

The Historic Environment Consultancy



CONSERVATION STATEMENT

For

Arbery's
11-12 Market Place
Wantage
Oxfordshire

Planning Reference: WAN/16246/33-LB

National Grid Reference: SU398878

Peter Wardle BSc MA PhD
&
Colin Lacey BA MSc PlfA

07/12/2009

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1. Introduction

This report has been commissioned to comment on a specific aspect, the date of a partition wall at the above property. This follows a request from the conservation officer during consultation for planning application WAN/16246/33-LB. The building has been studied in some detail on three previous occasions and the following reports have been produced:

1. Rhodes & Steane - 1998 report for Arbery Building Preservation Trust
2. Oxford Archaeology - 2001 Historic Building Investigation
3. Birmingham Archaeology - 2009 Historic Building Report

The building is a ?C16/C17 timber framed building with a Victorian brick façade.

The Rhodes and Steane report makes the following comments, concerning the room in question:

'G04 "Sitting Room" This is a panelled room with a lofty ceiling dating from the mid 18th century with a 19th century fireplace inserted. There are 20th century French windows leading into the conservatory probably replacing an 18th century window overlooking the garden. There is a fine framed and panelled door.'

'G-04 "Dining Room" (?Parlour)

Walls panelled, early 18th century pine panelling, above and below a dado rail, door to passage at SW corner permanently closed, door furniture removed, north wall has apparently secondary partitions at each side of door, glazed in upper portions (now painted over).'

The current listed building consent contains a proposal to remove part of the northern partition wall. Concern has been expressed over this proposal given the early date that has been attributed to this panelling.

Eighteenth century pine panelling is rare (examples of such panelling are appended). The Rhodes and Steane report gives no indication of what the evidence is for this panelling being eighteenth century. Pine was not commonly used in building until the late nineteenth century when cheap imports were available from Scandinavia.

This report has been prepared to consider this panelling and partition wall in detail and in particular:

1. The date of the panelling.
2. The date of the "secondary partition" wall.

The same report also notes:

'It is evident that the foot of the stairs has been cut about and re-rigged. At present it goes round quarter turns. Evidently (Mr Arbery's suggestion) it started in room GO4 and indeed led directly from this. The rail of the last piece as it descends to the hall is of a different wood. The balusters and newels of the lowest stretch are of late Victorian in design.'

What Rhodes and Steane appear to be suggesting is that the partition wall must be contemporary with or later than the alteration to the stairs described above, that is, the date of the partition is 1890 or later. This suggests that it is of lesser importance and it is more debateable if this wall should be retained. It is noted that removal of a similar partition wall has previously been authorised.

This report considers in detail the statements made in the Steane and Rhodes report.

2. Background

2.1 Location

The site is located on the southern side of the Market Place in the Oxfordshire town of Wantage. The general site location is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: General site location (not to scale)

2.2 General Description of the Building

Arbery's is so called due to its occupation throughout the greater part of the 20th century by the Arbery family who ran a drapery / department store in the premises from the turn of the 20th century until 1995. In later years, the lower floors of the building were converted into a public house, given the name 'The Arbery'.

The building is a multi-phase building with origins as a pair of 16th century houses facing the market square.

The building has four floors including a basement. The ground floor is split between two levels, c. 0.75m higher at the rear. At the time of writing, the rear (southern) part of the first floor and the entire second floor have been converted to residential flats. The remaining northern part of the first floor, the entire ground floor and basement formed the public house which closed c. 2007-8.

A large yard is present to the rear of the property, used as a beer garden for the public house.



Plate 1: Front (north) elevation, Arbery's

2.3 Sequence of Construction

In the time between the original construction of 11 & 12 Market Place and the present day, the building has gradually evolved with the addition of extensions extending the property to the south.

The original form of the building was a pair of houses c. 1550-1600, located on burgage plots running south from the southern side of Market Place.

In the 17th century, a north-south range was added to the rear of the western house.

The 18th century saw the construction of north-south range at the rear of the eastern property, parallel to that of the western. This had higher ceilings. Following this, the building was refaced.

In the 19th century, the shop front was added. The conservatory was constructed in the latter part of the century. A large amount of fixtures and fittings were installed. In the period between 1890 and 1900, the building underwent a large-scale remodelling coinciding with its purchase by the Arbery family.

Very little change occurred during the 20th century. At the end of the century / start of the 21st, the building was again re-worked as a bar and residential units.

The date at which the two properties were joined is unclear, although it is thought to have occurred in the 18th century.

