the West and South Ranges with the possibility of monastic foundations existing in the Blore Wing and cellar. Sixteenth century alterations to the building and its conversion into a house have been provisionally identified along with substantial eighteenth and nineteenth century alterations and rebuilds, which give the house its present form.

The Douglas Wing and the saloon roof at this stage are inaccessible and their interpretation and analysis await the final report.

The interpretation has been organised in terms of the different blocks of the building, rather than in a chronological manner. This is to facilitate understanding of the various areas of the building, which will be of use as the phased conversion works take place.

In the examination of the fabric of the building, individual architectural and structural features were given context numbers and annotated on plan. However, for this provisional level of interpretation, features are referred to by their location in individual rooms and reference should be made to TACP Designs' architectural plans for the room numbers. Fully-phased and contexted plans will be submitted in the final report.

5.1 The North-West Wing

The North-West Wing is aligned east-west at the north end of the West Range. It consists of three main rooms downstairs, G1, G2 and G4 and two rooms upstairs FF1 and FF2. As stated above, this wing was apparently rebuilt in 1796 (Lysons 1810) replacing an earlier wing depicted on the 1616 and 1775 drawings.

An analysis of the structure of the building suggests that this wing was rebuilt rather than reduced and refaced in the late eighteenth century, obliterating almost all archaeological evidence for the development of this part of the house. The exact date of construction of this wing may be two years later than Lysons suggests, as an inscription 'IB 1798' was found on the stone architrave of the north lateral light of the west window in G1, or alternatively the wing could have taken two years to build.

The walls of this wing are constructed with an external face of coursed sandstone ashlar and a brick internal skin, which originally had timber rails for the attachment of panelling. Most of these rails have now been removed and replaced by modern brick and mortar. All the windows in this wing appear to be contemporary with the construction of the walls as do the external pilasters, which are formed of three blocks of ashlar and have moulded bases and capitals. At the west end is a canted bay window with three central lights divided by stone mullions and transoms with a battlemented parapet and finials to the corners.

The ground floor windows on both the north and south faces are fourteen-light casements with moulded stone surrounds, mullions and transoms with triple key-stones. The first-floor windows are taller and have twenty four lights. Internally the four windows in G1 have reused timber lintels with empty mortices and peg holes. It is possible that these timbers were two spine beams, with mortices originally for the attachment of common joists, they have been subsequently cut into four lengths and reused. Upstairs in FF1, the two southern windows are blocked internally with brick which may relate to a nineteenth century evasion of window tax.

On the ground floor, the main alterations are the insertion of two modern brick and plasterboard partition walls in G2, forming the cupboard space G3. These walls encroach upon a blocked fireplace with a segmental brick arch in the east wall of G3. The doorway leading from G2 to G4 represents the modern narrowing of an earlier aperture and the external doorway in the north wall of G4 is also a later insertion. Internally this doorway has modern brick and mortar reveals and externally the area around this doorway is rebuilt with fine tooled ashlar, the hood moulding of an earlier doorway remains in situ. The original doorway with the hood moulding is depicted on the 1816 picture; the present doorway must therefore post-date 1816.

The internal walls on the ground floor which divide G2 from G1 and G2 from G4 are contemporary with the build of this wing. However, the wall which divides G4 from G6 is an insertion and contains a central blocked doorway with a reused timber lintel and a brick relieving arch. It is possible that these ground floor rooms were originally the dining room area before being converted into a bedroom and dressing room in 1821, as described by H. Cholmondeley, though the precise layout of the rooms in this area is unclear.

Upstairs the situation is more complicated. The wall which divides FF1 from FF2 is an insertion. It contains a central arched doorway with a neo-classical surround to the south of a blocked fireplace and alcove. It is apparent from the scarring on the north and south walls of FF2 that a wall originally running north-south has been demolished. This would have been on the same alignment as the wall which divides G2 from G4 downstairs, and it was probably demolished prior to the insertion of the present dividing wall between FF1 and FF2. These alterations could possibly represent the conversion of an earlier drawing room into the skin rooms that housed Lord Delamere's museum of trophies in the early 19th. century, as described by Mary Hopkirk. The alcove in the dividing wall between FF1 and FF2 may therefore have been for the display of some of the African game.

As with downstairs, the wall which divides FF2 from FF3 (the library) is an insertion with a contemporary central doorway. The fireplace at the south end of this wall is cut through the wall and is of two phases. The first phase consists of a shallow brick arch; in the second phase this was lowered and York stone reveals and a lintel were inserted. This wall may relate to the 1827 conversion of the old drawing room into an extended library.

5.2 The Library

The library (FF3) is situated at first floor level in the north end of the West Range; the corresponding rooms downstairs are G6, G7 and G9. Room FF3 has complex phasing. The south wall is an 1811 brick insertion and is related to the remodelling of the great hall into a saloon. That the hall originally extended further northwards into the present day library is suggested by the fact that in 1827, H. Cholmondeley noticed that, on pulling down the library ceiling, a gallery was found above the continuation of the saloon arches with a glazed lantern still in situ (1844, 256). The roof of the library has not yet been examined, but McNeil and Turner outline the evidence of an unsooted louvre that may have lit the dais end of the sixteenth century hall (1987, 64).

In the south-west end of FF3 is a re-used carved stone which appears to be bear a heraldic device: it may have been part of a funerary monument or architectural decoration in the church. This suggests that Thomas Holcroft may have rebuilt the first floor of the West Range using reused monastic masonry in the sixteenth century, possibly replacing a timber-framed first floor, which is suggested by the west end of the southern truss in this room. An examination of this truss reveals that originally it had a tie beam, wall plate and post conforming to a lap-dovetail assembly. Subsequently the tie beam was cut back and an arch brace tenoned to the underside of the principal rafter. All that remains of the post is the jowled area; the rest of the post was probably removed when the stone walls were built up to the wall plate. This suggests that the monastic west range was half-timbered. However, it should be noted that this is the only evidence for a medieval half-timbered phase of the west range: it is possible that the truss is not presently *in situ* and it is the conclusion of the project team that this evidence is presently unduly tenuous. There is no obvious external evidence in the stonework for the rebuilding of the first floor. It is therefore possible that in the sixteenth century, Thomas Holcroft rebuilt the first floor using re-used monastic masonry at the same time as he modified the roof trusses to create a hall.

A fireplace at the southern end of the east wall of FF3 has a moulded sandstone surround contemporary with a triangular relieving arch which extends into the present day saloon. The lintel of this fireplace has been removed and it has been subsequently bricked up to create a narrower aperture. This fireplace is in the correct location to have heated the dais end of the hall.

Immediately to the north of this fireplace is a window, blocked with stone, which is probably that depicted to the north of the north chimney stack in the picture of 1774. Thus it may have been an eighteenth century insertion, but any external evidence of this window has been obscured by rebuilding around the 1877 oriel window immediately to the north.

A small library was created in 1811 by the insertion of the present south wall of FF3, containing an elaborate wooden doorway with a broken pediment and columns carved with foliate motifs. The north wall of this small library has now been

demolished, but it is possible that it was originally on the line of the south wall of G7 downstairs, continuing the line of the south wall of the North-West Wing into the West Range. Any evidence of this wall has been destroyed by the insertion of the oriel window in 1877 and by the insertion of the north end of the west wall. However, the original existence of this wall is suggested by the straw and mortar insulating material supported on a timber lattice under the floor-boards, which extends as far as this point, but not into the south end of FF3.

In 1827 the library was extended by incorporating the old drawing room into the small library (Cholmondeley 1844, 256). The north wall of the small library may have been demolished at this date and the existing west wall inserted. Subsequent alterations include the insertion of the oriel window in the east wall in 1877 by J. Douglas and also the insertion of the north bay window. That this north window is an insertion is indicated internally by the cutting of the bricks of the north wall, and externally by the tooled ashlar blocks surrounding the window which contrast with the smooth ashlar of the wall. This window is not depicted on the 1816 picture of the building but two casements are in its place; it may have been inserted at the same time as the oriel window.

Downstairs there is a corresponding inserted bay window in the north wall of G6 and on the east wall is an arched doorway which was inserted in 1877, at the same time as the oriel window that it supports. A partition wall runs east-west forming the south wall of G6. This wall has been cut back by the insertion of the west wall, which, as with the corresponding wall upstairs, may have been built in 1827. The south wall contains a blocked doorway at its west end which would have led into the passageway G7 and opposed the door in the north wall of G9. The circulation pattern was subsequently moved further to the east by the insertion of a central doorway in the south wall of G6 and a corresponding door in the north wall of G9. Apparently the old library was located in room G6 before it was converted into a bedroom in 1811 (Cholmondeley 1844, 251).

