Exeter College Porters' Lodge, Oxford

Historic Building Investigation and Recording

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Exeter College Porters' Lodge, Oxford

Historic Buildings Investigation and Recording

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Contents

Summary 1

1 INTRODUCTION 2

1.1 Project Background 2

1.4 Methodology 2

2 BACKGROUND HISTORY 3

2.1 Location 3

2.2 General Historical Background 3

2.3 Specific Historical Background 3

3 OUTLINE DESCRIPTION 6

3.1 Introduction 6

3.1 Interior 5

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BREIF 8

4.1 Introduction 8

4.2 Stratigraphic Description 8

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS 9

APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY 11

APPENDIX B LISTING 13

List of Figures

Figure 1 Site location map
Figure 2 Agas's 1587 map
Figure 3 Hollar's 1643 map
Figure 4 Loggan's 1675 map
Figure 5 Williams's 1733 plan
Figure 6 King's 1848 plan
Figure 7 1876 Ordnance Survey Town Plan
Figure 8 1954 Victoria County History plan
Figure 9 Montgomery Architects 1966 refurbishment plan
Figure 10 Loggan's 1675 view of Exeter College with Turl Street façade in forefront
Figure 11 Williams's 1733 view of the Turl Street façade
Figure 12 The ceiling of the Porters' Lodge

List of Plates

Plate 1 Turl Street gatehouse with Porters' Lodge to the right
Plate 2 Doorways to Staircase One and Porters' Lodge from inside the gatehouse
Plate 3 Public area and front office of Porters' Lodge before soft strip looking north
Plate 4 Back office of Porters' Lodge before soft strip looking north
Plate 5 Porters' Lodge during soft strip looking south-east
Plate 6 Porters' Lodge north wall
Plate 7 Porters' Lodge east wall
Plate 8 Recessed masonry below window on east wall
Plate 9 Exposed masonry at southern end of east wall
Plate 10 Porters' Lodge south wall
Plate 11 Chimney breast with blocked fireplace on south wall
Plate 12 South-west corner of chimney breast
Plate 13 South-west corner of chimney breast
Plate 14 Part of a brick blocking the fireplace
Plate 15 Wallpaper overlying the chimney breast
Plate 16 Porters' Lodge southern end of west wall
Plate 17 Porters' Lodge northern end of west wall
Plate 18 North and west partition walls
Plate 19 Wallpaper on the north partition wall
Plate 20 Underside of Staircase One behind the north partition wall
Plate 21 Crude stud at the south end of the west partition wall with laths above
Plate 22 Floorboards looking west
Plate 23 Signs on the floorboards of a former partition or possible reuse
Plate 24 Basement opening below southern window of west wall
Plate 25 Flagstone hearth of southern fireplace
Plate 26 Ceiling looking north-east
Plate 27 Ceiling looking south
Plate 28 Northern principal joist looking west
Plate 29 Common Joists overlapping the northern principal joist

Plate 30 Laths above east window bay
Plate 31 Boarded ceiling above south fireplace
Plate 32 Common joist with evidence of a former partition looking south-west
Plate 33 Shadows and nails from former studs
Plate 34 Signs of reuse on wall plate at southern end of east wall
Plate 35 Excavation area before the flagstones were lifted
Plate 36 Excavation area after the flagstones were lifted
Plate 37 South section of excavation
Plate 38 East section of excavation
Plate 39 Completed excavation looking north-east

Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA) has undertaken a programme of archaeological investigation at Exeter College, Oxford during refurbishment of the Porters' Lodge in the west range of the main quadrangle. The Grade I listed building was constructed in 1682 during a period of great prosperity for the college.

The investigation included a watching brief to record elements of the Porter's Lodge revealed during the soft strip and was supported by historic research. An archaeological watching brief was also undertaken to monitor excavation in the Turl Street gatehouse.

The principal discovery was that the timber ceiling was designed to be plastered and had evidence for only one stud partition wall. This suggests the space was built as one main room with a fashionable ceiling found in high status 17th century interiors. Combined with historic plans, this evidence indicates the lodge had an unknown original function before being converted into student rooms by 1733 and a porters' lodge by 1848.