2.4 Listed Building Description

Building Name:	11 And 12	LBS Number:	251207
Parish:	Wantage	Grade:	II
District:	Vale Of White Horse	Date Listed:	22 April 1950
County:	Oxfordshire	Date Delisted:	
Postcode:	OX12 8AB	National Grid Reference:	SU3981587882

Listing Text:

SU 3987 NE WANTAGE MARKET PLACE

(South side)

542/9/111

Nos.11 and 12

22.04.1950

GV II

Town house, now house and shop. Circa late C16 and C17 timber-frame; remodelled and faced in brick in circa early C18. Flared header bond brick, red brick quoins and dressings; right side wall in Flemish bond brick with flared headers; Welsh slate roof; brick stacks. L-plan. 3 storeys; 4-window range.

Shop front of c.1890-1900 has twisted columns to acanthus leaf capitals and acanthus leaf consoles to moulded cornice; 2 double-leaf doors with cut-glass panels. Gauged brick segmental arches with decorative keystones to mid C19 horned sashes. Moulded wood cornice.

Hipped roof; lateral and end stacks. Similar 3-window range with C18 doorway to right side wall; similar one-bay block extending from right side wall has 6-panelled door with overlight and moulded brackets to flat hood.

To rear is 2-storey and attic 2-window range, probably C17, of Flemish bond brick with flared headers, double-gabled tile roof and brick lateral and rear stacks. Rear door has late C19 stained glass panels. C18 sash, late C19 border sashes with coloured glass borders and full dormer with 2-light leaded casement to left, side wall.

Interior: Late C19 dog-leg stairs with iron balusters adjoining pneumatic Lampson-Paragon tube. First-floor room to left has panelling to left side and to rear. Rear wing has early C18 quarter-turn stairs with moulded balusters. Fine late C19 fireplace with tiled surround to rear room.

INTERIOR: The brick cladding conceals substantial remains of a 3-storeyed [probably jettied] timber-frame, of L-shaped plan, with a tenoned-purlin roof structure with tie-beam and collar trusses with kneed principals.

Listing NGR: SU3981387869

3. The Panelled Room

The panelled room is entered via a doorway slightly west of centre of the northern wall. No door is fitted to this opening. The room is roughly square in plan and all walls are panelled. A small sample of wood was recovered from the southern wall and identified as pine.

The panels have been painted in a cream colour. This is thought to date to the use of the building as a public house and is in no way historic.

The floor of the room is of modern wooden boards and the ceiling is rendered and painted.

The panelling in the room is of the 'Large-Panel' type and takes the form of a panelled dado with dado rail fitted at c. 0.8m from floor level. Above this, rectangular panels the same width as the square panels below run to c. 0.15m below ceiling level.

A cornice tops the eastern and western walls and part of the southern wall and at the base of these three walls a timber skirting is located.

The northern wall also has skirting but no cornice. The doorframe is of timber and is moulded in a 19th century style. Above the door, a square panel is located. West of the door, three vertical glazed lights are located above a round moulding at a height of 1.9m. Below these, two panels run the remaining length of the wall. No dado is present. This pattern is mirrored on the eastern side of the door, although here the glass in the westernmost light has been painted on its southern side, obscuring the view of a structural timber post located immediately to the north. These panels, the door and its associated over-panel, and the panels to the west of the doorway make up the 'secondary panels' noted in the Rhodes & Steane report.

The remaining part of the northern wall, east of the 'secondary panels', follows the established 'primary panelling' pattern of skirting, dado, dado rail, rectangular panel, although has no cornice. This pattern of panels is repeated twice before the corner of the room is encountered.

The areas of 'secondary panelling' have a plain reverse, with the moulding of the door frame continuing, whereas the reverse of the 'primary panelling' is distinctly different, being divided into a pair vertical plain panels running from floor to ceiling matching the spacing of the internal panelling.

The eastern wall begins at the northern end with a full-sized panel, followed by a far narrower example. South of this, a Victorian fireplace with cast iron grate is fitted, over which a large rectangular panel fills the space between the mantle shelf and coving. South of the fireplace, a further narrow panel is located followed by a 1.9m tall door into a cupboard formed by the alcove left beside the chimneybreast. The cupboard door, hinged on its northern side, has panels mirroring those on the wall either side, minus dado rail, and is secured with a modern catch on its southern side. A further panel is situated above the door. South of the door, a narrow panel of the established form completes the eastern elevation.

The southern wall features a central opening to which double doors were fitted, leading into what was originally a conservatory area. The doors are now absent although the locations of previous butt hinges are still very much apparent. A top-hung window is located at the top of the opening, again fitted with a pair of butt hinges on its upper face. The window is held from swinging by a pair of sliding bolts. In its lower face, the window frame has a pair of central holes into which further bolts could be slid to retain the doors in a closed position. The window has a pair of single pane lights.

It is apparent that the frame present is somewhat smaller than the original opening in this wall, owing to the cornice on each side ending a short distance from the opening. Noticeable joins are also present in the skirting at corresponding points.