5.3 West Range

5.3.1 The cellar and ground floor

The brick-vaulted cellar which runs under the West Range and turns to the west under the North-West wing is an eighteenth century insertion according to Holland (1977, 27). The east and west walls have been faced with modern brick and the only evidence of earlier fabric is a stone window in the east wall of C10 and a stone doorway in the east wall of C5. The window is blocked by brickwork and encroached upon by the brick vaulting. It is physically below the blocked cloister window at the south end of the West Range and the doorway is also in line with the east wall of the West Range. It is possible that this doorway could have led to an "old subterranean chapel" discovered in 1842 (reported by H. Cholmondeley), and thus both features could possibly be the remains of a monastic undercroft. However, examination of the window indicates that it is presently set with external hollow mouldings on the interior, suggesting that it has been re-set. No firm parallel has yet come to light for the moulding profile, but it is the opinion of the LUAU architectural mouldings specialist that it is a standard type in both the fifteenth and

sixteenth centuries.

The ground floor contains a passageway running north-south with a series of six rooms to the west. The four windows in the east wall are depicted on the 1774 picture with broad-headed arches. Today the north window has a pointed arch and is glazed with armorial glass. It appears to be cut through the masonry of the wall and thus is a later insertion, although it is may be in the position of an earlier aperture. The other three windows have four-centred (or possibly segmental) arches with simple chamfered surrounds and appear to be contemporary with the wall. The south window was blocked when the chintz rooms were built in 1820.

Although the windows do not contain any evidence of tracery it is probable, due to their location, that they illuminated an enclosed cloister walk. This suggestion is further supported by the location of a doorway with a round-headed stone arch at the south end of the east wall. This would have led into the garth and possibly to external steps rising up to the refectory on the first floor of the south range. There is also a four-centred arched doorway, contemporary with an area of remaining stonework, located at the end of the passage which would have led into the monastic kitchen.

The west wall of this passageway is constructed entirely of brick and there is no indication of the original width of the monastic enclosed cloister walk. It was probably originally constructed in the eighteenth century when the supporting walls in the cellar were inserted. This passageway has a plaster-vaulted ceiling in a Gothick style of the early nineteenth century. It appears that the west wall was rebuilt at a point 7.5m. along from the north in order to construct this ceiling. At the south end of this wall is a confusion of blocked doorways which originally led into the west rooms.

In the north wall of G18 and the south wall of G19 are two back-to-back fireplaces, one of which has an oven area; all the apertures are now blocked. These fireplaces could possibly be the new kitchen range that was inserted in 1832 with a hot hearth and which blew hot air into the saloon (Cholmondeley 1844, 258). The partitions of these rooms, in particular the dividing walls between G10 and G11, G16 and G17, and G17 and G18, were probably inserted during the 1960s when ICI owned the building.

The windows in the west wall of this range are four-light casements and at least two phases of window are detectable. The stone wall has been rebuilt in brick, in order to form the reveals and relieving arches of the earlier windows. The brick relieving arches cut through the stone corbels which support the floor above. It is apparent that these arches have been subsequently cut through and a lintel inserted below, in order to create a wider and lower aperture for the present windows. Externally the cutting and rebuilding of the masonry around these windows is clear evidence of their insertion.

The first floor of this range is supported on a stone corbel table, along which rests

a timber beam which carries the floor joists. According to McNeil and Turner this technique may date to the first quarter of the fourteenth century and thus could be the remains of monastic flooring (1987, 62). These stone corbels in the south of the east wall have been cut back in order to insert a staircase. This stone staircase which leads to the first floor was constructed in 1811 and in a seventeenth century style with turned wood balusters and stone treads with ogival mouldings.

5.3.2 First Floor

The first floor of the West Range consists of the saloon, FF4, with the armoury, FF7, located to the south. On the east wall of the saloon are two blocked fireplaces with sandstone flat arches and both are situated in line with two large chimney stacks. These chimney stacks are only occasionally bonded into the wall and their enormous size suggests that they may have served to buttress the outward thrust of the hall roof once the tie beams had been removed. These stacks are depicted on the 1774 picture of the rear of the building and therefore must predate this time.

Adjacent to these fireplaces are two dummy windows. Externally these windows appear to be cut through and inserted into the masonry of the wall and they consist of twenty-four light sashes with key stones. These windows are depicted on the 1774 picture and the thickness of the glazing bars suggests an eighteenth-century date. Both these windows are encroached upon by two inserted fireplaces, with stone surrounds and with the Cholmondeley arms in the spandrels. They both have a cast iron register grate and probably date to 1811 when H. Cholmondeley refers to the removal of the fireplaces to the centre of the room (1844, 251). Thus the windows were also probably blocked in 1811 (possibly to avoid window tax which was not abolished until 1851, although it should be noted that other windows were apparently inserted in the 1830s).

At the centre of the east wall is a bay with a brick ogee arch. It contains a nine-light casement window with stone mullions and transoms, and at ground floor level, there is a broad arched window which mimics the style of the other windows at this level. This bay is constructed of fine sandstone ashlar and as with the chimney stacks, it acts as a buttress. This bay was probably constructed in the early nineteenth century and has removed any evidence of the mullioned window flanked by buttresses indicated in the 1774 painting.

The west wall of the saloon contains four casement windows with thirty two lights and stone mullions and transoms. These windows are probably the oak casements that were inserted in 1830 although the armorial glass has been removed. These windows sit in earlier apertures with triple keystone blocks that are cut through the masonry of this wall. The original windows were possibly the twenty-four light sashes depicted on the 1816 picture and of the same style as the dummy windows which remain on the east front. Located to the south of the two northern windows is evidence of two earlier apertures, a metre above floor height, which appear to be contemporary with the wall. These could be traces of the three light casements which are depicted on the 1616 picture.

Externally the pilasters butt against the west wall and also against the rebuild around

the windows. Thus, it is probable that the existing window apertures were inserted first, probably in the early eighteenth century The pilasters were possibly added later, possibly in the late eighteenth century when the North-West and South-West wings were constructed with pilasters in the same style.

The porch on the west front is in a Gothick style with angle buttresses, a pointed arch and a battlemented parapet with shields to either side. The bay window above is a six-light casement in the same style as the bay window on the east front, suggesting that they were built at the same time (possibly in 1823). As stated above, the porch replaced an earlier porch with steps up to the first floor which was demolished in 1811. No trace of this earlier porch remains other than the heavy studded oak doorway at ground floor level, which may be the original sixteenth century door from the first floor.

The north and south walls of the saloon are brick insertions of 1811 and both contain doorways. These doorways may have been subsequently lowered and narrowed, as suggested by the brick blocking of the reveals and the lath and plaster blocking under a round headed brick arch in order to create the present pointed arches; these may alternatively be relieving arches.

The roof of the saloon consists of eight trusses, the tie beams of which have been removed and replaced by arch bracing attached to the principal rafters by through loose tenons and pegs. This alteration may date to Holcroft's sixteenth-century creation of a great hall. Subsequently in the nineteenth century the ceiling was painted with heraldic shields and devices, and cusped wind braces in a Gothick style were inserted. The upper areas of these roof trusses are concealed by the ceiling and have not yet been examined. The most important point to note from McNeil and Turner's survey is that the fourth truss from the south may have been the location of a screens passage relating to Holcroft's sixeenth-century creation of a hall. Apparently the mortice configurations on this truss indicate that it was closed above the tie beam with raking struts morticed into a king post. McNeil and Turner also suggest that the southern half of this range was partitioned into two rooms with a three-bay chamber (1987, 63).

The four roof trusses in the armoury are less drastically altered and may give some indication of the monastic roof, or that of the first post-Dissolution house. The southernmost truss consists of a collar, tie beam with intermediate studs and straight wind braces. The remains of a post exist at the east end of the tie beam and suggest that this range may have been timber-framed at first floor level. The presence of studding suggests that this truss was probably a closed end gable and probably earlier than the kitchen roof, the tie beam of which butts against the east end of this truss. As McNeil and Turner propose, it is possible that this end gable is the remains of the lay brothers' dormitory which extended northwards for an unknown length (1987, 61).

The three other trusses in the armoury are of simple tie beam construction with additional diagonal bracing. It is possible that when, in the fifteenth/early sixteenth

century the monks dispensed with the lay brethren, they demolished the wind-braced roof except for the end gable and rebuilt the roof in a more robust and simpler fashion to function as a store or granary (McNeil & Turner 1987, 63).

Other features in the armoury include a blocked opening, probably a window in the east wall with the same dimensions as the dummy eighteenth-century windows in the saloon. This window has been converted into an alcove possibly for the display of armour.

In summary, the armoury roof may contain early trusses of two phases: it is to be hoped that further detailed examination will permit some discrimination of monastic from post-Dissolution fabric. The south truss indicates the possibility that the first floor of this range was formerly timber-framed.

In the sixteenth century Thomas Holcroft may have rebuilt the first floor (incorporating some re-used monastic masonry), removed the tie beams in order to create an arch-braced roof and built a fireplace at the dais end of the hall, now located in the south end of the library. There is some evidence for sixteenth century windows in the west wall of the saloon, but no evidence remains of the porch and stairs which led up to the first floor. The south end of this range was probably a chamber divided from the hall by a screens passage.