Limestone masonry of varying quality was exposed in some sections of wall, but most of the plaster was not removed. An original blocked fireplace with a flagstone hearth was observed on the south wall but nothing was visible of a later fireplace in the west wall. Original wide floorboards survived predominantly in the middle of the room.

No significant archaeological remains were revealed during the excavation in the gatehouse. The excavated area consisted of disturbed layers of made ground and 20th century pipes. The lowest layer reached had greater archaeological potential and produced post-medieval pot and tile.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) has been commissioned by Exeter College, Oxford to undertake a programme of historic investigation and building recording at the Porters' Lodge in the west range of the main quadrangle. An archaeological watching brief was also required in the Turl Street gatehouse. The buildings are within the Central (University and City) Oxford Conservation Area and are Grade I listed.

1.1.2 The scheme (ref 21/02150/LBC) involved the refurbishment of the Porters' Lodge to improve access and reduce heat loss. This necessitated the removal of internal stud partitions, a false ceiling, floor coverings and modern fittings. Excavation was required in the gatehouse to install a recessed platform lift for wheelchair users. The building recording and archaeological watching brief have been undertaken as conditions of listed building consent and planning approval.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Historic building recording was undertaken at Level 2 as defined by Historic England in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice* (Lane 2016).

1.2.2 The Historic England guidance document states that Level 2 *'is a descriptive record, made in similar circumstances to Level 1 but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building which is judged not to require a more detailed record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project. Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive and may be tailored to the scope of a wider project.'*

1.2.3 Building recording was carried out in the form of an intermittent watching brief during the soft strip to record previously hidden elements of the structure. Several visits were made to the site between 22 November 2021 and 19 January 2022.

1.2.4 The descriptive record was informed by observation and investigation using historic maps, views and the principal secondary sources.

1.2.5 A photographic survey consisting of general views and specific details was made using a digital camera.

1.2.6 A plan of the Porters' Lodge made by Jessop and Cook Architects was used as the basis for the drawn record.

1.2.7 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on 16 December and 20 December 2021 to monitor the platform lift excavation in the Turl Street gatehouse.

2 BACKGROUND HISTORY

2.1 Location

2.1.1 Exeter College lies in the modern centre of Oxford and occupies a large plot fronting Turl Street to the west (fig. 1). It is bounded by Broad Street to the north, Brasenose Lane to the south and by the Sheldonian Theatre and Bodleian Library to the east. The Porters' Lodge is located on Turl Street, on the ground floor of the west range directly south of the main entrance gatehouse (pls. 1 and 2).

2.2 General Historical Background

2.2.1 Exeter College is the fourth oldest college in the University of Oxford, founded on the present site of Hertford College in 1314 by the Bishop of Exeter, Walter de Stapledon. The following year, it moved to its present location and the foundation quickly began to take shape with much of the medieval site obtained between 1315 and 1406. It sat inside the town walls and fronted Somnors Lane (now Ship Street), which ran east to west on the inside of the north wall. The site remained largely undeveloped until the 17th century but there were notable phases of building in the early years, including a chapel and library. The earliest surviving building is Palmer's Tower, an entrance gatehouse erected on Somnors Lane in 1432.

2.2.2 There were no large endowments for over two hundred years following Stapledon's murder in 1326, meaning the early college remained unusually faithful to the statutes of its founder. It continued as a poor community of twelve to fourteen scholars largely drawn from West Country clergymen, increasing to around thirty scholars in the 1550s. Growth was largely restricted by the statutes until Sir William Petre, an important statesman in the Tudor court, refounded the college in 1566 and became its benefactor. As a result, Exeter College grew rapidly in wealth and importance to become one of the leading colleges in the university by the 17th century.

2.2.3 Newfound prosperity led to the continued development of the college site during the 17th century and many significant buildings were erected. At the same time, the college expanded its territory over the eastern half of Somnors Lane and across the former town wall up to Broad Street by Loggan's 1675 map (fig. 4). This made Palmer's Tower redundant as an entrance and the façade was reorganised along Turl Street. Construction slowed down at the end of the 17th century, but the college continued to grow. The Turl Street façade was refaced to match the new buildings on Broad Street in 1834, and the chapel and other buildings were rebuilt by George Gilbert Scott between 1854 and 1860. The last notable project was the Thomas Wood building in 1964 which gave the college its current footprint.