There are two regular sized panels east of the opening, whereas to the west, three vastly disproportionate panels are found - immediately west of the opening, a very narrow panel has been installed to fill the space created by narrowing the door opening. A regular sized panel and finally a wider example follow this. It is of note that a new narrow panel had been fabricated to cover the gap left west of the door opening, whereas to the east, the panels appear to have both been altered to provide an even spacing.

At the southern end of the western wall, a further door opening is present leading to lavatories, a fire exit and stairs to the cellar. Again, no door is present. North of this, a slightly narrower than usual panel is located, followed by three more regular sized panels. The western wall is bowed slightly at the level of the dado rail.

In the southwest corner, a modern convex mirror is present. Also present around the head of the walls are hooks from which picture hanging rods were suspended.

The interior of the cupboard in the southeast corner of the room is painted in a pale green-blue colour. Two shelves are fitted, the lower straight-edged, located c. 0.75m above the ground. The upper shelf, situated at c. 1.25m from the ground, is a curved L-shape, running along the northern and eastern walls of the cupboard.

Above the level of the lower shelf, a recess is present in the eastern wall of the cupboard. The outer corner of this recess features a rounded edge and a damaged finish indicates this wall is constructed of red brick in a lime mortar matrix, which has been rendered before painting. This recess is thought to represent a blocked window.

Above the top shelf on the recessed part of the wall, a modern rectangular aperture is located cut roughly through the wall. Two ventilation ducts are present within. Again, in the aperture, bricks are visible. These bricks, like those mentioned above do not appear to be hand-made, therefore a Victorian or later date must be attributed to this wall. The wall blocking the window is of double thickness at this point.

Externally, there are no traces of the blocked window. The wall is constructed of Victorian or later bricks laid in Flemish bond with decorative vitrified headers. It is thought that this wall was re-skinned in the Victorian period, possibly coinciding with the blocking of the window.

It is also noted that at the foot of the wall in the cupboard, a very plain painted skirting board is apparent along the base of the wall. This is considered again to have a Victorian or later date.



Plate 2: Northern elevation, panellled room



Plate 3: Eastern elevation, panellled room



Plate 4: Southern elevation, panelled room



Plate 5: Western elevation, panelled room



Plate 6: 'Secondary panelling' west of doorway



Plate 7: 'Secondary panelling' east of doorway



Plate 8: Cupboard, northeast aspect



Plate 9: Cupboard, southeast aspect



Plate 10: Detail of exposed brickwork, cupboard



Plate 11: Detail of air vents, cupboard



Plate 12: Reverse of wall showing area of blocked window (surrounding air vents)



Plate 13: Detail of skirting, cupboard



Plate 14: Victorian fireplace, east wall



Plate 15: Detail of light over southern door



Plate 16: 'Secondary panel' west of doorway



Plate 17: 'Secondary panel' east of doorway



Plate 18: Detail of reverse of 'primary panelling'

4. The Staircase

The staircase present in the room to the north of the panelled room is now a redundant feature. Previously it gave access to the first floor at this point, although following the conversion of upper floor rooms into separate flats, this access has been blocked at ceiling level. The staircase, however, has been preserved in-situ.

The treads and risers of the staircase are carpeted in modern carpet. The balusters are painted in white gloss, whereas the handrails and newels are plain wood.

Beneath the staircase, a further flight of steps leads down to the cellar. This is accessed via a door beneath the first floor landing and is separated from the ground floor room by timber panelling.

The staircase takes a winder form and is constructed in two phases. The original phase of construction, the upper part, features brackets in a late 18th-early 19th century style usually attributed to open-string staircases. It is possible that this staircase was originally open-strung and the underside was subsequently panelled in order to enclose the cellar stairs. The balusters of the original phase are stylistically dated to the 18th century.

The second phase of staircase construction is marked by a change in the style of the balusters to a Victorian style, and a change in the material used for the handrail from a darker hardwood to a much paler timber. The newel posts at the foot of the staircase are also stylistically late 19th century.

It appears that the ninety-degree bend in the staircase was installed in the 19th century and it is suggested that the original form was a straight flight of steps terminating in the panelled room.