It is possible that in the eighteenth century, sash windows were inserted, two of which remain as dummy windows in the east wall. The pilasters on the west front appear to have been inserted later in the century. The chimney stacks and fireplaces, now blocked, may also have been inserted at this time.

In the early nineteenth century, the hall was converted into a saloon by rebuilding the porch and constructing an internal staircase. New fireplaces and casement windows were inserted and partition walls inserted at the north and south ends. The ceiling was decorated with heraldic devices.

5.4 The South Range

5.4.1 Ground floor

According to the 'standard plans' of monastic buildings, in Cistercian houses the refectory was oriented north to south perpendicular to the south cloister. The only evidence for such a building lies in the well-coursed sandstone east and west walls of G39. This may be indicative of a passageway linking a refectory, located to the south of the present south range, to the west range. If so it is highly probable that the refectory was later reoriented to lie parallel to the cloister as the present layout of the south range suggests. There is evidence of stone walling in the north wall of G35 which may be the remains at ground floor level of this refectory.

The masonry walls in G39 have inserted round headed doorways now blocked with brickwork. These doorways line up with the doorway in the timber-framed partition wall in G38 and two spine beams on either side of this doorway have empty mortices on their undersides. These are interpreted as evidence of studs of a timber-

framed partition which would have created a walkway through the centre of this range. It is possible that this corridor dates to a sixteenth-century conversion of the former monastic refectory. The hard pinkish mortar infill of the timber-framed wall in G38 appears the same as the mortar used for the flooring above all the rooms in this range, apart from the kitchen. This mortar floor is supported on a timber lattice which rests in grooves cut into the sides of the floor joists. Thus, it is possible that in the sixteenth century the south range was refloored, a partition wall inserted in G38 and a central corridor created connecting to an unspecified number of rooms.

The present passage at the north end of this range may have been created in the 1860s when the whole of this range was refaced in brickwork. The internal walls div+iding G42 from G41 and the south end of the dividing wall between G36 and G22 were also constructed at this date, thus creating the present layout of five connecting rooms. This 1860s rebuild was in brick Flemish bond with stone detailing around the windows which on the ground floor are either four or six light casements.

The kitchen is located at the west end of the South Range. The four-centred stone doorway in the north wall and the masonry in the east wall may have been part of a monastic kitchen or may be post-Dissolution in date. The first floor has chamfered ceiling beams which are supported on a timber post; this floor is a later insertion and it is likely, by analogy with other sites, such as Glastonbury and Durham that the monastic kitchen was originally open to the roof. The fireplace in the west wall has a basket-arched wide hearth with lateral basket-arched openings. This nineteenth-century fireplace could possibly obscure evidence of a monastic fireplace.

5.4.2 First floor

One of the main features to note on the first floor is the remains of external timber framing to the west of this range and sealed by the Chintz rooms. This timber framing comprises herring-bone panelling above a mid-rail with close studding below. This is in accordance with the western tradition of timber framing as outlined by Smith (1965, 145); it was apparently rare before 1570 and may date to the time of the Holcrofts.

It is not clear whether Holcroft inserted this decorative panelling into existing monastic timber framing or if the whole of the first floor was rebuilt. Ormerod suggests that the Holcrofts rebuilt the whole of the South Range (1882, 155). However, the four-centred arched doorway is contemporary with the timber framing and is in the correct position for a day stair leading into the cloister garth and to the stone doorway (now blocked) at the south end of the west range. The eight-light window to the east of this door has chamfered mullions and transoms which appear to be later insertions, but the window lintel and reveals are contemporary with the timber framing. It therefore seems conceivable that the doorway and window aperture are monastic and that Holcroft inserted herringbone decoration following the latest sixteenth-century fashion. He may also have blocked the doorway as is suggested by a series of empty peg holes on the underside of the

lintel. Indeed, the picture of 1774 indicates a series of windows in the first floor timber framing but no doorway at the western end.

The passageway which runs east to west and creates a corridor FF19 and FF17 is timber-framed with close studding above and below a mid-rail. Only one door is intact; it is now blocked but would have led into FF20. It consists of a depressed-arched door head with chamfered sides. It is likely that there were four other doors, now obscured by plaster, that would have given access into a total of five apartment rooms, including the room over the kitchen, FF14. These apartments would have respected the bay divisions in the roof, with the exclusion of a partition wall under truss IV.

Of these partition walls only two now remain, the east wall of FF20 and the east wall of FF18. Removed partition walls are indicated by empty mortices on the underside of the tie beams of trusses II and V. The timber-framed wall below truss VI in FF20 consists of small framing of which almost all the timbers have been reused (as indicated by a profusion of empty peg holes). The central doorway has an ogee lintel and the south doorway has a canted door head. Both doorways appear to be contemporary with the wall, although the reveals of the central doorway have been refaced. It is possible that the south doorway led into a garderobe, all evidence of which has now been destroyed by the construction of the Blore Wing.

The timber-framed partition below truss III, in FF18, also has close studding above a mid-rail. The north end of this mid-rail has been cut back possibly to insert a doorway which has now been removed. Both of these partitions appear to butt against the timber-framed corridor wall, indicating that they are later insertions. It is probable that this series of five apartments were created by Thomas Holcroft in the sixteenth century as guest suites and subsequently altered into their present form of four rooms.

The conversion of these five rooms into four involved the demolition of two timber-framed partition walls below trusses II and V, the rebuild of the wall under truss V in brick and the construction of another brick wall under truss I. The partition wall under truss II was not replaced. Both of these walls appear to be contemporary with the south wall of this range and may thus date to 1860 when the range was rebuilt in brick. The two east rooms are wood panelled and the east one is referred to as the Kings' Room, as the panels are inscribed to record royal visits from Edward I to James I. The two western rooms are the lilac and morning rooms referred to by Mary Hopkirk in the early nineteenth century.

5.4.3 Second Floor

The roof in the South Range consists of six roof trusses with carpenters' marks numbered from I to VI beginning at the west end. It is divided by trenched purlins and short cross timbers producing a grid effect. These timbers are moulded in a double concave and 'birds' mouth' design and a flat area is left at their intersection, possibly for the attachment of a boss. This composition created a highly decorative roof that was presumably intended to be viewed from the first floor refectory. The mouldings on the purlins in the western bay, AF14, are less ornate and may indicate

that there was a less prestigious ante-room below. The ridge piece of truss VI at the east end, extends 0.70m beyond the truss, indicating that the refectory may originally have extended further eastwards. A dendrochronological date of 1460-91 for a timber from truss V indicates a late monastic date for this roof (McNeil and Turner 1987, 56, 75).

All of the roof trusses have been substantially altered. The inserted central doorways and the infilling of the trusses with lath and plaster or wattle and daub was probably undertaken in the sixteenth century and may relate to the creation of servants' apartments. Central doorways were cut through trusses V, IV and III, thus creating four adjoining attic rooms. Truss V consists of a tie beam, principal rafter and collar. The collar has been chopped back and queen posts removed in order to insert this central doorway. The central doorways in trusses IV and III have been inserted by chopping back the central boss on the collar and the insertion of ill-fitting queen posts that act as door jambs. Subsequently the line of access was moved further to the north by the blocking of the central doorways and the insertion of new ones into all the trusses by cutting back the tie beams and principal rafters. Thus a continuous corridor was created across the attic space.

The roof trusses of the kitchen are largely obscured, but parts are visible of the tie beam, the principal rafter, one stud and a section of collar are visible of the eastern truss. Judging by the mortices on the upper and lower sides of the tie beam of this truss it would appear that this was originally a closed truss, with studs above and below the tie beam. It is probable that this truss formed the end gable of the monastic kitchen that was subsequently butted by the construction of the south range. That the kitchen pre-dates the South Range is supported by the fact that one of the South Range purlins extends 0.26m beyond truss I and butts a kitchen purlin. It is not moulded which suggests that it was never intended to be seen from the refectory.

The north end of the tie beam of the south kitchen truss meets the tie beam of the closed south truss in the armoury, suggesting that the kitchen was constructed later than the West Range. The central truss is an arch braced false hammer beam, with chamfered trenched purlins and straight wind braces. These decorative features are not as elaborate as in the South Range, but they do suggest that the kitchen roof was meant to be seen and thus the monastic kitchen may originally have been open to the roof. The western truss does not survive, but it is depicted on the 1775 picture as a closed end gable of a similar style to the existing east truss.

5.5 The South-West Wing

The South-West Wing, aligned east-west at the south end of the West Range was rebuilt in 1796 at the same time as the construction of the North-West Wing. The architectural detailing is the same, with ground floor fourteen-light casements with stone mullions and transoms and triple key stones. The first floor windows are larger, however, and have twenty four lights and the west window is a canted bay.

The external walls are sandstone ashlar with applied pilasters, apart from the less visible south wall which is constructed of brick Flemish bond.