2.3 Specific Historical Background

2.3.1 The 1578 Agas map (fig. 2) shows an entrance from Turl Street as a fenced pathway flanked to the south by a two-storey building. A gatehouse replaced the pathway in 1603, as shown on Hollar's 1643 map (fig. 3), a conspicuous display of wealth that allowed greater control over access. These buildings are depicted on Loggan's 1675 map (fig. 4) and view (fig. 10), with the latter showing the irregular southern range in need of repair.

2.3.2 It was around this time that the façade was reorganised along Turl Street and the west range of the main quadrangle became the focus of development. Loggan's view shows the 1671 northern range which, after slight alterations, the existing southern range was rebuilt to match in 1682. The Archbishop of Dublin, Narcissus Marsh funded the remodelling of the gatehouse in 1703, retaining the vaulting of the earlier building and unifying the Turl Street façade in a classical style, as shown by William's 1733 view (fig. 11).

2.3.3 Williams's 1733 plan (fig. 5) of Exeter College is the first to show the interior of the Porters' Lodge. The space is divided into a suite of three rooms accessed from the main quadrangle. The large middle room has a fireplace on the south wall and the smaller rooms are unheated. This is like a student set, which comprised of a sitting room, bedroom and study at this date. There is no entrance from the Turl Street gatehouse, which only has a doorway to a staircase in the present location of Staircase One.

2.3.4 The Turl Street façade was refaced in a gothic revival style between 1833 and 1834 by local architect Henry Jones Underwood to match his newly erected buildings on Broad Street. The effect on the Porters' Lodge exterior was that the north casement of the southern window was blocked, and an internal chimney added between the northern and central windows.

2.3.5 King's 1848 plan (fig. 6) of Exeter College is particularly useful as it includes room descriptions. The entrance is now from the gatehouse and leads to a short corridor with doorways to the porters' lodge (no. 1), closet (no. 4) and sitting room (no. 5) with access to a bedroom (no. 6). Fireplaces have been inserted into the south-west corner of the porter's lodge and on the south wall of the sitting room, but the original fireplace on the south wall of the bedroom is either blocked or missing from the plan. The porter's rooms are self-contained and can no longer be accessed from the main quadrangle. Instead, this doorway now leads to a bedroom (no. 7) of uncertain occupancy that is within the confines of the Porters' Lodge.

2.3.6 The 1876 Ordnance Survey Town Plan (fig. 7) shows further changes to the layout. The corridor with staircase, porters' lodge and closet are the same, but the partitions between the former sitting room and bedrooms have been removed. A corridor or narrow room has been created between the porter's lodge and a possible bedroom to the east. The corner fireplace within the lodge has been moved to the west wall to insert a doorway to the possible corridor. The original fireplace on the south wall of the possible sitting room has returned and there is a doorway leading towards the main quadrangle.

2.3.7 The 1954 plan contained in the *Victoria County History* volume (fig. 8) also shows an entrance from the gatehouse leading to a corridor with staircase and the probable porters' lodge. An entrance or window has been inserted between the porters' lodge and gatehouse. The layout of the southern rooms has changed again: the partition forming the corridor or narrow room has been removed and an irregular partition inserted to create two rooms. The south-west room is likely a sitting room with a doorway to the likely bedroom. The south-east room is accessed via the former closet and has no clear purpose. It is quite narrow and has a doorway leading towards the main quadrangle. Both fireplaces remain and are shown in clearer detail.

2.3.8 The 1996 refurbishment plan (fig. 9) by Montgomery Architects shows the lodge as it largely was before the current scheme. A wide archway has been created from the gatehouse and the eastern doorway now leads only to Staircase One, which has been closed off from the lodge as it was historically. Partitions have been removed to create a public area and front office subdivided by a screen. Both fireplaces are blocked, and a store has been created by partitioning the small room west of the chimney breast. The irregular partition between the southern rooms remains and the south-east room has been subdivided to create a WC and bedroom. The doorway towards the main quadrangle has been blocked.

3 OUTLINE DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Prior to work commencing, the Porters' Lodge was divided into five rooms: a public area, print room, front office, back office and WC (pls. 3 and 4). The layout was created by Montgomery Architects in 1996 and the only notable changes since were the conversion of the bedroom and store into the back office and print room respectively.

