

**An Archaeological / Historical Report relating to
alterations carried out since July 1996
at Theobalds Green Farm, Heathfield nr Hailsham, East Sussex**

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prepared by David Martin FSA, IHBC, MIFA

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL REPORT
RELATING TO ALTERATIONS CARRIED OUT SINCE
JULY 1996 AT THEOBALDS GREEN FARM, HEATHFIELD,
Nr HAILSHAM, EAST SUSSEX**

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1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 1996 the Field Archaeology Unit of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Maguire to undertake an archaeological interpretative survey of their property, known as Theobalds Green Farm House. The survey was carried out jointly by me and Barbara Martin (Historic Buildings Officers employed by The Field Archaeology Unit, University College London) on 10th July 1996, under FAU Project Number 480. An archive copy of the report which resulted from the recording work is lodged at East Sussex Record Office under the reference ESRO HBR1/1257.
- 1.2 Late in 2006 Mrs Maguire contacted Wealden District Council in respect of certain alterations which had then recently been carried out within the house. Mrs Maguire subsequently made available to Wealden District Council a copy of our Archaeological Interpretative Survey (ref ESRO HBR1/1257). As a result of the conversations between her and the council, on 23rd November 2006, Mr Kavanagh of Wealden District Council contacted me (in my capacity as Historic Buildings Officer with FAU, which currently trades as Archaeology South-East) with a view to me and Barbara Martin attending a site meeting and writing a report in respect to all identifiable changes made to historical fabric within the house since the date of our survey carried out in 1996. The arrangements were confirmed by letter dated 2nd January 2007, to which was attached a brief outlining the requirements as follows:
- Assess any changes which may have been carried out since 1996 in terms of their impact on historic fabric. This is to include as far as possible any repairs or alterations where these may not be immediately

visible or accessible (e.g. where covered by modern plaster).

- Assess the extent to which mitigation strategies could be implemented in relation to any such changes which have, or may have affected historic fabric. 'Mitigation' would not be applicable for items or areas where historic fabric has been removed, or damaged beyond reasonable repair (in terms of percentage retention of historic fabric), or where reconstruction would be the only option.

The site inspection was carried out by us on 16th January 2007 in the presence of Mrs Maguire and Mr Kavanagh. In addition to a copy of our 1996 report, we brought along a copy of the original site survey notes and a nine-minute video of the house made at the time of the original survey. Mrs Maguire made available a series of photographs taken whilst the recent repairs and alterations were in progress. Access was given to all parts of the house. My assessment of the alterations and their impact upon historical fabric is given in section 2 below.

- 1.3 It should be stressed that the assessment which follows is my considered view based upon the information available to me. The assessment is offered based upon my knowledge and experience of such buildings accumulated over 35+ years and is intended as advice. Many of the views which inform the conservation of historical buildings are to some extent subjective – particularly with regards to more recent extensions and alterations – and thus it should be stressed that there is no guarantee that the opinions expressed within this document will be endorsed by the local planning authority.
- 1.4 For the purposes of context, given below is a brief overview of the development of the house based upon the original survey. For a full account of the building see the Archaeological Interpretative Survey (Ref ESRO HBR1/1257) prepared by us in July 1996.
- The earliest phase of the present house dates from 1729, the construction date being commemorated by two inscribed bricks on the first-floor fireplace and by a plaque built into the chimney: all three bear the date 1729 and the initials T^RS. At the time of initial survey in 1996 the dates on the fireplace were masked by thick paint and that on the chimney was (and still is) in a worn state: the latter was erroneously considered to be either 1722 or 1732. In its initial form the house comprised a three-cell, two-storeyed main range with axial chimney and a rear outshut interrupted by a small central rear range. It was constructed of brick with some internal timber framing.
 - Around 1800 the northern end of the rear outshut was removed and replaced by a small two-storeyed rear wing aligned parallel to the main

range. This addition incorporates a pretty first-floor fireplace decorated with swags. At about the same date the southern service room was sub-divided into two.

- A number of alterations were carried out in the 19th century, the principal of which was the extension of the original central rear range eastwards so as to better integrate it with the c1800 addition.
- Apart from some recent restoration, there appeared to have been minimal 20th century alterations. The external brickwork was by 1996 (and still is) fully tile hung, but whether this was carried out in the 19th or 20th centuries is unclear.

2. THE ASSESSMENT

2.1 Front Range: Northern Ground-Floor Room (original Parlour)

Both the survey notes and video made at the time of the 1996 survey indicate that the ceiling joists within this room were at that time exposed to view, though, as the report notes, 'they were originally intended to be masked by a plastered ceiling, . . .'. This fact was indicated both by the plain nature of the timbers and the presence of nail holes in their soffits. Although the central girder remains exposed to view, the joists are now masked by a skim-coated plasterboard ceiling fixed to the underside of the joists, thereby restoring the original appearance. Although this modification represents an alteration to the house since 1996, I do not consider it to have caused any damage to historical fabric and is entirely reversible. Given the original appearance has been restored, it is my opinion that removal of the ceiling would not be desirable. I note that plasterboard (rather than lath and plaster) has been used for the modern ceiling but, given that the original ceiling had already been destroyed, this does not, personally, cause me concern.