Plate 19: Eastern aspect, staircase



Plate 20: Detail of original part of staircase



Plate 21: Detail of later part of staircase

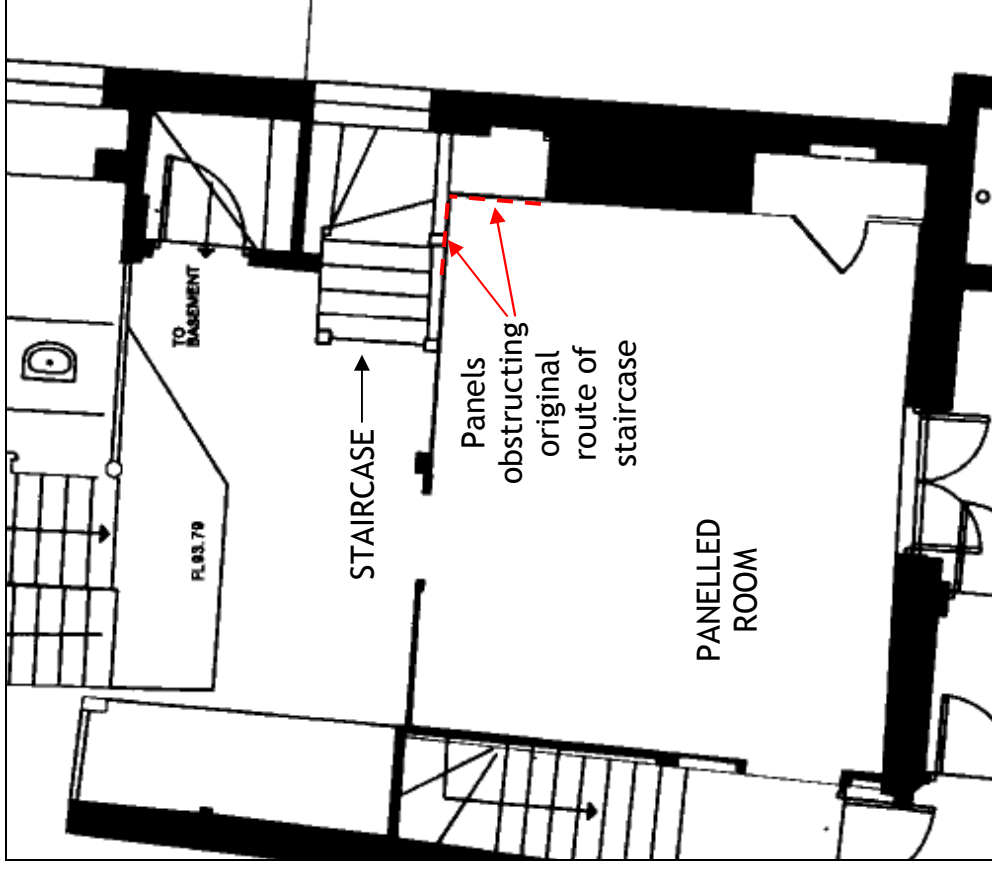


Figure 2: Plan of panelled room and staircase

5. Conclusion

Evidence that the panelled room is 18th century in origin is as follows:

- The room is in part of the house that is considered to have been constructed in the 18th century.
- Large-panel panelling is a characteristic feature of the late 17th - late 18th centuries and went out of favour soon after.

Evidence that the panelled room is later in origin is as follows:

- The panelling is of pine, a timber that was not widely used during the 18th century.
- The staircase could not have followed its original route whilst the room was panelled. The foot of the staircase would have ended at the chimneybreast in the panelled room and the gap behind the panelling is not considered to be large enough to accommodate the full width of the staircase at this point.
- The cornice along the top of the eastern wall is continuous and there are no indications of breaks at the northern side of the chimneybreast suggesting the panelling was not installed on this wall until the staircase had been altered in the 19th century.
- The cupboard in the southeast corner has a rendered, painted wall behind with skirting and a possible blocked window. It is unusual for the interior of a cupboard to have skirting and a blocked window, suggesting the room was in use for some time before the panelling was fitted.
- The presence of machine-made bricks in the rear wall of the cupboard suggests this wall was built in the 19th century. It is considered logical that the panelling was fitted after the construction of the wall, rather than the other way around.

Evidence that the 'secondary panelling' is more recent:

- The cornice does not continue along the northern wall
- The form of panelling does not match the rest of the room
- The large size of the glass panes at the top of the 'secondary panelling' hints at a late 19th century date - plate glass was introduced post 1837, before which smaller panes were used. In 1851, window tax was abolished and in 1857 the tax on glass was abolished. These factors contributed to the decrease in price and subsequent wider use of glass.
- Other works have occurred to the panelling on the southern wall at some time after its erection, suggesting craftsmen were capable of producing similar panelling at a later date.

It is suggested therefore that the 'primary panelling' dates to the late 19th - early 20th century, after the alteration of the staircase. It is likely that this coincides with the 1890 - 1900 refit when the Arbery family took on the building.

It is clear that the 'secondary panelling' is a later addition to the room, likely to have been installed to narrow a much wider opening. A precise date is at present unknown, although it is thought to be an early 20th century addition.

Reference

Hall L. 2005. *Period House Fixtures & Fittings*. Newbury: Countryside Books

6. Appendix: Gazetteer of 18th century pine panelled buildings

This gazetteer has been compiled from English Heritage's *Listed Buildings Online* - a searchable database of all listed properties in England. The search has provided the following 33 records of Georgian buildings which feature pine panelling, against a count of 201171 Georgian buildings as a whole.

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Online
ID