3.1.2 Most of the material removed during the current works dated to 1996, but partitions shown on the 1876 and 1954 plans were also lost. Plaster was only stripped from a few areas meaning little historic fabric was revealed on the walls. Most of the partitions were removed opening the space into a roughly L-shaped room (pl. 5).

3.2 The Interior

3.2.1 ***The north wall*** (pl. 6) has a square ashlar archway giving entry to the Porters' Lodge from the Turl Street gatehouse. A modern single pane window is angled north-east.

3.2.2 ***The east wall*** (pl. 7) has three ten-pane casement windows within a common frame. The top two panes are shaped into an arch and the others are square. A partition between the first and second windows was removed, revealing the masonry directly beneath to be slightly recessed in line with the windows (pl. 8).

3.2.3 Plaster was removed from the section of wall south of the window exposing the masonry (pl. 9). The wall was formed of roughly coursed rectangular limestone blocks of varying sizes and bonded with lime mortar. Some stones had pitted surfaces to take plaster.

3.2.4 ***The south wall*** (pl. 10) had a blocked fireplace (pl. 11). Although this is hidden beneath plaster a section of this plaster towards the top of the wall was removed, revealing the chimney breast to be made of roughly worked limestone with the west corner formed of rectangular ashlar blocks (pls. 12 and 13). These were bonded with lime mortar. Part of a red brick blocking the fireplace was exposed at floor level (pl. 14). The overlying lime plaster was hairy and retained some 20th century style wallpaper (pl. 15).

3.2.5 ***The west wall*** (pls. 16 and 17) has three sets of windows matching that on the east wall. The northern window has two ten-pane casements, the central window has three ten-pane casements, and the southern window has one ten-pane casement with a blocked opening immediately south.

3.2.6 A small section of plaster was removed beneath the southern window exposing the masonry. This was cruder than the east wall, formed of roughly shaped and uncoursed limestone with lime mortar.

3.2.7 Two stud partition walls were retained from the former WC in the north-east corner.

3.2.8 ***The north partition*** (pl. 18) retained a section of floral wallpaper which looked Victorian in style but could be earlier as it was handprinted (pl. 19). A hatch in the partition showed the treads and framing of Staircase One to be modern (pl. 20).

3.2.9 ***The west partition*** (pl. 18) had a crude stud at its southern end that was formed of three pieces of timber (pl. 21). It had marks and nail holes from six former rails and an empty mortice at the top. These relate to a doorframe removed during the soft strip.

3.2.10 ***The floor*** (pl. 22) is formed of east-west floorboards. Many are modern softwood replacements, but a lot of original boards remain, particularly towards the middle of the room. These were secured with long handmade iron nails with rectangular heads. The widths vary noticeably from 0.16m to 0.28m, with relatively uniform short lengths of around 1.70m, though one board measured 2.97m. Two boards had rectangular holes (pl. 23), indicating a former partition or possible reuse.

3.2.11 The floorboards below the southern window on the west wall were truncated to form a rectangular opening into the basement that was sealed with concrete bars (pl. 24). There was a rough hole in the wall directly above and a modern vent was visible within.

3.2.12 There was a hearth formed of three flagstones associated with the south fireplace (pl. 25). These were removed during the soft strip.

3.2.13 ***The ceiling*** (pls. 26 and 27) is made of high-quality timber and retains most of its original 17th-century fabric. It is formed of two substantial east-west principal joists that are 0.33m wide, with the west end of the northern principal joist curving c. 0.20m south (pl. 28). Between these are frequent tall common joists of regular width and spacing, measuring between 0.06m and 0.08m wide. These are tied to the beams using mortice and tenon joints with timber pegs, most of which have been lost and replaced with iron nails.

3.2.14 The principal and common joists are level, indicating they were designed to take a plaster ceiling and there were a lot of east-west lath marks. Some of the common joists were shaped to cover uneven areas of the principal joists to create a flat surface for the plaster (pl. 29). Laths survived in the east window bay and above the west partition of the former WC (pls. 30 and 21) but were removed during the soft strip.

3.2.15 The ceiling above the south fireplace was enclosed with seven short north-south boards, presumably respecting the hearth of the room above (pl. 31). Masonry was visible between a common joist and the wall plate where the internal west chimney breast was located.