Internally, the ground floor was originally divided into two rooms, both heated by fireplaces in the south wall with a doorway at the north end of the dividing wall. This wing was entered by a doorway in the west wall of G26. Subsequently in the twentieth century, these doorways and fireplaces were blocked and modern partitions inserted in order to create a corridor separating two rooms in the east end of the wing.

On the first floor is a large open room, FF9 which in 1821 was converted into a dining room. The east wall is a brick insertion and contains a central doorway with Corinthian columns to either side of a six-panelled door with swags and a pediment above. A scar to the east of this wall, and replicated downstairs, indicates that the original wall was located half a metre further to the east. The reasons for moving this wall are unclear, although it could be related to the need to create space for the stairway which now leads into the 1860s Douglas Wing.

The ceiling is elaborately plastered with a central frieze, strapwork and an enriched cornice with heavy foliage motifs. There are two phases of flooring, the present floor boards rest on narrower ones that have a mortared upper surface.

5.6 The Chintz Rooms and Servants' Hall

The chintz room and servants' hall were constructed in 1820 in the corner of the South and West Ranges. This building consists of one room on the ground floor, G20, and two rooms on the first floor, FF8 and FF16. The north wall of G20 butts the south chimney stack of the West Range and it contains a four centred arched window which imitates the style of the lower 'monastic' windows in the West Range. In the east wall is a fireplace which butts onto the wall and is of twentieth century brick and tile construction.

On the first floor, the partition wall which divides FF8 from FF16 appears to be original. In the west wall are two blocked eighteenth-century windows which are indicated on the 1774 drawing. The window in the north wall of FF8 is a twenty-four light casement with internal shutters and in the east wall is an inserted twentieth century two-light casement. There are two blocked fireplaces with segmental arches in the east wall of both these rooms and the partitions in these rooms are modern plasterboard creating toilet cubicles. The south wall of FF16 consists of a timber-framed wall with herring-bone panelling and is the remains of the timber-framed upper storey of the South Range, and as discussed above.

5.7 The Blore Wing

The Blore Wing which forms the triple-gabled wing at the east end of the South Range was constructed in 1833 by Edward Blore. It apparently replaced an earlier building, also triple gabled, but of half-timbered construction which is depicted on

the 1775 picture.

This wing is constructed of brick Flemish bond with sandstone detailing to the windows. The ground and first floor windows are six-light casements with four-light casements on the second floor. The main features to note in this wing are that the floor joists in G42 of the South Range have been cut back and these timbers appear to have been reused for the door lintels in the Blore Wing indicated by the groove in the sides of these timbers which originally housed a mortar floor. There are numerous blocked fireplaces with brick segmental arches and the line of the flues are indicated in grey paint on the chimney breast. The function of this paint is not clear, although it could have been for sealing the wall against soot or intrusive damp.

McNeil and Turner have suggested that the wide corridor G45 which runs north to south is an anomaly in the plan of the Blore Wing, as it does not form the entrance hall. They propose, due to its position in the corner between the monastic south and the putative east range, that it could have formed the passage and day stair leading to the dorter (1987, 61). However, there is no evidence of masonry in this wall; evidence of stone foundations occurs in the south and east walls of G47, and in the north and west walls of G52. In particular, the stonework in the west wall of G52, which projects 0.36m from the face of the brick wall, may suggest that these walls are the foundations of an earlier building. This stonework could be part of the foundations of the earlier building depicted in 1774 or alternatively it could be even older. Whichever is the case, it would suggest that there was formerly a corridor on the same alignment as the present east-west passage, (G49), and that there were masonry structures to the north and south of this passage.

6. CONCLUSION & SUMMARY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF VALE ROYAL HOUSE

It appears likely that Thomas Holcroft did not completely demolish the abbey, but substantially incorporated monastic fabric into the construction of his house. The main areas of possible surviving monastic fabric are in the West and South Ranges. In the West Range it is possible that the east wall contains masonry and window apertures of an enclosed cloister walk. The southern roof trusses of the armoury and saloon suggest that this range may have been half-timbered, conceivably even before the Dissolution. The earliest roof truss is the southern one in the armoury which may relate to a wind-braced roof of the lay brothers' dormitory. Possibly in the late monastic period this roof was rebuilt with simple tie beam trusses.

In the South Range, monastic stonework may survive on the ground floor; part of a timber-framed first floor also remains. The roof trusses may originate in the monastic period, although substantially altered. They were evidently highly decorative. Presumably they were intended to be seen from the first floor.

The relative phasing, in which the West Range predates the kitchen, which in turn predates the South Range, has been confirmed by an examination of the roof trusses. Monastic fabric may also survive in the Blore Wing and in the cellar.

The main indications of Holcroft's conversion of the monastery into a house are the present saloon roof trusses; their tie beams have been replaced with arch braces. There are also indications of sixteenth-century windows on the west front and a fireplace at the dais end of the hall. In the South Range a central corridor was created on the ground floor and at the first and attic floor levels a series of apartments was created which probably functioned as individual guest suites.

In the eighteenth century sash windows were inserted into the east and west walls of the West Range. Two of these windows remain in the west wall although they are blocked internally. Large fireplaces and chimney breasts were also inserted into this east wall. The North-West and South-West Wings were rebuilt and pilasters added to the west front, thus creating the present symmetrical facade.

In the nineteenth century substantial alterations were made to all areas of the building. The North-West Wing was internally modified, relating to a change in function and the main hall was converted into a Gothick saloon. The chintz rooms and Blore Wing were built and the whole of the South Range was refaced in brick followed by the construction of the Douglas Wing.

Twentieth-century interventions are quite minimal; they have been mainly restricted to the blocking of fireplaces and doorways, and the insertion of partition walls.

This interim report has proposed a model of the architectural development of Vale Royal Great House in which elements of the fabric of the south and west claustral ranges of the Cistercian abbey were retained by Thomas Holcroft in the sixteenth century. This follows the earlier conclusions of McNeil and Turner. However, it is acknowledged that at present, this is based on remarkably little firm evidence, principally dendrochronological assay of two timbers of the South Range, which produced dates in the late fifteenth century. The evidence of other timbers within the building suggests a development with considerable time-depth, but without firm dating control, it would theoretically be possible to accommodate this entirely within the post-medieval period: that is to say that there may be little or no fabric of the monastic buildings *in situ* at Vale Royal. (Nevertheless, a firm pronouncement against monastic survival would be inappropriate in an interim report).

One element of the present building indicates that the monastic phase may be of crucial importance in the understanding of the post-medieval development of Vale Royal. This is the ground plan, which shows that the West and South Ranges of the present building are in appropriate locations for the West and South claustral ranges of the Abbey and that they relate precisely to the plan of the church, as excavated by Hugh Thompson. This inevitably suggests an element of survival, a far simpler scenario than one in which all buildings were demolished and selected parts rebuilt on the same footings. This is what general models of the dissolution of monastic houses leads us to predict: those parts of the structure deemed essential for religion and for the communal life were demolished as a priority, in order to render the sites unusable in the event of a resurgence of the monastic ideal. Thus the churches, dormitories and chapter houses of monastic sites survive less commonly than West Ranges (Dickinson 1968, 64-74). Moreover, it helps to make sense of elements of the standing stucture, such as the stone cross-walls on the ground floor of the South Range and the inserted large traceried windows of the ground floor of the West Range, which are more easily understood as remnants of a monastic complex, than as features in an entirely new house.

The transition of monastic sites to secular occupation is an under-studied but fashionable topic, with the potential to inform debates on both ecclesiastical and domestic archaeology (Dickinson 1968, Howard 1987); it is also identified as an area deserving of further study in English Heritages research strategies document *Exploring Our Past* (English Heritage 1991, 37). There is compelling evidence that the first secular owners of the site took careful note of the pre-existing arrangements and that these set the tone for developments up to the present day. Vale Royal therefore respects the monastic layout to some extent, even if the appearance of the Great House has never borne any relation to that of the monastic buildings which preceded it.

The methodology adopted for this survey is based on the premise that all parts of the building are of equal importance and that all stages of its development are equally deserving of study. Previous work and the survey carried out for this interim report have demonstrated that the site has at least the potential to provide considerable information on the architectural history of Vale Royal in the mid-

sixteenth century. At present, this interim report has been compelled to assume some of what it must eventually set out to prove. It is to be hoped that the results of the watching brief will be more conclusive.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The fieldwork carried out by LUAU in the initial site survey has highlighted certain key areas of the building which seem to the project team to hold the most potential for the resolution of difficulties in the development of the building, as set out in the previous section. It is envisaged that particular attention should be paid to these during the watching brief. These areas include:

- The area of the former cross-wing at the west end of the North-West Range, presently only known from pictorial sources.

- The hall roof structure, with a possible lantern or louvre and the closed truss defining the north end of the hall.

- The complicated masonry sequence around the fireplace in the east wall of the hall and library.