2.2 Front Range: Central Ground-Floor Room (original Hall)

Regarding the inglenook fireplace in this room, the 1996 report states 'This is well proportioned with a slightly cambered, chamfered timber lintel. At some date the lintel was partially hidden by a fascia board and mantle shelf, though it is not possible to ascertain whether this was an original feature or an addition - it has been removed. The brick jambs are 'banded' in that they incorporate panels of both red and black bricks. Away from the front face, the fireplace incorporates some stone.'. The 'banded' brickwork is further indicated in the survey notes and is visible in the video taken in 1996, but is today masked from view by a hard plaster. This, therefore, represents an alteration since 1996. Similar banding occurs on the brickwork of the

fireplace on the first floor above, though in 1996 the brickwork at this level was masked by a thick layer of paint which has been very carefully and painstakingly removed since then, without causing any damage to the brickwork. My memory of the ground-floor fireplace is quite clear, as is my wife's memory of this feature. When we viewed it in 1996 the brickwork was mostly in a poor state: the faces of many of the bricks were damaged, some bricks were broken, and most were friable, though some areas were in better condition than others. They had been exposed by a previous owner who had roughly hacking off an applied plaster covering. The evidence as to the form of this plaster covering is contradictory: the adjacent architrave and other finishings suggest that it was applied at a relatively early date and therefore ought to have been a soft lime-based render, though the state of the brickwork as left after its removal suggests that it was in fact a hard cement-based render - perhaps the latter had replaced the former. It was because of the poor condition of the brickwork that, reluctantly, the present owners had it re-rendered. The modern covering seems to be hard, though it is likely to be no worse than that which had been removed. It would be nice to think the brickwork could have been left exposed, but such a view would be utopian: I feel certain the brickwork would have continued to crumble. In as much as the work undertaken to the fireplace by Mr & Mrs Maguire has returned the feature to its mid 20th-century condition, I do not consider the actions have damaged the historical fabric: the damage had already happened.

2.3 Front Range: 2 No. Southern Ground-Floor Rooms (Original Service Room)

This is one of the two areas of the house where considerable work has been undertaken since 1996.

The 1996 report gives little detail concerning this area, principally because little historical fabric was visible at the time of inspection. The ceiling was plastered and crossed by an intermediate crossbeam. Both of these features remain unaltered. In c1800 (but not necessarily contemporary with the addition of the new rear range) a partition had been added beneath the crossbeam in order to divide the room into two: this cut across the line of the front window. This partition is described in the 1996 report as follows:

' . . . of regular-stud construction incorporating raking struts at each end. Originally it was continuous across the entire width of the building, but a doorway (now [1996] blocked) was subsequently cut through its western end. On the northern face the partition's construction was [always] entirely masked by lath and plaster, but on the southern face the studs and struts were left exposed.'

The report also mentions the (assumed) original (1729) panelled front door, which had been refixed into the door opening between this area and the rear lean-to outshut. It is thus described:

'Although the [front] door has been replaced, the original has been reused within a widened opening between the southern service room and rear lean-to. The bottom of the door had rotted and has been roughly repaired. The heavily-framed door is of six panels - a pair of centrally-placed square panels with a pair of rectangular panels above and below. The panels are raised and fielded and the leading edges of the stiles, muntins and rails are cyma moulded. On the internal face the door is counter-boarded, the counter-boarding being applied diagonally. The shaped back plate of the original knocker, together with the knocker stud survive *in situ*, as too do the marks of the latch and the location of the wooden-cased lock. The original hinges also remain, indicating that the door was hung upon the southern jamb of the frame and opened inwards.'

No other details are given of this area, though the video taken in 1996 and the photographs in the possession of Mrs Maguire allow a few other pieces of information to be gleaned (see below).

In 1996 the floor was (at least in part) of brick: this has been lifted and replaced by the present floor. The internal face of the brick external walls was plastered. To judge from both the 1996 video and the photographs in the possession of Mrs Maguire this appears to have consisted of a thin skim coat of lime-based plaster/render applied directly to the brickwork. The present covering is a modern, hard plaster, which is already cracking and showing water damage. The eastern wall of the bay, which divided it from the adjacent lean-to outshut and which incorporated the reused front door, was of brickwork (date unknown). Since 1996 this wall has been totally rebuilt in modern materials and the reused door has been removed and badly damaged - it currently lies in an outhouse with the central section broken. Despite the description of the inserted c1800 partition given in the report, there is no drawn record. However, its form and constructional details are shown clearly in photographs in the possession of Mrs Maguire. This partition has been taken down and rebuilt to a different, but old-looking design using secondhand material.