3.2.16 A north-south common joist (pl. 32) was tied into the west corner of the chimney breast. This had shadows from six studs secured with iron nails driven in from above (pl. 33). It also sat lower than the other ceiling timbers. No further evidence for former partitions was seen.

3.2.17 The wall plate above the exposed section of the west wall had three empty sockets for joists (pl. 34). These were in the opposite direction to the existing joists and suggest it is a reused timber.

3.2.18 The lath and plaster ceiling of the former print room and the plasterboard ceiling on the underside of Staircase One were not removed.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken inside the Turl Street gatehouse where the refurbishment works were likely to impact buried archaeological remains. It monitored the excavation of a pit for a recessed platform lift at the foot of the steps leading to the Porters' Lodge (pls. 35 and 36).

4.1.2 The gatehouse floor is made of large flagstones of indeterminate date that are not thought to be original. Those lifted were retained to be relaid around the lift and for covering the platform surface. The area excavated was 0.50m deep and 1.60m long (N-S) by 1.25m wide (E-W).

4.2 Stratigraphic Description

4.2.1 The excavation did not reveal any significant archaeological remains. Most of the area was highly mixed layers of sandy made ground containing tarmac, brick fragments, stone rubble and fragmented animal bone. The top 0.30m overlied plastic sheeting and a north-south iron pipe with no obvious cut (pl. 37). At the northern end, this pipe had the remains of a valve which was surrounded by loose bricks. These did not form a structure and were a mixture of yellow and red machine-made 20th century bricks. The flagstone directly above the valve had a blocked opening.

4.2.2 A clear cut through the layers of made ground was visible in the east section at the northern end of the excavation (pl. 38). This contained an east-west iron pipe that turned south and ran beneath the higher pipe (pl. 39). The sandy fill within the cut contained brick fragments, oyster shell and highly fragmented animal bone, with cow ribs and sheep/goat long bones discernible.

4.2.3 The lowest layer reached by the excavation had the character of made ground but with greater archaeological potential. It continued under the Porter's Lodge steps and contained animal bone, oyster shell, post-medieval glazed pot, 19th century tile and a fragment of limestone roof tile with a nail hole.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) has undertaken a programme of archaeological investigation during the refurbishment of the Porters' Lodge within the west range of the main quadrangle at Exeter College, Oxford. This entailed a watching brief to record elements of the historic building revealed during the soft strip and an archaeological watching brief to monitor excavation for a platform lift.

5.1.2 Exeter College was founded in 1314 as a school for West Country clergymen. It was a poor institution until its refounding in 1566 began a period of great prosperity that lasted into the 17th century. Many buildings were erected during this time, including the range containing the Porters' Lodge in 1682, which replaced an earlier structure as part of the grand new frontage on Turl Street. A classical style gatehouse followed in 1703 and the whole façade was refaced in a gothic revival style in 1834.

5.1.3 The most significant feature revealed by the soft strip was the underside of the upper floor. This comprised principal and common joists of the same height, indicating it was designed to take a plaster ceiling. These became fashionable in higher status buildings in the 17th century, and it is symbolic of the college's wealth and ambition at this time. There was no evidence for the central chimney breast shown on the 1848 plan and it is almost certain this is the south fireplace drawn in the wrong location.

5.1.4 The only sign of partition was to a joist west of the south chimney breast. A partition shown on the 1876 map was removed here during the soft strip. However, the marks to the joist likely relate to a partition shown on the 1733 plan that was removed by 1848. There was no other sign of partition on the timbers, suggesting the Porters' Lodge was built as a single room from the south chimney breast to the gatehouse, likely with a doorway to a smaller south-west room. The main room was divided by 1733 but the partitions used from this date onwards were superficial. It is not clear if there was originally a staircase in the north-east corner, but it is possible this was inserted to access the first floor of the gatehouse during its 1703 remodelling.

5.1.5 Small sections of plaster removed from the walls exposed limestone masonry of varying quality. The southern half of the east wall was formed of neat rectangular blocks, while part of the west wall was made of roughly shaped and uncoursed blocks. The south chimney breast combined ashlar and roughly shaped masonry and had a flagstone hearth. The fireplace was blocked with red brick suggesting it was infilled before the 1996 refurbishment. The only evidence for the internal west chimney breast was some masonry at ceiling height; its fireplace was obscured by plaster and the hearth replaced with modern floorboards. Original floorboards survived predominately in the middle of the room, and these were of a wide width typical of the 17th century.