- The ground-floor passage of the west range, possibly containing a former monastic undershot claustral walkway.

- The junction of the West and South ranges at all levels, especially the rood structure of the `kitchen' and the area above the present staircase to the first floor.

- The masonry/brick sequence in the ground floor rooms of the South Range, possibly containing evidence for a passageway of monastic or early Post-medieval date.

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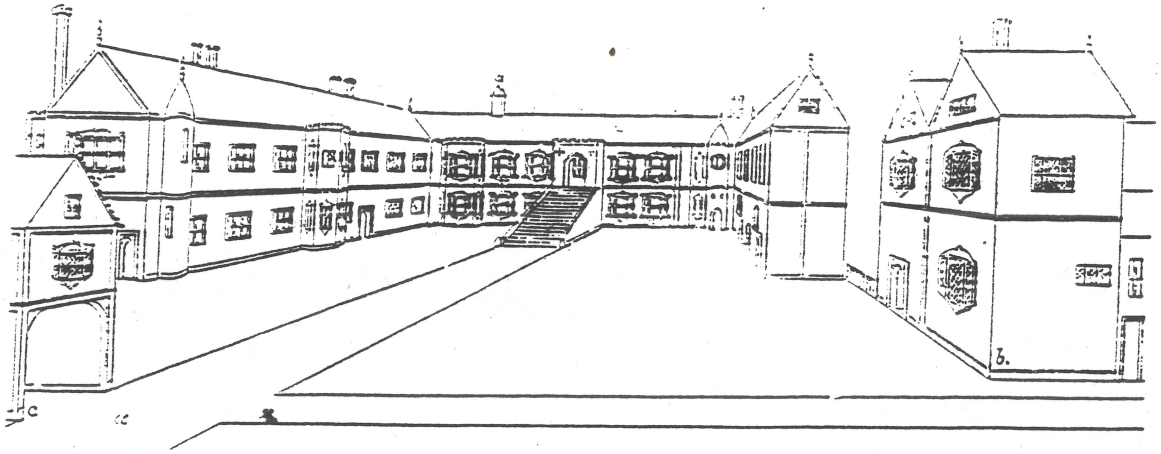
APPENDIX

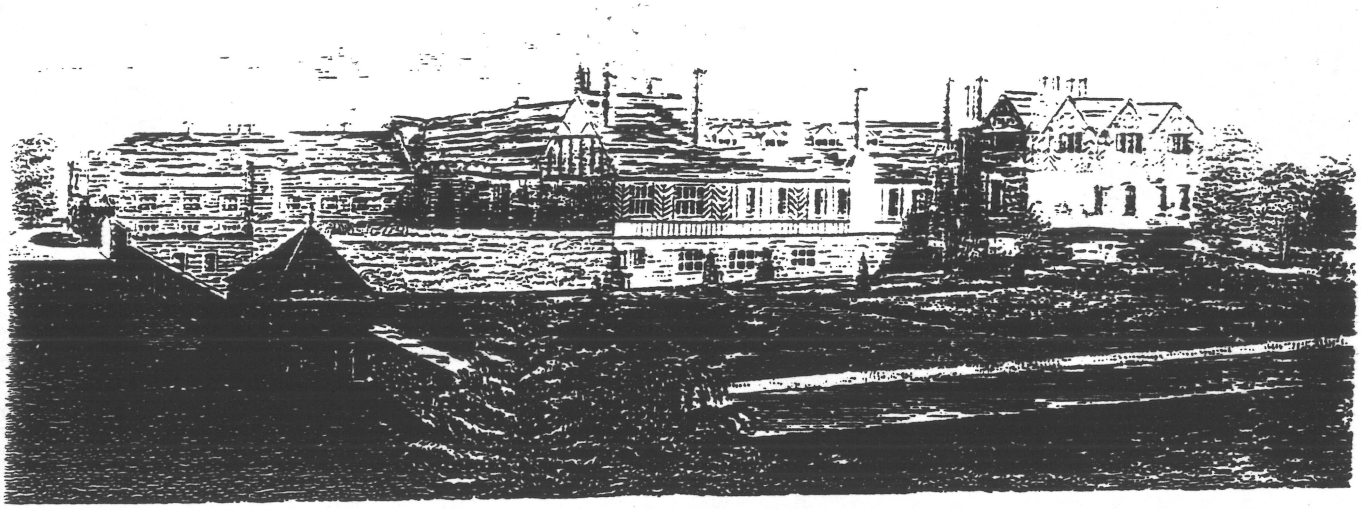
Project Design

ILLUSTRATIONS

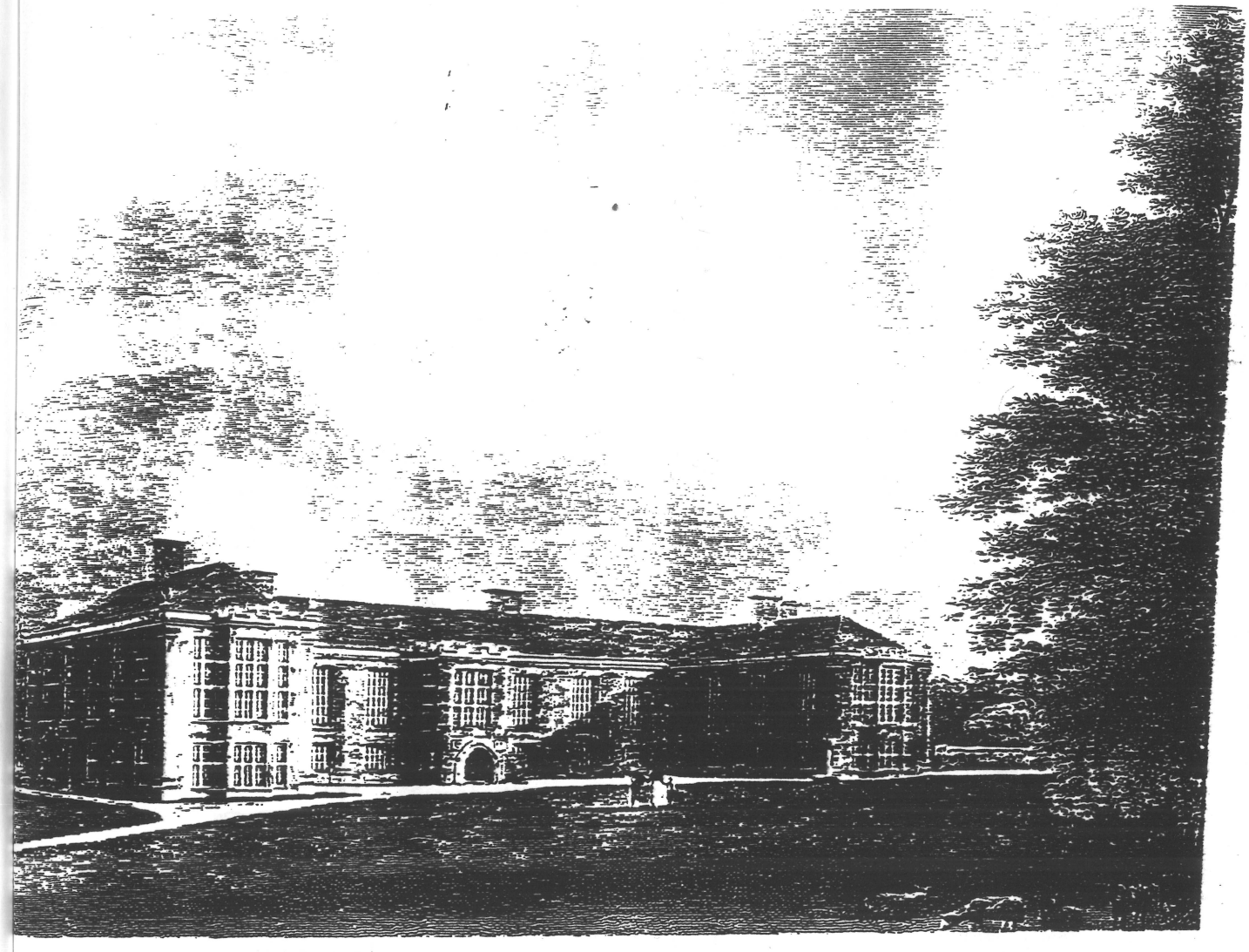


1616. 'Vale Royal House as it appeared in 1616, from an original drawing, in outline, in the possession of Thomas Cholmondeley', reproduced in Omerod, G. 1882. 'The monastery of St. Mary of Vale Royal', *History of Cheshire*, 2 edn. ed. T Helsby: 159