The building work summarized in 2.3 above has had a significant impact upon historical fabric. The individual elements are dealt with below:

- There is no doubt in my mind that both the brick ground floor covering and the plaster/render on the external walls needed repair, but the repairs to both have been undertaken with a disregard of the listed

status of the building and cannot (in my view) be regarded as like-for-like repairs. In particular, it is clear that there are problems with the plasterwork, though it falls outside my expertise to suggest how this can be corrected. With regards to both these features, the damage to the historical fabric has already been done.

- The condition of the brickwork which formed the eastern (internal) wall of the bay (*ie* the room as sub-divided) is unknown to me and therefore I cannot make a judgement either as to whether it was historically sensitive or whether it was beyond repair. Its reconstruction has resulted in loss of potentially historic fabric but, given the lack of available detail regarding the form of the original, no mitigation measures can be recommended. It was, of course, the opening within this wall which was fitted with the reused front door. Although removed, this door remains on the premises, though in a severely damaged state. Here there are two possible options with regards to mitigation, of which, if practical, the first is considered by me to be the preferable. This is that, if possible, the door should be carefully repaired to conservation standards and returned to the location it occupied in 1996. The second is that the door be recorded to adequate standards and a record of it be placed with the copy of the interpretative survey currently held at ESRO.

- As with the features discussed above, I have no doubt that the partition inserted in c1800 to divide the original service room into two was in need of repair, but, to judge from the photographs in Mrs Maguire's possession I do not think it likely that total replacement was necessary. Even if replacement was necessary, this does not excuse its replacement to a different, though (superficially) historical-looking design. The c1800 design of this partition clearly indicated that it did not originally incorporate a door at its eastern end - the intruded doorway cut through a raking strut. The present design suggests that the doorway was original to the partition and is therefore misleading. Furthermore, the replacement incorporates the wrong number of studs, the studs are of the wrong scantling, and they support plasterboard rather than lath and plaster. These variations mean that, even if the partition's reconstruction can be justified on the grounds of poor condition, the present work does not represent like-for-like repair. In the interests of historical integrity it is my opinion that mock historical reconstructions should always be avoided. With regards to mitigation strategies, it seems to me there are three alternative options available.
 - 1) Remove the partition altogether, thereby returning the room to its 1729 form.
 - 2) Rebuild the partition using totally modern sawn softwood and plasterboard-clad timberwork so as not to mislead.

- 3) Using the photographic evidence, accurately reconstruct the partition in new hardwood of appropriate scantling, using traditional methods, including laths fixed to the northern face only with lime plaster applied to both faces of the laths.

Which of these options is adopted will depend upon others.

2.4 Rear Lean-to Outshut - southern room and toilet

The modifications to the shared wall between this area and the southern bay of the front range have already been adequately dealt with. The first-floor section of this wall remains totally in the form it existed in 1996. The rear wall of the outshut has been lined in some way, but, given that this was a half-brick thick wall and has been retained within the modification, this does not seem unreasonable. In 1996 the north-eastern corner of this area was occupied by a toilet with a plastered skeeling, and this remains the case, though the present toilet enclosure is a replacement. However, there is clear photographic evidence to indicate that the toilet enclosure was in any case of 20th-century construction, and thus its reconstruction has not damaged historical fabric. One photograph taken during the work shows a board partition dividing this area from the room to the north, and this partition has either been covered or rebuilt. This too was not of antiquity so, regardless of its fate, it is not considered by me to have been historically sensitive. In fact, the work in this section of outshut has not, in my opinion, caused any damage - the area still retains both its character and the historical elements of its construction.

2.5 Generally

Based upon the information available to me, a careful inspection of the house indicates that no other alterations or repairs which effect historically sensitive fabric have been undertaken.

This document compiled by

David Martin FSA IHBC MIFA
Senior Historic Buildings Officer
Archaeology South-East
1 West Street
Ditchling
East Sussex
BN6 8TS

Dated 26th January 2007

Head Office
Units 1 & 2
2 Chapel Place
Portslade
East Sussex BN41 1DR
Tel: +44(0)1273 426830 Fax:+44(0)1273 420866
email: fau@ucl.ac.uk
Web: www.archaeologyse.co.uk



London Office
Centre for Applied Archaeology
Institute of Archaeology
University College London
31-34 Gordon Square, London, WC1 0PY
Tel: +44(0)20 7679 4778 Fax:+44(0)20 7383 2572
Web: www.ucl.ac.uk/caa

The contracts division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, University College London 

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