5.1.6 No significant archaeological remains were uncovered during the excavation for the platform lift. This took place in the Turl Street gatehouse at the foot of the steps leading to the Porters' Lodge. The area excavated consisted of disturbed layers of made ground and 20th century iron pipes. Below this was a layer without recent contamination that produced post-medieval glazed pot and a limestone tile. Food waste in the form of animal bone and oyster shell was observed throughout, and the

highly fragmented nature of the bone suggested it had been frequently disturbed. Stone and brick rubble was also present but there was no sign of the original southern range which is likely beneath the present building.

5.1.7 Overall, the evidence uncovered at Exeter College is consistent with the history of many other colleges. The 17th century was a golden age for the university when student numbers were soaring and there was a mass rebuilding of medieval structures (Elrington 1979, 74-76). This coincided with the renaissance at Exeter following its refounding and there may have been an element of catching up with the other colleges. The interior of the Porters' Lodge with its high-quality materials and fashionable plaster ceiling embodies the spirit of this time. However, it also raises the question of whether this space was originally the porters' lodge, as a plaster ceiling is an unusual addition for what was essentially servants' quarters.

5.1.8 There is unfortunately little information about collegiate servants in the 17th century, but domestic servants of this time did not typically have a designated space to call their own. Sleeping arrangements were generally ad hoc with servants using temporary beds in passages and public rooms (Vickery 2009, 38). This lasted well into the 19th century until overtaken by the Victorian era's specialisation and separation, as exemplified by the six designated spaces on the 1848 plan.

5.1.9 There appear to have been few formal collegiate servants in the 17th century. The statutes for neighbouring Brasenose College list only nine, including one porter who was also the barber, and some of these roles could be fulfilled by students (Buchan 1898, 41). Indeed, many duties were undertaken by the lowest ranks of students known as battelers and servitors until the mid-18th century.

5.1.10 Given the probable lack of formal servant space before the 19th century, it is doubtful the rooms shown on the 1733 plan belonged to a porter. The archaeological evidence indicates the space was built in 1682 as one large room with access to a smaller south-west room. It is unclear what purpose these served but they appear to have been converted into a student set by 1733. The evidence from Brasenose and other colleges suggests poorer students could fulfil servant roles, but such students typically occupied the worst accommodation in garrets. A porter, student or otherwise, would man the gate but apparently slept elsewhere in the college. It is uncertain when the space became the Porters' Lodge, but it was probably in the early 19th century. The plans show frequent internal modifications between 1848 and 1996, but always maintaining the same elements of work and domestic space until the 21st century.

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Cartographic Sources

Ralph Agas's Map of the City of Oxford (1578)

Wenceslaus Hollar's Map of the City of Oxford (1643)

David Loggan's Map of the City of Oxford (1673)

William Williams's Plan of Exeter College (1733)

Isaac Taylor's Map of the City of Oxford (1750)

James King's Plan of Exeter College (1848)

Ordnance Survey 1:500 (ten-foot) Map of Oxford (1876)

Victoria County History Plan of Exeter College (1954)

Montgomery Architects Plan of Exeter College Porter's Lodge (1996)

Pictorial Sources

David Loggan's View of Exeter College (1673)

William Williams's View of Exeter College (1733)

APPENDIX B LISTING

B.1.1 The Porters' Lodge is in the west range of the main quadrangle and is Grade I listed. The list entry reads:

B.1.2 EXETER COLLEGE 1. 1485 Main Quadrangle West range SP 5106 NW 8/150G 12.1.54. 1 2. (1) The range North of the Turl Street gate, 1671. Refaced 1833-4 in Bath stone. (2) The range North of (1) rebuilt 1682. Refaced 1833-4 in Bath stone. (3) Turl Street gatehouse and South West angle up to the Hall, rebuilt 1701-3 partly at cost of Narcissus Marsh, Archbishop of Dublin and Armagh. Refaced with rest of the West range 1833-4 in Bath stone by H J Underwood, architect.

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