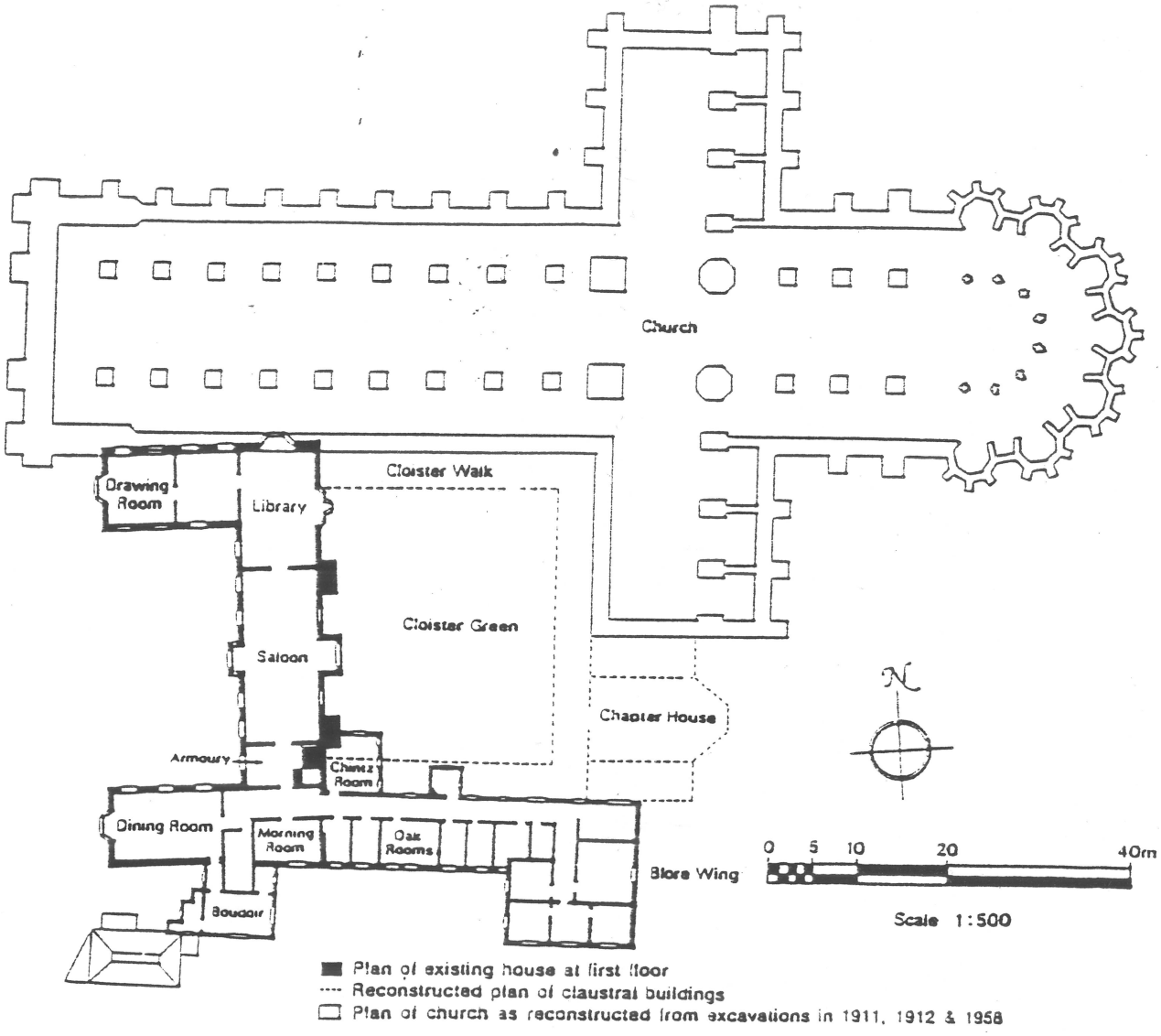
1774. 'The old hall of Vale Royal from the spot whereon stood the high altar', reproduced in 'The ancient abbey of Vale Royal'. *Journal of Chester Archaeological and Historical Society*, 19. 1912: 109



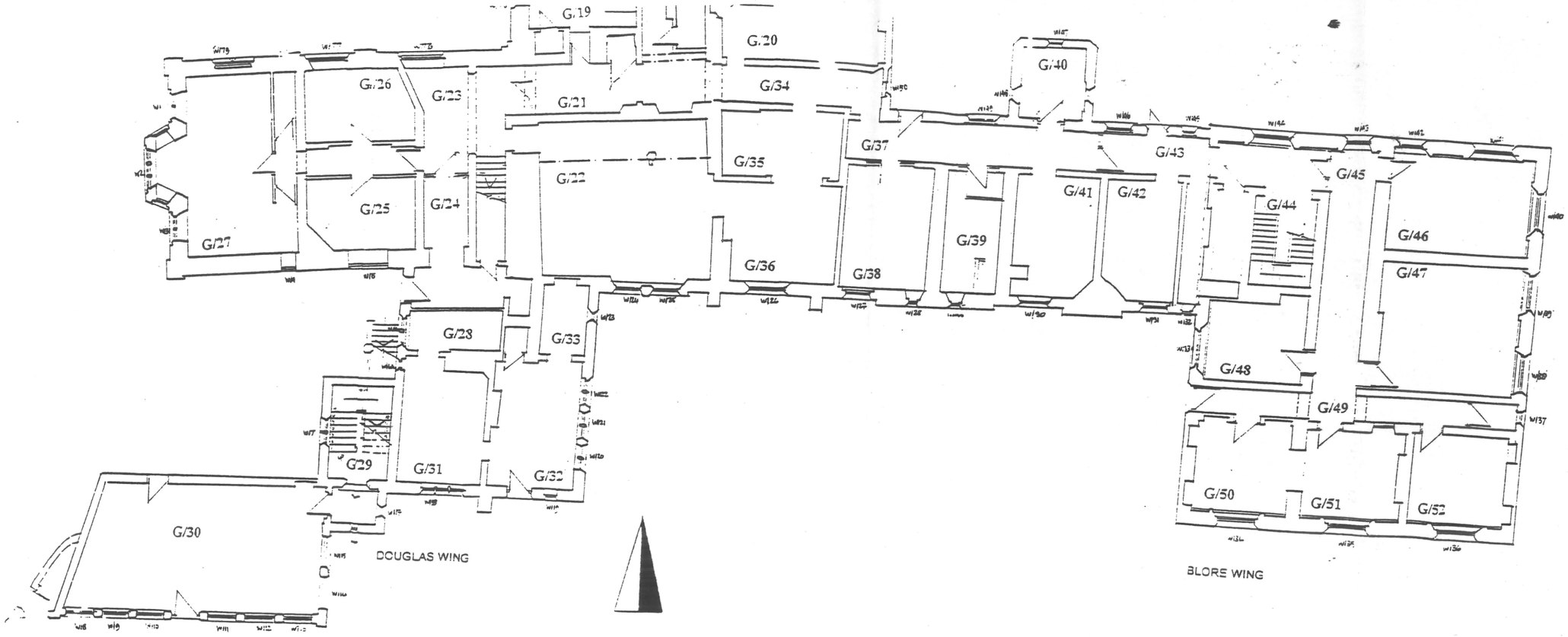
1775 'Vale Royal 1775', a view of the house from the south reproduced in Omerod, G. 1882. 'The monastery of St. Mary of Vale Royal', *History of Cheshire*, 2nd. edn. ed. T Helsby: 154



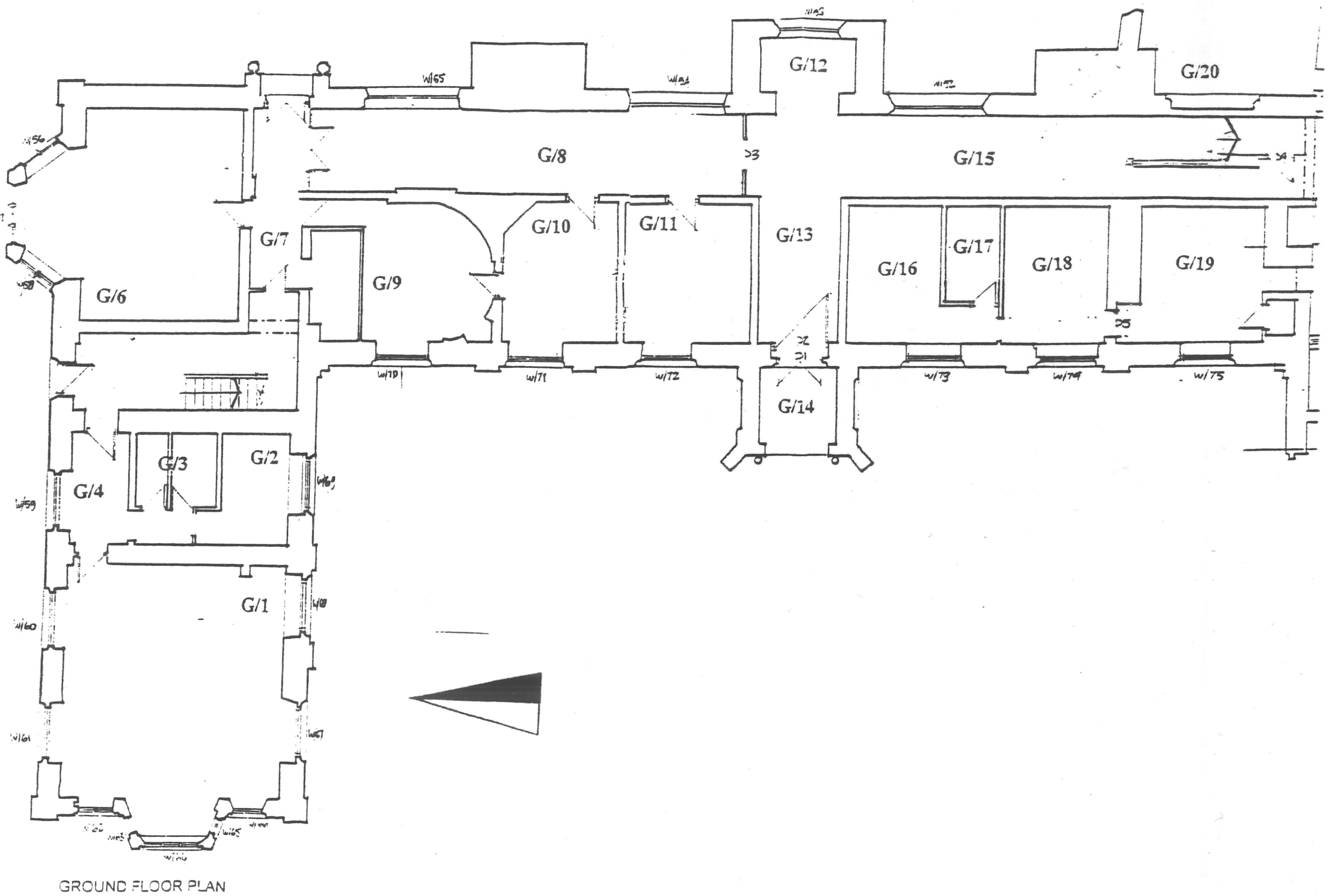
1816. 'Vale Royal', a view of the house from the north-west reproduced in Omerod, G 1882. 'The monastery of St. Mary of Vale Royal', *History of Cheshire*, 2 edn. ed. T Helsby: 158



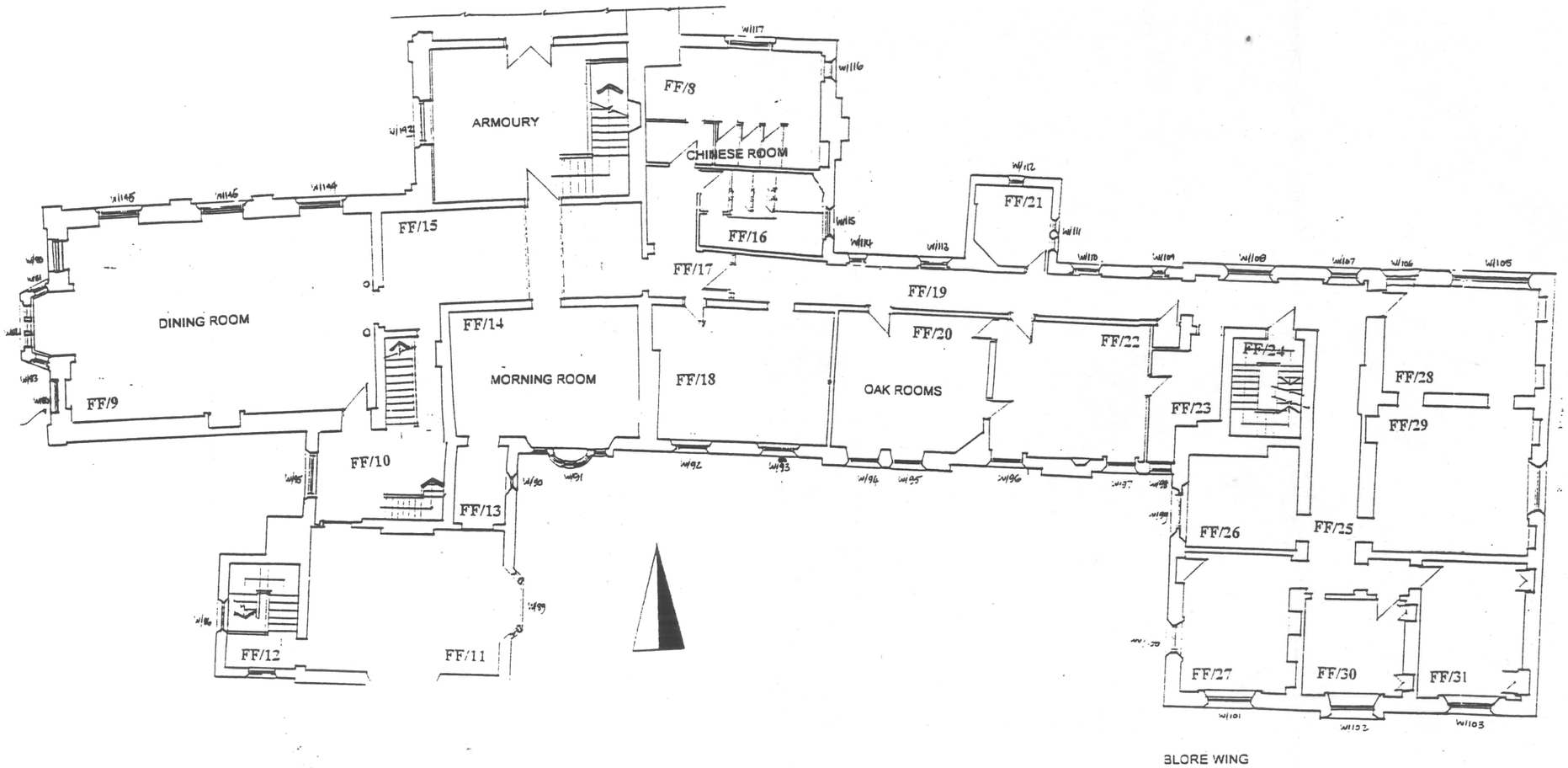
Plan of Vale Royal House in relation to the monastic plan, taken from McNeil, R and Turner, RC 1988, An Architectural and Topographical Survey of Vale Royal Abbey, *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 70, 51-79.



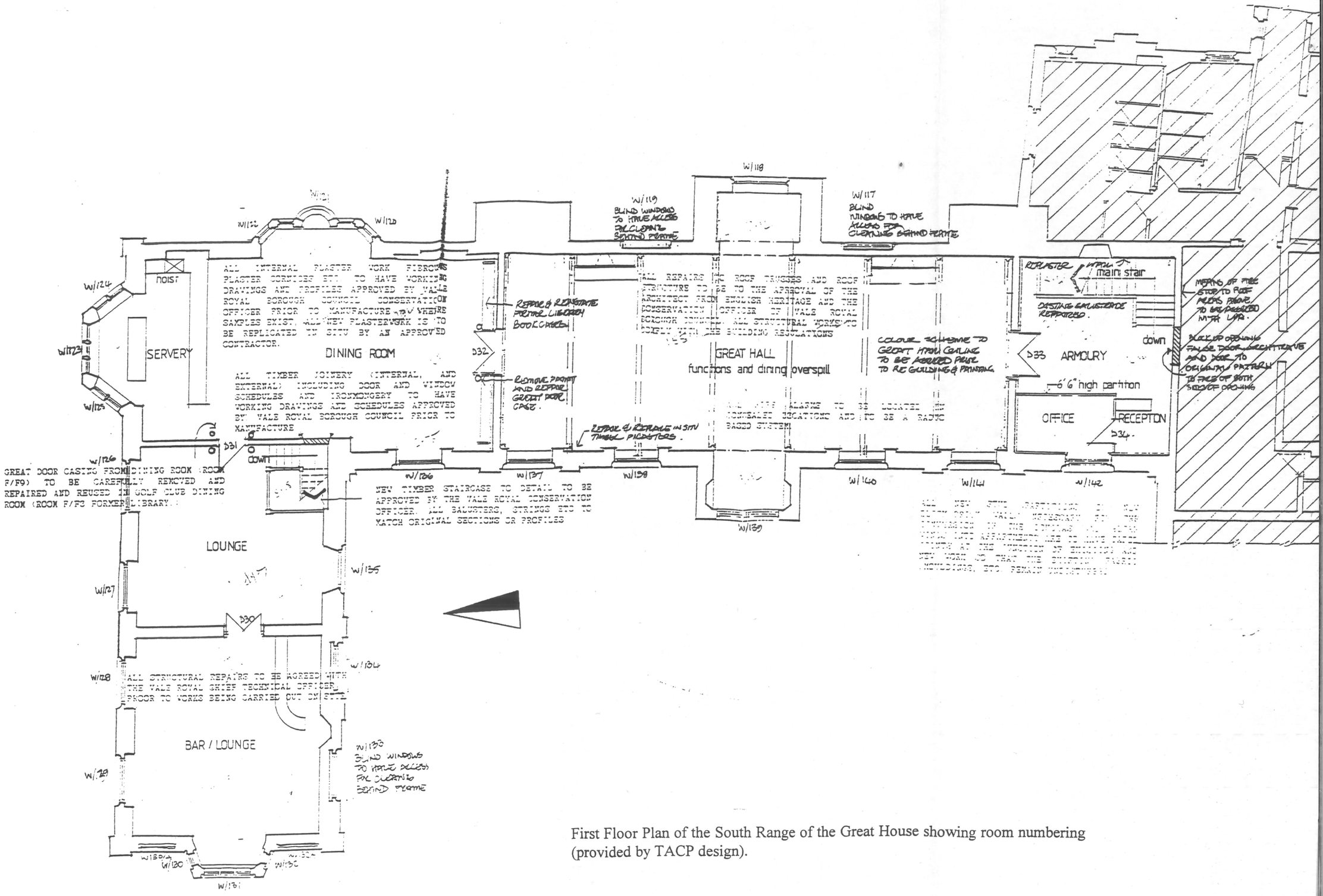
Ground Floor plan of the South Range of the Great House showing room numbering (provided by TACP Design).



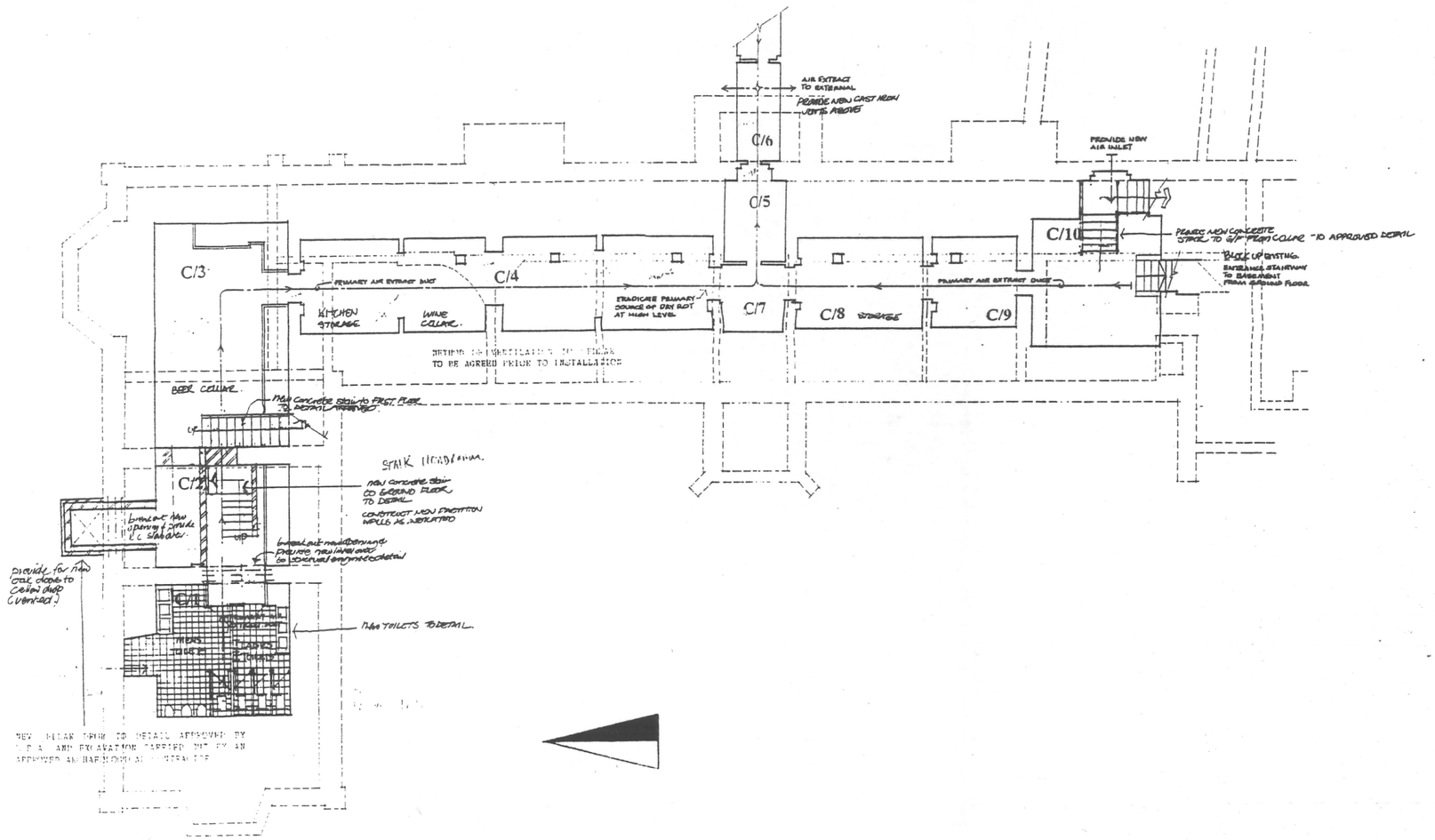
Ground Floor plan of the West Range of the Great House showing room numbering (provided by TACP design).



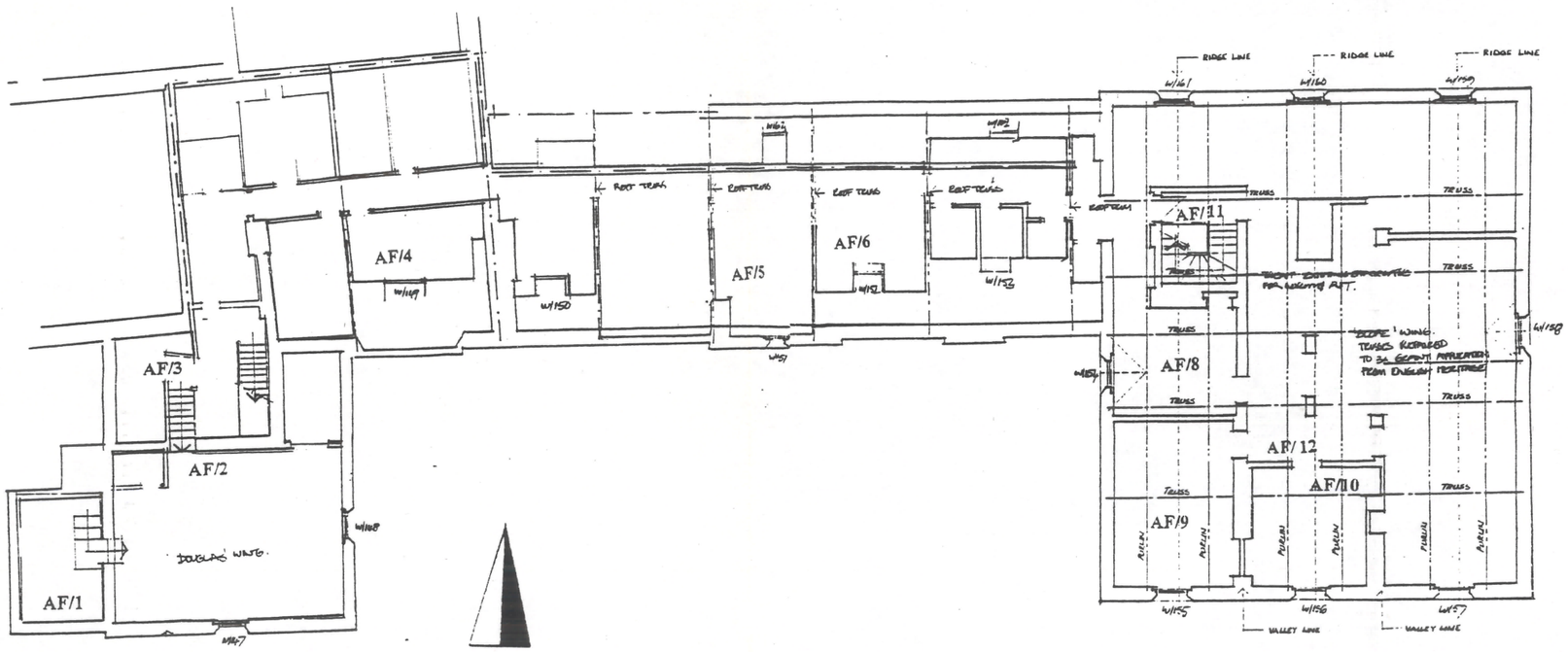
First Floor Plan of the South Range of the Great House showing room numbering (provided by TACP design).



First Floor Plan of the South Range of the Great House showing room numbering (provided by TACP design).



Cellar Plan of the West and North Ranges of the Great House showing room numbering (provided by TACP design).



Attic Plan of the South Range of the Great House showing room numbering (provided by TACP design).